

POLITICAL DRUNKNESS

PREFACE

The first thought that relieved my agony after reading Abel Mikayelyan's novel "Political Drunkenness" was this: the truth about our days has been saved. Time will tell if I am right and take this preface as words written on glass with hot breath, which may disappear in the next second.

An onion, a bottle of vodka, a good friend and grand amour. Beyond the boundaries of the visible, in the nameless planet of courage and madness, lives a man, a child of the Armenian people raised in free nature and proud mountains, one of the herds who knows how to soar. And there are other people too. There are good and bad. Some are cowards, few are fearless. There is no doubt that limits the possibilities, you can calmly walk on the sea, share bread with the gods, some around you are ready to swallow the sun, and then they can crucify you, those like you.

The events in the novel take place in Armenia, which won the war, where the national pride has vanished into the blue sky, giving way to consumerist passions. In this book, at every turn, helplessness, emptiness, self-righteous greed and cruelty are depicted side by side, and at the next turn, the "evils" are suddenly banished, when Katya appears, the beginning of everything, with her soulful love, her contented warmth, her life-giving heartbeat, with floral lightness, weather unpredictability, wild femininity...

In our country, which is dominated by hollow people and zero values, the conversion of "evil" is not excluded at every step. With different stories, the author reveals the moral decline and spiritual bankruptcy in us. The spoiled environment contrasts with the caring, yet human world of real friendship and sincere feelings.

This book is a beacon of the dark sides of our reality, presenting the events as they are with beautiful vestal solutions. We don't have to live like this, but we are condemned to this: madness, immodesty, bribery, servitude, power-craving...

We in this book and those around us are the culprits and witnesses of today's illicit reality. Our lost dreams and the deception of us all are depicted here. People give their lives every step of the way in these nameless battles and are not made heroes. The dead become native land; the living think of leaving. Some are cowards, few are fearless. Many leave, few stay. Perhaps they are left to change course to this devastating reality. Whether we stay or go, we are Armenians as long as Armenia exists. We are all Armenians in Armenia.

This book is worth reading to discover strength or weakness for yourself. Below we are dealing with a living book, and the living book is our life, still wretched, immoral, cloudy. But one day we too will be defeated, we are powerless against that unstoppable course of history, no matter what we are. One day we too will become the contemporary of advanced humanity. Of course, with the help of good literature.

Siran Grigoryan

How I ended up at the airport and met the wrong person, and that's how this story actually started

Beer or coffee? Beer or coffee? It seemed that the waitress was standing on my head instead of next to me, apathetically waiting for me to solve this serious riddle. She even yawned covering her mouth with the table cloth. She had probably been working all night. So what? And I had been drinking all night long. The difference was that the waitress had to hand over the shift, go home and sleep, while I had to meet someone, take him to the centre, take my daughters to school and go to work.

It was seven in the morning, a Friday. I don't remember the exact date, but I distinctly remember that it was November 2011. Probably fourth or eleventh.

The new complex of "Zvartnots" airport was put into operation quite recently and it was not bad at all. If I'm not mistaken, the president, the Catholicos, the prime minister and other high-ranking officials personally attended the opening ceremony.

They say that the airport is important in terms of creating an image of the country. The guests get their first and last impressions right here. That is, a good impression on arrival, and a good impression on departure. It's not a small thing, of course. And it didn't matter what happened in between. But even if everything was good there, and the guests got a good impression there, was that the main thing? Ten airports and a hundred hotels could be built for guests, and the president would be present at the opening of all of them. And for whom was the country being built? For those who were departing from this same airport?

Who were we fooling? May the president come one day and look at these people standing in line at the threshold leading to uncertainty, his compatriots, and ask them just one question: why?

No beer, though, and much less coffee. Fifty grams of vodka. And we will have an opportunity to talk about social and political issues, I promise.

And maybe it's time to explain how I ended up at the airport after a night of boozing.

As I said, it was Friday, which meant that the day before had been Thursday, which in turn meant that I had broken one of my main resolutions: only drink on Fridays. I mean, of course, this was not the first time when I violated and, like every time, I convinced myself that it was not my fault. This time again, if it wasn't for my friend Panda, I would still be asleep in my bed right now, and my wife would be trying to wake me up so I wouldn't be late for my daughters' school.

So, Panda appeared in our editorial office at around seven in the evening, walked around the area for some time, assessed the situation and concluded that everyone has an indomitable desire to relieve the fatigue of the day. As he said: "unquenchable desire" then left and returned shortly with several full bags, one of which rattled like it was the last Thursday of the world.

Panda (the name was given by a wonderful girl whom you still don't know), with all his faults (and they are not few at all), was considered my best friend, and perhaps rightly so. In general, when it comes to friends, life was generous to me, I will refer to some of them in this story and maybe while talking about each of them I will say that he is my best friend. Don't believe it, Panda is the best. There was no second like him in nature, despite the accepted view that every human being has a counterpart somewhere in the world. No, Panda was special, just because there was no one else who could get on my nerves the way

this human being did. Like, for example, yesterday, when he, knowing perfectly well that it was not my day to drink, took out bottles of rum from his bag with a big smile... I must say that I lasted surprisingly long, I think about twenty minutes, then the inevitable began: two bottles of rum in the editorial office, then vodka in the restaurant, then rum again in the Alexander Pub, then brandy in a place I'd I better not name. But don't be too quick to draw my moral profile. You will still have the opportunity to do so. And then, as I said above, it was all Panda's fault, who was now long asleep, holding a half-empty bottle of brandy in one hand and the neck of someone of the opposite sex (what was the need to emphasize this?) with the other hand.

It was already dawning. I approached to wake up my friend. Of course, I regretted it later, because even though Panda woke up, he wasn't going to move. And he woke up only to ask me to go to the airport instead of him to meet someone. The information Panda had on that one wasn't particularly much.

He comes from America, on a Moscow flight, he is a Diaspora Armenian, I think he is a man - this is all I learned from Panda.

I made several attempts to dislodge him, but to no avail. Well, I had to help my friend. And so, that's how I ended up at the airport.

The waitress had already brought my vodka, and I was staring at the glass as if it contained the answers to all my questions.

Meanwhile, the only question that concerned me at that moment was how I was going to recognize the man I came to meet.

Many people matched Panda's description, that is, they were Diaspora Armenians and were obviously male. I was standing in the very centre of the waiting room, and I was smiling with my mouth wide open. Most, however, had a different greeter, some had a confident look, others an indescribably large nose. And my guest was not there. Maybe Panda said something wrong? I was about to call my wife and ask her to take the kids to school because I was going to be late, when someone who looked a bit lost approached the office. I walked up to him, gave him Panda's name, then mine. Then I extended my hand. He glanced at me and reluctantly uttered, Vaghinak. I said that I was going to take him to the city. But more likely, he wasn't listening to me. He was looking around with a wandering eye and it seemed that he was going to cry. He was a man of about forty-five years of age, of medium height, with brown hair, brown eyes and a flesh-coloured face. In a word, nothing out of the ordinary, except for the above-mentioned wandering, strange look. Perhaps one could add to that the orange jacket, which, I don't know why, made me classify him as a Diaspora Armenian. He only had a small suitcase and a few "Duty free" bags.

"Sixteen years," said my involuntarily guest, without stopping to look around, and as if he had only just touched upon my existence, examined me carefully and continued, "well, no worries." Let's go to town. Sitting in my car the whole way, he didn't say a word, except for the part when he asked for permission to smoke. I noticed that he often makes strange, nervous movements accompanied by deep sighs. The man hasn't been in his homeland for a long time, maybe he misses it, I thought. Only when I got to the city centre did I realize that I don't know where I'm going to take him. Panda had said nothing about it. I had to ask.

Indeed, I had forgotten about that - he seemed to come to his senses again - take me to Aghayan street,

my house is there.

Aghayan, it is. I looked at my watch and saw that I was running late, so I overtook the garbage truck in front of me, right under the noses of the on-duty traffic inspectors, as it turned out. Of course, they stopped me. Considering the fact that I didn't have any documents with me, the car was neither MOT nor insured, and to top it all off, I smelled like a wine cellar after a party, I could safely assume that I was in a big trouble. But I was lucky. The traffic cops were surprisingly kind and after a few minutes of negotiation agreed to let me go for forty thousand.

- "The starter", -said one of them looking around, and quickly pocketed the twenty thousand notes.

Well, the reforms in the police system were already clearly felt. Life was getting expensive, what could one do? And I was already late for school and had to call my wife and ask her to take the children.

Panda's guest was costing me dearly, actually. When I took him to Aghayan Street, it turned out that his house is in a building with which I had serious memories. But I didn't have time to address them. The guest reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet before getting out of the car. He did it with a sharp movement, like a magician, then, probably forgetting me, he slowly counted the contents of the wallet and just said:

-I have dollars, would that work?

To be honest, at first, I didn't understand what he meant until he continued.

-We did not agree on a price. How much will I have to pay?

Clearly, he took me for a taxi driver. But then who was he, who did I meet...?

Vaghinak and his apartment, which took me to our not-so-distant past

I didn't really know it at the time. And I could not even imagine that this consequence of deviating from the drinking calendar would have a serious impact on the internal political life of our country.

- Perhaps it was the destiny that you came to pick me up, - said Vaghinak, when he learned about the whole misunderstanding, - let's go home, let's toast to our homeland.

Why it was the destiny and why it sent me, I have no idea, but his offer was too good to refuse. I was already late for school, I couldn't be of any use at work (with this hangover of mine), but there didn't seem to be anything urgent, and most importantly, my head started to hurt.

OK, let's go up.

Vaghinak opened the door, we crossed the threshold and immediately found ourselves in 1995. The apartment welcomed us with a warm cocktail of old things, dust, darkness and humidity. All around wandered the old ghost of smoke, a constant companion of our dark and cold past. Although it was morning and the weather was quite warm, the apartment was cold and dark. There was a wood burning stove in the hallway. A long rusty pipe seemed to meander into our recent past. In place of the vent glass was a piece of plywood with a round opening. It was from there that my memories rushed into the apartment, slowly at first, and then with headache-inducing speed.

He was also looking intently at the space black hole-like beast, which seemed to be a window into the past.

Then he started walking slowly around the apartment. He approached the "Helga" cabinet, a symbol of

Soviet welfare, and began to write something with his finger on a thick layer of dust. "Helga" squealed back like a loyal dog and gave her former master an accusing "look".

I stood silently. First, I didn't know what to say, and second, I was also excited.

My eye, accustomed to "Euro-renovations", was trying to overcome the culture shock, the barrage of good and bad memories that my new acquaintance's apartment awakened in me.

One of the plaster angels bordering the floral wallpaper lay orphaned on the floor. The celestial creature was blackened by the smoke from the furnace and looked like an unwashed little miscreant. Vaghinak took it and for some reason tried to fix the place. Then, realizing the senselessness of what he had done, he threw it aside. At the sound, a chubby mouse came out of the kitchen, looked at us impudently and slowly went to the bathroom, shaking his fat back. Vaghinak sobered up and laughingly said.

Look at that, we occupied its area. This is its place...

I think your apartment is more of a transit zone for him, considering there's nothing to eat here, I responded.

That reminds me, I don't have anything to eat, but I'm sure they haven't reached my drinks yet. Although I bought plenty from "Duty free".

He tried to turn on the light, but the dutiful local electrician had cut off the electricity to the apartment a long time ago. He approached the dining room table, took the oil lamp from it, but did not light it. So, with the unlit lamp in hand, he walked to the kitchen, took out two thick glasses and a dusty bottle of vodka from the cupboard. As he dusted himself off with a handkerchief, a bearded man, aka Rasputin, the all-time Russian enigma, winked at us from the label.

This man is really immortal, he tried to joke and filled the glasses. He did so with a sharp, jerky motion, causing some of the vodka to spill onto the table.

To be honest, I wanted to leave immediately, but in his eyes, I saw a silent cry: don't leave me alone in this dark, cold and empty apartment, don't leave me alone with my past. And I stayed...

We sipped the first two glasses in silence, each lost in our memories. After pouring the third glass, only Vaghinak started to speak. But again, I had the impression that he was talking to himself, and my presence was not particularly important to him.

Wasn't the surrender of myself and many others the reason we got here? I don't know, maybe I don't have the right to say that in the case of others, but I gave up. Tired, disappointed, disgusted... In this case, these are no excuses. No, surrender is the word.

Vaghinak began his speech with such an unexpected preface. We were sitting in the kitchen of his old apartment, in front of a bottle of Rasputin vodka on the dusty table, drinking from time to time without toasting, without even clinking the glasses. He was talking, I was silent, and all this was kind of funny.

I knew it was going to be this way. After all, I was one of the first to realize that we were deviating from the right path. When was that? ninety-one, ninety-two? When did I first feel that the once idols of the people are coming out against the people, that they are breaking the people, and it should be stopped? I don't remember the exact year and day now, but at that time it could still be dealt with. At that time, I was with them, I was by their side, and I warned them. How many hours I spent talking, explaining, persuading and arguing. I used to say that the people who came to power on the hands of the people have no right to be separated from the people. At first, they listened to me with pain, then with indifference,

and finally with hatred. You probably understand who we are talking about.

I nodded. Of course, I understood who it was about. I just didn't understand why he decided to tell me all this. Why did he decide to share it with me? That is, sharing with a stranger. Who was I to him? No more so than someone he met for the first time in his homeland after a sixteen-year gap. However, I reflected that his strange behaviour and frequent nervous movements were not accidental. Maybe they were talking about a certain mental disorder?

- No, you cannot understand who it is about, he continued, - it is about everyone; or the first ones, or the next ones, or the last ones. I know them all. They probably forgot about my existence, and that's not surprising. They haven't heard from me in sixteen years. Meanwhile, I could not forget them. Maybe my injury was the reason, maybe I had an inner conviction that one day I will return and deal with them again.

Here I couldn't resist for the first time and asked my interlocutor a question:

-Relate? How are you going to deal with them? He smiled.

-You don't know the most important factor. The reason I had returned.

-No, I don't. But why are you telling me all this? He looked at me without blinking.

-Nothing happens without a reason. And our meeting either, was not accidental. I need you to do me a favour. I will return that favour, of course.

-Are you trying to offer me money again?

-No, adventures. You don't mind, do you?

-No, I like adventures, but the idea is primarily important for me. Besides, it's time for me to go.

-Wait, don't go, -he said, -I will give you that idea, I promise. The thing is that I came back to become a president. President to the Republic of Armenia.

I couldn't hold my laughter. And he frowned.

-What? You don't believe me?

-No, of course, I do. Anything is possible in our country.

-That's what I thought.

-But there is a circumstance that might prevent you.

-What circumstance? -Vaghinak got angry.

- As far as I know, our Constitution says that only a person who has completed thirty-five years of age, who has been a citizen of the Republic of Armenia for the last ten years, and who has permanently resided in the Republic of Armenia for the last ten years can become the President of the Republic of Armenia.

-So?

-And what: I am forty-five years old; I have never renounced the citizenship of the Republic of Armenia; I even received a new passport from our embassy in Washington. As for living here permanently for the past ten years, for God's sake, who knows where I've been?

Vaghinak waited for a moment, then, casting a stern look at me, asked:

- Anything else?

Then we talked a little more and I realized that not only was he not kidding, but he was quite serious. He already wanted to introduce me to his goals and plans, but I politely apologized and left, finally convinced that my unwitting guest had mental disorders...

Pre-election autumn or speeches written in coffee shops

Not long before this story, on September 21, our state celebrated the 20th anniversary of its independence. The impression was that the main meaning of the holiday was to convince the people that our state is truly independent. The president made an impressive speech during the military parade held in Republic Square. It should be noted that the speeches of the third president of the third republic of Armenia were mostly impressive. And mostly they stayed on paper.

The president's speechwriter was probably a talented man. And he was doing a very important job. Because when the speeches written by him were heard from the lips of the president, those were the rare moments when the Armenian people could feel proud and the citizen of Armenia a citizen. I saw him work once. He was a simple man. He was sitting in one of Yerevan's outdoor cafes, with a pen and paper in front of him, drinking and writing. There was noise all around, loud music, constant passing, and this man was sitting writing a speech that was to be delivered by the head of the country. It was obvious that the speechwriter was composing at that moment. I didn't know him and I think very few people knew who he was. My friend pointed to him and whispered in my ear that this man was the president's speechwriter.

However, those speeches were not real. Here is an excerpt from the president's speech at the military parade of the 20th anniversary of Independence.

"On this day 20 years ago, many participants of the independence referendum cast their ballots in the ballot box with the hands of their parents, their children and grandchildren. Those children, who are now adults, should have inherited the country and lived in a free and independent Armenia... The most precious thing we have is the generation of independence. A generation that is a citizen of a free country and cannot imagine itself in any other status. A generation that has a lot to give to its country and people, but also has concerns and demands..."

Yes, this generation and in general, representatives of all generations in our country had concerns and demands. It is possible that after twenty, thirty or fifty years, when people read this book, they will find strange and funny the concerns and demands that the citizens of Armenia had at that time. No, neither the president nor his brilliant "speechwriter" could change the reality of that day. The reality that will seem funny and strange twenty, thirty or fifty years from now. It would, without a doubt, happen spontaneously. The evils that were infecting like a plague would automatically disappear from our reality. Permissiveness, impudence, patronage, bribery, election fraud, unfortunately, mostly unfolded during the period of independence. The independence whose generation the president considered the most precious. What did he mean by expensive? The five to ten thousand drams that people around him paid to the representatives of that generation, young men and women who had just received the right to vote, to buy their votes? What else could be expected from them after that?

"A generation that has a lot to give to its country and people," said the president in his speech. But did you give that generation the most important thing - freedom? The opportunity to live freely in an independent country.

However, where have we reached and where were we going? There were views that were put into

circulation, which although largely corresponded to the reality, but also made it difficult to get a deeper understanding of the reality. Moreover, the views put into circulation were limited to giving a very approximate diagnosis of the disease that plagued the authorities and society of our twenty-year-old state. That's it. A question mark was placed instead of the end point, which, however, did not imply a continuation. "The patient has a hyperdilatation of the stomach." a diagnosis given to the authorities, which was followed by the unanswered question: "how can one control the appetite in such a condition, if the patient's liver is destroyed as a result?" "The patient has deep depression and mental disorder tendencies." this is the approximate diagnosis of our society, and the following question was: "how can one go to work in such a state?" I mean, how could one fight in such a situation?

Although the diagnosis given to society was mostly correct, i.e., we had both deep depression and sufficient mental deviance, both of them could be overcome if there was an awareness that society's best doctor is itself. Society as a whole and each citizen individually. Deep depression could be overcome and terminal mental breakdown could be avoided. A citizen could do this if he believed in himself and respected and trusted society.

Society, in turn, could do this if it believed in itself and respected the citizen. In this case, it would not be unrealistic to treat the disease of the authorities. The stomach automatically contracts when the appetite is lost. So, it was necessary to find ways to suppress the appetite for power.

Meanwhile, we were tearing ourselves apart from the inside. Where do we get so much malice, so much hatred and envy? Instead of reaching out, we kicked each other, instead of encouraging, we disappointed, instead of giving medicine, we poisoned...

Our reality was sad, really, just like that pre-election autumn was sad...

My Priestess, or when love and gambling intertwine

I was most afraid that one day, when I put my hand under her bra, I would feel only her heart. Perhaps I understood from the very beginning that this was going to be an extremely difficult love. complete and incomplete, bright and cruel, happy and sad. I resisted myself and my devil for a while, but then I realized that it is God's will.

And here I was to see Katya again. It was seven o'clock in the evening, the day was Friday. I don't remember the exact date, but it was November 2011. I was sitting in "Alexander Pub" and waiting for her. As you already understood, I was drinking the day before, and I didn't manage to sleep for a second. I was crushed so much that I was sure that seeing me, Katya would be disappointed with Adam's race in general. And to ensure even more excitement, I started drinking rum without adding coke. She came after the second cup.

- Have you decided to drink until you lose your sexual orientation? - she asked and immediately added - don't worry, I won't allow it.

-Of course, you won't.

Katya looked at me puzzled for a moment, then started laughing. And I realized that it's over, it's pointless to resist anymore. And that's where I lowered my flag. I don't know who I surrendered to. I hope to God. I brazenly, at every moment of my weakness, remember God, justifying myself that the will is His. I don't

know if he will forgive me or not, but I think he understands. Otherwise, he wouldn't have taken such tests for the umpteenth time, seeing that I can't stand them anyway.

And Katya is just a miracle. I won't describe her. But if one day someone decides to make a movie based on this book, I make a condition from now on that I will choose Katya's actress myself. I just know it won't be easy. Let's say, about the same as taking a fake diamond instead of Orlov.

- You didn't sleep last night, you drank at least two litres of different coloured but highly alcoholic drinks, you had group sex and you failed in all your tasks. Am I right? -Katya asked, sitting next to me.

-Everything is correct, except for the group sex part, -I emptied the Rum glass, -although honestly, I was going to do it, but something held me back.

-And what was it?

-You.

Katya laughed again, but this time a little uncertainly. How different are women's attitudes and reactions when hearing a confession of love. But there is one thing in common - it is pleasant for everyone, regardless of the presence or absence of mutual feeling, and no one can hide it. Even Katya. Although I was sure that she had heard more confessions of love in her life than, say, congratulations on her birthday. There are women who always tend to refuse, even though they want to agree. There are women who always agree, even though they want to refuse. And rare are the women who are able to both refuse correctly and agree correctly. At the same time, not caring about life, environment, even the rules of the game. Such women know very well that it is impossible to control their own emotions, but they also know that one cannot play with the emotions of the other person. They also know that it is pointless to put barriers in front of love, even if you have all the possible statuses in the world. It makes no sense, because love will break down all those barriers anyway.

-What if I drink with you tonight? -Katya asked unexpectedly.

-Usually when you drink with me, we end up in bed, -I said lacking sense of shame.

But Katya was not easy to deal with.

-Really? -she said, -we end up or we start from?

I changed the topic and started telling her the airport incident. Actually, I wasn't expecting it to interest Katya that much.

-So, what happened to the man you had to meet? -she asked.

-No idea. Panda is still insensible and has no idea that I had met a wrong person.

-And what's the name of the man you met?

-Vaghinak.

-Old name. Like last century, -said Katya, that loved everything modern.

-He's old too. From our past.

-And why did he decide to come back?

-He wants to become a president, -I said indifferently.

Katya let out a long whistle (which, I must say, turned out quite well for her).

-Wow! You don't say!

-Isn't it fabulous?

-I don't know. But whatever! So, what are we going to do tonight? I got tired of this pub, -Katya changed

in an instant, -I want to have fun. Life is too short. How are you planning to amuse me tonight?

I bit my tongue to not say what I really wanted to say, but Katya saw it on my face, as if the idea of fun I dreamed of was written there somewhere and started laughing out loud:

-Don't worry. If only men knew what women often had in their minds, they would turn red from shame. There's a new club. Let's go there and chill a bit.

When we left Katya got into my worn-out and dirty Renault in a way as if it was a brand new, fresh from the salon. Actually, I noticed that she can make any man feel like a knight next to her. When I told her about it, she said:

-There are three types of women: wild, family and priestess. I'm a priestess. And don't you laugh at me. I seriously believe that I'm a priestess. A priestess of love.

She said in such a convincing way that doubting it didn't even cross my mind. I immediately silenced the danger alarms that were coming from within my brain, that were trying to warn me about priestesses demanding sacrifices...

It turned out that besides being a priestess, Katya was also a master of clubbing and chilling. I realised it the moment we entered a very modern club where men and women looked pretty similar. Only, they were even more feminine. But Katya was feeling very comfortable in that place, far from heterosexuality.

-Stop me, when I start dancing on the tables, ok, -Katya joked.

-You can do that?

-Sometimes.

I didn't like that idea very much, considering the fact that Katya was wearing a mini skirt.

-I know a better place, -I tried to take control over the situation.

-Let's go then, -Katya agreed really fast.

In "Margarita" bar-restaurant she ordered Margarita, lit a cigarette and remembered Vaghinak again.

-Your Vaghinak is strange. Crazy, yet romantic. But I like him. I wouldn't mind having a president like him.

-A crazy president, huh?

-Why not? We witnessed what serious, solemn and prudent leaders made of this country. Maybe it's time to change the rules of the game? Only fools live by the roles of life or higher spirits. The fools and the frail.

-Life is a written book, -I tried to intervene.

-Don't give me that fatalist look. Surely, life is a written book, but it is in every man's hand to decide which page and which paragraph he wants to live in. Deciding and settling is what a man has to do.

-So, you wouldn't mind if Vaghinak became a president? Is that right?

-Totally.

-I could help him for your sake, but I have to save my nerves and time.

-Because you're scared. You know you can't do anything.

-What if I prove you wrong? I can make him at least an MP.

-It's not easy as well. Let's see, shall we?

I agree. It's not easy. But men are profit-seeking creatures. I have no incentive to embark on such a nerve-wracking and time-consuming adventure, -You have it, -said Katya looking into my eyes.

-And what's that?

-A prize...my heart.

-This isn't you talking, it's the 5 Margaritas that you had unwisely.

-Unwisely? I trust you. But this is ME talking. If you can get Vaghinak into any party's electoral list, I promise you that I will place my warm, small and impulsive heart into your hands. You can do anything you want with it.

-Are you sure?

-I'm sure. But are you sure that you won't lose your head?

That I wasn't sure of. And the restaurant singer, as if reading my mind, started singing "Bésame Mucho" with her fine voice.

-I adore this song. Every time I hear it, it makes me wanna fall in love, go crazy, run under the rain completely naked. Oh, by the way, about crazy: since you voided me of dancing on the table, you have to compensate. Let's dance.

-The thing is that I don't really like that song, -I tried to get away from dancing, -but the way you said it, made me think that this isn't an invitation to dance, but a challenge.

-That's right! There's a tribe in Africa, where women pick their men judging by the way they dance. They say, that if a man is a good dancer, he's also good in bed. So, I want to see whether your rhythm coincides with mine or not. You gonna have to dance with me, no matter how indifferent you are towards my favourite song.

All right, I thought, I'm gonna show you my rhythm, my emotions, my feelings and held her really tight... Then, when we came back to our table, Katya smiled and said:

-I love Tango. I love Africa and the African wise women. You're a good dancer.

-I suggest taking the dance to another level, -I replied immediately.

Your mean horizontal level? Young man, you easily get spoiled, don't you? Who spoiled you that much?

-I can e-mail you the entire list.

-Which one? The Majoritarian or the proportional -What do you mean? -I got confused.

Katya relaxed:

-Well, women have two lists of their Ex's. The "Majoritarian" is the official list of ex-lovers, that is usually presented to the boyfriends, husbands and current lovers. And "proportional" is the real secret list. Only the closest friends and God know about it. See, even priestesses use your favourite political terms. So, which list are you going to send me?

-Sometimes your honesty makes me rethink my attitude towards women.

-I want you to know one thing: any sort of crazy dancing in bed is out of question, until you win my heart. A man has to get into my heart first, before I get into bed with him. Likely with clean shoes in both cases. We have a bet, if you remember. Let's toast to it.

-The day will come when you will place your head upon my shoulder and tell me everything about your majoritarian and proportional lists. I promise you.

-Are you threatening me? I get dangerous when people threaten me.

-No, not threatening, just warning.

-We'll see...Repeat our Margaritas. We have something to celebrate. Don't go away, we're about to

celebrate it till dawn, -Katya changed the topic and called the waiter.

How much can you drink?

When I opened my eyes, the first thing I felt was the cold. I was shaking all over. Then the first thing I saw was my pair of feet, one with a shoe on and the other without a shoe. My feet were on the steering wheel of the car, and a familiar image was visible from the windshield. It was our yard. I realized I fell asleep in the car and I'm in front of our building.

But why in the car, why didn't I go up to the house? Maybe I'm getting old. Of course, it also happened to me that I woke up in such places where it was possible not to wake up, but, as a rule, those places were much warmer and softer. And here I wake up in my own car, cold, broken and shoeless. And the reason was certainly the last glass, which, of course, I did not remember exactly where and with whom I drank it.

However, I was lucky. It was not yet eight o'clock, so I would manage to enter the house, tidy myself up and take my daughters to school. So, I did, finding my shoes beforehand of course, but I was in for a disappointment. Everyone in the house was asleep, which meant there was no school today, for the simple reason that it was Saturday.

Well, better. Saturday it is. I took a shower, cleaned myself up and went to the editorial office. I kept forcing myself not to think about the day before and try to remember what happened.

No one had come yet, and the office greeted me rather indifferently. I made coffee and turned on my computer. There was enough material to read.

My gaze drifted over the lines, which remained just lines and nothing more. My mind and body were completely elsewhere. Realizing that I can't edit anything, I decided to read the previous day's news. And that's where I made a mistake. Because reading the first internal political news, I remembered the agreement I made with Katya...

Vaghinak - a deputy? That's crazy. What bug stung me yesterday? How will I justify myself in front of Katya now? that I was drunk? What kind of excuse is that? I gradually remembered the details of the conversation and tried to understand how to get out of this absurd situation.

Well, what is on the table? Is it possible to win Katya's heart in another way? Or even if it is not possible, what kind of children's adventure is this, why not just forget Katya, her heart, not to mention the rest of the things? I automatically opened her "Facebook" page and started looking at the pictures. In one of them, Katya was wearing a red evening dress. He was like a rose, a red rose, left alone in the garden. They plucked all the other roses; they didn't dare to touch this one. She was looking directly into my eyes, as if saying. "Can you rip me off?"

Oh, I can! And of course, one cannot back out of the condition. If Vaghinak needs to become a deputy, then he will. Even if I have to make a deal with the devil for it.

The only comforting thing was that we stopped at the MP's option and not the presidents. In other words, there was no problem of changing the regime. That certainly made my job easy enough.

I closed Katya's Facebook page. A half-empty bottle of rum sat on the small table in my study.

The cleaner probably didn't dare to take it and the staff probably didn't even enter my room. Well, the

decision was made, we could have a glass.

I had not yet finished the glass when I heard the door of the editorial office open. I looked, and oh my goodness, it was Panda. He entered my room, stood directly above my head and said without greeting.

-How much can you drink?

I didn't react. He said it in such an accusing tone, as if everything was not his fault. I knew there would be a ten-minute sermon on the harms of drinking, followed by another on family loyalty. And Panda did it so naturally that one would think that all he was missing was a frock. by the way, Panda could have worn it exactly twenty years ago, if he had not been "cut" from the singing exam at Etchmiadzin Seminary. But in that case, I wouldn't have known him, because if he had been admitted to the seminary, we wouldn't have been in the same course at the Faculty of Philology of the Yerevan State University. However, even here it cannot be claimed that he finished it. Although, when they ask him, he says that he graduated from the faculty of philology of Yerevan State University... buffet.

But this time it was not his turn to preach. It turned out that my friend had come to inquire about the fate of the person who was supposed to be met at the airport, and whom neither he, nor even more so, I, never met. I presented my failure to him as artistically as possible and justified myself by the fact that I had met one of the future members of the native parliament instead. But Panda was not particularly comforted by this.

-For once in my life, I allowed myself to drink for two days in a row and for the first time in my life, I trusted you with something...

It must be said that in both cases he was right. I reflected that I don't remember a case of my friend drinking the next day, and even more so I don't remember a case of him interfering with me in his affairs. I had no idea how he made money, although every month I "borrowed" from him sums of various amounts, which, of course, were not returned. And the main thing is that I had similar plans now. after yesterday's fireworks, all that was left in my wallet were the memories of the good days.

-Relax, we will find your Diaspora friend. We will treat him really well and everything will be OK.

By the way, can you lend me some money, I'll pay it back as soon as possible. Panda left, promising to return, and I, in turn, returned to rum and politics.

Real and unreal ratings of political forces, or how the people will love the president?

A few months before the parliamentary elections, what political forces were on the scene and what was their rating? This was a question on which different analysts had different ideas in October 2011. On the eve of the parliamentary elections, which political forces were on the list of the authorities and the president himself, and what percentage was allocated to which? This was the other question, the answer to which was not naturally known and could only be guessed at. In other words, what was the real and "presidential" ranking of the political forces?

One of our media's political commentators, whom I tend to trust, had his own take on this: he claimed that there are only five political forces in the arena, that have a chance to enter the parliament through the proportional electoral system.

According to our analyst, the real rating of those political forces was like this. "Power at any cost" party:

20 percent, "Intrinsic" party: 17 percent, "Revolution without revolution" party: 13 percent, "Levon Mets" alliance of parties: 12 percent, and "American Heritage" party: 7 percent. As I said above, I generally agreed with our analyst's data. I will have an opportunity to tell you about that analysis, which is also my friend (perhaps the best), and for now I will present the second part of his analysis, which refers to the unrealistic rating of political forces, i.e., the rating that was imposed on the public. the government election fraudsters and which would get flesh and blood as a result of the elections. More precisely, in the residence of the president of the republic, according to our analyst, they discussed the following picture of the distribution of percentages between political forces in the parliamentary elections. "Power at any cost" party: 45 percent, "On its own" party: 25 percent, "Levon the Great" alliance of parties: 10 percent, "Revolution without revolution" party: 7 percent, "American Heritage" party:

6 percent. According to our respected analyst, the "Appendix vermiformis" party would also be added to this list, with five or six percent.

And so, in order to make Vaghinak a deputy, it was necessary to choose which of the mentioned political forces to focus on.

Everyone, except perhaps politicians, was involved in politics in Armenia for a long time. If we were to believe the data presented by the parties regarding the number of their members, more than one hundred percent of the adult population of our country belonged to the party. Do you find it amusing? Absolutely! But not in the sense that these numbers were real, and indeed the entire population of the country was a member of one party or another. That was certainly a lie. And the truth was that the entire population of the country was politicized, and the majority of it was directly involved in political processes.

They become party members and engage in politics in two cases: either out of excess of ideology or out of idleness. Which case prevailed in our reality, I think, is understandable.

As long as the state does not reach the point where its citizens are politicized only during elections, that state cannot be considered established. A citizen should have the opportunity to decide and make his choice, after which he should continue to live his life until the next election. Of course, he can make a wrong or a right choice, but it is by living his subsequent apolitical life that he can be convinced of his right choice or, on the contrary, see that this choice was wrong and try to correct it during the next election. And if he makes a mistake here, and makes a mistake the third and fourth time, that's normal too. This is the state-building process, and no matter how long it takes, it must go through. However, it is one thing when there is such an aspiration and another thing when the state is guided by the principle of not giving its citizens the opportunity to make mistakes. In other words, when the incumbent president or the ruling party, nominating his own candidate in the regular elections, is ready to take any step to prevent the people from "making a mistake" and electing someone else.

As long as the state does not reach the point where its citizens are politicized only during elections, that state cannot be considered established. Here, of course, the president of the republic can play the biggest role. However, let's try to understand the president of the republic. Let's try to understand what he was thinking doing what he did.

Unfortunately, the president was thinking. if any other power comes to power now, it will surely lead the country to destruction, therefore it cannot be allowed, and the power must be kept at all costs. And the president kept power at all costs. He did it during the parliamentary elections, he would also do it

during the presidential elections.

Therefore, let's admit that the president was honest in his goals. he simply did not allow the earth to be brought to ruin. I repeat, maybe the president really thought that as a result of his administration, the situation in the country was improving, the standard of living of the people was rising, Armenia was strengthening its position in the international arena. Couldn't he think so?

But in this case a question arises. if all this was really like this, if the government really worked well, then what was the need to pay the people to elect that government?

In the case of all three presidents of the Third Republic of Armenia, there may have been other things in common, but the most important commonality was that none of them could find the strength in themselves to give the people the opportunity to elect someone other than them. And perhaps this was the main reason for the other commonality between the three presidents. the people did not like any of them. This is a scary thing.

There was a third important commonality. none of the three presidents admitted their mistakes and did not regret them, let alone apologize to the people. This is also a scary thing.

When all three presidents spoke, it became clear that they were not talking to the people, but to their predecessors and successors. Yes, they talked to each other, appealed, promised, threatened each other, and sometimes the Americans and the Russians.

It was under the impression that their struggle, if it was for their sake, was for their sake, but in reality, it was against each other. The people were absent here, they simply didn't exist.

If they were doing a good thing, they were doing it for themselves.

By "them" one could understand a hundred people, a thousand, ten thousand. But was that all our people? But the saddest thing was that when they did evil to each other, the victim was the people again.

How would the people love these people?

Could it be said that tens of thousands of supporters of the "Levon the Great" alliance of parties loved their leader, the first president of the republic? No, they just hated the second and third presidents. And if by chance the first president of the republic came to power again, they would hate him as they used to hate him.

What kind of hatred have you instilled in this people against the president?

Happy is the people who love their president. But if this is impossible, then at least hatred should be removed from the people. And for that, it was necessary to talk not to each other, but to the people. It was necessary to admit the mistakes and apologize to the people. The people should have been allowed to choose someone outside of themselves.

My friend Andreas and Panda's lunch

Remember I promised you to introduce Andreas, our esteemed political analyst? He was also my friend and perhaps the best. I have already had occasion to say that life was generous to me in the matter of friends, and I will touch on some of them in this book. And maybe when talking about all of them, I should say that he was the best. Don't believe it again. Andreas was the best. There was simply no such second in the world, contrary to popular, universal, well-known opinion. Just because there was not and

could not be anyone else in the world who could as compassionately bear a large part of the pain of the same world and the whole of the pain of his homeland as this human being did. I was always amazed at how sensuality and masculinity could live so harmoniously in his muscular body. Andreas looked around with his eagle eyes and when he saw injustice, he could go out alone against all internal and external enemies of the nation and at the same time he could be excited like a child when he saw something beautiful. He simply could not tolerate injustice and was ready to fight against even the slightest manifestation of it. And perhaps that was the reason why he managed to get a stroke twice during his fifty years of life. Only that did not calm him down. he still continued to put down anyone who went against justice with the words that came out from under his pen and thick moustache.

And this man, who is the analyst of our site and without a doubt my best friend, entered the editorial office at the exact moment when I had emptied the last glass of rum and was about to go out and visit Vaghinak.

-Are you drinking alone again? -he said, in a tone unique to him, which you don't know if it's a scolding or a joke.

- Why alone? - I tried to justify myself - I knew you would come. The panda was here not long ago and promised to return... Andreas was clearly worried by the latest news. Hearing the name of the panda, he felt the danger of the impending feast, from which he was sure that he neither could nor wanted (in our opinion) to escape. It has long been a tradition that on Saturdays Panda used to come to our editorial office and prepare his famous meal. The reputation of that meal had recently gone beyond the circle of people close to our editorial office and spread throughout the city. It wasn't just a meal; it was a philosophy (although Panda said the purpose of the meal was to get rid of the inevitable hangover from the previous Friday's drinking). Especially for that philosophy, Panda bought a huge copper pot and a slightly smaller second one. In the first, he cooked all the agricultural products growing in Armenia and the region (including vegetables and fruits), and in the second, meat in a special way. Then it was all mixed together and beer, wine and you don't know what else was added. The whole process took at least three hours, and during that time Panda did not leave the kitchen or let anyone in, except when he called me for a drink. This happened at least five times, and by the time dinner was ready, I was understandably not hungover, just drunk.

In short, the same thing was waiting for us today and both Andreas and I knew about it very well.

But I came to tell you something else, much more important, Andreas muttered from under his thick moustache in such a tone that I involuntarily asked.

-What happened. Did Turkey accept the Genocide, did the USA recognize Karabakh, did the president resign?

- No, something more incredible. I have clear information that the Fly becomes a deputy on the Republican list.

When many high-ranking officials of our country are not the masters of their word, or simply the Fly

To be honest, I would not mention it in this book, let alone devote an entire chapter, if there was not an important circumstance. So, if the Fly could become a deputy, why couldn't Vaghinak do it?

Although the Fly had a first and last name, possibly a patronymic as well, however, I will not reveal them here. Because I have strong doubts that he will sue me again. The Fly had already done this twice. More precisely, it was not me who was sued, but our media and Andreas himself.

"The Fly feels the pain of the elephant." Andreas wrote in one of his articles about a year ago. Hence the name. And this was one of the reasons why the Fly sued us, demanding a retraction, a public apology, as well as a large sum of money for violating his honour and dignity. "After all, one must have honour and dignity to trample," said Andreas. And I completely agreed with him. And here, on this topic, our analyst made a second publication, in which he said that a person with dignity and honour "usually, officially addresses the editorial office and presents a written text, so that the media that offended him will publish it as a rebuttal: of an offensive article." Needless to say, such a thing never even crossed the Fly's mind. All he needed was PR, it didn't matter if it was black or multi-coloured. Well, of course, a little bit of money wouldn't hurt either, especially since that "little bit" wasn't that much. Therefore, the second claim was not delayed either. Yes, yes, the Fly picked up and sued us a second time, this time for Andreas' second explanatory article.

The Fly entered politics a long time ago, at the beginning of the nineties, but, as Andreas wrote in the same publication, "he never became a politician." Although, for the sake of justice, it should be said that he did not spare effort and energy for this. Being in an ideologically sound party, he worked hard for many years, learning from his leader, who, like the party, was ideologically sound, decent and principled. As an excellent student, in the parliamentary elections of 1999, he was awarded the mandate of a deputy and spent four years sitting with people for whom he had previously only "worked hard" (the formulation is Andreas's and one of the reasons for suing us). And it was here that the Fly began to gradually establish itself, but of course not as a politician, but as a skilled volunteer and again not for his party and leader, but for the authorities and so-called "business" deputies. And if Fly was able to carefully hide his contacts with the authorities, he could not do the same in the case of "businessman" (read: criminal-oligarchic) MPs. Just because, let's say, you can't secretly go to one of the then "elite" restaurants located on Sayat-Nova Avenue in the centre of Yerevan. But the Fly not only couldn't hide it, but also couldn't hide his pride. You should have seen the smug and surprised expression on his face when he got out of his luxury limousine with the oligarch known by the nickname "Grs".

It was as if at that moment he was saying to himself: "What happened to my poor office Fly, what kind of flight did I take?"... And to the ordinary mortals gathered around and looking at them (more precisely, at the luxury limousine), he said:

-Did you see what I have achieved, I get into the "Grs's" limousine, and what else am I going to do? And he did, actually: first, he betrayed the leader of his party (one of the rarely pure politicians in Armenian reality) and staged an intra-party coup with cunning tricks and the silent support of the authorities. (It should be noted that during this time he received several public slaps from the same person, his one-time teacher, and sued him). And now, if we were to believe the information Andreas had, he was included in the proportional list of the ruling party, which meant that he would become a deputy again.

This is what the Fly is like.

As I already said, he sued us for an article written by Andreas that was published on our website about a year ago. And here, a year ago, our analyst made an assumption that this "politician" has ambitions to

appear in the parliament again. "We understand that elections are approaching. But is it possible to sell oneself in order to be elected, and that too at such a cheap price?" Andreas asked in the article in question (this part of the article also contained defamation, according to the plaintiff). In fact, my friend's prediction came close to coming true. He was wrong only on one point. "A political figure should have his own opinion and not a stubborn desire to be flattered. By the way, let's tell him (the Fly) that the authorities don't like it now," Andreas concluded the article.

No, my dear friend, as you can see, the authorities continued to like it. I can also say who exactly. But before that, a little background.

So, after another envelope arrived from the court of first instance addressed to the editorial office, from the content of which it became clear that the Fly sued us for the second time and this time demanded twice as much money as the previous one, I got a little angry. Not much, just a little. However, I realized it was time to face this. We couldn't spend half the week in court and, on top of that, give half of our monthly budget to lawyers to protect us from flies. And that's when I met someone who had once been the leader of the Fly and had the imprudence to bring this to life. I spoke about that honourable man above, presenting him as one of the rare politicians in our reality who managed to remain as clean as possible. As a result (of course not without the efforts of the authorities and the Fly himself) he had to leave politics, but that is another topic of conversation. And so, to find out how to deal with his once-woe-student, I met the man, and he gave me some very wise advice. "No one can silence a dog faster than its owner. So, find the owner"; this was his advice, which I followed, and soon found that master.

In other words, I found the one whom, as Andreas wrote in his article, the plaintiff Fly had a habit of slandering. And that person was none other than one of the highest leaders of the country. Very high. I can't get more specific than that, I'm sorry, because overall he's a good guy, and I wouldn't want people years from now reading this book to know that he patronized flies.

Of course, I am not saying that this very high-ranking official did not harm others to the state and society. Of course, it isn't. It is enough to mention only the fact that for many years he stood not only at the top of the country's legal, but also shadowy, criminal-oligarchic power.

What kind of truth are these people being guided by? Of course, the number one truth is the law, but when it is common to ignore the law, other "truths" come forward that they profess. Unfortunately, during the entire formation of our state, this was the boyish, tribal, in other words, "thieves" truth. And this brought the country and society to the edge of the abyss.

And so, I met with this very high-ranking official who professes the "thieves'" truth to talk about his protégé, the Fly. As I said, in general he was a good person, although as it turned out, he was not a master of words. And here's why.

Our meeting took place during one of his regional visits. We were standing in front of a greenhouse where cucumbers were grown (the visit was aimed at promoting the development of agriculture) and we were talking. He suggested that the three of us (himself, the Fly and I) meet in his office and talk "properly". I said I don't have a problem; I just doubt the Fly would come. You should have seen the expression on the face of a very high-ranking official when he heard my words. much the same when a "thief in law" is said to be making an irresponsible statement.

It was good, at that moment the owner of the greenhouse approached, accompanied by security guards,

holding a tray on which young cucumbers were artistically arranged, as it turned out to be a new type. My interlocutor took one of them and began to smell it. "See you in my office. My secretary will call you," he said and ate the cucumber.

The secretary never called. Let me go ahead and say that we continued to be in court battles for another year, and then we won both cases, both in the first instance, appellate, and cassation courts, but the secretary never called.

The "bums" of Vaghinak

Perhaps it's time to return to our history and see how Vaghinak's and my fate is arranged. And although all this continued to seem foolish to me, I decided to take the first step. And the first step, naturally, was to get Vaghinak's consent.

Vaghinak's apartment on Aghayan Street did not have a bell, my knocks went unanswered, and since the door was not locked, I opened it and entered.

I found the host in the kitchen sitting with some people. He was in the same position in which I had left him the previous morning, when he announced his presidential ambitions, and I, putting him in the place of a madman, left. Looking at the people at the table, I couldn't believe my eyes at first.

"Bums": three men and one woman. The latter had something strange on her head, which I only realized after looking closely. It was a cardboard pizza box. One of the men was wearing a dirty winter coat, the second was wearing a sleeveless shirt, and the third was wearing Vaghinak's orange jacket. On the table were two more pizza boxes (both empty), a container of pickles (which served as an ashtray), badly chewed watermelon rinds, half a rotting onion (probably from one of the "bums"), and multiple cases of whiskey, gin, and vodka. - two bottles, the origin of which could be concluded by judging from the "Duty free" bags scattered here and there on the ground.

First of all, I opened the window because there was a foul smell in the kitchen, then I tried to assess the situation.

I must say that the lady and gentlemen did not care much for my appearance. They just glanced at me and continued their conversation.

-Anyway, I'm in favour of the dictatorship, - said one of the "bums", the one wearing Vaghinak's orange jacket, -I'm fed up with your seeming democracy.

-Democracy is not a pizza that you can eat and get full, - intervened the person who was sitting in a T-shirt.

- And I think that the world will be saved by the new global flood, - this was already said by the one who was sitting in a coat. Well, it could be stated that the start of the political activity of my friend Vaghinak, the future candidate for president (according to my plans, deputy) was given. But why did he decide to start it with the debate itself and with such a representative composition?

I walked over to the table, and as I continued to be ignored, I picked up the only bottle that remained full and emptied the contents into the sink. The scandal was inevitable: one of the "bums" (the one wearing Vaghinak's jacket) suddenly stood up, put his right hand on his heart and let out a long howl. The other one (the one in the coat) grabbed his head with both hands and screamed, "Mommy," and the third one

(the one in the shirt) jumped to my side and tried to grab the bottle from my hand. I didn't last long because it was already empty. I don't know what would have happened if the lady had not intervened at that moment.

- This man is from the KGB, I know him, -she said, - he came to take us.

Everyone immediately sobered up, and the hand of the "bum" in the T-shirt was in the air (he had raised the bottle and was shaking it). But the strangest thing was Vaghinak's attitude. As if his silence wasn't enough, something had made his eyes close.

The lady's "revelation" was to my advantage, and I didn't even bother to object. I calmly took the bottle from "Bum's" hand hanging in the air, put it on the table, then turned to Vaghinak's political team and said:

- For now, I announce a warning to all of you. Next will be the stern reprimand, and after that... take a wild guess. And now you leave here immediately.

"Bums" were subjugated. Without saying anything, they got up and assembled. Only the one with an overcoat, taking half an onion from the table, threw a pitiful look at me and asked:

- Can I take the empty bottles?

I nodded in agreement and even helped him collect the inventory.

When the "bums" left, I reflected on Vaghinak, who continued to sit in the same position, except that he had opened his eyes.

-Well, - I said, -maybe you can put yourself in order, there is something to talk about, -he slowly raised his head and nodded.

- Are you really a "Chekist"? Just don't tell me this was all set up in the first place and you came to the airport specifically to meet me.

Needless to say, it took me a serious effort to convince him that I had nothing to do with the special services, and it was all just a coincidence. I had to show my editor's certificate, Writers' Union membership card, I even called the editor's office in his presence and turned on the loudspeaker and talked to the employees at length. I don't know how Vaghinak believed me after all this. Nor could I make judgments about his level of sobriety. It was clear that he was not sober, but he did not give the impression of being drunk either. It was quiet enough, only occasionally making those jerky movements that I had noticed back when we first met.

- Why did you kick out my friends? Vaghinak asked.

- Were they your friends? - I was surprised.

- Well, as I say, it's a long story.

- Tell me, I have time. And in general, I would like you to tell me a little about yourself. How did you leave Armenia, how did you settle in America, what did you do there and why did you decide to return?

-I already told you why I came back.

-Yes, I remember. And that's why I came. I came to talk to you, but I saw those "bums" and I was amazed...

-Don't say that: You don't know them. One of them is a professor, another is an actor, the third is an architect, and that lady is a literary critic. What did you do to this country? - he approached the closet, opened the door and started looking for something.

-Where did you find them? - I asked.

- It's a long story, - Vaghinak returned to the table and stood above me, - you spilled the last bottle of vodka, what will happen now?

I stood up too.

- Let's make a deal, I bring vodka, we drink together, and you tell your story.

What is "AUD" (Alcohol use disorder) or Vaghinak's story?

I left the apartment, went into the nearest store and bought the best vodka there was, I think Absolut. I didn't want to give my future protégé the impression of a sloppy person. I also bought a box of red caviar and half a kilogram of redfish. God bless Panda.

Vaghinak did not pay attention to delicacies. He took the vodka bottle from my hand, opened it and poured the glasses. And here I understood that our hero was not a madman, and even if he had a mental disorder, the reason for it was simply that he had an AUD in the classical (as it turned out later, not classical) sense.

This term is likely to be unclear to many readers. Fortunately, the phenomenon is not widespread among Armenians.

So let me try and describe what AUD is. It is the most complex manifestation of alcohol addiction, which can sometimes have the most painful consequences. Moreover, AUD can happen to both regular alcoholics and people far from alcoholism. It all usually starts the morning after drinking too much, when a person decides to eliminate the hangover with the help of a new dose of drink, which is followed by a further course of alcohol use. As a result, each subsequent morning begins with a deeper hangover, which again requires drinking to get rid of. In short, stick to it.

AUD can last for several days, several weeks, even several months, during which the person gradually loses control of the situation, and his only thought and goal becomes drinking. He stops going to work, forgets all important tasks and appointments, and usually remains in the place where the AUD started. The phenomenon can happen to all kinds of people, and as I said before, they don't have to be "legitimate" alcoholics. AUD can be given to respectable people, such as serious officials or artists. This kind of people usually get AUD consciously. It even happens that they take a vacation specifically for this purpose and isolate themselves somewhere, of course taking care of the necessary supply of drinks in advance. It can be said that "getting into AUD" is not a particularly difficult thing, but how to "get out of AUD" is a question. Believe me, this is already a more serious process.

In short, Vaghinak was clearly "in AUD". Naturally, this was not in my favour, considering my plans for him. But on the other hand, it was better to deal with a drunk than a madman. So, this revelation could be considered comforting.

-Did you want me to tell you something? - Vaghinak said, emptying the first glass and wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

Then he told me everything. He told me how he left Armenia in ninety-five and how he lived in America for more than sixteen years. It was a sad story. But since our hero was going to become a deputy, I think the public has the right to get to know his biography, and I will allow myself to present it.

At the end of the eighties of the previous century, when the national awakening and the struggle for

independence began in our country, Vaghinak was lecturing at the university and simultaneously working on a PhD thesis in a technical direction. But the candidacy remained unfinished, because due to circumstances, the author found himself in a circle that led the national-independence movement. At first, he was only in the role of a helper, performed various assignments, participated in certain organizational activities. Gradually, the assignments began to become more serious and later, when the national-independence movement reached its goal, and people from the above-mentioned circle came to power, Vaghinak was offered an above-average position, which, however, he refused. The war had started, and Vaghinak took part in combat operations in the border regions. He followed the changes taking place in the country from the front and dreamed of returning after the victorious end of the war and doing science in a free and independent homeland, where every person does the work, he can do well. The war ended, there was a victory, Vaghinak returned, but he found himself not in the country he dreamed of. And he found the people around him a little different. He tried to talk to them, some listened, some didn't want to listen, some didn't even accept the former friend of joint struggle. Vaghinak's disappointment was quite deep, and he decided to postpone his candidate's thesis for some time and engage in politics. This part of his biography, however, is not worth dwelling too much on. It is perhaps only worth noting that Vaghinak was not allowed to engage in politics, and his disappointment reached its peak during the 1995 parliamentary elections, in which he decided to run as a candidate. Vaghinak was first persuaded not to do it, then offered a deal, then threatened, and finally kidnapped and released only when the elections were already over and our country had taken its first step into the swamp.

And it was here that Vaghinak "surrendered" and left for the United States. Disappointment was so deep that, appearing in America, he chose to settle in a state where there were few Armenians. He chose Alabama and took a job at the University of Montgomery.

In the early years everything was wonderful. He had a high-paying job in a university lab (once he invented an invention for which he was paid an exorbitant amount of money), got residency (green card) without a headache, married a red-cheeked Yankee, bought a house with a mortgage, in which he barbecued on the weekends. (barbecue), bought a brand-new Buick on credit (leasing). In short, everything was too American and probably would have continued like that if one day Vaghinak had not left for California, Los Angeles for work. Here he met some old acquaintances and friends, and the three-day business trip lasted three weeks (is it worth telling what our hero was doing during those three weeks?) Returning to Montgomery and having a serious conversation with his wife and the leadership of the university laboratory, Vaghinak promised himself never to set foot in California again. He kept the promise for several years. True, he drank occasionally, but only on Sundays and in moderation. Everything got mixed up again in 2004, when he met an official Armenian delegation in Washington, among which he knew some people. He drank with them for a whole day at the Armenian embassy and with their mediation he received a new passport of the Republic of Armenia in two days (the law on dual citizenship was already in effect). Then he stayed in the capital for a few more weeks (besides, the delegation had already left a long time ago, while he continued to drink alone). This time he was taken home to Montgomery by his wife, and with the leadership of the university laboratory he put the issue very sharply: either family and work, or drinking. Of course, Vaghinak chose the first one, but it turned out that everything is not so easy anymore. After Sunday barbecues, Mondays began to wake up with

severe headaches and empty Jack Daniels bottles piled up next to the Buick in the garage of the still-mortgaged house.

Vaghinak was removed from the university laboratory after a year. The woman lasted two more years and divorced. The rest is not interesting. It is perhaps worth adding that for the last four years, Vaghinak has been living a stable AUD life: drinking for a few months, doing scientific work for a few months. What kind of "scientific work" it was, he did not say, only that he fortunately does not have money problems, because thanks to his invention, the savings are enough to last for several lifetimes. And his visit to Armenia naturally coincided with a "month of drinking" that started in a pub in Montgomery, continued on the planes of the Montgomery-Cincinnati-New York-Moscow flight and reached his homeland: the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, Aghayan Street 19/1...

How I convinced Vaghinak to become a deputy

"That's it, I'm at home now," Vaghinak finished his story, "by the way, don't you know what needs to be done to turn on the electricity?"

- Why do you need electricity if you have to keep drinking?

- You are right. But who told you that I drink?

- And what is this called?

- Drinking can be different things, my friend. There are different kinds of drinking. And now I don't drink, but I drink.

- Let's pretend that I understood. However, I have a proposition for you that you neither have to drink nor drink if you agree to it.

- Do you really think that you can make such an offer for me to stop drinking?

- I think I can. Remember, you talked about your presidential ambitions?

- Of course, I remember. And I haven't given up on those ambitions at all. But why do you think you can't run for president while drunk? And maybe my goal is for the people to understand all the irony of reality.

Although I was convinced that the chair itself has no fault here, the people, even more so, still, I liked Vaghinak's sincerity. But it was time to get down to business and offer Vaghinak a parliamentary seat instead of the presidency. Of course, I realized that with this adventure of mine I could put an honest and patriotic person in a bad situation. But on the other hand, I tried to justify myself by the fact that this person himself was not only not against getting involved in such an adventure, but the initiative was his from the beginning, and at a higher level. Wasn't Vaghinak himself offering me adventures?

But, of course, I had a much more valid reason to get into all this - Katya.

- Do you remember, you said that you need my help? - I asked Vaghinak.

- Yes, and as far as I understand, you have decided to agree, - he smiled slyly.

- Partly. I will agree to help you if we edit your claim a bit.

- What do you mean?

- If you aspire not to the president's seat, but to the deputy's mandate. What do you think?

- Why do I need a deputy's mandate?

- Why do you need the chair of the president?

- Didn't I already say that? Haven't I finally lost my mind to think that I can become the president? I just want to laugh a little and leave. In this country, believe me, neither I, nor you, nor anyone from this generation can change anything.

I must say that I did not understand Vaghinak very well. More precisely, I did not understand when the former dissident and scientist was speaking to him, and when the man with a mental disorder and AUD was speaking. The contradiction between those two characters was too great, that strange transition from frivolous to serious, from meaningless words to thoughtful thoughts, occurred in him too often. And this circumstance hindered more than it helped. I didn't know how to talk to him like a grown man or like a child, like serious or like a frivolous person. However, his consent had to be obtained, in whatever form it was. And I decided to proceed without further ado.

- Parliamentary elections are coming soon, are you aware? - I asked.

- I know that presidential elections are coming soon.

- The presidential elections are in a year and a half, and the parliamentary elections are in a year and a half.

- I am interested in the presidential elections. And that's why I came back to participate. Moreover, I do not intend to go public, engage in pre-election campaigning, give press conferences, make speeches. Otherwise, I'm going to run and then sit at home and drink.

- And what can you prove?

- The one who understands will understand. Let me just say that there is no venom in me, no sense of revenge. - I just want to make fun of this reality.

- It's a great idea, but impractical.

- Why is it impractical?

- Because what you say will not be enough. There are many other reasons, but I will mention only one. It is impossible to register you as a presidential candidate for the simple reason that you have not lived in Armenia not only permanently, but also generally in the last ten years.

- What should we do? What is a reference? Do they fake things like that here?

- I agree, they are falsified, but this is not the case.

- If so, how do you suggest I participate in the parliamentary elections? I think there is a similar requirement for residence there as well.

- Yes, there is one there, but if we can get you into the proportional list of one of the ruling parties, then you can take a reference, and no one will pay attention to that reference. I still haven't decided which list and how, but there's still time. First, it's important to get your consent.

- I don't want to be "crammed" anywhere.

Vaghinak seemed offended by that word. He got up, went to the balcony door and tried to open it. The door, which had been closed for sixteen years, naturally did not give in easily, and I had to help. When the door finally gave way, he stepped out onto the balcony. I followed him. The nineties were here as well. On one side was carefully stacked broken firewood, a rusted axe lay on the ground, on the other side was a wrecked Riga washing machine, two pairs of military boots, a large box of mixed tools, an empty and dirty plastic oil can and a car battery.

Those were the days! Sometimes it seems like it never happened in our life. Let's say we saw it in a movie. It seems like years have gone by. And they remained in our memory only as shots. What did we leave in those times, what did we take from there? Here, this apartment, this balcony, which evokes memories like an old photo lost in a drawer. Sad and painful memories. But it is not the cold and the dark, but the loss of faith. Because our people were ready to understand and bear everything: deprivations, difficulties, declines, and losses. but the people did not understand one thing: why they did not live together with the rulers.

- What are they building here? -Vaghinak asked, pointing to the side of the construction being carried out near the St. Hovhannes Church near the Sayat-Nova Abovyan intersection.

- The Yerevan residence of the Catholicos.

-Really? - he wondered, -I thought it was a hotel.

I almost blurted out something, but I restrained myself and crossed myself instead. We stayed in the balcony for some time, then when we came back inside, Vaghinak suddenly asked:

- And is it possible to know what is your interest? Why do you want me to participate in the parliamentary elections?

To be honest, I was taken aback and didn't know what to answer. Telling the truth would mean mocking him. Even better, let him know that I don't want to make fun of him, but, like him, make fun of our reality. That's what I said.

He thought for a moment, then laughed and filled the glasses.

- Well, deputy it is, consider that you have convinced me. Only on one condition: I am not involved in anything, and even if all this works out, which I am sure we both very much doubt, I resign the mandate. We clinked glasses, drank and then shook hands.

Shall we toast?

-Shall we toast? -asked Vasya, taking out a flask from my pocket. He certainly knew when I had a flask in my pocket and when I didn't. Vasya was my friend, and "toast", as I'm sure you understood, meant drinking. I was said to have coined the word, although I couldn't remember for sure. At least, even so, Vasya and others used it more than I did. Well, I didn't mind at all.

But who was Vasya and the others? If I am not mistaken, I have already had occasion to say in this book that in the matter of friends, life had been generous to me. And here, Vasya and others were among them. There were four of them, but I will not give the names of the other three. In this case, you can consider Vasya a collective character who represents their whole group, the rock group that was called... However, I won't even give the name of the group. Let me just say that they were, without a doubt, my best friends. This is a completely different type of person, intellectual, citizen. This type has its own, exclusive truth, which in a word is called freedom. Freedom is their love, freedom is their faith, freedom is their homeland. They are the bearers and transmitters of that freedom. It is the transmitters and not the enforcers. And it's a good freedom, believe me. It is the freedom that has limits, as contradictory as it sounds. Only those limits are not spatial at all, but philosophical, that is, you are free as long as that freedom is beautiful and noble.

The hall of the puppet theatre was still empty, the concert would start only in an hour, and the Vasys were busy with some technical details. Only from time to time they would approach me, take my bottle, take a sip and return to their work. I was sitting in the last row with my notebook and pen in hand, trying to make a plan for my future actions. After I received Vaghinak's consent, all that was left was to decide which party list we would put him on (even though Vaghinak himself didn't like that word) and get down to business. Except it wasn't that easy to decide. I've been puzzling over this question for the second day now and I can't come to a final decision.

Good music always helps me think when I'm faced with a difficult creative problem. When, say, I'm sitting at my computer in the newsroom and I feel that the line is persistently half-hearted, I put on my headphones and turn on, say, Jethro Tull's "Aqualung". When the situation is a little more complicated, and not just the line, but the idea is left incomplete, I go to one of my favourite cafes, sit at the bar stool and ask the bartender to turn on, say, Pink Floyd. It helps.

This, however, was a completely different case. And so, I decided to rely on the help of live music.

One of Vasya stood in the centre of the stage and checked the sound of his guitar. It reminded me of the limp of a wounded dog. Others were moving things around and were constantly on the move. Two young female fans of the band were standing between the doors of the hall and were probably hesitating whether to enter or not. The cleaner, rag in hand, went from row to row and cleaned the backs of the seats. Someone was turning off and on the various lights hanging from the ceiling, making this pre-concert atmosphere somewhat unreal.

The barking of the dog finally stopped, and the guitar gradually began to play at full volume. Then the flute, bass guitar and drums joined next. How different a tool is on its own and how different it is with other tools. The girls standing at the threshold entered the hall. The old cleaner continued to do her work, but already intact, as if dancing, and right here, under the flashing lights, an idea occurred to me.

Not one, but all. Vaghinak had to "stuff" not one, but all parties' pre-election lists. What would happen? This would be a job. Katya too, but this was already a completely different topic. Here there was both an idea, and disobedience, and a fight. I actually proved that there was no politics in Armenia, and there were no political parties. There was just trade and there were organizations pursuing personal or, at best, group interests. Moreover, the trade could be divided into three parts. large, medium and small. Large trade was between organizations (political forces), medium trade was within organizations, and small trade was conducted exclusively with the people. And this is what we've been seeing for sixteen years, that is, since ninety-five.

So what? Wasn't it worth playing a game on the heads of these commercial organizations? And the game could be as follows: one who not only had no right to be elected, but also had an AUD and at that moment was in AUD, with the help of various deals and agreements, he entered the parliament at the same time on the proportional lists of all parties.

So, the plan of action was drawn up, it remained to proceed to its implementation. Well, let's have a good time, shall we? I took the bottle out of my pocket, but it was already empty.

What if the last woman on Earth disappears, or the samurai die but don't surrender?

After the concert, we went to the house of one of the Vasylas. I love that house and I go there often. It's an ordinary house in an ordinary suburb, with an ordinary wall and an ordinary garden. There is just a special atmosphere there, which provides a way to completely relax and feel good.

But this time I felt twice as good because Katya was with us. She joined us after the concert.

-So, as far as I understand, my high heels are not appropriate here, - declared Katya, quickly assessing the situation.

And the situation was as follows. All the guests were comfortably seated in the garden of Vasya's house, right on the grass.

-If you want, we can go, - I said a little annoyed.

-Absolutely not. I like the idea of a "grass afterparty".

Without hesitation, Katya took off her shoes, a little admired her little legs wrapped in black tights and felt sorry for the guests. I followed her example:

-What are we going to drink? - she asked.

- Only vodka is on the menu today, Vasya announced and handed us the glasses of vodka.

After some time, Katya said that she was cold.

- I saw a hammock under the trees. Let's go there!

We left the guests sitting, lying and hugging on the grass and settled in the hammock. We were slowly swaying and kept silent. Katya continued to tremble, then she touched me, fitting comfortably on my shoulder, so that I could feel her breathing on my neck. I tried not to move so as not to suddenly disturb the bliss of the moment. Usually, Katya liked to talk, as she called it, "babbling". When she wasn't "babbling" it meant she was sad or worried or both. The choice of each topic was very different and usually without logical transitions. She could very seriously start talking about Nietzsche, life, death, eternity, and suddenly, without any warning, immediately make a sharp transition and talk about a plastic dress she saw in another store. Moreover, she spoke about Nietzsche's super-human with the same enthusiasm as a little while ago. She accused me of being a taciturn and said that she had never met such a taciturn writer.

-You are not a writer, but a tram driver. A common man utters approximately 4,000 words a day, and you are limited to 400.

In response to my question about how many words an ordinary woman pronounces, she stated that around 25 thousand. When she saw my shocked face, she hurried to calm me down.

-Never mind, I'm no ordinary woman, I'll use up those 25,000 words before lunch.

I held her in my arms and dreamed of making that moment last as long as possible. Gradually, Katya warmed up and began to move. Inwardly, I sighed with regret, because it meant that now she would start talking again, and at that moment I was not in the mood for conversations at all. I could feel the warmth of her body under my clothes. It slowly soaked into my shirt, then reached my skin, penetrated into my blood and went down with the blood... Katya immediately felt my condition. But to my surprise, she didn't laugh as usual. She looked carefully into my eyes and said:

-You know, I'm always cold. I'm terribly cold. I only get hot when a man is next to me. I love men. They are the strongest, warmest, most naive and at the same time meanest creatures in the world. In that order.

- I don't agree with the last one.

- You should. Men are my hobby and study. It makes life significantly easier. Are you able to distinguish myths from reality?

- And what is the biggest myth about men?

- The fact that men are the stronger sex. It is the greatest myth of all time. Don't suddenly think I'm an unsatisfied feminist. I hate all kinds of suffragism and feminism.

- You look quite satisfied and pleased, - I interrupted. - What else do you know about us?

- I know for sure that when the last woman disappears from the face of the Earth, the sun will not rise again. It will be an eternal night, and men, alone and abandoned, will howl like wolves for a long time under the stars, and then they will go crazy... From eternal stars, longing, love, loneliness and sperm toxicosis.

- You started off quite romantically, I was even scared. But it's okay, you're back to your style in the end.

- Don't laugh. Men alone are guilty of women's cynicism. But it is a fact: a man cannot live without a woman.

- And women can? Can you live without a man?

- It depends. But surely women won't go crazy without men.

- And you can do without me?

- You are a rather interesting sample of study and research, - Katya avoided the answer.

- And if I win the bet and do not demand to fulfil the condition, leaving it to your discretion, what will you do?

-I won't respect you, - she laughed. I love this song.

- What song?

I just noticed that while we were trying to distinguish myth from reality, one of the Vasyas had brought a guitar and was playing "Blackbird" by "Beatles".

- From now on, every time I listen to this song, I will remember you.

- Let's agree that you will always remember me when you listen to this song. Let this be our song.

- The phrase "our song" is quite encouraging in the context of the development of our future relations. But I don't like the word "remember" in this sentence. It kind of smells like memories from the past.

- You forget that nothing is forever under the moon and the sun. Everything that has a beginning also has an end.

- Are you always this alert or only with me?

- Always. But especially with you. Samurai is always ready to die, whether awake or asleep. And I'm always ready for the fact that even the craziest love ends either in bed, or in the marriage veil, or in court. If at least 50 percent of women had the samurai formula in front of their eyes in their personal relationships, I believe that psychologists would be unemployed.

- You look more like a little geisha than a samurai. But you didn't say why are you especially careful with me?

- Because I have fantastically developed intuition.

- And...

- And it means that my intuition tells me to beware of you. Because there's a good chance that you'll break my unbreakable heart, and no Samurai formula will save me. Although it's a little hard to make

myself cry when I'm in a psychologist's room or write sadistic statuses about men on Facebook.

- To be honest, I...

- Well, it's late already. Take me home, I'm getting cold again.

- I suggest staying here, because as far as I know, there is no man in the house who has changed his status to a stove. Wasn't it you that said that you get warm only next to men? - I tried to prolong "swing nirvanas".

- I have an elderly terrier for personal use... I drove the car with my left hand. I grabbed Katya's hand with my right hand to warm it. The little samurai sitting in it drew his sword for a moment, but quickly retreated, and his hand remained in my palm. That's how we got to the courtyard of his building. I cherished a dim hope that Katya would invite me to go upstairs. But she pulled her hand back, took out her favourite French perfume with the scent of snowdrops from her bag, poured it liberally and said good night in a nonchalant tone. It seems that half an hour ago, it was not her who leaned on my shoulder and confessed that she was afraid that I would break not her heart, but let's say, Sophie Marceau's. I felt the rage slowly rise from my toes, reach my tongue and turn into stupid words of jealousy.

- And for whom are you liberally anointing yourself with French perfume in the middle of the night?

-Chance, - answered Katya calmly and got out of the car. Both jealousy and rage came out of me with the laughter.

Whatever they do, the samurai die, but they don't give up.

Appendix vermiformis

Vaghinak liked the change in our program. He even agreed to help me out when needed and even come out of AUD for a few hours if needed to attend some meetings. It was certainly good. But how was I going to implement our plan? Moreover, without harming Vaghinak and any other person. I'm not even talking about myself. After all, this was a big adventure that would be revealed sooner or later. So, first of all, everything had to be done without breaking the law. Second of all, bearing in mind that even if I did not break the law, I could later get into unpleasant stories (Vaghinak would go to his America, while I would continue staying here), it was necessary to find a way for my participation in contacts with political forces to reach a minimum and be only as an intermediary (let's say, a person who was asked to convey something), and third of all, it was necessary to act in a way that both in the case of success and failure, in the end, all this would not get a public resonance.

These are complex, yet derivative problems. The main and foremost problem was one: how to "put" Vaghinak into proportional lists of parties? In other words, what could the political forces be interested in? The answer to this question was not particularly difficult. What interests political forces more than getting more votes in elections? Of course, nothing. And what do the civic forces need to get more votes in the elections? Money of course. And this was the answer to the question itself: money. And I decided to start our adventure with the "Appendix vermiformis" party, only because I disliked this political force the most.

In 2011, I already had occasion to talk about the real and unreal ratings of the parties playing a role in the political scene. I didn't just talk about my likes and dislikes for them. But is it necessary? Honestly, I don't

want to be subjective. After all, if I express my sympathy or dislike, I must also justify it. Can it be said without justification that I had a deep dislike for, say, the "Appendix veriformis" party? In that case, the reader will have a question: why? And in order to answer that question, I will have to say that my dislike for the party was mainly due to my dislike for the leader of the party. Here, the reader will rightly ask the following questions: first of all, is it possible to evaluate the entire party based on the profile of one person, even if he is the leader of the party, and second of all, what is the reason for my dislike for that leader? And I will have to answer that in the first case, yes, the profile of the leader was enough to evaluate the entire party, if that party was "Appendix vermiformis". The reason was very simple: this party was built around the leader, and if there was no leader, there would be no party either. Maybe there was nothing wrong with that, but this is where the question arises: what kind of leader? That is, the second question that I also have to answer if I decide to talk about my likes and dislikes for political forces.

When you don't know a politician, you can get an idea of him by listening to him. But this may not always help because there are politicians who can speak in such a way that a mere mortal seems to be one of the apostles in front of him. He was that kind of a politician.

The leader of the "Appendix vermiformis" party. It would be a mistake to say that he was an orator, for when he spoke, he did so as an excellent student would answer a lesson he had memorized. And of course, it was mostly nonsense. But that, of course, is also a grace: to be excellent and to talk so empty that you can convince thousands of people. And so, when you don't know a politician, and listening to him is not enough to form a correct idea about him, it remains to get acquainted with his biography. And I wonder why many of our compatriots, those who trusted and voted for this man, did not do it.

The leader of the "Appendix vermiformis" party started his political career at the age of twenty-two, joining the then ruling party immediately after graduating with honours. The leaders of the ruling party noticed his legal knowledge, rhetorical skill and obsession with careerism very early and first entrusted him with several middle positions, and then helped him to be elected as a representative in the National Assembly of the first convocation. Here the young man had shown himself immediately. Not without the consent of his leaders, he started speaking from the podium of the parliament. Speaking a lot, skilfully criticizing the opposition and skilfully defending any move of the authorities, and what is more important, raising issues of great concern to the people, having no solution what so ever. Gradually gaining the sympathy of the common people thirsty for justice, he became an oasis in the discredited government. The fact that the oasis was fake, people did not realize at that time and did not realize it later, when after the change of power, he left his party and joined the new majority formed in the parliament. He continued to speak, skilfully criticizing the former authorities (forgetting that he once wrote a book in which he praised the country's first president), defending the new ones, and raising the same issues that are of great concern to the people, but have no solution in any way. Then he created his own party (there are serious reasons to suspect that not without the support of the current president, who was the head of one of the power structures of the time), he participated in the next parliamentary elections and managed to overcome the five percent threshold, which gave him the opportunity to be represented as a legislator. As a result, a few more people started speaking in his style from the podium of the parliament, skilfully deceiving the people, the people continued to be skilfully deceived, and the false oasis gradually grew. But this man's greatest leap was yet to come. In the National People's Congress of the third convocation,

his party received three times more seats than the previous one, and he occupied the second position of the state (again, there are serious reasons to suspect that exclusively under the patronage of the same person, the current president and the head of one of the power structures at that time). Later, he was removed from that position as a result of some dark stories, being called a "traitor" by the country's president at that time.

And here he nominated his candidacy in the presidential elections of 2008.

This man, of course, carefully hid his biography and was terribly afraid of the word. I had the opportunity to make sure of it, as I had the opportunity to know him personally. Here's how it happened.

On the eve of the 2008 presidential elections, I interviewed the presidential candidates for our newspaper. Now I don't remember why I decided to do that. I rarely do practical journalism and even more rarely do interviews, for two reasons: Firstly, that there are journalists in our editorial office who do this much better than me, and secondly, when interviewing, I am more interested in non-standard questions, which often may not please those I interview. This was not the case with the other presidential candidates, who answered all my questions, and those answers were quite deep and sincere. But that's what happened in the case of the leader of the "Appendix vermiformis" party, who refused to continue the interview after my very first question, saying that he was not ready. And the question was as follows. "What is a biography for a politician?"

And that man, who was afraid to say what biography is for him, got about twenty percent of the voters' votes in the 2008 presidential elections...

But why am I telling you all this? Because I decided to start the process of "deputizing" Vaghinak with this, in my subjective opinion, the most negative party.

I knew the leader of the "Appendix vermiformis" party, as I said. But it certainly didn't make sense to "seize" the matter (I am sure that the leader himself did not show a strong desire to meet with me a second time). So, it was necessary to think about which of the influential members of the party to focus on. Let me not forget to mention that this party was part of the ruling coalition, had three ministerial portfolios, six deputy ministerial portfolios and eight parliamentary mandates. And the leader of the party held another, very high position (as the president of the republic once said, "the third or fourth position in the country"). Although this position existed before, it gained its current "weight" for only one reason. As I already said above, the leader of the "Appendix vermiformis" party participated in the 2008 presidential elections and collected approximately twenty percent, but I forgot to say that at that time he and his party were acting from opposition positions. And the candidate who got the most votes after the elections (the current president) proposed this to the "opposition" candidate to join the ruling coalition and especially for him renewed the "third-fourth post of the country", which was actually nothing more than a secretary's job.

As I said, I was not going to deal directly with the leader of the "Appendix vermiformis" party. I knew only three of the other influential members: the leader of the parliamentary faction, a minister and the party's spokesperson. It was on him that my choice stood.

The spokeswoman's name was Ruzan, and I knew her from university. I had even been close enough before. Nothing substantive, just intimate. She was an attractive girl, talkative, open-hearted, sometimes overly excited.

But it was also nimble. After the university, I met her from time to time in different places and every time I learned that she had taken a new, more responsible job. But I think this was the peak of her career. Let's say, it's not a small thing, the press spokesperson of one of the member parties of the ruling coalition. Many will only dream.

In short, I called Ruzan and told her that I had an important job, to arrange to meet in the evening at one of the cafes on Northern Avenue. She picked the place herself. Although it was convenient for me because it was very close to our editorial office, it was not very profitable. I really didn't want the whole society of Northern Avenue to see us together. People would definitely see us because, Ruzan was not the kind of girl who would go unnoticed. And that's why I put a sports cap on my head (once Panda forgot it in the editorial office, and it was still hanging on the hanger), I asked one of the employees for his black sunglasses (I've never had anything like this myself) and I left the editorial office fifteen minutes before the agreed time to walk and think a little. I just didn't know exactly what I was going to say to Ruzan, how I was going to present my proposal.

North Avenue was crowded. I remembered that years ago, when we had just rented the space where our editorial office is located, I sometimes went out for a walk, and the picture was completely different. North Avenue was deserted and lifeless at that time. Once, while walking, I witnessed a strange scene, about which, I remember, I stopped and immediately wrote a review. And I saw a child who looked like Saroyan's Ulysses. He was standing on North Avenue, staring intently at a girl who had appeared here from nowhere. The child's mother, who was in the clothing store at that moment, called him, but the child was not interested in expensive clothes and preferred to look at the turtledove. Ulysses Macaulay, who loved all the people in the world, moles, and, surely, partridges, would certainly do the same. And I wondered at that time why there are no stores in Yerevan. Can you imagine how wonderful it would be if there were chicks on Northern Avenue? At least there would be some life, after all there were no people here.

Now, North Avenue was crowded, but it was still lifeless and somehow artificial. It must also have been because the lone grouse I saw here years ago had now flown away. Meanwhile, if he had stayed, maybe everything would have been different. Perhaps we would tolerate the turtledoves and start tolerating each other as well. Didn't we become more intolerant? Everything, i.e., everything good, believe me, starts with chickens. Because we were so short of breath, so short of life, and in this endless lifelessness we needed a bud that would also be hope.

There was evil all around us, and so little of the beautiful. What would you see if you looked at people's faces, going to work, going shopping, even going to have fun? Sad were the faces of the people and gloomy as the weather, sans sun in the sky.

Why couldn't we tell evil from good? Good is warm, good is bright, good has a smile, and it's a smile that makes everyone grin. And good is beautiful.

What lovely thing would you see if you looked around you? The newly constructed buildings and bridges, luxurious shops and cafes, shining "Hummers" and "Mercedes"? Even if they were really beautiful, what were they worth in the background of sad people?

Individuals can be sad or happy, it's not about them. Society was sad. What if you tried to stand on the sidewalk and smile at ten random passersby? How many would smile back? They would probably make

you look like a fool. Either crazy, or more likely, they'd think you're trying to get their hands on them and start a fight.

Isn't this a unique sociological question? What is a more effective way to know the public's attitude towards the authorities? Directly ask people about it or just smile at them? If your smile leaves a different impression on people than simply smiling, then they live a sad life, if you smile and think that you are touching them, then they are used to sullen and evil faces, if you smile, and you they put the volatile in place, so they think that only the volatile can be happy when everyone around them is sad.

People everywhere have worries. There are not many carefree people, no doubt. But that's not the life without a smile. Life without a smile is not because of worries, but because of indifference, the indifference of the common citizen and society towards the other person and the state, which is a consequence of the state's indifference towards the common citizen and the society in general. Ruzan arrived at the right time. I don't know if the position of press spokesperson was the reason for such conscientiousness or it just happened that way. I didn't even get to order anything to drink. I got up from my seat, he planted a "smashing" kiss on my cheek, then looked around and, spitting his finger, began to wipe off the lipstick mark from my cheek.

- Why do you look so strange? I almost didn't recognize you.

I didn't say that's why I look weird. Instead, I asked.

- What will you drink?

- I don't drink, my dear, I haven't for a long time.

- Do you drink in politics?

- I am involved in politics, that's why I don't drink.

- So that you don't say or do anything unnecessary?

- Both one and the other.

I liked his honesty. Although it had changed quite a bit, it was definitely the same inside. And I began to wonder if I had made the right decision to deal with him. But it was already too late to change anything, so Ruzan must have understood that I invited him to the meeting on a serious matter, and he was looking at my eyes (more precisely, my glasses) with such a look that it was clear that he was bursting with curiosity and wanted to understand what is happening in minutes. Of course, I could have made up something on the spur of the moment, let's say that I called him to arrange a new interview with the boss, but nevertheless, I decided to say the truth.

I formulated the problem as follows: one of my acquaintances (whose name I have not mentioned yet) is planning to make serious business investments in the media field of Armenia, for which he is looking for a strong political roof. Bearing in mind that

The "Appendix vermiformis" party is the only one of the forces of the ruling coalition that does not have its own media, neither printed nor electronic, my acquaintance thinks that it is possible to find edges of mutually beneficial cooperation.

I deliberately paused here. I slowly took out my cigarette, lit it, then began to study the menu. Ruzan was looking at me with wide eyes. He was like a child who had been told they had candy in their pocket but hadn't taken it out yet. As I expected, his response was not long in coming.

-It's interesting, -he snorted, -it's really interesting.

I continued to hold the pause. I was flipping through the menu and felt that Ruzan was not taking her eyes off me. She couldn't stand it again and said:

- But opening a TV station is an extremely expensive pleasure.
- As far as I know that person has no money troubles.

I slammed the menu shut and called the waiter over. Ruzan waited until I ordered, then spoke in a kind of pleading tone.

- I understand that you don't want to give the name yet, but at least tell me, is he a famous person?
- I don't think you will recognize him.
- Is he from Armenia or the Diaspora?

This is where I thought it was time to stop "playing tails". My interlocutor was already more than interested, and this can be used gently.

-Okay, - I pretended to give in, -I'll open some cards. But you have to promise that you won't talk about this anywhere.

She nodded intensely. I somehow held back my laughter and said it was about an extremely rich man who had businesses overseas. The name is Vaghinak. That's all, I can no longer answer any questions about him. I just want the leader of the party to know about this, and if he is interested, then we can continue. Moreover, it is not necessary for Ruzan to mention me, because I am only a mediator. She can say that the person turned to her personally. But Ruzan didn't want to give up easily. She continued to ask questions, and I drank my cognac indifferently.

One thing was clear, that I had chosen the right target. At least the spokesperson was obviously interested in what I said. It was clear that she saw own interest here, because it was about her field, and serious prospects could open up for her. And that's exactly what I needed, to tell the truth, because it was her own interest that would encourage her to present the issue to the party leader as best as possible. And I was sure that Ruzan is now impatient and would like to leave me a minute earlier to run and talk about all this.

And so, it happened. No diplomacy. She didn't even try to hide her excitement. She left the tea halfway through, kissed me on the same cheek once more (but this time she didn't remove the lipstick because she was in a hurry), took her coat from the back of the chair and left.

Looking for solutions

Exactly one week had passed since I mistakenly met Vaghinak at the airport. It was certainly one of the richest weeks of my life. And of course, the most relentless. I wonder if I were to count how many bottles of different colours, but (as Katya would say) high volume drinks I had poured into my body during that one week, what would be the number? I must say that I did something similar once. More precisely, not me, but Khachik, and not for one week, but for one winter. And do you know how much it turned out? I better not talk about it. And Khachik was my best friend. Life had certainly been generous to me in the matter of friends, and it sometimes seemed to me that every one of them was the best. But it wasn't like that. The best, without a doubt, was Khachik. He was from New York. He used to visit Armenia a lot, let's say he used to come for a week and... stay for a year, but recently he reduced his visits to a minimum.

When you asked why you come late, he answered: "Your authorities don't let me entertain my friends." He was one of the most apolitical and generous men I ever knew, and like all apolitical and generous men, he would wake up in the morning, get dressed, and reach into his pocket to find it as empty as his hangover head. But instead, life is full and beautiful, which should be continued as yesterday and all previous days. For that, of course, you need money, but you can always have that much money. That's what my friend thought, and I can't say I disagreed with him by and large.

Only then did my friend's life become somewhat difficult. Even he admitted it.

-A hundred dollars is no longer the same, - said Khachik, -do you remember when we used to break down a hundred dollars, go to Poplavok with eight people, drink all the vodka there was, and still have something left over to refresh ourselves in the morning?

I remembered, of course. That was ten years ago. Ten years ago, a hundred dollars was about sixty thousand drams, and that was a lot of money.

But was it about dollars and money in general that I wanted to talk about? Of course not, especially since I don't understand much about finance. And my friend didn't understand either, except for the cost part of course. And we have never bowed before money, and we are not going to. One thing was simply obvious. In Armenia, one hundred dollars was no longer one hundred dollars, nor was sixty thousand drams sixty thousand drams. In Armenia, neither the Armenian nor the American earned anything. Money was not enough for the most simple and lovely thing: entertaining.

You can safely say that the people in Armenia were struggling to earn their living, while this man talks about drinking and feasting. And you would undoubtedly be right. But, whatever I did, I missed my friend. He hadn't come for three years, and Vaghinak had come instead.

Oh, his drinking was different. As he used to say, there's always something to drink. Now, in fact, one week of his AUD and our work was over. Vaghinak continued to stay in his house on Aghayan Street, where there was still no electricity. I visited him regularly to see if everything was okay.

But there seemed to be nothing to worry about. He was either sleeping or drinking in the kitchen, always sitting in the same place and in the same position. Sometimes the deputy candidate was visited by his "bums" (Vaghinak threatened to cancel our deal if I upset them), and then the long philosophical conversations began. This was exactly the situation when I visited Vaghinak on that Friday in November. The composition of his guests remained the same and did not change. I remembered that Vaghinak said that one of them is a professor, another is an actor, the third is an architect, and the wife is a literary critic. Why not, it could happen. What would prevent a professor from becoming a "bum" in Armenia? The two pennies thrown away by the state that was more like a mockery? And did that state ever think about why an actor becomes "homeless" in our country? Did the state know that the wonderful Armenian cinematographer had passed away, and the talented actor would either devote himself to stupid TV series or become a "bum". Who in Armenia heard of an architect who respects his profession? And what prevented the last one from becoming a "bum" too? Wasn't it enough just to walk the streets of Yerevan (not to mention other cities) and look around? And what else would the critic criticize? How many books did all our writers write together per year? How many books did our society read a year? And in the end, who was worse, the "bum" professor or the professor who took money from a dumb student to give him a grade?

The "homeless" actor or the actor who portrayed the "homelessness" of our country in the TV series? The "bum" engineer or the architect whose ugly building was cracking after a year? The "bum" critic or the critic who, because he had no job, crushed a novice writer who had the courage to publish a book in our time without a master?

In short, Vaghinak could be right, and these "bums" were indeed once full members of society. It is also possible that they now feel more fully members of society than when they were not 'homeless'.

I honestly had nothing against "bums". Because I understood that they were just looking for a solution to the problem.

There was a "bum" who wandered at night on the street where our editorial office was, sometimes he met me wandering like him, and I understood that the only difference between us was that I had a home and also a job, but he didn't have a home and his workplace was this, the deserted street of our editorial office. Everything else was the same or similar. I had never spoken to the man, but I was sure he was. We wandered about as well or similarly because that was the solution to the problem at the time.

We certainly could have done it differently, that homeless man and me.

For example, we could have stopped wandering. I could sit in my chair at my workplace or in my house, he could sit on his cobblestone in his deserted street and we could look for solutions to problems.

However, let no one think that we were not looking for solutions while wandering. As is our entire society that is now wandering. Our whole society, regardless of whether it has a home and a job or not, is now in the status of that homeless person and a wanderer like me. Because society itself is looking for solutions to issues.

However, it was not supposed to be like that. After all, there were authorities whose duty was to search and find solutions to issues.

But the whole point was that the problems had no solutions because we had no authorities that could solve them.

But let's return to Vaghinak's "bums" who were debating in the cold kitchen of the house without light. The topic of the debate, however, was not political this time. I got to the point where they were discussing what money was. I stood between the kitchen door and listened to them.

-Money is a temptation and nothing else. But money and a lot of money are different things. It's about a lot of money. God gives a lot of money to someone and tests him - the one who said it, was the one in the coat (I think it was the former professor).

-And why doesn't God give me a lot of money? Am I not tempted? - was the question of the one who was wearing Vaghinak's orange jacket during our first meeting, while now he was wearing his own jacket with a clove head attached to the collar (probably he was the former actor).

-You will definitely be tempted, the professor said again.

-And I say I will not be tempted.

They continued to argue until the one who, both the first time and now, was wearing only a T-shirt (if we are guided by the principle of exclusion, then the former architect) intervened.

-Don't fight, gentlemen, it's not worth fighting over money.

- From here it follows: "money is for people to fight," said the author, a former literary critic. This time something made of dried leaves was placed on his head, neither a cap nor a crown. The lady was making

coffee on the stove and the strong smell of dry alcohol spread in the kitchen. The banquet table was poorer this time, there were only a few apples, mostly wormy. And now the red caviar metal box I bought served as an ashtray. But there was no shortage of drink, and good drink at that. They were placed here and there. Many full and empty bottles of Absolut vodka. Well, it seems that Vaghinak was right about his "savings". I asked him to stand aside, saying I had something important to talk about. Ruzan called me yesterday and said that the leader of their party wants to meet with my business acquaintance. That is, Vaghinak.

- That's how the adventures began, - I told him when we went out to the balcony together, - remember, you used to offer me adventures?

- What happened? I am not aware of anything.

- Of course, you don't know. You sit in the kitchen drinking all day, and I do the work for you?

- But wasn't that exactly what we agreed on?

- Anyway, during our last conversation, you said that you would help me, while now you have forgotten it.

I spoke to Vaghinak like this on purpose. I didn't know how dutiful a person he was, and even if he was, could a person remain dutiful during the AUD? The point is that I realized a long time ago that without his help I would not be able to cope with the work. Couldn't the deputy candidate be an invisible person? It had to come up at least once in a while, right?

Fortunately, Vaghinak was still able to hear and understand. I told him about my conversation with Ruzan and told him to prepare for the meeting with the leader of the "Appendix vermiformis" party.

- I don't know that person, I only know that he is a cunning scoundrel. But don't worry, I will talk to him in such a way that he will not only give me a place in their proportional list, but also agree to give me second place after him.

-We don't need the second place, - I said and started looking at Vaghinak with surprise.

Was this the man who had been drinking for a week? How incomprehensible was the transformation in him. In a minute he could go from a deranged alcoholic to a self-confident and sober-minded man.

- We don't need the second place. Any passing place will do. Even the tenth will do. In the first ten of their lists, there will necessarily be people who now have ministerial and vice-ministerial portfolios and will keep these portfolios after the elections, thus giving up their place on the list to the next ones. So, you should ask the honourable leader for the tenth place on the list. You will say that you are ready to transfer two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to the party's account in return, after the lists are published. In addition, you will promise a twenty-five percent share in your "media holding", which will be created after the elections. I think this will be enough. The whole point is how you say all this.

Vaghinak was listening to me carefully. He was leaning on the balcony bars, smoking and looking straight into my eyes.

- Where and when is the meeting?

- In their party office, Monday at five o'clock. If, of course, you stop drinking and clean up before then.

- I think I already told you that I don't drink. And don't worry, everything will be fine. By the way, can you clarify how that bastard is doing with the drink?

- Why do you need it? I hope you're not going to drink with him.

- Drunk policy is not subject to failure. And now let's go inside, we left my friends very alone.

Tbilisi-Yerevan

When I left Vaghinak, it was five o'clock. In other cases, "Friday" is the right time to start. I was sure that Panda was already waiting for me in the editorial office and had even managed to drink a few glasses without me. But he still didn't know that he was going to continue that day, that is, he was going to continue drinking alone, at least without me. I had an appointment with Katya at seven o'clock, and she demanded that I come to the meeting completely sober.

-I want to see you not drunk just once. I am sure that you will be unbearable, and it will be our last meeting, - said Katya.

In any case, I decided to go to the editorial office. Naturally, Panda was there. He had a bottle of rum out front and was making some sort of cocktail for the girls. I pointedly ignored him and went to my room. I turned on my controller and started working. It worked surprisingly well. I read all the articles that I hadn't managed yet, and even suggested some new material topics to the correspondents. In the meantime, Panda bleated several times, but I didn't listen. I was looking forward to the two hours that would pass so that I could slip away. And suddenly Katya called.

- We cannot meet today, - she said.

That's it, short and to the point. Without "I'm sorry", without "I'm sorry" or "regret", no reason, no explanation. We can't meet and that's it. I asked anyway if I could at least know the reason. She said that she is urgently leaving for Tbilisi on business of her company.

Well, as the favourite movie says, "we shaved our beards in vain"...

Of course, I had no choice but to show up to Panda. We finished the first bottle of rum in forty-five minutes, the second one took just as long. But we didn't manage to open the third one. An idea came to my mind: why not go to Tbilisi?

I called Katya from the road. When she found out about my decision, she started laughing. After a good laugh she said:

- Former young man, you are in love. Now I am sure of it.

I didn't object. I only asked for the name of the hotel where she was going to stay.

I had already reached Ashtarak when I remembered that my car did not have any documents. It's OK, I thought, I'll leave it near the border and take a taxi to Tbilisi. A little later, on the first steep incline, I remembered that the radiator of my car was out of order. More precisely, I didn't remember, but the radiator reminded me. The engine water had started to boil. I had to stop until it got cold. Then I reached a spring and added water. It went on like that all the way. At each more or less serious surge, I had to stop, add water to the radiator and wait for the engine to cool down. In short, I tortured my poor little Renault and just reached the Bagratashen border at midnight. It took another hour to get to Tbilisi by taxi. It was already one in the morning when I called Katya from the hotel lobby and told her about my arrival.

- Come up, - muttered Katya disgruntled into the phone.

Shee opened the door of the room, greeted coldly and stood at the door.

- Maybe you'll let me in? - I said in a fake pity tone.

- Maybe. If you answer why you crossed the Armenian-Georgian border in the middle of the night.
- Stupid questions do not suit your image of an intelligent woman.
- That very image forces me not to let you in, because I can roughly imagine the further course of events,
- Katya declared, looking at me hostilely.
- Don't worry. By eleven o'clock in the evening, I'm as safe and charming as a newborn puppy.

Katya smiled and opened the door on her heel. She was wearing a milky evening dress with the back completely exposed. My breath stopped for a moment: under the milky transparent fabric, chocolate-tanned skin was visible, unencumbered by the conventions of underwear. She was wearing a pair of dull gold high heels. She was so seductive that my gaze involuntarily began to search for the bed. Appreciating all the charm of the moment, Katya slowly and demonstratively turned around, walked just as slowly to the sofa, sat down, crossed her leg and looked at me questioningly.

-Are you in a hurry somewhere, like you said, in the middle of the night? - I asked.

- After a hard working day, I am going to relax with my friends in Tbilisi at night. In a club or clubs. You won't like it there, I believe. Because adorable, safe puppies should be drinking, curling up in a warm corner and purring at this hour.

- Buttermilk gives me an upset stomach, so I decided to replace it with whiskey.

-It's clear: Well, persistence should be rewarded. Before I paint my eyes, you have exactly half an hour to find a hotel, shave, put on a fresh shirt, and report to our lobby. If you are late, the carriage will turn into a pumpkin, and you will no longer find little Cinderella in the obscurity of Tbilisi clubs, - Katya suddenly became "nice".

Although I myself was ready in half an hour, but because I perfectly understood that time and punctuality are abstract and relative concepts for women, I waited for Katya not standing in the lobby, but sat in the corner of the bar, where the elevator and the wall of whiskey were visible. Seconds passed by, mixed with minutes, ice clinking in my glass of whiskey, and Katya was still not there. If women feel for even a second what a waiting man goes through, they will never be late again. At first, the man cherishes a vague hope that at least this time the woman will not be late, after twenty minutes the hope finally fades away, giving way to dull irritation, after thirty minutes the confidence comes that the movie or the concert will start without you, after forty minutes it's all in vain; trying to put out the first small sparks of the great fire of anger. And already an hour later, at the moment when he already wants to roar like a lion, the woman appears, the handmade masterpiece of make-up and hairstyle. She looks at the man with innocent eyes and calmly says. "Honey, I'm sorry, I'm a little late. I was thinking about you all the time and I couldn't decide what to wear to please you." And the giant, ferocious lion in the man's heart slowly shrinks and becomes a small kitten, which obediently follows the woman. The woman he was ready to tear to pieces a little while ago...

I had long passed the "lion stage" and reached the "mammoth reincarnation" when I realized from the reaction of the guys sitting at the bar that Katya was approaching.

In movies, I love the moment when the shot slows down and the audience gets to see everything. My senses were sharpened by whiskey, desire, and anticipation, and before Katya came out of the elevator and approached me, I managed to notice everything: the two Georgians sitting at the back table clucked their tongues eagerly, the three Germans at the next table, although they were sitting with "gender

equality, protection of women's rights" facial expression, nevertheless, their European "politically correct" faces were playing with serious Eastern passions.

-I have never waited so long for a woman in Tbilisi, - I said, -I'm sorry, but I had to drink alone.

-Okay, I'm sorry, - said the milk-colored priestess impudently.

She whispered in my ear as we got into the taxi.

- In my opinion, the taxi driver is Armenian or at least understands Armenian.

- So what? - I was surprised.

- Well, I warn you that if you suddenly decide to make indecent proposals to me, do it in a different language.

- You forget that obscene suggestions are made in a special tone. So it doesn't matter what language they are written in, the meaning is clear and obvious.

At that moment, the taxi driver, whose nationality was still under question, made such a gross violation that I immediately understood that he was Armenian.

- I want to ride the cable car with you, - announced Katya.

- In an evening dress?

- Yes. And now what, is it daytime?

The most difficult thing in this life is to firmly say "no". When you learn to say that one word at the right time, in the right place, and most importantly, with the right accent, your life becomes much easier. However, unfortunately, I have a weakness: when a beautiful woman asks me for something, I cannot refuse, no matter how strange and absurd her request is. And as a result, instead of spending a pleasant evening in a restaurant or bar at worst, or in bed at best, I end up in extremely unexpected places. This time, my bad habit of not being able to say "no" led to the fact that I ended up in the middle of the night with a half-naked beauty at the Tbilisi cable car station. And at the moment when I started to think that it is not such a bad idea to soar with Katya over the night Tbilisi, a Japanese man quickly pushed into the glass cabin. Every millimeter of his tiny body was used as a display board for the latest high-tech marvels. On his arm was a huge watch that showed the day, time, atmospheric pressure, degree of radiation, north, south, degree of water purity and a number of other useful and useless things. A professional camera was hanging around his neck, he was holding a Sony camera with his teeth, and with his short hands an iPad, iPod, iPhone and an iRubbish of unknown significance. And the funniest thing is, with the dexterity of a magician, he used all these digital toys at the same time.

-Oh my God, look how beautiful it is! - Katya exclaimed when the cable car started moving. Wow, and you're the Master too. You're a writer too, aren't you?

But at that moment, she looked more like a curious little girl who stuck her little nose to the glass of the cabin and gazed admiringly at the city bathed in lights.

It was really beautiful. I got up from the bench and stood next to Katya. She suddenly turned around, hugged my neck and started kissing me slowly. Before I could descend into the abyss of bliss, I noticed that the Japanese man's little eyes opened so wide that he looked like an ordinary European. We awoke to the clatter of iPads, iPods, iPhones and iRubbish of incomprehensible meaning: the clever person immortalized us and digitized us with all possible options...

I loved Chardin the most in Tbilisi. Named after a French Catholic missionary, the street was certainly

the heart and main artery of the capital city. Restored a few years ago, the Maidan, as Georgians call it, resembled the Champs-Élysées with its many cafes, restaurants, shops and salons.

- Can you explain to me how the Georgians managed to preserve and restore the architectural-historical-cultural face of their city, and our "Pink" turned into a dirty mask, -asked Katya.

- The reason is "rabbits", - I answered without thinking long.

- What does that mean? - Katya did not understand.

- How can I explain? Rabbits has been drinking our blood and eating our brains for a long time and destroying us from within. Maybe in a different sense, but "rabbits" caused as much damage to our people as the communists and the authorities of newly independent Armenia.

- Yes, that's right, - Katya surprisingly agreed with me, - but let's not spoil the evening. I adore this club. It is one of the best, most fashionable clubs in Tbilisi.

We were standing near a cellar that looked like a chicken coop.

-Really? - I couldn't hide my surprise.

- Don't look at the outer appearance. Believe me, you will remember the evening spent here for a long time, - Katya assured me.

However, I terribly disliked some of the undertones in her excited voice. - Why do you like those stupid night clubs so much? After all, you are a deep, full, bright personality. I can't understand what makes you so attracted to those warm, dark clubs where minors try their dissolve sexual energy in dance.

- Oooh! What kind of complicated words the taciturn tram driver started using, just to deprive the girl of a pleasant evening that was available to her. Okay, I'll explain one last time. Although I strongly doubt that from your poetic height you will understand the fears and passions that torment an ordinary mortal woman. It is the inalienable right of any woman to feel happy and young. Women whose age is 30+ go to clubs not because they enjoy being pampered by curvy puppies, but to prove to others and first of all to themselves that they are still "oh-ho" :

- Do you want to say that you like clubs..., -I started shocking and got disappointed, but Katya interrupted me.

- But there are exceptions. For example, me. I love clubs because I just love to dance. I love it very much: That's how I unwind. Some relax with massage, others with gambling, others with a drink or sex. I relax by dancing. No, I'm lying, sex helps too. But first dancing, then sex.

-That was pretty encouraging information, I said. But I officially declare that I will not set foot in that rat house, which you call the best entertainment place in Tbilisi.

Relax in a different place and under different music. And most importantly, in a different environment. I invite you to one of the most ordinary restaurants in Tbilisi. You will see not only how they dance, but also how they sing 30+, 40+ and 50+ sympathetic, non-promiscuous men. I will show you the real, "non-glamorous" Tbilisi.

- It sounds tempting. And there they give tea to the frozen, hungry priestesses?

- It is the duty of any man to feed and warm his woman, especially if that woman is not his... They give, they give everything. They even give wine...

I was woken up by my phone in the morning. They called from the bank to remind me that my loan is

due. But not only did I not remember the date, but if they asked me what date it was, I'm sure I would have had a hard time answering. I tried to get up, but realized I couldn't. My body just refused to comply. I threw the phone aside and went back to sleep. Then the phone called again: this time it was my wife. I said I'm alive and closed my eyes again. After the third call, which was from my workplace, I just hung up, mentally cursing the inventors of the so-called "roaming" and mobile communication in general. But still, they wouldn't let me sleep. This time my room phone rang. A gentle female voice announced that I should hand over my number. I looked, it was after twelve o'clock. Somehow I got up, found the bathroom and put my broken body in the shower. Fortunately it helped. I began to gradually come back to reality and remember some things, including the fact that I am not in Armenia. I also mentioned the year, the month, even the fact that the day is Monday. One minute, monday? On that very day, Vaghinak was supposed to meet with the leader of the "Appendix vermiformis" party.

I quickly dressed and went down to the lobby. In the mirror of the elevator, I noticed that my jacket was so dusty, as if they had cleaned the floor with it. Oh my god, what did I do yesterday...

By the time I handed in my number and paid, it was one o'clock. It was clear that no matter what I did, I could not be in Yerevan at five o'clock. So you could take your time, calmly drink a cup of coffee and decide what to do next. I remembered turning off my phone in the morning so I could sleep. I turned it on and called Katya first.

- What happened, why was your phone turned off? - she asked in a stern tone, -I've been calling since ten o'clock."

- Really? - I couldn't hide my joy - you called me?

- Of course I called. Didn't we agree to wake you up at ten?

- And why didn't you wake up?

- Because your phone was switched off.

- You could come to my room.

A sigh was heard on the other end of the line, then Katya said:

- You really don't remember anything? I told you that we will leave at six o'clock in the morning, I even offered you to come with us, but you refused. You only asked me to wake you up at ten o'clock. Well, did you remember?

Of course I didn't remember. But it didn't matter. What mattered was that she was restless.

- Did we dance yesterday? - I don't know why I remembered that we were dancing.

- Do you actually remember that one? Of course we danced and, oh, how we danced.

- What does "oh, how" mean?

- It means that you tried to twist me in your arms and we both fell on the ground.

Well of course. I remembered this one. That's why my jacket was so dusty.

-Do you love me? -I asked.

- No.

However, there was some happiness inside me. My body was aching, my heart was racing, my head was exploding, but still there was some happiness inside me. I drank my coffee and asked the waiter to call a taxi. I called Panda before it arrived. I gave Vaghinak's address and asked him to go to his apartment and call me from there (not only was there no electricity in Vaghinak's apartment, but also a telephone, and

he simply didn't have a cell phone). Of course, I didn't get away easily from Panda. He started questioning me. First, he asked where I was these two days, who I was with, what I did and similar things. I naturally didn't answer. Then tried to find out where I am now. I just said that I am not in Yerevan. In the end, Panda was interested who Vaghinak was and why he didn't have a phone. This is where I realized I had been a fool to reach out to him. I imagined what would happen if he suddenly started a conversation with Vaghinak and the latter told him about our plans. Not to mention that if suddenly the deputy candidate offers him a drink and he agrees. To make the picture even more complete, I imagined that the respectable "bums" were in Vaghinak's apartment at that moment. In short, Panda, or rather me, had an interesting life ahead.

That lucky call rang after about an hour, at the moment when I crossed the Georgian part of the Armenia-Georgia border, reached the Armenian one, and the Armenian border guard was checking my passport.

-You didn't go away, did you? - I heard Panda's voice, -where did you send me?

- What happened? - I asked.

- What do you think? There are corpses here.

- What corpses? - I was seriously worried and raised my voice. The border guard left my passport and looked at my face carefully. - Well, there's no way else to call it? There are four drunken people here, three men, one woman, - Panda continued.

-You idiot, how could you joke like that? - I shouted and turned off the phone and looked at the border guard with a guilty look.

Hesitantly, he returned my passport. I left the checkpoint and called Panda again.

- Can you explain normally what is happening there?

- Let me explain, - said Panda, - at the moment I am in an apartment that reminds me of a tomb, and the following scene unfolds in front of me. There are three dead bodies in the kitchen. That one of them is wearing a coat is understandable because it's freezing cold here, but why the other is half-naked I can't understand. The third man's body is currently under the table. There was also a woman who, seeing me, ran to the balcony, shouting that I was from the KGB. What else are you interested in?

- Wait, - I was surprised, - are there just those four? And where is Vaghinak?

-I don't even know which of these is Vaghinak. One thing I can say for sure is that he is not the one in the balcony right now.

I asked Panda not to hang up and to ask one of the "corpses" where Vaghinak was.

It turned out that the deputy candidate had been absent for an hour. There was an idea that he went to a store and there was an idea that he went to a barber shop. I asked Panda to stay in the apartment until the landlord returned. Of course he didn't agree. I persuaded for a long time and finally we settled on the option that he would wait at the entrance. I got into my car and rushed to Yerevan (as fast as possible with a leaky radiator). I had already reached Alaverdi when my phone rang. It was Panda's number, but the speaker was Vaghinak.

-Where are you? - he said, -I've been waiting for you for two days.

The voice was sober, regular. Did he really not drink, I wondered. I tried to excuse myself that it was an urgent matter and I left for Georgia. I said that I won't be in Yerevan by the agreed time.

-Don't worry, I'll take care of everything, - he said very confidently, "just tell me where their office is."

- It is better to postpone the meeting. I'll call their spokesperson and figure something out.
 - There is no need, - insisted Vaghinak, - I will go and everything will be fine. Just tell me the address.
- I gave the address and then said:
- I will reach Yerevan in three or four hours, where will you be
 - At home, where else?
 - Well, then we will meet at your place. By the way, don't you think it's time to keep a cell phone?
 - No, I don't think so, - he said and hang up Panda's phone.

That's it, I thought, it can be considered a failure before it's even started. Of course, that's how it should be. What else could be expected when an AUD addict like Vaghinak and a weakling like me take action together? As one of the Vasyas would say, "Did you have to drink that much?" And really, let's say I did well to go to Tbilisi, but was it necessary to drink so much that I forget my work? And Katya, if I'm not mistaken, constantly reminded us about our bet. A bet that can be considered to be lost. So go to Yerevan and continue drinking. You can even "go into the shop". There is a friend, there is a place to stay: Vaghinak and his apartment.

Before reaching Yerevan, I stopped at least ten places to add water to the leaky radiator. Poor car. It has served me faithfully for three years now, while I have not taken it to the mechanic even thrise. What had not happened to my little "Renault"... Once on the way back from Karabakh, the engine of the car turned off and would not start. I stayed on the road for an hour until a driver helped me. It turned out some injector wire had snapped. The driver fixed it with insulating tape and told me to change it when I get to Yerevan, because it will definitely come off again. That was a year ago and I hadn't changed that wire until now. Once again, I lightly bumped into a taxi, and the front fender of my car broke off on one side and hung on the ground. We somehow connected it with the taxi driver, and until now the jet was connected like that.

However, this time too, my faithful "Renault" got me to a good place.

To tell the truth, I went to Vaghinak only to record the end of this story, to apologize to him for belittling his "presidential" plans so much and for actually failing, and to say goodbye.

He was alone at home. There were no "bums". He was sitting at the kitchen table, in the same place, in the same position, with a bottle of vodka and two glasses in front of him (the second one was probably for me). But when I got closer, I saw a completely different figure in the light of the oil lamp. With an elegant haircut, gold-plated glasses, an expensive suit and a shiny "juju" tied around his neck under his shirt, as if he were a completely different person.

- What is this metamorphosis? - I asked in surprise.
- What will you not do for the sake of the deputy's mandate, - he laughed, - sit down, sit down, let's have a glass.

I was mechanically subjugated. I sat down, we drank a glass in silence, then the second. I didn't dare to ask anything. After the third cup, only Vaghinak spoke.

- Well, you can congratulate me. you can say that now I am a partisan. I don't have a membership yet, but that doesn't matter. The important thing is that I have been promised the tenth horizontal in the proportional list of the "Appendix vermiformis" party. I only regret that I listened to you and underestimated myself so much. I am sure that the fifth son of that scoundrel would agree.

- But how, - I asked confused, - how did you manage it?

- Well, I already said, at the price of a great sacrifice. I had to agree to join their party. It was hard to say no, you should have seen him ask. But I must say that half of the laurels of success are yours. You've come to the right place with your "media holding" idea. Money certainly played a role as well. And the rest was just a matter of technique. Didn't I tell you that drunken politics is not subject to failure?

Freedom of our press

Our editorial office was five years old. Five years ago today, we organized the first press conference in our club. That was in 2006.

Times were a little different. To say that freedom of speech and press was absent in the country would certainly not be correct. Only that was exactly what the print media said, without understanding or not wanting to understand the full depth of the paradox. It would also be incorrect to say that the authorities did not control television in the country and there was no censorship here, but that was exactly what all the TV channels claimed indiscriminately, not caring about the reality.

Other things were said in the print media: about all circles of the authorities and all those who were in power or had a connection with the government. About the president and his team, about the ruling party and its leaders, about the parliament and parliamentarians, about the judicial system and judges, as well as about the families of the mentioned people, their relatives and friends. Bad things were said.

All TV stations indiscriminately claimed other things. they claimed that there is a relentless fight against illegalities in the country, they claimed that bribery and patronage are rapidly disappearing from the country, they claimed that the economy is developing rapidly in the country, that the people believe and trust the authorities. In short, only good things.

And, in fact, the newspapers said that there is no press freedom in the country, and the television claimed that there is no censorship. But that wasn't the funniest part. The funniest thing was that despite all the depth of the paradox and regardless of the reality, there really was no freedom of the press in the country, and there was no press censorship. Because there was no press.

What purpose should the press serve in general and what purpose should the press serve in a society where everything is not in order? To inform the public? Of course. But not to be informed about the things that are of interest to the owners of the given media, but in general about everything that is important. But that's not enough. The press is not only a source of information. Because information, answering several important questions: what, when, where, does not answer a more important question: why? Therefore, the press should make sure that the public gets comprehensive answers to important questions: why did such and such a thing happen, could it not have happened, what will happen next, etc. But these should not be beneficial to the owners of the media, but real answers.

But that is not enough. The press should also educate, encourage, punish, encourage, guide, etc. This is in general.

And in an unhealthy society, the press has two main functions: to give the diagnosis of the disease and to offer the prescription. And to do it continuously until the recovery of society. Otherwise, it would not be wrong to say that there is no press, even if a hundred newspapers are published in the country and a

hundred television channels are broadcast.

Why were people reading such and such a newspaper and watching such and such a channel in 2006? For exactly the same reason they read other newspapers and watched other channels. Due to lack of choice. The print media, which had a very limited circulation and therefore a very limited number of readers, was not controlled by the authorities in that way and, of course, with the aim of creating some imitation of freedom of speech, as a result, it almost completely appeared in the hands of those "upset" by the authorities or in the hands of the "revanchists" and was exclusively engaged in attacking the authorities, often even presenting the positive as negative. Television, whose audience was the entire population of the country plus the Diaspora, was strictly controlled by the authorities for this very reason and presented only the positive happenings in the country, often even presenting the negative as positive. As a result, whichever newspaper the reader bought (with a few exceptions), he encountered the same bile, and whichever channel the TV viewer turned on (again, with a few exceptions), he heard the same admirations.

And so, at that time the "revengers" constantly claimed that there is no freedom of speech in Armenia. It was a bit unclear. When you can say there is no freedom of speech, then how is there no freedom of speech? It can't be what it is, can it?

I have a story to remember.

One day on the Yerevan-Moscow flight, a woman sitting next to me complained that there was no air in the plane. She was wearing a musket made of the fur of an otter or some other animal, on her head a hat made of the fur of an otter or some other animal, under which for some reason orange hair could be seen, and I was drinking brandy. Maybe it's just hot, I tried to ask the lady, but she was probably offended and looked at me and my goat. But the fun was yet to come. The lady called the flight attendant and said that there was no air on the plane and she demanded to be moved to another seat. Fortunately, the attendant was a girl with a sense of humor and asked with a sweet smile: "another seat, on another plane?" The lady, however, didn't get the humor, she scolded the sweet flight attendant and demanded to be moved to another seat on the same plane, away from the drunken crowd. Of course, I was the "drunken person", but that was not the important thing, the important thing was the next answer of the escort. "Would you please take off your coat, ma'am? All the passengers have already seen it." This finally roused the lady in the otter or some other animal fur coat and hat and for some reason orange hair, and she demanded that the captain of the plane be called.

I remembered this story every time they said that there is no freedom of speech in Armenia. Maybe shave off your moustaches.

Of course, freedom of speech and press were not established in our country, but who was making fuss about it? The media that made noise did have restrictions on freedom of speech, but their goal was not freedom of the press at all, and they were also just doing orders. And their limiters were not the authorities at all. At least for now.

The current authorities restricted the freedom of TV companies. I could almost say that they were doing well. Undoubtedly, they didn't do well, but still, let's imagine what would happen if the people who owned many newspapers of the time also owned televisions, and those televisions were run by people like those who ran the daily newspapers, many newspapers.

I once had the opportunity to deal, let's say professionally, with such a leader. At that time, he was the editor of a newspaper (by the way, now he was going to become a deputy on the list of the "Levon the Great" party alliance), and I worked as a director in a museum. And here in the newspaper, whose editor he was, an article was published in which, among other accusations, it was mentioned that the museum, of which I was the director, did not have a sign. Directly above the entrance of the museum hung and always hung and still hangs a two square meter marble plaque. I informed the editor about it and what do you think he replied? -The correspondent probably didn't notice. Here it is.

I must not forget to say that that correspondent later started covering domestic political events.

Now let's imagine what would happen if a TV company was run by such an editor and the reporters didn't notice the signs and continue to order, in this case with an audience a hundred times larger, and order from that audience what they ordered. Unfortunately, there was no doubt that it would happen like that.

- So, freedom of the press, for what?

Our editorial office was five years old. We were few, not many. A group of ten or twelve people who thought alike about the most important things. Professionally and in general. For example, you don't need to fake, you don't need to lie, you don't need to flirt, you don't need to gossip, you don't need to be afraid, etc. Both professionally and generally.

We published a media that belonged to each of us, each of our readers, and in general, everyone who respected truth and respected freedom. They constantly tried to convince us that there can be no independent media in Armenia. There can be no media that is not sold in the first place, or at least will not be sold at some point.

Imagine a museum guard who keeps watch so that the valuables stored in the museum are not stolen.

Or a janitor who sweeps the city sidewalks to keep them clean.

And a nanny who takes care of the child so that he grows up.

Those people get paid. A museum guard is paid to guard the museum's treasures, a janitor is paid to keep the sidewalks clean, a nanny is paid to look after a child. Does this mean these people are sold out?

It's one thing to pay a guard and ask him to occasionally turn a blind eye when museum staff are taking museum treasures.

If a street sweeper is paid to pick up litter from the sidewalk and dump it at someone's house.

If a babysitter is paid to teach a child interesting swear words.

They constantly tried to convince us that there can be no independent media in Armenia. There can be no media that is not sold in the first place, or at least will not be sold at some point.

Of course, it can't. And we, without a doubt, were not independent to the extent that we depended on our ideas of truth, morality, patriotism and humanity.

And we were unmistakably sold out and were ready to sell out at any moment, to the one who wants to preserve the values, keep clean and grow our small country.

We tried to be guards, cleaners and babysitters.

Our editorial office was five years old. What was not seen by our editors who were not here?

Five years ago today, the first press conference was held in our press hall. At that time, apart from engaging in media activities and publishing a newspaper, we had other interesting plans, but we could not implement them. We wanted to create a club that would become a gathering place for journalists and

politicians. Where these people could communicate with each other, get to know each other, discuss in a relaxed atmosphere the issues that interest them and concern the society, debate, where they could read newspapers, listen to music, drink. In a word, a club in its classical sense, where views would collide and glasses would be clinked. And I must say that we created all the conditions for all this. We even kept a cat, which we thought would absorb human complexes and help people feel free.

Then I often asked myself why the idea didn't fully materialize. And I thought that the reason was precisely the human complexes that the cat could not actually absorb. Only those politicians and journalists who had nothing to fear for what they did and wrote, who had always been honest and clean in front of their colleagues, the public, and themselves, gave themselves to the club atmosphere and felt good here. And there were few of them. The rest just couldn't feel good here. The problem is that in our political and media sphere (I'm sure in other spheres as well) it was an accepted thing to so-called "talking behind", "digging under", "turning on the head". These filthy phenomena had become so commonplace that they no longer surprised anyone. And how could they be together?

People who are "undermining", "making heads" with each other, and "talking behind each other's back" should gather in the same place with a clear conscience. Of course, they couldn't.

This is for the experienced. And those who were just entering the media or political field and had not yet had time to soak in the above-mentioned phenomena, were constrained and complicated to the point of being afraid.

As was the policy in the country, so were the politicians, as was the country's press, so were the press people. Unfortunately, the exceptions were so few that not even two dozen people got together in our club.

What was the reason for all this? Why didn't that layer of free-thinking and self-expressive, courageous and unrestrained people form in the twenty-year-old independent country?

Next is the "Levon the Great" alliance

"Levon the Great" alliance of parties was the second on my (perhaps with a clear conscience, we can say our) adventure list. But it was not because this political force or its leader was better than the previous one. At all. Simply, when in politics (perhaps not only) you combine mean and nasty, you give preference to the former whether you like it or not. At least it's not disgusting.

And here I have to be subjective again and express my distaste for the next political force on our list and its leader. And of course, I will try to justify it (I don't know how successful I was in the previous case).

Here I want to tell you a little story. Twenty-three years ago, in 1988,

around these days we were in "Poplavok" with several classmates. Some of the leaders of the Karabakh movement were sitting at the next table, five or six people. Those five or six people were silent for a while because they were eating. In the centre of the table, the famous lahmajouns of "Poplavok" smelled "mercilessly" stacked on top of each other. We were also silent, and we also ordered lahmajoun, but unlike the neighbouring table, we did not eat, but we were silent because we were holding our breath waiting for the idols of the people at that time to say something and for us to hear something. Fortunately, the silence didn't last long. The leaders of the movement must have been hungry, and their silence lasted just

as long as it took the lahmajouns on the table to run out. Or almost run out. There was one grain of lahmajoun left on a plate in the centre of the table, which looked very poor. The leaders started talking. They were discussing something in low voices, glancing at the last lahmajoun from time to time. After a while, the waitress came and began to clean the table so diligently that her giant breasts almost popped out from under the apron. But that was not the important thing: the highlight was the last remaining lahmajoun, which must have been frozen and looked very poor indeed, to the point that the waitress decided to take it away. Take it! Take what? Who would let him? Immediately five or six hands descended on the lahmajoun and tore it to pieces...

Then, in the same way, the earth was torn to pieces. And still continues to be torn apart.

Why did I remember this incident? Because everything could have been different, everything should have been different, but it wasn't. And it's not at all about the fact that those people who tore the last lahmajoun to pieces couldn't build a society, couldn't build an economy, couldn't take ownership of our victory in the war, what's more, they weakened the society, destroyed the economy and moved the war from the front to the home. trying to win over his own people. It is not about this, because this only speaks of a weak and immoral government.

They devalued the idea of independence and broke the spirit of struggle among the people. This is what it is about, and this is the greatest disservice to future generations.

But that was not all. The second coming of these people (ten years after they lost power) brought with it a new tragedy. For the first time in the history of our independent state, the attempted coup resulted in human casualties. Some said it was the work of the authorities. I thought it wasn't. The authorities, of course, had to be blamed because they could not avoid victims, because they were able to turn the crooked bodyguards of the oligarchs against the people, because they were not able to teach the commander and the soldier that one should not shoot at one's own people. But in no case could the authorities be blamed for having given the order to shoot at the people. Because they simply could not give such an instruction. Neither the second nor the third president could simply give such an order. Only because they were smart enough to realize that sooner or later it would all turn against them.

Even the first president could not give such an instruction if he was in power at that time. But not being in power, he could instruct his stragglers to go all the way until they were shot, knowing full well who would turn against the people. And he did it. As for why he did it, I think it was clear.

The first president was also smart enough to understand that he simply could not bring back the power. But he was also a cunning and wily man. And what can a cunning and wily man do, who is also smart enough, and who is also an ousted president, and who should go down in history as a defeated and weak president? He had to achieve that the authorities following him would remain in history as worse than him.

I don't think so, but there are many who do. So, it can be said that so far, he was succeeding.

And here, at the end of the fall of 2011, the alliance of parties led by him was preparing for the next parliamentary elections and it must be said that he had quite a big appetite.

As I said before, this political power was second on our adventure list. Vaghinak had already secured his place in the proportional list of the "Appendix vermiformis" party. Now it was the turn of the "Levon the Great" alliance of parties.

In the previous case, we were dealing with the party establishing the government, while the "Levon the Great" alliance of parties declared itself a radical opposition. And even though there was no internal democracy here either, and the decisions were made by one man, that man was too smart and it would not be so easy to fool him as we did with the "Appendix vermiformis" party.

There were also other obstacles due to the fact that behind this political force, unlike the previous one, there was people, and in this political force, again unlike the previous one, there were political figures. Therefore, the list, although compiled by the leader, was under serious control, and it was difficult enough to insert a random person there.

What did Vaghinak think about all this? He was well acquainted with this political force, wasn't he? Maybe he could find the key to their list?

But everything happened differently. My friend Andreas helped me find the key to the electoral list of the "Levon the Great" alliance of parties. More precisely, an article written by him, which our analyst started like this. "Do you all remember the story of the father, the three sons and the broom? Yes, the story teaches a person something very simple at first glance: it is impossible to break a broom if its blades are tied together, and vice versa, the blades are easily broken into pieces. In our times of making party lists, this tale acquires a rather serious and mysterious meaning. Especially in the case of large and medium-sized associations."

Then Andreas reminded that there are 18 parties and organizations in the alliance of "Levon the Great" parties, famous and prominent people, as well as ambitious young people and asked what to do.

-Of course, such a situation, which is created just because of making a list, must be overcome. Otherwise, what will happen: to be together on the street for four years, to endure all the hardships together, to receive true and unjustified criticisms together, to go to a dialogue with the authorities together, to go home together and come to the rally together under the leader's instructions, to sleep together under the same tent and now split for some list? No, it's not going to happen. On the one hand, the story of the broom warns that it is not allowed, - continued Andreas.

What did my friend mean and what can be learned from his solution for our case?

This political force, which was created after the second appearance of the first president, found itself in an extremely difficult situation on the threshold of the parliamentary elections, as a result of which all persons with an above-average role here, almost without exception, wanted to find a place in the transitory ranks of the bloc's list. And there were many of them. This alliance, acting from the positions of the radical opposition, had grown so much since its creation that there was no room left for parties and organizations with less than one member. And all, again almost without exception, were driven by self-interest, which was nothing more than a parliamentary mandate. But neither the parliament nor the list of "Levon the Great" party alliance was elastic, and there could not be a place for everyone. This had already caused serious conflicts within the alliance, which could lead to the split of this political force.

This could be understood from the article of our analyst and also to find a possible solution to the issue. And the solution was as follows. The joint list of the "Levon the Great" alliance of parties could be penetrated by taking advantage of the confusion prevailing here.

What I had in mind was a multi-step combo. First, all those parties and organizations whose candidates did not have real chances to occupy temporary places in the list should be offered as a candidate to

Vaghinak as a member of the alliance. Instead, they could be promised two things. let's say, the support of the USA, and, of course, money.

Then it would be necessary to invent a legend as reliable as possible. During these years, So, Vaghinak established serious ties with the elite of the ruling party in the USA and was sent by them to the homeland to promote the spread of the democratic ideas of the United States. A mutually beneficial transaction is offered. In order to spread those ideas, he goes to the parliament as a candidate of the given party, and in return the given party receives the support of the US authorities.

It was no secret that before each parliamentary election, the US ambassador to Armenia had meetings with major political forces. It was necessary to make sure that before the ambassador met with the leader of the alliance of "Levon the Great" parties, Vaghinak would have already made his proposal. In other words, he would have met with the heads of small parties and organizations included in the alliance and assured them that if his proposal was accepted, the US ambassador would make some hints during the meeting with the leader of the alliance, specifically about supporting them. Since the ambassador was going to talk unconditionally about the spread of democratic ideas during the said meeting, this could later be attributed as the result of a pre-arranged agreement.

And as for the money, as in the case of the "Appendix vermiformis" party, it was necessary to say here that the money (in this case, of course, not two hundred and fifty, but say fifty thousand dollars) will be transferred to their account for the publication of the lists, the next day.

But this was not enough to get the job done. In the head of the leader and leaders of this political force, a question could certainly arise as to who is that Soviet man who is so unanimously supported by all small parties. So, the next step was to do the following: if Vaghinak was right and had really been in close relations with the spiritual fathers of this urban force, then now was the right time to meet them and announce his return. Or rather, meeting one of them. As surprising as it may seem, it was not about the leader, but about someone else who, after the change of power, had been in the shadows for the last fourteen years, but whose influence here was perhaps less than that of the leader. Let's say:

"grey cardinal", whom Vaghinak must have known. Recently, there was no need to tell any fairy tales, it was just necessary to meet and talk about politics.

In short, why not, it could have worked.

Toast to old loves

I called Vaghinak. I gave him a phone and explained that at least it was necessary for our work. But, as you can see, I could not convince. He did not return calls. I had to go to his apartment. I had not seen him for two days and I was a little worried.

But as it turned out, there was nothing to worry about for now. Although the deputy candidate was heavily drunk, he didn't seem to feel bad. I didn't understand at first why she had moved from the kitchen to the living room.

Here was a real firework, or rather, a candlelight; candles were everywhere. Some he fixed on the chandelier hanging from the ceiling, the rest were on the dresser, on the windowsills, even on the piano. The table was lined with exotic fruits, various sweets, brandy and champagne, and in the centre was a

huge flower-bowl with white roses. When I walked in, Vaghinak could smell them.

- I can't claim that I was waiting for you, he said annoyed, when he saw me.

- That's why you can answer phone calls. I gave you a phone and asked you to be careful, -I excused myself.

-I forgot, - Vaghinak said dryly.

I turned to leave but he stopped me.

- Wait, I have good brandy.

- But you were expecting someone else, weren't you?

- Yes, someone I once loved. Stay, I will introduce you later.

I stayed. I drank a few glasses of brandy with Vaghinak (he was drinking his vodka), then I don't know why, I wanted to go out to the balcony.

Standing on the balcony of Vaghinak's house, I thought about my old loves. One of them once lived on this same street in this same building. It was a long time ago; it's been a lifetime and now I don't remember many things. However, I remember that even then I liked to stand on the balcony. I used to go out to the balcony of this same building on Aghayan Street and communicate with a sparrow that lived nearby. He came here often. I gave him breadcrumbs, and the sparrow, for some reason, was sad. He was probably alone, and the other sparrows probably didn't understand him. But he ate the breadcrumbs I gave him. I didn't get close enough to him that he had to fly, even though I knew he wasn't afraid of me. And he knew it. And I used to stand not far away and watch him eat the breadcrumbs I gave him.

And I thought where my love is that lived in this building. I was wondering where my sparrow was. I looked at the roofs of the opposite buildings and imagined how lonely my sparrow was and maybe hungry, and maybe cold, and maybe frozen, and maybe he was afraid of other sparrows.

And I was also thinking about other things. I liked to think about other things while standing on the balcony. And I knew that I was also hungry, I was cold, frozen, and I was also afraid of people. That's what happens when you stand on the balcony of your girlfriend's building, where your sparrow is not there. And I was sad.

I knew that people and sparrows should live so that no one in the world should fear one another. It probably doesn't happen like that, and it hardly happens, but still. I was afraid of people, not because they might hurt me, but because they might hurt themselves. And my sparrow, I knew, was not afraid of sparrows because they could harm him, but because they could harm themselves.

Then I thought that people and sparrows can be hungry and cold, but they must live so that no one in the world is hungry and cold. It probably doesn't happen like that and it hardly happens, but still, people and sparrows have to live so that no one in the world gets hungry or cold.

And I also thought that people and sparrows can be sad, but they must live so that no one in the world makes anyone sad. Maybe it doesn't happen like that, but it's worth living for.

Well, the past loves... We have hurt them, they have hurt us, and there have been thousands of such balconies in the world and will continue to exist for sure. And if, leaning on the balcony railing, we have chosen life, then it will go on too.

- Why are you standing like a statue? Let's drink, Vaghinak called from inside.

Indeed, it was the right time to drink. I entered the living room, sat at the table and filled the glasses. The

one whom Vaghinak was waiting for had not yet arrived.

-A toast to our old loves, - I said.

- Did you remember them too?

I didn't say anything. I took my coat and left...

My silliness or Vaghinak's insanity?

I talked about the case with Vaghinak the next day. He looked too happy; one could assume that yesterday's meeting had not only taken place, but had taken place. It must have been helpful to our cause. The future deputy was standing by the window, holding a mirror in one hand and scissors in the other, and was trimming his beard with his own nervous, sharp movements. I followed him for a while, then told him in detail about my thoughts and waited to see how he would turn out. Vaghinak's reaction was quite strange.

-A few days, - he said.

I looked at him in surprise.

- I will have to abstain from drinking for a few days, - Vaghinak explained, - doesn't your plan involve at least five or six meetings?

That was what worried him. Although I had no right to complain. Drunk or sober, he seemed to perform his assigned part flawlessly. But, in any case, I tried to find out what he thinks about the idea in general. His answer surprised me again.

- It is so mixed and unclear that it can work.

-And what do you think about meeting your old friend? - I meant the grey cardinal.

He didn't answer for a while; I had to wait until he finished the part of the right cheek, after which he just said:

- I know that person, I am sure that he can be convinced.

- Really? - I was a little surprised - what to convince and why are you so sure?

- Convince me that I want to return to politics. And why I am sure, because, as I already said, I know him.

-Perhaps you could still elaborate, - I refused, - we are doing a joint business, and I need to know what.

A few nervous flips of the scissors followed, after which he replied:

- It's just that I know the diagnosis of political disease not only of that person, but also of all of them.

- And what is that diagnosis?

- Fear.

- Fear? Fear of whom?

- They don't know from whom either.

Vaghinak had put down the scissors and picked up the razor. I had to stop my questions for a moment, worried that he would suddenly snap his neck. But I had another concern. It seemed to me that he was rambling again. So, I waited a while and asked him to clarify what he meant.

- It is an abstract fear - he explained - they are afraid of people they do not know. From their owners. And those owners are different. They are sitting in Moscow, Washington, London, Tel Aviv. Those

owners have always been there. The masters brought them to power, the masters deprived them of power. And they kept them in fear all the time. And now it is enough for them to hear the name of any power centre, that fear raises its head again. You understand:

-It's not that much, but you can continue, - I said honestly.

- Before they came to power, they spent some time in Moscow's "Matrosskaya Tishina" prison, then they were connected to Tel Aviv by invisible threads, then they underwent brainwashing therapies in London, and finally they were released by Washington. Do you understand? - he repeated.

I can't say I understood. However, this was more like a fantasy than a science. In other words, there was no need to worry. Vaghinak could appear as much as he wanted, it would not interfere with the work. And if he was telling the truth, and because of my short mind I did not understand him, then even better. In any case, we agreed that he would meet the venerable "grey cardinal" the next day.

Katya gets furious

When I left Vaghinak, the weather was wonderful. I decided to take a walk. I was kind of sad. In the depths of my soul, a fat worm was crawling here and there, turning me upside down. I thought about Katya all the time. I was thinking how it happened that I, an experienced man who has seen life and enjoyed women of different colours and tastes, have utterly lost my head. I was trying to understand the "anatomy" of my feelings for Katya. But that's how emotions work, they can't be laid on the operating table and buzzed with a lancet. That's how you hurt yourself. It was clear that I couldn't do it without Katya. It was clear that I needed her. It was necessary to live, to write, maybe even to drink. Yes, even to drink. I drank from happiness when she was next to me and from longing when she was far away. But it was also clear that she was living a wonderful life without me.

And suddenly I felt that if I don't see her right away, at this very moment, something bad will surely happen to me. So, I dialled her number. "The subscriber is unavailable. Please try again later," said the indifferent voice. How late, maybe that late will be too late, and something bad will happen to me, and I will never see her again. I couldn't bear it when I called Katya and her phone was switched off. I was going crazy. From anxiety, longing, jealousy, fear of never seeing her again.

Unfortunately, due to work, she was often "unavailable", and wide horizons opened up for my "psychosis". But this time I was lucky; the dark wave of anxiety could not remove the sludge of jealousy and fear from the depths of my heart. My cell phone rang. It was her:

- You called. I got a message.

- I called. But as your habit, your phone was switched off.

- Let's not talk about habits, okay? I seem to be quite tolerant of your countless habits. And besides, I'm not in the mood to tolerate scolding, whining, criticism, or moral lectures today. If you have clear, constructive suggestions and healthy thoughts, let's continue the conversation, if not, I've already put on my "pyjamas" with Winnie the Pooh and I'm going to sleep, - Katya made an unexpected aggressive attack.

- I have one, - already used to her attacks of aggression, I answered in a calm tone. - The weather is wonderful. I noticed you gained a little weight during our last meeting. So, get Winnie the Pooh off your chubby body and let's go for a walk. An evening walk is said to be one of the best ways to fight cellulite.

I heard Katya gasp in anger on the other end of the line. There was stone silence. Such a perfect silence usually precedes a thunderstorm. But I was in for a surprise.

- Where are we going for a walk to get rid of my cellulite? - asked Katya with a honey voice and sherbet accent.

I only knew that that angelic voice was the first sign of the great danger threatening me; knowing Katya very well, I also knew what was going to happen to me. But I had no other option to get her out of the house.

- In 20 minutes, in Cascade, - I answered and at that moment I realized that I also love Katya for her fantastic unpredictability. She was unpredictable like all the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian and I don't know which oceans combined. In her place, another woman would pout like an angry sparrow and for a week you would have to swear by the gods of all religions that she is not fat, that she is like the Venus, etc. And Katya decided to come and "kill" me on the spot.

-Good evening, handsome young man, - Katya hissed rather than said when we met at the stairs of Cascade.

- Were you in a hurry to come here? - I asked, examining her carefully.

- Why?

- You forgot to get dressed. I said take-off Winnie the Pooh, but I didn't think I should also remind you to dress at your own discretion.

Katya still had clothes on. But if you looked closely, you could only see a microscopic denim shorts and a short-sleeved white T-shirt. In contrast to the minimalist clothes, there were large military boots on the feet.

- I purposely forgot to get dressed. I hope that the admiring glances of men and the venomous looks of women will prove you that there is not a single extra gram on my flexible, toned body, and I do not suffer from cellulite either. You hurt me to death. Although the fault is mine: priestesses should not communicate with rude and impolite tram drivers. Social discrimination is actually a very true thing. I understand now.

Katya was really mad. To be fair, she looked great. We grabbed a beer and walked up to the topmost platform of the Cascade. Sitting on the stairs, we drank beer and were silent.

The fact that you can be silent next to a person is very important for me. Be silent so that neither you nor she feel uncomfortable. I wanted to hug Katya, but from her look I realized that today she is pricklier than a hedgehog and still hasn't forgiven my cunning.

It took some time before she broke the silence.

- How is Vaghinak? Sold his political virginity already?

- The auction is still in progress. Why did you suddenly remember Vaghinak?

- Listen, you don't seem to be very old. I don't like your signs of sclerosis. Have you already forgotten about our bet?

- I think about it both awake and asleep. Oh, by the way, since your defeat is inevitable, you'd better think about what you're going to wear on the day of the ceremony of handing over your heart.

- I will celebrate my victory and your defeat with a long red dress. You won't be able to bear your bet. No way, - answered Katya calmly.

- I will shave that day and wear a new shirt, - I dreamily continued, not paying attention to Katya's rebuttal. - Okay, for that occasion, I will also buy new socks. First, we will drink champagne, then we will dance a little tango, and then...

- Well, then I will call 1-03, so that they come and collect your insolent corpse. I promise, if you keep going like this, you won't live long. Didn't the fortune teller warn you when you were young to be very careful in this part of your life, - Katya said very slowly, very clearly, with a voice ringing with rage.

I realized that I had almost reached the point where she was getting out of control.

- No, a young, beautiful gypsy woman examined my hand and said that in 2011 I will find my great love under very interesting circumstances.

It seemed to me that Katya was making efforts to control herself.

- Do you understand that our relationship has no future? And no gypsy woman is needed to predict that simple reality.

- Katya, Katenka, Katyusha... Do you know that love is quite an egoistic feeling? It does not think about the past or the future. Only the present matters.

- Who needs the love that you have to feed with bloody pieces of your heart, that only brings pain instead of happiness, - shouted Katya, unable to restrain herself anymore.

I was amazed. Either I couldn't deal with women at all, or Katya loved me too. Even though the devil himself doesn't care about women, let alone me. But she was behaving very strangely that day. All the signs of a woman in love were present. Except that it was very easy to make a mistake in each specific case. The behaviour could be the result of, say, overwork or lack of sleep. You had to be very careful. I decided to approach from another side.

- It is clear, you have decided to leave me. Want to back a bet? Well, what can I do? Women don't have to keep promises, - I said with a hint of disappointment and masculine superiority in my voice.

The biggest insult for Katya was the accusation of dishonesty. And if a gender context was added to it, then she would run away from the connection altogether. She was convinced that women are more loyal, noble, strong, dutiful and true to their word than men. Knowing well their weak points, I had sneakily hit them. The short circuit didn't take long.

- Me? Leave? You? - Katya continued to shout. - Listen carefully to me, more carefully than to your old gypsy.

-Young. To the young gypsy woman, - I corrected.

- The day you put Vaghinak's parliamentary mandate on my table, I will lie on your bed or sofa. Got it? I'm going home now. And you will not accompany me. You abused my patience long enough today. I am far from the most patient and enduring Mother Teresa. I'm miles away. Bye, - the half-naked Tsunami burst out and hurried down the steps of the Cascade.

I didn't even try to stop her. Although I doubt, I would reach her. All that remained was me, the beer and the dirty worm in the depths of my soul, which woke up again and began to whisper...

Cops and skinheads

Many supporters of "Levon the Great" alliance of parties, did not miss the opportunity to say that our state

has turned into a police state and that we live in a police state.

Were they right?

Information regularly appeared in the media that, for example, in the area of Northern Avenue, police operatives attacked young activists of the "Levon Mets" alliance of parties who were distributing leaflets about the upcoming rally, and then brought them to the Central police station. I only knew one thing: the first president of the republic was already distorting the second generation. He used many conscious and courageous young people concerned about the state of the country for his own purposes.

It certainly could not be allowed. Only, for God's sake, not by arresting young people. Didn't that lead to the fact that those young people became so insolent that they discredited and denigrated all those who were not on their side, even intellectuals, even war heroes? It was the upbringing of the first president, of course, but the authorities were more guilty. Arresting was a bad idea, as by arresting them you make them more confident, you make them believe that they are doing something really serious, that theirs is really a struggle.

But it was a fact that young activists were really arrested and taken to police stations.

Only the supporters of the alliance of "Levon Mets" parties also announced that these young people were beaten in the same police stations. Of course, I didn't believe them. Their word was just not reliable for me. But I should also note that I did not particularly believe in the decency and humanity of many of our police officers. I didn't doubt that they were capable of beating people, at least it was part of their *modus operandi* at one time. But times had changed, and I wanted to understand the logic. After all, the young people were detained near the Northern Avenue and not near the "club" of a rural town in a remote region of Armenia. After all, the young people were detained by the Central police of Yerevan and not of a distant regional city or township.

After all, the policemen, even if they were obscene and inhumane, could not be completely brainless and not know that if they beat the young people, their bosses would by all means know about it. Some will surely say that it was done on their orders. But wait a minute, those leaders, even if they were brutal and inhumane, could not be brainless and not know that if they ordered to beat the young people, their leaders, that is, the authorities, would know about it. Some will certainly say that the authorities knew very well, and it was done on their orders. But wait another minute, please, even if the authorities were violent and inhumane, couldn't they be brainless to the extent to order to beat the young people, not knowing that the press would go past it. Some may say that the authorities did not care about the press, but here I would not agree even more, because they could not help but realize that if the press knew, the society and international institutions would also know, and even if the authorities did not care about the society, then in the case of international structures...

As I said above, I had no doubt that our police were capable of beating people, because it was once part of their *modus operandi*.

Here I will deviate from our history and refer to a man who, in my opinion, really turned our country into a police state for a period.

When that person was the Minister of Internal Affairs of Armenia, I worked on the radio. It was in ninety-three or ninety-four. In one of my reports about Yerevan, I wrote: "You can meet dogs everywhere in the streets, literally and figuratively." I was later told that the man had heard the report and was angry. My

dismissal, which happened shortly after the broadcast of that report, I certainly did not connect with the minister, but I regretted not saying a few important things in the aforementioned report. So, dismissal it is.

In general, I do not insult people in my reports and books. Even the most deserving ones. Of course, I tell the truth about them, but I don't insult them. Now, however, I want to talk about something else.

In ninety-three, ninety-four and similar years, when that man was the minister of internal affairs, the police were more brazen than the oligarchs' bodyguards are in 2011. They say that man eradicated crime in Armenia. Of course, this is not the case, but even if it was, a new phenomenon appeared: the police state.

The person I am talking about was not in Armenia in 2011. In 2011, people who missed him too much said that we now live in a police state.

No, ladies and gentlemen, in the police state we lived in a time when the police chief was the man you miss so much, and the despicable things that came to light later were just the details of a giant mechanism he created. Naturally, we had a different police system during the Soviet Union as well, but the "police chief" as such was a subordinate to that man. It is a well-known fact that the policemen who worked during his time also swore by that man and blessed those times, when there was police indulgence, when the policeman was allowed to do everything.

It was unfair that in 2011, those who were in the circle of that person's relatives and did not protest against his unpredictability called our state a "police state". Our police system was certainly still far from good, a police officer was hard to trust, but to say that we lived in a police state was unfair.

It would be different if they said that we live in the land of skinheads. One could agree to that, because the so-called "skinheads" had become an integral part of our reality.

There are people who are kind of soldiers. We are not talking about an ordinary soldier, but naturally strong, brave and honest people, who, however, do not initiate themselves and can only follow orders. As in the case of a normal soldier, the duty of this type of soldier is also to carry out the order correctly. These soldiers are extremely important to the nation and the state, both in peace and war. During the war, they are at the most important parts of the front to protect the state and the nation, in peacetime they should be in the power structures of the state to protect the security of the state and citizens. In both cases, however, they are order takers and are bound to carry out orders unconditionally.

The "skinheads" were, for the most part, none other than the soldiers described above. Our reality was to make them "skinheads". They were mostly soldiers for people who by and large did not care about either the nation or the state and pursued purely self-interest. And to protect that interest, they hired soldiers who became "skinheads". Because the state did not care that those soldiers were in the right place.

And their duty was only to carry out orders.

The order givers or the oligarch, the old man and the cow

And who were those who gave that order? Here I want to digress again and tell you a story. I have no guarantees about its authenticity, but still. So once, one of the so-called oligarchs of Armenia tests his new vehicle on the Yerevan-Sevan highway. It was a Bentley with a six hundred horsepower engine. One of

the bodyguards is sitting next to him, and several others are coming from behind in two "Mercedes". "Bentley" costs several hundred thousand dollars for the oligarch. But what was that money for the weight and prestige this car gave him?

And during that test, the oligarch increases the speed of Bentley to two hundred and fifty kilometres per hour. It doesn't bother him at all, while the bodyguard, with a horrified face, clinging to the upper handle of the side window with both hands, blinking his eyes rapidly, suddenly shouts after a small climb:

- The cow.

Ahead, at a distance of fifteen to twenty meters, on the overtaking lane of the highway, there really is a beige cow standing and calmly grazing the grass growing in the section dividing the highway. A car is moving slowly along the first lane of the highway, which, like the cow, had gone unnoticed due to the previous ascent. And there is an old man standing on the roadside who apparently owned the cow. Anyway, it was necessary to brake sharply, which was what the oligarch did. It is true that a heavy vehicle moving at a tremendous speed can slow down sharply, but it is not able to stop in such a short distance. Being a skilled driver, the oligarch immediately calculates that he has three options: hit the cow standing in the passing lane, avoid the cow, and hit the car in the first lane, or avoid both by crossing the curb where the old man was standing. In addition to being a skilled driver, the oligarch was also a connoisseur of cars and he realizes with lightning speed that if he chooses the first two options, that is, hitting a cow or a car, his Bentley worth several hundred thousand dollars will be badly damaged. And he chooses the third option.

Apparently, the old man doesn't understand the situation and remains motionless until the giant car hits him and sends him flying to the roadside ravine. The second car does not stop, continuing on its way. The cow continues to graze nonchalantly. The Bentley finally brakes just short of the collision point with the old man. The other bodyguard cars pull up behind him. The oligarch descends, carefully examining the slightly damaged car.

-Nothing much happened, boss, -says the bodyguard.

- If you were at the wheel, it would have happened.

- You're right.

-Let's go:

- Let's see what happened to that man?

- Who, the shepherd? - the oligarch thinks for a moment, - OK, let's see. They all go down to the roadside ravine, where the old man is lying in the waterless stream, his cane on one side, and his wide-brimmed hat on the other. The old man's eyes open, irregular, heavy breathing is heard. The oligarch stands overhead, looks disgusted in the face and suddenly kicks:

- So, you didn't die? Why don't you control your cows?

The old man tries to say something but is unable. The oligarch strikes again, harder this time, then the bodyguards strike. The old man begins to writhe in pain.

- You need to repair the car, - declares the oligarch, - do you know how much "Bentley" costs? I just bought it.

The old man tries to speak again and again fails, then, making an indescribable effort, stretches out his hand, picks up the fallen cane and hits the oligarch's knee with all his might. The blow is apparently

painful because the oligarch grabs his knee with both hands and screams. Then, with a sharp movement, he takes out the gun from his waist and holds it in the direction of the old man's head. The bodyguard tries to interfere.

- Don't do it, boss.

But the boss doesn't listen to him, only changes his decision and shoots him in the leg, not in the head. Then he bends down, punches a few times and then calms down. But not entirely: when he gets on the highway and sees the damaged car again, he gets mad again and starts shooting, this time at the cow. He shoots until the animal lies breathless on the ground. Then he just gets into the car and starts the engine.

- Let me drive, boss, - asks the bodyguard, - are you angry?

- Who is angry? - shouts the boss furiously.

- I'm sorry.

"Bentley" makes a turn, trampling the grass that the cow didn't manage to graze and rushes towards Yerevan...

Checkmate with the Knight

It was the first Friday of winter. We were playing chess in the editorial office. We organized a small tournament, in which, apart from Panda and Andreas, Kosto, Afo and Volodya were also present. Now if I say that these three were my friends, you will think that I do not take the concept of "friendship" seriously. Think what you will, they really were my friends. The only drawback of these people was that they were very bad at playing chess (compared to me, of course). But if we take into account that Panda and Andreas were not particularly strong (again, compared to me), then this universal flaw of theirs could not be focused on too much.

Friday chess and drinking were not only popular pastimes in our newsroom, but also provided extremely important things. But let's take things one at a time; so first about why you should drink on Fridays. I feel like you're never as honest with yourself as you are on Fridays. Or rather, that's what my friend-bartender said once, when it was Friday again, if I'm not mistaken, pouring the fourth glass. But that was a long time ago. For the last four years, we started and ended Fridays in our newsroom. And we advised other editorial boards to do the same. That is, not in our newsroom, because even though our doors were open to everyone, there might not be enough booze for everyone.

So, why did we do it and why would we advise others to do it? Because we had an unprecedented lack of sincerity, even if we didn't seem to be doing anything fake. And when we started and ended Fridays with wine, we were honest with each other. And when we were honest with each other, we were honest with ourselves, and it certainly meant that we would be more honest every next day.

If you don't believe me, try drinking on Fridays and you'll see for yourself. And if you don't believe that we have an unprecedented lack of sincerity, then, moreover, follow my advice.

Well, as for chess, it ensured the vitality of our editorial office in another sense. Without hesitation chess regulated the harmless transition from our sober routine to our non-sober routine and vice versa.

However, on that first Friday of winter 2011, I was losing game after game. My mind was somewhere else. At the same time, Vaghinak's meeting with the "Gray cardinal" took place, to whose office I took

Vaghinak myself. We agreed that he would call at the end of the meeting (Vaghinak had started using the phone occasionally). I must say that the future deputy was drunk. The point is that this meeting was constantly postponed. From last Friday, it was moved first to Monday, then to Tuesday and then to Friday. The official reason was that the "Gray cardinal" had pressure fluctuations and would not leave the house. I don't know how true that was. In any case, Vaghinak withstood the first two postponements, showing unbreakable will. He drank only one bottle a day. But after the last reprieve, he got mad and tripled the dose. Then, when it turned out that the meeting would finally take place that day, Vaghinak was so drunk that I was already trying to convince him to postpone it again. But he was adamant. Drunk politics is not subjected to failure, he said...

Andreas had announced a "check" with the horse to Kosto and was waiting for his counter move. The position was clearly in favour of Andreas, and his advantage was so great that there was no doubt. But the most important thing was that if he won this game, he would win the tournament. Panda stood above the players. He was solidified in second position at that moment, and Andreas' victory deprived him of all chances to win the race. There was no doubt that Panda was planning some mischief. I knew him really well. It was impossible for him not to spoil everything in the end. And so, Panda took the bottle of brandy and said:

-Dear competitors, I suggest you drink one glass each and then continue.

Competitors naturally did not object. Neither did the others. Panda began filling the glasses one by one and in the process knocked one of Andreas' pieces off the chess board. He did it so deftly that only I noticed. Everyone clinked glasses, drank and returned to the game. Everything might have gone well if Panda hadn't blown the Knight of Andreas with which he declared "chess". It was clear that a scandal was brewing. But I didn't know what happened next because that's when my phone rang.

-It's Vaghinak, - said Vaghinak, -can you pick me up?

I immediately got out of the editorial office.

I found him holding a large cardboard box waiting for me on the sidewalk.

I braked near him and opened the car door myself. He sat down in the front seat with difficulty, put the box on his knees and said:

- Take me home quickly. I haven't had a drink in two hours.

- What is in this box? - I asked automatically, because I had to asked something else.

- The leader's book.

- What?

- More precisely, books with English translation. I must distribute them to our American friends. "The Gray Cardinal" asked.

- So, did you manage to convince him? But how did you do it?

- I have already said that drunken politics is not subjected to failure. Now hurry up, if I don't drink another ten minutes I'll cease to exist.

Interim Reflections or Misanthropes and shopkeepers

It was December 14th; the day was Wednesday. In the editorial office, sitting in front of my desk, I looked

through the news of the day.

"Andrei Sakharov passed away 20 years ago today," I read in one of the headlines, and I don't know why I started thinking about who today's philanthropists are.

I can give just a few names, but those names won't ring any bell.

Perhaps the most serious of the problems in our society was the lack of humanity. And this kind of societies need real philanthropists the most. Meanwhile, the number of cannibals increased day by day.

Who were today's misanthropes? I can give you many names, and you will remember all of them wonderfully.

Where can society go when human relations are built on servitude, fear, envy and malice? Where our society was going. Towards misanthropy.

Of course, you can say that the reason is that the law, which is the number one guarantor of humanity, did not work in the country. And you would be one hundred percent right.

In those days, the president of our state, giving a speech somewhere, said the following:

"In our goals today, the establishment of a modern society, where democracy and the rule of law are daily norms of public and private life, which very often act as a custom, tradition or accepted behaviour, is particularly important. It is no secret that this requires long-term and consistent work; implies transformation not only of the state, laws, but also of public consciousness."

Nothing could be changed, President (or Mr "speechwriter") as long as you allowed the country to be run by misanthropes. If, looking around you, you did not see and distinguish those people, it means that you did not have the right to say what you said while speaking in some places.

The transformation of public consciousness requires many steps, and the government should take the first step.

You remember very well the great philanthropist Andrei Sakharov.

Parliamentary elections were ahead. How many misanthropes with the list of the ruling party would pass the National Assembly and protected by the mandate of the deputy continue their insolent and indulgent life? There would definitely be plenty.

There would also be MPs embodying a lesser type of evil. I call them "shopkeepers". They were still present in our parliament. Try to visualize the composition of the National Assembly of the fourth convocation. A list of one hundred and thirty-one people that will certainly take you some time to look through. However, I think you won't get bored, just because there is enough humor in that list. I don't want to give examples so as not to offend people. Because, you know, maybe most of the people whose biographies you look at and find so much humour in, weren't really bad people. Let's say, I don't know what kind of a father, what kind of a friend, what kind of a relative, what kind of a neighbour, finally, what kind of a deputy he was, who acquired a profession at the age of ninety-nine or someone else, who was only able to find the place of a button during his entire parliamentary activity. I don't know, that's why I don't want to offend them by pointing out all the ridiculousness of their character. But how many of the one hundred and thirty-one deputies could be singled out who deserved to be a member of the parliament with that very image, their profile, their biography, and their professionalism?

A few months before these events, I invited my Italian friend to dinner at one of Yerevan's restaurants, which best characterizes our restaurant culture. You understand what kind of restaurant we are talking

about. And there were two deputies of the National Assembly sitting at the next table. I can't say they behaved badly. They sat and ate. The only strange thing was that these people were constantly looking around, including towards our table, and there was something restless in their eyes, as if they wanted to understand, are they not doing something wrong, that they are sitting and eating. And here, my Italian friend thanked them, I don't know why. When I asked why he was thanking him, he was surprised and said, I thought he was the manager of the restaurant.

Indeed, the majority of today's legislators could be much better restaurant managers, so to speak, "shopkeepers" and "muddy men", and there is nothing wrong with that, the only thing that was unclear was why they were in parliament...

Do not say that every nation deserves its own government

It was December 14th; the day was Wednesday. Sitting in my office in the editorial, I was thinking about the continuation of the work we have undertaken.

So far everything seems to be going well. We managed to reach an agreement with two of the political forces without serious complications. Of course, that agreement was preliminary, but I hardly doubted that Vaghinak's name would be on the lists of both.

And now it was necessary to go ahead and find ways to the lists of the other four political forces. Those forces were: Power at All Costs, On its own, American Heritage, and Revolution Without Revolution parties.

Since I was guided exclusively by dislikes and not sympathies when making the sequence of steps, I now faced a difficult problem, i.e., which party should be the next one: "Power at all costs" or "On its own". I mean, which one was worse? There was no shortage of "shopkeepers" in both, but in terms of misanthropes, the first, of course, had no equal. Moreover, ninety percent of them were made members of the party by the president of the republic himself. And since he was also the leader of this party, I have to refer to him again in this story.

Why did the president fill his party with various inhumane, immoral, unpatriotic and illiterate people, why did the president need them? The answer was one- holding on to power. It was these people who ensured the victory of the ruling party during the elections, without any discrimination in the means, including bribing, buying, deceiving, threatening, intimidating, oppressing. The "local princes" were given a clear assignment to secure so many votes during the elections in their area. with twenty thousand each. Then they assigned their territory to the "good guys" of the districts, with two thousand each. These, in turn, assigned their minions to bring certain number of votes from specific yards, each worth two hundred. These also put their "minions" to work, with the obligation to provide twenty votes. All links in the chain were, of course, encouraged at the end. The "minions" got the right to hang out with the "good guys" and enjoy their benefits, the "good guys" with local princes, and the latter with party leaders and the president himself.

The president had no other option to keep the power. How could the people trust the authorities in a country where the minimum wage received by some did not correspond to the average consumer's basket, others were burdened with taxes, and the money received by the rest from their relatives abroad could

not keep up with the daily price increases.

The president also had no option not to rely on and use the above-mentioned "jerks", because in that case others could rely on them and use them.

What was happening as a result? A huge part of the people was demoralized and enslaved. About as many people as the ruling party received.

You know, I am far from such a simplistic way of thinking that since the president is one of the symbols of the state, one cannot say bad things about him. This is first of all and second of all, I also do not agree with him that every nation deserves its rulers. Let me explain why: if there is even one percent of the people who boldly and justifiably says that the president is bad, that the authorities are bad, but is ready to be useful to the president and the authorities, so that they either become good or leave, still everything is not lost.

This is normal, and many states have gone through similar stages on their way to being established. We will also pass, and as I already had occasion to say somewhere above, if someone reads this book in thirty or fifty years, he may find the reality of our days simply ridiculous...

Power at any cost or Poghos's hour and a half

And so, our next adventure was the "Power at any cost" party. Now, if I say that I have many relatives and even friends here, and even in the highest circles, it will certainly seem strange to you. After all, I spoke very negatively about this political force.

So, who were those close to me, and why were they close to me?

It's hard to explain. There is a type of people who are clearly aware that they have something serious to do in this life. And not only has, but should do. At any cost! Of course, the level of seriousness is different, but the determination is the same. These people never talk in the air, never hover in the air, never shoot in the air. High values, lofty ideas may not be particularly important for them. All that matters to them is that they do not deviate from their right path and it's no joke. These people are never mediocrity and wherever they appear, they do not betray their kind to the end. Indeed, when they are in power, they do not go into conflict with the scoundrels around them, but they also do not hang their heads in front of them, even the strongest ones are able to use them.

There were many people of this kind in the ruling party, and some of them, as I said, I was close to. But, without a doubt, I was not going to involve my loved ones and even more, my friends in our adventure. So, what to do? One thing was obvious: the list of the ruling party was drawn up according to quotas. Naturally, the president had the largest quota. The right and left hands of the president, the prime minister, the Speaker of the National Assembly, some leaders of power structures, oligarchs, old party members had quotas. Others had small quotas. And it was in the direction of those others that I was thinking.

In the "Power at all costs" party, there was someone, as it is customary to say, a "pro", who had enough influence within the party, and naturally also had quotas. I knew him by circumstance. It didn't matter who he was. There were still people like him in the ruling party, and now if I say Poghos, you can easily understand Peter.

So, Poghos. As I said, I knew him by chance. I think you will be wondering what the circumstances are. Anyway, let me tell you.

I met him during his press conference in the press hall of our editorial office. After the conference, we drank a glass of brandy together and exchanged words. And not long after that, when our media was facing financial problems, one of the officials of the ruling party's media field called me and said that Poghos wanted to meet with me. We met, and Poghos made the following offer to me: he provides the full financing of our media for one year, and I undertake to publish the materials provided to me during that one year. Just out of curiosity, I asked what materials they were talking about and who they were aimed at. And what do you think it turns out? Poghos's target was a member of his own political team, Peter. I politely declined and he asked to keep the conversation between us anyway. I promised not to tell anyone about it, but maybe I will touch on it in one of my books. Poghos laughed, and that was the end of the meeting. After some time, I realized that he still managed to achieve his goal. One of the media began to be flooded with materials discrediting Peter. Then I once again had the opportunity to meet Poghos. At the New Year's reception of one of the state institutions, he approached me with a glass of brandy in his hand. I was drinking vodka. He was interested in the state of our media, we talked a little about politics, and at the end thanked me for keeping my word and reminded me that he could be useful to me in many matters. In my turn, I reminded that I, possibly, will write about this in one of my books. He laughed and left. That's it.

And now again I remembered Poghos. He could be drawn into the game with a clear conscience, and there was enough reason to think that he could contribute to the successful outcome of our adventure.

I called at nine o'clock in the morning and said that I wanted to meet on a very important matter.

- Pal, I'm at a restaurant, eating Khash, - said Poghos, - I'll call you in an hour and a half, we'll make an appointment.

I called in an hour and a half.

- Pal, I'm playing backgammon, can you wait another hour and a half?

I waited another hour and a half and called again.

- They just brought the barbecue, I'll eat it and call you in an hour and a half, okay, pal?

I waited patiently for another hour and a half, but he didn't call. I had to call myself again.

- I forgot, pal, we came to a bath for a little steam. These people make you lose your mind, man. "Natasha, wait a minute!"

In short, we never met that day. We met the next day. Moreover, he called and invited me to his workplace. But I said that it is preferable to meet somewhere else, because the conversation is strictly confidential, and I have been afraid of "bugging devices" since I was a child. I naturally said that to make the matter more serious and I thought that he would not agree, but surprisingly the opposite happened.

I don't have "bugging devices", but let's meet somewhere else.

We made an appointment at one of the restaurants in Hrazdan canyon. I had come earlier and was waiting for him at the entrance. Poghos was not late. He got out of his official car, walked towards me, but suddenly remembered something and returned to the car. He took out his mobile phone from his pocket, gave it to the driver and said:

- If they call, tell them to call in an hour and a half.

- What if HE calls, boss? - asked the driver.

- HE won't call, he's not here.

I realized some interesting things from this conversation; firstly, that the only measure of time for Poghos was "an hour and a half", secondly, that he was afraid not only from the "bugging devices" at his workplace, but he was also afraid that they might even eavesdrop on his phone, and thirdly, I realized who "HE" was. In other words, there was nothing particularly surprising.

Anyway, we entered and settled in a private room. He said he was hungry and offered to have something to eat. I refused. If we had dinner, we should also drink, but I didn't want to drink with him. I said I'd just drink coffee and got down to business.

- I have a wealthy acquaintance. He has businesses in the United States that he wants to move to Armenia.

-So, he's looking for a roof? -Poghos interrupted me.

- He is not so much looking for a roof as he wants to become his own roof.

- What do you mean? - he was surprised.

- He wants to become a deputy, - I said sharply.

Poghos was even more surprised.

- He's got a big appetite.

- He offers one million dollars to you personally, one million dollars to the party and several million dollars in investments.

Poghos looked restlessly from side to side. He wanted to say something, but at that moment the waiter entered the private room. He put the coffee cups on the table and left. Poghos continued to move restlessly. I was afraid that he would give up and send me to hell. But he didn't. He was silent for some time and then spoke. Only it seemed like he was thinking out loud.

-I know you are a serious person. You have a newspaper. One million to me, one million to the party. I have to think. An investment. I have to think.

I told him that there is only one problem: my acquaintance has been living in the USA in recent years, to which Poghos responded briefly:

-Don't you worry, pal.

Then he asked if he could meet that person. I said by all means. We agreed that the meeting will take place the next day, at the same time, at the same place. Except I won't be attending that meeting.

Because the value in us was "0"

Well, it was necessary to deal with Vaghinak. I went straight from the valley to his house. The deputy candidate was at home. The "bums" were also at home. I entered at the moment when everyone was repairing the old oil burner together. "December's cold finally defeat the effects of the drink, and Vaghinak had decided to heat the apartment"- I thought. But it turned out that the story was different. I realized this when I saw the beef patties lined up in the kitchen sink and the giant pot on the floor. Our friends were preparing khash.

I asked Vaghinak to stand aside.

-I have to talk to you, -I said.

Vaghinak glared at me without stopping. His look said: "I won't let you spoil our khash party".

I walked over to the table, picked up the half bottle of vodka and started looking for a clean glass. Three of the "bums" left the oil fire at once and flew towards me. It seemed to them that I was preparing to pour the contents of the bottle again.

- Everything is fine, - I reassured them, - I want to drink with you.

I noticed Vaghinak's encouraging look and filled everyone's glasses myself.

- Let's toast to Vaghinak, - I said.

Then I took off my coat and started to help them repair the oil fire. Such a sudden and inexplicable change of attitude on the part of their once sworn opponent certainly surprised the "bums". They looked at me sceptically, not understanding why. Meanwhile, there was no special reason, just my mood, I don't know why, was high.

I spoke with Vaghinak later. I told him about the latest developments and asked him to prepare for the meeting.

- And anyway, you should postpone the khash and not drink it in the morning. Tomorrow you will drive a car, -I said at the end.

- Why should I drive a car? - Vaghinak wondered.

- For impression.

Then I said goodbye to the respectable society and left. I went to the editorial office to calmly thought about some organizational issues. The problem is, I wasn't kidding about the car. Moreover, not just a car, but a good car.

I presented Vaghinak as a rich man, and in Armenia the rich could not drive a bad car. And not just the rich. Anyone who had two pennies in his hand considered it his duty to drive around in an expensive car. And it was mandatory that the number plate of that car had as many "0"s as possible. The dominant opinion in our society was: how much?

There is a "0" on the car's license plate, so the owner of the car is a "good" person. For a long time, human virtues among us were not humanity and patriotism, courage and bravery, kindness and honesty, but brute force, servility and arrogance. And the value for us was not the homeland, not the person, not the freedom, but the car, the phone and their numbers. That is, "0". The value was "0" in us.

But the scariest thing was that our emerging generation also thought this way. And that meant that the "values" in us would remain the same even after a decade or two, they would remain "0".

The driver of the car with the number "0" rightly thought that he was the master of the situation. Rightfully so, because he saw that society agrees with him. Because he saw that the society treated him with respect. And the society thought that if there are many "0"s on this person's car number plates, then it is enough to treat him with respect.

This "0"-craziness might not be considered evil if it were simple showmanship. But, unfortunately, it had stopped being a display and had become a thought. Moreover, not only among the youth, or let's say, representatives of "show business", or businessmen of various calibres, which could be considered normal to some extent, but state and political figures, intellectuals, high-ranking military personnel, even clergymen.

For the sake of justice, I must say that my friend Panda and other friends also drove expensive cars with

"0" numbers. What could you do?

Of course, I could have taken one of their cars so Vaghinak could go to the meeting, but I didn't want to do that. There was a better option.

The next morning, I went to the office of a car rental company and rented the best car they had for a day, an executive class Mercedes. It certainly cost me a lot, but what could you do? Then, in my garage, I found an old German license plate that I had removed from my car imported from Germany years ago. It looked like this: "KK90009".

I put the number plate on the Mercedes and went after Vaghinak.

- Where did you get this car from? - he asked.

- It doesn't matter. Just drive carefully.

Then I explained in detail what to talk to Poghos, handed him the car and wished him luck.

When they take the voter as an idiot or the end of "Mercedes"

Success never hurt anyone. We were already beyond the level of even justified risk. Our adventure was not only political, but also financial. After all, we were promising money right and left, and what kind of money? Therefore, the reader may have a question as to how we were going to get out from under all this. Of course, it wasn't going to be easy, but there was an opportunity that could work.

Immediately after the publication of the lists, Vaghinak sent a letter to all the people with whom he had entered into a transaction and renounced his place on the list. In other words, he refused to become a deputy. This in itself was already so incredible that it would push the rest of the issues into the background. At a time when others were ready to give everything to become a member of parliament, someone gave up his place on the list, which guaranteed the mandate 100%. Was such a thing possible in our country? And before people looked for the answer to this question and naturally could not find it, Vaghinak would already be in his America. Well, as for me, if someone tried to demand an explanation, I could say that I was only asked to be a mediator, and I agreed, and then I would make the same argument, that the man refused to become a member of the Parliament.

But even if we had problems, was that what mattered? Could those problems be equal to what we would achieve on this adventure?

If the government treats the voter badly, why couldn't we treat them the same way?

Let's try to formulate the question more simply.

The elections were to take place short time after. But by the spring of 2012, many waters could flow by. We already had the courage to say that the idiot was the voter (however, note that not the people, not the society, but the voter). Accordingly, if the government was the one ill-treating the voters, then who was most likely to die by the spring of 2012? Of course, the government. Why? Too many questions! Because the situation was like that. And according to that, what should this person do in order to stay healthy? Will have to think about his flock. Isn't the allegory a bit too much (double the questions)? Of course, it is. What's a donkey horse, you may ask? But I assure you, the difference was not big. It was not big until our rulers realized who they were dealing with...

However, perhaps belatedly, I apologize for being rude (is donkey a rude animal)?

This is about the authorities. What about the opposition? Why did we make fun of the opposition with our adventure, you will ask? Because the opposition should not have thought about how to collect more votes in the elections, but how to make the voter feel like a human being, a human being with the right to express his own opinion. And equally, he had to think about how to do it in order to have enough power so that when the authorities put the voter in the place of a donkey, he would not tolerate such authorities.

Our reality was that for exactly four years and six months, the authorities initiated whatever they wanted. Mostly negative things. Thank God, not everything was successful.

And what four years and six months are we talking about? It was the period between elections. There were six more months, three of which the authorities needed to stay in power, the other three to rest. We are talking about the three months following and preceding the elections. And it turned out that in our reality it was only during those six months that the authorities did not initiate anything. Let's leave aside the election bribes, asphalt, flour and five thousand drams, which, of course, were also an initiative, and it was from them that everything started. But back to the intervening four years and six months.

This was the period when the authorities came up with such initiatives that, if they were successful, it was extremely difficult or simply impossible for the people to get out from under them. As we mentioned above, recently, thank God, some things our authorities could not manage. But these were purely matters containing national elements. You will certainly remember "Armenian-Turkish rapprochement" or "foreign language schools", which, even if they did not fail, met with such resistance that they lost their original meaning. And the rest? And those economic, financial, social initiatives that remained in the shadows for the simple reason that the people did not know anything about them? What percentage of the people was aware of the loans taken by the government during those five years after the last elections? And who would repay those loans? What percentage of the people were aware that since the last election, in those five years, by whom and how the riches on and under our soil were privatized. And what would be their fate?

All this was initiated by our authorities. And why wouldn't they initiate? After all, they were given that right by the voter.

Four years and six months was the period when the people had to be vigilant and think about how to behave during the three months when the authorities froze their initiatives and engaged in making asphalt, distributing flour and five thousand drams, falsifying elections. The four years and six months and the three months leading up to the election were equally important. In both periods, the people had to be equally watchful and prudent. And if the people were really vigilant and prudent, after the elections, the authorities could relax as much as they wanted. But already in the status of the former.

Power, of course, is a sweet thing. So, what was the point, you had to hang on to it until you couldn't hang on anymore? And maybe it would have been possible to hold on for another seven years? Wasn't it important what would happen to the people during that time? The condition of the people was bad and getting worse. And the government could not change this situation in any way.

Emigration had taken new levels. Probably seven out of ten people would be willing to leave the country if they had the chance, and many found that opportunity. And the government was unable to change the course of events.

The patient's condition was no longer stable. If it were so, the government would at least have the right to say that it cannot leave the patient, it could be justified that if someone else comes in his place, it might be worse.

I interacted with ordinary citizens every day. I used to visit villages and see the life of a villager. The people were no longer able to make ends meet, I could see it with my own eyes, and no one could prove me otherwise.

Meanwhile, under such conditions, the government was going to keep its power for another five years. This is what I was thinking about when I was sitting in the editorial office waiting for news from Vaghinak. He called exactly an hour after we broke up.

-I'm at home, - he said, you can come and take the car.

- But... - I didn't have time to ask my question because he hung up the phone.

I hurried to Aghayan street. Arriving at the Vaghinak building, I first looked for the car. Of course, I found it, but in what condition? The left rear light was smashed, the jet was hanging and the wing was crushed. Expensive "Mercedes" stood forlorn and seemed to say, "Who did you left me with?" Well, this was predictable. I promised myself that I would not scold Vaghinak if he succeeded.

Vaghinak succeeded this time as well. He briefly related the story. He only said that he was promised a temporary place in the joint list of the "Power at all costs" party. Then he added his usual expression: drunken politics is not subject to failure.

I tried to extract details, but he pointed to the vodka bottle and said:

- Even better, let's drink.

- At least tell me how you managed to hit "Mercedes".

-That son of a gun failed to stop his car, -he said.

- Who? - I didn't understand.

- Well, that man, - he asked, - what was his name... Poghos?

- Did you hit Poghos's car?

-Who else?

All I could do was laugh.

We had a good laugh, a good drink, and then I took the Mercedes and left.

Katya and my birthday

I declared a holiday that day. Everyone should take time out on their birthday every year. That temporary pause is just necessary to take a breath from the year-long race, to mark the useful and useless days in the calendar with red and black circles in 360 days.

I was sitting and thinking about life, death, love, when a boy entered the editorial office.

- They asked me to pass this on to you, - he said quickly and handed me a beautifully packed box.

-Who asked? - I asked.

-I don't know, - the boy hurriedly lied, hiding his eyes, and nodded just as hurriedly.

- Don't open it, it's a "bug" or a bomb, - Panda announced in an authoritative voice after sniffing the gift for a long time.

His face showed obvious struggle. Pandas are the most curious creatures, but at the same time they are terribly cautious. Our Armenian Panda was no exception. He was dying to see the contents of the box and at the same time he was scared. I quickly put an end to his suffering. I took the box and went to my room. Panda looked at me as if I had just taken a branch of fresh, green, juicy cane from under his nose. The gift was so beautifully wrapped that I couldn't tear it open. When I opened the box, I immediately understood who the author of the gift was. It was a coffee mug with a picture of Junga.

It was Katya... She adored water. H₂O was acceptable to her in any version. Whether it was a lake, a river, a sea, or an ordinary puddle, Katya had an irresistible desire to jump into the water, swim, or at least splash it with her bare feet. Wherever she went, she always took a bathing suit with her, declaring very seriously that even in the Sahara Desert an oasis can be found. I did not argue with such two-fold logic. Once, when she once again saw me unshaven, she rubbed my rosy cheek with her hand and said: - You know, you look like an old captain. A captain who has been tossed by the ocean of life, hot and cold winds and sea salt. A captain who has a wife in every port, countless children whose names he often confuses. A captain who is no longer surprised by anything. Nothing, nothing... So much so that even if the Loch Ness Monster crawled out and sprawled on the deck of his ship, he'd happily take his pipe out of his mouth and yell at the Junga, "Boy, you didn't clean the deck well!" You became a captain for nothing. I love Jungas, crazy, romantic, who sit at the bow of the ship at night, look at the moonlit sea and secretly dream of mermaids. Junga has not yet lost his ability to love and dream.

-I lost it?

-It's the price of being the captain. But I will teach you to love again. I will make a Junga out of you again. I promise you. You'll see. A real Junga.

-And how will I know about that?

-You will. As soon as you become one.

Now, looking at the picture of a little sailor with a striped shirt and naive eyes, I realized that this was Katya's best gift to me.

Indeed, I was getting younger with Katya. Her craziness, vitality, great love for life were contagious. She was like a little nuclear power plant, using all her energy to be happy at any cost.

I quickly called Katya.

- If I am Junga, then who are you, a priestess or a mermaid?

- Congratulations on your demotion, former captain. Happy birthday! Did you like my gift?

- It is incomplete.

-What do you mean?

- I want you to devote yourself to me all day today, until late at night. I want to celebrate the midnight together and I want you to be the first person I will see on my birthday.

There was silence, it seemed to me that she would give up now, but she took a deep breath and said:

- Okay, I'll be with you in an hour.

Already in the car, Katya, crouching on the seat like a cat, asked:

-So, where are we going?

-Outta town. A friend of mine has a hunting house in a forest.

-I hate forests. It's always humid, dark and wet there. And I constantly have a feeling like I will lose my

way back just like Hansel and Gretel.

-Why are you always talking like fairy-tales?

- Don't be fooled by my D cup and gorgeous bottom. In fact, I haven't grown up yet, I'm stuck in a fairy tale world. If you don't like it, stop the car, I'll go home - Katya clawed at me in an annoyed tone.

-On foot?

-Hopefully I will meet a kind man, who will give me a lift.

-I like you just the way you are, with your fairy-tale world.

-Would you mind if I crouch in the back seat? I'm exhausted.

I didn't mind at all. While I was thinking of braking, Katya quickly went to the back of the car and crouched down.

-You can sing a lullaby to me, -she mumbled and fell asleep.

When we got to the hunting lodge, I slowly opened the car door, carefully took Katya in my arms and got inside. She woke up, carefully looked around and said:

- I'm cold and hungry. What cave did you bring me to, old man?

- As a man, I will solve the heating problem. I will light the fireplace now. But according to the unwritten laws of the caves, feeding is already your responsibility.

- I love it when you brazenly exploit me.

Katya made sandwiches, spread my friend's old sleeping bag right next to the fire, and we comfortably settled on it.

-What shall we have?

-Wine. I'm up for wine today. Red, -I said giving her a glass.

-I wish it snowed today, -said Katya unexpectedly.

-You don't like snow -I got surprised.

-I'm in snowy mood today, just like you're in a wine mood. I feel like if it snowed, everything will be fine.

-Everything? Like what?

-Everything.

Katya was looking carefully at the fire and was silent.

-What are you thinking about? -I broke the silence.

-Why are people getting old. Why? I agree to die one beautiful, rainy day, but I don't want to get old. I don't want to witness my body failing me. I want to die young and beautiful. Is that so hard to be?

-So, you want to break the natural law? Young and beautiful people don't die easily, they always fight for life and chaos starts.

-But why women get older quicker than men, according to that same natural law? I'm terrified of senility.

-Women are more fragile, more sentimental and deeper.

-You're right. If I were a Member of Parliament, I would propose a bill to ban men over forty from divorcing their wives. Tell Vaghinak that when he becomes a member of parliament, to raise this issue.

-Why? -I got surprised.

- Because women dedicate their entire lives, youth, beauty to one man, and after forty a middle age crisis begins for that man. In order to be cool, he leaves his faithful wife and children and finds himself a younger woman. And the tired, disappointed and unhappy woman remains completely alone and lonely.

Because finding a man in his forties in general, and a young man in particular, is not easy unless you have the money of Alla Borisovna or Liz Taylor.

- Why do you think that after forty a woman has no chance, why must younger women come and take her man away? And why is it necessarily a younger woman, it can be another woman of his age?

- You see, if two women fight for a man, the man cannot physically share himself between them. He can easily do it mentally, though. But if it comes to war, only one of them will take home the prize. If the opponent is only, say, eight years younger, then the woman has a chance. Two women of almost the same intellect and body start a fight and the most experienced one will win. No woman can fight against a young eighteen-year-old girl. It's just not possible. You just can't win over her milky-scent, her laughter and her wide, innocent eyes. A man wants something completely different from a girl of that age, a different way of thinking, a different behaviour. He wants to get younger with her, touch her and save the milky-scent. No chance, right?

- Why are you talking about sad things?

- Because I hate birthdays and I'm afraid of getting old. Wow, it's already 10 to 12. Make a wish, but keep it to yourself, otherwise it won't come true.

-No, quite the opposite: it won't come true if I don't tell you. Kiss me.

-Is that your wish?

-It is for now.

The clock on the old wall of the cabin struck 12 times, but I didn't hear it, because I could only hear Katya's heart beating under my palm. And her milky-scent, which then continued to haunt me for a long time...It snowed at night, the first snow of the year...

Second stage of AUD or additional coin never hurt anyone

When I returned the Mercedes I rented, I was charged quite a lot for the broken headlight and body damage. They explained that since I did not apply to the insurance company at the time of the accident, I had to compensate for the damage myself. I paid without any hesitation. I wouldn't tell them the circumstances of the accident. To hell with the "Mercedes". The main thing is that it was useful to us in our work. Vaghinak, in fact, had successfully completed the negotiations with the representative of the ruling party, which meant that this was already the third political force with which we had a preliminary agreement. Let me remind you that we already had such arrangements with the "Appendix vermiformis" party and the alliance of "Levon the Great" parties. The first was leading. Here, as you remember, we promised two hundred and fifty thousand dollars and twenty-five percent in a "media holding" that did not exist and would never exist. In the second case, we dealt with a "grey cardinal" who was second in command in this political structure after the leader. Vaghinak's name was already given here and he was vouched for by the leaders of four small parties included in the alliance, whom our hero met and skilfully convinced, promising each of them fifty thousand dollars.

Well, it was time to move on. There were three more in line:

"On its own", "American Heritage" and "Revolution Without Revolution" parties. The first of them was the most vivid manifestation of our reality. Being the project of the second president of the republic, it

could not fail to succeed in the political arena. During the ten years of his tenure, the second president was able to mature as a politician to the extent that he realized that after terminating the presidential powers, if he wants to keep his influence, leverage and accumulated wealth over time, he must have a political support (by the way, until then he claimed that his party was his people). And here he created the "On its own" party. The second president had realized some other important things as well. In particular, that his period of power had created a situation in the country where all issues, from the smallest to the biggest, were solved by money. And here he appointed the richest man of Armenia as the leader of the party he created.

And the great trade had begun... Human trade.

I don't want to offend anyone, that's why I say that I don't think that people - workers, peasants, businessmen, doctors, journalists, artists, diplomats, officials - were sold by joining the "On its own" party. At all, maybe those people really wanted to be useful to the society and the country. So, I'm not saying they were sold, I'm saying they were bought.

I don't want to insult the leader of the party and say that he realized that he was buying people, from ordinary peasants to well-known intellectuals, with different amounts of money or material goods. After all, maybe he thought he was just doing a favour. Trading, buying and selling, had come naturally.

I don't want to insult the second president either, considering his services. It would be unfair not to mention that it was he who established civilized and solid state. But he also failed in further construction, paying tribute to his and his entourage's insatiable obsession for endless enrichment at the expense of the state and the people. It was he who left the third president a legacy of a society that was captive to money and power. And that "On its own" party was his legacy, which continued to turn people into "mankurts" waiting for mercy and clinging to mercy. Yes, exactly "mancourts".

Throughout the period of independence, all our governments were guided by the principle that if you want to have power, you should not create conditions for people to earn on their own, but you should make them "mankurts".

That's the sad stuff. But whatever, this was our reality in 2011 and likely to remain so for a long time to come.

Well, the "On its own" party continued to prosper on its own and to prepare for the next parliamentary elections on its own (it had quite a respectable presence in the current parliament). And the leader of the party continued to get rich, and the people continued to expect mercy from him.

I have always been surprised by the conscience of an Armenian man driving a Rolls Royce, even if he has no conscience, and even if he does not drive.

Let's admit that a person, using his abilities, without deception and fraud, without "throwing" others and breaking the law, earned millions over time and continues to earn. And so, he can afford to pay a few hundred thousand dollars and buy a Rolls Royce, or "Maybach" or "Bentley". And of course, he has the right; it's his money, his impulses. Who can blame a man for loving luxury and comfort? But let's look at the question from the opposite side. Even if that person really got rich in an honest way, where does he live, who are around him?

To say that there was widespread misery in our country is certainly not fair. Out of a hundred people, ten lived a wonderful life, ten lived a normal life, and another thirty might be able to make ends meet. But

wasn't there still fifty percent that was just dragging its existence? And what did that fifty percent feel when they saw a Rolls Royce worth several hundred thousand dollars treading on the footprints left by their torn shoes?

That's right. Let's go back to the "On its own" party, whose roads leading to the proportional list still had to be found.

The biggest problem was that money simply could not play a role here. The leader of the party had so much that he probably lost count. I had to think of something else, but I didn't know what. To tell them that we can secure certain number of votes... but wouldn't it be necessary to justify where we got those votes from? To promise the support of the United States... this was also pointless, because this political force had a completely different orientation and background.

There was only one thing that could help. During the previous parliamentary elections, the leader of "On its own" did everything to ensure that the party's proportional list should include people enjoying authority in various fields: doctors, artists, sportsmen, scientists. It was possible to stick to the last one. What bad scientist was Vaghinak? Just the fact that he had worked at the prestigious Montgomery University and was an inventor was enough. In short, one could try.

It was necessary to see what opinion our hero had about this.

I rushed to Aghayan Street and entering Vaghinak's apartment (he never closed the door), witnessed another strange scene. The three-time parliamentary candidate stood in the centre of the living room with a hammer in one hand and a nail in the other, studying a giant coconut on the ground.

- What are you doing? - I asked.

- I am opening the third stage of the AUD, - he answered, not taking his eyes off the coconut.

- What do you mean?

Vaghinak did not answer, he bent down, placed the nail on the coconut and started hammering.

- What does the third stage of AUD mean? - I insisted.

He stopped hitting and turned to me.

-I will tell you; But first help me crack this coconut because it's really hard.

- Because you put it on the wooden parquet. Try doing the same on the balcony.

- Try it yourself.

I took the coconut and went out to the balcony. I hit a lot, but nothing happened. I had to take the axe. The coconut was broken and the milk inside spilled on the ground.

-I could do that myself, - muttered Vaghinak, -give it to me.

We went back to the living room and he started separating the soft part of the coconut with a knife.

- You didn't answer my question, - I told him.

- Well, I will explain to you as my "impresario".

- The third stage of AUD has a feature that I discovered.

- And what is that feature?

-Coconut should be used with the drink, - he explained, and taking a bottle of vodka from the table, he filled the glasses.

-Wait, there is something to talk about, - I said.

- I can't, - he said and emptied the glass in one breath.

- I had to drink too and then told him about my thoughts.

-Complete sake, - Vaghinak said, -totally crazy.

I looked at him in surprise.

-The fact that a person is rich does not mean that he will give up money. Conversely, the richer, the greedier. As they say, an extra penny won't break the bank. Besides, there is one more circumstance. I know that person. I dealt with him in the nineties, when I once tried to do business here. I am sure he will remember me and I am sure he will not refuse the money. Leave it all to me this time.

-And how much are you going to offer her?

Vaghinak did not answer and refilled the glasses.

Years pass, I remain the same

That's how 2011 came to an end. Perhaps one could take a look at the past year. I don't know what it was like for planet Earth and humans. Who has the right to speak for the world? When there is a storm, a flood or an earthquake somewhere, does everyone feel the pain? Or when all that is not there, doesn't the population of the planet Earth itself create other disasters? War and bloodshed.

I don't know what the year was like for my homeland and my people. The president and the Catholicos will definitely talk about it in their New Year message.

But I can tell you what the year was like for me. Well, of course, it was half. Even more, drunk and half-hearted love and drunken and half-hearted politics were added to other half-hearted things. How long could one live half-heartedly like that?

At the end of every year and on the eve of the New Year, I make a resolution to start living fully and realistically. After all, my daughters are already growing up, and we need to think about their future. But the years pass one after the other, and I remain the same.

When I was little, my parents told me, other people save money so that their children can live well, we are trying to give you knowledge. I don't know how successful they were, but one thing is clear: I myself do not save money for my daughters, nor do I think in the direction of giving them knowledge. I am not even involved in their education. My duties as a father are the same as those of a regular driver: I take them to school, to music or, say, tennis and back home.

And only during this constantly repeating route do I find time to talk to them. And I tell them the most important things in my opinion. I say that a good man cannot be stingy, but a good man can also be smart and not let his extravagance be abused. A good person who is not smart can be a coward. A smart person who is not kind is basically a coward. But a man who is both kind and intelligent cannot be a coward. It will be a matter of overcoming fear once or twice, maybe three times, then just be careful, but never fearful. There are many people around you, more than usual. The reason may be your sincerity, your selflessness and generosity, but still, not everyone is your friend. Some are just acquaintances, some you may consider close, some are playmates, there will be people of similar mentality like yours, many take advantage of your extravagance, others flirt, others make plans with you because you are necessarily smart. Your heart is big enough to give a place to everyone there. Just know that one day they will hurt your heart and try to make sure that the pain is not strong. If someone is next to you, say at school, in the

yard, or in a tennis club, and you should not be friends with them just because they are less intelligent than you or know less geography or have bad taste or ugly ears or play tennis badly, then it's dishonest to say the least.

Of course, it is difficult or impossible to make a fool smart or change someone's ears, and maybe you shouldn't do that, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be friends with him. And if it's the other way around, that is, if the person next to you is smarter or more sympathetic than you, then let him think for himself. You don't have to be arrogant. It's another matter when the person next to you has an evil heart or is dishonest. But not in the sense that you don't need to make friends with them. Other than that, they can be changed. And they should. And the most important thing: many people think about themselves first, and then about others, but the opposite is true; you have to think about others first, i.e. everyone, then only about yourself.

These are the things I say to my daughters, and there is probably so much left to say.

And the years pass one after the other, and I remain the same.

And now, on December 31, 2011, less than an hour before the New Year, I drink the last bottle of the year. I'm at home, of course, and at least this could be considered somewhat of an excuse.

“Do you love me”?

It was the evening of January 1, 2012. Life went on, life remained the same.

As you can imagine, I was drunk. No, I'm lying, the aristocratic word "drunk" cannot give a correct idea of my condition, that's why I use the plebeian word "smashed". Yes, I was pretty smashed. And the most important thing is that I still planned to drink again. And I decided to do it with Katya. All that remained was to find her and bring her into custody, considering that Katya could not stand the New Year's commotion. It was said that New Year's holidays, as a rule, are met in bed with one of the classics of world literature. Yes, while everyone was celebrating the new year, Katya was calmly lying down and reading a book.

I had a vague suspicion that she had disconnected all possible phones, but decided to give it a try. In vain, I never won anything; she was unavailable. I didn't even have time to despair, because a brilliant idea came to my head. I will go and stand under Katya's windows and call her. I liked the idea more and more. When I got to the building, there was a faint light coming from the windows of her apartment. As I expected, Katya was "swallowing" another book under the light of the lamp.

– Katya, -I shouted.

The light flickered dimly. I clearly imagined how Katya is now waging an internal battle with herself: should she turn off the lights and pretend she's not home or answer.

-Katyaaaa! - I shouted louder to free her from the inner struggle.

And at the same moment, my cell phone rang furiously.

-Did someone tell you that I faint when a drunk and an elderly man is shouting under my windows at 10 o'clock in the evening, - Katya asked angrily.

-What makes you think I'm drunk? -I was honestly surprised.

-What do you want? -she made it quick.

-To see you.

-I have other plans and you don't make any of those.

-OK, then. I will stay here, right under your window. I will shout and sing and eventually freeze. Then one of your wonderful neighbours will pity me, take me home and warm me up. Then I will cry and tell her my unfortunate love story, that was very harsh towards me. About you, I mean. Then she will cry with me. After that you will become the favourite story for your neighbours for half a year...no, an entire year, after "Unfortunate Ann", of course. Long story short, I will embarrass you.

-Do you know that there is an article for blackmailing, -Katya hissed.

-Give me the number and floor of your apartment, otherwise "the Moonlit night begins", -I announced adamantly.

-Fourth floor, eighteen apartments, - Katya said in such a tone that I began to doubt whether it was worth going up. But after what I did, I definitely couldn't turn back. Blackmailers usually go all the way. There was no elevator. I climbed the stairs, trying to ignore my irregular heartbeat. I was terribly excited. Finally, I will see Katya's "home", as she liked to say. She had not given me such a privilege for so long. Katya was waiting for me at the entrance to the apartment.

-Oh, what impatience! -I tried to joke.

-Come in, -was the short answer.

You can never get a complete picture of a person until you see where she lives, sleeps, eats, what books and pictures she is surrounded by. For some reason, I was sure that Katya was living in such an apartment. I had the impression that I had been there many times. It was a small two-room apartment with shades of apricot and orange. No standard "euro" renovation. Her house was completely decorated in a warm oriental style. There were carpets, rugs, pillows, furniture made of straw and wood everywhere. And books, countless books, under the weight of which the reed cabinets sagged.

-If the case with Vaghinak leads to the fact that they will start persecuting me, can I ask for political asylum in your apartment, - I asked.

- And stay forever?

- Why forever? One night for starters, then we'll see. By the way, why don't you offer me something to drink?

- Please. You have a choice. Arsenic or cyanide, - Katya kindly offered in the tone of a polite waitress.

- I missed you terribly. I couldn't find my place. The last time I saw it was last year. If I didn't see you today, I would die, - I said honestly.

Katya didn't answer, but Frau von Hammersmark, the fascist warden of the concentration camp, awakened in her by my sincerity, probably retreated.

In any case, this does not give you a reason to make a performance under my windows at night, - she said in a calmer tone, - I do not keep alcoholic beverages at home, I can only offer tea or coffee.

- I assumed. Don't worry, I brought my drink with me, - and I took out a bottle of brandy from my pocket. Katya went to the kitchen, probably to get a glass. At that moment, a huge cat walked boldly into the dining room. It appeared to be a British breed with luxurious dark grey fur and emerald eyes. It came, stood in front of me, swayed a little on its strong paws and began to carefully examine me. Some scientists claim that cats have telepathic properties. At that moment I was convinced of it, because a thought like a

teletype was imprinted in my brain. "You sat in my armchair. You have three minutes to release it."

I got up on my own and gave way to the strange cat. The Brit immediately jumped into the chair, put its muzzle on its thick paws and began to examine me again. I felt like an 18-year-old meeting the girlfriend's strict father for the first time.

-If you keep the rules of coexistence, we will get along, - the grey beast said so clearly that a shiver went through my body. And since I don't have telepathic abilities myself, I asked out loud:

- And what are those rules?

-First of all, I am the only, irreplaceable and unique man in this house. Men leave and I stay, - replied the cat. - Second of all, you never sit in my armchair. And third of all, I can't stand the noise at night. You will review the hours and schedule of your visits. Did you remember?

-Give me your paw, savage, - I agreed.

-Who are you talking to? - asked Katya, entering the room with glasses in hand.

- Your cat.

- Berlusconi? About what? - Katya wondered.

- It was a difficult conversation between men. We defined the boundaries. Better not know the details. But excuse me, can you say the name again, it didn't introduce itself.

- The official name is Berlusconi, but we call him Basya for short. It is loving and passionate like the Italian Prime Minister. Keeps all the worms in the yard in awe. You know, it has a huge harem. But unlike the prime minister, cats love Basya selflessly, - Katya announced proudly, hugging the heavy Playboy.

-She is right. I love all of them equally, - Basya interjected, putting its satisfied face on Katya's shoulder.

-But I think you said you have an elder terrier, - I remembered.

- No, only Basya. I was telling you about the dog to scare you.

I thought that the grey Basya, with its ambitions, huge size and well-established manners, is definitely several times more dangerous than some unfortunate Airedale Terrier.

-Now that I got to know Basya, I feel safer for you, - I announced very seriously. - But can we continue our evening with just the two of us? Your beast kinda intimidates me.

-And you're right. You will live long. Okay, you can go for a walk, but don't stay out late, - the monster graciously allowed.

- For some reason, everyone is staying away from Basya. I do not understand. Okay, you hang out a little, while I get dressed, - Katya said, diving into the bedroom closet.

- I didn't like the prospect of being face to face with a strange animal, but I was lucky, because Basya, considering its "fatherly duty" fulfilled, went to the kitchen to eat.

-Tell me where are we going so that I know what to wear? - Katya's voice was heard from the bedroom.

- It seemed to me that you are already ready, - I sighed desperately.

- No, I'm still deciding. I assure you, in the case of women, this is already half the battle, - Katya reassured me.

- Why is it so important for a woman how she dresses? I never understood, - I asked sincerely.

- You are wrong. For a woman, it is more important how they will be removed. And depending on how she wears it, it will be clear who will take it off. It's a bit complicated for your male Pentium 1 brain, but I can't explain it any better.

- Are you dressing now with the implication of getting undressed? - I immediately showed unhealthy interest.

- Why does your "Pentium 1" start working faster than "Apple Macbook" when it comes to bed?

-It's one of the features of the male body, I can't explain it more clearly, - I repeated Katya's words. - Since today is the 1st of the month, and almost all interesting places of entertainment are closed, I suggest you go to the editorial office.

-And what are we going to do there?

-You'll see, -I didn't go into details.

-OK. I don't really care. Although I could stay at home with Basya.

-Staying at home with Basya is something I don't dream of.

Katya left the bedroom (in the end she had settled on a denim solution), went to the kitchen, warmly kissed Basia's big head, whispered something in its ear, and only after that we left the house.

-What were you whispering in its ear, - I asked suspiciously.

-I warned her that I would be back later so he wouldn't worry.

- And do you always report to him, - I wondered.

- Always. You have not seen Basya in a moment of anger.

- I can almost imagine - I said honestly. The editorial welcomed us with last year's scents dominated by alcohol and tobacco.

- Sometimes it's worth airing here, - Katya said displeased, smelling the area like a small animal.

- It's worth it, I didn't object, do you know how to play cards?

- Do I know? Look at me carefully. I play almost every card game and drink almost every drink better than any guy.

- Shall we gamble and drink?

-I want to remind you that you haven't come out from under a bet yet, - Katya laughed, - well, I agree, but we are playing "American".

-What is that? -I didn't understand.

-Sometimes I have the feeling like you've never been a student. It's a kind of a bet. The loser does whatever the winner tells him to. It can be just anything. Anything!

-Agreed! -I immediately got excited. -what will you have?

-Tequilla.

-Are you sure? Tequila will only work in my favour, and as an honest man I feel it my duty to warn you that you will surely lose. Choose another drink, - I warned honestly.

-I will drink a bottle of tequila, blow your self-righteous and self-confident fluff on this very table, then I will leave your drunken corpse under the table and go home by myself, hug Basya and sleep. Did you remember the sequence?

-I'm serving.

We drank and played, played and drank. I looked at her restlessly. After all, tequila is a strong drink. I have witnessed many times how quite strong men have fallen from this Mexican miracle. However, Katya drank it as if it were liquor in a glass.

-The score, please, -she asked, elegantly swallowing another glass.

I bowed my head. Katya was doing really good. At first, I thought I would let her win in order to heat up the environment. But after the first game I realised that I have to save my skin.

-Do you happen to have a brush in this establishment? -Katya asked.

-What do you need a brush for? -I was surprised.

-To clean up the mess from your teared fluff, so people won't slip on it in the morning.

-You're just lucky, that's all. You don't really know how to play, -I said angrily, because "I hate losing. It doesn't matter if it's racing or playing Ping-Pong".

-You were hoping that I'd lose my head after a couple of Tequilla shots, will tear off my clothes, fall into your arms and shout breathlessly "take me, right here, right now, on this table", -Katya taunted.

The way she said "take me" really made me laugh. She said it like a real pro.

-Where did you learn to talk like that? -I asked.

- From German porn movies, -Katya said laughing.

- Well, I liked the idea, especially the table part.

- Not all scripts reach the stage of film production, Katya "assured" me, then heaved a deep sigh and continued, "My God, am I really that old?"

-What made you think that? -I asked.

-Some scientists claim that the older we get, the later alcohol begins to affect our body. We drank as much as Russian cobblers, and I feel nothing. Nothing, nothing. So, I am old, she declared with tragic pathos and looked expectantly at me, clearly expecting a denial of what was said.

According to the script, now I have to jump in to calm you down? I'll say: "Oh, no, you're not old, you're not sleepy." You just say the order of lines, I'm ready.

-Sometimes you become unbearable. Listen, you know, I have a dream. And considering that you lost the "American", I want you to do it.

-What is the dream, tell me, - I worried. Knowing Katya's character, one could have a rough idea of her dreams.

-I have never smoked marijuana. They say it's like flying. But I've always been afraid of losing control. I trust you and I want to experience with you what a pleasure it is that millions of people are captivated by.

I was terribly flattered and excited. Katya, careful as a fox, trusted me so much that she was even ready to take marijuana from my hand. It is clear that at that moment I was ready to lay the whole world at his feet.

But what she wanted was a serious problem for several reasons. First, I've never really been interested in that kind of pleasure. Second, I naturally had no connections in the drug industry. And third, from a purely ethical point of view, I didn't like the idea. But after a preface like Katya's, it was hard to put on a mask of false piety and talk about the harms of marijuana. Katya immediately understood the reasons for my silence and said in a disappointed tone:

-I just wanted to try it once. But if you can't find it, no problem, I can make another wish.

-In 30 minutes you will smoke your first "herb cocktail", - I confidently announced, suddenly remembering something. Last year, one of my acquaintances brought me cigarettes as a gift from Cuba. On Freedom Island, those cigarettes are used by the poor; they were small rolls of tobacco wrapped in

palm leaves, which had a foul smell and taste. Their smell was so unbearable that I was forbidden to smoke in the editorial office. I was hoping that after a year of sitting on my desk drawer, they hadn't lost their quality and would help me get out of this situation with honour. Naturally, there was not even a hint of marijuana in them, but I hoped that the inexperienced Katya would not understand anything. In any case, I decided to step into the role and let her convince me little more.

-And are you sure that after marijuana, the "take me to the table" scenario will not come to life? Don't forget we drank a bottle and a half of sizzling tequila.

However, her face changed so much that I immediately regretted what I said.

Half an hour later, I went out, waited a bit on the street and came back with cheap Cuban cigarettes in my pocket. We settled on the floor. Katya looked at me impatiently. Then she took the roll, inhaled the smoke greedily and said with a knowing look:

- I don't feel anything. This doesn't affect me either.

- Wait a little, it will work now, - I reassured her.

After smoking two rolls, Katya suddenly declared that her head was spinning and she felt as if she was in the air. At that moment, it was a brilliant example of self-inspiration. However, I had well-founded doubts that if I told Katya the truth about the "Cuban cocktail", I would not leave the editorial office alive.

-Do you really trust me that much? -I returned to the interested topic.

-Why are you surprised?

-Do you love me?

-No, but you do.

-How do you know?

-I know, because I have my own philosophy on love, based on life experience, -she announced.

-And what is that philosophy? Come on, tell me.

OK. When a man asks, "Do you love me?", he really does. And when he constantly says "I love you", he only loves his love for that woman. In fact, love is a complex daily work. It has to be re-baked every day like bread. To be fresh and fragrant like bread. The day you turn off the toaster and stop baking, love will grow old, will cover with mold and one day you will have to throw it away like old bread to the chicks, no, food for the crows. It's clear: Well, it's already 4 o'clock in the morning, I'm going home by myself, as I promised, - Katya finished her speech unexpectedly.

-You played the role of independent, free and independent woman for a long time. I don't deny, it really suits you, but now you will dress like an oriental woman and sit in my car. OK?

-It is a myth that oriental women are submissive. Another myth invented by the men of the East. Okay, you convinced me, - she agreed with unexpected ease.

Usually, when I was with Katya, I drove the car with one hand, because I had a habit of holding her fingers with the other. That way I felt closer to hers, that way it seemed to me that she is mine and will not escape from me anywhere. Katya turned to me at the entrance of the building, looked into my eyes for a long time and asked:

-Do you love me?

-Your theory doesn't apply to women?

Katya didn't answer anything, kissed my cheek and got out of the car. I was silently watching when the

light in her windows would turn on. I hoped to see at least her silhouette, but in the dimly lit square, all I could see was Basya's formidable snout and its telepathic thought descending with the snowflakes: "I warn you for the last time, revise the hours of your visit, otherwise I will have to break our agreement". The sweet aroma of freshly baked bread was in the air. I felt how hungry I was...

Vaghinak disappears

On the table, on the right and left sides of my feet, there were two candlesticks with unlit candles, some people were sitting on the chairs lined up next to the table, there was music of requiem. Chances were that I was dead. The fact that some of my senses were still working meant nothing. Maybe it was my soul's senses.

Only, for some reason, I was cold, although they say that it is hellishly hot in hell.

To tell you the truth, I have never been afraid of dying, but who would have thought that I should be so cold? And then, where does this constant headache and nausea come from? Was this all I had to take with me from earthly life? A logical question arose: what is the point of dying if you still have to have a headache in the mornings and a troubled heart?

How much does a champagne worth in hell? Here are two bottles standing like a guard of honour near my dead body. What happens if I try to take one of these? My hand surprisingly obeyed. I think the left one. Trembling, it approached the half-full bottle of champagne and clung to it as if it were the last pillar of hope that held life on him. Then the sour liquid flowed through my body, literally like life-giving water.

And I found out that I was in the living room of Vaghinak's house, half-lying on Vaghinak's armchair, my feet on Vaghinak's table. It was morning; the candles in the candlesticks near my feet were probably burning since the previous night, Vaghinak's "bums" were sleeping on the chairs arranged next to the table.

And the music was not soothing at all. It was just the sound of Ian Anderson's flute that had long served as my phone ringtone.

Well, I had to answer.

It was my wife calling. She reminded me of the date and told me that if I decide to come home sometime around this year, I should take some bread with me. As always, she was unique. I have always wondered how my wife, who has all the characteristics of a perfect woman, has been enduring a husband like me for twenty years.

Disgustingly, I drank the remaining champagne in the bottle and looked at the time. It was eleven o'clock. I tried to mentally reconstruct the events of the previous night, but to no avail. I didn't remember how I said goodbye to Katya, what I did after that, and most importantly, how I ended up in Vaghinak's house. Yes, somewhere I was drinking champagne after I left Katya's place. I remembered the symbolic number, twelve, because I bought that much champagne at the store, considering that it is 2012. Good thing I didn't get a 2012 bottle. Some of the champagnes, mostly empty, are on the table, so I came here right after parting with Katya.

I tried to get up and walk to the bathroom. One of the "bums" was sprawled on the floor directly in front

of the living room door and I had to step over it. I washed myself with cold water (let's just say it wasn't hot), but my headache got worse. I was too old for champagne... When I was still a student, I drank a few bottles of champagne with the boys and it gave me a headache, no wonder I feel miserable now? I somehow kept myself on my feet and was shaking all over. I had to go home, take some headache medicine and get into a warm bed. Damn, it wasn't New Year's either.

But wait a minute, where was Vaghinak? I haven't seen him anywhere.

I went back into the living room, but there were only "bums" there. Vaghinak was also missing in the kitchen and bedroom. I called him; the phone was off. There was nothing more I could do, so I put on my coat and went home.

I spent several days in a horizontal position. I didn't get up even when guests came to our house to celebrate the New Year. It's good that on January 1st, before my drunkenness started, I managed to visit the most important people with my family.

I probably haven't watched as much TV or slept as much in the last few years as I did in those few days. And actually, I didn't drink either. And when I drank a glass of wine on Christmas Day, even it seemed unpleasant.

I called Vaghinak from time to time, but his phone remained switched off. Gradually, I began to worry, and when I felt well enough to leave the house, I first went to Aghayan street. The door of Vaghinak's house was open, as always. But there was no one inside. The apartment was cold, dark and dingy as usual. Judging by the empty bottles of cheap vodka lined up here and there in the living room and kitchen, Vaghinak had either not drunk in the last few days, or was not here at all, and the apartment was managed by "bums". But I was seriously worried when I opened the closet in the living room where Vaghinak kept his suitcase and did not find it there. Did the deputy candidate leave? That would be something. I again tried to mentally reconstruct the events of January 1st and 2nd. In fact, when I woke up, Vaghinak was already gone. But the whole ordeal was that I couldn't remember if he was at home when I came and got him those sinister champagnes.

"Bums" had to be found. I looked for them in the nearby yards and streets, but in vain. I returned to Vaghinak's apartment again, waited a little longer and was about to leave a note and leave when the door opened. It was the former actor. I had already started to tell them apart (maybe because I was starting to look alike?). The bum was holding an object tightly with both hands. Only when I entered the kitchen from the dark hall did I see a large oval mirror with a plaster frame cracked in places.

-Look what I found; someone had placed this by the trash can. They are strange people, - he carefully placed the mirror on the kitchen table, - how much do you think they will pay for this? I would take it myself, but I don't have a house. And maybe I should give it to Vaghinak? He is a good person.

-Where is Vaghinak?

-Why are you asking me? -the former actor was looking at himself in the mirror wondering whether the mirror was dirty or he hadn't washed his face this morning.

-Who else should I ask? You live in Vaghinak's house and you don't know what happened to him? -I asked angrily.

-How do I know? -said the bum.

-When have you seen him last?

-You talk like a detective. They took me to police station once. That's the way the detective was speaking.

-Was he at home these couple of days?

-I guess not, but I'm not sure.

Realizing that it was impossible to find out anything from the actor, I asked where his friends were.

-I don't know, maybe they will come soon. It's terribly cold outside. Do you think these plaster cracks can be patched?

The other "bums" came soon enough indeed. There was not only the literary critic lady. They said that someone found a lover and betrayed them. And they did not have any information from Vaghinak. They only assured that he had not been at home for the past few days. I tried to find out the details from the night of January 1 when I came here after the meeting with Katya and brought the champagne. Interesting things were revealed here.

One of the "bums" (the architect) remembered that Vaghinak and I were locked in the kitchen for a long time and when we came out, we were talking about some bears. And the other "bum" (scientist) added that we were discussing where to get a bear cub.

Hearing the bear's name, I suddenly began to remember things. But first, let me tell you what the bear has to do with this.

And the bear has a connection with the leader of the "On its own" party. I have already told you about him and touched on his obsession with luxuries and luxurious life in general. But I did not mention that this politician, considered one of the richest people in our country, had an indescribable love for wild animals, particularly bears. It was said that he had a special area within the walls of his castle reserved for his favourite predators.

And so, on that first day of the New Year, after emptying another bottle of champagne, Vaghinak or I (I didn't remember the exact one) had an idea to present a bear cub to the leader of the "On its own" party on the occasion of the New Year. Before that or after that (I didn't remember this one for sure) I think Vaghinak called him to congratulate him on the New Year and arrange a meeting. I think the conversation took place and lasted quite a long time, but I did not remember other details.

But that was enough to understand some things. The problem is that it was not so easy to immediately call the leader of the "On its own" party and talk to him. Let's say, it's almost the same as if someone picks up the phone and calls directly to the president of the republic. First you need to know the phone number. How we had learned it was hard to say. It is possible that I learned from, let's say, our journalists. But still that was one side of the matter. In order for that person to talk to the caller, he or she should at least know him very well. Vaghinak said that they once knew the leader. If that was indeed the case, it also explained to some extent that, as I remembered, their conversation took quite a long time. Oh, if I remembered what they were talking about... But one thing is a fact: the conversation took place, and that meant that everything should be fine. But then where was Vaghinak, why did he disappear?

And suddenly a shiver ran through my body. Well, of course, everything was clear. Vaghinak was kidnapped. It is possible that during that telephone conversation, he had insulted or said wrong things to the club-footed lover, and he had ordered his minions to kidnap and punish Vaghinak. That he was capable of such a thing was beyond doubt. I don't take rumours too seriously, but as they say, there is no smoke without fire. It was said that the leader of the "On its own" party not only had a habit of bringing

to him and punishing those who harassed him, but also had unique methods of punishment. One of those methods was... putting people in bear cages.

The shivering inside me grew stronger. Poor Vaghinak! He just wanted to make fun of our reality, and he became a victim of that reality. And the main thing - I clearly realized that everything was my fault.

But wait a minute, was it too late to do anything? I tried to overcome my fear and judge soberly. No matter how evil the leader of "On its own" was (and I, for some reason, had an inner conviction that he was not an evil person), no matter how great his offense was, couldn't he impose the maximum punishment for Vaghinak? No, most likely my friend was not eaten by the bears. So, he had to be saved.

There were two options for that. I could make noise (let's say in the press) and I could quietly turn to a friend of mine, a very respectable person, who could certainly help me. After thinking for a while, I settled on the second option and was about to call my friend, when suddenly something occurred to me: And it happened at the right time.

Vaghinak had taken the suitcase with him, right? If he had been kidnapped, couldn't he have said at that moment, wait a minute, let me get my suitcase? No, that was impossible. So, what happened? Was Vaghinak kidnapped or did he just run away? He woke up in the morning, remembered the drunken conversation of the night, got scared, packed his things and rushed to the airport.

Yes, this was a much more reasonable hypothesis. But still, some things needed to be clarified. To finally calm down, I checked the closet one more time, then looked for Vaghinak's suitcase in other possible places, and after making sure that it was really not there, I went to the editorial office. I wanted to find out what information was available about the leader of the "On its own" party. It was not possible to learn anything from the press, the last information was from last year. I made several calls to journalist circles and found out that the respected oligarch spent New Year's outside of Armenia.

One could breathe easily, Vaghinak was definitely not in a bear cage.

However, I didn't particularly like the idea of him being a runaway, however decent it seemed. First of all, he was a special bridge between Katya and me. If that bridge collapsed, I couldn't reach Katya, who was on the other side of the river. But let's put this aside for now. Vaghinak was also my collaborator, or rather, accomplice. How could he put all the blame on me and run away in the middle of the road?

During these two months of our acquaintance, it is true that I did not get to know and understand him entirely, but I kind of got closer to him. For all the contradictions in his character, there was something strong and noble about him that was not characteristic of a half-way friend.

No, escape was not the appropriate word here. He just left. Disgusted and left, as the whole people left their homeland.

You leave, and the earth of the motherland shakes under our feet

When people leave, the earth of the motherland starts trembling under.

We are all very exhausted.

Should the stranger give us water, or a helping hand? And it is not often that we have to cling to strangers.

No, we're staying.

You and I did everything and nothing at the same time. The course of our struggle turned into an apathy

of adaptation and indifference, and you again found yourself at the stranger's door. Your unresponsive knock echoed back home, and disorderly queues formed in front of other closed and open doors. However, the more you leave the motherland, the more the motherland leaves you. And he has already left. Because the homeland is not only Masis, Aragats and Andok or Mrav. Homeland is also the worker who takes an election bribe, the bus driver who swears at an old woman, the musician who plays in Turkish, the judge who makes an unjust verdict, the journalist who writes a commissioned article, the rich man who does "charity", the policeman who doesn't protect, the doctor who doesn't treat, the deputy who doesn't write the law... and the president who tolerates all this.

Leave if you will, but we stay.

Just know that wherever you go, you will be living in a part of the world that is not yours. Because there is only one part in the world where your roots are. And it is impossible to cut your roots until they dry out or wither.

And we will stay and try not to let the roots dry out and wither.

On the slope of Mount Aragats, a little above the village of Zovasar, there is a spring, which the shepherds call the spring of the Mountain. The white-water gushes from the spring, turns into a stream and flows towards the village, and then you don't know where. The water of the mountain spring, turned into a stream, goes down the mountainside, where the village herd grazes, and the shepherds sleep, then cuts the fields and meadows, where the wheat spikes shine, and the greenish thorns are shrivelled, and then it reaches uncle Mamikon's field, where uncle Mamikon's bees and a mole live.

From time to time, it happens that the stream dries up. And then the herd suffers, the wheat hang their heads, uncle Mamikon's bees do not come out of the hives. At the same time, the shepherds are furious, the thorns bloom surprisingly, and the mole living in Uncle Mamikon's field comes out from under the ground.

The land through which the stream flows from the water of the Mountain spring and dries up from time to time belongs to all of them: the deer and the dog, the wheat and the thorn, the bee and the mole. Maybe a lamb gets lost in the mountains, maybe a grain of wheat is carried by the wind to another field and it sprouts there, maybe a bee flies far away and does not return to its hive. But anyway, this is their land, on the slope of Mount Aragats, near the village of Zovasar. It doesn't matter, this is their soil, fertile or dry.

You were leaving, and the homeland was running away from under our feet. After centuries of losses, we finally have a gain. A little piece of our lost land we joined the motherland. Karabagh. Even if it did not have any international document formulation, even if the endless meetings of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan did not register any progress in the so-called "Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict". What was the last meeting? Kazan?

No matter what people say, one could not complain about that meeting. Furthermore, it would be great if future matches had the fate of this until... Because that "until" was a bit complicated, if you will, until the moment when the presidents of Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan met in Kazan, with the mediation of Medvedev, and signed the document we wanted. Of course, at the moment, such a thing was impossible. It would be impossible in the next five years, maybe ten, maybe twenty. But what did we want? After all, what we wanted was not Karabakh with an unclear status, without liberated territories.

So, what was the purpose of our haste?

There were people who believed that the unresolved issue of Karabakh hindered the development of our country. How did it get in the way? Was the Karabakh issue to blame for the fact that our authorities could not fight against widespread injustices within the country, could not provide minimum living conditions for more than half of the population, could not and did not want to hold fair elections...

Our people have mostly been able to resist the injustices coming from outside and keep their species. But it is also by confronting internal injustices and making that type strong that we will be able to solve our problems once and for all.

And I say again, let there be many more Kazans, it was necessary to preserve the so-called "status quo" until we were strong enough to put our signature under the document we wanted.

Meanwhile, how could we be strong when you are gone?

What was the reason why the president of our country allowed himself to approach the enemies of the nation without considering the opinion of the nation? What was the reason that had allowed him to invite a president of a country that was built on soil fertilized by our sweat and blood? What was the reason that our statesmen almost swore by the names of the enemy?

There was only one answer to these questions - you were leaving, and our homeland was running away from under our feet.

Escape or how the time of our lives passes

My favourite pastime is traveling by car. Except I've always done it alone. This may seem nonsense to many, but I have driven across Siberia, America, and all of Europe.

Except that a friendly trip is completely different, the miserable thousand kilometres we travelled with my friend in Ukraine were completely different.

The sunset was so strange here. Everything around was bright and suddenly it was dark in an instant, and you couldn't understand how it happened. It looked like someone was turning off the lights.

Before Yalta was only a short distance away, I was intensively turning the steering wheel left and right, and our Volkswagen was manoeuvring through the uneven curves of the Crimea.

The scent of the sea wafted in through the half-open window. My friend was singing some song about freedom-fighters, occasionally sipping from a bottle of Pertsovka.

We had been on the road since morning, had covered several hundred kilometres and had plenty of time to talk and think about various things. About the roads of Ukraine and Armenia, in the literal and figurative sense of the word, the Orange Revolution of Ukraine, non-revolution in Armenia and revolutions in general, Slavic and Armenian models of democracy and democracy in general, Ukrainian, Armenian and national liberation movements in general, about the Ukrainian, Armenian shores of the Black Sea and seas in general, about Ukrainian, Armenian and art and literature in general, about Ukrainian, Armenian and women in general and many other things.

I have already had occasion to say that in the matter of friends, life had been extravagant to me. And talking about each of them, I surely said that without a doubt, he is the best.

No, the best was Mushegh, because perhaps he was the only one left in the world from whom I was not

ashamed to learn. To learn how to be strong and kind at the same time, to learn how to be tolerant and intolerant, to learn how to love the motherland and people. And here, he was sitting next to me, singing a freedom-fighter song and drinking from the Pertsovka bottle. Mushegh was a freedom-fighter, an ordinary fighter and leader of the enduring struggle for freedom and justice. I don't know more about him, I only know that he would continue to be a devotee of that struggle, and that struggle would last forever.

We left our homeland with its problems for a few days, left our problems in the homeland and came here to the most beautiful resort in all of Russia. Why?

Sometimes it seems that the answer to all questions, even the solution, is in this bottle of "Pertsovka". Drink and sing, and the answer, the solution will pour automatically, partly from this bottle, partly from your soul.

Then new questions will necessarily arise that will require new solutions. Then again and again. Isn't life also an eternal struggle of questions and answers, problems and solutions? Moreover, in both cases, the struggle is two-sided. Life presents you with problems, you look for solutions, you ask questions about life and look for answers.

For example, I have now escaped from both one and the other. I have neither questions nor answers now. I'm sure my friend does too. We now sing our songs and drink our vodka on the dark roads of Ukraine. And we fight with the road, with the song, with vodka. We fight with the world, with our homeland, with man and his nature, with our received and unrequited loves. We are at war with ourselves.

When will we understand that our lives are running parallel and that our time to live is passing?

We forget that our work, our rest, our thinking, our dreaming, our fighting and our giving up, our joys and sorrows, our victories and defeats, our achievements and losses, our loving and looking for love, our loved ones, caressing and cheating, our excitement and boredom, our drinking water or wine, eating our bread, vegetables, meat or fish, our joint pains and headaches, our same or different days, our monotonous and turbulent nights, sitting in our place or traveling, our waiting and not waiting, our repeating and repeating again, remembering or forgetting our past, looking at our future optimistically, pessimistically or philosophically, listening to our favourite songs, reading our Narekatsi and Exupery, planting our tree and crushing a flower, our sitting crooked and speaking straight, criticizing, self-criticizing and being criticized, hiding and coming out, going to our church and then getting drunk, thinking about our beginning, waiting for the end, and sometimes getting tired of all of this goes parallel to our time to live...

The cub comes to the rescue

Our editorial office welcomed me as if I had returned not from a wonderful five-day trip, but rather from exile. The long hugs were followed by long and thin stories about the injustices that happened in our workplace and in the country during my absence, after which Kostó said completely indifferently:

- Oh, I forgot to say - some strange person was asking you, some Vaghinak.

Vaghinak... Although during these few days I tried my best not to remember him, not to think about him, I can't say if it worked. I tried to convince myself that I was indifferent, but of course I wasn't, first, because I was hurt to the extreme, and then I inspired myself that we had done something stupid in the

first place and what happened was the retribution for our, or rather, my stupidity. In addition, in Yalta, I made a decision to simply erase these last months from my biography and return to Armenia to drastically change my life, not even to drink, even to forget Katya. Whether it would be successful or not, in fact, remained unclear.

Hearing Vaghinak's name, I don't know what happened to me. I don't remember how I threw myself out of the editorial office and how I got to Aghayan Street.

The missing traitor was sitting at the living room table. Alone. On the table was a three-liter bottle of "Zolotoye Koltso" vodka, which I think should have been discontinued a long time ago. Scattered around the bottle were gnawed coconut shells. I approached and stood above Vaghinak's head:

-So, you're alive - I asked.

-It's hard to say for sure, - he answered without looking at me.

-Where have you been?

-What do you mean?... But wait, I have to ask you the same question.

I hesitated for a moment, then decided to ask directly.

-Are we ending our... I don't know how to say, our cooperation?

Here Vaghinak raised his head and looked into my eyes.

-What makes you think that?

-The fact that you left in the middle of the job.

He kept looking into my eyes as if trying to gauge whether I was drunker or he.

-If anything had stopped during this time, it was my drinking. Here I am filling in the blank, - I said pointing at the liquor, - it is already the third day. Although my liver is bad.

-Where have you been? -I repeated my question.

-Where else should I be? I was in Arabia.

-Where?

-United Arab Emirates. Dubai. One of the scariest places in the world. Can you imagine they don't sell drinks there?

-What were you doing in Dubai, - I asked in amazement.

-What do you mean? Wait, you were drinking that day...- he thought for a while and then continued, - you really don't remember anything?

I stared blankly at him.

-Well... how can I say it?

-You don't remember. You should not drink champagne, my friend. We were drinking champagne that day, weren't we?

-Tell me, - I said impatiently.

-How about a drink first?

Without waiting for my answer, Vaghinak got up, walked slowly to the kitchen and returned shortly after with a glass of vodka in his hand. He placed it on the table but did not fill it. "Just a minute," he said, leaving the living room again and entered the bathroom.

-You really don't remember anything, - he shouted from there. I didn't answer.

-I must say that you are not a very conscientious partner, - Vaghinak continued, you don't remember

what is not in your favour. As Ostap Ibrahimovic used to say...

I didn't understand what the Great Combinator was saying, because at that moment Vaghinak flushed the toilet (it was still the Soviet era in the toilet of the apartment on Aghayan Street). I waited until he returned to the guest room and said in a tone that did not accept any objection.

-If you don't finally explain what's going on, I'm leaving.

-Okay, okay, - he conceded, don't suffocate the revolution while it's still in its cradle.

Then he told me. On the night of January 1st, 2012, after drinking the eleventh bottle of champagne, Vaghinak calls the leader of the "On its own" party and wishes him happy New Year. At first, the leader does not remember Vaghinak, until he recalls some details from about twenty years ago. Then a warm conversation ensues. The interlocutors remember the past, get excited, and even toast each other remotely. And it is here that Vaghinak expresses his desire to visit the leader and present him with a Himalayan bear cub. However, it turns out that the leader is not in Yerevan, he is in Dubai and will stay there for a few more days. Vaghinak announces that in that case he will go to Dubai. When the conversation ends, we move to the living room and continue drinking excitedly. Instead of dissuading Vaghinak from carrying out this foolish idea, on the contrary, I announce that I am going along with him. We start discussing where to get a bear cub. All this takes quite a long time and as a result I get tired and suddenly fall asleep. Vaghinak tries to wake me up, but in vain. He is forced to pack his things and leave the house. Takes a taxi and goes to the airport. Here he gets disappointed, it turns out that the next direct flight to Dubai is only two days away. But Vaghinak does not lose himself. He takes the first flight to Moscow, and from there, as he says, to Arabia. Here, right at the airport, Vaghinak faces the "Arabian alcohol taboo". But the real drama begins later. Vaghinak first finds the hotel where the leader of the "On its own" party stays and takes a room. Then he asks to call the manager to him and asks whether it is true that in this hotel nothing is refused, and upon receiving a positive answer, he orders to get a bear cub. However, it takes quite a long time for the hotel management to complete the order, exactly one hour. An hour later, the little crooked-paw with a salty howl, enters the room with a cachet around its neck. How much Vaghinak pays for the animal is not known. And it's not even important (our friend, as already mentioned, has enough savings), the important thing is that fifteen minutes later, the teddy bear appears in another hotel room, which belongs to the leader of the "On its own" party. Vaghinak comes in behind the crooked paw. Warm hugs follow (including human-human and human-animal forms), after which drinking begins (the Arabian alcohol taboo does not naturally apply to a respectable Armenian oligarch). It lasts one day, one night. More precisely, it takes that long for Vaghinak, because that's how long it takes our friend to get a promise from the respectable oligarch to have a temporary place in the proportional list of the "On its own" party.

So, everything is fine.

-Drunken politics is not subject to failure, - Vaghinak concluded his story, - only my liver hurts badly.

Americanists

I had an acquaintance named Victor whom I hadn't seen for ages. He was probably in America. During our school years, we attended a group of young journalists together. Victor was an extremely active type.

During the lessons, he constantly asked questions to the lecturers and guests, entered into debates with them, often into arguments, and after the lessons, he stuck to his classmates, us, and did not let go. His main topic of conversation was America – everything related to America. He always brought old issues of American newspapers "Washington Post", "The Wall Street Journal", "New York Times" with him to classes, and no matter what the subject of the lesson was, he would take the newspaper out of his bag and say: "Look, what they write about in America". It was still Soviet times, and Victor's American propaganda could be dangerous for him. Fortunately, the leader of our group was a decent woman and didn't care much about all this. Once Victor invited me to their house, or rather to his room. I was amazed. In the corner of the room hung the flag of the United States from a long-nickel-plated pole, on the walls there were various posters symbolizing America, pictures, pages torn from magazines, I counted exactly fifteen models of the statue of liberty of different sizes, which were placed in all possible places. "Here, this is my America," Victor announced proudly, pulling a pack of Wrigley's chewing gum out of his pocket. He carefully opened it, pulled out one of the five chewing gums in the box, and after thinking for a while, divided it and handed half to me. Later, he said that they have relatives in the USA, and they are preparing to leave soon, they are waiting for the visa to be approved in Moscow. This is Americanism.

There were and are many American-loving people among Armenians. Surely, among other nations too. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, because the United States is truly a wonderful country, and one can even adore it. But why did I remember Victor? I'm just going to continue my story and move on to the next political party, in whose proportional list Vaghinak should still find a place. And that party was called American Heritage. It was generally a positive political force, and people of mostly positive profiles gathered there. People who subordinated personal interest to the interest of society, who were ready to fight and fought for society and human rights, people who had a clean biography. All this had close appeals, naturally, to the leader of the party as well.

So why did I not believe and trust these people and this political force?

Because everything they did was not Armenian. Because they thought and behaved in English, or rather "American". And they spoke "American" to the people. It is the same as raising your child in a foreign language so that he becomes a good person. Unfortunately, we have and had had that experience. During the Soviet years, many parents raised their children in Russian, but now they do so in English. And this was not simple civility, and it became thinking. Dangerous thinking because parents who think like this are convinced that they are not doing anything wrong. I always told them only one thing: it is not by chance that God divided mankind into nations. God put people into their species so that people would not become uniform, because contrasts sustain life and uniformity destroys it. By breaking away from one's kind, a man may become wiser, but he will never become better, because he will not be free, for true freedom lies in remaining in your kind and keeping that kind.

Anyway, let's go back to the "American Heritage" party, which was on the Armenian political scene for five years and during those five years managed to gain enough authority among the most civilized stratum of the opposition segment of the society. That reputation should have provided it with five percent, just enough to keep the mandates it already had in the parliament. It was a different question, thanks to which this political force gained the above authority. The secret was the socio-political technologies of the exclusively American model, which was guided (if not directed) by the party leader, a man with American

values who was born, raised and educated in the United States of America. First, he filled the party with undisputed, knowledgeable, courageous and dedicated people. Secondly, he was able to use these people in the best way in order to raise the party's rank. These people were always in the right place at the right time. And the right moment and place referred to such events, which were bound to get a public resonance in the future. Human rights infringement, restriction of freedom of speech, environmental problems, etc.. Of course, it is welcomed and appreciated that public figures are concerned about such problems and their involvement in any noisy justice, but unfortunately it was aimed and contributed to increasing the party's rating more, rather than solving the problems themselves.

In short, as I said above, I did not particularly trust this political force, which was facilitated by another circumstance that I forgot to mention. If we were to believe the most recent rumors (and rumors were never out of place in our reality), the "American Heritage" party would go to the parliamentary elections in an alliance with another party or with a joint list. That party was created very recently and was called "American Democrats". The core of the party was made up of people who left the "Levon the Great" alliance, who, despite being quite healthy political figures compared to the other members of the aforementioned alliance, but this union, at least in me, further radicalized the suspicion that this project was drawn up and was directed from the outside.

"American Heritage" and "American Democrats". And what's wrong with the American, you may ask?

An analyst I highly respect (not from our site) wrote an article the other day that I'd like to link to.

He compared the leader of the "American Heritage" party to the famous movie character Forrest Gump (a symbol of goodness) and wrote: "If Western technology is the way to good that he talks about, then let Gump's philosophy prevail in our country, which suffers from bile and total hatred. If the Americans want the monopoly of the ruling party to be broken in Armenia in order to form a more balanced government, then let that philosophy win among us... If Gump's philosophy will free us from the grip of the oligarchs, then let it win." Then the analyst made a comparison with another phenomenon in our country, which was related to the Russian influence, and observed that:

"Russia openly invests its agents of influence and bootstraps its politics." The analyst added that when people appear on the pre-election lists of the ruling party who promote Russian policy and claim that Russia is our master, without which we cannot do, this is not evaluated as the actions of foreign agents, and the experience of the West to improve the state administration system is considered interference in our internal affairs.

I think you'll agree that it's extremely stupid. If we ultimately have to make a choice, and that choice is between Russian arrogance and Western civilized approaches, why not settle for the latter?

We had to make a choice - this was the biggest tragedy. But we are a nation first, and then a community. If the solution of our public problems was possible in the near future, the same could not be said about our national problems. Yes, the West was ready to help us solve our public problems. He was ready to support us materially and, perhaps selflessly, to transfer his democratic values to us. But why didn't we want to understand that the West did not care about anything related to our national ideas and aspirations. And in case of relying on the West, we would have to compromise on the solution of our national problems: lose Nagorno-Karabakh and forget about Western Armenia. Of course, Russia also cared a lot about our national ideas and aspirations. However, pursuing its geopolitical interest in the struggle with

the West, Russia benefited from the presence of our national ideas, and this situation would continue to remain unchanged for a long time. It was dishonest, of course. But wasn't the West dishonest? Wasn't America dishonest in her intentions towards us? Let them not be offended by the word "dishonest". The wonderful United States of America, which symbolizes and embodies freedom and which has sheltered millions of our countrymen, certainly did not deserve to be considered dishonest in its intentions regarding us. However, it was about that freedom. America knew the value of freedom very well. Especially the freedom that was acquired at the price of blood. We had a small piece of that freedom and we had to shed a lot of blood for it. And we would shed it again if it was necessary to protect that freedom...

Gods must be crazy

It was ten o'clock in the evening when everyone dispersed, leaving me alone in the newsroom. It was Saturday, Panda had prepared his famous meal, we had a good drink and had fun. I also invited Vaghinak to the event, I wanted to finally introduce him, especially to Andreas. I had been foolish enough to tell him about our adventure. Andreas, however, did not believe my story, moreover, he did not believe in the existence of Vaghinak. In order to prove it, I turned to Panda and demanded that he confirmed that Vaghinak exists. The rogue had not approved. I reminded him that he was at Vaghinak's house.

-I remember some "bums", - said Panda, - but not Vaghinak.

That's the kind of bastard. Meanwhile, Andreas wouldn't be Andreas if he didn't bite after all this.

Are you creating a party of "bums"? Not bad. Not bad, at all!

Of course, Vaghinak did not come. And Andreas' bite could not remain without consequences. And here, when everyone had already left, and I was left alone in the editorial office, the following happened:

I was in my office (it's on the second floor of the newsroom) when I heard the front door open. I thought one of the guys had forgot something and came back. I waited for a while, then, seeing that no one was going up, I went down to the first floor myself. A man was seated near one of the tables in the press conference hall. He sat quietly to himself with his arms on the table, his head resting on the arms, and he was probably sleeping. He was a bum, of course, but I didn't know him. I stood over him and patted him on the shoulder. The wretch slowly raised his head and looked at me with contempt. I said nothing and waited for him to speak. But the "bum" wasn't going to do it. He continued to look at me for some time, then put his head on his hands again, assuming the previous position.

-Then? - I asked calmly.

His answer was unbelievable:

-Let me sleep, -he said.

I tried not to be rude.

-What the hell is wrong with you, man? Get out of here.

-I said let me sleep, - he repeated and turned his head to the other side.

Here I couldn't resist and pulled his arm.

He finally raised his head, but this time he looked at me not with contempt, but with a sad look:

-It's cold outside, - he said.

I felt sorry for him. But I couldn't do anything. I had to go out myself and naturally I could not leave him in the editorial office. I thought for a moment and said:

-See, there are two options. Either I force you out of here now, or I give you a thousand drams and you leave voluntarily.

"Bum" thought for a while and then said:

-Two. Two thousand drams.

Anyway, I sent the "bum" away, closed the editorial office and went to Vaghinak. It was really cold. I looked at the carefree and warm people sitting inside the windows of cafes on Northern Avenue and thought about the "bum" whom I actually kicked out.

What should he do with those two thousand drams earned by his "pure sweat"?

I found Vaghinak repairing the fuse of an oil lamp. When I entered the living room, he ignored me and continued his work.

-Why didn't you come? -I asked dryly.

-I was busy, - he pointed to the lamp.

I realized that it is pointless to talk about it and I just said:

-You are like the Carlson.

-What do you mean?

-You are there and you are not there. I talk about you every day, just like the baby boy in the cartoon, but it seems to everyone that you are a figment of my imagination.

-So, be it. Let me remain the creation of your imagination. Especially since this is all very similar to it.

-Don't you think we are crossing all possible boundaries?

-What do you mean? - Vaghinak finished the work and lit the lamp.

-The work we have undertaken, of course.

-Oh that...

-I wonder what else I could have meant.

Although possible, he attributed "crossing all the lines" to drinking.

-I sometimes wonder if we are really doing this for society or for us.

-What difference does it make? Even if we do for ourselves, we do for the society. You don't need anything big; you just need to understand that the interest of society is much more important than your own. Those who realize this are too few. Self-interested ones are a hundred times more. In other words, it turns out that one person should try to convince a hundred people that it is necessary to subordinate one's own interest to the interest of society. For the simple reason that it will be better for him. I think we are doing just that.

I agreed with Vaghinak one hundred percent. Involuntarily I remembered one of my favourite movies called "The gods must have gone mad," and I asked the would-be prophet if he had seen it. He didn't.

There's a lovely movie called "The Gods must have gone mad". It is about the kindest people in the world, the Bushmen. That little tribe has been living in the African Kalahari Desert for I don't know how long, completely unaware of what civilization and evil are. In the dry Kalahari, they provide water for everyone, hunt for everyone, build shelter for everyone. Everyone lives with everyone's worries and everyone's joys. One thing the Bushmen have realized is that if everyone thinks only of himself and

ignores the rest, the gods will become angry and their happy life will soon end, because when it is good for a few and bad for the rest, it is not fair. And then one day a twin-prop plane passes through the sky of the Bushmen, and a glass bottle of Coca-Cola falls from the plane. Little Bushmen do not understand the meaning of an unfamiliar thing and use it as it happens. one as a hammer, another as an awl, and a third as a whistle. And since the bottle is the only one, one day it turns out that it is very necessary for everything at the same time. Everyone wants to keep it with them for as long as possible, even always. And since it cannot be like that, the Bushmen are arguing and even hitting each other for the first time in their history. The Coke bottle becomes a real scourge. A bushman named Ki decides to take the bottle to the edge of the world and throw it away. He sets out and soon leaves the Kalahari Desert and finds himself in the land of men. Here, Ki encounters the customs prevailing in the land of people, sees how people live, act and think here. Spending several weeks here, he sees people's life in all its manifestations. "Perhaps the gods have gone mad," concludes Ki, throws the Coca-Cola bottle into the abyss, thinking it's the end of the world, and returns to her tribe...

-And when should our God be angry that we, the inhabitants of the land of men, get rid of our bottles of Coca-Cola? And finally, let's realize that society's interest should be preferred over our own interest. Because when it's good for some and bad for the rest, it's not fair, I asked Vaghinak.

-One day it will definitely happen, he answered calmly.

-Okay, let's leave it at that. why is there no news from our case?

-I wonder myself...

How we crammed another list

The news came two days later. It was February 13th, the day was Monday. I had just arrived at the editorial office and was drinking my first morning cup of coffee, when the clerk of "My name is Ar-Am" NGO called and said:

-The leader of the "American Heritage" party will come to our office today.

But I haven't told you the background to all of this yet. After we reached at least a preliminary agreement with four of the six powerful political forces that applied to participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections ("Appendix vermiformis" party, "Levon the Great" alliance of parties,

Power at Any Price Party, On its own Party), we were left to do the same with two more parties: American Heritage and Revolution Without Revolution.

If you remember, we made the order of the selection of political forces on the following principle: from negative to non-negative. Or, as Vaghinak argued, from too negative to less negative. For example, when evaluating parties, I was guided by simple logic: the negative and positive side of their ideas and programs, the negative and positive trends in the process of implementing those ideas and programs, and the positive and negative descriptions of party leaders. Or more simply, how many negative and positive things has the given political force done or can do for the nation and the state? Accordingly, the next two parties, which we have not covered so far, in my opinion, mostly fit into the positive profile. This made our job more difficult. It's one thing to cheat a bad person, another thing to cheat a good person. It's not so much the guilt that's the problem as the risk of failure. Or maybe both. Because that very pang of conscience

can betray you. However, our adventure wouldn't be complete if we didn't involve the following two political forces as well. First, it was the turn of the "American Heritage" party. So, what would it take for us to cheat them without feeling guilty, or cheat feeling guilty, but trying to not get caught.

What were the paths to the American Heritage party's proportional list? In order to find the answer to this question, first of all, it was necessary to understand how the list was compiled, did the party leader do it on his own, or was he aided in this matter by the embassy of one of the western countries in our country. Considering the fact that this political force decided to go to the elections with another newly created, completely unknown political force with its own electorate and no resources, but instead with the support of the above-mentioned embassy, it could be assumed that the list, however, was drawn up by the leader's non-discretionary decision. In addition, studying the previous proportional list of "American Heritage", with which they went to the previous parliamentary elections, it became clear that the list contained little-known faces to the public at that time. In fact, they were able to collect more than five percent with that list, that is, to pass the National Assembly, where during five years these previously unknown people were able to show themselves in such a way that they not only gained wide recognition, but also enjoyed respect in some circles of society. It was obvious that thanks to all this, the party was able to independently overcome the five percent threshold necessary to enter the parliament. So, what was the need to include other people in the list, and not from one's own party? What should have forced the party leader to abandon experienced teammates and rely on new people? The answer to the question was clear, at least for me. The list was compiled partly with the direct participation of the US Embassy, partly with approval and partly, so to speak, by flattering the eye. In our case, we should have meant the latter. In other words, Vaghinak had to be presented with an image that, if included in the list, would catch the eye of the Americans.

After weighing all this, Vaghinak and I decided on the following option (lately, Vaghinak was so excited about our game that he not only helped me without grumbling, but also often acted as the initiator). First, it was necessary to establish a social organization as soon as possible, which supposedly aimed to spread American values in Armenia. Then it was necessary to organize one or two actions on behalf of that NGO, which would receive a public resonance. Then it was necessary to arrange a meeting between the "president" of the NGO Vaghinak and the leader of the "American Heritage" party. A realization of all this was not connected with great difficulties. The only problem was lack of time.

First, we had to find an appropriate name for our public organization. After much deliberation, we found it. "My name is Ar-Am." This is how we named our organization. It was Vaghinak's idea. I think it's not hard to guess what this meant. However, apart from our love for Saroyan, it had another meaning related to the last word of the name. We deliberately wrote it that way, "Ar-Am", which could be opened as "Armenia-America".

The registration of the NGO did not take us long. We turned to a law firm that took over the entire case. Then we rented a presentable office in the city centre for a month, hired a beautiful office worker for a month, created our website, and started thinking about the main thing, what noisy actions can be organized to start circulating the name of our NGO.

In those days, an event took place in Yerevan that attracted the attention of the entire society. One of the regular green spaces in the centre of the capital was in danger.

Yerevan had already turned into a city-cemetery a long time ago. That is, both the country and the capital. It was under the impression that all our governments since independence were guided by the following principle: if ninety percent of the country's territory is stone, then why should the capital be moved? No, dear people, let's de-green Yerevan as much as possible so that the picture becomes complete. They started from the forests of Yerevan, moved to the gardens, and now they have reached the parks. Of course, the authorities could understand. There was no more room left for hotels, cafes, restaurants, "shops-boutiques" in Yerevan. Wouldn't they build it in the air? What is more important, the tree or the business? One garden more, one garden less, ten groves more, ten groves less, a thousand trees more, a thousand trees less...

A government that cuts down trees instead of planting them cannot be good. This is already a psychological problem. You treat people the way you treat trees. Of course, it is not about each and every case. Of course, there are and cannot but be priorities. Except it wasn't in our case. In our case, the priority was exclusively business.

Fortunately, times were changing and the level of public awareness was also changing with the times. People no longer understood that they have not only the right to breathe, but also the right to disagree, the right to rebel, the right to fight, even on an issue that once seemed so secondary, such as illegal tree cutting.

Groups of young environmentalists-activists were formed, which rose up from time to time against injustices. In February 2012, such a group fought against illegal construction in one of Yerevan's central parks. It turned out that the struggle had expanded enough to stop being merely environmental. Environmentalists-activists were joined by representatives of different layers of society: ordinary citizens, intellectuals, opposition politicians. Some sincerely, some out of lack of business, and some out of self-interest. But that wasn't the point. The important thing was that the society was now clearly aware that the authorities cannot be allowed to do what they want.

Well, it was time for the non-governmental organization "My name is Ar-Am" to join environmentalist-activists.

First, we prepared a statement on behalf of the NGO, in which it was specifically stated that our organization, a supporter of the rapprochement of the civil societies of Armenia and the USA, is ready to invest all its potential to support activists fighting against illegalities. Then we made sure that this statement was published in all Yerevan media. Next, we prepared leaflets in which we called on all citizens concerned about their city to join the people fighting in the park. We gathered a dozen students who undertook the distribution of flyers throughout the city. Then, on behalf of our NGO, we started to publish articles in the press, which told about the successes of the American and European environmental movements of the previous century.

This was enough to start talking about the public organization "My name is Ar-Am" in various social and political circles, which is exactly what we needed. Other ways could have been sought for Vaghinak's meeting with the leader of the "American Heritage" party. Considering my wide connections with this party, I again decided to do the same as I did before; to act as a mediator and organize that peer-to-peer meeting. I contacted one of my acquaintances from the "American Heritage" parliamentary faction and told him that my friend, the president of the public organization "My name is Ar-Am", wants to meet

with their leader, and he asked me to mediate. The MP promised to be helpful. A week passed, but there was no word from the MP. I contacted him again and inquired about the progress of my request. He said that he passed it on to the leader. Then another week passed and again, no news. And here I had already given up hope, and was thinking of looking for other ways, when the unexpected happened.

It was February 13th, the day was Monday. I had just arrived at the editorial office and was drinking my first morning cup of coffee, when the clerk of the NGO "My name is Ar-Am" called and said:

- The leader of the "American Heritage" party will come to our office today.

Well, it was like him. He was an interesting person in general. But it was even more interesting as a politician. Americans would say "extraordinary". It is when, say, a politician can decide something in the morning, make a statement about it, present the reasons for the decision, explain and convince that it is the right thing, then change the decision in the evening, make a statement about it, present reasons for changing the decision, explaining, convincing them that the right thing is, then the next morning... Well, you get the idea.

The leader of the "American Heritage" party was also known for his unprecedented, not at all typical of a politician, warmth that he felt for any citizen he met, whether he knew the latter or not. How sincere he was, but that was not the important thing, the important thing was that he managed to break the stereotype rooted in our society that when strangers smile and greet each other on the street, then they are at least crazy. This was no small thing, believe me. And this was perhaps the greatest achievement of his political activity.

And so, the leader of the "American Heritage" party himself came to our office to meet Vaghinak. How the meeting went, I don't know, because I was not present myself. I was sitting in my car, waiting for the meeting to end. I parked my car in front of the office we rented in one of the new downtown buildings that housed dozens of other offices belonging to various companies.

The meeting lasted quite a long time, about two hours. There was no way I could understand what they were talking about for so long. I was already starting to worry when I saw Vaghinak and our guest through the glass door of the building. Here I understood the reason for the delay. The office building in the centre of the city was very crowded, and our guest felt it his duty to say hello and exchange a few words with everyone.

Anyway, when Vaghinak finally managed to send him off, I asked for the details of the meeting.

-Nothing in particular, - he said indifferently, - he was offering me to join their party.

-Why is everyone asking you to join their party?

Vaghinak shrugged his shoulders.

-I have told you many times - a drunken policy is not subject to failure.

-And what, did you agree? - I continued.

-I agreed, but on the condition that by joining the party, I would also enter the parliament.

-Really? What did he say?

-He asked for time to think.

It took the leader of the American Heritage Party another week to think and come to a decision. In a week, Vaghinak learned that he was the sixth in the proportional list of this political force.

About how I got out

I had to welcome spring with a drink. The year was in decline, on the evening of February 29, the latest news on our website announced that: "Precipitation is expected from time to time in Yerevan tonight and on March 1, sleet at night, rain during the day. A wind of 10-12 m/s is possible, at night - ice in some places. It will be 0 degrees at night, during the day..." But I didn't care about the day.

That's how I wanted to welcome spring with Katya. Even if it's cold, even if it's sleet rain and wind, even if it's icy, I wanted to walk with Katya, wait outside for twelve o'clock and record the arrival of spring.

- My God, how short a time it took to carve the statuette I want from you, - Katya said laughing when I called her and presented my idea.

-I didn't understand.

-When we first met, you were hard as granite, and I had no hope that you would become a sculpture. But lo and behold, I succeeded. You dance, ride a cable car in the middle of the night, and now you want to welcome spring in the street.

-Granite romance?

-Maybe. Only I have to refuse.

-But...

-No buts.

Here it is. In her style. What was left for me to do after all this? Of course, "get out," as one of the Vasyas would say. What does that mean, you might wonder? In short, it's when you consciously reach a point where you don't respect yourself. It's probably a state of mind. It doesn't matter if you're happy or sad, rich or poor, fed up with the world or madly in love with the world, sometimes you just want to "get out." Doesn't it happen that you get tired of correcting other people's mistakes, holding others' hands? You want to make a mistake yourself, you want them to hold your hand and say: what are you doing?

But for the sake of justice, it should be said that Katya was not the only reason. So much had built up in these few months... Katya's rejection was probably just the last straw.

Half a bottle of apricot vodka caught my eye in the kitchen. It took me half an hour to empty it. Then I left the editorial office, entered the nearest cafe and ordered cognac. I drank about three glasses. Ordering the fourth glass, I began to look around and assess the situation.

Three college-age girls were sitting at the corner table drinking tea. They were probably girlfriends. In the other corner sat two slightly older girls, probably also friends, drinking beer. And two others were sitting at the table next to me, drinking some kind of cocktail. These

were also probably old friends.

I have always been surprised by a pattern - girlfriends always look alike. I do not mean the character, thinking, worldview, because the similarity of all this is self-explanatory, but only the appearance. If one of the girlfriends is extremely beautiful, then the other or the others are also extremely beautiful, if she is just beautiful, then the others are just beautiful, if she is less beautiful, then the others are too, and so on. Maybe it was for this case that it was said: "Similar find each other".

Anyway, the people sitting at the table next to me drinking cocktails were, without hesitation, beautiful. And as often happens in such cases, blonde and black. They were talking and laughing too loudly, absorbing the attention of the entire male (and not just) society of the cafe.

The two girls sitting at the corner table, drinking beer and water, were, so to speak, attractive. Unlike the previous ones, they behaved more modestly: they didn't make noise, they didn't giggle, but they kept glancing here and there.

The student-age girls sitting in the other corner drinking tea were not beauties, so to speak. They sat by themselves, kind of scared, whispering, looking exclusively at each other and drinking their tea. I think it took too long to convince themselves, then each other, that at ten o'clock in the evening you can go to a cafe with your girlfriends, and here they are.

I thought for a while, then called the waiter over and asked them to send them champagne. The waiter, thin, tall and red-cheeked, probably an inexperienced young man, looked at the girls and checked three times if I meant that particular table. There was certainly something to be surprised about. Except I didn't care about his opinion. I insisted on my order, but I did not limit myself to that; when the waiter, carrying a tray of champagne and stemmed glasses, approached the girls and announced that you were being treated to a champagne, I in turn blew an air kiss in their direction. Then you had to see what happened, it's a bit hard to describe. The female students got up, put on their coats and rushed out of the cafeteria as if there was an earthquake.

The waiter stood still with the tray in his hand for a moment (he hadn't managed to put the bottle and glasses on the table yet), then looked at me questioningly. I pointed to the girls sitting in the other corner drinking beer. But the waiter was puzzled and approached me first.

-Do it, - I ordered rudely.

-Ugh..., - he wanted to say something, but he probably didn't dare and walked uncertainly towards the girls sitting in the corner. They had undoubtedly noticed what had just happened.

I didn't hear what the girls said, but one thing was clear - their refusal was not polite at all. The waiter stood there listening to them like a soldier in mourning. Then, when he approached

me again, I noticed that his red cheeks were even redder.

-They said that... They told me to drink it myself. But I can't, - he mumbled, - now what should I do with this champagne?

I nonchalantly pointed to the next table where the beautiful blondes and brunettes were sitting sipping cocktails. The waiter bowed and approached the girls. These might have accepted the champagne if it had not travelled so long. Meanwhile, now they looked at me with such a look, the content of which is better not to express in words.

-Then? - said one of the girls, the blond one.

-I suggest you toast to spring, -I said.

The blonde snapped and turned her head ostentatiously. While the black-haired smiled at me and slightly raised the cocktail glass. Since at a young age I had seriously studied the difference between blonde and black-haired phenomena, I was not at all surprised by this contradictory behaviour of the two girlfriends. But I turned to the blonde again.

-I suggest you take this champagne as an indication of spring.

-Wooooof... - she snorted.

-We don't drink champagne, - said the black-haired, continuing to smile, -I'm sorry.

Well, I had to admit defeat. I paid for the four glasses of cognac and the undrinkable and thrice-rejected champagne and left the cafe.

Time was not ticking away; it was still more than two hours until midnight. I wondered who to continue drinking with. I didn't have the "desire" for Panda, old Andreas wouldn't leave the house at this hour, the Vasyas had also gone to Ireland for concerts. I decided to visit Vaghinak. I walked to Aghayan Street and before going up I entered the shop-stall in front of the Vaghinak building to buy vodka. The saleswoman was calculating behind the counter. She raised her head and, seeing me, said:

-I don't have an "Absolute". See what's in the fridge.

I opened the fridge and the first thing that caught my eye were the champagne bottles. I don't know what bug stung me again. I collected all the bottles, I think four of them, and approached the vendor.

-Champagne, -she wondered, -what's the occasion?

- Spring is coming.

The saleswoman stopped the calculation and looked at me, unable to hide her excitement. She was one of those women who could not come to terms with the fact that their best years were in the previous century.

-How romantic... - she said and smiled widely from under the bright red hair hanging on her forehead.

I in turn gave her an equally big smile and asked cheekily:

-Wanna join in?

Her bright red lips trembled.

-I have to close the shop...

You should have seen Vaghinak's face when we walked in. In the dim light of the only candle burning in the room, he seemed to be trying to figure out if he was seeing a vision. Then, convinced that the lady was real after all, he turned to the contents of the bag, the bottles of champagne, which I hastily arranged on the table. He was obviously not ready for this double shock, he looked at my face with a mournful look and seemed to say, for what?

It was the lady's turn. He couldn't have been less shocked. I don't think she expected to end up in a dark apartment and moreover, to see a second man there. I thought she would just turn around and walk away. But the lady did not live up to my expectations.

-How romantic... Champagne by candlelight, - she whispered, then took out a box of bonbons from her bag and added, -this one is from me.

Well, the evening promised to be interesting. We emptied the first bottle to the sounds of poetry. The lady was exclaiming. Moreover, at first she recited works of Armenian classics, then she moved on to her own masterpieces. The second bottle was accompanied by Russian romances, which, admittedly, the saleswoman sang quite well. After opening the third bottle, she got up and announced:

-I suggest you drink "bruderschaft".

Without thinking too much, I took my glass and stood up as well. But it turned out that I was in for a disappointment. The lady approached Vaghinak without looking at me. They drank, arms crossed, followed by a brief but firm kiss.

I had to admit defeat once again that evening. But I did it in the most dignified way possible. I emptied what was left in the bottle of champagne and said goodbye to the new couple and walked to the door.

The saleswoman ran after me and stopped me at the threshold. - You are not upset, my little one, are you?

When I left the Vaghinak and looked at the clock, it was five minutes to spring. The meteorologists were not wrong - it was cold, windy and sleet. But neither the weather nor even the spring was interesting anymore. A terrible emptiness came over me, and the only thing I wanted was to fill it with vodka. My steps led me "Alexander Pub". I sat at the counter and ordered vodka. I drank until I realized I couldn't drink anymore. Bits left of my consciousness told me something clever, especially, that the mission can be considered accomplished. I had decided to "get out" and had already done so properly.

But it turned out the climax of the day was yet to come. I had already asked for the bill and

was about to get up when I saw a girl enter the pub. She stopped at the threshold, examined the hall, then slowly approached one of the tables, took off her fur coat and sat down. Before the waitress approached, she took out two expensive cell phones from her bag, a gold-plated cigarette case and car keys and placed them all on the table for display.

I decided to stay a bit longer. I asked the bartender to fill me another glass instead and I openly fixed my gaze on the girl. She was really good-looking, but there was something artificial about her, kinda dolly. When I see those types of girls, I always think they are too pretty to be really. What was she doing here? This pub was clearly not her place. I decided to find out. I was almost one hundred percent sure (especially considering the string of failures of the evening) that she would send me to hell. I got up. I could barely stand. However, I didn't hesitate, I wobbled over to the girl's table and sat down without asking permission.

Amazingly, I wasn't kicked out. The girl looked at my face in surprise but said nothing. I spoke instead. I started with ancient Egypt, comparing her to Nefertiti, then I went to the Middle Ages and remembered Gioconda (I recently read somewhere that historians tried to find out who were the most famous women that civilization has known by face, and these two shared the top spot) , I did not forget another Renaissance beauty, the young Lucrezia di Butti, whom we can see in the paintings of her husband, Filippo Lippi, Simonetta Vespucci, whom Botticelli so brilliantly depicted in his "Spring" and "Birth of Venus" in the works and of course to Margarita Luti, in whose image the great Raphael's Sistine Lady appears to us. Then I moved on to the 19th and 20th centuries, remembered all the different women depicted by the Impressionists, and reached, I think, the actress Jeanne Samara from Renoir's painting of the same name, when I was interrupted.

-How about a drink? My treat.

Today's beauty did not wait for my answer and called the waiter.

We had a few drinks, talked about various other things (with me again being the keynote speaker), and then left the Alexander Pub.

Then, I, honestly, don't remember what happened. Or rather, I don't remember what happened at night between one o'clock and ten o'clock in the morning. Because what happened at ten o'clock, I'm sure I will remember for the rest of my life.

At ten o'clock, when I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was the white ceiling, which seemed to be falling down. Then I turned to the left and saw the March sun streaming in through the window. I smiled, looked a little at that first sun of spring and with that smiling face I turned again, this time to the right. And immediately the smile froze on my face. A huge dog (as I found out later, a St. Bernard) was lying next to me.

The first thing that occurred to me was that I was dreaming. I closed my eyes, opened them -

the dog was there. I repeated the same action for the second time, but the image did not change - the animal sprawled its huge blond body on the bed, its pink, livid tongue hanging from its drooping jaw, and its large, slanting eyes fixed upon me.

Generally, I'm not afraid of dogs, but to say that I was not afraid at that moment would be a lie. And most importantly, I didn't know what to do; should I stay still, but for how long, try to pet the dog, but what if it doesn't like it and it bites, and what if someone put the dog as a guard? But who would do such a thing? And here, the most logical question arose, which, of course, should have arisen from the beginning. Where was I?

I mentally restored the series of events of the previous day, which was interrupted in "Alexander pub". I didn't remember what happened after that. Anyways, I was lying motionless like that, trying to recover my memory, when the bedroom door opened and a girl entered with a tray in her hand. Seeing her, I immediately remembered the beauty of the previous day. She was wearing a white bathrobe, she had a towel tied around her head, but all the same, I recognized her.

-So, you woke up? - she asked with a bored tone - I wanted to wake you up. Here, I brought coffee, you should drink it and go, it's already late.

-Where am I? - I asked, still not daring to move.

-What do you mean? You're at my place.

-And what is this dog doing here?

-He's watching over you.

-And what have I done to you that he is watching over me?

-Well, the problem is that you haven't done anything.

A revolution without a revolution

And so, after our four-month drunkenness, the internal political life of Armenia had reached a milestone that was no longer explosive. I'm not exaggerating at all. At any moment, the civic forces participating in the parliamentary elections could publish their proportional lists. And in five of them ("Appendix vermiformis" party, "Levon The Great" alliance of parties, "Power at any price" party, "On its own" party, "American Heritage" party) Vaghinak's name should be there. And not just in lists, but in transient places of lists. And that certainly meant that in no time the journalists would be making noise. However, our game was not over yet. There remained a political force with which we still had no agreement with. I'm talking about "Revolution without a revolution" party.

To say anything bad about this political force would be to deal directly with Andreas. Or

rather, Andreas's pen, which is certainly more powerful than his triumphant body. The point is that my friend was a member of this party. However, I had to ignore this circumstance.

My and Vaghinak's adventure would not be complete if we did not involve all powerful political forces indiscriminately, and this story would not be complete if it bypassed the "Revolution without Revolution" party. It was also part of our shameful reality, and if we decided to mock that reality, we had to do it without exception.

I am sure that Andreas will frown after reading this part of the book, but I will tell him the following: let him be content with the fact that I refer to his party last in this story. If you remember, when compiling the order of civil forces, I was guided by the principle of negative to positive attitude, and if

I left the "Revolution Without Revolution" party at the end, that means that I consider it less negative or more positive (whoever one prefers) than the previous ones. However, I cannot say that I was delighted with the activities of this party.

A little off topic, let me tell you a story. In the mid-nineties, I was often in Russia in order to make money. I must say that more often it didn't work out for me, but that's not the point here. Once in Samara, an Armenian, whom I did business with, gave me a batch of shoes, I think two hundred pairs, in exchange for money, which I went to one of the city's fairs to sell. It was here that I met a man whose character later gave me many reasons for reflection.

It was a middle-aged, thin man with rough features, his name was Mher. He was a former boxer, now in business. He had several trading points at the fair, where he sold various products, including clothes and shoes. I immediately started dealing with him, leaving two hundred pairs of shoes with him. I used to come here two or three times a week to collect the money for the sold goods. And it turned out that I spent a lot of time at the fair and witnessed interesting things.

It was the period when petty extortion flourished in Russia or, which found its most vivid manifestation in such trade zones. Various criminal gangs demanded regular payments from traders or threatened them with severe reprisals. And people preferred to obey and adapt to this situation, otherwise they would have to fight every day instead of trading. The only exception was Mher, who not only did not pay the money-grubbers himself, but also made sure that other Armenians working at the fair also benefited from this advantage. It was said that he went through the most real chaos - many fights, beatings, shootings. Moreover, throughout that time, very few Armenians stood by him, and Mher faced the money heist almost alone. But that was not all. After settling the issues with the Russian criminal groups, various small and large problems arose with other nations: Azeri, Chechen, Tajik, there were many clashes, from which Mher also came out victorious. As a result, no other nation could

offend Armenians, except... Armenians.

During the few weeks I spent here, I personally witnessed how our compatriots deceive each other, extort and steal from each other, organize conspiracies against each other.

And where was Mher, you ask? And your question will be very appropriate.

One day I had a long talk with Mher. We sat in one of the barbecues at the fair (naturally, it belonged to an Armenian) and drank vodka. He couldn't explain anything. Or maybe I didn't understand... Why did I remember this story? Because I think Mher's character has not far-fetched appeals to the party I'm going to talk about.

The "Revolution Without Revolution" party, throughout its history, directed all its potential to the fight against external injustices, and was mostly successful in that fight, but it could not achieve success in the internal struggle. And he couldn't explain why. Or maybe I didn't understand.

Being an extremely ideological, extremely principled and sufficiently organized party, this political force should not have just played a role in the internal political life of Armenia, but should have been in a leading position, either in the government or in the opposition. Meanwhile, the situation was completely different - the party was in the second position when there was both the government and the opposition.

In the entire history of newly independent Armenia, there has never been a political force that could, so to speak, stand up for the people. It was no accident that I remembered Mher's story. Foreigners have always tried to devour our people. And if we somehow managed to resist, it was thanks to people like Mher. But our people, unfortunately, also have a tendency to devour themselves. And here people like Mher cannot do anything. There was no power that would stand up to the people and not allow us to decay from within.

That force, I repeat, could have been the "Revolution Without Revolution" party, but for now it was not like that.

Two questions clearly arise here: first, what could this political force do that was not doing? And secondly, why wouldn't it do it?

To answer the first question, it is necessary to consider what prevented the normal development of our country. Or it would be more correct to say, who was in the way.

Mismanagement was certainly one of the main obstacles to the normal development of the country, but not the only one. There was an equally important obstacle. That obstacle was people. People who imagined the country as a barn and the people as a flock of sheep. They were occupied exclusively with milking the herd, and they did it not with their own hands, but with the hands of their maids. But the biggest pain was that the authorities not only tolerated these people but also encouraged them. And they acted like that because they

depended on them. Under such conditions, the task of fighting against this evil should be undertaken by the force that had not only sufficient will, but also the potential to succeed.

Here is the answer to the first question above (what could the "Revolution Without Revolution" party do that was not doing?)

And why he didn't do it is a completely different question.

I don't know how far my friend Andreas and my other "revolutionary" friends will agree with me, but I have to say my opinion anyway.

In the spring of 2012, as well as in the eighteen long years preceding it (since the Karabakh war entered the ceasefire phase), the "Revolution Without Revolution" party was in a state of mind, which is popularly called "desolate". This state of mind was replaced from time to time by another state of mind, "coming out of desolation", which, however, was immediately followed by the "desolate" state.

To understand what the reasons for this were, it is worth taking a quick look at the annals.

"Revolution Without Revolution" party played a major role in our victory in the war. However, the truce was followed by the first "desolation" of the revolutionaries. They returned home from war in civilian clothes and urban ideas. They considered that they simply fulfilled their duty to the motherland and did not demand anything from the motherland in return for what they did. They carefully hid military uniforms and rifles, ready to take them out again at the moment of need, and engaged in political struggle. While it was not the same for others. Many soldiers and commanders who returned from the battlefield thought that the motherland owed them and demanded compensation. And the authorities of the day found the way to use those people "correctly". As a result, in a short time, a military-feudal order was formed in Armenia, and here the foundations of the future unfair course of our state were laid. The revolutionaries tried to get out of the "desolation" by engaging in political struggle against injustices. Unfortunately, that didn't last long. At the end of 1994, there was a second "desolation", which lasted for about four years. The party spent these years suspended, persecuted and imprisoned.

In 1998, there was a change of government in Armenia, in which, however, the "Revolution Without Revolution" party did not play a role. But it got a chance not only to resume its activities, but it also became clear that its suspension and the charges on the basis of which a number of party members were arrested were unfounded. Getting out of suspension and jails, the party also tried to get out of the "desolation".

Maybe it would have succeeded if there were no circumstances: first, the party was given government levers, and later it entered the government coalition, receiving several ministerial portfolios and many minor positions. As they say, "from the ship to the ball." Another

"desolation" was inevitable.

After some time, coming to terms with the fact of being in power, the party reappeared and spent several years in the state of mind to get out of the "desolation".

And the last, fourth, "desolation" overwhelmed the party in 2009, when due to disagreements with the president on national issues, it had to leave the coalition and become the opposition.

"Desolation" started again and goes on until today.

But the party's biggest problem was different. Throughout its activities in the homeland, it was never able to win the trust of the broad masses of the people.

Once the leader of the "On its own" party (a lover of bears) said something to the "revolutionaries", which I think was extremely accurate. "Revolution without revolution" party always has 10-15 percent: they are the ancestral voices."

Indeed, this political power lived on the hope of that small part of the people (I think that the above percentages are at least doubly exaggerated), which is in one way or another filled with national ideas, which is somehow proud, fair-minded and rebellious. Of course, I'm not saying that there aren't such among others, only that there are people who need to be awakened to consciousness and there are people who have it in their blood.

The revolutionaries, however, could not in any way be accessible and understandable to others...

In all cases, money is the solution

I thought for a long time about what could be done to get Vaghinak into the list of the "Revolution Without Revolution" party. But nothing crossed my mind.

It was even kind of insulting: with the other parties, everything went so smoothly, and here are the "revolutionaries" standing in front of a dead end. In fact, "old friends" are good at betraying.

I was already almost disappointed and even thought of acting very simply, without further ado. I was thinking of openly asking the "revolutionaries" to include Vaghinak in their list, on the condition that later he will withdraw. Being an ideological and a "friendly" party, they could not refuse a friend's request.

But I immediately gave up on that idea.

There was no other option but to rely on Vaghinak.

I hadn't seen him since that historic night (of my "getting out"). It had been three days. It was necessary to visit the five-time ambassador candidate.

Arriving on Aghayan Street, I first entered a small shop to buy vodka and see our favourite

saleswoman. But she wasn't there. Instead, a young girl stood behind the counter. I took a bottle of vodka from the fridge and approached her.

-Where is Mrs... - I tried to remember her name but to no avail.

-Mrs. Gayane? - the saleswoman helped me - I am her daughter.

-Really? -I wondered.

-Actually, I'm not so much like my mother, - said the girl amorously fixing her hair.

-And where is your mother, - I asked.

-She got sick. Three days ago, she was poisoned very badly. But now she's getting better.

I paid for the vodka and left.

Vaghinak was sitting on the balcony. Here he moved the small living room table and a broken armchair, leaned on it and put his foot on the balcony railing.

I took a bottle of Absolute out of the bag.

-What did you do to the poor woman, - I asked.

-What woman?

-To Gayane.

-Gayane, who? - Vaghinak thought for a moment, then probably remembered, the saleswoman...- I don't know, I fell asleep after you left, and when I woke up, she was gone.

And what happened?

-Nothing in particular. She was poisoned. But don't worry, things are getting better now. Only, unlike me, you are lucky.

-Why am I lucky?

-Because you woke up in your house and alone.

I told him how I had woken up with the dog that morning. We laughed for a bit and then I got down to business.

-How do you feel about the revolutionaries, - I asked.

-Very carefully, - Vaghinak answered without thinking.

-And more seriously, - I insisted.

-Better let's have a drink, -Vaghinak tried to "disperse" the conversation.

But I was practical.

-I promise to drink with you until dawn if we find the answer to the question that bothers me.

-What is the question that bothers you? How do I feel about revolutionaries?

-No. How to get you on the list of revolutionaries.

-Oh, you mean the party?

-You finally guessed it.

Vaghinak lowered his legs from the balcony railing and sat down for some reason.

-And what if we leave them alone? To tell the truth, it is the only political force that I would not want to deceive, -he said.

-I might agree with you. But we would not be entirely honest if we gave in to sympathies. In addition, I think that the political power that we want to save is a part of this reality, and necessarily has its share of guilt that we live in such a reality now.

-And what is their fault?

-That they haven't made a revolution yet.

Vaghinak got up with a sharp movement and took his empty glass from the table and went inside. I noticed that he had lost weight. I mean, what else could it be? I reflected that in all this time I had never seen him eat normally. In general, Vaghinak's AUD went very strangely and by and large did not correspond to the classical AUD standards. Classic AUD does not accept variations: less to more, then gradual reduction. Meanwhile, our friend drank so irregularly that even respectable "bums" did not know how many full and how many empty bottles to expect on which day. In addition, the mind of a person in AUD usually fades and even reaches a point when a person is guided by mere instinct. Meanwhile, in the case of Vaghinak, this pattern did not work at all. Of course, there were blackouts from time to time, but he was able to pull himself together very quickly, and his mind sometimes flashed in such a way that it was impossible to imagine that a person had been in AUD for months. And now, more than ever, I needed one last flash of thought from our friend.

-And what will happen if we offer them money as well, - Vaghinak asked, returning from the kitchen with a full glass in his hand.

-I certainly thought about it. No matter how simple it was, we had no other choice. Only you have to do it. Here I step aside, - I announced shamelessly.

Vaghinak did not object. All I had to do was keep my promise and drink with him until dawn. We had found the answer to the question, hadn't we? No matter what happens next. Even if the revolutionaries rejected us.

Toasts

The revolutionaries did not refuse. They agreed to include Vaghinak in the top ten of their proportional list, in return Vaghinak promised to finance their election campaign by transferring one million dollars to the party's account immediately after its launch.

And so, it was time to wrap up our adventure. It was March 21st, the day was Wednesday. The deadline for submitting the proportional lists of parties participating in the National Assembly elections to the Central Electoral Commission was one day left.

As of yesterday, none of the main political forces had done so, and according to my accurate information, they would do so that day. However, our agreements with them were clear and final. Accordingly, Vaghinak was promised transitory places in the proportional lists of "Appendix vermiformis", "Power at any cost", "On its own", "American Heritage", "Revolution without revolution" parties and the alliance of "Levon the Great" parties. All these political forces requested, received and submitted to the Central Electoral Commission all the necessary documents for the registration of a deputy candidate, including a certificate of permanent residence in the Republic of Armenia for the last five years, which Poghos, our sponsor from Power at any cost, helped us get.

As for our future actions, I imagined them like this: First of all, Vaghinak was buying a plane ticket for the 22nd of the month. On the same day, when the CEC published the proportional lists of parties nominated for the National Assembly elections, Vaghinak wrote a resignation letter and removed his name from all the lists. Then he contacted the people representing each political force who had made a direct agreement with him and cancelled the deal with the following reason: since his name has been included in the lists of other parties against his will, he generously takes this step so that no one gets into a scandal. Then the deputy, packed his bags and left for America.

That's it, short and to the point.

Vaghinak and I were sitting in my editorial office, drinking brandy and waiting for the lists to be published. And although Carlson was finally pleased to appear, we were not aware of it. Vaghinak had agreed to come to the editorial office on the condition that I would not tell anyone who he was. Editorial staff periodically entered my room with various meaningless questions, offered coffee and tea with unprecedented kindness or simply peeked through the half-open door, trying to understand who I was drinking brandy in the morning and at night. I must say that I was tempted to introduce Vaghinak to my friends, but the agreement must be stuck to.

Before emptying the first bottle of brandy, I bought an online ticket for Vaghinak for a Yerevan-Moscow-New York-Cincinnati-Montgomery flight. It was all kind of sad. I connected with Vaghinak as if we were together from kindergarten until now. Was he going to leave tomorrow and it would all be over? These few months spent with him gave me a lot. What was I before the meeting with Vaghinak? Just a poor observer. If it wasn't for Vaghinak, I would still be watching the political games of our country, sitting in the stands, or in the journalists' lodge to the max. And now: I must say that I was quite pleased with myself now... "Power at any cost" party presented its list to the Central Electoral Commission. One of our girls announced upon entering my office.

I asked her to print the list and give it to me. When she brought the paper, I waited until Vaghinak was thoroughly examined and left, then I picked it up with a trembling hand. But there was no way I dared to read. Vaghinak, who was indifferently sipping from his cup, took pity on me and took the paper from my hand. I watched his gaze slide over the list from under his glasses and clenched my fists in anticipation. The few moments that passed seemed like an eternity.

-Here I am, - Vaghinak finally said in an extremely calm tone, - people actually kept their promise, and you criticize them.

I did not believe and literally took the paper from his hand. But our friend was right. His name was written in black on white. Taking into account the fact that even the hundredth position in this list was considered transient, it could be stated that Vaghinak's place in the future parliament was secured. His name was the third on the list.

I raised my glass and exclaimed.

-To Poghos.

We drank. I started pacing my little room and continued my thoughts. Yes, I was quite pleased with myself. And why shouldn't I be satisfied? In fact, I managed to do what no one else had managed to do before - to prove that politics as such does not exist among us, politics is nothing but a "market" and everything is subject to sale.

-The proportional list of the "On its own" party is also known, -said another of our girls, entering the room. I also asked her to print and bring the list. She didn't leave until she had examined the guest from head to toe. When she left the room, I immediately handed the list to Vaghinak. Again the moments of waiting seemed like eternity, until he said:

-Of course, I didn't doubt him. I wonder how the cub is doing.

I grabbed the list again and started reading. Vaghinak was in the top ten here. I almost overturned the cognac bottle in joy. I somehow filled the glasses with a trembling hand and said:

-To the cubs.

We drank. I mentioned that it was my first-time drinking cognac with Vaghinak. How much vodka and champagne we drank during our acquaintance, only the devil knew, while we drank brandy for the first time. Maybe the last one too? Yes, our political drunkenness seemed to be ending.

The door to my study opened again and our third girl entered the room with some paper in her hand:

-The American Heritage Party has released its list, here it is.

She left the paper and went out, having first studied Vaghinak well. Vaghinak took the list.

This time, my anxious wait was shorter.

-What a progress, -he said, -here I am three points higher.

-Long live America, -I shouted, -to Mr. Obama.

We drank. Yes, our political drunkenness was about to end. But not just political drunkenness. I was clearly aware that along with the end of our political drunkenness, drunkenness and politics would end for me, separately and forever. These few months were enough for a lifetime. There was a knock on my office door. It was Afo. In terms of politeness, the girls in our editorial office had a lot to learn from the boys. And Afo, although he came not so much to announce the publication of another list as to see my mysterious guest, but at least he knocked on the door before entering.

-Would you like to get acquainted with the list of the "Appendix vermiformis" party, -he asked, unable to hide his gaze directed at Vaghinak.

We were in the top ten here as well. I raised my glass for a toast, but hesitated. I didn't know what to say. I wouldn't toast to appendix? Not knowing what to do, I turned to Afo:

-Cheers!

When he left, certainly not understanding why his toast was drunk, I turned to Vaghinak:

-You have to take a picture with our team.

He looked at me in surprise.

-Why did you suddenly decide that?

-When all this is revealed, you will become a living legend. Do that favour to my beloved team and take a photo with them.

Vaghinak thought for a moment and then said:

-When all this is revealed, I will not be a living legend, but someone accused of fraud and wanted. How much your favourite team needs a photo with such a man. I certainly did not agree with him, but I didn't insist anymore. I suddenly remembered that my friend is leaving tomorrow, and I probably won't see him again. And what was that photo?

There was another knock on my office door. It was Costo this time.

-I received the list of the "Revolution Without Revolution" party, - he addressed me, looking at Vaghinak with the corner of his eye.

Here, too, everything was fine: the passage was secured.

-Well, let's drink a toast to the revolutionaries, - I raised my glass, - more precisely, to the revolution.

Costo also drank with us, waited for a while, hoping that I would introduce him to the mysterious guest, and left empty-handed. I opened the second bottle. It was a good thing we were drinking brandy though. There was something symbolic in it. Cognac is a political drink,

isn't it? More precisely, an Armenian political. If we were in America, we would be drinking whiskey. And then an idea occurred to me. Maybe I should go to America with Vaghinak? What if we do the same thing there as we did here? Given our vast experience and the fact that there are only two parties in poor America.

We could succeed.

There was some noise in the editing. Apparently, Panda had appeared. It wasn't part of my plans to be honest. Panda knew Vaghinak and seeing him here, he could talk unnecessary things. Before he entered my room, I hid the bottle of brandy, just in case.

But on the other hand, I wasn't fair. If it wasn't for Panda, I wouldn't have met Vaghinak, and all of this wouldn't have happened. Wasn't it because of his (maybe in any case my) carelessness that I got to know the future deputy? No, I had to drink the Panda's toast.

I opened my office door myself to invite him in. I saw that the girls were giving him some paper and muttering something. It was clear that the subject of the gossip was my mysterious guest, and the paper, it turned out, was the list of the alliance of "Levon the Great" parties. Panda handed it to me and greeted Vaghinak as if he met him here every day.

Seeing the list, I immediately forgot about my friend. I wanted to look at it a second ago, but I remembered Vaghinak's luck and somehow restrained my temptation and gave the paper to him.

- Yes! - he said, glancing at the list.

I took a deep breath. And since I had no desire to drink Levon the Great's toast, I raised my glass and drank Panda's toast.

The scent of snowdrops

It was time to call Katya. I had won the bet.

"The subscriber is unavailable" - the familiar stranger repeated her usual text.

- One day I will smash this girl's phone, so that at least she has a valid reason for being unavailable, - I shouted angrily, forgetting that I was on the street.

A man walking beside me looked at me sympathetically and shook his head in agreement.

I decided to go to the cafe next to Katya's workplace and wait for my prize there. After three glasses of brandy, fifteen calls and eight texts, Katya was finally available. More precisely, she called.

-Phew, I'm finally free! I was at a consultation. From the deluge of your calls, I assume something very important has happened.

-Naturally, you didn't follow today's news.

-I don't want to burden my highly intellectual and carefully groomed head by the capital's best stylist with such nonsense, - Katya said.

But you will have to, because it has an indirect connection with your head. Go to our website, read the news and call me again if you feel like it later. She called five minutes later.

-And...- was her indifferent answer or, rather, the question.

To be honest, I expected any reaction: admiration, praise, anger, but never that laconic "and".

The thing is, after thinking for a long time, I decided to refuse the bet. I had won and that was enough. I decided to leave further developments to Katya's discretion. I knew that proud Katya would consider avoiding the bet below her dignity and would go all the way. However, I was already at the stage where I needed something completely different from her. I needed an irrational, untouchable Katya. I needed her thoughts, her dreams, her tales, her imagination. And the rational, tangible body, as tempting as it was, was just a bonus, a pleasant addition.

However, Katya's indifferent and somewhat sarcastic "and" was the proof that I would get only the empty template, and Katya, the real, full, deep Katya, I would lose once and for all. That's why I pushed behind my shoulder the devil who kept repeating the words "loser, you were deceived" and said in a calm voice:

-And I won the bet. However, I release you from any kind of responsibility. I don't want you to keep your promise just to fulfil the condition of the bet. I don't need that. It was very interesting with you, Katya! Good bye: I will never bother you again.

-Thank you. I enjoyed being with you too. Stay safe, - said Katya calmly, without any regrets, and hung up the phone.

It's hard to explain what I felt at that moment. It felt like someone hit the part of my head called the solar plexus. I immediately blacked out in front of my eyes, my oxygen ran out and I felt excruciating pain under my chest.

-Do you need water? - asked the waitress in a frightened voice, seeing my flushed face. -Should I call a doctor? What should I do?

However, I did not die. Nor did I pass out. Disappointment, pain, anger, jealousy - all these feelings overwhelmed me at the same time and did not let me lose consciousness. Katya's "goodbye" kept repeating in my head like a broken CD.

But why? What had I done to her to deserve such a response? After all, my attitude had only one purpose: to free Katya from the shackles of the bet. I was expecting everything but that ominous "stay safe". I expected that Katya would not take me seriously, would laugh at me or tell me in her own style that I would not get rid of her so easily. Meanwhile she repeated my imprudently uttered "goodbye."

And suddenly something occurred to me: maybe this was the good thing, maybe this should

have been the ending...

I picked up my phone and called Panda. Yes, just him. Now I needed Panda like air and water, with his cynicism, his reliable back and the eternal supply of brandy kept in the car.

He found me sitting in my car exhausted. He quickly assessed the situation, did not ask any unnecessary questions, took out the bottle of alcohol from his pocket, handed it to me and said: -The rehabilitation schedule is as follows: first the contents of this hot pot, then vodka, then sauna, then girls. I'll figure it out, don't worry.

I woke up in the sauna phase. The chubby Panda, wrapped in a towel, had already managed to call the "familiar girls", and now they were all actively going through the first two stages of the schedule, laughing and sipping brandy and vodka. The girls resembled the famous "Viagra" band's sex-bombs, but the Armenian version. Panda generally believed that women should be many and preferably of different tastes. And the reason for that was just that his taste was changeable.

Until the black-haired, blonde-haired and red-haired "Viagra women" were getting integrated, Panda was busy with my recovery.

-Even the most beautiful legs grow from the butt. And if you don't understand this simple, physiological truth, you will end up in the ass, - he said, filling my glass. - What or for whom did you get into the image of a dying swan? I assure you - no woman is worth dying for.

-Don't talk about things you don't understand, - I tried to close the topic.

-I do not understand: Me? - Panda was shocked. I am a women's x-ray machine. It is enough to take half a look at a woman and I can tell how many kilos she weighs, what her IQ is, what she wants from this life, when was the last time she saw a man and when will she see him again. Well, that's right, and you say I don't understand, - Panda muttered indignantly.

I was lucky, because at that moment the loud laughter of the "Viagra women" playing water-handling in the pool distracted Panda, and the great womanizer with his x-ray machine left me.

At that moment, my cell phone rang: it was a text message. I opened the virtual envelope with lightning speed, but there was only the official message of the mobile operator (in the 21st century, loneliness is when messages are sent to your phone only from different services). I remembered Katya's sms: humorous, scandalous, romantic, aggressive, according to her mood of the day. "If you woke up in a bad mood, spoil the mood of your neighbours' too," Katya liked to say when she sent me aggressive text messages for no reason. I could barely contain myself not to call her and scream, why? Why did you do that? How many men do you know who are ready for such madness for your sake, for your love? You always said that first of all you value chivalry, madness, "unity" in a man. What happened: I may not have Panda's x-ray machine,

but I clearly felt your love, your attitude. You can't hide it or fake it. Didn't you say that love is the only thing a woman can't fake? Sadness, longing, pain, pleasure, orgasm, you can do anything easily, but love can't, you said. So, what happened, Katya?

My internal monologue was interrupted by the blonde. She approached me with the attitude of a self-confident girl who is aware of her beauty, held out a glass of vodka and sat next to me.

-Do you have problems? Moreover, with a woman, - she announced in the tone of a professional fortune teller.

-How do you know: Is it written on my forehead that I have problems with a woman?

-Yeah? - she said. -You don't have to be Agatha Christie to understand that if a healthy, interesting man is staring longingly at his cell phone instead of looking at the six long legs of three charming girls, it means " Cherchez la femme".

-My head is exploding, please leave me alone, - I said and immediately regretted it.

But it was too late, the blonde made a sad face and left.

I wanted to call her back and ask for forgiveness, but I wavered. I had no desire or energy.

Absolutely: I looked at my mobile for the last time. However, it remained stubbornly silent.

Go to hell. You and your fairy tales, your Jungas... - I shouted and smashed my mobile phone on the opposite wall. Now that waiting for her call was pointless, I was kind of relieved. As soon as I emptied half of the vodka from the bottle, I jumped headfirst into the pool...

It was three o'clock in the morning. I suddenly remembered that I should be at Vaghinak's house at five o'clock and take him to the airport. But I had neither the strength nor the desire to do so. At that moment, I had a brilliant idea. Once I saved Panda and went to the airport for him, now it's his turn. He started all this, let him put an end to it.

I woke up my friend and said in a tone that did not accept objections.

-Now you will wash, drink coffee and go to the airport to see off Vaghinak. This time it's your turn.

-You have a special and exceptional talent to ruin everything, - was Panda's answer.

We went out together. Panda went to Aghayan Street, I went to the editorial office. I decided not to even see Vaghinak before leaving, not even to say goodbye. I was thinking, I wish I hadn't met him at all.

I promised myself. I am starting a new life from tomorrow, Vaghinak and Katya will not be anywhere. Only my heart ached. It wasn't beating fast, it wasn't piercing, but, literally, it was hurting.

It was pitch dark on the street. The moon had decided not to be seen that night. It was probably sad because it had a heart too. It must have been drinking somewhere.

I closed the car and walked to the entrance of the newsroom. A human form took shape at the

door. I thought it is one of the "bums". Whoever that was, they curled up on the stairs and fell asleep with head on the banister. I decided not to disturb, bypassed, took out the key from my pocket and was about to open the door, when I felt the familiar aroma of snowdrops. I froze and didn't dare to turn around.

- You finally came, - I heard Katya's voice behind me, - I called one hundred and forty-eight times. You were unavailable. Promise that you will never be unavailable again. Do you know how cold I am?

Promise me that you will never leave me again. Do you promise?

- I promise - I repeated automatically.

Something like the end

Beer or coffee, beer or coffee... The waitress was standing not above me, but right on top of me, waiting for me to solve this serious problem.

I arrived at the airport at the last second, when the check-in for the flight to Moscow was already ending, and in fact I managed to say goodbye to Vaghinak. He should be on the plane by now.

My relative was leaving, and it was not clear what would happen next.

Maybe you will learn about it from my next book, if I write it. And for now, fifty grams of vodka...