

THE WIND OF CHANGE

When this book was going to the publishing house, another war broke out in our homeland. An interrupted war flared up, to be exact, with a new, unprecedented and unparalleled force.

On September twenty-seven, twenty twenty, the wind of change turned into the storm of war.

When this book comes out of the publishing house and you will be reading these lines, the war would probably be over, or we might still be fighting for victory or dreaming about the big and real triumph, and it will come by all means.

Anyway, that's what this book is about...the author will write all about it...it's not clear, though; he will write if he's safe and sound, if he's in the mood of writing and has the desire to write.

"Wind of change" is a result of being in the mood... in the mood of writing, something that my friend, the author didn't have every day, but he wrote every time he had the heart and time for it.

And so, even before reading this book, I already knew that it was worth reading, I was sure that it was about our times and about us, about our type and our homeland. I was sure, because the previous books, "Carousel" and "Political drunkenness" have given me that right. The reader will agree with me. I'm sure of that too!

"Wind of change" is a fictional-documentary-analytical story. In the fiction sense, be sure that you will love it and will read it in one breath. All the functioning and non-functioning rules of adventure literature are preserved. In documentary point of view, it is invulnerable: the author, quoting the official news, reminds us of the internal political transition of the spring of twenty eighteen, which is not safe from being distorted in future. In analytical point of view, the book is a source of thinking.

Today's reader will accept with a sharp "yes" or "no" principle. Those who bring the wind, those who come with the wind and those who oppose the wind have not changed much at least at this moment (2020). Another thing is how the average reader will perceive the author's thoughts years or decades later.

Nonetheless, the book is a true story. We all are in it, whether we want it or not, whether we are an active participant or an observer, a "black" or a "white", former or current.

Anyway, I hope that by the time of reading "Wind of Change" the storm of war will have passed in the Armenian land, and there will be no atmosphere of internal intolerance, instead a gentle breeze of peace and solidarity will blow, which is so important for achieving internal and external justice.

Vardan Onanyan

SOMETHING LIKE PROLOGUE

This story that took place in Armenia in twenty eighteen might as well happen in some other country and some other time.

For example, in... It does really matter.

Even if it has happened somewhere, at some time, it changes nothing. It is very likely that something like this will happen again in some other place, at some other time, and this is not even the point.

The path that the nations, living in all the countries of the world, go through is still the same, even if it's not. It's just that some people are on the tenth kilometer of that path, some on the fiftieth, and some on one hundred and fiftieth. What happens at the fiftieth kilometer happens to everyone, maybe with different plots and characters, but the essence is similar.

Sometimes people go ahead of their time and the maneuvers they have to do on the fiftieth kilometer, they do on the thirtieth. Usually, it pushes them off the way and they need a lot of time to get back on track and continue their way from that point on.

One thing is for sure, the world is developing and not a single nation can go past that development.

In two different parts of the world, they don't throw stones at women, or they don't beat people in police stations to get statements, or they don't fraud the elections, or they don't listen to bad music twenty, with time difference go fifty years and even a century. It is just that the time will come and people living at that part of the world have to be ready. Otherwise, all this will not happen naturally and won't benefit either the one that got beaten, or the elections, or music, or the state or the people.

But let's get back to this story that took place in Armenia in twenty eighteen.

HOW PETROS AND KIRAKOS MET

When, after a twenty-eight-year absence, Petros was to set foot on his native land and breathe the air of the homeland for the first time, as already mentioned, it was the year of two thousand eighteen, the sixth of April, Friday. However, first it was the paddle in front of the border checkpoint entrance of Bagratashen he set his foot on and instead of the homeland's air, his lungs were filled with thick diesel fumes that the lined-up trucks released.

And this was probably symbolical, taking into consideration what was waiting for Petros at his twenty-eight years of age in Armenia. After a sleepless night, border guards, customs officers, travelers and a stray dog were welcoming the rainy dawn with a yawn. Cold wind was blowing and spreading across all the rubbish gathered throughout the night. Something like music was heard from one of the cars, where someone was left alone in the world, begging another one to not leave.

And all Petros had to do in this unwelcoming atmosphere was changing his wet sock. And maybe have a cup of coffee.

So, Petros decided to change his sock, or more precisely the socks, at the "Golden Crown" coffee shop, which resembled a rusted and crumpled old wagon or something like that, where beside the golden crown five shining stars were painted. Behind the showcase-refrigerator, a chubby woman bent over the electric stove, was stirring something, and at one of the three tables a man in a white kepi and a white leather jacket was seated, for whom the lady was painstakingly cooking, tenderly stroking her voluminous derriere.

-Mister tourist, this is not a dressing room for you, -a man said to Petros, - people come to have breakfast here.

The man in a white kepi was Kirakos and he also had arrived at his homeland very recently, but he was luckier than Petros not having fallen into a puddle, because he had crossed the Georgian-Armenian border in a "Range Rover". He didn't give a slight damn about what he saw or didn't see, nor did he care about the dawn, or the rain or the wind. Instead, he extremely longed for a tomato omelet, and he had also entered the first café that he came across, where Petros would come into a few minutes later.

That café, called "Golden Crown", was not really a café, but a coffee shop and it had just one employee, who was also the owner, and whose name was Taguhi (Crowned). Taguhi was the former mistress of a former customs official and for already fifteen years had been selling coffee, pies and other stuff in her wagon shop, in addition to groceries and cigarettes, but she had never sold a tomato omelet. And she didn't sell it that day either, but she treated him with it, because Kirakos was not at all the man that a shop-owner, moreover a former mistress of a former custom's official could refuse something or miss an opportunity to treat him.

-What makes you think I'm a tourist? - Petros responded in Armenian to the remark addressed to him in broken English, continuing to change the wet socks.

Kirakos lifted the white kepi slightly above his eyes, took out his eyeglass box from his chest pocket, then the glasses from the box, quickly cleaned them with a velvet cloth, put them on and began looking at Petros carefully.

-You're a tourist, -he said.

Then he took the glasses off, put them back in the box, put the box in his pocket, pulled the kepi over his eyes and lit a cigarette.

Petros didn't say anything, he put on his shoes, took the backpack, went outside, threw away the wet socks into the garbage bin in front of the entrance and approached a coffee machine nearby.

During that time Taguhi managed to put the omelet, two potato pies and a bottle of mineral water onto the table.

-I'm out of bread, I didn't get it yet, -she told Kirakos.

-And when did you get the pie?

-Well, yesterday. It's not too old.

Kirakos didn't say anything, ate the entire food so quickly as if Taguhi was about to take it back. Then he drank the water, got up, burped and said:

-This tomato omelet was about to make me propose to you, but those one-day-old pies ruined everything. I'm leaving now, but I promise to come back one morning.

-Maybe we should have coffee together? I haven't had my coffee yet, -muttered the shopkeeper. But Kirakos was already out.

HOW PETROS WENT BANKRUPT

A month before coming to Armenia, Petros had misfortune. He was counting the money he had earned during the last two months in his room of Wynn hotel in Las Vegas, and when he already reached to one hundred and fifty thousand, he heard a knock on his door.

-I don't need anything, come back later, please, -he shouted, thinking it was the maid.

-It's the hotel security, open up, please, -he heard from behind the door.

Petros loaded his bag with the money he didn't manage to count till the end, put the bag into the wardrobe, approached the door and made it ajar.

-Yes? -he said.

There were three men standing behind the door, including a tall black man with shaven head, looking at who you would no longer need to look at the other two men.

They came in and very politely explained to Petros that his latest fraud had been revealed and suggested to voluntarily return the eighty-eight thousand dollars he had received from the cash register of Wynn casino, otherwise threatening to call the police.

-Xiangjiang had confessed everything, -said one of the security guards.

Xiangjiang was a dealer at Wynn casino, on whom Petros had spent a considerable amount of time and other resources. He had studied the daily life of this slightly petite and somewhat attractive Chinese woman for exactly two weeks, collected some information about her past, then got to know her, flirted for another two weeks and only then suggested the deal. In general, Petros's "companions" were of two types: those who got into a deal with Petros for profit, and those who did it selflessly, exclusively out of love. Xiangjiang belonged to the second type and for two weeks she fell in love with Petros so madly, that she forgot about everything in the world, except for the blue eyes of this fair-haired man. And the deal that Petros was offering to his "companions", the Blackjack card game dealers at various casinos, was very simple: they had to help him win by making pre-arranged gestures during the game. Petros either shared the jackpot with his "companion", if the latter had got into the deal for profit, or he bought an expensive piece of jewelry if the "companion" had fallen in love with him. In both cases, after the deal, Petros disappeared.

That's what he was about to do that day as well, only the security guards of Wynn casino ruined his plans completely, since they turned out to have all the recordings of not only the obvious hints the Chinese dealer had given, but also of all the places the "lovely couple" had spent time together.

And so Petros had to return each and every cent of the eighty-eight thousand dollars without a single word. But this was just the beginning of his misfortunes. Petros guessed that after he saw a boy approaching him in the parking lot of Wynn Hotel: he was Chinese. The boy smiled and said that Xiangjiang wanted to talk to him. Together with Xiangjiang two huge-bodied Chinese men sat into the car, and eventually, Petros left Las Vegas with zero cents and bruised blue eyes that Xiangjiang was so attracted to.

But this was not the end either. The house Petros rented for nine thousand dollars per month, in the small city of Santa Barbara, California, on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, a new surprise awaited him:

a notice from the police. The securities of Wynn casino had turned to the police anyway, and there was no other way. Petros was simply fooled by returning the entire cheated amount of money, because he had to guess that he was trapped. Anyways, everything could have been even worse, up to being detained, but thanks to a very experienced lawyer, whose services Petros had to pay the whole money earned for years of work, it didn't take place. Only that, for the young swindler the doors to all the casinos in the USA were closed, from Las Vegas to Atlantic City, and he had to find other ways to make money. Only for that he needed a starting capital, which Petros didn't have either.

KIRAKOS AND "KOROVKIN"

The "Korovkin" meat factory, which was located in one of the small towns of Samara region, on the banks of the Volga River, had long been operating at a loss. Two years before, when the owner of the factory Nikolay Sokolov was killed by one of the bulls of his own factory, the factory and the farm was inherited by his wife Varvara Sokolova. The first instruction she gave was turning the killer bull, which her late husband named Vladimir in honor of his idol, into a delicacy sausage. Probably it was the curse of Vladimir or Madam Sokolova's bad management that the factory started falling into pit.

It would be wrong to say that Varvara spent little time at work. She used to come to the factory every day at one in the afternoon, walk through all production units and check if every employee was present. In order to increase the efficiency, Madam Sokolova abolished lunchtime. But you shouldn't consider her as a harsh woman. The employees could have lunch, but they had to do it while working. Moreover, the owner of the factory provided each of the workers with one hundred grams of salami per day; of course, this was those salamis that were not delivered to stores for various reasons.

At two o'clock sharp, she would get into one of her three, recently purchased Porsches, depending on the weather: a SUV, a sedan or a soupe, and rush to Samara, to her favorite fitness club. Here she spent four hours a day, two in the afternoon and two in the evening.

And it was here one winter day that she met a strong and masculine man in a white tracksuit, white sneakers and a white cap. The man's name was Kirakos.

It took Kirakos exactly one day to conquer the bedroom of the late Nikolay Sokolov, on the wall which there was a big-sized portrait of the widow painted by one of the provincial artists. And at the office next to the bedroom, there were two more canvases belonging to the same artist. One depicted the bull Vladimir and the other depicted the idol Vladimir.

Kirakos and Madam Sokolova welcomed New Year together in Egypt's Sharm-el-Sheikh.

This vacation cost Kirakos exactly seventy thousand rubles. He had to spend the equal amount in the next two months, till he got the widow's approval to sell the meat factory, the farm and the "Korovkin" brand, and with the proceeds open a fitness club named "Varvara". Varvara gave him fifteen million out of one hundred and thirty million rubles from the sale, to purchase all the necessary equipment for the gym from Moscow.

Instead, however, Kirakos bought a three-year-old white Range Rover for four million rubles and went to his homeland that he had sincerely missed.

SWINDLERS

People like Petros and Kirakos are a lot in the world. They don't necessarily have to be Alphonsos or gamblers. They can be taxi drivers, tradesmen, journalists, doctors, bankers, state workers, political figures. Even heads of countries.

There is a word of dubious origin that best describes these people: “swindler”. “Swindlers” can usually be small-time and average, big ones rarely come out. But when they do come out, one can only imagine how many people can suffer from them.

In case small-time “swindlers” victimize individuals, average ones victimize dozens of people, then the actions of big “swindlers” can affect entire nations.

“Swindlers” are not always evil people or total scoundrels; sometimes they are capable of good deeds. They can help a person or many people, or even a whole nation. They can be normal friends, they can be patriots, but all the same, a “swindler” is a “swindler”. “Swindlery” is in their nature, and they act more instinctively.

Those who are cheated by "swindlers" are a whole different story. Sometimes they are individuals, sometimes a team and sometimes an entire nation.

First of all, it's not easy to hold back from being deceived, it's quite hard. When, say, an honest person suggests a businessman to invest conventionally ten drams and have about twelve in a month, the businessman thinks he is being deceived and doesn't agree. But when the one suggesting is not an honest man, but a “swindler”, and he suggests investing ten drams and turning it into not twelve but one hundred in a month, the businessman for some reason believes him and takes the bait.

This is the case with individuals.

The case with nations is harder. When an honest politician promises to improve the livelihood of people in ten years with ten percent, people don't believe him. Instead, they believe a “swindler” who promises to do it immediately and with one hundred percent.

But why only during elections? Sometimes the nation happens to believe the “swindlers”, follows them and make revolutions.

But enough with swindlers, there are much better and beautiful people in the world. Particularly beautiful! Like Ksyusha, for instance!

KSYUSHA

The Russian multimillionaire Mark Popovich was walking around the living room of a huge hotel room in the small town of St. Moritz in the Swiss Alps in a bathrobe, discussing with someone apparently a very serious issue on the phone. Beyond the glass wall, standing at the cold balcony of the same room, the Russian model Ksyusha was looking up at the Peak of Pisa Bernina Mountain, silhouetted through giant flakes behind the fir trees and snow-capped peaked roofs.

Ksyusha was thinking that a mountain is the strangest creation of God. Just like a man.

Why does a man strive for heights? So that he can look at things from above, like a mountain looks down at fields and rivers, forests and lakes, which are also God's creation?

Here was the hotel room, for which she paid one thousand seven hundred and fifty Swiss francs for one night. In fact, it is Mark who paid, not her, but that did not change the essence of the question. Two short fur coats hang in the closet, one made of otter fur and the other of chinchilla fur, and each cost ten times the annual income of ordinary people living in poor countries.

Mark paid about a thousand francs for last day's dinner, seven hundreds of which was the cost of a bottle of champagne, while somewhere in the world, let's say, in Botswana or Nepal, or in his native Armenia, many people do not have money for daily bread.

-You will be cold, Ksyusha, -said Mark opening the glass window of the balcony.

-It's ok, - said Ksyusha without turning back.

-Come in, anyway. Should we have breakfast downstairs or order room service?

-You know what, Mark, I have no appetite. You go have breakfast; I will join you for coffee.

Ksyusha never entered, nor turned around. Leaning on the balcony railing, she continued looking at the peak of Pisa Bernina, which was silhouetted in the far away out of the abundant snowflakes.

HOW LENIN WINKED AT PETROS GRIGORICH'S WIFE, SEDA LEVONOVNA

In the kitchen of her four-room apartment on Sayat-Nova Avenue in Yerevan, Seda Levonovna stood behind the housekeeper, making sure she wrapped the dolma correctly. The housekeeper had just started working in their house and had not yet learned how to wrap dolma correctly, as Petros Grigorich demanded neatness in everything.

Petros Grigorich was Seda Levonovna's husband. He loved dolma, and on rare days when he came home early from work, he demanded dolma for dinner, properly wrapped. However, on that day, March three, nineteen ninety, Petros Grigorich did not come home.

After six in the evening, instead of the doorbell, the phone rang, and the driver, unable to hide his anxiety, said:

- Petros Grigorich was taken to the hospital...a stroke...

Seda Levonovna dropped the cherry compote her husband also liked very much from her hands. And the first thing Seda Levonovna's heart felt was that Petros Grigorich would never drink cherry compote or eat dolma again...

The little Petros's crying was heard from the bedroom. His parents left the two-month-old grandson under the care of his grandmother and went to work at the embassy of the Soviet Union in one of the Arab countries. Naturally, Petros Grigorich arranged that work for his son and daughter-in-law. He had gone through all the ranks of the nomenclature of the Communist Party of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia and for already several years had anchored at the Central Committee.

In addition to the four-room apartment on Sayat-Nova Avenue, Petros Grigorich had five more apartments, all in the center of Yerevan, and a country house in Jrvezh. Seda Levonovna knew about them. But she did not know what her husband had done with the gold that he had collected first in grams, then in kilograms, during the twenty years of holding high positions.

Perhaps it was because of her love for her husband that Seda Levonovna, forgetting her grandson and dolma, rushed to the hospital. And she did the right thing, because when she reached the moment when the soul of the high-ranking communist, who turned out to have suffered a massive heart attack, was leaving his body, if only he had something like that.

-Lenin...

This was the final word that Petros Grigorich whispered before dying.

Of course, he was a devoted communist, and everyone knew about it. In the last two years since the Karabakh movement began, Grigorich had suffered two strokes. He actually sensed the impending doom of his beloved state and party, but he was destined to die soon.

Seda Levonovna went to her husband's workplace on the same day with the driver. She ordered the latter to wait at the reception desk and, throwing a cold glance at the red-head secretary, entered her husband's office. The fireproof safe box was in the lounge. Seda Levonovna opened it with the key she had taken from her husband's pocket beforehand, and good heavens, it was empty...

Or rather, it was not so empty, besides various papers, there were ten thousand rubles there, but what was that compared to Seda Levonovna's expectations... She was sure that she would find dozens of kilograms of gold in it. The woman's confidence was not odd. Besides being aware of how much gold her husband had collected over the years, she had also witnessed the meeting between her husband and Joseph, a jeweler they knew, and had heard fragments of their conversation, from which she understood that her husband had ordered Joseph to turn the gold into something. She could not find out anything from her husband about that. She was also unable to find Joseph the jeweler, who had closed his workshop and left for permanent residence to the United States.

After turning her husband's lounge upside down, Seda Levonovna went into the office. Not finding anything there either, she felt exhausted on Grigorich's chair.

-Complete nonsense! - Seda Levonovna was thinking, -Where is the gold?

The fact that it was not in their country house, nor in any of the five apartments, she knew, because she had managed to check them thoroughly during her husband's lifetime, having dim suspicions that one day he would suffer the last stroke and take the secret with him. And the most terrible thing was that the lady knew about the long-term relationship between her husband and the secretary and was afraid that the red-head "monkey" would inherit the gold.

And Seda Levonovna, sitting in her husband's chair, began to cry. The driver and some other people entered and tried to calm her down, but in vain.

And a little later, the first secretary of the Communist Party himself came.

-Petros Grigorich was a devoted communist, -he said,-these fool cannot do anything. May your husband rest in peace! Moscow will take care of everything.

Seda Levonovna got up from her husband's chair, hugged the first secretary and started to weep.

-He said Lenin on his last breath.

-Yes, he was a real devotee of Lenin's ideology.

And over the first secretary's shoulder, Seda Levonovna saw a bust of Lenin winking at her on a giant plinth on the far side of her husband's desk.

FATHER AND SON, OR HOW PETROS VISITED A PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

Five of Petros Grigorich's six apartments in the center of Yerevan had been sold for already a long time, and only the four-room apartment at Sayat-Nova, where Seda Levonovna was spending her eighty-fifth year of life, was left.

After her husband's death, she sold one apartment every five years to support herself and her son's family. Her son's diplomatic career, deprived of support, was abruptly interrupted in nineteen ninety, and he left for permanent residence to the United States of America, taking Petros Jr. with him. There, too, he was unable to achieve anything and at first, he gave in to alcohol, then to drugs and ended up in a psychiatric hospital. Petros was raised by his mother, who died in twenty ten, when her son was twenty years old and already enrolled at the University of Santa Barbara. The money received from the sale of the last apartment, which was supposed to serve as Petros Jr.'s tuition fees, was wasted very quickly, or rather it was lost in casinos, because needless to say, after the death of his mother and his father's hospitalization, the young man considered studying pointless.

In short, the apartments had run out, and Petros needed money. Actually, the apartments were not completely over: the four-room apartment on Sayat-Nova Avenue, where he was born, and where his grandmother, Seda Levonovna was living, who Petros did not even remember, still existed. He was sure she would be glad to see him. And the world wouldn't fall apart if grandma lived in a one-room apartment instead of a four-room one.

Petros needed money. He could not apply to the banks because he had been on their blacklist for a long time, he had not acquired any property, because considering the nature of his occupation, he could be deprived of it at any moment, and he did not have anyone to borrow money from.

But before turning to his grandmother, Petros decided to visit his father in a psychiatric hospital, he might have some savings.

The doctor said that his father had had another seizure the day before and was now under control. But Petros still managed to see him for a few minutes.

-There's no democracy here, it's all a lie, America is not what it used to be, -the patient lying on the bed was shouting, -I want to meet the president. My rights are violated.

Then, seeing his son entering the room, he shouted:

-What have you done with my father's gold? Have you eaten Lenin's head?

Petros looked puzzled at the doctor.

-This is a usual thing, -said the doctor yawning, -he keeps talking about some gold and demands Lenin's head.

Petros asked to be left alone with his father.

-Nobody believes me, -his father said,-they don't let me speak. Then they talk about democracy and freedom of speech. It's all a big lie! I want to meet the president.

Petros sat down on the bed, at his father's feet and said:

-I am desperately in need of money.

-What have you done with the gold? There were fifty kilos of gold. Joseph the jeweler has told me.

-Who's Joseph the jeweler?

-The one who sculpted Lenin's head.

-Where is he?

-Who? Lenin?

-No, Joseph.

-How do I know? Maybe he's dead.

JOSEPH THE JEWELER

Joseph the jeweler was alive. Moreover, at the age of ninety, he still continued working and had his own small workshop in West Hollywood. He also had two disciples, one Polish and one Pakistani. Of course, calling those people disciples might not be very appropriate. The Polish man was fifty years old, and the Pakistani was sixty. They had been working for their master for almost thirty years now and were still learning from him.

Master Joseph loved to tell them strange stories of his life and in the course of thirty years he had told them so much that the disciples knew them by heart. But still, he continued telling.

The stories were basically related to the period of his work in Soviet Armenia.

Master Joseph's customers were not random people. They were representatives of the party nomenclature, trade sharks, so-called "underground manufacturers", high-ranking militiamen and "made men". But the interesting thing was not the customers but what they ordered.

For example, an "underground manufacturer" ordered a one-kilogram gold bar to be reshaped into a "Volga GAZ 24-10" car model in a way so that the license plate was visible: fifty-five, fifty-five. A storekeeper ordered a golden lion, with an open jaw, quite large, but puff inside, with a total weight of five kilograms. When the order was almost ready, he came and said that he wanted a deer in the lion's open jaw. Then, when he found out that he had to add two kilograms of gold and additional payment, he said that it was not necessarily to be a deer, a rabbit would be just as fine. A militia general wanted to gild his gun, and a "made man" ordered gold handcuffs. 'As soon as they catch me, I will demand that they put on these', he said.

But the strangest order was from the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. It was the most secret order Master Joseph ever had. The secretary of the Communist Party, whose name was Petros, and whom he had known for a long time, had given him no more, no less, fifty kilograms of gold and ordered him to cast the bust of Lenin. But that wasn't all. Petros also ordered to cover the bust after finishing the work, so that it looked like it was made of plaster.

It was in the late nineteen eighties. Then the master moved to the United States of America. For a while he kept the secret, as he had promised, but later, finding out that the client had died, and bearing in mind that the Soviet Union had collapsed, leaving Leninism in ruins, he began to tell this story to his disciples, among other memoirs.

And one day, the wife of the Polish disciple, who worked as a nurse in a psychiatric hospital nearby, after hearing the master's story, said that they were treating an Armenian patient who often

repeated that his father was one of the leaders of Soviet Armenia.

The master got up and went to the psychiatric hospital, having no doubt that this was just a coincidence. It turned out that it was not a coincidence at all. The patient was indeed the son of his client Petros Grigorich, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Armenia. The master talked to him for a while, asked him what happened to Lenin's fate, but after listening to the answers of his old friend's son, he understood that he was really insane and regretted that he had come to visit.

That was five years ago.

Joseph the jeweler was standing on the sidewalk watching how the disciples were closing the metal shutters of his jewelry shop, when a young man approached him and said:

- Hello, Mr. Joseph. I am Petros, Petros Grigorich's grandson.

LET'S BREAK UP!

- Would it upset you if we part here? - Ksyusha said unexpectedly to Mark while leaving the first-class cabin of the Zurich-Moscow flight.

-What's going on, Ksyusha? -Mark wondered.

-In fact, - continued Ksyusha, not listening to his question, - let's break up.

A smile froze on the face of the flight attendant standing at the door of the plane. She was about to say goodbye and wish these "important" passengers all the best, instead she mumbled something incomprehensible.

-Don't be crazy, Ksyusha, the car is waiting.

Down the escalator a Mercedes, servicing VIP passengers, was waiting for them.

-I'm serious, dear. You go and I will wait for the regular passengers and go with them.

The word "dear" was certainly an exaggeration. Ksyusha didn't love Mark. About a year ago, when she met him at the New Year's reception organized by "Nasha Moda" magazine, she immediately realized that this man completely met her criteria of a beau: with large pockets but a small belly, tremendous authority and equal modesty, strong but kind... The merits were truly overwhelming, and one could turn a blind eye to many things. That's exactly what Ksyusha did and within a year she received movable and immovable property of about a million dollars as a gift: a studio on the bank of the Moscow River, a Maserati and a handful of jewelry.

Love didn't appear obviously. There were many lovely evenings, trips and a couple of incidents with Mark's wife, who turned out to be overly jealous. Of course, Mark handled the incidents with special tact, but it was time to seriously think about the future.

And Ksyusha started thinking, drawing conclusions, but it was impossible to make a decision. And now the time had come. The first-class cabin was already empty, and the economy class passengers were waiting for their turn to get off the plane. Mark was still standing on the escalator, still unable to figure out what had happened.

-Go, please, don't wait for me, - Ksyusha said with a sad smile, -we'll talk later.

Then she joined the "ordinary" passengers, passed through passport control and customs, left the airport, got into the first taxi she saw and gave the address of her old apartment, finally deciding to return the studio on the bank of the Moscow River and the Maserati to Mark. She could keep the jewelry, because they had completely different significance.

HOW PETROS AND KIRAKOS MET

When Petros approached the coffee machine after changing his wet socks in Taguhi's wagon-shop, he remembered that he had no money. He had arrived at Bagratashen from Tbilisi airport by taxi,

paying thirty dollars, and now he intended to take another taxi to Yerevan after having coffee. He started looking around to see where he could exchange currency.

At that same moment, Kirakos came out of Taguhi's wagon-shop and seeing the confused young man asked:

- How can I help you, Mr. Tourist?

-Where can I exchange dollars? - Petros asked, not paying attention to the taunt.

-If you need money for a cup of coffee, I will buy one for you. But if you intend to exchange so much money that will quiver the exchange stability of Armenian Dram, then don't count me in. By the way, are you a spy? You don't look like an Armenian.

-If I don't look like an Armenian, it means I am a spy?

Kirakos threw a coin inside the coffee machine and asked Petros:

-What kind of coffee would you like?

-Americano.

-And what conclusion should I make after this?

-What do you mean?

- For some reason, a young man with a choice leather bag and an expensive coat crosses the Georgian-Armenian border on foot, then changes his socks and drinks "Americano", - Kirakos handed the cup of hot coffee to the young man in an expensive coat.

The latter took a sip, frowned and threw the full cup into the trash.

-Even a spy can't be treated like this, - he said, - how do you drink this coffee?

- The best coffee in the morning is at the "Cafeshop" café located at the intersection of rue Martir and rue Truden in Paris, next to the Museum of Eroticism.

-My name is Petros, -said Petros extending his arm.

-My name is Kirakos, - said Kirakos extending his arm.

This is how Petros and Kirakos met.

Then they were silent for a while, obviously observing each other. Both of them undoubtedly saw each other as a competitor and wanted to understand what kind of an animal the other was, where it came from and why.

-Where are you from? -asked Kirakos.

-You should have guessed by now, -answered Petros.

-America is a big country.

-And so is the world.

-Ok and where are you going?

-Yerevan.

-I can give you a ride.

Kirakos nodded to the white Range Rover parked a short distance away. Petros whistled in response, which could have been taken as a sign of agreement.

And so Petros and Kirakos went to Yerevan together.

HOW PETROS AND KIRAKOS MADE THEIR STEP

"The participants of My Step campaign camped on the border of Lori and Tavush regions and prepared for overnight stay. Today, they were visited by musicians, who cheered up the participants with zurna and drums," one of the Armenian news websites wrote.

"The participants of My Step initiative have traveled a hundred kilometers and set up a camp in Dilijan. According to Nikol Pashinyan, their friends from Dilijan, Ijevan, Noyemberyan, and Hrazdan visited the camp," the same website wrote the next day, April six, twenty eighteen.

This media had started informing the readers where the participants of the "My Step" initiative reached since March thirty-first, twenty eighteen, when they started walking. Along with presenting the movements, the site also regularly talked with the leader of the initiative.

"Nikol Pashinyan stated that regardless of the threats of the RPA members, they will take their steps. Summarizing their march of these six days, he noted that the results will be seen on April thirteenth, through the presence of people. Their march is a message to the citizens to take their step, because if the citizen takes his step, then Serzh Sargsyan and the Republican Party will take their step back," the website wrote in one of its issues in April.

While Petros was admiring the dawn of his homeland, Kirakos was driving and trying to guess what his reason of coming to the homeland was. Songs of Dzakh Harout were being played in the car.

-Have you missed Armenia? -asked Kirakos lowering the volume of music.

-I don't know. What about you?

-Of course! When have you been to Armenia last?

-Long time ago. What about you?

-Three years. What do you do for a living?

-Different things. How about you?

And Kirakos realized that they were starting off on the wrong foot, he turned the volume of the music up again and accelerated sharply just as a police car was approaching. The latter made a U-turn, reached the Range Rover and ordered it to stop.

Kirakos did not get out of the car, but waited until the police approached instead, heard how he introduced himself and requested his documents, then said:

-Have you just eaten khash?

The police officer looked confused.

-Yes, -he said,-but I didn't drink alcohol.

-So you ate khash and didn't drink? -asked Kirakos,-where did you eat it?

-At a tavern.

-Who did you eat it with?

-The guys.

-Who paid the bill?

-Vagho.

-Are you sure you didn't drink?

-I didn't. I swear.

-All right, off you go, then.

The policeman turned around and limped back to his car.

Kirakos turned the music up again and Dzakh Harout continued singing.

That was how they reached Dilijan, where they saw a group of people walking on the side of the road, about fifteen to twenty of them.

-Who are these people and why are they walking? - asked Petros.

Kirakos, unlike Petros, followed the Armenian news from time to time.

-These people are our future, - he said, braked sharply, just ahead of the walkers, and got out. First, he took a bag from the trunk of the car and then approached the group. Petros followed him out of pure curiosity.

-We would love to join you, but we can't, we have important business in Yerevan. But consider us as one of you, and we fully share your views. Please take this, -Kirakos said, pulling out two large boxes of chocolate from the bag.

-Where are you guys from? - asked a man with a backpack and a half-white beard. Actually, all of them had backpacks and beards, except for two or three who had a good reason not to have a beard.

I am from Russia and my partner is from the United States of America. Keep fighting and I'm sure

you'll win one day.

-Stay up, guys, that day will surely come, and your step will contribute to it, - said the one with the half-white beard and shook Kirakos's hand. He also shook the hand of Petros, who never understood first of all, when became Kirakos' partner, second, what step he was talking about and finally, who these people were.

KSYUSHA DECIDES TO RETURN TO HOMELAND

During a ten-year career as a model, which can't be considered successful, although it wasn't unsuccessful either, Ksyusha had lived a whole life, perhaps just as long as a model's life lasted. The time had come when a girl engaged in this business experienced a change in purpose, respectively a change in approaches, and new priorities emerged. And as strange as it is, sometimes it happens all at once. In other words, you wake up in the morning and realize that everything is not as it's used to be.

It happened to Ksyusha in the Swiss Alps, when she woke up, went out to the balcony and realized that the period of her careless and aimless life was over.

Now, when she was collecting things from the apartment Mark had gifted her, she was trying to rethink the life she had lived. "Rethinking" was a strange word and it sounded kind of heavy.

Of course, Mark had always been extremely lavish and gentle at the same time, but there was no love. And when there is no love in that kind of a relationship, one thing is obvious: you end up selling your beauty. Or you give it to rent, that does not change the essence. Anyway, Ksyusha's decision regarding Mark was final, as was the decision to return this apartment. And the most important thing was that the decision to end the modeling career was final.

The contract with "Nasha Moda" magazine was about to expire in a few days, the agency which she cooperated with had not been involving her in serious fashion shows for a long time. It was necessary to think of something new. And Ksyusha had thought of something new. She would return to her homeland and publish her own magazine.

WHAT WERE PETROS AND KIRAKOS THINKING?

Petros wondered how came that the tunnel on the interstate highway was not lit. How could such big potholes exist on the road of that tunnel? To avoid those potholes, you had to get into the oncoming lane, right? Then he was thinking how beautiful and how ugly at the same time this country was.

Once at Caesars Palace Casino in Las Vegas, he met an Indian dealer named Chandrakanta. He had not seen such beauty before. Chandrakanta's eyes captivated Petros so much that he almost fell in love and forgot about everything. But things changed when they went together to the girl's rented room. Dirty clothes and food scraps were strewn everywhere, and cockroaches were playing hide and seek in the unbearable stench. And the most surprising thing was that all of this seemed normal to Chandrakanta, she smoothly led Petros to the bed, taking off her dealer's uniform at the same time.

But the most important thing Petros thought about was the bust of Lenin. Where was it now, had its secret been revealed? Where and how should he start searching? The worst thing was that he was not familiar with Armenia at all. Moreover, not only was he unfamiliar with Armenia, he had no acquaintances there, except for his grandmother, whose help would certainly not be solemn.

And Petros began to think about an idea that at first glimpse seemed very risky. What if he took Kirakos as a companion? The idea was risky because Petros knew very well who Kirakos was. He was much more experienced than him, skilled and physically stronger. Of course, these unquoted

virtues could contribute to the deal, but at any moment, especially if the deal was successful, they could work against him.

But still, maybe it was destiny that the first person he met in Armenia was Kirakos? And even though Petros stopped believing in fate after the last incident in Las Vegas, he still couldn't give up that extremely risky, but at the same time, extremely tempting idea.

Kirakos was thinking about something else entirely. To tell the truth, he regretted that he had stopped by the participants of the march, expressed his support and treated them with sweets. After all, there was a high probability that their movement was under control, and all those who at some point and in some way supported the march could attract the attention of special agencies. Especially, if this movement succeeds. Kirakos, for some reason, did not doubt that it would be a success.

On the other hand, however, if the movement was really successful, he would definitely remind the incident to some concerning people.

After all, he came to Armenia to relax, because he sincerely missed it, and he was not going to do anything illegal. So maybe it wasn't that big deal?

Second, what or more precisely who Kirakos was thinking about, was his companion. Back in Bagratashen, Kirakos made a pop-up calculation of how much this blue-eyed young man's clothes cost. Only the jacket, the suitcase, the watch and the sunglasses together should have worth at least ten thousand dollars. So how much money he had in his pocket and on his bank account? Maybe too much, maybe naught! Kirakos knew that from his experience. And in general, the young man reminded of him of fifteen years ago in many ways. And from that one can assume that he didn't have any money either. Expensive clothes were probably the remnants of a successful business that could be sold or pledged any time. So why did he come to Armenia? The intuition told Kirakos that there was something serious.

These are the things Petros and Kirakos were thinking about when they were passing by Lake Sevan.

HOW KIRAKOS AND PETROS BECAME COMPANIONS

After eating fish at one of the restaurants on the shore of Lake Sevan, Petros revealed his secret.

The fish that Kirakos treated his companion with was sig, whitefish, which was banned in Lake Sevan. But all the same, fish was served in this and other restaurants; fried, grilled, or boiled it was enjoyed by lawmakers, supervisory bodies, and even environmentalists.

Perhaps one could understand it from the lawmaker position, as while pressing the "Aye" button, they mostly had no idea what they were pressing that button for, what law it was going to pass as a result, and what the law passed by them related to.

One could also understand the supervisory bodies, as they had to spend their breaks somewhere, or have dinner after a busy working day.

But it was difficult to understand environmentalists: once, during the International environmental conference held in Yerevan, the organizers brought the participants to this restaurant to introduce the situation on the spot. After getting acquainted with the situation, the organizers treated the participants with fried whitefish.

Petros and Kirakos, however, neither knew about the law nor had they ever been interested in environmental issues. They had ordered four portions of fish, two fried and two grilled, and were waiting for the waitress to bring the food.

When at last she approached with a huge serving dish in hand and began to arrange the appetizing and banned food on the table, Kirakos told her:

- Did you know that the ingredients of fish flakes are widely used in the production of lipstick?

The waitress probably didn't know if it was a remark or a compliment, she hurriedly finished the job

and ran to the bathroom to check how her lipstick looked in the mirror.

- Have you ever wondered who bites the bait easier, - Kirakos continued, already turning to his tablemate, - fish or people?

-Depends on fish and depends on people, -answered Petros without thinking, then he thought a little and added, -but people, unlike fish, are of three types: bait givers, bait biters, and another type that does neither.

Kirakos took the eyeglass box out of his pocket, took the glasses out of the box, put them on and began dealing with his fish. Then, taking another thorn out of his mouth, he said:

- I keep thinking what has brought you to Armenia. I don't understand.

- And why do you want to understand?

- Because I know that you have come on business. Moreover, for something vague, but it has to do with big money. And I know something else: you can't do it alone for two reasons - first of all, because you don't have any acquaintances here, and most importantly, you don't know Armenia at all.

- And you offer your help.

- I don't help anyone just like that. And if you help self-interestedly, it is no longer help, but a deal.

- And why should I make a deal especially with you?

- Because that's the only way your success will be guaranteed. By the way, we haven't ordered drinks. After the deal is made, you have to toast to it.

- But I still haven't agreed.

- I am sure that you have already agreed in your mind. I don't want too much, in case of success, which is inevitable and guaranteed, I expect forty percent.

- Twenty.

- Thirty.

-Twenty-five.

- What will you drink?

- If I'm not mistaken, they drink wine with fish.

The companions called over the waitress, who had managed to wipe off the bright red lipstick and ordered wine.

THE MEETING OF GRANDMA AND GRANDSON: AND WHERE IS LENIN?

Seda Levonovna last saw her grandson when he was a few months old. The parents took little Petros with them to the United States of America. They had promised Seda Levonovna that soon she would also move there. But that never happened. Instead, her son came to Armenia several times to sell an apartment that he had inherited from his father and went back again. Seda Levonovna's heart ached. Her only hope was little Petros, who, she thought, would grow up and take care of his beloved grandmother. However, he grew up, but he never remembered his grandmother.

And one day she received an unexpected call from him. When the grandson said: "Dear grandma, I miss you", the cherry compote fell from Seda Levonovna's hand. Until then, she devotedly used to make a cherry compote every year. And on April six, twenty eighteen, she made dolma and was waiting for her grandson.

Petros did not come empty-handed. He had brought a necklace with a three-carat sapphire for his grandmother. Of course, the sapphire was fake, but Petros was sure that his grandmother wouldn't know that.

After eating dolma, Petros had to listen to his grandmother's stories the whole evening about the best times of her life. Then he had to excuse himself why he never remembered her during all these years, and in the end, only when Seda Levonovna was already falling asleep, he asked about the

heritage left by his grandfather. Here Seda Levonovna immediately woke up:

- So, that is you are interested in.

-Of course, I'm interested, - Petros didn't even try to object, - I recently found out that grandfather had had a lot of gold. I'm not like my father. I will provide you with everything. I will take you to America and you will live in my luxurious mansion by the ocean.

The grandmother looked into her grandson's eyes for a long time and asked:

-Won't you take me without it?

-Of course, I will, - he answered so confidently that the old woman could not even doubt.

Then Petros talked long; sad, almost crying he told his grandmother what difficulties he had gone through, what a sad and difficult life he had lived. The grandmother was so moved that if the heritage left by her husband was nearby, she would immediately take it out and give it to her grandson. But she didn't have it.

-It's not going to happen. Your grandfather's wealth has disappeared, - said Seda Levonovna, wiping off her tears.

-And what kind of wealth was that? - asked Petros, handing her his handkerchief.

-I don't know, -said the grandmother, -I don't know anything for sure. But he had gold, lots of gold. I have searched in all possible and impossible places, but in vain.

Needless to say, before having a heart-to-heart conversation with his grandmother, Petros had walked around the apartment looking for a bust of Lenin. And it is even more needless to say that if he had found it, that heart-to-heart conversation would not have happened. He would take Lenin and bid farewell to his grandmother under any pretext. Of course, he would give her something later, but he wouldn't take her to America, naturally, and her grandmother wouldn't live on the ocean shore.

Only Lenin was gone and Petros had to reveal the secret he knew.

-Lenin? -the grandmother muttered, - Lenin...? It can't be true...

- Calm down, grandma, don't get excited. And what happened to the bust?

- I wanted to take it and bring it home, but the country was falling apart, and I thought it's better for it to stay there.

- Where, where to stay?

- It was in Petros Grigorich's office in the building of the Central Committee.

- What is in that building now?

- The National Assembly.

ABOUT HOW KIRAKOS GOT INTERESTED IN POLITICS

Kirakos used to come to Yerevan quiet often. There he had many acquaintances from various circles: business, political, intellectual, and even criminal. Those acquaintances knew him as a successful businessman from Russia.

Kirakos grew up in Yerevan and knew the city, its people and customs very well. He had never done his business in his homeland because he intended to return one day. Although Russia was endless and rich widows, living there were countless, his career would sooner or later come to an end. There was a building at the top of the Cascade that Kirakos was very fond of. He intended to buy an apartment there. And for now, during his short- or long-term visits, he lived in a rented apartment on the top floor of that building and spent the evenings sitting at the balcony drinking his favorite Irish whiskey and smoking his favorite Dominican cigar.

That was exactly what Kirakos was doing in the evening of April seven, twenty eighteen, when Petros called. He was waiting for that call since the previous evening and was sure that the blue-eyed young man used the extra day to understand if he could handle the job alone. When agreeing

on the deal, Petros did not disclose many details: he only said that his grandfather had left tens of kilograms of gold, and he didn't know where they were.

Kirakos never let his intuition deceive him. And though he never had business with representatives of his sex, he was sure that he would not make a mistake here either, or the new partner would definitely come to him.

- We need a fellow member of parliament, the traces of gold take to the National Assembly, - the new companion said over the phone.

Of course, Kirakos had fellow members of parliament. But first it was necessary to understand what kind of gold they were talking about and what the National Assembly had to do with it.

-Let's have whiskey together, - Kirakos suggested.

The young man came over very quickly with an old file in his hand.

- If you want the job to be successful, you must first tell me everything in details, without leaving anything out, - Kirakos told him.

-Fine! -Petros agreed easily and took out some photos from the old folder.

The photos featured various famous figures from the Soviet era, including Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev himself. Next to all those famous people, at all the photos there stood a small man with curly hair and long whiskers.

-It's my grandfather, -said Petros proudly, -Petros Grigorich.

- When did he die? - asked Kirakos, looking carefully at the photos.

- I think in the nineties, I don't remember exactly.

- And where did he work?

- In the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Kirakos returned the photos.

-Now I understand what National Assembly has to do with this.

Then Petros told the story of Lenin's bust in full detail, as Kirakos requested, and told the story of Lenin's bust.

Kirakos listened without interruption, taking occasional sips from his whiskey glass.

-Fifty kilograms, then, - he said when Petros had already finished, - it's not a small number.

- Of course it is not small.

- That is, five hundred thousand dollars. This is not a big number anymore.

- Why five hundred thousand? - Petros wondered, - one kilogram of gold is worth approximately forty thousand dollars today, so fifty kilograms will be two million.

- I am counting my share. And I don't like it, actually. I am sure that your honorable grandfather, if he had a companion like me, would agree to work on equal bases. I mean one million sounds better.

-I don't think my grandfather would deal with someone who breaks the agreement.

-All right, all right, I'm joking. Half a million, then, - Kirakos emptied the full glass of whiskey in one breath, - I will have to get into politics. More precisely, into the internal political life of Armenia.

INTERNAL POLITICS

History, alas, cannot answer certain questions correctly. For example, the following question: what if things were different than they are now?

What would happen if the third president of the Republic of Armenia kept his promise and refused to hold the highest state position after his term of the presidency expired?

Million things could have happened, but no one, including historians, can say exactly what. But one thing would definitely happen. The president would have kept his word.

During his entire term in the office, this man, who was guided by the "right" and solved issues in a "right" way, was actually unable to keep his own "right".

Those who respected him and those who teased him, those who valued him and those who feared him, those who loved him and those who hated him repeated in unison that he was irreplaceable. That "irreplaceable" man was sitting quite comfortably in his seat in April, twenty eighteen, hardly having any premonition of the upcoming hazard. All issues were resolved: the "Center" had given its "approval", its political team had done its best and continued to do its part of work, its feudals lords continued to make regular contributions. In short, everything was under control. There was, of course, a group of former "roof jumpers" and "highway walkers" who were about to do something, but it wasn't provoking either. But people... Oh, the wonderful people! People lived their lives in peace. What can a farmer do when he has no water to irrigate his garden? He will have to leave the trees to God's fate. They will either survive or dry out. But the thing was that there was water. It was little, but it was. However, it wasn't enough for all the trees. Five trees out of a hundred ensured a good harvest, other fifteen or twenty ensured a meager harvest, the same number of trees simply endured and did not dry up, and the rest... The rest dried up. Meanwhile, water could have been distributed in a way that it would reach all the trees. And at the same time, they could dig new streams. How did the people of Armenia live in April twenty eighteen? Official statistics probably had some data. But were they really necessary to have an idea about people's lives? Official statistics probably had their figures. But were they necessary to get an idea of people's condition? If hundreds of cafés and restaurants in the center of Yerevan were full in the evening, was it an indicator of people's good living? After all, hundreds of villages in Armenia were empty in the evening and at all hours of the day. A small part of the population, perhaps five percent, lived very well, indeed. They were secure, stable and happy. They had luxurious apartments, every evening they left those apartments, got into pricey cars and went to dinner in the above-mentioned restaurants, and several times a year went for a vacation at a seacoast. There was another fifteen to twenty percent who were also doing well. They had an apartment bought on loan, a car bought on loan, they were able to repay those loans on time and could afford to have dinner in restaurants from time to time and go on a vacation once a year, on loan or without it. Another twenty to thirty percent could barely make ends meet. The rest of the people lived poorly, many of them extremely deficiently. And the gardener stubbornly did not want to give up his place to someone else. To someone, who could distribute water evenly to all the trees and dig new streams.

HOW COMPANIONS MET KSYUSHA

Araks left Armenia twelve years ago. And in Moscow she became Ksyusha. She used to visit Yerevan from time to time. Her mother, sister and some childhood friends lived here. She even came with Mark once, who she never introduced to her mother and sister, leaving it only to friends. One of her friends, Lilith, had an entertainment magazine that had some troubles and was on the edge to closing down. Ksyusha suggested reviving the magazine together, taking into consideration her experience in magazine business, her connections in fashion industry and of course the savings that she had and was willing to invest in that business to make it successful. And so today Ksyusha's friend invited her to one of the pubs of Yerevan for a fun night out, where a

rock band was to play.

The concert hadn't started yet, but the cafe was already full. There were only a few free tables with "reserved" signs put on them. Lilith said something in the waitress's ear, and they were seated by the front door, at a table added especially for them.

-Well, Araks, nothing like Moscow's glamorous parties, is it? - asked Lilith, studying the list of drinks, -what shall we drink?

- They haven't called me by my real name for a long time. I seem to like it that way better. And I like it here better than in the glamorous environment you mentioned. I feel like a bottle of champagne there.

-Why champagne?

-Because I hate champagne. Just like anything fake. Just like a fashion model. Champagne is a fashion model among drinks. I hate when people look at me and see just a fashion model.

-But it's not people's fault that you're so beautiful.

-It's not their fault. They see what they see. And I look for someone who can see the invisible. You know what, let's have champagne.

Once again the door of the café opened, two men entered and the public, for some reason, immediately turned their attention to them. So did Ksyusha. One of the newbies, with curly hair, sky-colored eyes and a slender figure, reminded her of male models who walked the catwalk with her not long ago. The second, in a white jacket, a white cap and a much more masculine face and figure, looked like those who sit in the front row during a fashion show and think about which of the models is worth inviting to dinner in the evening, mentally calculating how much it will cost.

-Would you mind if those men sit at your table? -asked the waitress, -there are no seats left.

Petros and Kirakos ended up in this pub by chance. They first walked around the National Assembly building, then went down Baghramyan Avenue and continued walking along Saryan Street. Kirakos offered a drink, and the companions entered the first place they came across. It turned out that there was going to be a concert there soon, and there were no free tables. But not for Kirakos! Although he did not particularly like the place, and had absolutely no desire for a concert, there was one circumstance that could make him stay at the place. A beautiful lady that was sitting at one of the tables.

Petros, on the contrary, liked the place, and also, he was in the mood of listening to music. Undoubtedly, he also noticed the beautiful lady.

But that beautiful lady was not particularly interested in those two. The "dude" and the "dishy", she named the new visitors in her mind. Naturally, she could disagree for them to sit at their table, and she would probably do so, if she didn't catch a thrilled glimpse of her friend. The guys completely attracted Lilith and it was not surprising: both could easily be on the cover of her magazine.

- Did you know that the pressure in a champagne bottle is six atmospheres, and exceeds the pressure in car tires for several times?

The speaker was the "dude". He took out his box of glasses from the pocket of his white jacket, took out the glasses from the box, put them on his eyes and began to study the bottle of champagne ordered by the girls.

-You'd better open it, -Lilith smiled.

-I will certainly do, - continued Kirakos, - but keep in mind that a champagne cork can develop a speed of more than one hundred and twenty kilometers per hour and rise up to fifteen meters in the air.

After saying this, there was an explosion. It is not known at what speed the champagne cork flew into the air, and it is also not known how many meters it could rise, as it immediately hit the ceiling and landed sharply on the head of an Armenian man from Diaspora sitting at the next table.

-What the hell was that? -he jumped up from his seat,-son of a...

HOW PETROS AND KIRAKOS MADE A BET

‘Why not having fun?’, thought Ksyusha. Rock'n'roll was encouraging, gentlemen were cheerful, champagne was plentiful. And at last, a new life was starting.

And Ksyusha started having fun. Her dance was like a firework, and everyone was so excited by that firework that by the end of the concert, it looked like a bomb had exploded in the hall.

In the morning, she woke up with a severe headache. The phone was ringing. It said "Kirakos" on the screen. She didn't answer and fell back asleep. A little later a call came again. Now it said "Petros". This time she hung up and went back to sleep again, without recollecting who those Kirakos and Petros were and why their names were registered in her phone. Then Lilith came along.

-Get up, - she said breathless, - the guys are waiting for us downstairs.

-What guys? - Ksyusha was surprised, - why are they waiting?

-Kirakos and Petros. Don't you remember? We agreed to go out of the city today.

Ksyusha began to gradually recall the previous evening. But there wasn't much to remember, just the usual fun, maybe with a little too much champagne.

-Did I agree on that? -she asked yawning.

-Don't you remember?

-No, I don't. Look, honey, dump them, would you? Just tell them I have made a joke and let's have some coffee.

And this was the second time Ksyusha “dumped” Petros and Kirakos. The first time she did it was at night, when after a lot of dancing and drinking the entire stock of champagne the pub had, the guys suggested continuing.

While Petros and Kirakos were expecting such treatment. Never had a woman, even as beautiful as Ksyusha, tried to ‘dump’ them and even more, do it twice.

-Well, “even Homer nods”, - said Kirakos in Russian and as Petros didn't understand him, he translated, - literally it means that even the old can fail. And it means that even an experienced fox can miss out a chicken.

Petros probably liked the explanation, and he started laughing.

-But let's see what comes next, - continued the experienced fox, - we'll think of something else.

-It's useless, - said Petros, - no need suffering in vain, you won't succeed.

-And will you succeed?

-Do you doubt it?

Kirakos thought for a moment and said:

-in that case, wanna bet?

-What bet?

-Who can catch the chick.

-Catch and do what?

-Pull out the feathers, what else?

-Agreed!

-What should we bet on?

-Twenty-five per cent.

Petros looked surprised.

-If you win, I don't get anything after the deal, - explained Kirakos, -if I win I get fifty per cent.

-I like that bet.

-With one condition, though, the bet is valid till we find Lenin. Deal? - Kirakos extended his hand.

Petros squeezed it and said:

-Agreed. But don't you worry; I will give you some ten per cent anyway. You won't be working for

free.

NICKNAMES

There are people whose purpose in life is to eat and use the toilet. They are capable of anything, if for some reason their food runs out, or someone occupies the toilet at the moment they want to use it.

Of course, you can ignore the existence of such people, let them continue eating and using the toilet as much as they need, but sometimes they become dangerous for the surrounding, even for the people and the country. Because over time, these people begin to perceive the country as a feeding trough and a lavatory.

Unfortunately, those people are everywhere. They can be bus drivers, restaurant singers, community heads or members of parliament.

In a healthy state, they could hardly be seen, because a healthy state has a healthy society and healthy authorities elected by that society. Both of them will not allow devouring and polluting their country.

But when the country becomes a feeding trough and a toilet for the government, and the society adapts to it, in that case the above-mentioned people rightly feel like a fly on muck. And whether they are driving a bus, yodeling at the stage, walking around the community or pressing a button, just two things are on their mind: eating and...

There is another type of people that is just as disgusting. They are called "Jackals". This type is also abundant and omnipresent. But it is dangerous especially at one place - in politics. Because if you can just yell at a jackal, the head of condominium and he'll hide under his desk out of fear, it won't work with a jackal member of parliament. Because he is hidden. He hides behind his constituents and waits until the devourers and toilet goers leave only skin and bones of those same constituents. Then he will do his job.

Of course, there are many other negative types of people both outside politics and particularly in politics, but Kirakos's two fellow parliament members belonged to the two types mentioned above. And since all similar member of the National Assembly had nicknames, these two can also be called by conventional nicknames: Muck and Jackal.

TO THE BOSS 1

On the fourteenth of April, twenty eighteen, the "Associated Press" agency referred to the current internal political events in Armenia and the public gatherings that started in Yerevan's French Square.

"Thousands of people with oppositional views blocked four main entrances leading to one of the central squares of Yerevan and paralyzed the traffic. The cause of the uprisings is the constitutional changes in Armenia, which, according to the protesters, hand over the future leadership of the country to the retired President Serzh Sargsyan as Prime Minister. He lost his authority on April ninth, when Armen Sargsyan assumed the position of the President of the Republic of Armenia. The latter will be the president with less authority, the main leader of the country will be the Prime Minister and Serzh Sargsyan is nominated for that. The protesters say that they will surround the building where the voting for Serzh Sargsyan will take place," - "Associated Press" wrote.

On the same day, April fourteenth, twenty eighteen, Kirakos arranged meeting Jackal and Muck. They would meet separately because these two, despite being from the same political team, that is the ruling party, could not stand each other. Kirakos told both that he had important business with them. What kind of business, he hadn't decided yet.

He arranged to meet with the first one at six o'clock in the evening at a café and with the second one at seven o'clock at a restaurant.

The sequence, time and place of the meetings were specially arranged like that. A cup of coffee and some thirty minutes with Jackal were pretty enough, but Muck had to be fed.

However, both of them did not come to the meetings. Kirakos waited for half an hour at the café and kept calling Jackal all the time. The latter's phone was switched off.

He waited for an hour at the restaurant, where he had set a rather luxurious table, and since Muck's phone was also turned off, he had to invite Petros, in order to not lose the delicacies, put on the table.

Before Petros arrived, he read the following news on a website.

“An external session of the RPA executive body and council took place today, in Tsaghkadzor. The executive body, as per the reference of the first deputy chairman of the party, Karen Karapetyan, decided to nominate the candidacy of Serzh Sargsyan, the chairman of the Republican Party of Armenia, for the position of RA Prime Minister. At the meeting of the council, the decision of the executive body was presented by Karen Karapetyan, the first deputy chairman of the RPA. The council discussed the issue and unanimously approved the candidacy. On April sixteenth, the RPA fraction of the RA National Assembly will officially propose Serzh Sargsyan's candidacy for the post of RA Prime Minister. To remind, the protestors fighting against the extension of Serzh Sargsyan's rule had planned to block the RPA office on Melik Adamyan Street in Yerevan in order to disrupt the meeting of the RPA council. In the morning, the opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan announced that, according to their information, the session will take place this evening in Tsaghkadzor, and due to that the protesters decided to car rally to Tsaghkadzor”.

Well, there you go, Kirakos thought. So, the honorable parliament members are not guilty, they also came as a surprise. Couldn't they at least call and warn, though?

Then another publication caught his eye, in which it was mentioned that one of the representatives of the ruling party announced that the decision to hold the session of their party's council in Tsaghkadzor was made a week ago. He denied the information according to which the decision to hold the session in Tsaghkadzor was conditioned by the statements of the members of “My Step” initiative, according to which they were going to besiege the RPA office. *“When the Republican Party decided that the meeting should be held in Tsaghkadzor, Nikol Pashinyan was strolling with his colleagues through Vanadzor-Dilijan highway,”* he said.

This is a hundred percent lie, Kirakos thought. If holding the session in Tsaghkadzor was really decided in advance, then Jackal and Muck would have known about it, and if they had known, would they have agreed to meet with him at the same time in Yerevan?

Anyway, at eight o'clock, when Kirakos and Petros were toasting the success of their mission, Jackal called.

-I was not in Yerevan, I could not come. The boss has called on state affairs, - he said, in a very serious tone, emphasizing the word "boss".

-Is the situation serious? - Kirakos asked.

- What situation?

- The situation with the country.

-I can't say over the phone, - Jackal whispered for some reason, -let's meet tomorrow.

And they decided to meet the next day.

A little later Muck called.

-Are you still at the restaurant? -he asked.

-Yes, -Kirakos answered.

-I'm starving; I'll come over to eat something.

Kirakos hang up the phone and sank deep into his thoughts. He was not expecting such

development. First, he called the waiter and asked to refresh the table, and then he turned to Petros.
- Perhaps it would be better if you leave. According to my planned scenario, you have to appear later.

- And is it possible to know what your intended scenario is? - The companion asked skeptically.

- Why, don't you believe me? - Kirakos asked in a way that someone else would think that he had never deceived anyone in his life.

- It's not important, - said Petros, - it's not in your interest to deceive me. - Just wanted to check out the scenario.

- My scenario is improvisation...

Kirakos met Muck at the entrance of the restaurant. When they approached the table, a smile immediately appeared on the parliament member's tired and sullen face. At least ten dishes from the Caucasian cuisine were arranged side by side on the carpet-like tablecloth, as well as a rabbit belonging to an unknown cuisine, with which Kirakos's guest started as if being afraid that the long-eared one would catch his breath and run away.

Kirakos filled his glass with vodka and asked:

- What happened in Tsaghkadzor? How is the boss's mood?

Muck swallowed another bite and looked at his tablemate skeptically, probably wondering why he mentioned the boss.

- Honestly, I don't understand anything. They all have to be detained. Who do they think they are? Bastards...

- And what does the boss think? - Kirakos insisted.

- Well, the boss... - Muck wanted to say something, but stopped abruptly, trying to understand how honest one can be with the interlocutor. He thought for a while and added, - How do I know what he is thinking? He probably knows something.

- What does he know? - Kirakos persisted.

But Muck didn't give way.

- I will say one thing; all of them should be detained. We will also loosen up, we have so many problems. Don't you agree?

- Of course, I agree, - Kirakos raised his glass, - let's toast to the boss, he knows what he's doing.

Muck straightened his tie, pushed the plate aside, raised his glass, stood up and, taking a serious pose, said:

- To the boss.

The second glass was a toast to the homeland, the third to the parents, and the fourth to the friendship.

Only after that Kirakos got down to business. He said that a familiar director from the United States of America had come and was making some kind of a film. The filming was also planned in the building of the National Assembly, where a pass was required to enter.

- What kind of a movie? - Muck wondered - TV series.

- No, he is a documentary maker; he makes a film about the Soviet heritage. And since the Central Committee of the Communist Party used to be in the building of the National Assembly, he wants to see what is left there from the Soviet period.

Of course, Muck did not understand much of what Kirakos said, but he promised to help.

TO THE BOSS 2

Sitting at one of the cafés in the center of Yerevan, Jackal was waiting for Kirakos and watching the news on his phone.

One of the news websites wrote that the steps of civil disobedience were present. Consequently,

according to the results of the first stage, there is widespread sympathy among the citizens of the Republic of Armenia, but the sympathy must be turned into concrete political actions, and it must be done from the next day. The hour of mass civil disobedience was declared: fifteen past eight in the morning of April sixteenth. The action plan is as follows: the first step is to block Davtashen, Hagtanak and Kievyan bridges. Citizens should stop their cars on the bridges, turn on the emergency lights and walk to the National Assembly building, informing the people on the way that they are gathering there.

The next step is blocking all possible streets. In parallel, the work of the Yerevan subway should be also stopped. Passengers, in groups of four or five, should lie down inside the train doors and prevent the trains from moving. Everyone should cash their money into their bank accounts and put it in their pockets. Then a strike must be announced. Young people should lie down in front of the buses, lower the "barbells" of the trolleybuses.

Jackal didn't have time to read what would happen next, because Kirakos entered.

-What is happening in this country? - He asked after being greeted.

- There is nothing dangerous; we have been in worse jams than this, haven't we?

Kirakos called the waitress over and ordered brandy.

- My heart feels heavy.

-You know something? - Jackal got worried, - Moscow is involved?

- Not at all, - Kirakos hastened to calm him down, - I'm just worried.

- If Moscow is not involved, there is nothing to worry about.

Kirakos took out two cigars from his bag and handed one to Jackal.

-And what does the boss think? - he repeated the same question he asked Muck the day before.

Hearing the name of the boss, Jackal looked around.

-Hushhh,-he said, - dial it down.

-And what does the boss think? - Kirakos repeated the question in an almost muted voice.

Jackal pulled the chair closer, leaned on the table and whispered.

- Tomorrow their issue will be solved, the organizers will be detained, and everything will be over.

Who are those monkeys? We will not turn our homeland into a circus. These are the words of the boss.

He again leaned back in the armchair and lit a cigar, feeling satisfied with what he had said.

The waitress approached and placed the brandy glasses on the table.

Kirakos raised one of them and said:

- To the boss.

Jackal put the cigar in the ashtray and stood up.

-To the boss,- he repeated.

Only after that Kirakos spoke to him about the matter that was the reason for their meeting.

The point was that Muck and Jackal were parliament members of different calibers. And while Kirakos expected only a pass from Muck, the expectations from Jackal were higher. It might be necessary to meet with the leadership of the National Assembly. Muck could barely help there, while this one could.

Of course, Jackal could not refuse; after all, they had toasted to the boss together.

AND WHERE IS KSYUSHA?

Ksyusha was walking in Yerevan. Alone. She wanted to understand the city and the people living here.

Yerevan was like a "puzzle", unsuccessfully assembled in some places, and not assembled at all in other places. The impression was as if several people in succession had tried to assemble piece by

piece, but they failed and left all the pieces scattered. Meanwhile, if they could collect them and do it right, some kind of an image might be perceptible. Beautiful, or less attractive, maybe even ugly - but some certain image would be seen.

Latent image was the word for describing Yerevan, irregular, senseless and nondescript, but that was not the most terrible thing. The worst part was that the city had no soul.

Who was to blame: the government?

The government can solve issues of transportation, waste disposal, elevators, and no matter whether it's done good or bad, but the government cannot give a soul to the city, as this is what people do.

But people... Ksyusha was walking in the streets of Yerevan and observing people. They lacked the most important thing - respect. Respect for the person walking next to you, respect for the monument, respect for the tree, respect for the concrete. Respect for the city. Respect for the Homeland.

When a person is able to spit or curse in his city, then he does not respect his city, then he does not respect his Homeland.

Love is just a word in this case. A person can swear ten times a day that he loves his Homeland, make toasts and write poems to Homeland, stand on the balcony and sing patriotic songs, and then spit from the same balcony when he's done. Or walk down the sidewalk and spit. So, basically, he spits on his city. But nobody spits at home, right?

When only four walls are considered to be your home and you have nothing to do with what's outside, then the city becomes a strange place for you.

Ksyusha was walking in Yerevan, looking at the buildings and observing people, and it seemed to her that the city was not breathing in. It was only exhaling.

And in this incomprehensible, unattractive and weak darkness, Ksyusha in vain was trying to find something that would be inspirational, enthusiastic or at least pleasant.

However, she didn't encounter with either the first, or the second and moreover the third one.

While walking along Sayat-Nova Avenue she saw a white car parked by the sidewalk and a man in a white kepi stuck out his head.

-What a surprise, I didn't think I'd see you again, - said the man, getting out of the car.

Ksyusha immediately recognized him and immediately understood that it was no surprise at all; Kirakos had simply followed her and waited for a suitable opportunity to come out face to face. The point was that Ksyusha had spotted this white "Range Rover" with Russian license plates several times during her stroll.

-Why do you like white color so much? - she asked.

Kirakos approached her with a smile on his face.

- White symbolizes eternal youth.

- But a person cannot be young forever.

- It is possible if they don't jinx him. And white clothes protect against the evil eye.

-No kidding, -Ksyusha laughed, - I thought quite the contrary.

- So, you also believe in evil eyes.

- Not at all, I believe in kind eyes. Kind and lovely. I was glad to see you.

Ksyusha waved and left. A smile froze on Kirakos's face. He wanted to say something but remained with a petrified and frozen face.

And at home, a new surprise awaited Ksyusha - a huge bouquet of red roses. This is probably that "dude", she thought. But she was mistaken. The bouquet was from Petros.

WIND OF CHANGE

On the seventeenth of April twenty eighteen, the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia

elected Serzh Sargsyan as Prime Minister in a special session. Seventy-seven members of parliament voted for and seventeen deputies voted against. Parliament congratulated Serzh Sargsyan with applause. On the same day, the President of the Republic of Armenia, Armen Sargsyan, signed a decree appointing Serzh Sargsyan as Prime Minister.

Before that, the future prime minister gave a speech from the podium of the parliament and reflected on the ten years of his administration. *“During that time, we have faced two major economic crises, we have overcome a war situation, we have faced the most serious internal and external challenges to our security, we have been able to register progress in bad conditions, implement or initiate many reforms, we have been able to stand firm on the complex and ever-changing international platform and look directly into the eyes of all our partners with clear conscience. The past ten years are about our country and all of us, and not about Serzh Sargsyan. And that isn’t worth blackening at all costs,”* he said and added that there will still be serious analyses and professional studies about those years. *“They have to be, and in the end, history will give the true assessment,”* Serzh Sargsyan summed up his speech.

In parallel, the popular movement continued to gain impetus throughout Armenia and particularly in Yerevan. The leader of the movement, Nikol Pashinyan said during the evening rally: *“In the coming days, we will form popular velvet revolution committees that will lead this movement and bring it to a victorious end. Revolutionary committees will be created in all settlements and regions of the republic. Very soon, all RA departments, including the police, will have to follow the orders of the revolutionary committees instead of Serzh Sargsyan. Tomorrow morning, entire city of Yerevan should be paralyzed, from the ninth district of Nor Nork to the villages Three and Four. Serzh Sargsyan and his gofers should not be able to move in Yerevan, they should move through the checkpoints we are going to set. Tomorrow we will establish checkpoints on all the streets of Yerevan that will operate only for republicans and their bashibozouks”.*

The wind of change had reached Armenia for a long time.

One of these two people had hardly ever heard this brilliant political song by Scorpions, the second might have heard it, or have not.

Both of these men said something right and something wrong. Both of them were using the people in their own way, and the saddest thing was that the people could not distinguish between the right and the wrong and did not want to understand that they were being used.

Most of the people hated the first man and probably in a while might hate the second man as well.

But it was the same people that have created the first one and will create the second one of what he will become.

And maybe ninety-nine percent of the same people did not know the song "Wind of change". Although the wind of change had reached Armenia a long time ago, when people were not ready for a change. Because they were not ready to change themselves.

People wanted to change their ways of life, their salary, their phones, TVs and cars. But they did not want to change themselves. They didn't want to change their way of thinking, or their approaches or their taste.

In nineteen ninety, when "Scorpions" presented the song "Wind of Change", the people of Eastern Europe, including Armenians, were ready not only to change something, but also to be the change. And they changed, as a result the evil empire was destroyed, and more than a dozen nations, including the Armenian nation, began to live in independent states.

In some of these states, including Armenia, not everything went well, and their only serious achievement was independence. And there where not everything is well, the wind of change will blow again one day. Only people should be ready for that wind. People must be ready to change, otherwise that wind can destroy everything, including their only achievement.

HOW KIRAKOS LOST HIS KEPI

Already for several days, the companions were waiting for the member of parliament to organize their visit to the National Assembly building. However, neither Muck nor Jackal could do it. Of course, these two must have been concerned in being useful, because Kirakos had done everything for that. He promised Muck to help and sell the products of his factory in stores of Moscow, and he promised Jackal to ensure the presence of a famous Russian singer at his son's wedding. Needless to say, he wasn't going to keep either of his promises. Later he would think of something to escape, but for now he had to get moving.

- I don't want to upset your honorable grandfather, but he could have been farsighted and cast Nikol's head, instead of Lenin's - Kirakos told Petros, - in that case we wouldn't have to put up with so many hazards.

- It seems to me that those two heads are very similar to each other, - answered Petros, - and not only the heads. I once saw a documentary about Lenin. He was yelling all the time too.

- By the way, do you remember that you are a director of documentary films?

-Don't worry, - Petros reassured him.

The companions were sitting in a café on Mashtots Avenue when Jackal called.

- I am at the National Assembly, you can bring the American, - he said, - just do it quickly, I can't wait long.

It was not so easy to do quickly. Demonstrators were marching along Mashtots Avenue.

-Where is the march moving to? - Petros asked one of the protesters, leaving the café.

-Baghramyán Avenue.

-Well, let's join the crowd, - Kirakos said, pulled his kepi over his eyes and started chanting with the crowd, -Take a step, Reject Serzh.

The demonstration reached Baghramyán Avenue when a strong stampede began. A little further up, the police formed a barricade.

"The policeman is ours," the crowd shouted.

But the police probably didn't understand why they were theirs and didn't let the protesters move on.

-It's time to get out of here, - Kirakos shouted in Petros's ear.

But it wasn't easy either. The crowd was so tight there was no room to move. People pushed each other and kept shouting. However, the police were not going to give way.

When Kirakos finally managed to get off the street and onto the sidewalk, where it was relatively more peaceful, he realized he had lost Petros. But it wasn't as scary as the fact that he had lost his white kepi. As if that was not enough, his white suit was torn. Kirakos began to curse Serge and Nicole in his mind, and it was reasonable, actually, because both of them were to blame here. Even if he could curse loudly, no one would hear him. And suddenly he saw a hat under his feet, which probably someone like him had lost. On the hat was written "with courage". Kirakos picked it up, dusted it off and placed it on his head.

What our buddy members of parliament would think if they saw me in this hat? - he thought.

Needless to say, buddy members of parliament did not see him that day, because the companions never managed to reach the building of the National Assembly.

I WILL FIND A SPONSOR

Ksyusha and Lilith went to the theater. Actually, the place where the friends went was not so much a theater.

In an abandoned building in one of the suburbs of Yerevan, which used to be a factory or something

like that, in a rather large area that was once a production unit or something like that, a studio called "Land of Men" had been operating for several months.

The space was not renovated, it was not heated, the floor and walls were made of concrete, and the windows had cellophane instead of glass. The lighting was done by several lanterns hanging from the ceiling, the stage was assembled with metal constructions, and the seats for the audience were made of special wooden mattresses designed for cargo transportation, which were arranged in a staircase mode in the center of the hall.

Twice a week, the audience could witness quite interesting performances in this environment with very simple solutions.

The studio's repertoire was also original. Instead of plays stories, poems and fairy tales were performed. The main show on the schedule was called "Land of Men", just like the name of the studio and just like the name of Exupéry's novel.

However, on that day, April twenty first, twenty eighteen, the audience was to see a different performance called "The Frenzied Masses".

What was happening on the stage, could not possibly be described, it had to be seen. More than a dozen actors scattered, without taking turns, were signing the genius poem of Charents:

"Lit by the crimson sunset fire - under fire-filled
The incensed masses were fighting in that old field.
They came thrilled, fervently, full of fire and hopes,
Came from cities far and near, villages and steppes.
Who came from the city - he left behind the old haze,
The fog that had become a smoke cloud over their lives.
Who came from the city, he left the moist land,
On which the obedient life no gold spike has yielded.
Who came from the steppes, he left the endless infinite -
The wide horizon, which had become a prison for him.
Who came from a distant city, there was a vague fog,
He brought his diseased heart as a waving red flag.
Who had left the endless dark village in the distance,
He had brought the power of land sown in his muscles.
Who came from the steppes, where they lived like slaves,
He brought the width of steppes in his azure eyes...
They were all crazy, unruly, not carrying the old life either,
Gathered in the barren field, they went to the battle."

Ksyusha was so impressed that she just had to see the authors of this strange and wonderful idea. It turned out that they were young boys and girls, professional and non-professional actors, directors and musicians.

-What do you say if I take you out for some wine? - asked Ksyusha.

-We have wine, lots of wine, - said one of the young men.

- Then let's drink your wine and talk for a while.

They talked for not a while, but for a long time. These young people were saying different things, but for all intents and purposes they were saying the same thing. They were saying that the Armenian people were, of course, a unique nation in all aspects, but in one aspect in particular: they were extremists. They were extremely intelligent and extremely stupid, extremely willful and extremely jealous, extremely tolerant and extremely aggressive, extremely tasteful and extremely "rabiz" (low rate). Especially in the case of the latter, the average was rare. Which of these extremes reigned was another question. Probably the negative one. The "rabiz" had settled tastelessness and vulgarity in us so fundamentally that it seemed to be never possible to get rid of. And how to get rid

of it when it was everywhere: in the streets and houses, in cafes and restaurants, on radio and TV? How to get rid of “rabiz” when it was encouraged and promoted at the state level? It was more terrifying than an external enemy, because if the enemy could shoot you dead, “rabiz” destroyed and kill from within, just like cancer.

To get an idea of people's well-being, it is enough to see what books they read, what movies they watch, what music they listen to. A nation that loves "rabiz" cannot live well, even if it owns the largest reserves of oil and gold, it cannot be influential beyond its borders, even if it has a hundred nuclear bombs and warheads. The people who love "rabiz" cannot fight for justice, neither internally nor externally, because the phenomenon that drives injustice is unjust itself.

This is what these young people were saying.

And Ksyusha offered them to turn "Land of Men" into a real theater in a new area, with new amenities and new opportunities.

- I will find a sponsor for you, I promise - she said.

TO THE BOSS 3

On the afternoon of April twenty-two, twenty eighteen, Petros was fast asleep when Kirakos called.

- Get ready quickly; we are going to the National Assembly.

Muck had called Kirakos.

-Everything is over, -he had said.

-What happened? -asked Kirakos, who was washing his car at the "Wash Yourself" car wash.

- All of them were caught, I told you, didn't I?

- What does that mean? - asked Kirakos.

- It means that everything is over. Come to the National Assembly, I will bring a pass. Bring cognac, I'm out of mine.

Of course, Muck was wrong. It was just the beginning. And Kirakos understood that very well. Since morning, he was looking for a car wash in the center of Yerevan, but everywhere was closed. All the car washers had left their jobs to participate in the "people's movement" and Kirakos had to “wash it himself”.

But he had to go to the National Assembly so long as there was a chance, but he had to leave the cleaning of the car incomplete. But anyway, he checked the accuracy of the news first.

“Minutes ago, the police arrested Nikol Pashinyan, the opposition member of parliament from Yerevan's Artsakh Street, who is leading the protests against Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan. The police used special measures to restrain the protesters who were angry with the actions of the security forces. There are also other detained citizens,” - Kirakos read on one of the Internet sites.

The companions had not yet reached Baghramyan Avenue when Kirakos received another call. This time the caller was Jackal.

-Did you hear the news? - he asked in an extremely happy voice.

-Yeah, but what does that mean? - Kirakos asked the same question he asked Muck.

- What do you mean what does it mean? It means that Moscow is with us.

- But the protesters... - Kirakos wanted to continue, but Jackal interrupted him.

- The protesters are at Artsakh Street, you can bring your American to the National Assembly, I will issue a pass.

And Kirakos found himself in a difficult position. He regretted for a long time that he had asked these two parliamentarians for the same favor, because he knew that they did not get along. Accepting the invitation of only one of them and telling the other that they cannot come would not be right, because they could be easily caught, and in general, you could not cancel the visit because there might not be another suitable occasion, or it would be too late.

And Kirakos found an intermediate solution. He called Muck and said he didn't need to bring a pass, because they already had one, he could wait in his office.

-I'll wait at the buffet, - said Muck, -did you get the cognac?

Kirakos had bought cognac, but nothing good would come of it. Jackal met the partners at the official entrance of the National Assembly.

-Did you see what happened? - said the parliamentarian enthusiastically, leading the guests to the building, -let's go and have a drink at the buffet.

- Why in the buffet, - Kirakos was surprised, - maybe we can go up to your office.

But it turned out that Jackal's office was under renovation. The subsequent course of events was not so pleasant. Seeing Muck in the buffet, Jackal said in a low voice.

- What is this ox's muck doing here?

Muck greeted Kirakos and whispered in his ear:

- Why did you bring this "jackal"?

Kirakos did not lose himself; he put the cognac on the table and said:

- The boss is a wise man. Did you see how it ended? Let's toast to the boss!

Toasting to the boss for the third time was quite beneficial. Knowing that the "American director" was interested in attributes that had disappeared from the Soviet period, Jackal said that he should contact the head of some department.

And Muck said:

- What is the attribute?

A head of a department, hearing that "an American director was interested" in the property of the establishment, was a little afraid at first, but when he learned that it was about a thirty-year-old property, he breathed a sigh of relief.

- What exactly are you interested in?

Petros wanted to say something, but Kirakos stepped forward.

-My friend is interested in flags, posters, paintings or sculptures with a communist spirit, - he explained.

-Nothing is left here, - the head of the department waved his hand, -we don't even have vaults. After all, they are useless things, who would keep them?

- Why are they useless? - Kirakos was surprised, - How can works of art symbolizing an entire era be useless?

- You need to contact Mnatsakan Poghosich, - said the head of the department.

- Who is Mnatsakan Poghosic?

- He is an old man, he knows everything.

THE OLD MAN OR HOW KIRAKOS CHANGED THE STRATEGY

The "old man" turned out to be really old. So old that he didn't even have a cell phone. The companions found his home phone number and called the next morning. Kirakos talked to her daughter for a long time, then hung up the phone and asked Petros:

- Do you happen to complain of gastrointestinal disorders?

- What's that? - Petros did not understand.

- I don't know what that is, but that's what our old man is treating in the sanatorium of Jermuk. We are going to Jermuk.

- How far is it?

- About one hundred and sixty kilometers and it will take us three hours to reach.

- Why so long? - Petros wondered.

- Because we will drive by the roads of Armenia. By the way, our adventures are costing me quite a

bit, and it's time I present you how much I've been spending.

-Don't be so small.

-What do you mean? It is the law of business: businessmen make the initial expenses jointly, - Kirakos took off his cap and scratched his head, - and since I have already spent a thousand dollars, please return the seven hundred and fifty.

-I don't understand, - Petros said, making calculations in his mind, -why seven hundred and fifty?

- Because you will have seventy-five percent of the profit, I will have twenty-five percent; therefore, the initial expenses will be made with the same calculation.

- Do you know that I graduated from the Faculty of Business Administration at the University of Santa Barbara?

Naturally, both companions were not telling the truth: Petros had studied at the University of Santa Barbara for only one year and studied a completely different major, while Kirakos had spent three times less the amount he said.

- However, there is an important subtlety, - Kirakos continued, - our bet. I will certainly win it, and my share will become fifty percent. Therefore, you can give me five hundred instead of seven hundred and fifty. I'm going to buy a gift for Ksyusha with it.

- Of course, you won't win the bet, and I'll buy Ksyusha a present. But that's not the point. Companions shouldn't have this kind of conversation, - Petros took out money from his wallet. -I'll give you two hundred and fifty dollars. This is more than needed.

Kirakos did not object, took the bills and said with a smile:

- It's true; companions shouldn't have this kind of conversation. And you say that I am being small.

It took longer than three hours to get to Jermuk. Mnatsakan Poghosich was eating honey and watching TV in his sanatorium room when the nurse opened the door and invited the guests in.

-These people don't look like doctors, - said the old man.

- You look great, what do you need doctors for? - Kirakos approached and put a bottle of cognac on the table - We have come to reminisce good old times with you.

-What are you doing? - cried the nurse, -Mnatsakan Poghosich cannot drink alcohol.

-Old times are long gone, - the old man ignored what the nurse said and looked happily at the cognac bottle, -times are different now. See what's happening in the country. The giant state was turned into ruins and no lesson was learnt from it. Now they want to demolish those ruins.

Tens of thousands of people gathered in Republic Square were shown on TV. They were chanting: Take a step, reject Serzh.

-Mnatsakan Poghosich, do you know who I am? - Petros suddenly said, coming forward.

Everyone looked at Petros in surprise, but Kirakos was the most surprised. He wanted to say something, but Petros whispered in his ear.

- We need to change the tactics, - then he added in a loud voice, - I am the grandson of Petros Grigorich.

-I knew one Petros Grigorich,- said the old man, -he was one of the secretaries of our Central Committee, a real communist. If you're his grandson, you're welcome.

Actually, changing tactics was the right thing to do. Kirakos, who got confused for a moment, calmed down after hearing "you are welcome". 'We can entrust future developments to Petros', he thought, after all, the young man came from America, not from heaven.

Petros gained his trust big time. First, he asked the nurse to bring cups, and he said it in a way that even if he asked for poison for the patient instead of cups, the nurse would not refuse.

While emptying the bottle of cognac, the old man did not let the young men speak. He would have gone on and on about his good times if Petros hadn't had to interrupt.

With a tragic tone to his voice, he said that there was any memory left of his grandfather. The grandmother had sold everything that was in the house. And he wanted to know where the property

of his grandfather's office could be, he was particularly interested in paintings of socialist realism or sculptures of Marx and Lenin. Then he changed the tone of his voice and continued much more boldly.

- I am myself a bearer of communist ideas; maybe it's in my genes.

It was difficult to say whether Petros's words moved the old man, or the cognac was the reason, but he started to cry. It took quite a while, and Kirakos and Petros already regretted coming and wanted to go out and leave the old man alone with his memories, but two things happened that prevented them from doing so.

-There was no statue of Marx, there was a statue of Lenin, - the old man said through tears, -if I'm not mistaken, your grandfather's secretary took it...

The companions did not have time to say anything, because at that moment the nurse headlong came in and yelled:

- Serge has resigned.

NICOL WAS RIGHT, I WAS WRONG

"I appeal to all citizens of the Republic of Armenia, the elderly and my beloved young people, women and men, I am addressing those who have been standing in the streets night and day with the "No to Serzh" slogan, as well as those who kept getting to work with difficulty and did their office duties without complaint, I appeal to those who followed live news reports for many days, and those who maintained the public order day and night, I appeal to our brave soldiers and officers standing at the border, I address to my comrades-in-arms, I turn to my fellow party friends, all political forces and politicians.

I am addressing you for the last time as the country's leader. Nikol Pashinyan was right. I was mistaken. There are a number of solutions in the current situation, but I will not resort to any of them. That is not my work style. I am giving up the post of the country's prime minister.

The movement in the streets is against my tenure. I comply with your demand.

I wish peace, harmony and common sense to our country.

Thank you".

Serzh Sargsyan left with these words. However, there were only two expressions in that speech, which were to be extremely important for further developments.

"Nikol Pashinyan was right. I was wrong."

If this small part was not in Serzh Sargsyan's speech, maybe many things would have been different in the future. The point is that till that moment, people who came out to the streets, the activists of the movement and even the leaders did not believe in any way that the long-time leader of the country could leave just like that. In addition, this man, who was guided by the "underworld law" during his entire tenure and did not admit almost any of his mistakes, suddenly stood up and said that not only he had made a mistake, but even more – his opponent was right.

Over time, the people governed by the "underworld law" become the bearers of those ideas, whether they want it or not, and believe in the "underworld law" instead of the actual law. When people see that the parliamentarians who are obliged to develop a law, the law enforcement officers who are obliged to be guided by the law, the judges who are obliged to make judgments according to the law, do not care about it and are working under another "law", they willingly or unwillingly, live in a way that does not violate the other laws. How can the legislative, law enforcement and judicial system be established in this reality? And who is the main responsible for such a reality, if not the head of the country?

The leader of the country is perceived by protestors as an undefeatable evil, as a monster who has

closed their livelihood source.

How true people's perception is that is another question. The fact was that there appeared someone who removed the monster from that source, and the "monster" himself named him.

People thought that by removing the monster, its source would be released, and life-giving water would begin to flow. And the conqueror of the monster would inevitably become an idol for the people.

Time will show whether the life-giving water would flow or not and would also show whether it was the monster that blocked it or the hero of the day and whether that hero would not become a monster himself over time.

And there was another question that the people who were rejoicing at that moment, alas, did not ask themselves. If that man was really a monster, why didn't he drown them in his clutches?

We have won, people shouted, and no one even wondering what would happen next.

KSYUSHA KEPT HER PROMISE

When Ksyusha promised the young people of the "Land of Men" studio to find a sponsor for them, she was overly excited and under the influence of impressions. Then, when the enthusiasm passed and she tried to imagine how much it would cost to acquire even a small space for the theater, renovate it and equip it with everything necessary, she realized that it would not be easy. Even if she gave up the idea of publishing a magazine and direct her savings to that business, nothing would work, because they were at least five times less than the amount needed. Turning to Mark was out of the question, after returning the apartment and car that he had given to her, Ksyusha finally said farewell to him.

But the promise was made, and breaking a promise wasn't Ksyusha's style. Besides, there were also other circumstances. First of all, what these young people were doing was really wonderful and they should be supported. Second, a theater having an audience can be profitable. And finally, Ksyusha really wanted to do something good.

Ksyusha was thinking this all over while eating ice cream in one of the outdoor cafés at Cascade in the evening, when her phone rang. It was Kirakos. Not only were those two constantly calling, but they were literally following her, and Ksyusha didn't know how to deal with them.

- If you look to the right and up, you will see a rejected and desperate man who is about to throw himself down from the ninth floor.

Ksyusha didn't understand what Kirakos was saying but looked to the right and up anyway.

-Look up a little bit more, - continued the rejected and desperate man, -I'm waving at you.

Ksyusha looked up a little bit more and saw Kirakos standing at the balcony of the top floor of a residential building. The latter, however, had no intention of throwing himself down. He was drinking his Irish whiskey and smoking his Dominican cigar and was about to call Ksyusha again when he happened to see her downstairs.

-Let's see, shall we? - said Ksyusha, -I have always admired men who are ready to commit suicide for love.

Such a development of events, however, was not favorable to Kirakos. After a long search, he finally managed to find the secretary of Petros's grandfather, which meant that it was possible to find Lenin's head as well. So, it was not the time to commit suicide at all.

-It's better to come upstairs, let's enjoy the sunset together, - Kirakos suggested.

Ksyusha wanted to send him off, but suddenly she saw something: new Range Rover, an apartment at Cascade... Kirakos must be rich, plus, his attitude towards her... In a nutshell, she could present the theater program to him. Isn't it better than committing a suicide?

-I won't come up, -said Ksyusha, - but you can come down. And it is not necessary to do it in the

shortest way.

Kirakos did not expect such an answer. Without haste, he changed his white tracksuit into a white suit and left the house, being one hundred percent convinced that he had won the bet. But when he got to the café, he couldn't believe his eyes. Petros was sitting next to Ksyusha.

Petros, as a true gambler, took the bet very seriously. If he lost, he would have to share Lenin's head with Kirakos, if, of course, they managed to find it. And finding it was becoming realistic. So, Petros decided to not waste time and meet Ksyusha at any cost, and since the latter did not answer his phone calls, he started following her.

Petros had another plan as well. He intended to tell Ksyusha about the deal and offer her to participate in the search with a guarantee of receiving ten percent in case of success. Thus, the probability of both finding Lenin and winning the bet would be higher.

And while Kirakos unhurriedly was putting on his white suit and going down from the ninth floor in a non-direct route, Petros had already managed to offer Ksyusha to become a millionaire.

-Where did you pop-up from? - Kirakos asked Petros.

- Totally by accident, I decided to have ice cream, - Petros said with an innocent expression on his face, -don't you know how much I love ice cream?

-Napoleon loved ice cream very much, but it didn't help him defeat Russia, - Kirakos said, unable to control his anger.

-By the way, I offered Ksyusha to join the buisness, - Petros said so calmly, as if he was saying that he offered Ksyusha to have a cup of coffee.

-What business? - Kirakos wondered.

- Our business. We'll give her ten percent; I hope you don't mind.

SWINDLERS 2

After Nikol Pashinyan was not elected as Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia as a result of the voting held in the National Assembly on May first, twenty eighteen, in the evening at the Republic Square, he called again to close all streets, railways and the airport.

"I, as the people's candidate for the Prime Minister, call all civil servants, tomorrow we announce a total strike," declared the people's candidate for the Prime Minister.

His attitude throughout the movement had been really bold, as he used to say, "with courage", extremely frontal and uncompromising. And surely that was the main reason for success. And that attitude was perhaps really worthy of respect and could not but gird the people.

It is possible to rise up an entire nation; it is possible to make people believe that everything in their life and in their country will change for the better very quickly. It's not that difficult. It is not a difficult thing when everything is really bad in people's life and in the country, and people naturally want change. In that case, anyone can use the situation of the people and get revolt them. Another question is how honest are his motivations and how far is he willing to go? But this is not all. If his motivations are truly honest and he is not backing down halfway and will go till the end, as happened in this case, the most important question is whether it is possible to change people's lives and the condition of the country.

Until May first, twenty eighteen, people's lives and the state of the country were really bad. The authorities were more often unfair, than fair, they were taking more than they were giving, and th people had good reasons to dislike them.

But people's life was bad, and they disliked the authorities even in nineteen ninety-eight, when they were ready to go after the former leader of Soviet Armenia, not considering the fact that it was during his tenure that the corruption and patronage flourished in the country. Or few years later, when people were ready to go after a Russian-Armenian "merchant" who later went to prison on

charging for ordering murder, or in two thousand and eight, when they were ready to go after the first president, who was once accused of all the possible sins in the world, and who popped-up again and on March first hid behind the people, in his mansion. Or in two thousand and thirteen, when they were ready to go after the Guinness record holder for the number of greetings he gave, who, after rousing the people, left them in the street and went to pray...

Somewhere in the beginning of this book there was a mention of "rascals".

It's a pity that this word sounds very bad in Armenian - "swindler", and perhaps does not express the true nature of the character. So "rascal" is the perfect word for that.

Of course, it could not be insisted that the leader of the popular movement was a rascal. But that wasn't the problem. The problem was that the opposite could not be claimed either.

PETROS GRIGORICH'S SECRETARY

It turned out that Petros Grigorich's secretary, whose name was Chnashkharhik (or "Angelic") was not that easy to find. The companions first applied to the personnel department of the National Assembly through the fello parliamentarians, searched the archives, but they did not find any information about an employee named Chnashkharhik. Then they started studying the recent history of the Communist Party, thinking that Chnashkharhik, as a sworn communist's secretary and concurrently a mistress, could continue the ideological struggle in her own party. But it turned out that several old men were left there but none of them was particularly angelic.

Petros had to turn to his grandmother, Seda Levonovna.

-What do you need that monkey for? - she asked angrily.

The grandson explained that he had serious doubts that she had taken Lenin's head.

-No way! - Seda Levonovna exclaimed, - I won't even go to his grave anymore."

-Whose grave? - Petros wondered.

- Your grandfather's.

- I don't think that my grandfather gave it to her. It is more likely that she took it without knowing what was inside.

- It doesn't matter, I will kill her.

- Who?

- That red-head monkey.

- But in order to kill her, we have to find her first.

- It is not difficult; I often see her in our supermarket.

- So, her hair's red?

- The reddest...

And the companions started to be on duty near the supermarket. On the third day, at 6:30 in the evening, Chnashkharhik appeared. She bought a low-fat sour cream and cottage cheese, oats, apples and grapefruit, one kilo of each. Kirakos followed her out of the store and said to Petros:

- Two things are clear: Chnashkharhik has not changed her profession and lives alone.

-What do you think how old she is? - asked Petros.

- I don't know how old she is, but if someone tells her that she is over forty, he will have to answer for it, possibly right in her bedroom.

Kirakos wasn't wrong. Chnashkharhik lived alone in her one-room apartment in one of the alleys of Abovyan Street, which was given to her by Petros Grigorich in good old days. And she worked in the State Revenue Committee as a secretary to one of many bosses.

-Well, I will have to raise my bar, - Kirakos said.

-What bar? - asked Petros.

-Regarding the age limit for women. I'd gladly give this red-head beauty to you, but I'm afraid you'll

get her also involved in our business by promising other ten percent like you did with Ksyusha. The next morning, Kirakos put on one of his white suits and went to see one of many bosses of the State Revenue Committee, whose secretary was Chnashkharhik. He introduced himself as a Russian resident businessman who was going to export a large number of grapefruit from Armenia.

-Does grapefruit grow in Armenia? - asked the secretary.

- Not yet - declared Kirakos with full responsibility, - but that day will come very soon.

Leaving the building, he said to Petros, who was impatiently waiting for him outside:

- There are three types of secretaries: those who do not sleep with the boss, those who do sleep with the boss, and those who sleep not only with the boss. Our Chnashkharhik, fortunately, belongs to the third type. In the evening, we are having dinner together in a Syrian restaurant.

-Why Syrian? - asked Petros.

- Because she was listening to Arabic songs on her computer.

After breaking her long-time diet in a Syrian restaurant and drinking half a bottle of aniseed vodka, Chnashkharhik couldn't resist inviting Kirakos to her apartment. Whatever had happened there, Kirakos was decent enough not to tell Petros.

-The important thing is that the leader of the proletariat was not there, - he said.

-So, where is it? - asked his partner.

- For a long time, Chnashkharhik kept it as an intangible relic of his beloved, and exactly twenty years ago, in nineteen ninety-eight, she gave it to a poet, whom she had feelings for.

- I hope you have found out the poet's name.

- I even had to listen to some of his poems, and I have to say that reciting was less good for Chnashkharhik than...

THIS IS HOW CONTEMPORARY ARMENIAN LITERATURE IS CREATED

The companions found poet Ludwig at "Vernisage". The one who had once captured the heart of the young Chnashkharhik was not in good shape now. With long messy hair, scruffy beard, and a face reddened by the sun, he was standing in front of a pile of books randomly arranged on the sidewalk, talking to a man in a tie. The latter had a book titled "Herbs of Armenia" in his hand, and he was persuading Ludwig to sell it for a thousand drams. But Ludwig didn't seem to agree.

- At least two thousand, - he said, - I can give the book "Birds of Armenia" for one thousand.

-But I'm interested in herbs, -insisted the man in the tie, -I have kidney problems.

They ended up with one thousand five hundred. Ludwig took the money, asked the old man selling stamps standing next to him to watch his books and ran somewhere. A little later he returned with two bottles of beer in his hand.

-What are you interested in? -he asked Kirakos, opening the beer bottle with a folding pocketknife. Kirakos was leafing through a thick Russian book on the cover of which it was written: "The Life of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin: questions and answers".

- I am interested in many things, -answered Kirakos, putting the book down, - but at the moment I am most interested in why one of today's most brilliant poets is no longer writing.

The beer was about to stop in Ludwig's throat. He began to cough and looked around to see that one of the most brilliant poets of our time. Then, probably making sure that it was about him, he asked excitedly:

- Are you familiar with my poems?

- Of course, I am, -Kirakos replied, also giving his voice an emotional tone, - Why don't you write anymore?

-I'm writing, of course, I am, -said Ludwig, he took out a notebook from the pocket of his worn jacket, opened it and, swallowing some consonants, began to read a poem dedicated to his homeland.

-Bravo! -Kirakos shouted when the reading was over, -You are the greatest poet of love.

- But the poem was about the homeland, - Ludwig was surprised.

-It doesn't matter, - not at all confused said Kirakos, who throughout the reading was studying Ludwig's denture, where all the teeth were missing from the front part, except for the top two and the bottom one, -what is the homeland, if not love?

It is difficult to say what further development the conversation would have, if Petros had not intervened.

-Maybe we should invite the respected poet for a drink? - he said.

-That's exactly what I was going to do, - Kirakos added.

The respected poet naturally did not mind. He again asked the neighboring stamp dealer to watch after his books, gave him a bottle of beer and said with a serious attitude:

- I'm ready, let's go. They entered the nearby outdoor café, where Kirakos ordered a bottle of vodka and some other things. After drinking each a glass, Ludwig would take out his notebook and read another poem, and only after the third glass, seeing that the respected poet was already reciting, shouting and banging his hand on the table, Kirakos had to interrupt him and talk about the topic that interested him.

Fortunately, the poet immediately remembered both Chnashkharhik and Lenin.

- I have even written a poem about that person, - he announced.

- Who? - Kirakos asked, - Chnashkharhik or Lenin?

- Of course, Chnashkharhik. Would you like me to read it for you?

- No, no, it's not necessary, - Petros interjected, - you better tell us what you have done with the statue of Lenin.

Ludwig first drank a glass, then he silently sang a part of the Soviet Union anthem, and then he reflected on the question he was asked. It turned out that the bust of Lenin, which was a gift from Chnashkharhik, had been placed in the studio of his friend artist for many years, and only five years ago, when he started trading at Vernissage, he remembered it and brought it there to sell.

-And did you sell it? - asked Petros impatiently.

- Of course I did, for a hundred dollars.

- Who did you sell it to?

- To Judge Bozoyan.

Ludwig took the vodka bottle, poured himself another glass, drank, then got up and continued to sing the anthem of the Soviet Union loudly. Realizing that the poet was becoming uncontrollable, Kirakos turned to Petros.

- We can go, it won't be difficult to find a judge with such a surname.

Then he called the waitress and asked for the bill. Ludwig stopped singing and shouted:

-Stand up, everybody, the anthem of the Soviet Union is on.

-This is how the modern Armenian literature is created, - Kirakos told the waitress while paying the bill.

FROM SCRATCH

On May eighth, twenty eighteen, the breaking news of international media outlets related to Armenia: *"The Armenian parliament elected opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan as the country's Prime Minister, putting an end to the political chaos that lasted for several weeks,"* CNN reported. *"The revolutionary leader wins the election for the Prime Minister,"* was the title of the article published on the "BBC" website. *"The leader of the opposition, Nikol Pashinyan, was elected the new Prime Minister of Armenia, thus ending the peaceful revolution,"* France 24 reported.

"He is not a populist, he is popular: Nikol Pashinyan became the Prime Minister of Armenia," wrote "The Guardian".

On the same day, a little earlier, the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia elected Nikol Pashinyan as Prime Minister with fifty-nine votes in favor and forty-two against, and the President of the Republic of Armenia, Armen Sarkissian, signed a decree appointing him as Prime Minister.

"Based on the decision of the National Assembly of May eighth, twenty eighteen, on electing Nikol Pashinyan as Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan was appointed Prime Minister in accordance with Article 149, Part 5 of the Constitution," said the decree. Thus, Nikol Pashinyan managed to do what no one had managed to do since independence.

That was the truth. However, the new Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia did not answer a number of extremely important questions.

No leader of the Republic of Armenia apologized to the people for his mistakes after resigning. This means that either they did not make mistakes, or they did not admit their mistakes, or they did not consider the people worthy of hearing an apology from them.

The biggest omission, however, belonged to the first president, because it was during his presidency that the first elections were falsified, and for the first time, force was used against peaceful protesters challenging the results of those elections. The development of the Armenian statehood would be completely different if that hadn't taken place. It is not about economic development. It is about the faith and trust of the people, society, that were destabilized under the watchful and hateful gaze of the first president of the Republic of Armenia.

Besides, it was the first president that had tried for the first time to force the people who had won the war to back down from their victory for the sake of peace, an unguaranteed peace.

What was supposed to happen later simply could not be avoided, because the moment to build a truly clean, just and strong state and society was lost.

In May twenty eighteen, in the symbolic year and month of the centenary of the First Republic of Armenia, the Prime Minister of the Third Republic of Armenia had a unique opportunity to start everything from a scratch. However, for that, as it was said above, he had to answer a number of extremely important questions.

First, what did he think about the events of nineteen ninety-six and the man who perpetrated them? If he condemned it, why did he later join the political team of that person and participate in perhaps the most shameful events in the history of the newly independent state named "March One"? If he later regretted it, why didn't he apologize to the people?

And secondly, what did he think about the approach of the first president regarding the issue of Artsakh, which is the most important question for Armenia? If he did not agree with them, then why did he later join the same man who had not changed his approach at all? Or if he later regretted it, why didn't he explain himself later?

And if in both cases he neither condemned nor repented, then there would be no anything from scratch.

VLADIMIR LENIN AND VSEVOLOD ZHOPKIN

Of course, Ksyusha loved adventures. She had been to the North Pole, climbed Mount Elbrus, participated in the Paris-Dakar race as part of the Russian "Kamaz" team and did many other things. But what Petros offered her was a little different. Ksyusha did not take it seriously at first, thinking that it was just an excuse to attract her. Of course, she understood that those two guys were flirting with her for some reasons. She even had a sneaking suspicion that they had a bet on who would reach her. It was definitely insulting, but Ksyusha had long ago learned not to be insulted by such things, but rather benefit from them.

Undoubtedly, Petros, and especially Kirakos were talented "swindlers", but it was possible to benefit

from them as well. And Ksyusha decided to enter the game.

-There are some things that don't make sense, - Ksyusha said to the guys as they sat together at the balcony of Kirakos' house,- and I'd really like to hear your opinion."

-What's not making sense? - asked Petros.

- First of all, why did your grandfather cast Lenin's head out of the enormous amount of gold he had and keep it in his office in front of everyone, and secondly, why didn't he inform his son or wife about it?

- As for his son, my father, I think he didn't trust, - Petros answered after thinking for a while, - his wife, my grandmother, probably, too.

-Wait a minute, -Kirakos intervened, -we should not forget that before he died, respected Grigorich tried to tell his wife where the gold was, but he only managed to say the word "Lenin", which the venerable lady attributed to his love for the leader of the proletariat.

-And why was Lenin kept in the office in front of everyone's eyes? - Ksyusha repeated the first part of his question.

Kirakos answered again, instead of Petros:

- He kept it not only in front of everyone, but also in front of his eyes. He probably thought it was safer that way. I don't think that fifty kilograms of gold was collected by Petros's respected grandfather in a legal way, and if he turned it into jewelry or blocks and kept it, say, in the basement of his house, it would be very easy to find it in case of a search. Don't forget the times he had lived in, even though you hadn't been born yet.

-And who is talking about legality? - Petros said with a smile.

- Those were really cruel times, - Kirakos refused to listen, - the giant state was collapsing, and people took whatever they managed.

-How old are you?- Ksyusha suddenly asked.

-They don't ask men's age, - replied Kirakos with a serious face, -but it's better to get down to business. We need an action plan.

-What do we know about that judge with an obscene last name? - asked Ksyusha.

The companions had collected enough information about the judge with an obscene last name. Former judge, to be exact. Mr. Bozoyan took a well-deserved rest a year ago.

Now he lived in his luxurious country house in Dzoraghbyur, the third floor of which he had completely turned into an exhibition hall. Evil tongues said that Bozoyan had one of the largest collections of paintings by the Armenian artists. Evil tongues did not say, however, how and by what means the former judge had compiled that collection.

Mr. Bozoyan's garden was an object of particular interest. Several dozens of sculptures and figurines were arranged under various, mainly decorative trees and bushes. True, their material and artistic value was significantly inferior to the value of the paintings hanging in the exhibition hall, but the idea was certainly interesting.

The companions had not yet managed to be in the territory of the summer house, but from over the fence they saw the garden, where two of the sculptures placed vaguely resembled Vladimir Ilyich.

-Well, dear treasure hunters, -said Ksyusha after hearing the information about the judge,-what do you plan to do? I hope stealing Lenin is not in your plans.

-Why should we steal? -Petros was surprised,-we can just take it, because I'm the legal heir to the statue.

-And you're about to argue concerning inheritance issues with the judge? -Kirakos laughed,-I have a better idea.

And they started with his plan.

He called the former judge, introduced himself as a novice collector living in St. Petersburg, and said that he would very much like to see his collection. They agreed to meet in the evening at the

summer house in Dzoraghbyur.

Kirakos asked not to be disturbed during the next few hours and spent them studying the history of Armenian fine arts. Then he put on his white suit, took the eighteen-year-old whiskey he had previously bought, and went to the meeting.

Mister Bozoyan welcomed him like one collector would meet another one. First, they had a glass in the study, smoked a cigar, talked politics and then went up to the exhibition hall to see the pictures, which, understandably, didn't interest Kirakos at all.

The former judge had a pretty good impression about his guest and was in his element. He was walking with his head up high next to Kirakos and was listening to the latter's amazed exclamations. But that was all Kirakos could do. He had hopes that names of the authors will be written next to the pictures, just like in museums, and his self-education will allow him making some comments, say: "How wonderful the colors of Minas are". But there was nothing written next to the pictures and Kirakos could only make stunned exclamations or whistle at the most.

-None of our collectors have a work of art like this, -said the judge, showing the canvass of Yeghishe Tadevosyan, -even him...

Here he took a pause, thought for a moment, then remembered something and said bravely:

-Even him, the former president.

- Yeah! - said Kirakos making a serious face, -this work is truly amazing.

-And what works of Armenian classics do you have? -asked the judge unexpectedly.

Kirakos wanted to say a few names of the Armenian classics, that he had learnt by heart, but he feared that the judge might ask additional questions. So, he simply said:

-My collection is made of the Russian classics. I will touch on the Armenian fine art now.

-Really? -The judge was honestly surprised,-what Russian artists do you have?

Kirakos was not ready for this turn of events. He knew of the Russian art as much as the man standing next to him knew of women's lingerie.

-I'd better invite you to my exhibition hall in St. Petersburg, so you can see the canvasses with your eyes, -he said escaping the answer.- By the way, you mentioned the former president; do you think it was all planned?

The former judge didn't want to talk about the former president; instead, he suggested walking around his garden and see his statues. That was what Kirakos needed.

Real art lovers would never be interested in Mister Bozoyan's collection of statues. He knew it himself, because once they entered the garden, he said:

-These statues are not really worthy; I just collected them according to my preferences.

It turned out that the former judge's preferences were very multi-genre. Sculptures of lions and eagles, horses and deer, angels and monsters, half-naked men and women and many other sculptures were placed under the decorative trees in the huge garden. There were also famous people. Here was Karl Marx, Joseph Stalin, Jawaharlal Nehru, Yuri Gagarin, Maxim Gorky, and of course Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in three copies.

In one of the sculptures, the leader of the proletariat stood in full height, the other two were his busts, the first made of metal, the second made of plaster.

'In fact, the judge bought fifty kilograms of gold for a hundred dollars and didn't know about it', Kirakos thought and approached the plaster bust. It was placed on a marble plinth under a silvery fir tree. Ilyich was looking sternly, as if he wanted to say: stay away from me, and Kirakos was ready to kiss his broad forehead.

-What a strange coincidence, -he told the judge trying to hide his anxiety,-I collect Lenin's statues myself.

-I bet there are many left in Leningrad, -said the judge.

-Not really, believe me. The communists have taken everything. I used to have twenty sculptures,

five of which I gifted to Mister Zyuganov when he paid a visit to my exhibition.

-You shouldn't have, -Bozoyan got angry, -Zyuganov was a weak communist. He defeated Yeltsin in the 1996 presidential elections, but he did not fight until the end and made a deal with the authorities. Meanwhile, if he fought, he could have succeeded, at that time the Russians were ready to restore the communist power.

-Maybe, maybe, -said Kirakos indifferently, caressing Lenin's head.

And suddenly the unexpected happened. Bozoyan put his hand on his shoulder and said:

-If you liked this statue so much, I could sell it to you or exchange with a painting of Russian artist but take into consideration that this statue is very pricy.

When Kirakos heard the word "pricy" he was feared whether the judge knew its secret, but then realized that it couldn't be.

-All right, -he said, -I will give you one of the canvasses of Vsevolod Zhopkin.

-Who is that? -the judge was surprised.

-He's a young artist from St Petersburg. Very promising, -explained Kirakos.

Vsevolod Zhopkin was the name of the man Kirakos bought his Range Rover from and didn't know why he had remembered that name. But that was not important now. Now he had to bring the plan to an end and do it fast, and lest the judge changed his mind, take Lenin's head to his car as soon as possible.

When the "Range Rover" sped from Dzoraghbyur to Yerevan, and the bust of Lenin rattled in the trunk, Kirakos was thinking about how to act. Petros and Ksyusha were waiting for him at the cafe at Cascade. He could go there and surprise in some original way. But he could also do something else. He could just disappear and then there would be no need to share the fifty kilograms of gold with anyone. However, there were two circumstances that prevented Kirakos from doing so. As the bust of Lenin was being carried to his car, it seemed surprisingly light to him. If there was indeed fifty kilograms of gold inside the sculpture, it must have weighed at least fifty kilograms. What if there was no gold at all and it was a completely different sculpture? This was the first circumstance. And Kirakos did not even want to think about the second circumstance. Honesty doesn't exist in this world; everyone is deceiving each other.

It is unknown what circumstance made Kirakos not to manage the future fate of the sculpture alone. Vladimir Ilyich's head was smashed right in the trunk of the car, in a deserted place outside the city. There was nothing in there.

-I can't believe this, -Petros shouted, -where's my grandfather's gold?

Kirakos didn't say anything. He thought for a moment, then picked up the phone and called the judge.

-You won't believe what happened, -he said laughing, -the sculpture fell off my hands and smashed.

-That's terrible, -said the judge, -you should be more careful.

-You can't imagine how hurtful it is to me, -said Kirakos giving his voice a tragic tone, -do you have another statue?

-Well, I have one more, but it's made of copper and costs more. I could...

-No, I don't like metal statues, -Kirakos interrupted, -where can I find a plaster statue? Do you know people?

-You should look for at the Vernisaje, -prompted the judge, -I bought one from there once.

-The one I broke? -asked Kirakos impatiently.

-No, another one. Then I sold it to director Chobanyan.

-What does Chobanyan has to do with Lenin's statue?

-I believe he was making a movie about Soviet times. By the way, I googled the name Vsevolod Zhopkin and didn't find anything about him...

WHO THE HEAD OF THE COUNTRY BEAT AND WHO IS YET TO BE BEATEN?

The Republic of Armenia was proclaimed by the “Armenian National Council”, on May 28, nineteen eighteen in Tiflis. One hundred years later, on May 28, twenty eighteen, during his speech in Sardarapat, the newly elected Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia would say: “We have won and will always win every time we decide to, when we rely only on ourselves instead of others, when we overcome any obstacle, when we love, endlessly love both our homeland and each other, and avoid imposing our personal interests on our own people and the state, when each citizen realizes that he is the master in his own country and not a servant”.

Glorious words indeed, that perfectly express the sacrament of the day. However, alas, the new head of the country didn't quite get that sacrament.

“Just like this, 100 years after the Sardarapat victory in April-May of 2018, the Armenian people held another glorious victory, establishing its own power in its own homeland. That victory also seemed to be equally impossible”, he should have said as a continuation of his speech.

Here, a natural question pops up: towards who the nation held “the next glorious victory” exactly one hundred years after the victory of Sardarapat? However, it was useless to ask the new Prime Minister of the country that question.

If someone is so overwhelmed by the victory he has held in fight for power, that he compares it to a victory in the battle against an external enemy, then what do you call him?

Who did the Prime Minister beat? If the previous authorities, then what his entire battle was if not for the power.

No matter how bad the former authorities were, did they massacre the people, oppress the old and children, rape women and girls? And therefore, how could today's victory be compared with the victory held a hundred years ago?

No matter how bad the country was governed, was it not independent? No matter how bad the condition of the people was, did they not live in an independent country? How could the victory held against the authorities be compared with the victory for independence?

And maybe the new prime minister has won over his own country and his own people?

If the struggle for independence and the struggle for power are comparable for the leader of the state, then that leader can win over the people in order to keep his power.

“REVOLUTION” AND “SITCOM”

Director Chobanyan, who had bought the bust of Lenin from Judge Bozoyan, was not actually shooting a movie, but a series or, more precisely, a so-called “sitcom”. The companions had to watch the entire “sitcom” in turn, but they never saw Lenin's bust in any of the episodes. Instead, they were surprised to find something else. The actors who played here were active participants of the revolutionary events, and one of the main actors could often be seen next to the leader of the revolution.

In an episode of the “Sitcom” a child asks the hero of the aforementioned actor: “Do you know how Khachatur Abovyan has disappeared?” “I don't know,” the hero answered, drinking beer, “he has climbed the peak of Aragats and never came back.” “Aragats?”, -the child wonders. “Yeah, I guess his friends had invited him for khash there. By the way, khash over there is terrific”, -explained the hero. The child, however, insists that Khachatur Abovyan has climbed the Ararat Mountain instead of Aragats, to which the hero responds: “Are you nuts? They don't serve khash at the Ararat, why would he climb it?” Then the child asks if Abovyan will return. “If he finds out about the prices of the houses on Abovyan Street, he will definitely come back,” answers the hero, who was played by a widely known actor, who could always be seen next to the leader of the national movement, and

who, according to rumors, was considered by the latter for the position of Yerevan mayor.

And if those and many other similar “sitcoms” and serials were shown on the most popular TV channels in Armenia and gathered the largest audience, then why couldn't “beloved” actors become “beloved” high-ranking officials as well? If the revolution turns into a “sitcom”, then why shouldn't society turn from an involuntary spectator into a protagonist? If the society enjoys watching and listening to how “tough guys” make fun of one of the brightest characters in its history, why shouldn't it trust those same “tough guys” with its future?

Nonetheless, Lenin's head was missing.

-We will have to smoothly transition from fine art to cinematography, - said Kirakos, addressing his companions.

-If what we watched they call a movie, then monkeys can be actors, - laughed Ksyusha, - but don't worry, Lilith is familiar with all this “beau monde”.

They went to the shooting pavilion with Lilith, but without Ksyusha. The latter said that if she wanted to see monkeys, she would go to the zoo.

The pavilion was located in an apartment of a newly constructed building, and it occupied two floors. The companions entered the moment when “beau monde” was celebrating the end of the eighth season. The director, Chobanyan himself, was making a toast.

-Today the entire Armenia is watching our “sitcom” and admires what we have created. We have made a revolution not only in Armenia, but in the Armenian cinema as well...

Seeing the incoming guests, the director interrupted his toast and invited them to the table. Kirakos, whom Chobanyan introduced as a benefactor from Russia, raised his glass and continued the interrupted toast.

-Let me speak on behalf of the Armenians living abroad, - he said, -today, not only the entire Armenia is watching your “sitcom”, as our beloved director mentioned, but the entire Diaspora as well.

Kirakos spoke quite long enough, and his speech was so lively that the applause did not stop for a long time. The actresses were approaching the “the benefactor from Russia” without taking turns to get to know him. Those who stepped out of line relied on Petros.

When the passions subsided, Kirakos took Chobanyan aside:

-My good friend, judge Bozoyan told me that you have purchased Lenin's bust recently from him.

-Yeah, I recall something like that, -said Bozoyan straining his memory.

-But it wasn't used in any of the episodes.

-Yes, according to the script, one of our heroes had to throw it out of ninth floor window, but the script got changed and we didn't need the bust anymore.

Kirakos was about to say how good it was that they had changed the script, because he immediately imagined what might have happened if they threw Lenin out of the window.

-Why are you interested in it? -asked the director.

-The thing is that I collect Lenin's statues...If you don't need it anymore, you may want to sell it to me.

-I would not sell, but bestow it to you with great pleasure, but I have already given it to somebody else.

-What a pity! - said Kirakos unable to hide his disappointment, - and who did you give it to, if it's not a secret? Maybe they will sell it to me?

-Sell? -Chobanyan laughed, -he's one of the richest people in Armenia, an oligarch.

The director did not say anything else about the oligarch, and the companions had to turn to their old friend deputies for help. Jackal helped, who, as it turned out, was in a godfather-godson-kind-of relationship with the oligarch. According to the deputy, the latter was not in Armenia. He went to the United Arab Emirates to attend another oligarch's birthday. Jackal promised to organize a

meeting but said that such anniversaries usually last seven days and nights, therefore expecting to meet him in less than a week was useless.

-Well, it looks like we're going to have a forced layoff, - Kirakos said to Ksyusha, -I suggest spending it in Dilijan. I've rented a beautiful cottage in the forest there.

Petros, who this invitation was not addressed to, did not agree:

-It is better to stay in Yerevan in case the oligarch comes back sooner.

-Both ideas are wonderful, -said Ksyusha, -so one of you can go to Dilijan, the other stay in Yerevan, and I have other plans, I'm sorry.

EXCERPTS FROM CONVERSATIONS OF THE NEW GENERATION

Ksyusha's plans were related to the youth of the "Land of Men" studio. She promised to go to Tatev Monastery with them on Sunday. Ksyusha had never communicated with compatriots of her generation and wanted to understand their thoughts, their wishes and their beliefs. On the way, in the bus, Ksyusha was going to ask questions, but there was no need for that. Young people began conversing and Ksyusha did not know that some fragments of these conversations she would remember for a long time.

"How good it would be if the borders on the planet Earth disappear, and people would finally come to realize that they are owners everywhere and equally guests".

"Yes, but that's not going to happen, at least in the current century. A large part of people living on the planet Earth still do everything to live at the expense of the other part, and the other part does not want to tolerate it in any way."

"Are we talking about people or nations? Because God hardly gave an advantage to anyone when he was dividing people into nationalities. But it is a fact that some nations in the course of their evolution came to the realization earlier that they should take care of both their own and foreign people, both their own and foreign nations, and humanity in general, and some nations still continue to drink their own and foreign blood". Nations or people? People, nonetheless."

"In all cases, tolerance and peace are the right things".

"Peace can be preached when justice has triumphed. Because otherwise you are promoting injustice. Only the strong can speak of tolerance, because when the speaker is weak, it is not at all tolerance, but plain cowardice."

"And what should the weak do, that doesn't want violence, but just want to live?"

"They cannot live."

"How come? Should they die?"

"No. They will not die, but they will live an undignified life. They will be scorned, oppressed, humiliated as long as they are weak and accept being weak. Is it really living?"

Later, in the mountains of Syunik, sitting in a valley near the Tatev monastery, the young people continued to talk.

"Why have our people built so many churches and still continue building them?"

"The important thing is not the purpose of building a church, but the further role the church has".

"And isn't it better to build ten houses and give them to homeless people instead of building one church?"

"The church is also a home, not for ten, but for thousands of people."

"But isn't the home meant for living and people live at homes".

"Yes, home is for living, but the church makes them live."

"You mean, going to church makes people live?"

"The important thing is not just living but knowing how to live. When one does something wrong, something dishonest, something unfair, and then goes home, how should he look into his parents or

child eyes? Similarly, he has to look into God's eyes, when he goes to church, because church is his home. When one thinks about everyone instead of only himself, but can't do much for everyone, he goes to church and prays, and church is home for all. Yes, with a thousand gold you can build ten houses instead of one church, but this will solve the problem of living conditions for ten families, but the way of life is the most important".

"Wouldn't it be possible for each person to decide for himself how to live? If someone perceives church only as a structure, he does not go there to pray, and it does not prevent him from living properly."

"Perhaps, but a person does not live only for himself, does he? You have to think about the rest. Imagine when someone is sick, and you can't help them in any way. You go to church and pray for him. You pray for someone who is in trouble, and you can't reach out, who is on the way somewhere far away from you and you can't show him the direction. Think about people: imagine when there is a war. What should the elderly, mothers and sisters of soldiers do? They go to church and pray. And the problem is not whether the prayer will reach them or not, whether God will hear you or not, whether he will fulfill your request or not. They simply need to pray. Of course, you can also pray at home, at the holy icons, or outside, looking at the sky, or simply with your eyes closed. But a person is closer to God when he is at church."

"Faith is needed only for people to live without evil. Not to fear that God will punish them for them being evil, but simply to know that God is kind, therefore the right thing to do is to be kind."

"All bad things in the world are based on evil. On hunger, poverty, wars. One must realize why to be kind. One should also realize that God is kind, even though there is hunger, poverty and wars in the world. You don't need to fear God, you need to get close to him. And a person feels closer to God when he goes to church. That's why let there be many churches."

And on the way back, Ksyusha was impressed by the following fragments from the conversation of the new generation.

"Even those states that are real defenders of human rights and freedom, largely contradict themselves. After all, a person is not only a citizen of the USA, Canada or one of the states of the European Union. A citizen of Cambodia, Botswana or Kyrgyzstan is also a person. Only, the latter's rights and freedoms will end the moment he tries to cross the border of one of the states that is a real supporter of human rights and freedoms. For instance, a Kyrgyz who has never been interested in politics and is not aware of what is happening in the world, has decided to travel around that world, which belongs to him as much as, say, to a Frenchman. And here he leaves Kyrgyzstan, crosses Kazakhstan, then Russia and Ukraine and reaches the border of Slovakia. And this is where his human rights and freedoms end, because it turns out that this part of the world is closed for him. Or a Cambodian gets on his small motorboat, crosses the Gulf of Siam, then the South China Sea, sails through the Indian and Pacific oceans and reaches the shores of the USA. And this is where his human rights and freedoms end."

"When will the time of justice come? For all. For all nations and every nation individually. For all people and each person. And what should each and every one do about it, or at least those who think about it? When will wars, violence and cruelty disappear from the world? And what should people do about it?"

"Isn't it possible to talk to each other in a simple, human language that will be understandable to all the people of the world? Ladies and gentlemen - heads of states, that's enough, let's finally stop our steps towards destroying the world and get down to building the world. You don't have to delve into what and who is preventing it. It's very simple and you don't need it. Your principal agreement, handshake, honest speech, mutual trust and faith are the only important things. Because you are the actual leaders of the world, you have people behind you, and people will certainly encourage you, because people need a carefree life, which can be ensured if the resources of the planet Earth are

used not to destroy the world, but to build, to live peacefully, untroubled and just with each other. Take that step, and people, the population of the planet Earth, will stand behind you.”

Arriving home and recalling what she saw and heard, Ksyusha was thinking that she should do everything possible, as well as impossible, so that these wonderful youth can live and create in their country and serve as an example to others.

EXCERPTS FROM CONVERSATIONS OF THE NEW GENERATION 2

Since Kirakos and Petros didn't trust each other, and both had strong grounds for that, they decided to spend the free time together. They each took a room in one of the luxury hotels in Tsaghkadzor and decided to relax. Of course, each of them had a different idea for relaxation. The first evening, Petros won the “Jackpot” of about five million drams in the nearby casino and Kirakos received diamond cufflinks and a gold watch from two Russian women the next morning as a recollection of the night spent together. The gifts that the ladies had bought in Yerevan were intended for their husbands, but they didn't reach the owners.

In the evening of the second day, when the companions were celebrating their success at the restaurant, Kirakos said.

- Maybe it's not worth going back to Yerevan, we are well fed here as well.

Petros, not familiar with Soviet animated cartoons, however, disagreed with his companion and pointed out to the steak in front of him.

- On the contrary, they feed very bad here. The menu says veal. Does this look like veal?

- The best steak should be beef instead of veal. By the way, the calf should be raised with special methods: it should be fed with selected grain, you should treat it beer sometimes, do daily massage sessions and, necessarily, with classical music.

“Why classical?” asked Petros.

But Kirakos didn't have time to answer, because at that moment there was a fuss at the next table. Several young men of twenty-twenty-five were arguing with the waiter. One of them, a snorter with a hairy forehead, thin and unshaven face, yelled at the waiter:

- I smoke wherever I want, are there any questions?

-But you can't smoke here, - the waiter explained calmly.

-It may not be allowed to you, but it's allowed to me. Any questions? - the snorter continued in the same tone.

Another young man, with the same haircut and snout, demonstratively blew cigarette smoke in the waiter's face and said:

- You were told to bring an ashtray.

-We don't have ashtrays, - the waiter refused.

Here the third young man intervened, who seemed to be borne by the same mother as the other two.

-You will get this bottle on your head- he shouted.

The waiter wanted to say something, but probably regretted it, turned and left. The snotters, pleased with themselves, began to giggle and filled the glasses with vodka. But their joy did not last long. Soon, a lady in black who appeared to be the manager of the restaurant approached and said something in a low voice. The first snorter answered her:

- I don't care whose restaurant this is. Do you know who we are?

The lady in black shook her head.

-Well, if you don't know, then go and find it out, - said the second snorter.

Realizing that her mission would also fail, the manager also left and stood in the far corner of the hall. The snotters started to giggle again. A family sitting at one of the neighboring tables left dinner

halfway through and went away.

-Maybe we should go too, - Petros said a little anxiously, - I don't like this place.

-Let's just look and listen, - Kirakos disagreed, -aren't you curious about what the new generation is like?

And the companions continued observing the new generation and listening to the fragments of their conversation.

-Do you know the owner of this place? - asked one of the snotters.

-I don't care, -said the other one, -if he sees my car's plate numbers, he will be afraid to even approach it.

-They think this is Europe, - said the third one, -how come you can't smoke?

- This country is a real hellhole, - concluded the fourth, - God damn...

He dropped the cigarette under the table and put it out.

A man sitting at one of the tables, who was quietly dining with a woman, got up and approached the snotters. He didn't say anything, just grabbed one of them by the ear and stuck his head into the tomato salad. The second one tried to jump but was elbowed in the jaw and fell to the ground. The other two didn't make a move and froze in fear.

-Get under the table, - said the man in such a calm tone, as if he had come to ask for salt.

The snotters looked at him and then at each other in surprise.

-let's get to know each other, bro? - said the first snotter, taking his head out of the salad and wiping his face with his sleeve, -I'm...

But before he could say who he was, the man grabbed him by the ear again and pushed him under the table. Two of the other three smartly followed their friend. The third jumped up sharply and wanted to run away but couldn't. The man cut in front of him, grabbed him by the collar and dragged him under the table. Then he turned to the manager of the restaurant:

- Call the police and let them take these away.

About fifteen to twenty minutes passed before the police arrived. All that time, the snotters kept sitting under the table, not daring to stick their heads out.

The guests of restaurant did not know what happened next, they only saw that the police took away both the snotters and the man who restrained them.

WHAT'S NEW IN POLITICS?

The honorable oligarch arrived in Yerevan from Dubai and immediately left for Moscow to attend the birthday party of another oligarch. Kirakos was informed about this by Jackal.

They met at the Cascade Cafe. Petros and Ksyusha were sitting at the next table.

-But the birthday party was in Dubai, wasn't it? - Kirakos wondered.

-This is another oligarch, - explained Jackal, -I was also invited, but I couldn't go.

-How long will this one last? -asked Kirakos.

-The same, -answered Jackal.

-Seven days and nights?

-At least! What's the reason you want to meet him, if it's not a secret?

-Our American friend has a business with him, -Kirakos pointed at Petros sitting at the next table, - but the business is very important.

Jackal looked at Petros and saw Ksyusha sitting next to him and made an exclamation, something like this: "Wooooow" ...

-Who is that beauty? -he asked coming back to senses.

-A very important figure of global scale, - Kirakos improvised and immediately changed the topic, - by the way, what's new in politics?

-What do you mean? -the Member of Parliament got so much surprised as if he never had anything in common with politics.

-I mean what will be the future of this country? -Kirakos explained.

-How do I know, what it will be? - Jackal exclaimed. – he has let us all so down to know what will be.

-Who? This one?

-No, the other one.

-He?

-Yeah, plus your Moscow.

-What's Moscow got to do with it?

-Like what? Nothing happens without Moscow.

-So, now what will be?

-What will be? Well, they are after everyone. They want to put everyone in jail. Don't think it is about me, I've nothing to do with it.

-They say that they are fighting against forgery and bribery.

- Man, what a kick! Will there be an end to bribery in this country, will there be an election without fraud? We were living peacefully...

- And you 'an't get along with them?

- They will have to try getting along with us one day. Do you honestly think that these people will not rig the election, or take a bribe? So, who is that girl?

-Then, what should we do? - asked Kirakos changing the topic of the girl again.

-Nothing is needed, we have to wait and see.

-But you said that they are after you. Want to put you in jail.

-The one who doesn't pay will go to jail. But the one who pays will be free. Don't think I'm talking about myself; I've nothing to do with all this.

-Are there many?

-Whoever there are. All these wants is money. They say: you have taken it now bring it all back. One will pay five, the other ten, another one fifty. Don't think I'm talking about myself; I've nothing to do with all this.

-Who do they pay to?

-You'd better ask that question to the one who pays, I've nothing to do with it.

Jackal was silent for some time, and then he thought of something and realized that he had probably crossed the line and said:

-Do you know these people?

Kirakos was expecting that question.

-What do I have to do with them? I live in Russia.

-And how is the situation with Russians? They say that something like this can happen there.

-No way.

-Why not?

-The Russian people adore two things: His Highness the Tsar and His Highness Vodka. God save the Tsar and may God give vodka.

HOW KIRAKOS DECIDED TO GROW A BEARD

When the companions again accidentally and already for the second time appeared in the pub where they met Ksyusha two months before, it turned out that it was closed for some event. Of course, the pub employees remembered the client in a white cap, who had ordered exactly one dozen of champagne during the previous visit, but still, they said that the party was by invitation

only.

- You have just upset the customer, who is most welcome in the best clubs in Paris, Monte Carlo and Saint-Tropez, - said Kirakos with an extremely serious look, - I have to contact the entertainment commissioner of the United Nations.

But that didn't help either, the waitress stood there with a guilty, red face and kept repeating that there was nothing she could do. Last time, Kirakos left her as much tips as all the customers together, in one day.

The companions were about to leave when a young man approached and addressed the waitress in a commanding tone.

- Wait, these are our folk.

Kirakos did not understand what was going on and whose folk were they and looked at the young man in surprise.

- These people walked with us, - the latter continued, - you must know that.

The poor waitress blushed even more and now she didn't know what to do.

- I... I didn't know... - she mumbled, - I will add a table now.

-There is no need for a table, they will sit next to me, - said the man, putting his arm on Kirakos' shoulder and asked: - You probably didn't remember me?

- No, - Kirakos said with puzzlement, then he thought for a moment and added, - but that does not prevent me from accepting your invitation.

-A couple of months ago, on the road to Dilijan, you stopped by us and gave us chocolates, - the young man reminded.

- Well, of course, Kirakos recalled, - you are one of those brave young men...

- Yes, - the brave young man agreed without a hint of modesty, - do you remember? You said: continue your struggle, and you I am sure that one day we will win. The day have come and we have won.

-And now you are celebrating the victory. Good for you! - said Kirakos, sitting next to the young man, then turned to the waitress, -bring us champagne.

- No, we celebrated our victory a long time ago and for many times, - explained the young man, - now we are celebrating something else. The Prime Minister has offered me a position.

-Oh, well - Kirakos exclaimed, -and what position?

But the young man did not have time to answer, because at that moment some foreigners entered the hall, and he approached to meet them.

-Maybe we should leave, - Petros whispered in Kirakos's ear.

- Are you nuts? - Kirakos whispered in response, - the future government of the country is gathered here.

- Will these stubbly young people be in the government?

- Only them. Moreover, those who are shaved will have no place there. Except, perhaps, women.

The young man who had got the position, whom, to be honest, Kirakos never remembered, escorted his foreign guests to another table and sat down next to them. A little later, the waitress brought the champagne Kirakos had ordered and said in a guilty tone:

- Sorry, I didn't know that you walked too. You have no beard.

-Here is the confirmation of my words, - said Kirakos to Petros, then turned to the waitress, -you must know the participants of the revolution.

Then he opened the champagne and treated the tablemates. One of them, a smiling young lady, asked:

- Are you one of those who had provided the financial support? I haven't seen you during the walking.

-It is not important, - Kirakos said modestly, -the important thing is that we have reached our goal.

By the way, who are these foreigners?

- They are from the State Department of the United States of America.

- Now I understand why this party is private, - Kirakos whispered again in Petros's ear and added, - you were right, we'd better go. If this girl asks a few more questions, we can get caught.

And when they left the pub, he decisively said:

- I 'm gonna grow beard starting tomorrow.

KSYUSHA DIDN'T DO THAT

The oligarch, whom the colleagues were waiting for so impatiently, and who had first left for Dubai, then from Dubai to Moscow, now left Moscow and headed to an unknown destination.

Kirakos was already anxious. If he had known for sure that the bust of Lenin was with the oligarch, he would not have been so concerned because he already knew what he would do in that case.

And the plan was as follows: Jackal introduces Kirakos to the oligarch, and Kirakos invites him to hunt. The fact is that the respected oligarch was a great lover of hunting, and Kirakos had an acquaintance in Barnaul, who was one of the most famous huntsmen in Altai region and all of Russia. His name was Petya, his wife's name was Dusya. The latter hosted Kirakos for several times when her husband was away hunting. One day, while returning from hunting untimely and unexpectedly, Petya was about to find Dusya with Kirakos, but he didn't. Instead, the huntsman and Kirakos drank all night and became so close that Petya promised to organize an unlimited number of boar and deer hunting any time.

The oligarch would hardly refuse such an offer, and in parallel, just by the way, Kirakos would ask for the statue of Lenin, and the oligarch would hardly refuse.

In short, this was the plan, but the oligarch stubbornly would not return.

And Kirakos decided to wait a little longer.

Petros's plan was different. He had his own plan as well, which he kept secret from Kirakos. Petros had spoken to his grandmother and found out that the oligarch's father and his grandfather had once been close. Now he decided to meet the oligarch somehow, tell him the whole truth about the sculpture and offer to share the gold. He hoped that the oligarch would be so generous that he would give everything to him, considering the closeness of the ancestors and the fact that two million is hardly big money for him. And if he doesn't agree to give the whole, sharing would also be beneficial; anyway, he had to give half of it to Kirakos and Ksyusha. This was also Petros's plan, but again he had to wait for the return of the oligarch.

But what about Ksyusha? As it turned out, Ksyusha was the closest to success.

One day, while having dinner in one of Yerevan's elite restaurants, her friend Lilith introduced her to a boy who turned out to be the son of an oligarch. Everything happened so unexpectedly that Ksyusha even thought that Lilith was aware of their business, and all this was well organized.

The oligarch's son, who was barely twenty years old, surely had not seen such a beautiful woman in his life of twenty years. At least, that's what his look indicated. He made four proposals to Ksyusha in a one-minute time:

- I'm flying to the Maldives in an hour, join me, would you?

This was the first proposal.

- In the evening, I organized a "party" at my summer house in Sevan, you are invited.

This was the second.

- Abraham Russo is singing in my restaurant tomorrow; I can introduce you to him.

This was the third.

- I have bought a new "Lamborghini", let me give you a ride around the town.

This is the fourth one.

Ksyusha gave all four offers a big smile, saying in her mind: I've been to the Maldives at least for five times, I'm tired of "partying" to death, I hate Abraham Russo, and I just got rid of my Maserati. And again, she added in her mind: but you can give me the Lenin's head.

Of course, Ksyusha could do it. She could agree to one of the proposals of the oligarch's son, capture his heart in a minute and ask for the bust of Lenin. She could even take the bust and not say anything to Kirakos and Petros.

But Ksyusha didn't do that.

CAN WE TALK IN PRIVATE?

In mid-July 2018, it was so hot in Yerevan that even the air conditioners of buildings and cars stopped functioning. The sun decided to warm up the people who made the revolution pretty good, but it seemed that something didn't work out, and instead of getting warm, people were burning. Of course, the former authorities were behind all this menace.

During the daytime, the streets were almost devoid of cars, the sidewalks were devoid of passers-by, and the air was devoid of oxygen. And in the evening, the swelter started, and people did not understand where the evening winds, special to Yerevan, had disappeared. Of course, the former authorities also ate it.

- Why do you need four air conditioners, - Kirakos asked Ksyusha, -and so big? They won't fit in the trunk of my car.

Four air conditioners were bought by Ksyusha for "Land of Men" studio. On that day, the young people had a performance in the same abandoned building in one of the suburbs of Yerevan, which used to be a factory or something similar, where they accommodated their theater. It needed cooling. The area was not renovated, the floor and walls were made of concrete, the windows had cellophane instead of glass, and the lighting was provided by the powerful lamps hanging from the ceiling, that even more arousing the unbearable swelter.

Seeing how the faithful audience was sweating during the previous performance, Ksyusha decided to buy air conditioners and so she did. Four air conditioners in total, which cost quite a lot and were indeed so big in sizes that they might not fit in the trunk.

- Can you fold the back seats? - asked Ksyusha.

-What, - Kirakos exclaimed, -this is a Range Rover, not a van.

- In that case, we will put two in the salon, - Ksyusha said, - I hope the Range Rover will not be damaged.

- For your sake, I'm ready to damage not only the car, but also myself, - Kirakos boldly announced, carefully placing the giant boxes on the expensive leather seats, - but you didn't say what these air conditioners are for and where we're taking them.

- It's a long story.

- And will you have dinner with me in the evening?

- No, but instead in the evening I will invite you to watch a play.

- What play?

- "Liar hunter".

The performance to be staged that evening by the "Land of Men" studio was really titled "Hunter the Liar". However, it had little in common with the fairy tale of the great writer from Lori. It didn't tell though how Hadi and the other five or six people went hunting one day with swords and guns, but how Nikol and the others started walking without swords and guns. And it ended almost like Tumanyan's fairy tale. "Hungry people, they came over, they ate and ate! Neither the eyes saw anything, nor the mouths entered a thing" ...

Only the performance was not supposed to take place on that day. Nor were the air conditioners to

serve their purpose.

When Kirakos and Ksyusha entered the gates of the factory, they saw the same Range Rover as theirs, only a black one. A squabby man was leaning against the car, talking to two others. His red, unsightly cheeks went down to his neck. The young people of the studio were gathered not far in the shade of a tree and were arguing with the police.

- What is happening here? - Kirakos turned to Ksyusha.

-I don't know yet, - said Ksyusha and got out of the car.

Seeing the second Range Rover, the police were confused for a moment, not knowing who it came for. The squabby also got confused and said something to the people standing next to him.

Young people greeted Ksyusha enthusiastically.

-Today's performance will not take place, - one of them said with a smile,-as well as all other performances.

-What happened? - asked Ksyusha.

- They demand that we vacate the area.

- Who demands it?

-This man, - the young man pointed to the squabby.

- Who is he?

The young man didn't have time to answer because one of the policemen intervened, a tall, thin guy with major's straps.

- He is the owner of this area. Can you tell me who you are?

- The owner? - laughed Ksyusha - is he a king or an emperor?

-You can also say that way, - the policeman agreed after thinking for a moment.

-And who are you? - continued Ksyusha, -his aide-de-camp?

Here the policeman, who still did not understand who he was dealing with, refrained from answering and looked desperately in the direction of the squabby. However, the latter was no less uncertain because he also had no idea who this beauty was. However, overcoming the uncertainty, he came forward.

-Do we know each other? - he asked Ksyusha.

- It's a strange question, - Ksyusha laughed, - if we knew each other, you wouldn't have asked such a question.

The squabby apparently did not understand what the girl meant and again fell into vagueness.

- I want to say, - he mumbled, - I want to say... Are you perhaps from the new authorities? I have a lot of respect for Nicol. I transferred some money from Russia...

-Very well, but...-Ksyusha tried to interrupt him.

- And after the revolution, I returned, and I want to operate this factory. I came back because...

-Just a minute...

But the squabby wouldn't listen.

- I believe in the new government. Nobody was allowed to work before, but now everything has changed. I have come to Armenia for a couple of times, I wanted to sell this, but there were no buyers, because they didn't let anyone work. Now the situation has changed.

- I didn't get you, - Ksyusha finally managed to interrupt him, - now you want to sell this factory or operate it?

Here the squabby got finally confused, wiped his sweaty red forehead with a handkerchief and mumbled:

- Well, how can I say it... If they let me...

-Okay, that's your business, - Ksyusha reassured him, -now you want these young people leave the area?"

- But who asked them to organize shows here? This is my property. By the way, they were mocking

Mr. Prime Minister. I saw it with my own eyes.

Here one of the young men intervened:

- A year ago, when we thought of locating our studio here, we talked to the regional authority and got his consent. We cleaned this area of garbage, restored the electricity supply and pay the guard every month for already a year. More than that, we have spent a lot of money to furnish the theater. But with all this, we understand that this is not our territory and we do not have a contract. And we are ready to leave, we just ask you to give us time, at least for the next two performances, because we have already sold the tickets and we cannot move to another place so quickly.

-And what does this gentleman say? - Ksyusha asked, looking at the young man.

- He demands to vacate the premises right now.

Ksyusha turned to the squabby:

- Can't you give these young people two weeks?

The squabby thought for a moment and said:

- Well, if the new authorities intervene in it, I certainly don't mind... I just repeat that they were mocking Mr. Prime Minister. I saw it with my own eyes. Pity, I didn't take a picture.

-We have nothing to do with the new authorities, - Ksyusha said with a proud smile, -and whatever these young people are doing is not mockery, but humor.

- Now what should we do? - the policeman couldn't stand it and turned to the squabby, - how long can we stand in this heat?

- What are you going to do, just arrest them, - for some reason, the squabby got excited.

Kirakos, who was following the whole conversation from the car, after hearing the last sentence, got out and approached the owner of the area.

- Hello, - he said in a very polite tone, - can I ask a few questions?

The squabby was confused again. He looked at the respectable appearance of Kirakos and began to smile again.

- You... We... Do we know each other?

- It's not important, - Kirakos came closer to him, - do you want me to ask the questions in front of everyone or separately?

-You... I, - continued the squabby, -what questions?

- So, in the presence of everyone, very good, - continued Kirakos calmly, - and the questions are as follows: when did you privatize this factory? How did you privatize it? What did you do with the machine-tools and the remaining equipment?

-I... - the squabby wanted to say something, but Kirakos didn't allow him.

- You have no answer. But I will answer for you. So, you privatized this place in the early nineties and you did it illegally. You sold the machine-tools and all the equipment of the factory, and then you went to Russia and started a business with the money generated from the sale. And now you returned, and you want to sell the factory instead of reoperating it.

Here he suddenly stopped and waited for a moment.

The police and everyone were looking at Kirakos in surprise. Except for Ksyusha. The latter was laughing.

After a short pause, Kirakos already turned to the police:

- Are the new authorities aware of this?

The major scratched his head.

- It is not our business. We received an alert that the territory was illegally occupied, and we came to clarify. And what happened in the nineties is none of our concern.

-We haven't seized anything, - one of the young men said excitedly, -we're just asking them to give us two weeks, is it that difficult?..

Kirakos looked down at the squabby.

- Well, what do you say? Maybe we should ask the police to leave? I'm sure they have more important things to do.

- Yes, I have no complaints, - announced the owner of the area, then looked at Kirakos and added in a low voice, - can we talk separately?

The air conditioners, however, did not serve their purpose. It is true that the squabby owner of the area no longer insisted that the studio urgently left the area, but the young people did not want to stay there any longer. They decided to give the last performance that day and move to another area, which of course still had to be found.

And at the moment when "Hunter the Liar" was being performed in the abandoned factory, Kirakos was having dinner with the squabby in a restaurant at the latter's invitation and was explaining in detail how much inconvenience he caused to the new generation today. As a result, the squabby had to compensate the money spent on air conditioners.

ABOUT WHO PAID UTMOST

The oligarch, at who, according to the latest information, the bust of Vladimir Ilyich had found refuge with, returned to Armenia in early August.

His long absence many related to the changes taking place in the country. Recently, there were even rumors that they wanted to arrest the oligarch, and that was the reason why he had left Armenia. They said that he was at the top of the "blacklist of ex's".

Kirakos managed to get to know that list. It was presented it to him verbally by Jackal, after which Kirakos let out a long whistle. The list contained the names of people who, as Kirakos acquaintance, a skinny major would say, felt like they owned country just two months ago.

- And what will happen to those people? - Kirakos asked.

- What do you think? - replied Jackal, - they will pay off and enjoy until the time for these comes to an end.

-Whose end?

-For these.

-And who should they pay to?

-To these.

Then Jackal explained what was going on. According to him, the "KGB" was dealing with a couple of dozen people in the list, instructed by the "number one guy". An individual approach was applied to each and everyone. Calculations were made in advance to find out how much these people had "taken" over the years. And according to those calculations, numbers were "set" on the people in the list. Some had to pay "ten dibs", others - "thirty dibs", and there were also those who were "set" on over "one hundred dibs". Most of the people on the list didn't take it seriously at first and refused to "pay off". However, specific actions of the "KGB" followed, and people realized that it was better to pay the price of their freedom, of course, after bargaining. As a result, those who were supposed to pay "twenty dibs" paid "ten dibs", who were supposed to pay "fifty dibs", paid "thirty dibs", those who were supposed to pay "two hundred dibs", paid "one hundred". And they were left alone.

- And how much did our oligarch "pay off"? - asked Kirakos.

- Fifty dibs, - assured Jackal.

-And where does the collected money go? - Kirakos continued to inquire.

-Where else should it go? - Jackal grinned.

The fact that the representative of the former system spoke so boldly surprised Kirakos at first. But then he understood the reason. Of course, the most important thing for Jackal was being out of the "blacklist". And he was sure that he couldn't have been there, at least at this stage. Its caliber was small enough, and the volume he had "taken" was not enough to be in the focus of the new

authorities. And if the stages continued, again then his turn would hardly come, because there were so many big and medium fish in the line, that before reaching the small ones like him, the new government's term would probably end.

-So, our oligarch has absolutely no problem now, -asked Kirakos.

-Not a bit, -assured Jackal, -he has solved his problems.

-I want to meet him, -said Kirakos.

-That can be arranged. Hopefully you haven't forgotten the favor I asked for, -asked Jackal.

-Of course, I haven't, -answered Kirakos.

LIGHT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE A REVOLUTION

What the member of parliament, being the prominent representative of the previous system meant while hinting that the "paid off" money was not going to the state budget, but to some people's pockets, probably did not match the reality. It was possible that the money that had been stolen from the people and the state over the years, and then partially returned, was not pocketed by the new authorities. But even so, where is the promise of the new authorities that from now on there will be no deals behind people's backs, that everything will be done openly and transparently? Where's the guarantee that the process would not cease to be honest one day and that the authorities would resist the temptation to the end? Besides, did the people give their consent to the new authorities to make a deal with those who robbed them? And finally, where did the law and legality go? Is this how the legal state is built?

Of course, the authorities could say that there is no deal, or somehow justify the lack of transparency. Except, that's not the way.

Even if everything was too dark before, there was no light now either. Meanwhile, light is the most important thing for the people who have made the revolution. When the authorities turn it off and start acting out of sight and the people don't see anything, when the authorities hide in their cabinets and act covertly, and people don't hear anything, it still doesn't mean that people don't know anything. Not at all! Even if people don't see or hear what is happening behind their backs, they always have that unknown sense, which is called premonition. And that feeling can never be ignored.

But there were also some things to see and hear. Not everything can be hidden by authorities.

People who come to power on people's shoulders, have no right to live better than ordinary people, than the average statistical person. No security consideration, no any protocol can justify cutting off the people who came to power from the lap of people. Living behind seven walls, driving around in armored cars with sidekicks and make those sidekicks open their car doors and hold their coats...

One day, people will definitely match the visible and invisible and will definitely understand that they were cheated. And disappointment of people will be terrible. Not from the authorities, though. They will feel disgust and hatred towards them, as always. People will be disappointed with themselves.

And the deepest disappointment will be the one of the new generation. Of those teenagers and youth who wanted to make their country better.

HOW KIRAKOS BECAME PETROS'S UNCLE

While the Jackal was trying to organize the meeting with the oligarch, the companions had some sort of a working meeting at Kirakos's balcony to discuss how to be presented at that meeting and what to talk to the oligarch about. When Petros presented his version and announced that the

oligarch's father and his grandfather had been friends, Kirakos's eyes began shining. He jumped up and said:

-Why didn't you tell me earlier?

-I found this out yesterday from my grandmother, - Petros lied.

-How close were they, ideological-communist or bar-restaurant? -Ksyusha teased.

-Grandma said that he often used to be a frequent guest at our summer house, -Petros lied again, because his grandmother told him not "often", but "for a couple of times".

-Ok, then, - said Kirakos, who got up from his place and was walking in the balcony, -the first thing that would cross the respectable oligarch's mind after hearing your grandfather's name will be that you'd come to ask for either work or money. You won't deny that, let him think like that for a while...

-Maybe we should really ask for money from him, -Ksyuha laughed, - what is two million for him? But Kirakos was not listening to her.

-You have to look very emotional, -he continued turning to Petros, -tell him how close you were with your grandfather, how he had read fairytales for you on his lap or took you to the park on his shoulders...

-But I've never seen him, -said Petros suddenly.

-Who haven't you seen? -Kirakos got surprised.

-My grandfather.

-What do you mean? -Kirakos got confused, then he thought for a while and continued,-Of course you have seen him, more than that, you were very close with him.

-You grew up on his lap and shoulders, -interfered Ksyusha who was laughing the whole time.

-Long story short, we need an extremely emotional prelude with your grandpa's death as a culmination. Then you'll tell him what horrid life you had while living abroad, until you got rich.

-Rich? -now it was Petros's turn to get surprised.

-Yeah, got rich, -Kirakos assured, -oligarchs don't like losers.

-I completely agree on this, -Ksyusha interfered again.

-But...-Petros wanted to say something, but Kirakos didn't let him do it.

-The sweet childhood spent with your grandfather is followed by the rough adolescence on foreign shores, then the stormy years of youth, during which you are becoming a successful businessman.

-And what is that business?

-We will think of that.

- As a result of your stormy youth years, you founded a swindler's club that successfully operated all along the West and East coasts of the United States, - said Ksyusha.

But Kirakos seemed to be very serious. He ignored Ksyusha's another sarcasm and repeated:

-We will think of the business later. Now back to the most important issue.

-The most important? -Ksyusha laughed,-and what's the most important thing?

-Lenin's bust.

-Oh, I thought you have forgotten about it and concentrated on making friends with the oligarch. Kirakos stopped walking and sat down at the table.

- The most important thing should be tackled very carefully. And here it's me to do it. I assure you; we will leave the meeting with the oligarch with the bust of Vladimir Ilyich in our hands.

- Wait, - Petros was surprised, - do you want to come with me too?

-What did you think? Should I leave you alone at this responsible moment?

- And who will be introduce you as?

- I haven't thought about it yet.

-Uncle, - Ksyusha suddenly exclaimed, -say you are his uncle.

HOW KIRKOS DIDN'T BECOME PETROS'S UNCLE, BUT INSTEAD, THE COMPANIONS SAW
LENIN'S BUST FOR THE FIRST TIME

However, two more weeks had to pass before the long-awaited meeting took place. The oligarch received the companions on Sunday morning in his house, or rather in the garage, where he was standing in front of a giant SUV with the body open and examining the engine with such a look that one could think that something had broken down there, and he was going to repair. But of course, it was not like that, the engine was completely new, as well as the car - six hundred horsepower Lamborghini Urus, with market value of four hundred thousand dollars. There were other cars in the garage: several Mercedeses, a Bentley and another sporty Lamborghini, and all black.

-How many of these are there in Armenia? -the oligarch asked the man standing next to him, who was probably his bodyguard.

- Not a single one, - answered the latter, - only you have it.

The oligarch seemed to like the answer; he carefully closed the hood of the engine, started stroking it, then went to the car door and opened it. However, before going to inspect the interior of the car, he noticed the guests and said:

- Sit down, I will come now.

Jackal, Kirakos and Petros looked left and right in confusion because there was no place to sit in the garage.

- Hello, - the Jackal had the courage to speak, - what a nice car! Have you just got it?

But the oligarch did not listen, because he was already seated in the car salon. Instead, the bodyguard answered.

- We ordered it a few months ago, they brought it today. It is the first one in Armenia.

- And...

Jackal wanted to ask another question but did not manage to. The oligarch started the car engine and a loud howl was heard. Then he lowered the window and said:

- Sit down, I'll come a little later.

The Lamborghini howled louder and pulled away sharply.

This time, the guests had to find a place to sit, because "after a while" stretched long enough. They settled in one of the garden pavilions and waited for about half an hour. However, the oligarch never appeared. The Lamborghini was returned to the garage by the bodyguard, who then approached the pavilion and said in surprise:

- Why are you sitting here?

-We are waiting, - whispered Jackal.

-Who are you waiting for?

- Him.

- Haven't you just seen him?

Jackal was confused and didn't know what to say. Petros spoke instead:

- Please tell him that Petros Grigorich's grandson has come.

The bodyguard examined the guests carefully, trying to understand which of them was the grandson of Petros Grigorich, and who was Petros Grigorich in general, but he did not understand anything and had to throw:

- Ok, I'll pass it on, but you can't see him now. He has guests from Cuba, very important guests.

When he left, Jackal spread his hands and said:

-What should I do?

-What guests from Cuba? - asked Kirakos.

- He often goes to Cuba. He has some business and colleagues there. As far as I know, he also knows Fidel's brother, Raul Castro.

-The Cuban communists in Armenia, - Kirakos said under his breath, - it is symbolic...

-Let's go, we'll come another time, - suggested Jackal.

- No, we will wait - Petros decided for everyone.

They moved to the entrance of the mansion and waited for another hour.

An hour later, the oligarch and a short Cuban in a wide-brimmed straw hat came out of the mansion's door hugging each other. The Cuban was followed by a young man with glasses who was probably his assistant or secretary. The latter was tightly hugging the bust of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin with both hands.

HOW KSYUSHA DIDN'T ALLOW THE COMPANIONS TO STEAL

Esteban Ramírez-Núñez was sitting in the lobby of one of Yerevan's five-star hotels, talking on phone. It was seven o'clock in the evening. Earlier, after the failure of Kirakos and Petros in the morning, when the coveted bust was snatched from under their noses, the companions started panicking. Kirakos tried to speak directly to the oligarch, but the bodyguards did not allow him. Jackal could not help either. The oligarch, for some reason, got angry with him and kicked him out, cursing in front of everyone. Petros run after the oligarch, shouting that he was Petros Grigorich's grandson. Come next Sunday, said the oligarch and left.

But another Sunday would be too late.

The companions hastily left the mansion territory, got into their car parked at the entrance and tried to catch up with the Cuban. Fortunately, they got them, found out which hotel he was staying at, and then gathered as much information as possible about his visit.

Not much was known about Esteban Ramírez-Núñez personally. They only found out that he had held high positions in the Cuban government for many years, now occupies a high position in the Central Committee of the Communist Party and has close relations with Raul Castro. He arrived in Armenia on Saturday, August 11 and will leave on Sunday, August 12. That is, on that day.

-If we do not take urgent steps, the fifty kilograms of gold in the image of the communists' idol may find its final resting place in the last communist state of the world, -Kirakos told his companions.

They were sitting in Kirakos's car, in front of the hotel where the Cuban lived.

-Cuba is not the only communist state, - Petros pointed out to Kirakos, -communists also rule in China, Vietnam and Laos.

- How do you know so much?

-Don't forget that I have studied international relations at Santa Barbara University, -lied Petros.

At that moment, the Cuban in a wide-brimmed hat, accompanied by the secretary, came out of the hotel and approached the car waiting at the entrance; it had a state representation plate on it.

-The bust is not in their hands, - said Petros, -it's probably in his room. What shall we do?

-I hope you are not planning a robbery, - Ksyusha asked restlessly.

-Of course, I'm not an expert in such matters, but there seems to be no other way out,-Petros grumbled.

- If you finally stop at that option, I have to say goodbye to you, - Ksyusha took her bag and opened the car door.

-Wait, -Kirakos suddenly exclaimed, -I have a better idea.

Petros and Ksyusha looked at him skeptically.

- I have a better idea, - Kirakos repeated, -what if we talk to the Cuban?

-What should we talk about? -asked Petros.

- First you will introduce yourself, tell him about your communist grandfather, tell that the bust belongs to you and ask to return it.

- What if he sends me to hell?

- It will most likely be so. But then you will unlock the secret of the bust. You will say that we'll let customs know and he won't be able to take the sculpture out of the country.

Ksyusha closed the car door.

-Exactly, we have;t thought about this,- he said, -how can fifty kilograms of gold pass through the customs office? Especially when you don't know it's gold.

-Well, so we stop at this option. - Kirakos said, starting the car's engine to keep the Cuban in sight anyway.

The Cuban stayed in sight till the government building, from where the car with representative plate entered through special employee's gates.

Esteban Ramírez-Núñez spent about half an hour here, after which he left for Etchmiadzin. Again, his car entered the territory of the cathedral through a special entrance.

-Assumably the Cuban is treated seriously here, if he is received in the government and Etchmiadzin on Sunday, - Kirakos said.

-Is it good or bad? - Ksyusha asked.

- Of course, it's bad. That means he won't have a problem taking the bust out.

- So, the second part of our plan won't work? - Petros asked.

- I guess not.

- We are short of time, - Petros anxiously looked at the watches, - we have to go back to the hotel and find some way to enter his room. Otherwise, you can forget about gold forever.

-Only without me, - said Ksyusha.

- Let's get it straight, - Petros turned to Ksyusha, - this is not a theft. The bust belongs to me, and it was taken from me against my will.

- First of all, the bust doesn't belong to you, - explained Ksyusha, - second, even if it did, what you're planning to do is still a theft, and if you get caught, no one will be interested in your tales.

-You're talking in plural form for nothing, - Kirakos interjected, -I'm not going to steal, moreover, to get caught.

-Do you understand that fifty kilograms of gold are being snatched from under our noses, - Petros said, -and you don't want to do anything about it.

-You don't have to despair, - Kirakos comforted him, -I'm sure that Ksyusha will do everything right.

- Ksyusha?

- Yes, Ksyusha, - Kirakos repeated and looked back, - you are our last hope.

THE LAST HOPE

Esteban Ramírez-Núñez was already finishing his dinner at the hotel restaurant when Petros and Ksyusha approached him.

-Sorry to bother you, - Ksyusha said in Spanish, -we have an important business with you. Can we meet at the bar when you finish dinner?

With nodding his head, the Cuban made it clear to the secretary who popped out from nowhere directly above his head that everything was in order, and then he took aside the tablecloth from his knees, stood up and extended his hand to Ksyusha.

- Esteban Ramírez-Núñez, - he introduced himself, -I didn't know that the Armenian women are so beautiful.

He was an old man with thick white eyebrows and mustache and big kind eyes.

Ksyusha also extended her hand, introduced herself and said they would wait at the bar.

-What's the need to waste time? I'm leaving for the airport in an hour, - the Cuban told the secretary with his look to accommodate the guest.

The secretary moved the chair, Ksyusha sat down, and Petros, whom no one was paying attention to, stood next to the secretary.

-If you have time, - Ksyusha said with a smile, -I want to tell you a story.

- You are very beautiful, very..., - the Cuban suddenly switched to singular “you”, - I will find time for you.

- Are you for the first time in Armenia?

- No, but after getting to know you, I will definitely come more often. Or maybe you'll come with me to Cuba? Have you been to Cuba?

- No.

- You must come. Cuba is very beautiful, very! Beautiful like you.

- I will definitely come to Cuba one day if you listen to my story and fulfill my request.

- Request? What kind of a request? Beauties like you can only demand.

And Ksyusha told an exciting story, where the main character was Petros Grigorich, a faithful communist, “brother-in-arms” of Fidel Castro. Kirakos invented that story on the spot and added an important detail at the same time, according to which the Armenian communist of blessed memory had two grandsons - the second was Ksyusha. The second part of the story was about Lenin's bust, which had disappeared for a long time and then appeared.

- That is the only memory left from our grandfather, - Ksyusha concluded the story.

During the entire history, the Cuban was looking at Ksyusha with such kind eyes that the latter was sure that he would immediately send his secretary to bring Lenin.

But everything was not so easy. Hearing about the sculpture, the Cuban got confused.

- Only not that, ask for anything you want, but not that.

-But I don't need anything else, - Ksyusha said sadly.

- Do you understand, they gave me that sculpture to pass it to Raul Castro? It's a gift for him. I spoke to Raul a while ago and told him about it.

-So, you reject me, - Ksyusha made the last attempt.

Esteban Ramírez-Núñez must have been a really kind person. He was silent for a while, staring at Ksyusha in confusion, and began to think.

However, at the same time, something that should not have happened at all, happened.

Petros was standing silently next to Ksyusha for the whole time and watching the conversation. The stock of Spanish he had acquired during his years in California while communicating with the Mexicans, was enough for him to understand some things. Especially the fact that the old man had promised to give the bust to Raul Castro. Hearing this, he privy whispered something in the secretary's ear standing next to him. The latter also whispered something in response. And while the old man was thinking, looking confused at Ksyusha, the two went a little further and continued whispering.

At that moment, the old man hit his hand on the table and shouted.

- How can I refuse you?

Ksyusha stood up, approached the Cuban and gave a warm kiss on his left cheek.

-Holy God, - Said the old man, - forgive me!

Then he called his secretary and ordered to bring Lenin's bust from the room.

They waited for the secretary for five minutes, then Petros began to show signs of anxiety. After waiting for five minutes more, he went for the secretary. After a while, everyone went for.

On the floor of the suite there were several small pieces of white plaster, one of which vaguely resembled a part of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's nose.

Master Varazdat started working in Yerevan taxi park No. 2 in nineteen sixty-six and over the course of twenty-five years he has changed several “Volgas”, the last of which, “Volga GAZ 2410”, he kept for himself and the use of his family after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the taxi park. He then continued to drive it as a taxi and was doing it until currently. The car served honestly, because the master took a better care of it than of his own wife, who had blood pressure fluctuations. This is that keeps our house going, he said.

In the garage of his house in Aresh, the master used to oil the car once a month, clean it once a week, wash it every day and go to work. The white “Volga” shone like a pearl. Two months ago, a neighbor offered to trade it for an Opel, and the mechanic was so furious that he kicked him out of the garage, shaking the iron crowbar.

She income he earned was, of course, several times less than what he had in the Soviet years, of which he necessarily used to share with all his passengers, afterwards he used to curse the current authorities.

He has cursed and continued cursing everyone: he cursed Levon during his time; he cursed Rob at Rob’s time and Serge, of course, during his power; and for these last few months it was Nicole's turn to be cursed. And since neither Levon, nor Rob, nor Serge, nor even more Nicole were ever as well acquainted with the state of the people as master Varazdat, the latter’s attitude was fair.

In addition to cursing the former and current leaders of the state, the old driver liked to talk about his happy life during the Soviet years. “I used to get twenty-five rubles a day, I gave five to the shift leader, the rest was mine”, he used to say. “How else does justice happen? I used to change cars every five years, I gave five hundred rubles to the head of the taxi park and kept the old car to me”, he used to add. “What can one want more from the Soviet Union? Once a year I went to Gelendzhik, once to Moscow”, he continued. “Soviet Union will always be the best for me”.

The August of twenty eighteen had an interesting beginning for master Varazdat. Because of the heat, he went to work in the evening, and the very first passenger he came across turned out to be a foreigner. He asked to drive to the hotel and was saying admiring words about the old “Volga” all the way. The master, in his turn, was smiling all the way, asured that a big reward was waiting for him. Upon reaching, however, the foreigner gave him one thousand drams. “I love old cars”, he said in English, to which the master replied in Armenian: God damn your Trump...

The stingy passenger had not yet gotten out of the car when another, also a foreigner, approached. In his hand was some kind of large round object wrapped in a white sheet, which he was dragging somehow. Unlike the previous one, he spoke Russian and asked to be taken to Gyumri. “I will give you one hundred dollars”, he said.

This is how interesting that August day began for master Varazdat.

ALEJANDRO

When the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, visited Cuba in July 2014, Alejandro was working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Liberty Island. He was included in the reception committee of the distinguished guest, considering Alejandro's excellent knowledge of the Russian language and Russia. The fact that, after the visit of Vladimir Vladimirovich and the meeting with Fidel Castro on his deathbed, Cuba was forgiven ninety percent of the debt of about thirty-five billion dollars left from the time of the Soviet Union, was certainly not Alejandro's achievement, but the young diplomat reserved the right to feel the pride. A month later, he already started working in the staff of Prime Minister Raul Castro, and one more year later, he received an offer from the Prime Minister's friend, Esteban Ramírez Núñez. After the warming of the Russian-Cuban relations, wide opportunities for business cooperation were opened between the two countries, which the leader's friend was quick to take advantage of. The business soon spread from Russia to Belarus, Central Asia,

and also to Armenia, and during his visits to all these countries, the Cuban businessman began to take Alejandro with him.

Alejandro was one of the last graduates of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations after the collapse of the USSR; he was admitted in 1991 and graduated in 1996. While still a student, he fell in love with his fellow student Lyudmila, but he could not win her heart. After graduating from the institute, Lyudmila married the son of a high-ranking official. Alejandro, heartbroken, returned to his homeland. And here, twenty years later, appearing again in Moscow, he found Lyudmila and learned that the latter had divorced her husband a long time ago. And Alejandro decided to try to win her heart once more. Then propose to her and live with Lyudmila in Moscow. And for that, a lot of money was needed, that Alejandro did not have. And he began to carefully rob the boss. However, by carefully robbing it seemed not possible to collect a lot of money.

On the last day of his visit to Armenia, when leaving the Armenian oligarch's mansion, his boss asked him to take the bust of Lenin, that seemed strangely heavy to him. For some reason, it occurred to Alejandro that the bust was made of gold. At some point, in the hotel room, he even wanted to check, but he immediately backed away from that absurd idea. But the feeling did not deceive him. And when, during the meeting with the boss, the Armenian young man took him aside, whispered the secret of the bust in his ear and offered to share fifty kilograms of gold, Alejandro nearly slammed his head into a nearby wall. But still he was lucky. What the ex-diplomat did for the next ten minutes was done instinctively, with Lyudmila's image in front of his eyes. He reached the hotel room in a matter of seconds, took the passport, the bag, then took the sheet from the bed and wrapped it around the bust. In haste, the sculpture fell out of his hand and was slightly damaged. The second attempt was successful. Alejandro ran to the elevator, quickly exited the hotel, and approached the first taxi that came along.

HOW KIRAKOS FORGAVE PETROS OR THE BET CANCELLED

As Kirakos lifted a piece of white plaster vaguely resembling Lenin's nose from the ground, Petros grabbed his head with both hands and let out a sound that was very similar to a wounded dog barking.

-What happened to this young man? - wondered Esteban Ramírez-Núñez.

However, no one answered him. Kirakos roughly tugged on Petros's arm and dragged him out of the room.

- Did you tell the secretary about gold?

-We have to catch him, - cried Petros and ran to the elevator. Kirakos returned to the room.

-That idiot told him about the gold, - he turned to Ksyusha, -ask the Cuban where his secretary could be.

-Should I tell him about the gold? - asked Ksyusha.

-No way, just ask him about the secretary.

The Cuban, who did not understand what was happening, looked at them in surprise.

- Mr. Ramírez-Núñez, - Ksyusha addressed him, - where is your secretary?

-Perhaps the sculpture fell out of his hand, it broke, and he took it to repair, - said the old man with a kind smile on his face, -Alejandro is a good guy, he must have felt bad and ashamed of what he did. Ksyusha looked at him skeptically.

- But where should he repair? Does he know Yerevan? Besides, you have to leave for the airport soon, don't you?

-Really, -mumbled the old man, -I forgot about that. But don't worry, Alejandro will come now.

The old man was wrong, of course. Alejandro was rushing towards Gyumri at that time. And Petros was frantically looking for him in the vicinity of the hotel.

After waiting for half an hour, while repeatedly and in vain calling the secretary, the Cuban announced:

- I am sure he is at the airport. I'm late, let's go there together.

The companions had nothing else to do but to agree. At the entrance of the hotel, the old man offered Ksyusha a ride in his car.

-I understand how much you loved your grandfather, - he said already on the way, - why cannot I be your grandfather? Come to Cuba with me.

- I promise to come to Cuba one day, if we find your secretary, or rather the faded memory of my grandfather, -Ksyusha assured him.

- Do you promise?

- I promise.

The old man's eyes sparkled.

-Alejandro is a good guy, - he said, -I'm sure he's waiting for us at the airport.

The mood was completely different in the "Range Rover" driving behind the car with state representative license plates serving the Cuban. Petros was sitting with his head down and frequently hitting his knees with his palm. Kirakos turned to him from time to time, wanted to say something, but held himself back.

- We are doing something wrong, - Petros finally spoke, - it is impossible for that guy to be at the airport.

-He might be or he might not, - Kirakos threw angrily, -but you don't have the right to speak.

Petros raised his guilty gaze from the ground.

- I was thinking about us...

After some time of silence, Kirakos said in a slightly softer tone:

- Nevertheless, that guy could have gone to the airport. Without the sculpture, of course. He could have kept it somewhere, go to the airport and wait for the boss. Tell the latter that he has carelessly broke the bust. Then leave for Cuba, come back after some time and think about what to do with the gold without any rush.

-Why do you think so? - asked Kirakos.

- Because even if he can escape from us, he can hardly do the same from the boss.

- What if we wait for him at the airport?

- He can easily say the same that the sculpture is broken and there was no gold there.

- And what should we do in that case?

- Leave it as it is. We will think of something.

Here Petros put his hand on his companion's shoulder.

- It's my fault, I'm sorry.

Kirakos thought for a while and said:

- We have to review our deal.

- How should we review it? - asked Petros a little scared.

- If we find the sculpture, which I almost exclude, our shares become fifty-fifty.

- But we promised Ksyusha another ten percent.

- By the way, about Ksyusha. We will definitely give her the ten percent. But I suggest canceling our bet. It creates unnecessary complications.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ALEJANDRO

While the companions were busy dividing the bust of Vladimir Ilyich, the latter was moving at a speed of ninety kilometers per hour along the highway leading to Ashtarak.

-Could you drive a little faster? - Alejandro asked master Varazdat in Russian.

- I have been a driver for fifty-five years, and I have not had any violations yet, - answered the master.

He then tried to strike up a conversation with the passenger, but to no avail.

Alejandro was sitting in the front seat thinking about what to do next. The leader of the proletariat, wrapped in a white sheet, was seated at the back seat. What he was thinking was not clear.

But anyway, what should Alejandro do, what did he hope for and why did he ask the taxi driver to take him to Gyumri?

Everything was very simple: in Gyumri, he had an acquaintance whom he knew from his student years in Moscow and whom he had the opportunity to meet again recently. He was a high-ranking officer in the Russian army, he was serving at the Russian military base located in Gyumri. Alejandro hoped to strike a deal with his old acquaintance and secretly travel to Moscow with his help. As for the honorable Esteban Ramírez-Núñez...well, damn him.

Except, the secretary's plans were not destined to come true.

When they passed Ashtarak, somewhere on the road master Varazdat slowed down the car and turned right.

-What are you doing? -the Cuban got worried, -why did you stop?

-I have to fill gas, -the driver explained.

-What gas?

- The car runs on gas.

- Will it not reach Gyumri?

- It will be enough, but I like to be on the safe side. I've never run out of gas in fifty-five years.

When they entered the territory of the gas station, the driver continued.

- You have to get out of the car.

-Why? - the passenger wondered.

- That's the way it is.

- How long does it take?

- Five to ten minutes.

Alejandro reluctantly got out of the car and looked around for a place where he could wait unobserved until the car was filled and at the same time keep the taxi in sight. In the far corner of the gas station, between the waiting room and some sort of a building, there was a toilet with an open door. Alejandro entered there.

Maybe everything would have gone well and even the toilet would have served the purpose for the Cuban, if at that moment two police cars with their flashing lights on did not enter the gas station area.

To say that Alejandro was scared would be an understatement. He wasn't scared, just suddenly embarrassed. First, the old boss appeared in front of his eyes with his kind eyes, whom he actually robbed, then Lyudmila, with her sleepy eyes, whom he would never reach again, and living seemed pointless to Alejandro. He started to feel ashamed of himself and was ready to flash himself down the toilet from shame. He probably would have done so if he didn't suddenly see an open window above the toilet. And he instinctively decided to run away.

The window was extremely narrow, yet he managed somehow to pass through it, jumped down and hurt his leg. He limped towards the net fence surrounding the gas station area, found a hole, passed through and ran again. Ahead, about a hundred meters away, were vineyards. Green bunches that were not ripe yet hung profusely on the rows of the vines.

Alejandro sprinted through a few rows, then felt tired and decided to rest for a moment. Hopefully, holding his stomach he squatted down and the first thing that crossed his mind, for some reason, was why they didn't grow grapes in Cuba. But he didn't have time to think about anything else, because at that moment he felt a sharp prick on his butt. He turned around and saw a snake with brown

patterns behind him.

The police cars, entering the territory of the gas station, stopped at the entrance to the waiting room. Four policemen went out, approached the coffee machine and started throwing coins into it.

Master Varazdat had not drunk coffee for several years. Maybe five or ten. While his old “Volga” was being filled with gas, he was sitting in the waiting room and telling his wife about the day's events on the phone. Then he came out of the waiting room and started asking the police officers who were drinking coffee about the condition of the road to Gyumri, because he had not been there for a long time.

The police responded to the elderly driver, finished their coffee, got into their cars, turned on their lights and drove away.

After a while, the gas filling guy came and said that the filling was over. The old man paid, moved the car and started looking for the passenger. He was looking for five minutes, for ten, and then got really angry. The reason was that the foreigner had not yet given the promised hundred dollars.

I SWEAR ON FIDEL'S MEMORY

Esteban Ramírez-Núñez was restlessly walking here and there with the phone in his hand in the “VIP” hall of “Zvartnots” airport, dialing the secretary's number every half a minute. Ksyusha was also there, while Petros and Kirakos were looking for the secretary in the other part of the airport. The flight check-in for the Yerevan-Moscow flight had already ended long ago and boarding of passengers begun.

-Where can that guy be? - exclaimed the old man, waving his hand in despair.

-Don't wait in vain, he won't come, - said Ksyusha calmly.

-Is that sculpture valuable? - asked the Cuban.

- Yes...- Ksyusha wanted to tell the truth but hesitated for a moment.

She was honestly tired of all this. Life was turning into a detective, and the only thing that did not allow him to deviate from this plot was the expectation of a large amount of money, which she was sincerely willing to give to the “Land of Men” studio. But maybe not everything was lost yet? And she added: “It's extremely valuable to me”.

The old man took her hand and excitedly said:

- We will find it, I promise. I'm not going anywhere; I'm staying with you.

The employee approached and said:

- Mr. Núñez, it's time to get on the plane.

Ksyusha gently released her hand and began to think. At that moment, the boys entered the “VIP” hall and said that they searched for the secretary throughout the airport and did not find him.

-What do you have? - asked Kirakos.

- Nothing. The old man wants to stay, - Ksyusha informed.

-Did he find out about the gold? - Kirakos was worried.

- No, but he feels guilty and decided to stay.

Kirakos raised his cap and began to scratch his head.

- No, it is not in our favor, he will disturb us. Tell him you don't have to. But definitely, take a phone number.

The Cuban agreed to leave, on the condition that Ksyusha would definitely visit Cuba that year. He again tried to call the secretary for several times in vain. Then he hugged Ksyusha and said:

-I love Armenia. If you don't come, I will die. I swear by Fidel's memory.

On the way back to Yerevan from the airport, everyone was silent. The road was jammed, and they sat in the car in silence for about two hours. Kirakos had turned up the volume of the radio and some retro music was playing. When they finally reached the center, he suggested that they meet at his

house and discuss what to do next.

-And what can we do? - asked Petros.

- Well, most important, let's not fall into despair, - Kirakos lowered the volume of the radio receiver a little and continued, - first of all, you should try to get the recordings of the cameras installed inside and outside the hotel. If these do not help in finding Alejandro's trail, it is necessary to find an acquaintance in the police, make an interesting offer to the latter and undertake an informal search. And all this needs to be done very quickly.

But it turned out that there is no need for it. It was the news hour on the radio and the broadcaster was presenting the news of the day. Among them, in particular, the last one had the following content: "A viper bit a Cuban citizen in the vineyards of Aragatsotn region. The latter was taken to the hospital. Doctors assess his condition as consistently heavy".

LENIN IN THE GARAGE

For over fifty-five years of working as a taxi driver, no one had ever cheated Master Varazdat. There were cases when the passenger turned out to have no or little money, and the master was limited to just a good cursing. But like this: not paying and running away was the first experience for him.

Only that the master didn't get the point. If that strange passenger was going to run away, why did he do it at the beginning of the journey? Let's say, he was running late and decided to take another taxi, then why would he leave his things? And if he hadn't run away, then where was he? In short, the master got completely confused.

After waiting for ten minutes, he decided to look at what the passenger had left in the car. He opened the back door, lifted the white sheet and... Good Heavens!

The old man was so excited that for a moment he forgot about the passenger and the promised hundred dollars. He settled into the back seat of his car, hugged the statue and began stroking Lenin's bald head. It was such a weird scene that a kid standing next to the waiting room approached and asked:

- Grandpa, are you nuts?

The master looked at him for a long time and did not answer anything.

-Who is this man? - asked the kid.

Master was still silent.

-Why is his nose broken? - the boy continued to inquire.

Soon his father came and took away the son. The old man was sitting like that next to his idol for a long time. It is impossible to describe what was going inside him at that moment.

On the way back to Yerevan, the master was driving the car extremely slowly. His heart was beating faster than usual, and his eyes seemed to be foggy. When he got home, he first asked his wife for cardiac drops, then lay down on the couch for a few minutes touching the bust. He could not lift it alone and asked his neighbor to help him.

-Where did you get this from? - asked the neighbor.

-The fate has sent it,- said the old man seriously.

The house where master Varazdat lived was not very big. The master and his wife had only two rooms and a kitchen and. And of course, the car parking space, or to be more precise, the garage. It was the master's shrine. Neat, clean and bright. It was exactly here that Ilyich, whose nose was slightly damaged, found his next refuge.

AT ASHTARAK'S HOSPITAL

When the companions arrived at Ashtarak Hospital, it was late evening. They met the doctor on

duty as he was leaving the intensive care unit where Alejandro was lying.

-Are you the doctor? - Kirakos asked sternly.

The man on duty looked at Kirakos with a kind of fear and nodded.

- How is the Cuban?

-Are you his relatives? - asked the doctor uncertainly.

-How can I be his relative, if he is Cuban, - Kirakos threw with feigned anger.

-Well...- the doctor mumbled.

-How is he doing? - Kirakos repeated.

-The patient did not get the first aid, he was brought to us in a state of shock, - said the doctor, in a kind of broken voice, then he added more confidently, -but we did everything possible, and his life is out of danger.

- Let's go to your office - instructed Kirakos.

- But... - the doctor wanted to object, but he didn't dare. He walked to the end of the corridor, opened the door of his room and invited the guests in.

The small room had a desk, a chair, and an old couch. Kirakos sat down by the table, Petros - on the couch and the doctor was standing up.

- Do you understand what you are dealing with? Do you realize who that patient is? - Kirakos asked in the same style.

- We did everything we could, I assure you, - the doctor justified himself, - he was bitten by a viper species. No first aid was provided. Under such conditions, the bite could lead to fatal renal failure and hemorrhage. But we have prevented that.

- Very well, if everything is just like you said, we won't forget it, - Kirakos said kindlier.

-You see, the point is that the snake bit his butt, - the doctor whispered this for some reason.

- The butt? - Kirakos somehow restrained his laughter.

- Yes, the right part of the butt, very close to...

- Anyway, - Kirakos became serious, - the patient should be transported to Yerevan.

- But that's not possible... - the doctor mumbled, - the patient is prohibited to move, it can lead to lifelong disability or amputation.

- You probably have trouble understanding, - Kirakos got angry again, - we are talking about Armenian-Cuban relations. This is a political issue.

- I understand, but... - the doctor could not finish the speech.

-Ok, I trust you, - Kirakos interrupted him, -the patient will stay here.

-Yes, that's a better idea, - the doctor breathed a sigh of relief.

Kirakos was silent for a while, thinking how to continue, and then Petros intervened:

-Where are his things? - he asked. The doctor was confused again.

- I... I don't know, you should ask the nurse on duty.

The nurse on duty escorted the colleagues into her office and pointed to a leather bag on the windowsill.

-Here, - he said, -I didn't open it.

-Of course you opened it, - Petros said angrily, -but where is the rest?

The nurse was so scared that her face changed.

-I just wanted to see..., - she put her hand on her heart and began to breathe heavily, - I wanted to look at...

-Calm down, - Kirakos interjected, -no one blames you.

-I didn't take anything, I swear, - the nurse was already sobbing, -and there was nothing else, just this bag.

Petros took the bag from the windowsill, opened it without hesitation and began rummaging through it.

Of course, the sculpture was not in the bag and could not be. Instead, there were a few crumpled shirts and other stuff.

-Tell me in detail who and how has brought him here, - Kirakos asked the doctor on duty.

It turned out that Alejandro was brought to Ashtarak hospital by two villagers in a tractor. The patient was unconscious. The villagers waited until they found out that the patient's life was not in danger, and then they just left.

-Then the police came, - the doctor continued, -we are obliged to call the police in such cases. They made a report and left.

- And how can we find those villagers with a tractor, - asked Kirakos, - and where did the incident take place?

The nurse, who had calmed down a bit and was no longer sobbing, answered on behalf of the doctor.

- They were the guys from "Sovkhoz" ... They were very drunk... They said that they found that person in the vineyard. They put him in the tractor and brought him to the hospital.

WHO'S THAT?

The villagers Hamo and Varo had finished the day's work, put vodka, tomatoes, cheese and some other things on the body of the tractor and had already started the celebration when they heard horrible screams from afar.

-Who's that? -asked Hamo in the accent of his ancestors who came from Sasun.

-A man, -answered Varo.

-Why is he yelling?

-Can't a man yell?

And although the man let out inhuman screams, the villagers continued to drink. Only when they ran out of vodka, they hurriedly went in the direction of the sound and saw Alejandro lying face down on the ground. They stood above him and looked at each other.

-Who's this? -Hamo asked.

-A man, -Varo answered.

-Our villager? -Hamo asked.

Varo bent down, turned Alejandro over, looked carefully at his face and said:

-I don't know, but I guess he's a grandson of our villager.

-Whose grandson? -Hamo asked.

Meanwhile, Alejandro was writhing in pain and saying something that the villagers did not understand.

-He says 'zmeya', -finally realized Varo.

-What's that? -Hamo didn't understand.

-I think he means a snake, -Varo explained.

-Gee! -Hamo exclaimed,-did he happen to get a snake bite?

Convinced that this was indeed the case, the villagers got a little serious and tried to provide first aid. Probably, they were involved in many such cases and knew that it was necessary to suck the poison out of the wound, so that it enters as little as possible into the blood, before taking him to the hospital. But first it was necessary to find out exactly where the snake bit. And it was exactly at that point that a serious test awaited the villagers. The snake had shamelessly bitten Alejandro's butt.

-Suck, -said Hamo.

-I won't suck, -said Varo,-you suck.

-Gee, I won't suck it, -Hamo didn't agree.

-Now who's gonna suck? -Varo asked.

While the villagers were arguing, Alejandro stopped screaming because he fainted. Needless to say,

he was never given first aid, but it cannot be said that the villagers were completely inhumane. No, they dragged Alejandro to the tractor, put him on the body and took to Ashtarak Hospital. They waited there until they learned that his life could be saved, they went to the village and began to tell the fellow villagers about their bravery, thanks to which the village shopkeeper agreed to give them three bottles of vodka they could pay for partially. The first bottle was drunk at the village center, the other two - at Hamo's backyard under the haystack. They slept there and it was there that Petros, Kirakos and the head of the village found them in the morning. The companions introduced themselves to the latter as special commissioners of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Naturally, the head of the village did not understand what a "special commissioner" was, but still, head lost he hurried to find Hamo and Varo.

It took a long time to wake them up. It took an equally long time before they came to their senses and realized that they had guests, "serious guests". That's how the head of the village introduced Kirakos and Petros and helped the villagers to get up.

-Why didn't you provide him first aid? -asked Kirakos in a stern tone.

Hamo stretched himself, rubbed his eyes and turned to Varo:

-Who's this?

-A man, -Varo answered, doing the same actions.

-Do you know that the foreigner is in bad state?

However, news about the health stated of Alejandro didn't quiet interest the viligers. Hamo turned around and fell asleep again and Varo looked at the head of the village gloomily and said:

-Simonyan, be human, get some beer from the shop.

Only after recovering from hangover, it became possible to speak to the villagers and clarify that they had seen no sight of the statue.

-Lenin? -asked the villagers in unison, -who is that?

KSYUSHA LEAVES THE GAME AND ENTERS AGAIN

And where was Ksyusha while her companions were looking for the bust that had so ironically disappeared from under their noses?

Ksyusha was tired. Ksyusha was tired and decided to leave the game. She was back in the magazine publishing business, went to the pool every day, played a lot of lawn tennis, and signed up for a yoga class. For sometimes she used to drink a few glasses of rum with pineapple juice late in the evening. She did not answer the calls of Petros and Kirakos and avoided meeting them in every possible way. Everything would probably have continued like that, if Ksyusha had not decided to drink coffee one evening while passing through one of Yerevan's parks. The open-air cafes that followed one another were either not working, or even if working, they were empty and neglected. It was not clear why: the park may have been unattended, but it was green, chilly and inviting.

Near one of the cafes, Ksyusha witnessed an interesting scene. The cafe seemed not to be working: the fence was bent and rusted, the cloth cover was torn, and the tables and chairs were stacked on top of each other, tied with a metal chain. Deep within fairy a large area, a stage was built on which three kids were playing.

Ksyusha stood for a while, then entered the cafe and began to watch the children play. It wasn't so much a game; it was more like a performance with characters from some cartoon she didn't know. And an idea occurred to Ksyusha.

She first walked around the abandoned area, studied it well, then entered the open coffee shop next door, sat down at the first table, ordered coffee and asked to call the director. She found out that the cafe next door was on sale. The director did not know more details, but he could get the phone number of the owner of the cafe and passed it to Ksyusha.

After a while, the owner appeared. He was dressed in all black and was wearing at least per one piece of gold on various parts of his body. Seeing Ksyusha, he released another button on his shirt, and it turned out that the gold weighted two pounds.

-I sell it for three hundred thousand, but I will give it to you for two hundred, -he said.

Ksyusha ran around quite enough that day. She went to the central municipality, the district municipality, the real estate cadaster, met an architect she knew and learned everything she needed. Then she contacted the cafe owner again and offered one hundred and fifty thousand. The owner asked for time as if to think it over.

Then Ksyusha went home, made a cocktail for herself with rum and pineapple juice, and began to think.

She liked the idea. In the center of Yerevan, in a ring-shaped park, to build a theater hall, which will be an open-air in summers and in winters will be closed by mobile constructions. And the “Land of Men” studio could work there all year round.

The young men of the studio, hearing about the project, were so excited that they were ready to start the work at the same second.

But there was a problem; first, it was necessary to buy the area.

And Ksyusha called Kirakos.

-Any news on the case? - she asked.

-Are you getting back into the game? -Kirakos enthused.

- You can say so.

A LITTLE INVESTIGATION

When the companions found out that the villagers had neither seen the statue of Lenin nor heard about it, then went to the place where the snake had bitten Alejandro and found nothing there, they had nothing to do but wait until the injured revived and it became possible to talk to him.

The injured, fortunately, recovered, only it was not possible to speak with him. The health issue of the Cuban citizen became the business of the government and the people of the oligarch. The latter transported him from Ashtarak hospital to a private clinic in Yerevan and established a round-the-clock surveillance for him.

At first, the partners did not understand what this surveillance was for. Who did they protect him from – from a snake to not bite him again?!

Worst of all, visiting the patient was strictly forbidden. Even Kirakos could not find any way to get into his ward. There was no way to arrange a meeting with the oligarch either.

Everything became clear only when Ksyusha spoke on the phone with Esteban Ramírez-Núñez. It turned out that he took care that his assistant was isolated until he recovered, and then immediately transported to the homeland.

Alejandro left for his homeland on a Yerevan-Moscow-Havana flight at the beginning of September, and the companions never managed to talk to him. However, they managed to make sure for hundred per cent that Alejandro did not take the sculpture with him. In other words, the leader of the proletariat continued to stay in Armenia.

The companions managed to learn other important things as well. In particular, the fact that before appearing in the vineyards, Alejandro was at the nearest gas station.

Fortunately, cameras were installed there. At the cost of long sufferings, Kirakos was able to get the video recording of the day of the incident, and after watching it, everything became clear. In the video, it was clearly seen how Alejandro was getting out of the taxi that entered the territory of the gas station and hurriedly walking to the toilet. And the driver was walking towards the waiting room. Then the police cars were coming with their lights on. The cops were drinking coffee and

leaving. It took five to ten minutes. Alejandro never left the toilet.

After all this, it was not difficult to understand that the Cuban, seeing the police cars, thought that they had come after him, had decided to escape through the toilet window. Only then he met a snake in the vineyards.

As for the taxi driver, it was clear from the video that he also left after waiting for his passenger for some time. And judging by the fact that Alejandro got out of the car without the sculpture, one could be sure that the sculpture was still in the car. Therefore, it was necessary to look for the car – white “Volga”, which belonged to master Varazdat.

A CONVERSATION AROUND BACKGAMMON

Master Varazdat treated his neighbors like a stamp collector treats his collection. He had two long wooden pews by the garage, to be exact – benches. From time to time, he gathered all the neighbors, have them sit on his bench and studied them for a long time. The neighbors, as a rule, sat silently and waited. After thinking for a while, the master singled out some of the next-doors and invited them inside the garage. And he used to say to the rest:

- Why are you sitting here? Go to your homes, don't you have things to do?

The neighbors would silently obey.

The lucky ones who remained in the garage played backgammon with the master one by one and lost one by one. Of course, there were cases when they won, but in such cases, as a rule, the master got mad, threw away the dice, and that was the end of the backgammon session.

That evening, the master again, after walking along the bench for some time stopped and said:

-Serozh - you, Sako - you and Ghazaryan - you!

And invited them to the garage to play backgammon. Then, at the entrance, he regretted:

- No, Sako, you go home, Romik, you come!

Sako, a little angry, but without making a sound left with the others and Romik, Serozh, and Ghazaryan entered the garage following master Varazdat. Romik was the owner of the nearby grocery, Serozh was a “car mechanic”, Ghazaryan was a professor, a former lecturer. All three were not particularly strong backgammon players, but all three were aged and communists at heart. The choice of the master that day was not accidental at all.

-Look what I have, - he said, pointing to a bust of Lenin on a plinth in the corner.

The four winter tires of the Volga, stacked on top of each other, covered with a red cloth from top to bottom, served as a pedestal. The forehead of the proletariat shone in the yellow light that flashed from the Volga's anti-fog lamp, specially hung from the ceiling of the garage.

-This is Ilyich, - Ghazaryan, a former professor of USSR history, exclaimed.

- Those were the days... - echoed Romik, who was the director of gastronomy in the best times of his life.

-And why is the nose broken? - wondered Serozh, who worked as a “car mechanic” both in the Soviet years and now.

-The nose is not important, - the master approached the bust and hugged it, -the nose is not important.

- Where did you get this from? - Ghazaryan inquired.

But the old taxi driver didn't answer anything, sat down in front of the backgammon on the table and arranged the pieces. That day he lost to his first opponent, but he didn't get angry, as he usually did. He entered the house from the garage and returned with a bottle of “Tonakan” cognac in his hand.

-This is Soviet cognac, - Ghazaryan exclaimed.

- Those were the days... - responded Romik.

-I will open it, - said Serozh.

He took the old cognac bottle from the master's hand, dusted it off with his sleeve, and removed the cork with his teeth. Then he filled the glasses and said:

- Let's make a toast to master Varazdat.

- No, - master Varazdat objected, - let's make a toast to Lenin.

All four of them got drunk very quickly. Maybe they were excited, maybe they hadn't drunk for a long time, and maybe the cognac was strong enough. After drinking the last glass, master Varazdat approached the statue of Lenin, hugged it again and began to cry. The other three did the same.

KSYUSHA OPENS UP HER CARDS

In parallel of searching for the white "Volga", Ksyusha had another matter of concern. The thing was that she could miss the café in the park that she had committed to buy for the "Land of Men" studio. The owner of the cafe informed that there was another buyer who was ready to pay one hundred and sixty thousand, but he said that he had promised the cafe to someone else, and if Ksyusha did not change her mind, she should hurry. Ksyusha hadn't changed her mind, but she couldn't hurry either. The amount was not small. In addition, after purchasing the cafe, it would be necessary to modify, construct and furnish it to serve its purpose. Otherwise, it would turn out that Ksyusha just got an asset, which had never been her intention. In short, money was urgently needed, but Ksyusha did not have it. Damned Lenin didn't want to be found either.

And Ksyusha decided to consult with colleagues when they gathered on the terrace of Cascade.

-He is lying, - Kirakos said after hearing the whole story, -there is no other buyer. But why do you need that cafe?

-Why do you think he is lying? - asked Ksyusha, not answering the second question.

- It is very easy to check. Give me his phone number.

Kirakos picked up the phone and called the cafe owner. He said that he urgently wanted to buy the cafe, then lowered the price to one hundred and twenty-five thousand, then announced that he had not yet made a final decision and would inform later.

-You see, everything is very easy, - he said, satisfied with himself, hanging up the phone, -always know that when there is even a minor shock in the country, people temporarily avoid acquiring property, and the upheaval in our country was not so minor.

-Haven't you ever thought about becoming a member of parliament? - Petros asked for some reason.

- Once they wanted to nominate me in the Russian Duma elections. Zhirinovskiy himself was interested, but I refused.

At that moment, Ksyusha's phone rang. It was the owner of the cafe. Ksyusha was listening to him with a smile on her face.

-What did he want? - Kirakos asked when the conversation ended.

- He said that he has a buyer who is ready to pay one hundred and seventy-five thousand, but since he is a man of his word, he is giving me the last chance.

- I am sure that he will agree to a hundred thousand in the end, - Petros interjected, - except that you are busy with a useless matter.

-Really, - Kirakos agreed, -why do you need that cafe, Ksyusha?

Ksyusha thought for a while and said:

- Why do you think I got involved in this case? -Petros and Kirakos looked at her in surprise. And Ksyusha told about her plans.

-If we find the gold and sell it, I am ready to give the money needed to buy the cafe, - Kirakos said in all seriousness.

- It's too exciting, - said Petros, - but first you have to find the gold.

-Yes, - Kirakos agreed,-a little more investigation is needed.

ANOTHER SMALL INVESTIGATION

It took the companions about a month to find Volga. It is true that the cameras of the gas station had recorded the license plates of the car, but it turned out that everything was not so easy.

First, at the cost of long sufferings, they managed to get the videos. Then, it was necessary to find out from the state auto inspection whose name the white “Volga” was registered under. Kirakos did not manage to do it. The fellow members of Parliament did not help either, they said that the situation had changed and their friends who were the heads of the state auto inspection had also changed. Ksyusha had to intervene; the new head couldn't resist her charm and gave the details of the car owner with a trembling hand. A person named Serob Serobyan. The companions went to the address the latter was registered. But here another disappointment was waiting for them. It turned out that the apartment at that address was rented, and the renter was not Serob Serobyan, but a real estate agency. The agency refused to provide the phone number of the owner of the apartment, perhaps thinking that the applicants wanted to buy the apartment, which they offered for a daily rent with high commission. Ksyusha intervened again, and this time the head of the agency could not resist her charm. However, the phone number he provided was not Serob Serobyan's, but his wife's. Serob Serobyan himself was not in Armenia. When asked where he was, his wife replied, “in hellhole”. Petros met the lady and found out that the “hellhole” was Syktyvkar, where Serob Serobyan went to work. Not being able to resist Petros's charm, the lady told other details as well. In particular, Serob Serobyan had another wife in Syktyvkar and two children from that woman. Moreover, during the last ten years, he had sent money only five times, and the lady had to rent out the apartment in the center for a daily rent and live in the suburbs with her parents. She heard about the white “Volga” for the first time. Of course, she graciously provided Petros with her husband's phone number, but later, when the companions tried to call him, it turned out that such a phone number did not exist. At least, that's what the Russian operator's voice said. This was already a dead end. And the worst thing was that quite a long time had already passed since the vanishing of the sculpture, and the driver of the white “Volga”, whoever he was, could have known the secret of the sculpture over this time.

However, he might not have known. Anyway, he had to be found. And Kirakos put his connections in Russia into action. The judge of the Moscow Arbitration Court, Kapitolina Semyonovna, who could not stand the charm of Kirakos, contacted the president of the Komi Republic court, and he in his turn contacted a police general, and on a cold September evening, Serob Serobyan was taken to the Syktyvkar police station. That was exactly the place from where he contacted Kirakos. It turned out that the white “Volga” which was used to be a yellow one and served as a taxi, never belonged to him. Back in nineteen ninety-one, it was alienated from the taxi park by his uncle who registered it in his nephew's name. At that time, the taxi still had Soviet-style license plates. Then the uncle painted it white and in nineteen ninety-seven re-registered it again in Serob's name, this time with new, Armenian license plates. He saw uncle last ten years ago, he was again driving the same car as a taxi. The uncle lived in Aresh, his name was Varazdat. That's it!

Colleagues did not know what happened to the future fate of Serob Serobyan, who was brought to the Syktyvkar police station. They rushed to Aresh to find the white Volga, or rather, its real owner, Master Varazdat.

It was the thirtieth of September twenty eighteen, Sunday. Master Varazdat had gathered the neighbors in the yard in front of his garage and was choosing who to invite to play backgammon with him, when a white Range Rover stopped in front of him and a man in a white suit and a white cape got out of it.

HOW KIRAKOS'S NOSE SURVIVED

If only Kirakos knew that at that moment that Lenin's bust was just ten meters away from him, even more, that, his secret was not revealed at all, he would probably have chosen a different tactic. But for now, he was just happy that they finally managed to find the white Volga, which was shining in the autumn sun.

Kirakos himself had a white Volga back in the early nineties, and as much as he kept it like the apple of his eye, he had to admit that this one was much better. Perhaps it could be reconciled with its owner. And Kirakos made the first mistake.

-Whose is this beauty? - he asked the men gathered near the garage.

Everyone looked at master Varazdat, not daring to answer for him. And the latter threw a sharp look at Kirakos and said:

- Your uncle's wife is the beauty.

- My uncle's wife has a small Lahmajoun bakery in Istanbul. According to the latest information, she weighed one hundred and thirty kilograms, - Kirakos approached the master, - as far as I understood, you are Varazdat.

-I am Varazdat for sure, - said the master indifferently, -and who the hell are you?

- I have a business talk with you, - Kirakos said seriously.

- What talk?

Here Kirakos made the second mistake:

-Can we speak in private? - he asked.

-Are you a girl I should be hush-hush with? - laughed the master.

The others also laughed in unison, and Kirakos realized that he was in a ridiculous situation. Something had to be done. Of course he tried, but sometimes it's better not to try at all.

- Mr. Varazdat...

- Don't call me "mister", you are "mister" - the master was furious.

- Listen for a minute...

- Your "misters" robbed this country... Where did you get this car from? - The old man pointed at the SUV standing not far away, - did you buy it with the money stolen from the people?

- Listen for a minute, I will explain everything to you, - Kirakos tried to calm the master down, - I am your friend, not your enemy.

However, the master did not want to listen. He opened the door of the garage and went inside, cursing all the "misters" of the world.

Kirakos decided to make one last attempt and addressed the crowd:

- I really want to offer him something good, can you convince him to listen?

The gathered looked at each other uncertainly. Serozh was the only brave one.

- Varazdat is an old man, - he explained, - he needs the right approach, and you call him "mister".

Here Kirakos committed the last fatal mistake.

- I just wanted to buy his old car, - he said in a guilty tone, - I was ready to pay a good price.

The mistake might not have been fatal, if only Serozh or even all the other gathered people heard what he said, only not master Varazdat. At that time, the latter was sitting at the table inside the old garage, arranging backgammon pieces.

-What did he say? - he exclaimed, as if not believing what he had heard.

Probably, the car mechanic Serozh might still have saved the situation. He might have convinced the master that he had heard wrong and prevented the explosion, if Kirakos hadn't gone into the garage.

When he entered the garage, two things happened: master Varazdat threw the pieces in his hand on

his face, but before that Kirakos managed to see the bust of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin on a pedestal covered with a red cloth in the corner with his broken nose.

Kirakos fortunately managed to save his own nose, which would also likely have been broken on that autumn Sunday. More precisely, it was saved by the gathered people, led by the lecturer Ghazaryan, who, by forming a natural shield, did not let the master approach Kirakos with the backgammon board in his hand.

THE NEXT DAY CAN BE SKIPPED

After the clash with the old taxi driver, Kirakos could not come to his senses for several days. During his long career of “scoundrel”, there were, of course, cases when he could not get what he wanted, when he found himself in uncomfortable situations, when he even got into a fight. But, that Kirakos himself was kicked out, that had not happened yet.

He was so depressed that even Petros began to cheer him up.

- Things happen, - he said, when they were all gathered at the Cascade house, - once I was beaten up so badly in an Indian community in Oregon that I had to have my nose surgery.

- What were you doing in the Indian community? - asked Ksyusha.

- There are casinos there. The United States government allows Indians to carry out gambling activities within tribal communities. There are about five hundred such gambling houses in America, but it is difficult with the Indians, - admitted Petros.

- What do you usually play in casino? - asked Ksyusha.

- Blackjack.

- And do you play backgammon?

- No.

- It's a pity.

- Why?

- You could beat the taxi driver. Play on the bust of Lenin and win.

Then Ksyusha turned to Kirakos.

- Why did you frown? You should be happy. After all, we had almost given up hope that we would find Lenin safe and sound.

However, Kirakos did not answer anything.

- I will be the one to make the next attempt - Petros announced.

- What kind of an attempt? - Ksyusha didn't understand.

- Getting along with the taxi driver.

- And how are you going to do that?

- Very simple. I will introduce myself.

- That's the only way you know. Although in this case it might work.

- Yes, it can work.

Both of them looked at Kirakos, but he was stubbornly silent.

- The old man doesn't like rich people, is that true? - Petros continued, - I will go to him in a worn-out suit and torn shoes.

- Maybe the opposite, - Ksyusha teased, - in a torn suit and worn-out shoes.

But Petros paid no attention and continued as if thinking aloud.

- I will say that I am Petros Grigorich's grandson. I will take our family album with me. I will cry a little if necessary. Then I will say that the sculpture belongs to my grandfather and is the only memory left of him. We just have to figure out how it got to the Cuban. Here, signs of life appeared on Kirakos's face. He even got up and started walking.

- You will see that it will work, - Petros continued even more enthusiastically, - I will play on the

delicate strings of the old man's soul.

Kirakos took a bottle of Irish whiskey from the bar, placed it on the table, and without addressing anyone in particular, said:

- We are drinking today. Actually, we gonna get drunk.

- Why do you want to get drunk? - Petros got surprised.

- Because that is the best solution - Kirakos filled the glasses.

-I never drink more than three glasses, -Petros said seriously, -three at the most.

- Why, - asked Ksyusha, - don't you behave gracefully when you're drunk?

- No, there's just always the next day when your body breaks down and your head explodes. What do I do the next day?

-You can skip the next day, - said Kirakos, emptying the glass in one breath.

HOW MASTER VARAZDAT PULLED PETROS'S EAR... OR EARS

Petros knocked on the door of master Varazdat's house at eight o'clock in the evening, when it was already dark and the neighbors that had gathered earlier in the yard had dispersed. He was wearing his grandfather's old-fashioned suit, carrying his grandfather's old-fashioned bag, which his grandmother, Seda Levonovna had agreed to give him after long negotiations.

Before that, Petros had a thorough conversation with Kirakos, without Ksyusha.

-The old man will not give you the sculpture, forget it, -said Kirakos, -but you must go to his house, of course. Moreover, you have to do everything to get him take you to his garage. You understand?

-Do I understand? - answered Petros.

What these two secretly understood is probably not hard to understand. Anyway, when Petros knocked on the door of master Varazdat's house, wearing his grandfather's old-fashioned suit and holding his old-fashioned bag, a female voice called out from inside:

- Who is it?

-Is Master Varazdat home? - Petros asked, although he knew for sure that he was at home.

A very round woman with red hair opened the door and examined Petros from head to toe and said:

- What do you need?

- I am the grandson of master Varazdat's friend.

The lady once again examined the young man and, perhaps not being able to understand what kind of friend they were talking about, said:

- He is in the garage.

Then she led the way to the kitchen, from where a small door opened to the garage.

Upon entering, Petros could not see master Varazdat, because the latter was under the car, in the pit intended for repair.

Instead, he saw the bust of Lenin on a pedestal. Needless to say, he was so confused that he forgot the pre-planned scenario, rushed towards the bust and might have hugged it and left, if master Varazdat had not shouted:

-No touching!

Petros turned mechanically but saw no one.

-What do you want? - the master continued shouting from under the car, -and who are you?

Here Petros ruined everything for good:

-This sculpture is mine, - he said.

The master didn't just get under the car. He was lubricating the carriers of the "Volga". And when he came out of the pit, his hands were completely in oil.

-Is it yours, hah? - he shouted, grabbing Petros's ear, -Not at all!

And he gloriously slapped the impudent young man. Then he turned to the woman, who, honestly,

was not surprised by what she saw:

- Why did you let this one in?
- He said that he is your friend's grandson.

The master continued to hold Petros's ear, and the latter was trying in vain to free himself.

-Let me go, - he was shouting, -there are photos of my grandfather in this bag.

- What grandfather?

- Petros Grigorich.

- From the taxi park?

- No, from the Central Committee. Let me go, I'll show you.

The master released Petros Junior's ear, which was black with oil. And on the left cheek the greasy stain of the master's palm was stamped.

Actually, the pictures did not impress the old taxi driver.

-So what? - he asked, glancing at the picture of Petros Senior.

- It's my grandfather; he was the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Armenia.

The master looked at the last picture once again, but with the same cold look. Then he rudely threw it away and said:

- If this is your grandfather, secretary of the Communist Party, does that give you the right to enter my garage and say that the statue of Lenin is yours?

-It's not mine, but his, - Petros tried to explain.

-What? - the master did not understand.

- The sculpture belonged to my grandfather; he inherited it to me, and a Cuban...

But Petros didn't manage to finish, because the master grabbed his ear again, this time his right ear. However, he did not slap him. He dragged him by the ear to the garage door and kicked out the grandson of the former secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

KSYUSHA IS TAKING A TAXI

Ksyusha rarely took taxis. During the last two years of living in Moscow, she had a Masserati, before that a Mini Cooper, and before that she relied on her long legs. In Yerevan, she also liked to walk, and although she was always and everywhere in the center of attention, she did not feel good or bad about it.

-There are two kinds of beauties, - Kirakos once said, -those who look at how they are looked at, and those who don't look at how they are looked at.

-Mine is just a profession, - Ksyusha smiled.

Anyway, she didn't like taking taxis.

Only now she had to. After the shameful failures of the two companions, she was again their last hope. The plan was like this: for the first time, Ksyusha gets into master Varazdat's taxi at the location he usually parked as if by chance. During the trip, she expresses her admiration for the old and wonderfully preserved "Volga" and tries to woo the driver. Then she offers him to drive her permanently, promising a reasonably high fee. Then they'll move how it goes.

And so, on the seventeenth of October twenty eighteen, at nine o'clock in the morning, Ksyusha approached the white "Volga" standing near the Covered Market on Mashtots Avenue and opened the door.

- Are you free?

Master Varazdat had just parked the car, bought the day's newspapers from the nearby kiosk and opened one of them. He was reading a headline with an extremely anxious expression on his face, he was so anxious that one might think it was the start of World War III. However, it turned out to be

something else.

-Did Nikol resign? -the driver asked Ksyusha, as if he was asking where are you going?

-How come he resigned? - Ksyusha wondered.

-Sit down, - said the master, -here, look.

He handed over the newspaper. On the first page there was the picture of the prime minister, and above it was the title of the article, which actually read:

“Nikol Pashinyan resigned”. Ksyusha read the rest out loud. “Dear compatriots, dear people, proud citizens of the Republic of Armenia, as I said, today I am resigning from the post of Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. The purpose of this resignation, however, is not to leave the post of head of the administration, or to run away from the responsibility, but on the contrary, to complete the non-violent, velvet, people's revolution that we carried out together by holding early parliamentary elections and returning all power to the people.”

Here the master interrupted and impatiently asked:

- I didn't get it, did he resign or not?

-Wait a minute, - Ksyusha said and continued reading.

-During this entire period, the members of the government will continue to fulfill their duties, I will continue to fulfill the constitutional powers of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. I will continue to be the guarantor of the people's victory, and if you give a vote of confidence to our political force in the elections that are to be held in December, I will be re-elected in the position of RA Prime Minister”.

-Is Nikol still the Prime Minister or not? - the driver didn't understand again.

-He is the Prime Minister, - Ksyusha confirmed.

-Damn him...- master Varazdat somehow restrained himself, - where are you going?

- Cascade. Don't like the new authorities?

- What? - the master got angry, - I don't like any authorities. They have robbed the country.

- But they haven't robbed people yet.

- They haven't, but they will. You said, where are you going?

-Cascade, - Ksyusha repeated and tried to change the topic of the conversation, -what a nice car!

But the master seemed to be against changing the subject.

- In the beginning it was Levon, damn him... he destroyed everything.

- This car must be very old, isn't it? ...

- Then Kocharyan came, damn him too... he sold everything.

- I'm not into politics...

- Then Serge, damn him... he ate everything.

- But...

- Now it's Nikol, damn...

However, what the last head of the country had demolished, sold or eaten, the master could not say, because at that moment a car suddenly braked in front, and the white “Volga” could not avoid a collision with it.

HOW LONG A BALLOON CAN BE BLOWN

The last leader of the country continued maintaining his extremely high profile. And most likely he would do so for a long time, although the opposite camp had another idea. Everyone in the opposite camp unanimously claimed that these authorities and the prime minister would serve for a year utmost.

It could not be so.

It could not be so, because in one year it would not be possible to waste the stock of confidence that

people had. And although the first steps were already taken, hundreds more such steps were to be taken, as the people's trust was really big. And why was it big?

There was only one important reason for this. Because the hatred of the people towards the previous authorities was great. The previous authorities were removed from the arena by the current authorities. A simple reminder to the people about the doings of the former authorities would be enough to make the people forgive any fault the current authorities did. And the current authorities used that tool masterfully. And people accepted it.

It never occurred to anyone how long they were supposed to live like that under the shadow of the past, only looking back, without moving forward, without thinking about the future.

That question was out of the agenda. It wouldn't get into the agenda for the next one or maybe two years. But someday it would. The psychological food which the authorities threatened the common people would most likely expire one day, and the same people would continue earning their daily bread with extreme difficulty.

What should the government do then?

All prerequisites witnessed that it would become like the "formers". In other words, they would have to tell the people: no, you are wrong, everything is fine; I have raised your salary, I have provided huge investments, the economic and other growth like that, and you just don't want to see it.

People are like children. They like balloons. They blow that balloon and blow it up, not having time to enjoy it. The question is how long can a balloon be blown?

THE LAST OPTION

It took a lot of time for the companions to make sure that not only it was impossible to get along with master Varazdat, but also that his castle was invulnerable. Actually, not for the companions, but for Petros and Kirakos. The point was that these two had not informed Ksyusha about their new plans. And they couldn't, because Ksyusha would send them to hell. The plans were clearly those that intended actions that would be impossible to do without breaking the law, even more - rather tough articles of the criminal code were stipulated thereof. There certainly wasn't going to be any violence towards the old taxi driver and his wife. Fortunately, both Petros and Kirakos were against it.

However, they were not opposed to the option of somehow breaking into the garage and stealing the sculpture. They spent long and hard days looking for ways to implement this option. But in vain! It was true, that there were no video cameras around there, but instead there were always neighbors... lots of neighbors. The situation was made more complicated by the fact that both Petros and Kirakos could not be seen near master Varazdat's house, because the old man knew both of them and had already had an occasion to expel them.

And at night, the master used to lock his shrine with seven locks. Even during the days when the "Volga" that had been damaged in the recent accident, was at Serozh, the mechanic.

What should be done? Ironically, the mind and imagination of the companions with such a rich experience in frauds were powerless here, and they did not have a clue.

And who should help, if not Ksyusha? Realizing that the guys were hiding something from her, one day Ksyusha demanded to meet and discuss what to do next. And the guys had nothing to do but to admit that they were facing a dead end.

-We need to think in a different direction, -said Ksyusha.

The guys looked at her helplessly.

-You have to think in a different direction, - repeated the girl, -you say that he is constantly surrounded by neighbors, is that true?

The guys nodded affirmatively.

- So, we should work in the direction of those neighbors as well.

And Ksyusha explained what she meant. According to her scenario, it was necessary to find someone among the neighbors who was both close enough to master Varazdat and who could be a “backhander”. That is, someone who would be willing to enter into a deal with them for a certain amount of money.

- And what is that deal like? - asked Petros.

-First, you need to find that person, - said Ksyusha, -someone who, let's say, has serious financial problems and needs money urgently.

- Suppose we find him, - insisted Petros, - what will we do?

- He should change the sculpture, - Ksyusha's eyes were shining.

- How should he change?

-I think I get your point, - Kirakos interjected.

- Yes, - Ksyusha became more excited, - we will order another Lenin of exactly the same size and exactly the same shape in advance, and we think how to exchange it with our Lenin.

-I still don't have a good idea of everything,”- Kirakos said honestly, -but overall, it is good. It needs to be elaborated.

- The old man will not give the sculpture to anyone, - Petros objected, - it is sacred to him. When I told him that the sculpture was mine, he almost killed me.

- And would have done the right thing, - Kirakos laughed.

- Because you wanted to take it and keep it to yourself, - Ksyusha was more serious, - while our man should ask for it for a certain time, on the condition of returning it.

-It doesn't matter, he won't give it, - Petros insisted.

- Everything depends on the person who is asking, - Ksyusha disagreed, - if we find the right person, it might work.

-Anyway, we have no other option, - Kirakos concluded.

GHAZARYAN SENIOR AND PETROS JUNIOR

During the USSR, lecturer Ghazaryan used to teach the history of that state at the Yerevan State University. The state, that fortunately had a very short history. However, alas, even that short history was enough for people to develop such slavish manners and a belief that could not be undermined even by the independence. The history, during which a type of a human being was formed and became dominant, that could not get free of even after independence. The corrupt type of a human being, that was everywhere. At all levels of government, in the army and the police, even in areas such as education and health care. And that type, unfortunately, continued existing almost everywhere even after independence.

When lecturer Ghazaryan was taking bribes from parents to admit their kids to the faculty of law or international relations, he did not care if those kids would become rubbishy policemen, judges or diplomats in five or ten years. When he was taking bribes from students for high marks at the exams, he didn't care that they would start taking bribes in their locations after graduating from the university.

Instead, Professor Ghazaryan lived very well. He had a two-story private house in Aresh, furnished with expensive furniture and bathroom accessories made in the neighboring countries, a similarly furnished two-story country house in Ptghni, and a beige ‘Zhiguli 2106’ with Niva bumpers. It was during the Soviet years. After independence, of course, he continued to take bribes, but the income was no longer the same. Then, already in ninety-seven or ninety-eight, Ghazaryan opened a “private institute” where anyone could be admitted, as long as they were able to pay. The institute, however,

had worked for several years and did not pay off. The professor fell into debts and lost his former “reputation”. But by then, he had managed to get his son a job to live carefree. The job, of course, was in the state system, and the way of living carefree was, of course by taking bribes. The son was very smart and surpassed his father in taking bribes. Moreover, he had been able to advance during the years and for the past three years he had been holding the position of the head of some program implementation agency. However, if the first revolution had a negative impact on Ghazaryan Sr., then the second one, or more precisely, “the change in the situation”, was tragic for Ghazarian Jr. The National Security Service had revealed a number of crimes committed by him related to the budget misuse and arrested him. Then, of course, they let him go by replacing the restraining order with a signature not to leave, but before that he was obliged to restore the damage incurred to the state. Ghazaryan Jr. repaired the damage incurred to the state, but for ‘even more’ there was no money left. And here that he was already facing the danger of being arrested.

In short, it was a terrible situation at the Aresh house of the Ghazaryans. And the companions had learned about it from a well-informed source. And it was Petros who knocked on the door of the Aresh house of the Ghazaryans on November twenty eighteen.

The companions had decided that he was the right person to talk to the former professor. The latter, when he heard the name of Petros Grigorich, exclaimed:

- Really? He was your grandfather?

- Did you know him? - Petros was happy.

-Did I know Petros Grigorich? -the professor grinned, -you ask me if I knew Petros Grigorich? Do you know that I had admitted your father to the university?

- How? - Petros was surprised.

- Yes, faculty of international relations, - Ghazaryan thought for a moment, then continued, - if I'm not mistaken, it was nineteen eighty-one or eighty-two.

- You have no idea how happy I am - Petros was excited.

-I was even at your grandfather's house, - continued the former lecturer, - it was exactly there that Petros Grigorich gave me ... Well, it's not important.

They talked for a long time. The professor asked his wife to prepare tea, and Petros, who did not expect such a development, did not dare to proceed to the actual task for a long time. Only when Ghazaryan started talking about the problems they got into, Petros plucked up his courage and said:

- I can help you.

-Really? -The former professor looked at him skeptically.

-I can help you, - Petros repeated, -but you must also help me.

And he told him how the bust of Lenin belonging to his grandfather appeared at master Varazdat, and the latter did not want to return it.

- Yes, Varazdat is a tough person, - confirmed the professor, - but what can I do?

-You have to convince him to give you the sculpture for one day, - Petros explained.

- Suppose I did, how can I escape returning it later? Can you imagine what he will do to me?

-You will return it, - said Petros confidently.

- In that case... - Ghazaryan mumbled, - I don't understand anything...

- You will return another sculpture, exactly the same, - explained Petros.

The former lecturer was lost in thoughts.

-I don't understand why that sculpture is so important, -the professor seemed to think aloud, -didn't he leave you anything else?

The situation could become dangerous, but the companions had foreseen something like this.

- My grandmother sold everything; do you understand? And that's the only thing left from my grandfather...

The former lecturer was certainly no fool. To what extent he believed Petros, was not clear. He

looked at him with a sly look and said:

- Anyway, it's not my business. I need twenty-five million drams.

Petros began to count in his mind. A well-informed source had informed that Professor Ghazaryan was desperately looking for thirty thousand dollars.

- How much is twenty-five million drams in dollars?

- Fifty thousand.

- I can give you twenty-five.

They stopped at thirty thousand. That was exactly the amount that was supposed to save Ghazaryan Jr. from being arrested.

-But I need the money now, - said the former lecturer with unquestionable emphasis.

However, Petros was at his best:

- You will receive the money when I have my grandfather's heritage.

- No deal, - the former lecturer was also unbending, - I need an advance. Give me at least ten thousand.

-Ten thousand? - Petros repeated.

- Yes, ten thousand. And don't forget the replica of the sculpture.

PEOPLE TAKE BRIBE

In the autumn of twenty eighteen, you may say that there was no bribery in the Republic of Armenia. The traffic policeman did not extort money for not fining the driver, the customs officer did not demand money to facilitate customs formalities, the teacher did not take a bribe for passing an exam, and all that jazz.

However, bribery was not eradicated, but simply prohibited. The traffic policeman, the customs officer, the lecturer and others did not take bribes, not because they realized that it was a bad thing to do, but because they were afraid of being caught.

Probably, there is no a single state in the world where bribery is not prohibited. But there are many states in the world where the corrupter is not afraid to take a bribe, because he's not afraid to get caught. Because even if he is caught, he knows that he can bribe the catcher and not get punished. The catcher, in turn, is not afraid to take a bribe from the one he caught. Because he also gives a share of what he takes to the one who can punish him. And the latter – in his turn, so the circle goes on. And this, of course, is bad, very bad. And in the Republic of Armenia, before the period of events described in this book, the picture was exactly like that or almost like that.

And now there was no bribery in the country. Except that it wasn't eradicated, it was banned. And it was banned at the level of the first person of the country. And of course, it was good, very good. However, there was an issue: an official should not take a bribe because he is afraid of being caught, but he should not take a bribe knowing that he is doing something bad. And in order for bribery to be truly eradicated, it is this consciousness that must be formed officially.

But here there is another issue. A corruptor is a human being, an ordinary human being. He has a mistress, neighbors, a mother-in-law, a sofa and two armchairs, a car bought on credit, he has things to care of, interests and weaknesses. Taking a bribe for any of the above is, of course, rascality. Of course, it is rascality to take a bribe for buying flowers for the mistress or mother-in-law, to have a soft sofa, pay off a car loan, or satisfy one's own interests and weaknesses. But the corruptor is also a person who has a family and children who need to be supported, fed, warmed-up, clothed, brought up, educated, and married. Taking a bribe for this purpose is also bad, of course. But, before accusing and condemning a corruptor for taking bribes for those things, isn't it necessary for the state to take care that he receives a salary that satisfies his needs to take care of his family with dignity?

If the customs officer, a policeman or a lecturer who receives a salary of one hundred and twenty

thousand drams does not take a bribe, then his children will stay hungry. He can endure like this for a few months, maybe a year and during that time he will naturally perform his duties imperfectly and unpleasantly, but can he endure it more than that? Hardly! He will either start looking for ways to take bribes again or he will start looking for ways to emigrate. And what will happen if all start acting like that? All, who earn a ridiculous salary and can't support their families. It will be the same as before.

But anyway, hoping that it won't be like that, let's get back to our story.

NEW CONDITIONS

-Who has a contact of a sculptor? -Petros asked, joining his colleagues who were waiting for him in one of the Cascade cafes, -and ten thousand dollars.

Kirakos and Ksyusha looked at him puzzled.

Petros sat down at the table, asked the waitress for coffee, waited until she left and said:

- At first, he wanted fifty, but I lowered it to thirty. We only agreed that we should pay ten thousand in advance. And the replica of the sculpture. Otherwise, the deal is off.

-It's not serious, - Kirakos said, -it can't be done that way.

- And how is it possible? - Petros got angry.

- He will take that money and pay off his son's debt, Kirakos explained with great confidence, - then he will try to take the sculpture from Varazdat. And what happens if he doesn't give it?

-He will, - Petros exclaimed with similar confidence.

- Just like he gave it to you? - Kirakos teased, - By the way, how are your ears?

-And he kicked you out in front of the whole Aresh,- Petros said.

They continued to argue while Ksyusha was listening in silence.

- You forgot that if it wasn't for your stupidity, the Cuban would not have stolen the sculpture, and now it would have been with us.

- And you promised that the parliamentarians you know will intercede with the oligarch.

- If it wasn't for me, you couldn't have even found the trace of the sculpture. It was thanks to my fellow parliamentarians that we have found it.

- I could find it myself.

- You can only lose.

This is where Petros got off track.

-Lose? -he exclaimed, slamming his hand on the table, - I have beaten all the casinos in America while you were busy getting into the laps of hundred-year-old women.

Petros misunderstood the meaning of the word "lose" because in English it rather means "defeat". But that wasn't the interesting part. What was interesting, was that Kirakos didn't go off track.

-By saying that, you are insulting not me, but women, -he smiled.

And here Petros said something he should never have said.

- Then why didn't it work out with Ksyusha?

- What should have worked with Ksyusha? - Ksyusha wondered.

- He has made a bet.

- What bet?

- Well... - Petros mumbled, - about you.

-You idiot, - Kirakos said righteously.

-You are the idiot, - answered Petros unfairly.

-Wait a minute, - Ksyusha tried to calm them down, -if you think I didn't know about that, you're wrong.

-How come you knew about it? - exclaimed Petros and Kirakos in unison.

Ksyusha took a sip from her glass of juice and calmly continued:

- And you thought that I should get upset and leave now? I take such things lightly. Let me just say that from the beginning you both had equal chances: zero! Therefore, you have both lost. All I have to know now is what you bet on.

Petros and Kirakos looked at each other.

- I suppose, some share of Lenin, - Ksyusha did not wait for an answer, - let's say, with a weight of ten kilograms. Am I right?

Kirakos took a guilty look.

- Yes, we have made a bet. But then we canceled it. You can ask Petros.

The latter nodded intensely.

-It doesn't change anything, - said Ksyusha calmly, -you both have lost. And since you both have lost, then I have won. Therefore...

But Kirakos interrupted her.

- Therefore, we divide Lenin into three equal parts.

HOW MASTER VARZDAT GOT A STROKE

When the former lecturer Ghazaryan received an envelope from Petros with the money in it and a huge box with Ilyich head in it, he asked everyone not to disturb him and began to think.

He did not like the taxi driver Varazdat, considered him to be of low social class, and hardly communicated with him. 'Hello' and 'good morning' he said from above, as he would say to a university guard. But at the same time, he was also careful, because he knew that he was a solid person, and his neighbors respected him. They had been neighbors for forty years, since Ghazaryan bought his mansion in Aresh. Only during the last ten years, when he was out of work and usually idle, he started communicating with the master willingly or unwillingly. Especially, since there were two important things connecting them: backgammon and memories of good old times. Good old times, when both lived as they wanted.

But the old times were gone, the new times were gone, and now a completely different time had come, when a person can actually be arrested for robbing the state. Who hasn't robbed? - thought the professor. Is there such a person who has held a public position, had the opportunity to rob or take a bribe and did not do it? Hardly. So why should his son pay for all this? So what, if he has caused a loss of fifty million to the state? Others made it to fifty billion, so what?

Anyway, most of the damage was repaired but fifteen million was still to be paid. And that money came knocking on their door by itself. It was strange, actually, but there was also something symbolic about it. Why Lenin?

-Lenin? - Master Varazdat muttered. -What do you need Lenin for?

-You probably know, - said the former lecturer in a miserable way, -misfortune has come to our house.

-Do you mean your son? - asked the master.

- Yes, - said the professor, - they want to take him to jail.

- Then why did he rob? - said the master, - how much did he rob?

- Who hasn't robbed?

The master wanted to continue in the same spirit, but perhaps he felt sorry for his neighbor and said more gently:

- Well, what does Lenin have to do with it?

The former lecturer looked desperately into his eyes.

- I am thinking of putting it at home for a couple of days for good luck.

- Good luck, hah? - the master scratched his head, - let's play backgammon.

- Will you give it to me or not?

- Let's play backgammon!

-All right, - the professor agreed enthusiastically.

And that was his mistake. Thrilled by the unexpected success, he didn't even understand how he did three “mars” to the master, one after the other.

-Let's play one more time, - said the master furiously after the last defeat.

- I have to work, I'll go...

- No, we have to play.

In the second round, Ghazaryan pulled himself together and tried to do everything to lose. But the dice were surprisingly favorable, and there was no way to lose. Master Varazdat cursed the dice not leaving out any family members, remembering first ants and then parents, but it was useless. The dice were unyielding and seemed specifically designed to make the master lose. After the second game, he threw them out the garage door and asked the neighbors to bring new ones.

-Today is not your day, Varazdat, let me go, we will play later, - said the professor imploringly.

- No, we have to play.

But the new dice didn't help either. The master was losing game after game, cursing, fuming, slamming his hand on the table and continuing to play. After the third game, he closed the backgammon, hit it several times and smashed it. Then he told the neighbors to bring a new backgammon. However, the neighbors did not make it. Master Varazdat grabbed his heart and fell into the arms of Professor Ghazaryan, who had so carelessly brought him to that state.

The master continued cursing before the ambulance arrived. He was cursing everything and everyone erratically, and after the ambulance arrived, he started cursing the doctors. The latter recorded a massive heart attack and said that the patient should be taken to the hospital immediately. But the patient objected. Exasperated, motionless and with an uncommunicative look, he continued cursing barely audible and demanded everyone to leave.

However, neighbors managed to put the master on a stretcher and carry him to an ambulance. Professor Ghazaryan was trying the most.

-Wait, - called the master, as if he was preparing to say his last will, -bring Lenin.

- Varazdat, you promised me... - Ghazaryan almost dropped the stretcher from his hand.

- Damn you...

When Master Varazdat and Lenin were placed in the ambulance and it started with the sirens on, Professor Ghazaryan stood there, cursing his luck, which had been so kind to him that day, even in terms of dice.

ANOTHER FAILURE

Master Varazdat and Vladimir Ilyich spent three days in the intensive care unit of Erebuni Hospital. On the first day, when they were taken to the hospital by an ambulance, both were unconscious, and the doctors assessed the chances of both as equal. Considering the patient's age, they were against surgery and told his wife and the neighbors to be prepared for the worst. However, master Varazdat came to his senses after an hour and asked where Lenin was. It was true that the neighbors took Lenin from the ambulance, with great difficulty brought him up to the third floor, where the intensive care unit was, but they were not allowed to put it inside. “Let it stay in my room for now”, - the doctor said. Only when the unconscious patient demanded it, there was nothing the doctor could do. The old man could not be subjected to a new stress and willy-nilly, Lenin was brought to the hospital room and placed on the windowsill.

At the door of the intensive care unit, in the corridor, the neighbors set up a duty, and on the third day, when the doctor declared that the patient's condition was good enough and he could be

transferred to a regular ward, they collected money for necessary expenses. These expenses also included the fee for a separate ward, where the master, his wife and Vladimir Ilyich spent another two weeks.

And where was Professor Ghazaryan during that time? The neighbors did not allow Professor Ghazaryan to see the patient, but also approach the threshold of the hospital. Everyone blamed him for what happened. Of course, the professor was forced to participate in the fundraising, and the latter gave quite a presentable amount from the contents of the envelope he had recently received. He rightly hoped that this would change the way he was treated, but it did not. But that wasn't the worst thing, and neither was the fact that Petros called every hour and asked what happened to the bust. The problem was that the son could be arrested at any moment. And the professor decided to take a dangerous step. He gave the money he received in the envelope (which he had spent a little, and which was three times less than what was requested) to his son and told him to transfer it where he was due, thus hoping to gain time and prolong the detention for a while. On the same day, in a cafe in front of Erebuni hospital, he met Petros, who had come with a burly man. Although he was wearing dark sunglasses and a cap, he seemed to have seen the latter.

-This is not gonna work, my man, - said the man with dark glasses and a cap, -we gave you the money you asked for, but you didn't give us what we needed.

-But who are you? - asked the professor, not knowing what to say.

- Usually, they don't ask me this kind of questions, and if they do, I don't answer - Kirakos wanted to take off his dark glasses, but changed his mind, - and taking into account your age and the academic title, I will say the following: agreements must be respected.

- I just wanted to say... - Ghazaryan was obviously scared, - I wanted to say that...

- It doesn't matter what you wanted to say, - Kirakos interrupted him, - where is the bust of Lenin, which is the only memory left of Petros Grigorich?

-It's here, in the hospital, on the third floor, in ward three hundred and twenty, - the professor said quickly.

-And why haven't you taken it yet? - Kirakos said in a stricter tone.

- Varazdat promised to give it to me after he is discharged, - the professor lied, - be patient for a few more days, please.

Kirakos again reached for the dark glasses. They were clearly bothering him and the only reason he was wearing them was for his former professor not to recognize him.

- Okay, we give you two more days.

However, the companions did not receive the sculpture in two days. They did not receive it neither in five days, nor in ten, nor by the time master Varazdat was discharged from the hospital and moved home. This time, he placed Ilyich not in the garage, but in the living room, because the doctors demanded him not to leave the house for at least a month.

Professor Ghazaryan, who the neighbors never allowed seeing master Varazdat, also locked himself in the living room of his house and did not answer phone calls.

It was clear that this was another failure and the companions needed to think of something new.

HOW MASTER VARZDAT RECEIVED A BOOKLET

Master Varazdat welcomed the beginning of the election campaign of the National Assembly in 2018 in his house in Aresh, where he had not left for already ten days. His neighbors took turns in bringing his daily press every morning. The master did not follow online media, as he had neither a computer nor a proper phone. And here, on the table in front of him, there were placed two newspapers of the day, one on the first page, the other on the last page, a glass of mulberry vodka, as well as a piece of boiled chicken. On the first page of the newspaper, the master read the following

headline: “My step” alliance starts its campaign”, on the last page of the newspaper read: “One of the crocodiles of the zoo died”. Before reading this news, however, the master drank the mulberry vodka, then tore off the butt of the boiled chicken and began to chew with delight.

The following was written under the first heading: *“The Government under the leadership of the Acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, “My step” alliance will start its pre-election campaign in Aragatsotn region today. At eleven o'clock, a rally will be held at Talin Square, and then Pashinyan will visit Shirak region to hold pre-election meetings in several more communities. In the evening a rally is planned in Gyumri. The Acting Prime Minister informed that he was taking a leave starting from today in order to fully participate in the campaign”.*

Under the second heading there was news from a completely different field:

“One of the crocodiles in the zoo was found dead yesterday morning. The crocodile named Alyosha was ten years old. This was reported by the press service of the zoo. The reasons for the animal’s fall...”

However, the master did not get to know the reason for Alyosha's fall, because at that moment the doorbell rang. Some conversation was heard from the corridor, and then his wife entered the living room with several colored papers in her hand.

-What are they? - asked the master.

-Booklets, - answered the wife.

-Here we go! - the master got angry, -tear it up and throw it away.

But the lady was in no hurry to do so. Instead, she handed the booklet to her husband and said:

- Look who it is.

-Whoever it is, - the master became even more angry.

-Don't be angry, you shouldn't be angry, -the lady reassured him, -it's Alyoshik.

-What Alyoshik, - the master wondered, -the crocodile?

Now it was his wife's turn to be surprised. Moreover, she nervously approached her husband and put her hand on his forehead. But there seemed to be no fever.

-What happened to you? - she asked.

- What should happen to me? - the master reached for the booklet independently.

- What crocodile?

- The crocodile in the zoo died. The name is Alyosha.

The booklet, however, had nothing to do with the latter. It was another Alyosha. More precisely, Alyoshik. He lived a few houses away.

-God damn, -said master Varazdat and nevertheless tore the booklet.

ALYOSHIK, A PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE

At the moment when master Varazdat was tearing the booklet, from which a handsome young man was looking at him with a fake smile, a parliamentary candidate Alyoshik, the latter was standing on the stage at the central square of one of the small towns of Armenia with the same smile and was getting ready to make a speech.

Master Varazdat certainly had his reasons for disliking Alyoshik. He had known him since he was a schoolboy and used to take him to classes in his taxi. At the end of each month, Alyoshik's parents paid twenty dollars. In nineteen ninety-two, it was serious money. However, the parents had a condition that if their son ran late for even one class because of the master, he would lose the monthly salary. And in general, he earned that money with difficulty, but the master had to endure. Times were hard and there was no other source of income. Once, one of the neighbors, knowing that the master takes Alyoshik every morning to the same school where his child attended, asked him to pick him up on the way. And although he would not pay for it, the master agreed. Anyway,

there was room in the car. The other child's name was Ashot, and he came from a much more socially disadvantaged family. And every time on the way home Alyoshik did not miss the opportunity to put him in an uncomfortable situation: "What kind of shoes are you wearing?" he used to ask, showing his expensive "Adidas". "And do you have a watch like this?", he used to say showing his electronic multi-functional watch to the boy. Then he would take out an orange or a banana from the bag, clean it and start eating it, naturally not giving Ashot a share. And one day, Ashot couldn't stand it anymore and gave Alyoshik a good wallop at the back seat of the Volga. The result was that master Varazdat was deprived of his monthly salary and Ashotik's parents were taken to the police.

Years later, when Alyoshik was already a student, the neighbors again appeared in the police department, thanks to him. This time the boy was given a good wallop by his fellow students, one of who was the son of a high-ranking police official, then they came to their yard in Aresh to give him another wallop. But the neighbors protected their kid and they beat the newcomers and especially the police chief's son. As a result, they ended up in the police, where Alyoshik testified against them. Naturally, this young man's bravery was not limited to this, but this was enough for master Varazdat to remember and be furious. 'And now this young man wants to run for parliament from the same neighborhood he has spent his "brave" childhood, adolescence and youth', - master Varazdat thought, tearing the pre-election booklet.

At that moment, the brave young man was standing on the stage at the central square of one of the small towns of Armenia with a fake smile and was preparing for a speech.

-He's a cute boy, - said one of the women gathered at the square.

-He is an actor, - said the other.

- No, I know him, he is a singer - said the third.

At that moment, the parliamentary candidate, who, in addition to being nominated in Yerevan by the ranking list, was also nominated by the proportional list and occupied a rather high position in that list, started speaking.

- We must reach out to the poor; we must eliminate poverty in our country...

One of the women gathered at the square clapped enthusiastically and said:

- He is a smart boy.

-He is from Yerevan, -said the other.

- No, I know him, he is from our parts, - said the third.

The parliamentary candidate continued to talk in a self-absorbed manner.

- The former authorities will still continue their attempts to return. We must support each other and fear nothing in order to bring our battle to a victorious end. With courage!

-Wonderful, - said one of the women gathered at the square.

-A real man, - said the second.

-With courage! - exclaimed the third.

Master Varazdat fortunately did not hear either the conversations of these women or this speech when he was tearing up the booklet of Alyoshik, a parliamentarian deputy.

ABOUT HOW MASTER VARAZDAT WAS HIT WITH THE SECOND STROKE AND DIED

On December 7, the last day of the snap election campaign of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia of twenty eighteen, master Varazdat woke up in an extremely bad mood. In his dream, he saw how Vladimir Ilyich was climbing down from the windowsill at night and entering his wife's bed.

-Vladimir Ilyich, what are you doing? - asked the master.

-Go back to sleep, -Ilyich whispered.

- What do you mean to sleep? - the master was surprised, - She's, my wife.

-Sleep, sleep, - the leader of the proletariat whispered again.

The master did not remember what happened next, but in any case, he was looking at his wife suspiciously. He was not looking at the bust of Lenin on the windowsill at all. He was sitting with his back to it and eating buckwheat with sour cream. And he was about to drink his morning glass of mulberry vodka when the doorbell rang. A little later, his wife entered the living room and said:

- He is a kind of parliamentary candidate.

-Tell him to get outta here, -the old man got angry, but then he regretted it, -Okay, tell him to come in.

He thought it would be a good way to dissipate a little from the dream and relax. But the opposite happened. The one who appeared in the doors of the living room was no one but the parliamentary candidate Alyoshik.

- How are you, master Varazdat, - he said with a special smile, - I haven't seen you for ages.

How should master Varazdat be? He had recently had a stroke, he couldn't go to work for a long time, and he had abandoned his beloved "Volga", the man he respected the most in the world tried to get into his wife's bed at night, and now Alyoshik was standing in the living room of his house.

The latter was not alone. There were three more people with him, the gender of two of them was clear - they were definitely girls, but the third one was unclear. And it was that third, in fact, that caused the eighty-year-old taxi driver's life to end.

When master Varazdat poured the mulberry vodka, he had in his hand onto Alyoshik's face, that young man of unknown gender screamed:

- What are you doing? I will call the police now.

- What... Damn you...

Master did not finish. He put his hand to his heart and fell on the couch.

During the last minute of his life, he tried, but still did not understand the gender of the screamer. However, he understood something else when he looked at the bust of Lenin on the windowsill. He should not be left unattended in a house with his wife.

-What happened, Varazdat? -the woman was crying in tears.

-You will bury Lenin with me, - said the master as his last will.

And off he went.

HOW WOULD THE PROFESSOR KNOW

The companions learned about master Varazdat's death from Professor Ghazaryan. Before that, however, some interesting events took place. The professor himself knew about the death of his neighbor quite late, because he had been locked in the house for a long time and had turned off the phone. As part of a visit to the neighbors' houses, Alyoshik, the parliamentary candidate, visited the professor and passingly conveyed the sad news.

-How did it happen? - asked the former lecturer.

-I don't know how it happened, but it happened at the moment when I was going to visit him, - Alyoshik said, -and I undertook to cover the expenses related to his funeral. Master Varazdat was an honorable man.

Of course, Alyoshik lied in the first part, but the second part was absolutely true. The point was that at the time of the master's death, Alyoshik, his team and the future widow were present in the living room. There was no one else. When the old man expressed his last will and passed away, the widow hugged Alyoshik and started sobbing and through tears she said:

- Lenin was more important to him than me.

- No, it's not true, the parliamentary candidate reassured her.

-What am I going to do now? -the widow whispered, -he left nothing but his old car.
-Don't worry, - Alyoshik said, -I will take care of all the expenses related to the funeral. And I will take care of you. Can you tell this to all the neighbors? And of course, we will fulfill the last will of your honorable husband.
-Really? -the widow smiled through her tears.
-I promise, - the deputy candidate assured.
And as confirmation of his words, he gave the lady several large bills.
It should be noted, that Alyoshik kept his promise. A funeral service was involved to organize the memorial and funeral ceremonies; they bought a grave place at Tokhmakh cemetery and rented one of the nearby funeral halls. He also arranged and paid for the wake. Then, with the attitude of a hero, he returned to the house of the deceased, where all the neighbors had already gathered and announced that everything was arranged, nobody should bother anymore. Neighbors naturally took the bait and began to look at Alyoshik differently. Now, even if he was not a hero, he was the worthiest parliamentary candidate in their district.
And so, on Saturday, December 8, the day of silence of the pre-election campaign for the snap elections of the National Assembly of twenty eighteen, Alyoshik came to Professor Ghazaryan's house. The point was that the parliamentary candidate was not aware of the things taking place in his district and did not know that the former lecturer's reputation was suffering for a long time, even more, he had serious problems.
-I didn't know, honest to God, I didn't, - Alyoshik said, listening to the story related to the Ghazaryan junior.
- We have compensated all the money, but they still want to detain my son, - said the former lecturer, - do something, please.
-I didn't know, - repeated the parliamentary candidate, pondering how he could help the professor and whether it was worth helping him, -I honestly didn't know.
-I will tell everyone to vote for you- promised Ghazarian, -just do something.
-I can think of something, - said Alyoshik, counting in his mind how many votes those "all" could be, - you give me your votes, and I will think of something.
Then Alyoshik went to the funeral hall, where master Varazdat was to be laid to rest shortly and urged the professor to go as well.
The former lecturer did not particularly believe Alyoshik. He was not going to participate in the elections. Neither he was planning to go to master Varazdat's memorial. However, he had something else in mind. And where is Lenin? The master can't take it with him to the future world. The professor had no idea that it was the master's last wish.
Ghazaryan turned on the phone, which had been switched off for several days, and called Petros.
-Varazdat died,-he said,-we can exchange the sculpture. But you have to help me.

A MAN WHO HAS MADE A REVOLUTION CANNOT BE LIGHT

Master Varazdat's memorial service was quite crowded. The whole neighborhood was present. However, the main focus was not the deceased one, but the parliamentary candidate Alyoshik, who had organized the funeral and took care of all the expenses. And now he was collecting votes for himself. The next day, on December 9, twenty nineteen, parallel to Varazdat's funeral, the snap elections of the National Assembly were to take place.
And parallel to the memorial service, something else was happening. It could not be characterized in any other way than a theft. Or maybe it could. Is there an article in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia that prohibits replacing one bust of Lenin with another one? Or is there an

article that prohibits entering someone else's house when the door of that house is open?

At least, the situation was exactly like that when Petros and Kirakos, accompanied by Professor Ghazaryan, approached master Varazdat's house. Ksyusha was waiting in the car. She agreed to join the companions under the condition that nothing illegal would happen. They will go in with the former lecturer and simply change the sculptures. Honestly, the former lecturer did not plan anything like a theft. According to his plan, there should be a person in the master's house, say one of the relatives or neighbors, they should come in and say that they have come to take the statue of Lenin to the memorial hall. Then they had to change the sculptures. This much.

The door of the deceased's house was open. Professor Ghazaryan, Kirakos and Petros went in very nervously, as if they were afraid that master Varazdat would show up from somewhere and throw them out cursing.

The lights were on in the hall, as well as in the kitchen and living room. The wooden floor was creaking. It smelled of moisture and arsenic.

-Anybody home? - the professor said in a frightened voice.

There was no answer, and he entered the living room first. Petros and Kirakos followed him. The sculpture was not there. It was also missing from the bedroom and kitchen, where the unsuspecting thieves entered next.

-Maybe they moved it to the garage, - said the professor and tiptoed to the door leading from kitchen to garage.

It was also open. In the garage, the white "Volga" stood abandoned and sad. But Lenin was not there...

-Let's look in the car, - said Ghazaryan, -the old man loved Lenin and his Volga the most.

However, Ilyich was not there either. And it couldn't be, because at that moment it was in a completely different car, in the trunk, to be exact.

On the same day, in the morning, Master Varazdat's wife called the parliamentary candidate and asked him to take Lenin out of the house.

-He has ruined my house, - she said, -when Varazdat brought him home, everything changed. First, he has hit the car, then he had a stroke and was hospitalized, then he died.

And Alyoshik with his assistants came and took the bust.

-So heavy, - said one of the assistants, the one whose gender the luminary master did not even understand.

-A man who has made a revolution cannot be light, - Alyoshik said seriously.

-And where are we taking it? - asked the assistant.

- We will take it to the National Assembly - the parliamentary candidate ordered.

-But didn't that person ask to bury this sculpture with him? - wondered the assistant who was present at the moment when master Varazdat voiced his last will.

-I haven't heard anything like that, - said Alyoshik, -put Lenin in the trunk of my car.

And it was there that the bust of the leader of the proletariat found its next refuge.

THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN ILYICH AND ALYOSHIK

In the snap elections of the National Assembly of twenty eighteen, Alyoshik, a parliamentary candidate nominated by the ranked electoral system, collected more than ten thousand votes in his electoral district. And although his name was also in the proportional list of his political power and in a quite advanced position, he was still elected as a member of parliament by ranking election system.

Alyoshik was excited, so excited that he left his colleagues at the headquarters, went out, got into his car and started driving aimlessly around the city. While driving in a wrecked street, he felt

something rattling in the trunk and remembered that there was a bust of Lenin. He stopped the car, got out and opened the trunk. Lenin did not turn around; he stood as he usually did the way he was alive and put on the pedestals in the squares of Soviet cities. The clatter came from somewhere else. The fact was that the parliamentary candidate, confident that he would win, had bought a box of champagne in advance and placed it in the trunk.

"Well, I can open a bottle", Alyoshik thought. And so, he did. There was a slight explosion, the cork flew into the air, and the bubbling liquid spilled here and there.

-Do you think we should toast the revolution? - said the people's elect, turning to Vladimir Ilyich and without waiting for an answer, took a big sip from the bottle.

And the old revolutionary looked sideways at him, as if saying:

- Look, boy, revolutionaries don't drink champagne; in general, revolutionaries keep themselves modest.

Only the boy was excited and did not perceive Ilyich's look correctly.

-I'll put you in my office, - he said, -just for fun. And also, you seem to bring good luck to me. A toast to success.

And again, he sipped from the bottle. He wiped his mouth with his sleeve and carefully looked at Lenin, who clearly did not like the fact that he would be put in some office for a joke. And he said:

- A revolution is not a joke; it cannot be turned into a joke.

But Alyoshik's passion had turned into excitement, the champagne had warmed his head, and he was feeling too good.

- Ten thousand votes, do you understand, ten thousand? I did it! Do you understand?

He took another big gulp and started dancing to the music coming from the car.

Meanwhile, Ilyich was getting angry.

- Boy, pull yourself together, the revolution is not a game or a dance.

Here the newly elected member of parliament stopped dancing, took another sip from the bottle, approached the trunk, put his foot on the bumper of the car and turned to Lenin:

- Why are you looking at me like that? We are no worse than you. We have also made a revolution.

And it seemed to him that Ilyich asked him:

- And have you dekulakized the country?

- We will do it.

- And have you arrested SR's?

- We will do that.

- And have you killed the Tsar and his family?

- We will do that too. The time for that will come as well, - assured Alyoshik, - everyone will be punished.

And he emptied the champagne bottle in one breath.

Vladimir Ilyich did not manage to ask the next question. He wanted to know what his fate would be. But he didn't know.

It's not clear whether it was from excitement, enthusiasm, dancing, imagining the scene of the murder of the Tsar's family, or just champagne, Alyoshik suddenly began to feel sick and staggered to the nearest trash can. That trash can, or similar ones, served Alyoshik and his teammates as barricades during the revolution. But instead of worshiping it, Alyoshik began vomiting into it.

HOW MASTER VARZDAT ROLLED OVER IN HIS GRAVE

When the companions once again lost the track of Lenin's bust, they were not as disappointed, discouraged and nervous as before. Moreover, they even took it with humor. It had already become a routine. Ksyusha even said:

- I think the real Lenin did not travel as much in his life as his replica.

And Kirakos joked:

- Will that moment not come when I stick Lenin to the wall and break his head?

Petros, however, was concerned about something else:

- This is already a matter of honor for me, - he said, - will I not be able to take possession of the heritage from my grandfather?

But all three understood that something had to be done before it was too late. Professor Ghazaryan was their hope again. The latter, in turn, was still hoping to get the rest of the money he needed from the companions.

After Master Varazdat's burial, the former lecturer waited a few days, then visited the widow. The lady, hearing Lenin's name, could not control herself and started screaming:

- You kill me with your Lenin, leave me alone.

However, the professor did not give way.

- We are old communists: me, your husband, may he rest in peace... Remember what good times we lived.

- Of course, you are old communists, - the lady softened a little, - Lenin is more important to you than anything else.

-He is our idol, - said the former lecturer seriously.

The widow looked at him strictly and in a low voice, as if she didn't want to, uttered:

- So, you have buried your idol.

-What? - the professor did not understand.

-You have heard me, - continued the widow more confidently, -even the real Lenin was not buried, but you have buried yours.

-You mean...- the professor hesitated.

- I want to say, - the lady interrupted him, - I'm fed up with your Lenin. Leave me alone.

Right after leaving the widow, the professor called Petros and said:

- I know where your sculpture is. Prepare the rest of the money.

Of course, this time the companions did not give the rest of the money to the professor in advance. Kirakos demanded to reveal the location of the sculpture and promised to pay the money only after taking it. The professor had to agree.

But the most interesting thing started later. Ksyusha categorically refused to participate in the grave desecration.

-It's even worse than stealing, you know, - she explained.

-You're right, - Kirakos suddenly agreed, -we won't do that. Others will do it for us.

And the companions got into the "Range Rover" and went to the cemetery. Finding the "others" wasn't difficult. Kirakos approached the three gravediggers when they had finished their regular work and were about to take a lunch break. He placed three bottles of vodka on the table. The vodkas were called "Serp i Molot" and Kirakos had specially chosen them. On the label, in addition to the hammer and the sickle, Lenin's head was depicted.

- Hello to working class!

The gravediggers could not believe their luck. One of them, who was the oldest and probably the "brigadier", jumped up from his seat and almost stood up.

-What should be done, boss? - he asked the benefactor.

And Kirakos explained the essence of the case. He did it very delicately and artistically, fearing that the gravediggers might refuse. Only, it turned out, there was no need for it.

-One hundred thousand drams, - the "brigadier" said without thinking.

Master Varazdat's grave was demolished at night. The old man was lying quietly and probably thought that they had come to correct the mistake. After passing on to the future world, he still did

not understand why they had not fulfilled his last will and buried Lenin with him. And when Petros and Kirakos, who were watching the activities of the gravediggers with bated breath, realized that the bust was not here, it seemed to them that the master had rolled over in his grave.

HOW LENIN APPEARED AGAIN IN THE BUILDING FROM WHICH HE LEFT THIRTY YEARS AGO

In the trunk of Alyoshik's car, Lenin was not feeling too well. Despite the fact that for the last thirty years he's been everywhere and with many people, but he has never been treated as carelessly, as by a newly elected member of the National Assembly.

And where has the leader of the proletariat been for the last thirty years?

From the office of Petros Grigorich, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia, he was moved to Chnashkharhik's apartment, where he spent ten years till nineteen ninety-eight. After that, Chnashkharhik gave the bust to her new lover, the poet Ludwig, who has kept it in his friend artist studio for fifteen years. Then he brought it to Vernissage and sold it to Judge Bozoyan, in whose garden the bust spent the next few years. From there, Lenin was taken to a film shooting space, where, according to the script, he was supposed to be thrown out of the window of the fifth floor. But the script was changed, and Lenin was saved. Moreover, he settled in a luxurious mansion of an oligarch. From there, he was supposed to be transferred to Cuba by businessman Esteban Ramirez-Núñez and stay at Raul Castro's house or workplace, but with the help of the businessman's secretary Alejandro, Lenin moved to Aresh instead of Cuba and stayed at the house of taxi driver Master Varazdat. He would have found his last resting place in the grave of the same master, but he ended up in the trunk of the car of the member of parliament Alyoshik. There! And would Vladimir Ilyich know that he would end up back where he had started his long journey?

When Alyoshik parked his car not far from the official entrance of the National Assembly on December twenty-five, twenty eighteen, a white Range Rover parked behind him, with Kirakos sitting at the wheel, Petros at the front seat, and Ksyusha at the back.

During the week preceding that the following events took place. Kirakos, accompanied by Professor Ghazaryan, visited Master Varazdat's widow and had a long talk with her. In the course of the conversation, he learned that there was an Alyoshik, who had not only organized the master's funeral, but also had taken care of all the expenses. Then, already without the professor, the companions started looking for Alyoshik. However, it was possible to find him only in ten days, on the twenty-fifth of December, because the young man decided to rest after the intense election campaign and left for Egypt. During all that time, the bust remained in the trunk of his car, but the companions did not know that. And while the people's elect was enjoying his well-earned rest, Ksyusha, Kirakos and Petros, especially Petros, could not find peace due to anxiety. Kirakos had even managed to enter Alyoshik's apartment under some excuse, but, of course, in vain.

And so, that morning, knowing that the young man had returned, the companions decided not to waste any more time and meet him. Meeting him was reserved for Ksyusha. She should have done it as if by accident in a convenient place, preferably in a cafe.

Only, Alyoshik was not going to the cafe that day. Leaving the house, he took the car out of the garage, first went to the beauty salon, then to the party's office, and then to the National Assembly. In the first two places, it was in no way proper for Ksyusha to meet him by accident. The third place was even more improper. After parking the car, the newly elected member of parliament quickly entered the checkpoint of the National Assembly and disappeared behind the doors. The companions had to wait outside. In half an hour Alyoshik returned, accompanied by two guards, and opened the trunk of the car. One of the policemen took out a box full of champagne bottles, the

other one - the bust of Lenin. They walked to the checkpoint of the National Assembly, and Alyoshik followed them.

HOW KSYUSHA MET ALYOSHIK AS IF 'BY CHANCE'

Alyoshik was drinking wine in one of the cafes on Northern Avenue when Ksyusha entered and sat down at the table next to him. Her entrance caused an earthquake of at least four magnitudes in the cafe, with frequent aftershocks. The epicenter of the earthquake was near the table where the newly elected member of the National Assembly was sitting.

Ksyusha was wearing skinny jeans and a short leather jacket with many chains, like those worn by motorcyclists. Entering the cafe, she lifted her sunglasses, looked around the hall and approached one of the empty tables next to Alyoshik. She called the waiter with her hand and said:

- Campari with cherry juice. And the Wi-Fi password.

Then she took out the phone from her bag and started dealing with it, not paying attention to her surroundings.

- Have you ever been told that there is no one as beautiful as you in Armenia? -Alyoshik said as low as possible.

-It's an extremely simple way to get acquainted with me, - answered Ksyusha, not taking her eyes off the phone.

- The thing is, - continued Alyoshik overconfidently, - that usually I don't get acquainted with women, they do it for me.

-Really? - Ksyusha finally looked at him,-Are you an actor or at least a singer?

- No, - said Alyoshik indifferently, - I am a member of the National Assembly.

-No way! - Ksyusha pretended to be surprised.

Alyoshik got convinced that his positions are getting stronger, smiled broadly, stroked his own hair and said:

- Can a newly elected member of the National Assembly of Armenia treat the most beautiful girl in Armenia?

- He can - Ksyusha also smiled - but first he has to answer a question.

Alyoshik excitedly got up and approached the table next to him with a glass of wine in his hand.

- And can the member of the National Assembly, who, by the way, had collected ten thousand votes during the elections, sit next to the most beautiful girl in Armenia?

- But you still haven't answered my question.

- I will answer, - Alyoshik, without getting permission, pulled the chair and sat down, - you can ask me anything.

- I'm not going to interrogate you; I just have one question...

- As long as you don't ask if I'm married or not.

- Absolutely not. I have another question, are you black or white?

Alyoshik was surprised here.

-What do you mean? - he suddenly switched to informal "you". Ksyusha did the same.

- I mean, are you one of the former or one of the current?

-Of course, from the current, -said Alyoshik proudly, -Did you doubt? We have made a revolution.

- In that case, I will ask you to return to your table, - Ksyusha switched to formal "you" again, - I do not sympathize with the current authorities.

During the entire conversation, Alyoshik's self-confident gaze was fixed on the interlocutor. It immediately descended from her eyes to her neck, then gradually further down, between her unbuttoned shirt, immediately rising up again. However, hearing Ksyusha's last words, the self-confidence of the newly elected member of parliament immediately disappeared.

- How... - he mumbled, - we have made a revolution.

-I repeat, - said Ksyusha calmly, -I do not support you, all those who have made a revolution, moreover your leader.

She said it quite loudly, and Alyoshik looked restlessly to sides, as if he was afraid someone might hear her.

-But...- he continued, -but how can you say that...

Ksyusha got up, took off her leather jacket, hung it on the back of the chair, sat down again and returned to her phone, implying that she was no longer interested in the interlocutor. To be safe, she unbuttoned another button on her shirt.

However, Alyoshik was not going to leave. More precisely, he was unable to do it. He was nailed to his chair like Lenin to his pedestal.

The waiter came over and placed a glass of Campari and cherry juice on the table. Ksyusha sipped, squinting at her tablemate as if trying to understand why he was still there. Alyoshik tried to pull himself together to avoid the ultimate fiasco.

- And maybe we should leave politics aside, - he tried to smile, - what does a beautiful woman like you have to do with politics?

- Nothing, - Ksyusha also smiled.

- You see, - continued Alyoshik hopefully, - put down that drink of yours and let's have wine. I want to treat you to the best wine here.

- I drink wine only at dinner.

-Even better. So let's go somewhere and have dinner.

Ksyusha put the phone on the table and pretended to look carefully at the interlocutor.

-Listen, I like you, - she changed to informal "you" again, - maybe I could accept your invitation. But there is a disturbing circumstance. Your power...

- Well, what does that have to do with...?

-It has a lot to do with it, - Ksyusha interrupted him, -I like it when a man is a man. And there is no masculinity in you. I don't mean you specifically, no offence.

- None taken, but...

-Do you understand? - Ksyusha interrupted him again, -I can't stand your rule.

And here something happened that Ksyusha could never expected to happen. She simply did not believe.

When, a few hours before, she was discussing with her companions how to proceed after an allegedly accidental acquaintance with Alyoshik, Kirakos proposed a scenario that seemed incredible, with which Ksyusha did not want to agree in any way. But Kirakos was able to convince her by assuring that it would work. And now, it seemed to be working. When Ksyusha said that she could not stand the authorities, Alyoshik thought for a moment, then came forward a little and whispered:

-Me too.

-What? - Ksyusha was sincerely surprised.

- I can't stand him either - Alyoshik came forward and was already on the table with his whole body from the waist up.

-Who? -asked Ksyusha.

- Well, you understand.

-I don't understand, - insisted Ksyusha.

Here Alyoshik could not resist and named of the person he couldn't stand. Then he stepped back, elbowed the wine glass and turned it over.

SURPRISE!

Ksyusha left the choice of the restaurant to Alyoshik, moreover, he offered to take her to a place where they can have dinner not in the common hall, but in a separate room. Then, when they reached the place and sat down at the table, Alyoshik, unable to hide his excitement, said:

- I love courageous girls.

What would the newly elected member of parliament know that it was just a part of the scenario drawn by her companions? And then he shouldn't have uttered the word "courageous".

- I also like courageous guys, - said Ksyusha with a sly smile,- but the "courageous" people in my perception are a little different.

-What do you mean?

- I mean, real courageous people are courageous when they are alone, not when they are hiding behind others.

But Alyoshik didn't seem to be listening:

- You are so beautiful...

He tried to grab Ksyusha's hand, but the girl deftly moved it aside.

-I hope you're not like that, - she continued.

-Like what? - the member of parliament asked hearbroken.

- You don't hide behind other people's backs.

- Anyway, I don't understand what you mean, - Alyoshik sat closer to the girl, - please, let's talk about something else.

-No, - insisted Ksyusha, - I have to know.

- What do you want to know?

- That you are not one of them.

- But didn't I already say that?

- What did you say?

And Alyoshik not only repeated what he had said but went even further. He said many things concerning his teammates and their leader... And then he concluded like this:

- I play my own game. God damn them all. I needed to become a member of parliament, I did. Don't you want to have a friend member of parliament? Others would dream about it.

Here Ksyusha calmly got up and said:

- Order the oldest wine for me, I'll be back shortly.

Alyoshik looked fervently as she left the room, then called the waiter and ordered the cheapest French wine in the wine list. Then he started thinking about where to go after dinner. He had already decided, but to make everything even more effective, he called his assistant and ordered a bouquet to be brought to the restaurant. Then, extremely satisfied with himself, he leaned on the back of the sofa and began to wait for Ksyusha.

However, Ksyusha did not come. Kirakos came instead, accompanied by Petros.

-You must have entered by mistake, - Alyoshik said indifferently, seeing the unknown people who opened the door of the private room.

- We entered the right place.

Kirakos approached the table and sat down without waiting for an invitation. Petros was standing by the door.

Alyoshik was confused at first.

- What are you doing? Someone should come to me now.

-Someone? -Kirakos repeated.

Then Alyoshik got worried.

- Do you know who I am?

-We know, - answered Kirakos confidently.

Alyoshik was already scared.

-Where are you from?

- Where we need to be from.

Alyoshik, however, made one last attempt, clearly terrified:

- I am a member of the National Assembly.

Kirakos took out the glasses box from his chest pocket, then the glasses from the it, cleaned them with a velvet cloth, put them on his eyes and calmly said:

- The member of the National Assembly is also a person. And he can make a mistake. Even a big mistake.

- But what have I done?

Kirakos did not have time to say what Alyoshik had done, because at that moment the door of the private room opened, and the waiter entered with a bottle of wine and two glasses in his hand. Petros sent him away, closed the door and stood in front of it like a watchman in his position. Alyoshik was horrified by this scene even more and repeated:

- What have I done?

- You lied to the deceased, you promised and did not fulfill his last will. You have stolen his precious relic.

Alyoshik didn't seem to immediately understand what he was talking about. He thought for a while, then he remembered. Here he calmed down a little, took a breath of relief and said:

- So, you are his friends? Leave here immediately or I will call the police. I am a member of the National Assembly. By the way, from the prime minister's team.

Kirakos naturally expected such a development. He certainly didn't leave. Nor was he in a hurry to answer.

He calmly took the bottle of wine, turned it upside down, then looked at the label and said:

- And you wanted to treat Ksyusha with this cheap wine?

Alyoshik wanted to say something, but Kirakos didn't let him.

- So, you say, you're playing your own game, hah? Damn them, you say?

Alyoshik again did not immediately understand what was going on. Then he remembered that he had said the same things to Ksyusha and became afraid:

- I wasn't serious, I... he spoke quickly, -I... I was joking... I swear.

At that moment, the door opened again. A large bouquet of flowers first appeared in the doorway, then the face of Alyoshik's assistant. The same assistant whose gender was unclear.

-Surprise! - he exclaimed with his mouth wide open.

Then he looked at the people gathered in the private room, thought for a long time and still did not understand who he should give the bouquet to.

HOW LENIN FELL ON ALYOSHIK'S FEET, AND THAT WAS THE END OF THIS STORY

The cause of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's death, according to the official autopsy report, was widespread vascular atherosclerosis. However, there is also an unofficial version, which the "European Journal of Neurology" put into circulation in two thousand and four. According to this version, the leader of the proletariat died of neurosyphilis.

After Lenin's death, the funeral commission received tens of thousands of letters and telegrams from different parts of the country with requests to preserve the leader's body.

"It is necessary that Ilyich is physically with us, and the huge masses of workers can always see him" the letter sent by the workers of the "Putilov" factory said.

"The body of a leader so loved by the people cannot be buried under any circumstances", - the workers of Moscow's Rogozho-Simonov district wrote.

“Don't keep it in the ground like a mere mortal, don't hide it from our eyes”- the villagers of Sharlikov Volost of Orenburg province demanded.

As a result, Lenin's body was placed in the Red Square mausoleum in Moscow and is still there.

After the death of the leader of the proletariat, until nineteen ninety-one, about fifteen thousand statues of the leader were erected in the republics of the Soviet Union, member states of the Warsaw Pact, as well as in Mongolia, Cuba, India, Vietnam and elsewhere. Surprisingly, about half of them are still in place today.

It is not known how many busts of Lenin were cast during the Soviet Union. It is also unknown what happened to them after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Except for one!

The one that about thirty years ago, was cast by the jeweler Hovsep from pure, ninety-nine-karat gold, upon request of Petros Grigorich, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia. And again, at the request of the same person, it was masked with plaster after casting, so that it would give the impression that it was made of plaster, not gold. As a result, the bust weight increased by additional five kilograms and became fifty-five kilograms. Then the Cuban Alejandro broke a piece of plaster of Lenin's nose, and the bust weight was reduced by five grams.

In short, when the newly elected deputy Alyoshik took the bust of Lenin out of the trunk of his car, it weighed exactly fifty-four kilograms and nine hundred and ninety-five grams.

The thing was that Alyoshik had not raised this bust before. The first time, when it was moved from Master Varazdat's house to his car, it was done by the assistants, then the guards on duty took it from the car to the National Assembly. They also brought it from the National Assembly and placed it again in the trunk of the car.

And maybe those extra four kilograms, nine hundred and ninety-five grams were the reason, or maybe the reason was the deformity of Ilyich's nose, that reduced the weight of the bust by five grams, however, immediately after removing it from the trunk and turning over, Alyoshik lost his balance, but did not fall immediately. Lenin fell first. It fell directly on the parliamentarian's leg and was crushed. Then Alyoshik just fell, screaming in pain and holding his leg.

It is worth saying, that no one came to help Alyoshik. While all three companions came to help Vladimir Ilyich at the same time.

IF ONLY THIS NEW YEAR...

The companions welcomed the New Year in the open-air cafe of the circular park with the boys and girls of the “Land of Men” studio. Ksyusha, Kirakos and Petros bought the cafe together, by selling Lenin and gifting it to the young people.

The tables were not rich, just bread and wine, but the content of the celebration was rich. One of the young people began to recite.

If only this New Year puts an end to Armenians' pain.

If only evil gone astray and the good lived in our hearts.

Then they clinked glasses and drank, one of them started playing the guitar, and a girl sang:

If only this New Year brought freedom to Armenia,
And valleys shone around our Mount Masis.

Then the drum started beating from somewhere, and the boys' choir joined:

If only this New Year brought unity to Armenia.
If only Armenian flag waved on top of Karin's temple.

And in the end, everyone joined:

Do not ever hesitate; all this is to happen soon,
If only we eliminate trifle from our hearts.