

Dedicated to those who were gone and lost in the 90-s





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Tandem

Novel

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The novel “Tandem” is about expectations and aspirations at the crossroads of epochs. Is there a chance to receive everything from your destiny? Can you save it all with that - your dream, family, business and yourself?

The novel is based on real events. The names of organizations and medicines, as well as the names of characters are fictional.

On the cover: Kazimir Malevich. Two Male Figures (In White and Red).
Beginning of 1930s

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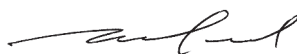
Author's note

I hope the book about people at the crossroads of epochs will not just talk about the business with its harassment, raiding and corporative blackmail... There is no escaping them! A lot of things depend on how the initial capital accumulation takes place. No one has ever done without this set of “high technologies”.

The choice inevitability for a casual participant of new born exchange relations is always dangerous. Many people are not ready for those destiny twists. They come across tempting toys lying all over the shop, they believe in their illusions and bring common human feelings like friendship and love into business... That causes mistakes. From the established habit to difficulties and constant struggle blinkers are bound to appear covering a lot of other possibilities of self-expression, in which case a person has to engage himself in something that contradicts his original assignment. People are looking for themselves the way they can and Time gradually discovers their highlights. With some people it happens quickly, with some – slowly. For some people life is not long enough.

Sometimes you just want to stop this race of “weeks and years” and look behind...

Boris Kornev



*Prince, n'enquerez de semaine
Où elles sont, ne de cet an,
Qu'à ce refrain ne vous remaine:
Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?*

François Villon

*Prince, don't ask me in a week
or in a year what place they are;
I can only give you this refrain:
Where are the mows of yesteryear?*

François Villon

(Translation: Robin Shirley)

Prologue

Near the window with heavy wine-coloured curtains, in the corner of a spacious room, there was a massive leather arm-chair. Next to it stood an Italian floor lamp with a small and very bright bulb, which was fixed on the end of a flexible metal arch and peeped out from behind the arm-chair. Its light was flowing accurately on the table where there were fresh newspapers and magazines. If someone opened the study door they would think there was no one in the room.

A lean, not very tall middle-aged man seemed to be hiding from people. He could hardly be seen between the high arm-rests and a giant seat-back the same colour as the curtains. The grey, nearly ash-coloured face gave away numerous deep-rooted illnesses. He was holding a large transparent cup with strong tea in one hand and was turning over the newspapers with the other hand reading headlines and looking at the pictures. He was mainly interested in the back pages – criminal news. The man would carefully put his tea cup on the saucer now and again, slowly put on his glasses in a thin golden frame and immerse himself into reading.

The study door opened quietly. Someone in rustling felt slippers gently floated along the multicoloured wood species of parquet mosaics to the middle of the room.

“Don’t you know I like reading newspapers while having breakfast? I like to know who was killed and where, who snuffed it... Why are you disturbing me?” the man nervously said from his hiding-place.

“Petro Mikhailovich,” whispered the other man apologizing, “I thought...”

“You?”

“I meant...”

“Explain properly. You’ve spoilt my breakfast anyway. Take the porridge away, I haven’t finished it. They put milk into it again. They are trying to be kind at my expense. You do know I am not allowed milk, don’t you? I’ve got an ulcer!”

The bodyguard of the famous Mafia boss Pyotr Mikhailovich Philippov was an extremely close person, assistant and the only “liner” between the leader and all of his “empire”. Having shown the insult from his boss’ distrust, he took away the bowl of nearly untouched porridge, returned and started to report with embarrassment, “This, what’s-his-name, Pharmacist, who you lent the money to... He either sold his business or someone snatched it from him. In short, our people from the Economic Crimes Department say he is now at a loose end. Who will give you the money back? So I thought...”

The owner of the place lifted his head and slowly took his glasses off.

“Sorry. I mean, I’ve heard, he is about to leave abroad.”

“See, how good it is when you can report properly,” Pyotr Mikhailovich suddenly slipped off the chair and stood in front of the puncher, who smelt of the cheap eau de cologne, with his ironed double-breasted, cobblestone-coloured suit buttoned up, his too short tie tied in a clumsy knot and sticking out of the lapel of his blazer. He was wearing soft, worn-out slippers on his bare feet.

The guardian hastily moved back to the door. He knew better than to bother his frail looking boss, who quickly approached the telephone, picked up the massive receiver and without listening to the answer, started talking in a completely different voice, thoroughly picking up words as if he was dictating.

“Right. First of all – Knave and Accountant – to me at twelve. By then find and carefully bring me Pharmacist. Secondly – find out where academic Maximov is nowadays and... When will I get that poxy factory in Smolensk? Report to me by tonight.” Without waiting for an answer, he carefully put the receiver back on the shiny metal phone set cradle and sat down in his favourite chair.

Pyotr Mikhailovich Philippov, known as “Philya”, was not a godfather – his life was posh but “his people” also respected him. He had spent a third of his life in prisons, but in early nineties he suddenly found himself in demand for big business. He had recently returned to Russia for a week or two from Spain where he had been living and

reinstating. In spite of living abroad, he did manage to “control the justice”.

His main project was a legal oil business in Yamal-Nenets district. He was liable to “his people” for it. That was the major source of refilling the common fund in Cyprus. The rest was also important, but not to such an extent. Payments from the “middle management” for the criminal protection and raiding – property and profit-making companies take-over – made only a third in the total income.

Philippov considered Pharmacist’s business special. There was no land, houses, oil or gas, there were just patents, not many people from the gang were able to understand what to do with them. But he loved that clever toy. Sure thing! Kind of nothing, but the auditors from “Coopers & Lybrand” think this “nothing” was worth forty million dollars. A trademark was worth one third of it, let alone the marketing network all over the country. This was where Philippov got his twenty per cent for the criminal protection.

On the sixth of August 1997 Pyotr Mikhailovich gave Pharmacist another loan for development. To do that he even flew from Spain. There you are! It had only been a week and something had gone wrong. Now he had to sort it all out.

At twelve o’clock all the wanted people were sitting in a row in the office of the “competent businessman” and waiting. On the left there was Knave, a robot of uncertain age in a denim suit with no feelings or reflections, next to him there was Accountant, a fat man, being a heart case, in a thin grey jumper, just under seventy, who certainly shouldn’t have got upset. On the end, at some distance, there sat cross-legged Pharmacist – Vasily Fyodorovich Prokhorov. It was he who on behalf of the biggest in the North-West drug company carried on negotiations and took decisions on signing contracts. Everyone was used to the idea of Prokhorov being the main person in the company. It was not the owner of the drug company, who no one ever saw, and it was not the person who the owner and the managing director gave the designation of authority, it was Prokhorov. He always had the last word and his decisions were always carried out; contracts and orders were taken, documents were signed, powers of attorney were issued. It didn’t matter that he was kind of nobody. On his business card of expensive paper with watermarks there was only his phone number. No name, no post, no address.

The phone on the table of Philippov's assistant was quiet, it didn't flash, but he suddenly got up and listening to his inner voice, opened the study door and let the three people inside.

Pyotr Mikhailovich was standing in the middle of the room smiling and opening his arms. Vasiliy confidently came up, gave him several kisses and without asking any questions got out of the way waiting for the others to hug their idol. Having finished always the same greeting procedure, the host returned to the coffee table and got into his favourite arm-chair, without thinking of his manners. The three hesitating guests came up to Philippov.

"My dear," Philya addressed Prokhorov, "how can I have my "little tenner" back? I did warn you I was lending it to you without interest or papers. But could take it back any moment after a week. You know the rules, don't you?"

"Ten million dollar loan! Well! Pyotr Mikhailovich, a week hasn't passed yet. The accountants have just sent the money according to the schedule," Vasiliy tried to answer, bowing with respect and looking at the man sitting in the arm-chair.

"So, tell us, my darling, tell the worrying people, where we would look for it if something happened." Philya pointed at his assistants who showed obvious interest and extreme anxiety supporting the host's words. They were aware of Pyotr Mikhailovich's habit to make a show at shoot-outs with his partners or pupils so they liked to play along skilfully. If they didn't, they wouldn't survive.

"What do you mean "if something happened", Pyotr Mikhailovich? I need at least two weeks. I am going to pay interest every week. Even five per cent a month..."

"From what, Vasiliy?"

"From what? I can even pay twenty five per cent a year instead of twenty while the loan is working. OK?"

"Look, he doesn't know." Philya even got upset because Pharmacist kind of had no idea.

"Don't know what? Do tell me what the matter is!"

"First of all you tell me where our "tenner" is. What is the schedule?"

"I don't really know. It was Accountant's idea. He knows what he's doing. Ask him. What's the matter, damn? Has everything gone? No, it can't! Everything's been seized! Right step, left step – end of the game!"

The host felt something was wrong. He fiddled with a wooden jewellery-box with marquetry, standing on the coffee table, then firmly opened the lid and took out a cigarette. Without waiting for his bum-licks with golden lighters, he lit a cigarette with a match. The sharp sourish tobacco smell reminded everyone of Pyotr Mikhailovich' favourite brand. They were Cuban cigarettes "Ligeras", or "Death under Sail", strictly forbidden by his doctors.

When he was young and worked as a tree-cutter in a prison, his mates used to send him those cigarettes and laevomycetin. If he got the flu in a marsh and his temperature raised up to 38, he would take a couple of his tablets, drink alcohol, eat a slice of raw bear meat with tomato paste and smoke "Ligeras", one after another, taking cigarettes from a black pack with a white sail in the middle. One puff, another puff, then back to work. His cold would disappear in no time. But it didn't do any good to his heart.

Now he only smoked when adrenalin exhaling in a scent of trouble could be suppressed with another, simple and understandable, danger. For instance, with a danger of harsh smoke of cigarettes "Death under Sail" for his entirely ruined lungs or gastric ulcer.

One glance of Philippov towards Knave between puffs was enough, he got the message. A sharp short-armed punch – and Vasiliy suddenly rolled up, as if he was made out of playdough, then he got a blow on his chin and found himself on the floor.

"Not this," Philya said hastily, "not this. I don't need any blood on the parquet."

"Did you get it?" Knave shouted. "Did you get it?" He was kicking Pharmacist, who was lying on the floor, and at the same time looking at his boss with guilt and surprise, as if answering him, "There is no blood. I am not stupid and know how to work with the client."

"Mister," Accountant barged in the discussion, "you can't help knowing. Sorry, but it doesn't happen like that. Can you please write down where the money has gone. Bank, account number, firm information..."

"Exactly! Write down while your fingers are not broken," the robot added.

Pharmacist was lying on his side, doubled up with pain, not able to shout, groan or say anything. Dislocation of sternal extremity of clavicle caused choking fits and the broken front tooth was scratching the gum painfully.

“Darling, you know you’ve got to answer now,” Pyotr Mikhailovich dazzled. “Have you sold the business? You have. And didn’t ask us. That’s not nice. Where is our share now?”

Philya stopped for a second pretending to be emotional, then suddenly recalled something and continued.

“Have you taken my money? Yes, you have. Where is it now, this money? Not fair, Vasya,” Philya bent to Pharmacist’s face and persuasively hissed, “Have you decided to leave us?”

Vasiliy rolled over to his back. He was trying to answer to the reputable businessman and opening his mouth but he couldn’t pronounce anything. Pink froth was leaking on the immaculate shirt like a thin brooklet. It wasn’t absorbed with the nylon fabric and was about to crawl on to the floor. Knave looked at his boss with a fright and decided to handpick the froth from Pharmacist’s face and slop it over the crimson lining of his unbuttoned blazer. An assistant came into the room with a sheet of paper.

“Petro Mykhailovich, I’ve got a copy of the register here.”

“So who is running the show now instead of this idiot’s jerks?” Philya returned to his arm-chair, put his glasses on, cast a look at the document and suddenly realized the company presented in public by Vasiliy Fyodorovich Prokhorov had got hold of, simply by changing the share register. He even guessed who it was. Recently through good connections he had been shown a list of “technological” companies used by a famous in town gruesome-tuosome – a former big cop and a big Federal Security Service officer. Both of them were the town watchers. The situation just turned upside down. Company “Pharma-2” now didn’t have anything to do with Vasiliy. Its new owners had appointed a new manager who butted into everything with his sleeves up and was likely to be looking for the money. His money! That was a separate problem. But the loan! That was too bold!

“Do you agree with me, Vasya?” Philya finished his arguments aloud, directed the light of the Italian bulb at Prokhorov, looked at what had suddenly spoilt his office interior and called two machos on the phone. When the security men came in, the boss, still sitting in his arm-chair, pointed at Vasiliy, turned to Knave, had a thought, then looked at Accountant, pointing his responsibility, and harshly pronounced, “Take Vasiliy. I must know where the money is. I want to know today. Tomorrow morning at the latest. Otherwise the newcomers will find it. They have all the rights now. Have you got it?”

His servants nodded and disappeared as quickly as they came. “The system is working perfectly,” Philippov thought, but then he remembered about Prokhorov who dared to leave him for all the world to see, about his immaculately white shirt with baby pink stains on the chest. He looked at the patterned parquet shining in the light of the only bulb in the office and relaxed again.

Chapter 1

1

“Br-r-ezhnev! Br-rezhnev! Br-rezhnev,” an elderly woman was saying quietly but energetically. She was sitting in a chair at the first row of an old bus, looking out of the window and repeating the name of the General secretary. She didn’t just say it, but every time she was pronouncing it with a different intonation followed with the same arm movement with her index finger stretched out. It looked like she was piercing someone with a needle. She wasn’t looking at the other passengers and they were trying to turn away and pretend they couldn’t hear anything. Five minutes before the final bus stop, the driver would open the door and let out the woman. Still staying on the pavement and waiting for something from the dark, frosty, winter morning, she would carry on with her convincing monologue. And the passengers, clinging to the windows, would watch her with a fright.

This happened every day. The bus was not Hungarian, but from Lvov. So in winter it was warm inside except that it always smelt of petrol. From five o’clock in the morning it was travelling round the town and picking up the poultry farm workers. The cranky woman would get on the bus in the same place with a load of passengers and in twenty minutes she would confidently get off her seat and direct her steps to the exit. Everyone was used to her, as if she was a factory whistle. When the morning shift began people forgot about her. The head of the killing room of the poultry farm was Yekaterina Pavlovna Nelidova. In the year of the one hundredth anniversary of Lenin’s birth, in December, she had a baby girl. She called her Maria. At the presence of men

the mother liked to say it was her present to Ilyich' jubilee. She was pretending to be uncertain which exactly Ilyich she meant. At the time they talked a lot about another Ilyich on the telly and radio. Yekaterina Pavlovna didn't have a husband so the little girl was brought up without a father. The mother and daughter lived very poorly, in a wooden two-storeyed house for five families outside Leningrad, in a village of Gorelovo. Masha used to wake up herself every morning, get ready and go to school. After her lessons she would come home and cook dinner. Her mother would get home late at night. After her shift she had to get some shopping. Tired and nervous, she hardly had the strength to eat her food, look through her daughter's books and planner, read her a lecture, after which she would immediately fall asleep.

There was always a shortage of workers at the poultry farm. To fill the gaps in the production of seven thousand chickens a shift and to get extra money, the head of the killing room took Masha and her friends with her in the school holidays. First they were sneakily watching the cranky woman on the bus. Then, in the killing room they would put bright green plastic hats on, white backwraps, plastic aprons, the same colour as the hats, then rubber gloves. They would take forks for chicken gutting and start execution. They cut off chicken heads and took giblets out.

The only practical thing the daughter learned from her mother was sewing skills. Masha could sew trousers, dresses, shirts. Besides, she enjoyed it. After all, it was not a duralumin tub filled with dead chickens' giblets.

After school Maria Nelidova went to the Leningrad Badge of Honour Order College of Light Industry and two years later she could design different garments. She was really good at sewing patterns and could use different home and foreign sewing machines. Straight after college Masha was invited to work in a co-operative shop. There she didn't lose any time and got a lot of clients. She started getting decent money. Maria glammed up and often went to the pictures with her friends. She liked to watch films about travelling, somewhere far away, to South America. She used to sing the same song to herself, "Will I ever see Brazil, Brazil, will I ever see Brazil before I die?"

When Masha was eighteen, her mother died of cancer. The company housing was taken away of course.

Having arranged with her friends, Nelidova stayed in a new place nearly every night and kept saying "I am like a young Caiman lizard.

It lives at the Amazon but doesn't stay in the same place." At first she liked that romantic life. "I could live in a tent," she would say to her friends. "Why not? No parents, no home. But I have a passport so I can vote. Freedom!" In fact, she couldn't get a ballot paper because she didn't have an official residential registration. She was signed out from the old place and she didn't have a new one.

In 1990 she got fed up with that and being despaired she decided to get together with a beginning businessman Ignat. The lad was plain-looking, with short hair, nearly bald, but he had money. At school he had not been bright but he had been doing black marketing – he got chewing gum from foreigners and then sold it to his school friends, a rouble for one stick. So he had been taught business since childhood.

Maria met Ignat at the cemetery. They both had buried their relatives at "Krasnenkoe" and met on Holy Trinity accidentally. The graves were near each other.

Now Masha's life turned into a wild and uncontrolled flow. One day they had a lot of money, the next day they had none. The people around her were cheering and enjoying themselves or hiding from creditors and wandering around, pale and dejected. They would keep silent and get their bags ready with the necessary things – underwear, a track-suit and trainers. They were ready for jail, if their friendship with the state failed, or for "immersion", if they had to hide from bandits and creditors.

In the early summer of 1992 they got a cargo transporter with instant coffee from Israel. Big blue tins, a little dented, with red letters in Hebrew, were sold quickly. People bought them without asking why the tins were dented, and they liked the letters. Ignat had got them half-price. They raised at once, glammed up and decided to go on a holiday abroad. Therefore, to Paris. Where else? They visited a travel agency, booked a flight and two rooms in a cheap two-star hotel in Monmartre. One room for Ignat and Maria, the other for their friends. They were also persuaded to buy tickets for three tours around Paris.

So now they were wandering around the streets in Paris, the city everyone was crazy about at the time. They didn't know the language, didn't get any education, their faces said they were ordinary and simple-minded. How could they run a business? It was mind-boggling! Having filled their bags with little things from the shop Tati, which

was in Republic Square, they got on a boat tour, looked at the sights and listened to the guide. On their left they saw City Island and Notre-Dame de Paris. They recalled the old French film – Quasimodo, Gina Lollobrigida... Then the Seine turned left and they could see Place de la Concorde. Behind it there were the Champs Elysees up to the Place de l'Etoile. However, the Champs Elysees were stretching in an opposite direction to their ship. Before the Alexander the Third Bridge they could see the home for the disabled. Why disabled? Masha didn't get it. Napoleon was buried there but he wasn't disabled. There, as if on purpose, they put the heart of the Marshall Grouchy, who had not arrived to help Napoleon and let him get defeated. Everyone knew that from the film "Waterloo". They also saw Champ de Mars, the building of UNESCO behind it and high round towers of Conciergerie where Marie Antoinette had been imprisoned whilst waiting to be beheaded...

Pretty soon they forgot everything they had heard. They got out of the boat near the Jena Bridge. Not far from it there was the really high Eiffel Tower, lit by the lights. They say it's the most expensive property in the world. Near the bridge they were shown a place in the river where a beautiful barge used to boat at rest, in which someone famous lived, either Pierre Richard or Alain Delon. The guide didn't really know. Everyone remembered Alain, of course, and loved him so they livened immediately. Masha was not an exception. She liked brunets with delicate features and blue eyes. Sure thing!

Maria and Ignat didn't climb the Eiffel Tower, they were hungry. They got away from their friends and without thinking long popped into a cafe. They sat at the table, took a menu and stared at the foreign words. They didn't understand a thing. The first two days they had been to cafes where in the menu there was a picture next to the name of a dish. But here there was nothing. What could they do? What was more – they had also missed the tour to the Eiffel Tower, which cost at least twenty bucks. They got upset. The waiter passed by their table a few times trying to figure out if they had chosen their dishes or were still deciding. The young businessman from Russia could wait no longer and when the waiter came up to them, he proudly lifted his head, strictly looked at him and staring at his mouth, started repeating the same word, "Yum-yum!" Not to look a complete idiot, he was pronouncing it every time with different intonation and bowing his head. To do

justice to the cafe staff, they were ready for anything and knew the tastes of the Russian tourists. They brought them onion soup in small bowls, then lamb ribs with sauce and peas and in the end a pot of black hot shells. There were mussels inside them. Delicious and worth remembering! They didn't get any bread. Oh, well! They thought about wine, but it was too late. The people from their group had come back from the Eiffel Tower. They all had to go on their last tour, to the Sacre Cœur, appearing white on one side of Paris.

They were tired. Tired to hang about the museums, listen to the guide with his stories of the French history, Napoleon, Danton and Mirabeau... Tired to eat a lot every day, eat the same food. Ignat was getting homesick. He felt like going to the countryside, making a shish kebab, having cold vodka and herring with onions. There would be friends around him, a guitar, playing cards...

On the contrary, Masha, who had never been to any museums before, was taking everything in, absorbing everything, like a sponge. She wanted to know if the dead French pilot had been found. She even remembered the full name of the author of "The Little Prince" – Antoine Marie Jean-Baptiste Roger de Saint-Exupéry! She would really like to stay longer in the Louvre where she saw a painting of a woman enjoying the babies playing in the garden. "How I would want a life like that!" Maria thought and stopped in her dreams.

Ignat grabbed her hand and pulled her away from Raphael's painting. They had to catch up with the rest of the group and Masha came back to the sour reality. One of their friends threw up on the floor in the room with Mona Lisa. They had had too much to drink the night before when they had been playing cards. They were not like other people! So what if they were drunk, or, let's say, they were not sober! They had paid for the tickets, they were walking trying not to move a lot, only glancing everywhere. But that idiot! He was not like other people!

Immediately a woman in a pure white gown, rubber gloves and a special trolley appeared. She poured sawdust from a box on the floor and without taking notice at the tourists around her gathered the breakfast of Ignat's mate into a shiny nickel dustpan with a mop, put everything into a small red plastic bucket and disappeared.

Masha tried to persuade her boyfriend to go out the remaining three days but he stayed in the hotel and didn't let her out so that she didn't waste money. Of course, she got upset. She knew that in some time she

would have to drag Ignat to Brazil. That was for sure. She saw in a film giant lizards in the Amazon swallow big shells, which could even contain a pearl.

The woman sitting next to her on a coach said, "You are stupid! What do you need a lizard for? Let your boyfriend just give you pearls without any lizards. What would you do with a lizard? How would you get a pearl out? Are you mad? That's a big problem!"

In the hotel room where Masha and Ignat stayed all their business friends gathered in the evening. One night they were drinking and playing cards and the room was filled with smoke. Suddenly they saw smoke creeping over the fine sofa. Someone was hurrying to return to the card game and threw a hopper on the sofa. Now there was a hole the size of a saucer. They all drooped and got sober immediately. They would need to pay for the sofa and their money was running out. One of them suggested they put a cushion on that place, another said they could buy a throw and cover the hole. Maria surprised them all with her quickwittedness and confidence.

"Listen! Listen to me! Go to a shop and get a handsaw and rubbish bags. We will put the telly on really loudly with their rock, saw their sofa into small pieces and take them all out as if there was nothing in here." The businessmen were listening to her instructions and standing in a row with their drunk heads sticking out. "You will find the most convenient rubbish skip," she said to Ignat, "there you will only leave the contents of the rubbish bags, bring the bags back to the hotel room," Masha was instructing the card players eagerly.

A whirlwind started. The sacks were filled with clothes and taken out of the hotel or on another floor so that the maids could see clothes in them. Between the blank journeys they were taking out the pieces of the sofa in the same sacks.

The next day a cleaning lady came. She looked around and started yelling. In French, of course. A receptionist came and started talking nearly in Russian in her fright. Asking them where the sofa was. They had already got used to their guests from Russia taking towels, slippers, shampoo bottles or sawing kits. But the sofa!

Ignat couldn't help scoffing. He came up to the cleaning lady, turned his back on her, stuck his back and slapped his buttocks.

The gesture was deadily expressive. Both French women fell into a muse and left the room.

That's how Maria's meeting with Paris, European art and travelling finished. Maybe, her last meeting. Ignat was completely out of his mind. He thought, "Just wasted time. I should have done some buy-sell business while watching all those graves and houses."

The Leningrad flat that Ignat bought after his luck with Israeli coffee was at the same time his home, office and a conference hall. In the hallway there sat a young secretary who had graduated from the philological faculty of the university. She answered her phone calls with a lot of enthusiasm. "Yes, Denikin's headquarter's speaking. Who? One second..."

"Stop yacking on the phone," Ignat would interrupt her. "No one is in. Did you get it? Just write down all the messages and don't say anything. But if they ring from Hungary, call me straight away." But the secretary couldn't help it and the next time someone rang she answered, "Headquarter of the First Horse Army speaking", or "Business-centre "Strawberry meadow" named after comrade Bergman speaking".

New Year was coming but the Hungarian champagne hadn't arrived yet. They spent nearly all their money on it, that "Madame Pompadour". Luckily they hired a refrigerator for two thousand dollars. Other people used usual trucks with canvas tops cheaply. So they didn't mind now. When the lorries drove down the Tatras, all the cargo had it because of the pressure fall – the tops of the bottles were cut off. But they were still waiting for the champagne. The following day would be New Year. After receiving it they had to clear entry customs, unload and deliver to shops.

By now they all knew they had run into bucks with the champagne. The peculiarity of that product was that after the 31st of December nobody wanted it. Apart from aristocrats and degenerates as the honoured artist said in the film "The Diamond Arm". There were no aristocrats yet in the country, but there was the second type. They were the only hope! The carbonated potion came on the New Year's eve. The shops didn't take it so they had to send it to the warehouse. As they didn't have any more money, they hired the warehouse without central heating. It was nearly empty – some wood and building materials and their boxes of champagne. Now they had to wait until the 8th of March! What an awful thing to happen – in February the temperature fell to minus twenty five degrees! The security guard rang "the headquarters of Denikin" and asked them to listen – in the receiver there were frequent cracks, similar to the radiation reading tool.

"These are the bottles bursting... Hello! Can you hear? Hello! What shall I do?" the security guard was shouting.

Maria was the first to respond. She grabbed the phone from her unlucky hubby and started her distinct instructions, "Burn the wood. There is also some polyethylene there, big rolls. Pull it over the top. Get a fan from somewhere or blow the smoke under the polyethylene..."

She was a decisive woman. They all learned it. Firstly, she was the boss' girlfriend. Secondly, she usually knew what she was saying.

A third of the products burst. In the rest of the bottles there was settling, they would not be able to sell them. So Mashka had an idea! She was a genius! She suggested they sell those bottles to restaurants and cafes for half price. "That's right. When they serve champagne there," the secretary grasped, "they usually cover the bottle with a white tea towel not to leave marks and not to freeze their hands or the champagne not to get warm and also to take the drops of the neck of the bottle."

Everyone turned their heads at the same time and stared at the "staff philologist". The businessmen's eyes were shining with surprise and respect. They used to think the tea towel was to wipe the table or hands with.

One of those days of February frost Ignat came home gloomy and anxious. "That's it, Mashka!"

Looking at his white face, Maria decided that her boyfriend's business had gone out of the window and they had to escape urgently not to be killed. However, Ignat was mumbling something what was impossible to understand. Masha told him to start from the very beginning, "My heart is pumping blood to the right half of the body and not to the left side," Ignat, being white from fright, said distinctly but with difficulty.

"How is that?"

"I went to the warehouse today. So cold! I put on a sheepskin coat and winter boots. So, most of my body feels warm, but the left side is cold."

"Are you telling me this? You are such an idiot, Ignat, why did you buy the diploma? I did tell you not to buy a coat in Arab quarter. You didn't listen, decided to save the money, so here you are now! There is nothing wrong with your heart! Where is your coat?" Masha took the new brown sheepskin coat Ignat had bought in Paris, turned it

inside out and burst out laughing. The left sleeve was without real fur. Just faux fur, that was it.

The time passed, but their material wealth did not change to the best. Maria was often recalling the Louvre, the wonderful painting with babies which radiated peacefulness. She had to do something. She had to look for the way to make money if silly Ignat couldn't. Her feeling to the young and successful at first businessman was dying. In a month they were in debt and had to sell their flat and move to a room in a communal flat. The secretary from the business-centre "Strawberry meadow" resigned. Instead of the beds they had folding beds, and unpacked bags with clothes. Ignat would turn up for a couple of minutes, slave-like, he was trying to escape from creditors and it could finish him off. "I am not in if anyone asks. I am transporting metal to Belgium," That was what Maria heard from him. Then he would disappear for another week. Then again...

"Well, that's it," Maria told herself confidently, "I've had enough. I need to disappear now. Or they will claim his debts from me. He doesn't want a baby, he can't go to Brazil with me, he owes everyone all the time..." She felt really down and she left.

2

In Vasilievsky Slope behind St. Basil's Cathedral, there were lots of cars, as usual. Everyone was waiting for someone. To the left of the Tower of Spas, some people would go into the registration office, stay there for twenty minutes and go to the gate with a pass. The disgraced Yeltsin appeared. He quickly went to "Zhiguli" of model Six, got into it with an effort and at the same moment it left towards the bridge across the Moskva-river. It had been snowing all day. There was so much snow that without melting it was turning into sleet. For a change try to get out of the car and walk around – you'd definitely get a cold! Especially if you wore polished black shoes with thin leather soles. In ten minutes it wouldn't matter whether you were wearing shoes or just wet socks.

It was nearly nine months since the 30 year old lawyer and former party official Leonid Vladimirovich Malkin had been invited to work to the Institute on Bio-technology and Bio-regulation. His director,

a famous physiologist academician Leonid Alexandrovich Maximov was founding the first in the country joint-stock Centre of Pharmaceuticals. And the skilled lawyer and specialist in party work became his assistant.

To apply to the Council of Ministers from the “outside”, either on the phone or by writing, the director had already tried. More than once. There was no point! As soon as Malkin came to the Institute, he started to plant one truthful fact, “If you want to change something or build something and get the money to do it, you’ve got to produce a government instruction. Only after you address someone in the Council of Ministers saying “Hello,” followed by “government instruction number nine zero three five” they will at least listen to you”. People who didn’t know such words should stay at home, live a common life and stop dreaming dreams.

Leonid Alexandrovich didn’t want to live like that. He was always wanting more. He seemed to have everything in the Soviet measurements – a flat, a car, a country cottage, an interesting job where he was respectfully called Academician, even though he was only a professor and a corresponding member of the Academy, where both academicians and corresponding members were called so. Nevertheless, an academician couldn’t exist without some bright acts, without leaving his mark on the way he had chosen in his young years.

Maximov soon realized that to produce a government instruction was quite a complicated business and just skills, scientific knowledge and science degrees were not enough. Before sending an initiative to the government, you had to at least frame it up the way clerks did. And how did they do it? Who knows?

In the government they made it clear that the initiative couldn’t just fly from bottom to top. For the administration it would be a hornet which they couldn’t swat and could only pat its head. Just keep patting until its sensory organs disappeared. Oh, they were in its legs. Well, then let it wear them out up to its bottom! Let it wander around the offices or crawl on the windows – no difference! As long as it didn’t buzz or distract from the matters of state!

If someone at the top actually touched that initiative, then it was a different story! For a civil servant of any rank there would be a reason to read a piece of paper not familiar to him. The document, disgusting in every respect, the paper, produced somewhere at the very bottom,

in a stupid head of some scientist or wimp. The paper would be decorated with a resolution, multicoloured marks, big blue letters of time limit set and control cards with red stripes and it would soon attract attention and become a document, a government instruction, or a “GI” for short.

But even all that would be not enough. A “GI” in the offices of the almighty administration were being rubbed out by everyone trying to reduce it to zero. They would say something was missing so at present it was not possible to agree with the initiative. In general it would be possible but at the moment – no way!

Not to give people a chance to kill a government instruction turned out even more difficult. Just luck, connections and a verbalized dream was not enough. You would need the highest tolerance and systematic jumping down your own throat. God forbid the innocent melody of your dream to sound in the government offices of the White House or in Old Square! You didn’t need it at all! You’d have to be a complete cynic. Or at least be able to be. Like Malkin could.

Leonid was not a good target for the tricks of different bosses and leading experts of the government and ministries departments. He would always find some new refined ways against them. That was what he had been taught in the Smolny.

For instance, Malkin knew where exactly on the vice-chairman’s desk was his document in a file, what number it was in succession and when that respected and very busy person would be at work. He also knew that a senior manager wouldn’t have enough time to read all the papers. But his assistant would put the letter signed by Maximov on the top in his file, and the prepared resolution project as well. And the secretary, as soon as she got the letters looked at by her boss, would immediately ring and report good-looking Leonid from Petersburg. Because the assistant could have lied in his promises for his own sordid motives. But the nice middle-aged lady, sitting at the reception and knowing everything in the world, would tell the truth for the same motives. Anyhow, it was difficult to keep quiet and not to argue when your idea was straight off rejected by everyone who got it. That must have been the reason why Malkin got a high temperature as soon as he went to Moscow. Without any reason – as soon as he got on the train “Red Arrow”. “That’s how my protective device is working,” the lawyer explained to himself the unusual natural phenomenon, “as the high

temperature kills wreckers. Here this device switches on in advance. Before you go to any offices of Council of Ministers where everyone says “no”, you get a chill and a fever.”

Today Leonid had come to Moscow with his boss. They were having a meeting with the vice-chairman. They wanted him to ring the bottom of his administration and tell them the best he could. And the Academician’s assistant would be waiting with explanation and information at the doors of any small but important official of a ministry. To be fair, not a single time after the vice-chairman’s or minister’s call did anyone execute what their boss told them at Maximov’s presence. “They must have learned from the bourgeois,” Malkin thought. He had read a lot by Balzac in his childhood. “There was a banker du Tillet who sent applicants to a cash-keeper to lend some money and often forgot to put an accent over letter *e* in his note. For the cash-keeper it was a sign not to lend the money. Maybe, our ministers have the same secret code.”

The bureaucrats hoped that no one would ask to meet a big boss for the second or even third time. Really, you had to be absolutely senseless and thick-skinned to break the same door with the same request several times.

Maximov was neither of them but he was really persistent. He had his third appointment with the vice-chairman.

The assistant had been waiting for his boss for more than four hours now. “I’d like to get out of the car and have something to eat,” Malkin thought. “But how can I? Firstly, there is nothing here, secondly, by the time I find something and get there, my feet will definitely be wet and I’ll catch a cold. If I get ill, the whole process will stop. This is not why I put my shoes on. And the main thing is as soon as I go, the boss will be here.” So the lawyer by profession and the bureaucrat by vocation continued sitting in the car, sometimes he would put the heater on when he got really cold. The warm air and idleness made Malkin feel comfortable. Unknowingly, he started thinking of nice things, like the boss having received approval from the vice-chairman. Himself, without his trips to the lower authorities. Or maybe, everything had turned out a success. Academician could have met his friend – the administrator officer of the Council of Ministers. The latest saw whose GI it was, they could have looked through the resolution, moaned and groaned... Suddenly out of a clear sky came the General Secretary. Gorbachev remembered academician Maximov, took the re-

solution, immediately decided it was exactly what the country needed at the moment and entered the Prime Minister's office. Great! Dream on! Malkin nearly woke up from the weird unreality of his dream. For them to do anything useful... Very unlikely! Last year he was at a Central Committee conference with his boss. The conference about nothing. About the mess in the country, reconstruction being stuck and ways out of the situation. As a result – empty phrases, “I think, we have managed to have a good conversation. And the main thing is things are really cooking. We just need to deepen the process.” The only thing they did manage to do was to pass the note with Maximov's suggestions to the General Secretary in person, avoiding administration obstructions on their way.

3

The boss appeared an hour later; fashionably dressed, with slightly grey hair, medium height and slim for his fifty years. Slowly, without taking notice of the slopping snow under his feet, he walked from the Spassky Gate to the car, quietly opened the door and got into the seat of the black Tatra to Leonid's right. At first Malkin didn't even notice him, he must have slept or dreamed. Academician Maximov kept silent.

“How did it go, Leonid Alexandrovich? Did you manage?” Malkin asked. To be safe, he wanted to smooth out a possible misfortune.

“We've got to be patient,” the boss whispered through clenched teeth looking in front of him, at St.Basil's Cathedral. He looked as if all that time he had been sitting and counting its eleven domes and not staying for five hours behind the giant brick walls of the Kremlin. A minute later Maximov continued slowly and thoughtfully, “Korolev's services are always reporting to him during the space launch of the dogs, “Fifteen seconds – normal state flying qualities, twenty seconds...” and so on. But it is not normal with at least three services. However, they keep quiet. They know they shouldn't be quiet but no one wants to be the first. The one who is the first to report a problem will take the blame. Sergey Pavlovich...” the boss didn't finish, shook his head and wiped the sweat on his forehead. “The vice-chairman hasn't come yet. Everyone is waiting for him. Been waiting for hours.” The assistant nodded

as he got a very pleasant thought in his mind – as there was no resolution from the vice-chairman to the administration, his role in today's trip was gradually being reduced to zero. It was nice to think that he had no scope of work. Now he could return to Petersburg and think about more important things. Not about how to trick another bureaucrat but about the real business. Malkin took the first train to Leningrad and Maximov went to see the vice-chairman the next day, where he had been waiting for him for three hours, but at last the problem was solved. The big bureaucrat didn't ring anyone that time and instead wrote a resolution. A resolution was a good thing, of course, but it delayed the action – at least three days for paper work. After that you should watch where the document was and who was dealing with it.

In Leningrad Leonid didn't waste any time. For Maximov, who returned from Moscow, he arranged a literacy project on property and rights of workers' association.

"Look, Leonid Alexandrovich," Malkin came up to the blackboard on the wall of the institute director's office, and drew two circles with a piece of chalk. "Two state companies, for instance, the Kirov Factory and the Izhor Factory, created a third one and equipped it with their stock. They can do that. In the Russian Federation there is a law, more accurately, President's decree." On the blackboard he drew a huge third circle. "What's left in balance of the legendary Peter's associations?"

"Nothing's left. What can be left if everything's gone?"

"That's the thing! In balance the number will be the same. But it won't mean machines and buildings, it will mean just financial credit documents, like shares received for those machines and maybe the cost of a rubber stamp and a safe."

"The property in a new factory still belongs to the government, doesn't it?" Maximov kept questioning Malkin.

"Of course, it does. Sure! But if you, Leonid Alexandrovich, as a third founder, along with the Kirov and Izhor Factories, decide to invest at least a rouble into the new company..." Leonid started tapping the chalk on the third circle with a mysterious look.

"The property will become mixed," Academician grasped and wrote the word "mixed" in the third circle.

"Exactly!" Malkin specified, dividing the circle into two uneven parts. "It will be ninety nine per cent of government property and just a little bit of private one. And we know – if there is more than half of

the government property, it is managed by the workers' association. It's difficult to pull anyone from the West by force there, even if it's a ministry company. First you've got to retire from the Ministry, or you are not allowed to. Nor the Kirov, or the Izhor's. But the most interesting thing is," Malkin continued, "that a little bit later, this new third company wants to create its own company." Leonid drew the fourth circle under the third one, connected them with a white line, stopped talking and looked at Maximov with a mischievous shine in his eyes.

"In this company... all the property will be... mixed, one hundred per cent of it," slowly, as if he was answering an exam question, said Academician and got scared of what he had just heard. "Where is the government property?"

"It's in the upper circle... it was. If you make something only from the mixed one, where will the government property get from? I mean, you can drop everything into the fourth company, but not straight away, only after having it for a second in the third one..."

Leonid explained his reasoning to his boss many times, trying to make him understand the affair legitimacy. He had appeared at a special workshop for the KGB officers with those facts. The controlling authorities were still carefully watching all the accounting transactions. Meanwhile, the government property was leaking at an agreed rate into the private sector of the economy. Under the government decision, active assets of the administration could go over to the big associations.

Of course, you didn't have to take a risk and change anything in the home pharmaceuticals management. But then the usual lack of budgeting from above would lead the industry sector, engaged in development and manufacturing of the newest pharmaceuticals, to a collapse. It was not about aspirin or norsulfazole, but about pills, ampules and capsules, which were used in the latest scientific discoveries on biotechnology to treat diabetes, blindness, arthritis, liver and pancreas. They were used to not just slow down or stop the negative processes, as doctors said, but to cure them. In a couple of months the creators of that "fairy tale", not having received their wages, would stop thinking and start letting their offices of the unique laboratories to various limited liability partnerships and sole proprietorships and in their once respected corridors it would smell of sausage, beer and household detergents, sold by retail.

In the end of the winter of 1990, nine months after Malkin and Maximov's first trip to Moscow, the government at last produced a resolution of the first joint company in the country. The boss at the time was abroad looking for the future investors and was phoning the office nearly every day, trying to control everything.

"What's the number?" was the first thing Academician asked when he heard the document had been signed. Malkin was pleased with the question more than the fact of the resolution publication. It was nice to know that the Academician cared about little things! It encouraged optimism. It would be easy to work together.

"Five-two-eight."

"What's the date?" Korolev's perfectionist of a pupil couldn't calm down. "What's the date?"

"I thought you knew, Leonid Alexandrovich."

"What am I supposed to know?"

"Well... We tried really hard," Leonid knew how to flatter. Everyone knew that. But that was extraordinary... "Exactly on your birthday, Leonid Alexandrovich!"

The other end of the phone went quiet. He must have been shocked. The boss couldn't "digest" the present. As no one else, he knew very well how difficult it was to issue a government document with a specific date. Even if it had been signed a week before.

"Well, you are an expert, brother! Get ready for a trip to France, get yourself skis," the nervous boss could say no more.

4

In his childhood Leonid used to travel by plane with his parents. They were geologists and took their son everywhere with them. At night, just before dawn, when the plane was flying over the mountain ranges of the Pamirs or the Caucasus, he could see coloured spots appearing in the dark below through the cabin window. First they were bright orange, then they were turning into yellow ones. They looked like flower buds and were gradually blossoming in the warm sun rays. Gliding on the surface of the Earth, spinning towards them, they first illuminated the snowy mountain tops and then a light spot of the foothill. Once, when they were on a plane,

his father woke up the sleeping boy and showed him that beauty. Since then, flying over the mountains, Leonid had always been enjoying the wonderful mystery and, like it or not, feeling his involvement into something enormous and important. It was dazzling him and attracting again and again. He felt like watching that picturesque sight for a long time, not just in the short moments of the night flight eight thousand meters above the Earth.

Soon Leonid lost his parents. It happened in the summer of 1967 in the Pamirs. The blast in the tunnel exploded before its due time. Both of them got covered with the ground at once. They didn't even get dug out. Their friends fixed a note on a rock with their names, that was it! "Vladimir Borisovich and Tatyana Rodionovna Malkin, geologists". They were both born in 1935.

After that tragedy the expedition management were looking for the seven-year-old Leonid's relatives for a long time. In autumn he had to start school, that was when an aunt-cousin had been found. She lived in two rooms of a communal flat in Vasilievsky Island and worked in a district executive committee of the council of people's deputies. The orphan was sent to her. The "Soviet official" didn't get any problems with the child's custody.

Life was flowing smoothly, without any excitement. As any middle ranking civil servant, auntie spent all her time at work, had a decent wage, an access to a health centre without any queues and a monthly ration of a stick of sausage cervelat, smoked sausages and a bunch of bananas. She had no friends so they hardly had any visitors. Leonid was growing into a normal boy interested in football, playing cards and gambling. Homework was not for him. If he copied homework from someone else before the lessons, he was pleased, if he didn't, he didn't care.

His school years flew by fast, he was not particularly interested in any subject, nor did he show good behaviour at school. He would often skip lessons and go on a tram to a town end, far behind the Finnish rail station, to a village of Ozerki. There he could see skiers go down the smooth slopes towards a big frozen lake. In the week there were not many people there. There would occasionally be someone bunking, like Leonid was. They were small and had no dread or fear of breaking a leg or an arm and they were daring with their plain skis with a hook for a boot or a felt boot, jumping up on self-made hills.

Sweaty and happy, having spent a day in the fresh air, bunkers went to a stall where they sold coffee from a tank. In the same stall they also made gratinated calescent doughnuts. They were squeezed out of a pipe, falling into a bowl with boiling oil and from there the sales-girl would catch them with a fork, put them in a row on a big tray and scatter them with castor sugar. They were five kopecks each. People would always buy a lot of them, and the doughnut-maker was struggling to catch up with the young skiers' appetites. Leonid could eat ten doughnuts at once.

At school they also sold doughnuts, but they were cold and didn't smell of anything. You wouldn't eat a lot of them! The rouble, that his aunt gave him for his school breakfast, Leonid spent just on the doughnuts. He would buy twenty of them and chew them all day during the lessons. He could give a couple to someone. And he wouldn't eat anything else from morning till late night. That was why he was so slim. Just his Roman nose was sticking out. His unruly hair with a middle parting was emphasizing his height. He looked like Paganini!

For the ten school years he had formed his own value system, on the top of which was a big motto "Now and here!". If there was a possibility to have fun, have a nap or a grub or cheat in a lesson, he had to do it without thinking about the next day. Everything that was going to happen in the future didn't interest him.

When it was time for him to go to university, his auntie solved all of his problems. She brought him to the district committee of the party, told them about his parents who had died heroically... In short, he got a reference for a university entrance for the law department as an orphan – without having to compete. In his second year he became a Komsomol committee member and before graduation he joined the party and was offered a place at the department.

In 1987, with his auntie's help, who decided to organize her nephew's life according to the principle "Follow the leader!", Leonid got a job in the district committee of the CPSU, in two years he got a promotion and he was transferred into the regional committee, to the Smolny. He wanted to get married but changed his mind. They offered him a flat – he got it. He had been asking for a tour of France for a long time – so he went on a skiing tour as a group leader and had a chance to ski downhill a few times in Grenoble. When the CPSU disappeared, the town deputies suddenly happened to find out about lawyer Malkin. After the coup in August 1991 Leonid had a chance of

handing the Smolny over to the representatives of the new Leningrad council. The “revolution headquarter” had been left by everyone, there were no first or second secretaries, but Malkin stayed. Although being a party official, he was also a lawyer so he made the delegation of deputies return to the Mariinsky Palace several times, first for the resolution original, then to collect all necessary stamps and signatures. They took their time to go round all the offices, close windows, seal doors and safes. Malkin was proud of himself and liked to tell that story saying, “They had the front to break in and use the phone for free. You had to watch them not to plant something in the safe. I didn’t want any trouble!”

The party didn’t exist any longer but there were still courts and close contacts with the KGB officials that any party clerk had. It was there where the irrepressible lawyer with administration skills and useful connections became active. For a small expense, he boldly solved numerous problems of the new army of businessmen and at the same time he delicately, without exposing himself, informed all his “friends” from the Big House in Liteiny Prospect of the new representatives of the town business community. The so called New Russians looked exactly the same – they wore blazers of wrinkled Italian fabric with bright-coloured lining, pointed shoes made of wrinkled leather, expensive ties and Swiss watches. Their similar mistakes in business led all of them to Malkin. Feeling that something was just about to happen in the pharmaceuticals industry, his “friends from Liteiny” recommended the initiative and approved lawyer to academician Maximov as an assistant.

His boss’ words “Get yourself a pair of skis” meant that Malkin would surely get the money for the purchase and would go to his favourite place in the world. And there... There even before he enjoyed skiing down the hill, he would breathe in the flavour of the freshest ham, mouldy salty Valmont cheese and hot pastry. Apart from downhill skiing, Leonid loved having a nice meal outdoors. Maximov was well aware of his assistant’s addictions. Leonid had told him many times about the colour play at sunrise in the snowy mountains of the south of France. So before the start-up of the first in the country joint company, which was called “Pharma” after a moment’s consideration, the boss rewarded Malkin with a week’s trip to France. He also had to hand over big envelopes with galley proof of the new book to the co-author

of Maximov and bring them back with the French man's correction. The official business trip came upon Leonid at the best time for mountain skiing season. The boss didn't say what the reward was for – the resolution, as he had promised, on the latest victory over the trade-union organization, which didn't want to give the power back.

In fact, Leonis Alexandrovich was a very practical person and did nearly everything in his life not because he liked to do so but because it sped up the result. Academician didn't just work a lot, but he could present the result skilfully, exaggerating its meaning. Planning the idea with the joint company, Maximov was counting on the principal changes in the home pharmaceutical industry management, but also on the external effect of the new form as well.

Emphasizing and stressing out the fact of the special resolution publication, dedicated generally speaking to him and his business, he made all of his assistants buy new expensive suits and paid for them. What was more, they got new imported cars from the new joint company. Mind you, Academician obviously went over the top, he later understood it, but it was too late to take the cars back. The scientist physiologist had to think of something he had never been able to do before. He made his assistants sign a paper, a worthless paper, about leasing out their cars to the company, getting nothing for that and forgetting about them. That was it!

Malkin didn't have a car, but he got a new foreign passport, every Soviet person's dream, with two stamps, "exit admitted" and "multi". Rewarding his assistant, Leonid Alexandrovich secretly hoped that abroad he would find new useful connections. An investor could turn up any time from anywhere. That meant they had to take every opportunity and they couldn't decrease the number of chances!

Having bright childhood memories of the snowy mountains, Leonid went to the Caucasus nearly every winter. Sometimes he went with a young female judge or solicitor from Leningrad, but usually on his own. It was much nicer to ski in the Alps, in the sports complex in the south of France. A lot of young people from all over Europe were hanging around there, which gave him a good opportunity to get new and interesting connections. But for Malkin France was quite a difficult spot. He had managed to go there just once, for free, but with a group of tourists who he had to count over and over again. He had only skied down the hill three times, on someone else's skis. This year

he got everything – a passport, money and skis. He also didn't have to pretend to be someone else, count someone all the time or constantly brown-nose in the offices of the Council of Ministers. He went to France on his own and on the company's money he decided to visit his ex-girlfriend from university.

When he was a third-year student, in spite of his remaining feelings towards his skiing friend, Leonid fell for his university friend who was also an active Komsomol member. They had a kind of romance between them. However, later the girl met a real French guy and she immediately left uni, got married and left for Bernin near Grenoble and the famous ski resort in Saint-Pierre-de-Chartreuse. Malkin had no other choice than to meet another girl. This time from the outside of university. The relationships between Malkin and his university girlfriend smoothly turned into friendship with the memories of romance.

After that story Leonid easily met new people. He liked coming in touch with them, developing a relationship, securing it and then coming away without letting his "victim" go far. He was like a hunter! There was a peculiar thing, though. All the people Leonid was hanging around with, were of some interest for his job as a lawyer. He preferred to benefit from any situation. "We will work out the problems as they come up," he used to say if someone warned him of the possible future difficulties.

Since then more than ten years had passed and all that time Malkin was violating the instructions which forbid unauthorized contacts with foreigners and keeping in touch with his ex-girlfriend and other people who he met in his life. That approach inevitably washed out any complicated feelings in his relationships and strengthened pure mechanic and shallow ones. All he needed to do was to gently kiss, say "happy birthday" or meet in a cafe.

5

As easily, as if they had only seen each other the day before, and ignoring the fact his ex-girlfriend had a French husband, Leonid rang his university friend two weeks before his business trip. Then he flew to Bernin and stayed in her house without ceremony. From the window of his room he could see the town

stretching along the river. Its both sides were restricted by the mountains. In the east the mountains were wild woods, in the west they were smooth, chalky, with ski trails and steep rocks.

While Leonid was doing a physical drill, the sun would start rising from behind the woody mountain. Two-thousand-metre peaks were gradually coming on with an orange flame. In the morning snow couldn't be pure white. It was different. Yellow, pink or the colour of flaming fire. Its blazing tongues were slowly "setting afire" the highest edge of the mountain. Then the fire was climbing down the slope, it was getting lighter and dawn was not hesitating to enter the valley. Those wonderful moments of gazing the morning mountains seemed to be the only thing that had a meaning. The rest was just a background for his normal existence. He understood that and always tried to cover his cynicism, usual in his everyday law and staff life, with flirting and jokes.

By the way, a walk in the morning town gave Leonid as much enjoyment as skiing down the mountain. There was a significant difference between those two. If everything was for his eyes to watch at the top, at the bottom everything was about scents. Along the narrow streets of the small town he could smell fresh ham and cheese. The streams of the fresh morning air from the range of the Chartreuses were pushing those smells on the passers-by. In a minute Malkin would turn behind that house with multicoloured glass in its windows and stop as usual, struck with the smell of fresh baked pastry. Then he wouldn't be able to control himself and would rush up to the bakery. But even in those minutes Malkin would remember with adoration his favourite cafe in the Ozerki, coffee in a thick glass tumbler from a tank and he would never swap freshly baked, gratinated doughnuts for the most sophisticated delicacy.

At the top everything was different. There you could visit bars and restaurants, listen to music, customize your mountain skiing equipment to perfection or you could do what you were there for – get on your skis and go skiing.

Leonid got a lot of pleasure from going down the slope four times. The new skis were turning very easily. Many people liked them.

Every time when Leonid got on the plateau, where the people were standing before skiing down, he saw a couple in posh clothes in the same place.

They had stretched mountain skiing coats with a big adjustable hood, which were rare even for Europe. The chin protector was made of fleece, the Lycra cuffs had a hole for a thumb... In fact, each item of clothing and equipment was worth at least a thousand bucks and the skies probably two thousand! Those two were standing like mannequins, looking around. Malkin heard them speak Russian and immediately decided to come up to them.

"Sorry to disturb you. You've been standing here for an hour. Is everything OK? Or is this the plan?"

The man looked at Leonid and waved his hand greeting his countryman, "I am Michael. Moscow".

"Leonid. Petersburg."

"You are very quick-sighted, comrad-d-de," Michael emphasized the last consonant trying to separate himself and his name from everything Soviet. "Yes, that's our plan. We are watching and enjoying it."

Medium height, between thirty and thirty five years old, plump beyond his years, with black like tar thick curly hair sticking out from under the helmet, the man suddenly undid the button on his cuff, raised his right hand and glanced at his watch.

Leonid thought that his new acquaintance had surely done that on purpose. The careless gesture of the Moscovite didn't escape from the lawyer of the presumptuous Petersburg businessmen. That was why "Patek Philippe" with a rose-gold watchcase worth thirty thousand dollars was worn!

Playing a role he had rehearsed in Moscow offices, he decided to start with demonstrating a curious flatterer.

"To be honest, I just can't indifferently go past. Short slalom skis just drive me crazy."

"There is no denying the truth. I couldn't be happier," Michael answered surrendering a nice feeling of superiority.

The contact seemed to be working out. Leonid was trying to catch his conversation partner but didn't know how. Right. He had to follow the settled habit. When you left things you could do and got into something new, any contacts were important. A real negotiator always appreciated any potential opportunities and, like a bad electrician, grabbed any new contact.

"I bet entering the turn is light and the bow accuracy is astonishing."

"Don't be jealous. There are disadvantages everywhere. It can't be OK all the time," Michael answered claiming the exceptionalism of his simple statement. "A very strong shock power. When you finish the turn, you are sitting down."

"It's probably just on a broken slope..."

"Did you see a smooth one anywhere?" the man seemed full of himself when he looked at his female companion. He continued, "Don't get sloppy and suppress the irregular landscape with your knees..."

The young pretty brunette was looking away indifferently. Michael was silent while he was thinking about whether he should give that sort of information to the man he had just met. Leonid's flattery was touching him and resulted in him talking. After a small pause, pointing at his friend, the wavy-haired Moscovite added, "Last year her sister – she is also from Leningrad, by the way – forgot the essentials. So we had to practically live in the Alpien hospital in Grenoble... Oh, meet Nelly."

Malkin touched his knitted hat with his hand greeting her and smiled.

"Leonid."

"As if you lived in the hospital!" instead of greeting, she spoke for the first time. She pursed her bottom lip aggrievedly and just glanced at Malkin. Michael didn't respond.

"I also had both of my legs broken," cried Leonid suddenly trying to get rid the awkward situation.

Then he came up to Michael, patted his shoulder confidentially and pointed at the descending skiers, "I will tell you what – you are doing the right thing, you've got to wait a little bit and see a couple of falls. After that the anxiety will disappear like yesterday's news."

Well, in the mountains everything is so unpredictable," Michael hurried to object. "I mean the snow..."

They had been standing for another five minutes and looking at the skiers silently. Michael and his companion were critically estimating other skiers and exchanging expressive glances. That seemed to have been their job all their life. They were waiting for someone to trip over and fall, then they would rise in their own opinion. That doubtful superiority had to egg them on the activity. At least, their fear would turn into a strong desire to become even cooler. Everything seemed so simple! "Now, this skier will fall! Oh, no, that one has fallen. And we

are so cool, we are standing and not falling down!" Shifting from foot to foot and leaning on the ski poles, Michael was sliding back and forth on his skis. He wasn't just watching the skiers' mistakes, but also thinking whether he should be continuing contacts with that guy from Leningrad or not. Malkin was the first to talk.

"What are you doing tonight? I live not far from here, in Bernin, twenty minutes drive. We could enjoy ourselves... Everyone here is so withdrawn, like sitting in an egg shell. I have a feeling, when they meet their countrymen, they are scared they will have to share or lose something."

"Where did you study, Leonid?"

"Leningrad University, I am a lawyer," Malkin answered.

"Hmm," Michael mumbled, "so we are colleagues."

"Well, there you are! We have nothing to share. We are "virtuals", we have nothing but ideas." Leonid suddenly thought he didn't feel like asking Michael about his Alma Mater. Firstly, wherever he had studied, it didn't mean anything for Malkin. Secondly, he sensed it was not worth asking him. His watch was too expensive. Nelly couldn't help telling him her companion's secret, "Michael graduated from Sciences Po..."

"I suspected so," Malkin thought, "it's similar to Moscow State University of Foreign Affairs, only in Paris. All the French Presidents graduated this Sciences Po – Paris University of Social Sciences, or the National School of Administration. He is a mummy's boy from a family of some Foreign Ministry's official."

Michael kept silent and didn't comment on Nelly's words. Being a leader, he never took any notice of her. As if she was not there. She was like an ornament or an escort.

"So what would you say, Michael?"

"OK, you've persuaded me. Lawyers should mix. We have a very important thing in common. Apart from being "virtuals" as you say, we always need a bearer. We need a problem which we need to stick to, then smoothly get inside it, break the subject and... give advice. Only then our knowledge will give us a profit, won't it?"

"He is just like Stierlitz," Leonid thought paying attention to the "tag" in the end of the sentence. He didn't notice anything reprehensible in the other words of the French Moscovite. "Oh well, we'll rock each other for any information sources. Lawyers should be friends."

It's natural. "Bearers" can fight with each other but lawyers – never! They have no right to. On the contrary, sometimes when the time of truth comes, it is lawyers' friendship that pulls the situation from non-existence."

The Leningrad lawyer was pleased. Sure thing! "Things were happening," as the General secretary used to say. The Moscow lawyer was concerned. He had seen Leonid somewhere. But where?

In any case he could use the situation and find out as much as possible about his new acquaintance's business. And not just find out but certainly try and use it. The party finished after midnight, the visitors said goodbye to the hostess and Malkin went outside with them to the taxi. The snow was crunching under their feet. The sky was covered with stars. Their light was falling on the surface of the Earth, reflecting and diffusing. It was as light as in the day.

"I used to live here with my parents," Michael suddenly became talkative. "In Paris. Got used to it. I love it here. By the way, I graduated from the University of Political Researches. What was the point of wasting time in Sorbonne? It's just an open house there, you don't even need to take any entrance exams. They took me to Gorbie because I know many people from the French Foreign Ministry. They used to teach us. I am sure I know a lot of those who are going to work in their Foreign Ministry. So I am offering consultations to high-rankers in Old Square."

"It's worthful! By God, it is!" the Leningrad university graduate appreciated and he suddenly remembered a Gorbachev meeting in October the year before where he had been with Maximov and seen a lot of the Kremlin smarty pants – different consultants, analysts, advisers. Young and well-known and honoured men. But the young ones looked the same to Leonid.

A taxi arrived.

"Ring me when you are in Petersburg, we'll have a chat," Malkin raised his index finger and changed his voice into a quiet and mysterious, "now I am inviting you for a good reason, hoping to ferret out a secret of our many-sided domestic and foreign policy, as well as the French one. So, any confessions, Michael?" Leonid shook Michael's hand with jokes.

Michael and Nelly exchanged looks. Secluded lifestyle of parents brought an excess anxiety into the genes of the child of the Foreign

Ministry's officials, didn't allow to make fun of such subjects and made Michael disappear immediately from where it took place. At the same time, his sixth sense suggested the Leningrad lawyer was hiding something interesting and worth his attention.

He got his thoughts together and said, getting into the cab, "First you come to us, to Moscow," and he passed Leonid his business card through the open window.

Malkin returned into the house, looked at the glossy card. Next to the national emblem there was Michael's name, "Alyabiev Michael Petrovich, Presidential Administration, advisor". Below it there was the telephone number in Moscow.

The taxi was taking the couple into the hotel, slowly driving up the mountains along the serpentine road covered with a layer of thin ice.

"How was the hot goats cheese with toasts?" Michael pronounced thoughtfully and stared at the dark outline of the Chartreuse against the background of the starry sky. Nelly carelessly shrugged her shoulders and said nothing. "It was not bad with white wine, was it?" he continued talking to himself.

After a pause Michael turned to his tipsy girlfriend, hugged her shoulders, drew her to himself and, slowly stroking her bare leg between her knickers and stocking, whispered slowly and quietly, as if he was articulating his boss' resolution on a document, "Look here, gorgeous, call your sister and tell her to come and see me in Moscow!"

"Why is that?" Nelly asked anxiously in an offended voice.

6

In 1955, soon after the rehabilitation, Vera Vsevolodovna Dvorskaya and her daughter Anna came to Leningrad from the village of Poludino in North Kazakhstan, where they had spent ten years in exile. They were housed outside Vyborg, in a small village called Manola, in one of the rooms of a wooden one-storeyed house. Four other families lived in the same house. Anya worked in a local school. First she was a primary school teacher, then she graduated from the part-time biology department of the university and started teaching botanics and biology. She was a young woman of twenty five years, beautiful and gentle – she couldn't help being

noticed. In 1959 a captain of the local fishing fleet married her. A year later they had a son. The executive committee signed out an order for the whole family with the mother-in-law for a wooden house, tacky, but separate, which had been built by the Finnish. The captain repaired it in the summer, built a small bath house near it and in autumn they all had a house-warming party.

The boy was called Mishenka. He didn't go to kindergarten because he was always catching a cold. His mum left him with his grandmother. Grandma was not old, just fifty five, from a family of a famous Petersburg surgeon. She was small, slim and fair, with blue-green eyes, too big for her face. Their expression made her look old. She was always dressed modestly, nothing in excess, the same hair style – a smooth knot at the back of her head. The years, she had spent in exile, sapped her health. Her diabetes having been neglected for years, caused really bad eyes. She couldn't work and stayed at home.

They didn't talk about her husband Yakov in the family. He seemed to have got lost somewhere abroad in 1945, after the war.

As soon as they settled down in the new place, Vera Vsevolodovna decided to flood different authorities with letters. She was also writing to her ancient friends and her husband's friends. In the thirties they would all often get together or go on holiday to the Crimea or Caucasus. Maybe, they knew something about Yakov... In the evening she would sit at the low table in the light of a petrol lamp, holding a big magnifying glass in one hand and a plain school pen with a point in the other hand. The pen would creak and scratch the notebook, leaving an uneven ink trace behind it.

Nickolay Petrovich Ivanov, Anya's husband, a big, kind and cheerful man, had settled in Primorsk after the war. There he was at war as a ship-boy, defending the town in 1944, then he swept for mines the water-way of the Gulf of Finland, worked as an ordinary seaman, finished the maritime academy and became an executive officer. In the end of 1958 he was appointed a captain of the fishing fleet of that small seaside town where two leaky boats and a liveable seiner were nestling at the pier. Nickolay didn't spend a lot of time indoors. He was at sea or worked ashore, or on a business trip. He could do anything. People like him were usually called "gifted hands". In spite of his high post, the fleet captain often stood out to sea in a seiner. He enjoyed looking for and finding a flock of fish on a new echo sounder by outward signs.

Ivanov belonged to the category of sailors for whom the sea was their home and their team was their family. Being ashore was a business trip for him. Every month Nickolay Petrovich went into the sea, unless the ice covered the bay exit. When he returned home he would start drinking. Not out of grief or joy. To have a drink with the captain of the fishing fleet was an honour. And Nickolay Petrovich couldn't say "no" to anyone.

When he was sober, he would mend everything at home, he could even repair a TV easily. He was tall, big, with a receding hairline and he liked to sing the same song, "When I am drunk – and I am always drunk..." He seemed to be making an excuse that he had happened to be sober that day, it was not his day at all!

In those happy days his son would sit near him and he would tell his little boy about far away countries and the ocean storms, about interesting events and tragedies that had happened within his memory. The boy loved listening to his father and imagining himself at the wheel on a captain's bridge, wearing a naval uniform, with a dirk...

Dreams, dreams! The lad was travel sick so much he was weeping on the train going from Zelenogorsk to Vyborg via Primorsk. As soon as the train approached the platform and he smelt diesel fuel, Mishka would burst into crying. The same thing used to happen on a bus.

Once Mishka's father was in the sea in summer. The children were playing soldiers. Someone's dad was making swords for everyone out of twigs of the freshly sawn down aspen. The swords looked very real, bent and a bit flat. Misha came up to the man who was confidently cutting twigs with a knife and shyly stretched out his arm. "Here you are! Look, you've got the best one," the man said giving Mikhail the "sword". The boy tucked it under his belt and proudly walked towards his home to show it to his mum. At the same time his mother got ready to go to Vyborg, to a shop, with her neighbours, and was looking for her son to take him with her. Together they walked to a bus stop and his mum noticed a big stick under his belt, which was being dragged on the ground. Without knowing who had made the "sword" for her son, she told him to leave the "weapon" hidden in the grass, in a ditch near the bus stop.

When they were on the bus to Vyborg, Mishka was crying. On the way back, he had a transformation. He was expected to be crying but instead he was sitting silently with his face pale and strained.

The mother got worried. She thought something had happened. Mikhail was bearing for some time but when they were near his home he got very anxious. He was worried about his new favourite stick. All the journey he had been thinking about where he was going to keep it – in the corner near the hanger-rail or between two doors on the porch. He had been imagining playing with it.

The boy was the first to run out of the bus through the front door and he dashed to the other side of the road, to the ditch. His mother was going to get out of the bus when she heard a horrible brake squeak and passengers' shouts, "There is a child over there!" A giant tipper truck was sticking out of the ditch with its back wheels hanging over the ground. The wheels were still rolling in the same place where Mishka had been running. On the asphalt there were long dark tracks from the truck's brake way. It was a dreadful sight. Petrified Anna was taken out of the bus. She could neither speak nor move. The driver had gone absolutely mad and was running around the truck looking for the child.

On the hill behind the ditch, where the giant truck crashed, stood a slim boy with ginger hair in a white sleeveless top and brown trousers with shoulder straps. His knees were grazed and he had a stick under his wide black belt. It looked like he was standing at watch without understanding anything. He was looking around, watching the people near the bus, the frightened and lost driver and his mother sitting on a bench at the bus stop with her head down as if she were asleep, and other women around her.

An hour later the tension went by but since then the boy had been stuttering. When Mishka started school, Nickolay Petrovich left his family and moved to Riga. It may have been for the best. The parents had been arguing all the time and the husband even had laid hands on his wife. It also fell on the little son a lot. The little boy would run to his father from behind with a scream and try to stop him. Mishka twigged it to have hidden all the belts and wooden hangers which were in the house, but every time his father would grab something heavy.

In spite of all that Mikhail was really suffering about his father's leave. He felt something very dear had been taken away from him. He even looked at his school friends with hard feelings, as if it was their fault they had fathers and he didn't. Mishka now didn't play outside very often, he became interested in books he took from his mother's room, looked at the pictures of flowers, birds and insects, then he found

“Human Anatomy”. It was so interesting! To earn more money, his mother spent more and more time at school, took extra hours, taught other subjects.

Grandma was the only close person who Mishka could talk to about his feelings. He was often teased because he had ginger hair. When he first heard, “Ginger boy, ginger boy, freckled boy, you killed your grandpa with a toy!” he couldn’t stand any more and told his grandma. It was then that he learnt the secret of her husband. He had been a military man and his surname had been different – Belkin, and his name had been Yakov Ivanovich. Misha was the spit image of him. Before the war, straight after mother’s birth, grandpa had gone on a business trip to Spain, then to France. Just before the war started, he had come to Moscow twice and in spring of 1945 he went on a business trip again, to Brazil. Grandma was going to go with him taking mother, who was eleven years old. They had got all permissions but Anya suddenly fell ill. Then something happened. In Brazil or Argentina, or maybe in Moscow. Grandma didn’t know exactly what it was. Since then they had not known anything about grandpa, and his wife and daughter were deported to the north of Kazakhstan in 1945.

Vera Vsevolodovna’s correspondence with public offices and her husband’s work fellows had been going on for a long time, for several years, and finished unexpectedly. All the sources seemed to have agreed to answer in exactly three years after receiving the first letters. They all informed dryly that Yakov Belkin, working in Brazil as a second secretary of the Soviet Embassy, died of a heart attack in 1946 and was buried in San Paulo at the cemetery of Morumbi. Yakov’s friends kept silent for a long time, then they sent her letters from all over the country. For some reason they all congratulated grandma saying the justice had rejoiced and she had been rehabilitated, but not a single word did they write about grandpa.

One winter day, when Mikhail was a fifth-year pupil, an elderly long-legged and grey-haired man knocked on their door. He had been grandpa’s friend, Galaktionov, with a strange name, Aristarkh. When they were young, both grandpa and Aristarkh had been in love with Vera. Grandma chose grandpa then. Now, twenty five years after Yakov’s death, he found out from the letter that Vera lived outside Vyborg with her daughter and grandson and he rushed to see them. The military pensioner turned up with a bunch of white roses – incredible for

the middle of winter – and his war time photos. He proposed to grandma straight away and surprisingly she agreed.

In 1972 all the family moved to Leningrad, to the district of Sosnovaya Poliana. Aristarkh didn't have any other relatives and he lived on his own in a three bedroom flat in a nine-storeyed brick block. Grandma and her new husband had their own room, so did mum. They also had a big living room with a dining-table, chairs and a cupboard with glass doors. Misha had the smallest room with a sofa, a desk, a chair, a chest of drawers and lots of books. The books were scattered everywhere. A straight pile of books fitted on the desk, thin books lay on the window-sill, big books were on the chest of drawers. Together with the books, there were also photo frames with the pictures of Misha, his mum and grandma sitting on the porch of their old house outside Vyborg.

They all moved to Aristarkh's flat but only Anna Yakovlevna and her son got registered there, Galaktionov got registered in Manola, together with grandma, and later he registered the house as their summer cottage. He said that was the right thing to do.

In winter Mikhail would often sit near his bedroom window. He would do his homework, read a book, then sit on a chair near the window-sill and stare at the yard, as if he was looking for someone, then he would wave to someone, brushing his ginger hair up.

When he was ill, he used to miss school for a fortnight and he got really sad. He had no friend, brother or sister. He read and thought a lot, he dreamed and couldn't keep everything in his head. He couldn't sit and talk to grandma, like he used to. She found a new lease of life. Together with Aristarkh she went to the theatre, usually to the philharmonic society, for she could hardly see.

Gradually the boy grew very unsure of himself. His uncertainty seemed to nearly have absorbed everything apart from his lovely room, his oasis of privacy which let him insulate himself from all those who didn't understand, rejected or forgot him. His relationship with peers was getting broken and inferiority complex was being born. Loneliness made Mikhail think about himself and life in general. When he was on his own in his room, he was imagining bright and balanced images. He would imagine his father as he had been six years before he left them, or a brook and a lawn near a Finnish protestant church. He and some other boys were playing football all day long and in the

evening he would go to the woods with his father. They decided to stay in the woods overnight and sleep in a shelter to start looking for mushrooms early in the morning. By the next midday their hike had been over and they would be happy to return home with their baskets full of aspen mushrooms.

At home everything would be ready for lunch. On the table there would be a cast iron pot with cabbage soup. In the middle of the table there would be a wooden bowl with fresh cucumbers, just picked up from the vegetable garden, a small dish with soured cream, and chopped garlic cloves, dill and spring onions on the chopping board. Grandma and mum would be standing near the stove with their arms crossed and admiring their men and looking forwards to them eating it all. Then they would go to sleep in the logged bath-house. There, in a small room before the steam-room, it would be nice and cool and they would hear the pleasant babble of the water in the cold brook. Meanwhile grandma would make a fire in the bath-house. In a couple of hours father and his son would enjoy whipping each other with a bath besom and splash the water on the burning hot stone and jump off the bench to the floor with a scream. There they would need to get down very low. The hot steam would pleasantly scald their bodies covered with mosquito bites from the night before.

While their bodies were still hot, they would jump into the brook. Then they would get out of it and sit on the green grass without thinking of anything. Their blood vessels would tighten, their head would spin and they would forget about everything in the world.

7

Mikhail was spending all his time doing his homework. He didn't play outside, he didn't chase after girls, he didn't even go to the cinema. At school he was held up as an example. He surely got only "fives" at school. It was difficult to say what subject was his favourite. But everyone in his form knew he was the future Mendeleev or Pavlov. If someone saw Mishka Dvorsky without the books, he was with a cat or a dog. He would feed them or bandage their hurt paws. Generally speaking, he was a "doctor". That was what they called him.

First he brought a kitten home, as ginger as himself. Then he brought home a dog with a bandaged paw. At first Mishka's mother didn't let him keep pets at home but when she saw her mother was pleased with the kitten, she agreed. Anna was at work, Mishka was at school and the ginger kitten was crawling on the sofa from Aristarkh to grandma, climb on their laps, lick their hands. He reminded them of Misha. As affectionate as he was.

In the upper school Dvorsky fell in love with chemistry. No one else did. It didn't even seem to be a science. No one could understand it. Everything had to be memorized. And he would write down all experiments at home, the ones they had to do at school the following day, and then he would pour the solution from one tube into another and watch it change the colour from transparent into gentle lilac or he could see the yellow crystals appear on the walls of the tube. It looked like gold. He was as happy as a baby and he would carry it to show Lenka who was sitting at the last desk in the end of the row. She was pleased the cleverest boy in class was in love with her. In fact, everything was much simpler. Lenka never called him "ginger" or "a doctor", she always smiled when he talked to her and she called him Mishenka. Like his grandma did.

Two years after Aristarkh married Vera Vladislavovna, he was urgently called into Moscow. There he lived in a hotel, near Kaluzhskaya square, and rang his family in Sosnovaya Poliana every day. Why did the Military Department need the pensioner? No one knew that but grandma must have had an idea because she was constantly crying and no magnifying glass could now help her to read books. It looked exactly the same as her first husband Yakov's departure on his last business trip.

Less than half a year later the Executive committee informed them that "Aristarkh Volfovich Galaktionov died of a heart attack in Sweden where he went on a business trip. His body has been cremated. You can receive his cinerary urn at the address..."

Grandma immediately broke down. Her blood sugar levels reached twenty. She would sit in the arm-chair all day long staring at the window and saying something about the flat. She said Aristarkh had known everything, that was why he had married her. He'd wanted his flat in Sosnovaya Poliana to belong to the daughter and grandson of his war friend.

Vera Vladislavovna died at night, when everybody was asleep, the next day after receiving the letter from the Executive committee. Her family were used to her being ill. But now, when she was lying in her bed, she looked so small and dear, they suddenly felt grief. It cut like a knife. There was nobody to listen to the grandson, stroke the kitten or tell them about grandpa. She left the world peacefully, like she had wanted. Mishka made a decision, "I will be a doctor! I want to think of something to cure that horrible diabetes!" It didn't happen very often to him to state his wish so simply. It was not as easy as doing a maths problem about the pipes in a swimming pool or writing a chemical equation, it was about an important life decision. It was similar to picking up a stray kitten or going to the pictures with Lenka.

Dvorsky had two important school events in his memory, the first one being Lenka and the second – his gold medal. The medal influenced another important life decision – the choice of university. To be exact, his childhood dreams of the sea and his drive to science, medical science, came together. When Galaktionov was alive, he would come up to Mishka when he was not busy with his homework, look in his eyes, smile and say, "You do look like your grandad. dead spit!", then he would touch his ginger hair and be at it again, "You know, Mishka, you should go to the Military Medical Academy. They have everything you like – chemistry, medicine and biochemistry. You'll be a military man, like your grandad. You've got to... You're our only successor..."

Mishka didn't mind.

Time went by quickly. It was easy for him to get into the Academy, department of the navy doctors, he had everything that was necessary – a medal, victories at the town competitions. A new life began for him – his friend-cadets, barracks, navy uniform, summer work experience at the vessels of the Baltic fleet and lots of laboratories. As many different types of chemistry, as many laboratories.

From the third year each student could apply to a military scientific club at any theory department of the academy. That meant real science, participation in inventions, first scientific publications and maybe even work experience in an establishment of the Academy of Science. Everyone was willing to get to the trendy biochemistry department. But there were only a few available places. That caused serious arguments between the students.

During the break they would gather in the toilet to have a smoke and not to snap at the passing by officers. Mikhail didn't smoke but he didn't want to get out of line.

"What are you doing, idiot?" a tall brunet shouted swinging his arms. "Look at him! What a jerk! Why are you trying to get to the biochemistry department? You are like a dog in the manger! You only have "threes"... Old fart!" the student went on shouting.

On the stone floor, surrounded by his mates, there sat a lad who had just been slapped in the face. He jumped up, and touched his face to check if there was any blood. When he saw blood his face twisted with anger and became red. He had already got a bruise on his cheekbone. He appeared to be going up to the tall guy, grabbing a knife and stabbing in his stomach...

Instead the guy with a cut lip and a bruise wiped the blood with a handkerchief and started reasoning, "What does it have to do with you? I can if I want to! I don't need to ask for your permission. They do invite me, not you, to get there. You'd better make up your mind who I am, a dog or an old fart. Dork!"

The students in the toilet were hoping to watch a fight but they got disappointed. Some of them left, stubbing cigarettes out. The trickster looked at them seeking their support and continued, "Guys, this penny pincher wants to spoil everything. Big deal – an A-level student! Nowadays they need all-round men, not narrow-minded! So what if he's hatched "fives"... Are you a chicken?"

"He hasn't got enough, guys! Honestly, I am going to kill him now!" the brunet got wound up.

"Vitka, s-stop it now!" Dvorsky grabbed the tall guy by his sleeve and dragged him into the corridor.

"You're so simple, Zavialov!" another student butted in. He was the leader of the year Komsomol organization Dobroserdov. "Don't waste yourself on this idiot! Especially in the toilets. Come on, we'll do it another way."

Viacheslav Dobroserdov was the head of the year Komsomol organization of the faculty and he knew very well how the students could get into the scientific clubs and later to work experience at the prestigious medical or scientific institutions.

He quickly gathered the bureau of five people and they voted to recommend A-level students Dvorsky, Zavialov and himself, Dobro-

serdov, to join the scientific club. Any official document was important for the order of the military and scientific clubs and weighed much more than profitable connections.

Dobroserdov was immediately chosen as chairman of the students' scientific club at the biochemistry department. High ranker! Students' participation in planned and contract work and getting an independent research subject depended on him quite a lot.

Three more years passed. The military band sounds roared and slender rows of the medical officers marched by the Academy flag solemnly. It rained of coins, as a good sign, over the caps of the new officers. The three A-level students, famous for their achievements in scientific research and proud of an invention and an article in an academic journal, stayed at their favourite department. Its management thought they had to continue their research. So the next step was a registrarship. To do that, firstly, they needed two years of experience and secondly, only three people a year were accepted there according to the plan approved by the Head of the Main Military Medicine administration once in three years. They had to wait. The inseparable threesome were serving in a garrison hospital, on vessels and for a while were placed on service of the Bio-technology and Bio-control Institute.

At last everything came together – their rights, possibilities and wishes. As usual, they had to collect loads of documents, to report to the authorities before the New Year. If the authorities said “yeah”, they would have to hurry up and collect all the documents quickly, before they changed their mind.

Dvorsky was admitted. So were his friends. They had been A-level students and obtained patent on new medicine for a good reason! Speciality in the registrarship was all theory so the medical business took a back-seat. The real science started. No “pouring in-pouring out” but well-considered, consistent steps in searching new medical qualities and new medical formulas. At the end of the first year of the registrarship Mikhail got a subject for his independent scientific research. He plunged into the jungle of peptidic autoregulation. Zavialov and Dobroserdov hadn't seen Dvorsky for weeks and forgot what he looked like. They would pop into his laboratory, look at their “crack headed” mate and disappear. They knew if Michael saw his idle friends, he would make them do something for his experiment. He was itching to work! Everything had been thought through, calculated and re-counted. He

just needed to set one experiment after another, until he got that unfortunate and desired second peak in the diagram of caloradiance. If there was a second one, it would mean everything was OK. Molecules of a new medical drug, invented by Dvorsky, were activating “sleeping tails” of the affected liver DNA with their charged radicals. The “tails” would switch on and start carry information again, which meant they worked.

It was half past twelve at night. The reaction had been launched, the appliances had been switched on and were registering the slightest variations of the thermal condition. An eye blink was four calories. Here everything was thousand times less. The self-recorder had carelessly registered the first peak. That was the heat from the drug dissolving in the blood...

“What are you doing here?” Mikhail suddenly heard the sonorous voice of an officer on duty.

“Registrar Dvorsky!” he jumped up. “I am carrying out an ex-xperiment. Continuity of the biochemical process needs 24-hour m-monitoring. I’ve got a permit,” Dvorsky was standing bolt-upright and trying to reach the paper with the department head’s resolution.”

“I can see it’s an experiment. I am asking about the pistol!”

Mikhail had got so used to the molecules of peptides, he seemed to feel their “breathing”, slightest changes in the biological energy of the reaction. When the officer on duty came in, he was squatting near the monitor and waiting, no, he was demanding the second peak in the graph. It had to pop up any second! Mishka was holding a pistol in his hand. He was threatening the self-recorder aloud, “I am gonna shot you, I’ll smash you into pieces, you metal dumbo!”

He had to waste precious time to convince the officer, who had come in so unexpectedly, that it was a toy pistol firing with caps.

“My God! What warriors we’ve got!” the officer mumbled leaving the laboratory.

After that Mishka realized one thing – he couldn’t be present at the important events. He was radiating too strong biofield. Sometimes it affected the wrong way. Like now – the second peak wouldn’t appear, what could he do? Later in life he would realize that from his field computers froze. As soon as Dvorsky got on the computer, they had to call an engineer – the monitor would freeze.

It must have been because he got distracted by the officer on duty, that the bio-chemical processes went on as required and on the graph

there appeared his favourite and at the same time hateful “second peak”. The area under it told Dvorsky the main thing. Nearly thirty per cent of molecules of his medical drug were activating “dead” fragments of DNA! “It’s crazy!” Dvorsky shouted to himself. “It’s a discovery! It’s the Nobel prize!” Well, whether it was the Nobel prize or not, the Supreme Personnel Review Board awarded Dvorsky Mikhail Nickolayevich an academic title of a candidate of science upon the application of the Board of Science of the Academy and Special council on the thesis defence. He was only twenty four! Anna Yakovlevna didn’t particularly give meaning to that event, but if her son was pleased so was she. His friends Zavialov and Dobroserdov didn’t know how to behave. “How lucky Mishka is! A scientist! He didn’t eat or sleep for a good reason! He has been looking for the formula!” Dvorsky always answered the same thing. Shyly looking down, he would say, “You don’t have to be a scientist, but you have to be a candidate of science!”

After graduating from a registrarship, the three of them stayed in the Academy. To develop a promising direction, a new laboratory was created. The head of it was appointed an ace from the rector’s office, medical lieutenant-colonel and the director of the academic biotechnology and bioregulation institute, corresponding member of the Academy of Science Maximov had agreed to become the scientific supervisor on a voluntary basis. The employees of the new department felt a challenge and got into the swing of things. When Leonid Alexandrovich Maximov would come to the laboratory, he liked to experience thoughtless green years, remember himself as a junior research assistant working in Korolev’s office day and night without food or sleep. He would take his posh blazer off, hang it carefully on a chair, put on a marked white lab coat with his name embroidered in red on the chest pocket and immerse himself into an experiment. Sitting on the floor with his young colleagues, he would mess around in a vacuum oil pump or try to get rid of magnetic pickups in a new device measuring current in the minus seventeenth degree Ampere. Some respected teachers were surprised with the professor’s behaviour. Instead of answering their questions, he would hide his face stooping his head, to disguise the joy shining in his eyes.

To say academician Maximov liked a scientific experiment was not enough. He loved it. It felt like a living organism. Twenty five years before, after postgraduate studies and work experience in a university of West Berlin, he had spent all his money and bought a “Volga van”,

which looked like an ambulance car, to transport various tubes and pumps picked from a skip or borrowed from friends for new installations.

Young officers got used to academician Maximov always being around when any important equipment broke. In spite of his age and rank, he would crawl under the frame of the device, trying to touch everything with his hands and feel the reason of breakage. That created a feeling of respect and admiration of their scientific supervisor and made the officers be ordinary, initiative and not close-minded with different instructions and old-fashioned standards.

"You are over-thinking again, Mishka! This is not in the experiment programme. Why are you adding this rubbish?" Zavialov was getting steamed up, he was in charge of the drug and its components fineness.

"It's n-not rubbish at all! Try to imagine there will be lilac liquid, like a lilac bush, in an ampule instead of transparent..."

"What the hell do you need that for? In the formula there are no additives."

"Then order it! You know, it doesn't make any difference, only changes colour."

"Right! What shall I write in pharmacological properties?"

"You can write – salt s-solution of trivalent europium is added to get special violet glow to intensify p-positive psychological effect of the drug use. D-don't you like it?"

Dvorsky twisted the test tube with lilac liquid inside it and continued, "You do know, what F-electrons of europium do. As soon as its salt gets into solution, especially if it's crammed with c-complex compounds... They fall off their orbit to the lower one and surely radiate energy, which..." Michael stopped for a second, then smiled and gently stroking the test tube, added, "which is exactly what we need, Slavik, it's slightly violet."

"Is it nice to know what's going to happen?" Zavialov asked out of a blue sky.

"Don't change the subject! Come on, write it down! Salt solution of trivalent europium... That's our first joint patent! And nobody in the world has done it before. Academician will go crazy! We'll b-be the first!"

Of course, Victor agreed with "crazy" Dvorsky, and Viacheslav gave up in the end. Sure thing! "Just try not to!" they were saying to each other having a beer and Caspian roach. "He won't give up, he won't let us sleep and will scare away all the girls." They both laughed and Zavia-

lov was tinkling on a guitar, sticking his fingers into Dvorsky's jumper with holes from acid on it and saying "He is a burned through chemist."

8

The confused, odd and tragic year of 1991 was coming to its end. The great state was finishing its existence, like a cheap co-operative shop or joint venture. The familiar flag over the pedestal of sports winners, pictures in the ABC book, school, Motherland, patriotism – everything suddenly collapsed with the party and Dzerzhinsky's monument in Lubianka.

The coup became a breaking-down point of the continuity in the situation change. Everyone suddenly seemed to have realized where they were. Without state institutions and with an agonizing economic system.

A change of traditional symbol contents took place without symbol change. Newspapers with the same titles and a succession of the orders of Lenin on the top would fling dirt at communism and socialism. Half a year later the "private guest" of Gorbachev, former leader of GDR Erich Honecker was ordered out of the country... Dollars were circulating everywhere and at the same time according to the Criminal Code a long prison term was in order for owning them. If someone wanted to leave Russia they could, they just needed to get a passport and go to any country they were allowed in. But that was a treason and would result in the death-penalty. The country was covered with a tsunami of western words – "cash", "margin", "racket", "realtor", "rating"... Bright multicoloured matrioshka dolls with the faces of Gorbachev, Yeltsin, Lenin... were being sold to foreign tourists as the main symbols of the epoch. Only the Mausaleum in Red Square seemed to have remained the unshakable citadel of the past.

The split of public mind started. There occurred a dangerous uncertainty and, as it always happened in such cases, there was a scent of dictatorship. On its own account, that concept was familiar to the Soviet people. The power vacuum was gradually and fatally fulfilled by the dictatorship of then only organized power – criminal world.

In "Pharma" everything was taking its course. In the end of 1991 at the exhibition in Vancouver, Canada, they showed a new technological range of pankagen synthesis, a powerful drug for treating diabetes.

Its creator and author was a young officer of the Military Medical Academy Mikhail Nickolayevich Dvorsky. By request of Maximov, he had been sent to the exhibition.

From the fallen to pieces Soviet Union a lot had been brought there – Turkmenian rugs, Belorussian tractors, Tula gingerbread and shot-guns, Vologda laces, Gzhel crockery... Out of high technologies there was only their range and drugs. Hardly anyone was taking an interest in them. Everyone was into shiny incrustated guns and Gzhel painted cups.

Only on the last day a small man in a smart suit came up to the young scientists from Leningrad and started asking them questions in really bad Russian. He had a good handle of every equipment unit. He seemed to want to make sure those Russians had invented that miracle. The visitor understood straight off who was the author of the unique unit. And Mikhail understood from the first questions the man was not just an idle amateur of new drugs. He could feel a foreign intelligence service. He had been taught those sounds in the academy for six years. Dvorsky knew very well where the lists of goods and technologies, like computers, information database and Internet, liable to export into Eastern block countries were made, hiding behind the organization CoCom.

“Are you from CIA?” Mikhail dared the man.

“If you does it yourselves,” the little man continued ignoring the question, “I liquidation embargo this technic. Situation non-profit.” He stood there for another minute, looked at the equipment from every side, felt the main unit with his little plump fingers and added, “Yes. I... Colonel. You need include Organizing Committee of the exhibition technical particulars of the equipment.” The last words he pronounced without any accent. He must have done that all his life.

The American left and Dvorsky remembered academician Maximov’s words about the controlled technological lag of the USSR and about their duty to “break” all those controllers from the West. “Is it really possible with our technological culture and wooden microelectronics?” Mikhail thought then but didn’t say a word. Now he remembered it and suddenly found himself in his childhood, in 1976, in Tallinn.

When he was in year 9 he went to Baltics with his school friend Lenka. At home they told their families they were going on a school trip to the Pushkin hills.

It was winter. They found a big restaurant “Gloria” in the capital of Soviet Estonia, saw their prices and ordered just starters. They ate

them quickly and to kill the clock Michael went to the toilet. After that he was really shocked. The Soviet school boy and A-level student Misha Dvorsky couldn't figure out what and where he was supposed to push or open the unusual Estonian toilet. Everything around him was shining and smelt of perfume. The black tiles finished him off. He was used to the white tiles in places like that. But here... Instead of the usual toilet bowl there was an oblong shiny miracle which looked like a polished coffee table without a vase of flowers. Behind it, in the wall, there were some metal plates. There was no water tank or handle... He felt even more underdeveloped after they returned to a long brick building with an offensive name "Hostel for Leningraders". Having walked there through the wet snow, with wet socks and boots, they decided to urgently save their health. They secretly got into a back room on the last floor, found an electric kettle, poured water into it, switched it on and let it boil for a long time to warm themselves up. The first unhappy impressions of Tallinn were disappearing when the kids were sitting next to each other, breathing in the steam from the kettle, cuddling and trying to warm each other up. From time to time they would put their cold feet over the stream of hot air. Having put warm towels on their heads, they would kiss, laugh and kiss again... The inner warmth was filling their bodies and it didn't matter whether it was cold or warm around, whether there was any money left in that happy world.

Ten years had passed since Dvorsky married his school friend. Their wedding was straight after he got a dirk and pips of the medical lieutenant. Everyone said he had been really lucky. Michael hadn't really had any friends at school and he had always avoided girls.

9

After the exhibition in Canada technological ranges of medical drugs synthesis were excluded from the list of forbidden goods for export in the USSR. They didn't have to. A month later the Soviet Union didn't exist any longer. Two years later the CoCom, carrying out export control, was liquidated as useless.

But it was impossible to plan things hoping the ill-fated organization to stop functioning. One had to live, develop business and rela-

tionships with western companies. To do all that without any information was the same as getting blindly through the razor wire high voltage.

Academician had always kept up with the time. Or even ahead of the time. By itself it was good, but sometimes it caused problems he hadn't even suspected of. Maximov found out about the American databases and since then he couldn't sleep. Those databases were treasure of valuable information – companies and their owners, patents and company accounting and many other things that might seem useless at first. However, when someone looked for a partner, any data was valuable. The access was obviously closed because of embargo. But there were ways...

Some time ago diplomatic relations with Israel were renewed. There were a lot of former Russians there. Could they help? They probably hadn't forgotten the Soviet habit of helping even if no one asked. So Academician decided to look for contacts with Israeli informative firms. It would also be a good idea to establish pharm business in Moscow or Leningrad with clinics from Tel Aviv. He had a little left to do – to find people in the Land of the Covenant who were practising business intelligence and information and also those who would want to take a chance and invest in the pharmaceutical whirlpool of new Russia.

Military Medical Academy and joint company "Pharma" sent Dvorsky again on a mission. He had approved himself and his inventions in Canada. They had managed to take off embargo, so they would try to find a way around now. Lawyer Leonid Malkin was appointed a partner of the medical captain. When he worked in the Smolny, he used to be in charge of academic institutions and knew many Leningrad Orientalist scientists. That was just what was wanted. They flew on a business trip, kind of from the academy. The plane "E1-A1" landed on the runway of the airport named after the first president of Israel and stopped gently, without a jerk. A stairway was rolled up and all the passengers rushed to the open door. The hot air from the outside, which was filled with the aroma of all the flowers of the world, poured into the plane cabin chilled with the air conditioning. It happened if a bottle with nail varnish or solar colours broke. The strength of the smell would be the same, but it would smell really nice.

"Are you the group leader?" a lady in the uniform asked Dvorsky, "Purpose of visit?"

“Scientific. Our group is two people. Me and this c-comrade. Don’t be surprised. We’ll meet members of different c-companies.”

“What companies?”

“Well, “T-tadiran”, “El-Op” ...

“What’s your scientific profile? Field of interest?”

“Oh! Very extensive. Optics, informational support, Internet, d-data bases, business intelligence, pharmacy.”

After that word combination any sensible person, especially a security officer, would have to suspect industrial spying. The lady made a fuss, touched something under the lid of the table and stared at Dvorsky with her big brown eyes. In a few moments a middle-aged man appeared in her glass booth, not in a uniform. He looked Russian, as if he was from somewhere outside Kaluga.

“Mr...”

“Dvorsky Mikhail.”

“Can you please repeat what companies you are going to visit in Tel Aviv.”

Michael named all the companies he knew. He also added a university and scientists who were named to Malkin in Leningrad department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences.

“Do you know those people in person?”

“Me?”

“Yes, you!”

“Oh, no! But I have been sent here by the Institute of Oriental Studies. So the head of this respectful institute knows them. I can give you these scientists’ phone numbers in Tel Aviv.”

“If you please,” said the man. He took the list of phones and went to another booth. Those three words hurt him. Those were the words that the character of Mishka’s favourite book “In August of 1944” used to say. They meant “Action!” in the language of those who worked in the military security service. Dvorsky was being watched by the queue of at least fifty Israeli behind him.

Several minutes later the tight man “from the outside of Kaluga” returned, said something to the female officer and disappeared. Mikhail took a sigh of relief. The same moment he heard a sharp click and his passport got a red stamp with words in Hebrew the size of half-page, which was better not to show in Arab countries. The lady from the glass booth stared at the Soviet scientist and said in Russian, “How are you

living there, in Leningrad?" but got frightened of her own words and without waiting for his answer, she added, "Welcome to Israel!" The first words must have slipped out of astonishment. Russians on the land of the Covenant! There had been so many wars and conflicts with the Arabs and the Soviet Union had always been on their side... There were so many emigrants from the Soviet Union... And those just came to visit!

Malkin wasn't asked anything. From time to time he would ask a border guard how to get to the check-in desk, whether he needed to queue there or there was another queue, if he could collect his passport or it would stay there... He accompanied that nonsense with his favourite "Sorry to disturb you..."

The first two days, according to the cover, Dvorsky paid a lot of visits to their colleagues – scientists from the Institute of Oriental Studies, then he and Malkin got ready for the main purpose of their trip. The next day they were going to visit the management of the Medical Centre "Shiba" in Tel Aviv and figure out if those smart men would agree to build the same one in Leningrad.

Quite soon they realized that without any additional efforts to find influential "friends" it was not possible to involve local health professionals into the financial act of "invest their money somewhere far away". So they had to turn to the backup. Malkin set out on the route the extraordinary commission had not approved. He went to the former Soviet dissident Vladimir Spivak's home. In the Soviet Union they knew Spivak was an authorized representative of the big godfather Pyotr Mikhailovich Philippov and was transacting his financial business. In Israel police didn't take any notice of that. Vladimir Leonidovich was respected because in the time of the Soviet Union he had been in prison outside Perm. However, it was far from certain that Spivak's request would solve the problem with the investors. Still Malkin couldn't help trying.

After he rang the bell, the door opened. In the doorway he saw a fifty-year-old man with short black and greyish hair.

"Hello, Vladimir Leonidovich. My name is Leonid Malkin. Sergey Bogdanov from Petersburg is sending his regards to you."

"Is the party dealing with everything again there?" the former dissident was truly surprised and he kept standing on the landing in front of his flat.

"I replaced Sergey in the Smolny after he had been sacked from the Regional committee. Everyone knew your story. Before I came here I saw Sergey. I found out your parents' address..."

"How is he?" Spivak was obviously not interested and he asked the question just to be polite.

"Drinking..."

"Well, is he eating anything?"

Malkin smiled. Spivak shook his head slightly to show he had thought so and didn't ask anything else. He was waiting to hear what his school friend's mate would say.

"I just wanted to ask for your advice about investing..."

"I haven't got any money," Spivak said quickly and abruptly. He was just about to turn his back on Malkin.

"Oh, no! It's not what I was asking..."

"What were you asking?" Spivak stopped. He got curious. "Where to find idiot Pinocchio for burying his money in the Land of Fools? Ask someone else."

"Really, we can find those idiots ourselves. We'd like to know how it works. We have no information about you. Nowhere to be found."

"You need free literacy project?"

"We can pay for your advice."

Spivak looked at the alive representative of the whole country of Soviets, thought for a moment and then quickly said, "Listen, go over there," Spivak came up to the window and stretched his arm out. Malkin thought he was being sent to disappear, but Spivak went on, "There is a cafe round that corner. Take a table and I will see you there in twenty minutes." The door closed. Being a diligent performer, Vladimir Leonidovich went back into his study, rang Philippov and reported to him everything. Philippov gave the go-ahead and warned that Malkin was surely from the Big House in Liteiny. So he had to be quiet about his business!

Spivak didn't forget his school friend, Sergey Bogdanov, who had let him, an ex-con and a tourist with a false passport, go to the American Embassy in Malta. He was often thinking about him with gratitude and now, after receiving his boss' consent, began to explain to his school friend's mate the business practice in Israel. Among the other things, he told him about marketing in general, information market research in particular and databases... He even explained how plan-

ning of funds expenses of local private and state companies was arranged. Leonid was trying to write everything down. Where, when and at what conditions they could expect investing. Basically, without connection to the specific subject which Malkin tried to force to his conversation partner.

As for the medical centre, it was evident they had to come here again more than once. They had to welcome a delegation in Petersburg. Only then they would believe in the clinic "Shiba" that the Russians had serious commitments. The information companies that Spivak named turned out very useful.

Vladimir Spivak and Leonid Malkin parted as if they had never met. No emotions. No regards. The former dissident seemed to have worked out his debt to Bogdanov.

In fact it was completely different. The weight of different habits the former Soviet prisoner of conscience owned was too heavy.

Malkin returned to his hotel room.

"You know, next time I'll p-pretend to be ill," Dvorsky shouted cheerfully spooning out the thick yellowy-violet juice from half of a passion fruit. Not asking about Leonid's meeting with Spivak, Mikhail went on, "Next time I go to "Shiba" I'll p-pretend to be ill. They will feel sorry for me, start talking..."

Malkin was quiet and kept pressing his pen. He was enjoying his success and was waiting for Dvorsky to shut up. "Firstly, nothing will make the local business people cough up." Leonid started stating the commercial basics he had just learned. "Secondly, people like you would probably agree to be led. But it's hard to say what you are – a scientist who got carried away. Somewhere he is not waited for."

Dvorsky nearly choked from his companion's pressing. He didn't really understand why the laboratory head sent him to Canada and Israel. What could he think of, apart from formulae? On the other hand, his bosses knew the best.

"Not bad at all! C-carry on!"

"Well," Malkin went on, "address list, companies dealing with information, directors' names, telephone numbers, passwords, places of meeting... How about that? Maximov will be pleased. There is an outcome of an engineering office where there are our captured tanks straight at the entrance..."

"What do we need tanks for?"

“Haven’t got a clue. But we’ll visit it. They might be pleased in Liteiny.”

“Where did you get all that?”

“It doesn’t matter. The world is small as we are told... Do you remember the old anecdote?” Malkin got overwhelmed telling the story about an Israeli soldier who got an Egyptian banner. When his commanding officer asked, “How did you do it?” he answered, “I exchanged it for our banner.”

10

Academician was arrested in 1992, at the end of the summer, outside, they laid him down, his face in a puddle. He thought they were bandits, took a gas pistol out of his pocket and shot the gas in their eyes. They got offended and beat him up. Then he was put into “Kresty”, an eight-meter cell with twenty people. The first night Maximov couldn’t sleep at all, the other people were sleeping in turn. All night Leonid Alexandrovich was picking up the pieces of his broken teeth with his index finger.

The same day police searched his flat. They confiscated money, his wife’s jewellery, a computer. They also took his car. They had already had a vehicle depot in the yard of the administration – “Mercedeses”, “Volgas” and peanuts. Let the boss be pleased! Things for his report. See how many valuables they had returned to the country!

The next morning after the search Academician’s wife came to the parcel office of the Investigation Cell No.1 She had queued, filled in the application form for the parcel, then laid out all the food she had brought in. In the office, that looked like a money exchange office, they handed her her husband’s shirt in blood stains...

The investigating officer didn’t call Leonid Alexandrovich for a long time trying to answer two questions. The first one was – where did the government property go? In the government act about joint companies it didn’t say it could be got a grip of so easily. There was another question. Did the government allocate the money for a new clinic? It did half a year ago. Where was the money now, millions of roubles, or fifteen million German marks? “I can’t understand!” the investigating officer repeated to himself, not being ashamed of looking stupid.

The fact said Maximov had started his company in Holland. Then he converted the roubles he had got from the government for the clinic building into currency and transferred it into a private company in Amsterdam.

“So what’s the difference?” the investigating officer asked himself many times in doubt. “The government gave a lot of money to the company with mixed property. Why can’t the company manage the resources the best way it can? Not to lose them in the general disorder of changes but increase them and build a modern clinic pavilion in Russia?”

That was all right. However, now Maximov could deal with the budget money without asking anyone. He could keep it. Who would know? Not good at all.

“So, my dear corresponding member,” the investigating officer was thinking, “first of all we’ll nick you, keep you there for a week and then start asking you questions. Or we won’t ask you anything. Depends on what goal they’ve got at the top. They might be happy for the fashionable building constructed by Academician to crash, maybe his joint company is in someone’s way. Fifteen thousand German marks is not a lot of money to worry someone. Or do we need to train all businessmen, innovators and inventors purposefully and methodically and teach them to share?”

Dvorsky was in Israel at the time. Here he would sometimes afford to waste money and ring his wife from a phone-booth. That was cheaper. That morning he was woken up by the nice sound of the hotel phone. It was Zavialov. He told him about Academician’s arrest, searches and seizures in “Pharma”, questioning of Maximov’s assistants and even his blood-stained shirt.

At first Michael was outraged. “What a lot of rubbish!” he shouted as if he was throwing himself on a barricade.

“I am just telling you the facts and you can think about them... All the papers are talking about this. The bosses are turning up their noses. They pretend Maximov had his private reasons. Do you understand?”

The conversation didn’t last long. After that Dvorsky stayed in the hotel room even though Malkin was waiting for him in the restaurant.

“The bosses are turning up their noses...” Mikhail kept saying quietly, “what d-do we do now?”

All his thoughts were with his scientific leader. He seemed to be feeling Leonid Alexandrovich’ pain and sufferings with all his body.

He couldn't talk or think about anything different. Similar feelings of any law-abiding and sensitive person overfilled him and didn't let him get distracted. If they talked about local police on the telly, Dvorsky would imagine them putting handcuffs on Maximov. If they showed a murderer and rapist, he was thinking about Academician somewhere next to him, with a bloody face...

Dvorsky tried to concentrate and ratiocinate but he couldn't. His imagination would show him new and bright images. He thought about films of the war and guerillas. Questioning, tortures... His imagination would colour the pictures of sufferings in, with all the details. "What can I do now? I am also... As soon as I am there, they will arrest me... Prison... What a word!" Michael breathed out loudly as if he was blowing down the flame of danger, danger for him now. "What does it have to do with me? The medicines are good. They are not medicines yet. Before the tests are completed they are not medicines... But no one has died. And I have a diploma from the Minister of Defence..."

In the afternoon Dvorsky was handed a telegram at the reception. He was ordered to go to Sukhumi urgently, the next day, for carrying out a series of tests of a new batch of medical drugs. It didn't say where to arrive. The details would be there and then. It was signed with the laboratory head's name, without his rank and post.

"Thank God!" Michael sighed with a relief. "Far away from all that commotion." He ran up the stairs, went into his room and rang his wife in Petersburg. A minute later Malkin came in. Dvorsky showed him the telegram but didn't say a word about his morning conversation with Zavialov.

"The command is a command," Dvorsky said and started throwing his clothes into his suitcase. "Usual behavioural sequence. Finish up with the information companies and we'll see about the medicine later." He passed Leonid the money for their business trip. "And ring them at work. Any news there? Why did they recall me so urgently?" Michael couldn't tell him about Zavialov's phone call.

Malkin got lost at first but a moment later he grabbed the phone and dialled the Leningrad number. Not a single phone of "Pharma" would answer.

"Strange... It's one thing after another," Leonid said.

Only the next day he would manage to get one of his friends on the phone and find out about Academician's arrest. But in the mean-

time he was sitting on the sofa in his friend's hotel room and counting one-hundred shekel notes he'd just got.

Mikhail tried to calm himself down, "I was told – I have done! I don't need to be stupid and worry about nothing. If that was some sort of science or a problem with an experiment... No! I am only doing the leg-work for them. I hate to be doing something like that. It feels like diletantism. It always does."

Dvorsky suddenly realized he had not been thinking of Maximov for an hour.

Next morning Michael left Tel Aviv for Kiev, and then went to Adler. At the bus station in Sukhumi he was met by the assistant chief of the sea launch border detachment. Since then medical captain Dvorsky was placed under orders of the border detachment chief and became attributable to torpedo boat number 067.

Lena was pleased to hear about her husband's new business trip. The sun, fruit, vegetables... Especially now, when she was six months pregnant. She packed quickly, resigned from the knitting factory where she worked in the Personnel department and came to Sukhumi.

11

Autumn came to Abkhasia. Hydrangea blossomed early in 1992. Their rich light green buds invisibly transformed and became completely white. Nearby they looked like lumps of snow and reminded Lena of Leningrad. In autumn the flower heads would turn pink and three-meter bush branches would bend down to the ground under their weight. No one here knew the scientific name of them but their smell of vanilla or jasmine would be remembered. Luxurious white caps of fanciful petals on long strong stems were growing into the open window making everyone breathe in the wonderful aroma. The smell got even stronger with the morning chill coming down from the mountains and pushing out the velvet and warm sea air. A delicate ashy two-headed Sukhumi mountain could be seen from the window of a small room on the first floor of a wooden and unplastered house. A blue lane of the stone road with multicoloured spots of slowly and silently moving cars was stretching to the mountain top turning around the foot covered with cedars. On the left, be-

hind the various roofs, there was a narrow strip of the sky-blue sea, restricted by the skyline. The white sky was being filled by the gentle morning sun. Its ray flashed from behind the mountain and got into the untidy room. First it shone on the curved Viennese chair back and carelessly left clothes on it, then it noticed a young woman lying in bed and stopped on her face. Her sensitive eye lashes flinched.

“Lenushka, are you awake?” Dvorsky asked, gently stroking her fair hair. The eye lashes flinched again on her careless sleepy face.

“Aha, you are awake!” Michael answered to himself with a smile. He was sitting on the side of the iron bed and touching his wife’s face in the places where the sun ray had just been, to stop the sun tickling her. Then he bent over and gave her a gentle kiss. He put his hand on her bump under the cover and softly stroked it. “What a shame you can’t eat citrus at the moment. The locals b-brought two barges of tangerines to our pier. They are so easy to peel! We eat them for lunch.”

“Mishenka, why are you wearing a uniform?” Lena whispered under breath stretching herself. “What’s the occasion?”

“There isn’t one! Last night Georgian landing troops turned up in Gagra. Would you imagine, they’ve got St.Andrew’s flag! They got the ships last year after the separation and haven’t changed anything. Or maybe on purpose... They’ve got a former P-political Bureau member now. He might still be thinking he is a Foreign affairs minister. And this uniform is just in case.”

“What case?”

“Nothing. Don’t worry. I’ll come back soon and in the evening we’ll go motor-boating. The captain promised, do you remember Alexey? He popped in last week,” the medical captain quickly got up, rolled the imaginary steering-wheel and sang, “Orange sky, orange sky, tra-la-la, tra-la-a...”

Mikhail left without having breakfast and Lena stayed in bed thinking about their evening boat ride.

They stayed in a room of a four-storeyed private house. A straight road led from the house to the sea, it had been planted with slender rows of date palms, Chinese palm trees and gentle oleanders and was called Leon avenue. Recently it had been re-named Lenin Avenue. Two kilometres from the house there was a military pier with a lot of Russian boats, barges and tug-boats. That was where Michael had been going every morning for two months. He lost himself in his new work and tried not to think of Maximov or Malkin.

Lena had to buy something for the dinner so she went to Sukhumi's central market. She had to wait for a bus for a long time but it didn't come, so she decided to walk to Mir Avenue and then she turned left and walked another thirty minutes to Karl Marx Street. After walking past two or three quarters of the buildings she saw a nervous man running towards her. He said the public transport was not working and there had been a bomb explosion at the market, there had been victims and casualties. While they were talking, something had changed around them. Kindergarten children ran past them followed by women with bags and sacks.

Lena stopped. She decided not to go to the market but to turn back, to the house. The way back was long and weary. She had to walk around the new anti-tank barriers. She could see militiamen with guns. Near her house in the Lenin Park, she could see armed people.

That day armed troops of the Georgian army entered Sukhumi but were stopped at the Red Bridge by the Abkhazian militiamen. That was near the piers of the sea port. Georgian helicopters appeared in the sky and a moment later went away after firing a military sanatorium and the building of the Supreme Soviet. Radio, television and telephone didn't work. Dreadful rumours were spreading all over the town – Georgians let all the criminals out of the prison and they were robbing, raping and murdering in town.

Eighty-year-old heavy old man, the owner of the house where the young family stayed, tried to calm Lena down, promised to help her go to Sochi. It was no good looking for Mikhail. The old man advised not to go to the trade port where the holiday-makers were getting ready for evacuation, there could be a real babel there. Being heavily pregnant, she couldn't go there. It was not far to go to the naval base where her husband was serving, but all the Russian boats had left for Gagra in the morning.

All that reasoning was interrupted by the shouts outside the house and the shriek of the shot dog. People with guns broke into the house. They knocked down the old man and tied down two young women – the man's niece and Lena.

A pacey short man in a tacky jacket and black jeans with round shifty eyes – he must have been the youngest – had already finished with the old man's niece and now started ripping the clothes off Lena. She was lying on the floor and trying to resist. No one could help the young pervert. Everyone was busy. They were emptying the draw-

ers, quickly throwing the contents into a big white sheet spread on the floor. The ironed underwear and clothes, crockery and everything turned up by chance was thrown there.

“Sir!” the young guy was annoyed, “What shall we do with this bitch?” He turned to his boss with shoulder loops of senior lieutenant of Georgian guard and spoke Russian so that she could hear. “Look at her belly! What shall I do? Shoot her?”

The boss was running the show downstairs. He carefully examined tied sacks that his people were throwing from upstairs and from time to time he would give an angry glance at the old man sitting on the chair in the corner of the room.

“Don’t bother, bring them all here and go and find someone else. I’ve got to teach you everything, puppy!”

The small “guard” pulled the women downstairs by their hair. He threw them in the corner where there were fresh seedlings of vine and kicked both of them with his boot. He spat vexedly, he was disappointed he hadn’t got a chance to have enough fun between the fire-fights. Then he suddenly stood up over the women and relieved himself laughing.

At the same time the other men took the old man into the yard and started asking him about the Abkhazians’ weapons. They demanded three million from him, then one million, half an hour later – three million again. They beat him up and shot in the air. The old man fell unconscious. They took him inside, pulled him in the same room on the ground floor where his niece and Lena were lying on the floor. The Georgians found an iron, undressed the old man and started torturing him. They had been bullying him until the morning came and were enjoying it. They still didn’t get the desired money. In the morning another group came, they were criminals. They also beat the old man up and demanded a million. When they saw the alive women, they were very surprised. They turned them faces up. The tortured eyes covered with dirt and blood were looking at them. Bruises and ripped dresses with a strong smell of urine cooled down the wishes of the drunk rapists. They dragged the owner of the house outside, put the handcuffs on him, hanged him on the thick tree branch and beat him up, this time without asking for anything. Then they stopped, slaughtered the chickens and shot morphine.

While they were torturing the old man outside, Lena managed to untie her hands and the other woman’s. They got upstairs together.

Through the window of her room Lena climbed down, practically jumped on the ground, into the white buds of hydrangea bushes. The old man's niece followed her. They decided to find their way to the military pier.

The town had changed a lot in the last twenty four hours. All day it had been fired from the Georgian helicopters. Everywhere houses' ruins were burning, along the prospects burning trees looked like bright torches. Near the park there was a truck with a canvas cover. It was full of corpses. They covered the carriage of the truck mixed with clothes, sandals, hats, socks and dresses.

Slowly, with a big effort making their way between the ruined houses, the women peeped into one of the yards and a second later ran out of there. They saw a big hole in the ground. Out of there women were crying and shouting, dug in the hole up to their shoulders. They were holding children in their raised arms. Around them there walked armed people, shouting something all the time. It was difficult to understand whether they were Abkhazians or Georgians... They could have been someone else who came to help Abkhazians and torture local Georgian people. It was a mutual slaughter.

The two women were making their way along the road in the end of which there was a small wine shop. Its Georgian owner used to always open it for all comers. Now all the windows in his house were smashed, broken bottles were lying around and among the scattered toys – trains, rubber rockets, multicoloured cars – his wife's body was lying in a big puddle of blood. The shop door was facing Rustaveli Embankment and the old Georgian man was nailed to the door.

They had another hundred steps to the pier. They could see no Russian boats. There was a small shiptet, spinning and pulling tow-ropes of the only barge near the pier. The first barge, full of refugees, had already sailed away. It was being slowly dragged by a tracker. On the pier there gathered about forty women, children and old people. The second barge could be their only rescue. The hospital ship "Yeni-sei", guided from Sebastopol to evacuate refugees, had just appeared and was approaching the harbour. However, a few Georgian motor-boats were already darting in and out between the ship and the coast. Two tanks were coming to the pier along the prospect and rollicking "guards" of the Georgian army were wandering towards the harbour...

Trying to save themselves, people were jumping into the barge hold. On the tangerines. Like on a soft mattress. Lena looked around – her fellow traveller had disappeared. She could already be on the barge or she could have changed her mind and returned home, to the old man.

Lena climbed aboard across two narrow boards and tried to climb down the hold but lost balance and fell on the other people. They picked up the pregnant woman carefully and carried her into a safe place. The refugees on the ship were looking at each other with anxiety and joy at the same time. Now, very soon they would be taken out of that hell...

Here, in the hold of the old rusty barge, it smelt of tangerines and nothing reminded the people of the war apart from the bullet shells in the hands of the children who were showing off their trophy in front of each other.

As soon as the tug-boat pulled the barge away from the pier, a military helicopter flew past and the firing of the town resumed again. The tanks turned towards the trading port, where the “Yenisei” was accosting, a military motor-boat was approaching the barges and a small cannon turned up on the shore. Georgians were turning it towards the sea to shoot at the barges. The first one, being at a longer distance from the pier, was a good target. The second barge was just leaving the harbour. Its tug-boat turned the horn on and its irregular loud tone sounded like a helpless wounded creature, it blacked out helicopters’ roar, tanks’ caterpillar tracks rumble and impudent shouts of raging “guards” staying on the pier of the Russian military base.

Being unable to do or understand anything, Lena was lying motionlessly among someone’s sacks and looking indifferently at the sky. A small colourless crab was clumsily crawling out of a crack in the rusty metal into the sun. Lena had gone through a lot of pain and had done everything she could. Now all her thoughts were of one thing. The baby. She was wishing the barge to go as far as possible.

The cannon shell sank the first barge straight away and tens of people went to the bottom of Sukhumi harbour. The tangerines were rhythmically rocking on the sea surface. Thousands of red, orange and green balls looked like multicoloured serpentine after a cheerful New Year night.

The second barge left the harbour and was waiting for its fate.

The motor boat approaching the pier took the position between the coast and the barge and slowed down.

“What are you doing, jerk?” the officer was shouting in his megaphone, waving his hand with a gun and shooting in the air. “Do you want war with Russia, scum bag? Come on, shoot me! Make sure you d-don’t miss!” the officer was pointing at the tricoloured flag raised on purpose, to differ from the Georgian boats with St. Andrew’s flags.

Lena recognized her husband’s voice but she couldn’t move to let him know she was there. The tug-boat was slowly pulling the barge leading it further and further away from the terror of the last 24 hours, from the coast of Sukhumi harbour with a Georgian cannon on the pier and from the boat with Michael.

Two sailors from the Russian motor-boat threw life-rings into the sea. After the first barge sank, every here and there were appearing people on the surface with tangerines. They managed to distinguish the life-rings in the orange mush, grab them and paddle clumsily to the shore. The wail of the second tug-boat horn and dreadful screams of the people in the hold of the barge were blacking out the officer’s shout. Mikhail continued swinging his gun and shooting but in his head he could hear the words of a children’s song he had heard on the radio in his childhood, “Orange sky, orange sky...”

It was just five cables to the shore. Suddenly there was a thunderous explosion. The captain of the motor boat launched his only torpedo into the pier without any calculations. The Georgian cannon and half of the tie-up stands broke into pieces. However, the boat was able to moor at the broken pier. Not waiting for the tie-down, both officers jumped on the shore and ran along Leon Avenue, to the houses their families had been in. Mikhail had to stop several times, he was sick of what he’d seen or maybe of the sea sickness which he had suffered of since childhood. Being a sea and medical officer, he always hid his sickness. Both during a storm and lipper. Lipper was actually worse – it lasted longer! Mikhail was out of breath when he ran up to the familiar house. There was no one in their room. There was broken furniture, scattered clothes, smashed dishes everywhere in the house and broken hydrangea bushes under the window. Coming downstairs, he was terrified to see the niece of the old man try to take his body off the tree.

“Where is Lena?” Michael asked quietly. He lifted the old man and took him off the tree branch. Half a minute passed but he didn’t dare look at the woman, he was scared to learn the truth from her eye. She covered the old man with a blanket, glanced at Dvorsky, looked dully somewhere and said, “On the barge with tangerines.” Michael understood everything. If she had been in the first barge, she was dead, if she was in the second one, she was on her way to Sochi.

In the morning Gagra was captured by Georgians. Their troops accomplished their goal – Abkhasia was cut off Russia. Now all Russian boats near Gagra had to go into the open sea and were going to defend the hospital ship with refugees from Sukhumi. They were waiting for orders. The captain of the torpedo boat Alexey understood his old vessel was useless. They had twice less sailors, just two officers – he and a medical officer – and one air torpedo. So, breaking all orders, he was keen to go to Sukhumi to save his family and trying to persuade himself, repeated the same thing to himself, “One hour – there, one hour – back. The radio isn’t working. No one will know anything.”

On the broken pier, where Mikhail returned, there were five people from the first barge. They were pulled out by the sailors. Dvorsky didn’t ask them anything. He was scared to learn the worst. What if someone had seen his Lena. He could only wait for a miracle to happen. They had to lead the armless boat through the Georgian military ships and make for the open sea. After that, on the way to Sochi, they could catch up with the second barge.

More than half an hour had passed but the captain was still not there. Dvorsky was walking nervously on the deck looking in the direction of Leon Avenue. A minute later he saw Alexey appear in the middle of the road, make a couple of steps, freeze, swing his arms and crash. He couldn’t hear shots but a second later armed people in the uniform of Georgian “guards” filled the road.

“Cast off!” unexpectedly for himself, Dvorsky raised his voice to a shout. He forgot many things they had to do and check before that order. He never remembered them.

The boat with white digits on the side “067”, obeying the only remaining officer, quickly pulled off from the shore.

The train “Saint Petersburg – Warsaw” arrived strictly on schedule. Around forty people with bags, sacks and suitcases came out of the compartment carriage. Four young girls had met on the train and were now standing aside. They were here to work outside Warsaw as housemaids or nannies and were waiting for someone to meet them.

Soon they saw an elderly woman in an old long grey coat. Under it they could see several multicoloured silk skirts. Her shiny brown boots were tight on her plump clumsy legs. She was holding a stick with a white notice. They could hardly see the name of the firm, written in Russian in a blue felt-tip pen.

“Is everyone here from this carriage?” were the first words she said. She had a harsh voice of chronic rheuma. However, she was talking Russian without any accent. “There must be two more girls. Have you lost them? Where can I find them now?” the old woman was obviously not happy. “The car won’t wait long. It won’t.”

She said something in Polish, fussed, then waved her arm and slowly walked towards the exit of the station with her brood. The girls kept quiet, looking at each other and shrugging their shoulders and thinking they had not seen any other girls.

Maria Nelidova had earned a good reputation on their way to Poland. They would have got hot boiled water and tea in tumblers and glass-holders. The tea was without soda and with fresh packets. They all had come here in the same compartment. The tickets had been paid for by the agent. Before the last stop Masha had a chat with the stewardess trying to find out any useful information. She learned that every week there were groups of girls going to work in Poland. The latest two months they had been travelling more often. The stewardess hadn’t seen anyone going back. Maybe, they travelled one by one? She hadn’t seen any groups. Near the station in a side lane there was a minibus. The girls took their seats cheerfully and the bus drove off. They didn’t ride long. In half an hour they got off, took their bags and went to a big wagon, or to be exact, cold storage truck. It looked similar to the one Ignat had got champagne in from Hungary. Maria felt something was wrong, she grabbed one of the girls and pulled her. There were about fifteen steps to a forest. But that was a strange forest. It could end in a hundred metres...

Right there six husky blokes jumped out of the truck. They threw the girls on the ground, tied their hands behind their backs, gagged them, then pulled into the truck, threw on the floor and piled mattresses on top of them. The iron crimped door shut down. There was no light or fresh air inside. The blokes sealed the door and got into two cars, and the truck slowly gathered speed. There was a long way ahead.

They went through Poland, a part of Germany and Holland. They stopped at customs. There they checked the seal on the door, signed some papers and the cold storage truck with "frozen meat" continued driving according to the delivery note. They finally stopped after twenty four hours, on a bank of a canal, five kilometres from Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

There was an open forest around them, no houses or roads. At the bank there was a moored barge with a closed top. There were armed guards in black jumpsuits with truncheons. There were two minibuses nearby.

"They wet the mattresses again, tarts! Can't have enough!" one of the guards shouted in Russian, he climbed inside the wagon through the opened door. He kicked the tied-up helpless women checking if they were alive, then he called another guard for help. Together they picked up one "tart" by her arms and legs and threw her on the ground. The body fell, the girl moved and groaned. Two other blokes came up and carried her inside the barge. Then another body was thrown from the wagon and another one...

The girls regained conscience in the hold. They were naked, tied up by one arm to the bed. Beside them, there were ten other girls who had hoped to earn easy money. Near each bed there was a bowl and a jug of canal water. For drinking, washing or weeing, whatever they wanted. As soon as they came to their senses, twenty blokes stumbled in the hold. They were not guards and dressed differently. They must have been local workers or emigrants. Many of them spoke some Russian. All hell broke loose. It was impossible and useless to fight them back. All the positions were thought through, the tied-up arm was changed every three hours, the bowls were taken out and the water was poured into the jugs. Sometimes the women were given dirty sheets to cover themselves with at night. In the morning everything would start again. There were four or five "goes" a day. It gave the owners of the "company" a profit of five thousand dollars a day. Or a hundred and fifty thousand a month – just from one barge which didn't even move. How many

were there around – Arabs, Blacks, Asians? There were enough women for everybody.

Masha had understood everything in Poland when she saw the wagon. She had to find out where they were. What would happen to them later? It was clear they were alive witnesses of abduction and slavery in the middle of civilized Europe. They would get rid of them. But how? Masha couldn't think of any happy ending. She had to wait. Suffer and wait. If someone tried to struggle and prevent to satisfy natural needs, they would severely beat them up. The first time in front of everyone, next time they would carry them outside. The girls would hear the screams of the victim but in the end they would disappear. A new girl would be brought to the vacant space. After the first beating some girls were eager to report of any escape attempts to the guards.

Maria had always had a habit of wearing a thin piece of cloth around her neck, like a decoration. They hadn't ripped it off. They hadn't even noticed it. Inside that cloth there was a tiny pocket with a needle and cotton, and the cotton was marked by knots twenty centimetres a piece.

A whole month of suffering was coming to its end. She already knew what they did with the girls after that. After a month no one survived, they fell ill. To avoid infections, the girls were taken away and must have been drowned in the canal. Maria learned to pull the cleanest bloke from each party. It lessened the chance to fall ill. So long everything went smoothly if this word was suitable for her situation.

Once she asked yet another man to carry her over to another bed, next to the porthole. It took him a long time to untie her, then tie her up again, but now Masha was next to the light and could see what was happening inside. At night she measured the diameter of the porthole. Excellent! She would definitely get through it. She needed to know what was on the other side of the window. Where would she go and what would she wear?

She had to do everything immediately. She didn't know what the local guards would do when they found out she had been carried to another bed. Masha started to rip the rope on the left hand with the needle. Carefully, thread after thread. Two hours later she just had to pull her hand and the rope fell apart. She used the needle again to rip up the mattress and sew a vest and knickers. The cotton finished on the last stitch.

It was dark inside the barge. The guard came out of the hold to the toilet. Masha slowly, without saying a word to anyone, stretched

her arm to the porthole, turned the catch and the window opened. She stood on her tiptoes, then stepped on the edge of the cable tomb and climbed out of the window waist-high. Now she had to slip down clinging on the rough unpainted barge board.

May Day was beginning. The day of solidarity of all people on the planet. Crickets were rattling and frogs were croaking. There were lots of mosquitoes. She had not noticed them inside the barge. Now that she was free, they were in her way, they were buzzing, stinging and following her.

Maria Nelidova was trying to find a police station, walking through a park, along the paths of fine gravel. Here and there she would see dull street lamps. Her bare feet were pricked by sharp gravels. There was no blood but her feet were covered with scratches. All her body was aching. In the park she would meet men and women wandering in some crazy clothes or capes made out of tropical bird feathers. They were carrying paper orange windmills. Their painted faces were indifferent. They were either drunk or junked up. Some of them were easing themselves. Masha, barefoot, uncombed, in her striped knickers and vest, looking like a concentration camp prisoner, didn't stand out among the other people on May Day. Tall Dutch, like clowns on stilts, looked down upon her. No one cared about anyone.

By the morning, behind the edge of the park, Masha could see stone houses with high roofs and rare cars. Just near the park there was a one-storeyed building. Its windows were shining with yellow light, around it there were a lot of cars with long flashing lights across the vehicle body and with the word "Politie" on the doors. Masha stopped. She felt like storming into the building, falling on the floor and screaming. She would shout as loudly as she could. The last trees of the park were still separating her from the police station. She was about to leave her hiding-place when a familiar scuffed minibus pulled up near the entrance. Three guards in black got out of it. Confidently they went into the police station. Masha strained herself and backed up, then she turned around and bolted.

The day before they celebrated Queen's birthday in the Netherlands, today it was May Day. What would be tomorrow? Maria could only think of running up to people and falling on the floor... In a shop. Anywhere...

When the torpedo boat under the command of Dvorsky was heading into the open sea, it was attacked by the Georgian military ships. The boat was damaged badly, five people were killed after the first hit, the pilot-house caught on fire and a thick brown smoke poured from the engine-room. Georgians must have thought the Russian boat was destroyed and didn't chase it. The boat disappeared behind the cape using the smoke. The team and the passengers saved from the first barge left the boat when it was practically drowned. People tried to reach the shore on a raft, with life rings or just by swimming. At the very border of Russia two sailors tripped on mine. The explosion got Mikhail – it injured his left arm, he had a broken bone and tendons. Only a week later the survivors found themselves in Sochi. Dvorsky and two sailors were put in a hospital. There, in spite of the injury, he was questioned by the investigating officer why their boat had been crash-dived near Sukhumi when all the other boats were located near Gagra.

The barge Lena got into was safely pulled to the ship hospital "Yeni-sei". The Georgians didn't dare turn up near the big ship. Soon Lena gave birth in Leningrad. It happened a month and a half before the due date. The baby girl was long kept in an incubator of the clinic named after doctor Otto but she died.

There was nothing dangerous in Mikhail's injury. His wound healed in a month. But his eyesight was falling. His arm was in good condition but the bones were healing slowly, he couldn't feel his fingers, especially the index finger. However, Dvorsky could walk, ring and write. As soon as he got a chance, he rang his mother in Leningrad. Mikhail felt sorry for her and didn't tell her anything about his injury, but she told him that Lena was in her home "In Aprashka's", she had given birth but the baby had died.

"What can I do now?" Dvorsky was thinking. "Shall I write letters and console her or shall I ring and console her?" Not long ago, a month before, Dvorsky had not asked himself questions like that, he just had run headlong in the occupied by Georgians town searching his Lenka. He knew very well that captain Alexei was breaking an order going from Gagra to Sukhumi to save his family. But his Lena was there so he agreed with his boss immediately.

Dvorsky rang his wife at home. No one answered. He kept ringing until it occurred to him, that was it! She'd left him... She was free now. Her husband was nowhere to be seen, he left her in that slaughter. She lost the baby... He kept thinking of that trying to convince himself in that difficult decision. "It's always better when life is definite, however hard it is!"

Mikhail could not even imagine that Lena had just switched the phone off and didn't want to hear from anyone. No one at all! Not any certain person, but not a single person at all! It had been two months since her baby girl died – she was depressed and she didn't leave the house. She was eating opening a tin of food now and again. Lena was looking for her husband. But in the Academy no one knew anything about captain Dvorsky. In Sukhumi and Gagra a lot of people went missing. Only two months later Lena was informed about her husband's injury.

They met in February 1993. Mikhail came to her studio flat she had got from her mother. As always, it was dark there, because the flat was on the ground floor of an old wing of St.Petersburg house with a "well" type courtyard between Sadovaya Street and Fontanka Embankment. When Lena opened the door, she didn't recognize her Mishka, he had changed so much in the last few horrible months – in steaming glasses, a strange black coat dusted with snow and a knitted ski hat, which was white from the snow. He was holding chrysanthemums... They hurt her memories. They looked like those white flowers outside the window, where the death darted past her. And it touched her baby – her close helpless small person. Now all that would be in her mind and soul for ever. Without saying a word, she stepped forward, fell on Mikhail's chest and burst into sobs. Dvorsky caught his wife, the bunch fell out of his left hand injured from the mine, and the round flowers were lying under their feet. They stood on the landing in front of the open door, silently and hugging each other. Lena's warm tears were dropping on her husband's coat dusted with snow and left black curved traces. It looked like the tears had become so horrible after having waited so long inside. She had not cried in Abkhazia, being on the brink of death, or when she buried her child. That was not any true grit or callousness. She was like a baited animal hiding in an imaginary corner and looking around in terror. All she had left was constant hatred and come and go fearsome anxiety and full apathy to everything. Those

unexplainable changes caused a pain. But they also kept her tears inside. Now the only close person was standing in front of her, her tears were not indifferent to him, he would understand everything without any words. They were together again.

Five months flew past – the time of lack of money. It seemed there was no money anywhere. The country didn't have enough cash. It was brought by helicopters to the places where revolts started. There were no jobs either. No one in town would recruit a doctor with the Medical academy diploma, unless outside Leningrad, let alone a scientist. Scientists were not a good bet, they were very unpractical. There was much business around. People would sell, buy and sell again... But they didn't know how to sell their skills and knowledge. Nor buy... Dvorsky, a young officer, scientist and doctor, lost everything he had aimed for and dreamed of since childhood – a military rank, profession and favourite job...

At first they would go to their child's grave in Smolensk cemetery every week. There Mikhail would drink half a glass of pure surgical spirit brought from somewhere. Silently and without any food. Two months later the spirit finished and he had no money to buy more. He didn't know what to do and where to take money from. He didn't have any friends left in the academy, everyone he knew had gone to different places, the laboratory had been shut down. The Soviet habit to have a fridge full of food for a special occasion had gradually gone as well. The family relationships were surrounded by unsolvable everyday problems, evenings would end with arguments, shouts and insults.

It was the first anniversary of their daughter's death that day. Early in the morning they went to her grave, tidied the yellow grass and dry twigs fallen off the pine-tree, ploughed the sand with a small rake, covered the wreath with polyethylene for the winter. Mikhail was sober and thoughtful. They didn't say a word to each other. They just sat on a bench, then got up at the same time and left. Lena went to the factory and Dvorsky...

He decided to surprise his wife that evening. He came home and got ready for her coming back. He brewed fresh tea, not from teabags, but in a teapot, according to the tea-drinking tradition. He poured some into a tumbler. Put some dried biscuits in a bowl, some chocolates – walnut in chocolate, the only thing Lena had left from Abkhazia – into another bowl.

In the end of 1992 laying off started everywhere. That overwhelming process seemed to be unstoppable and it got into all companies – government, private, co-operative and others. Economic Crime Department was not an exception. They had their own “reductions”. They were freeing suspects from jails. They had possibly got an order, They decided not to sort out Maximov’s money and they freed him. An amnesty in relation with the country’s premature death came in time. The property of “Pharma” had been pulled apart, the people had gone leaving their work record books for the half-year while Academician was doing time in “Kresty” and then in a remand prison in Lebedev Street and in another three months the company stopped functioning. “Guilty? Not guilty?” Leonid Alexandrovich would tell later. “It’s just philosophy. They call it considering a question basically. Who would let them potter about in details! It’s important to open or close the subject. It’s a peculiar dyadic algorithm of Euclid for the fast decision making in any situation.” After that Maximov would wave his arm at his too clever thoughts and cut to the chase of everything he got from that story, “It’s better to get up and go somewhere far away. And God forbid to plan another initiative. All people are waiting patiently. The resolution has been issued for everyone. About joint stock companies, and other companies. Never rush! It’s not good. I’ve only done it once! Who rushes is to blame. Here’s the result.”

They were sacking young employees in the Military medical academy because of funding lack. While Dvorsky was in hospital in Sochi, Victor Zavialov was demobilized and so was Viacheslav Dobroserdov. At first the friends stuck together but eventually each tried to save his own soul. Nothing kept Dobroserdov in Petersburg and he returned to his motherland, to his parents in Lipetsk. He stayed there for a few months, then met his school friends who had also been Komsomol activists, and joined the Department of Health of the town administration. But no one would be able to get a job for nothing. Viacheslav had to take responsibility and sign phony contracts. He would sign everything they shoved. He was paid enough for that but he was also killing himself every day. He knew he could be arrested any time for “exceeding official authority” or for “bribery”. If they wanted. At the moment they didn’t.

Victor lived with his wife and son in the area of “Shuvalovo – Ozerki” in Ho Chi Minh Street in a two-bedroom flat of a new block of series 137. Victor’s parents had bought the flat for them. His wife hadn’t been working since their son had been born. Now their son was in Year 5. After they fired Zavialov from the laboratory, his family were selling the furniture and books to survive. They didn’t have enough money. They hadn’t paid the rent for several months. They didn’t want to go anywhere where doctors were needed – they had a flat in Leningrad.

After a year and a half the former military doctor got a job in a restaurant singing and playing guitar. He had always done it and been a people person! When a band in a restaurant took a break, he would come out on a stage on his own, wearing jeans and a red shirt with the two top buttons undone and a chain with a cross on his neck, and sing in a nice husky voice, “Hey, the young lad has gone on a bender, young, young lad, in a red shirt, he is so cute...”

The low velvet voice of Zavialov was full of confidence. It was intriguing and calling with its mystery. You couldn’t talk or sing hastily or loudly in a low voice. Victor knew that so the lyrics always sounded smoothly and slowly. Women would always applaud him. He was fed for doing that. Sometimes he would bring food home but they still didn’t have enough money.

Zavialov’s wife tried to go back to work but understood that she had got out of the habit. She didn’t want to get up early, go on a bus, then forty minutes on the tube, come to work on time, do nothing there and then go back home the same way. The wages were ridiculously low. The child wouldn’t be looked after. In his age he could get into a gang or start taking drugs.

“It’s better to die of hunger indoors!” she would say to Victor and try to push him into doing something.

He didn’t have to wait long. Zavialov, always open, sincere and amenable to persuasion, got into business. He just touched that side of life. To be exact, it was not even business, he had to invest in something he didn’t know and wait for a profit he didn’t know who from. It was the dullest, most terrible thing to do for a former Soviet officer at the very start of free market economy.

Of course, the more he had invested, the more he would get. Victor understood that. So he took a couple of “rattle-heads”, like him, into the project. They all pawned their flats, obtained a credit from a bank...

and lost everything. One of Victor's friends did try to find something about the person who collected the money to buy a large batch of cigarettes and have it delivered from France to Petersburg by sea. "Come on, he is my friend," Victor was saying with an insult in his voice instead of asking for a copy of the passport from that friend-businessman. He persuaded him. They gave him everything they had, the three of them. The next thing to happen was no ship, no childhood friend and no money of course. The bank took their flats and sold them. So the three friends were left without homes and in debt.

This could make them jump out of the window. But the officers were tough. However Zavialov's wife was diagnosed with cancer and his son was arrested for drug-dealing. So they lived apart. The wife stayed with her parents in a communal flat. The son gave up school. Where did he live? Nobody knew. Victor Zavialov, "in a red shirt, so cute" was staying with friends. Luckily, he had a lot of them.

Nevertheless, people who had nothing to lose any more, were often in great demand. His former colleagues, quick and smart, found and "implanted" him quickly into a new founded company as a liner between the money and those who the money was for. It was an independent government company which collected insurance fees for compulsory health insurance of the population and then controlled the extent and quality of the medical service. Zavialov played a role of cannon fodder, being a managing director of all that.

There was a lot of money! He had to be able to save it and increase it for the benefit of the ill population. Victor Zavialov? To save? But the official meaning was just half the battle. Here was the beginning of a chaos. One person wanted what the other one got. What was the result? A shot or a clubbing blow on the head!

16

That day, on the daughter's anniversary, Lena came into the flat late at night and suddenly glanced strictly at her husband, then at the tumbler with tea on the table, then she confidently went past the kitchen into the room, got changed and returned to the kitchen. She wore an old dressing gown, worn-out slippers on bare feet, and under the dressing gown there was a striped vest.

An unpleasant and long simmering dispute started. She was asking questions she had thought of before. The questions were hurting Michael.

Why were they living like that? Why didn't he return to get her in August last year? Why did he keep quiet so long? For half a year in the hospital he didn't contact her. Did he think there was no one to contact? Did he think she had drowned in Sukhumi bay?

There were only questions. No answers. Lena didn't really expect to hear answers. She had foreseen the consequences of that attack. But she couldn't bear it any longer and took out everything she had had inside for the last year on Mikhail. She started with the simplest and most evident thing. On the table there was a tumbler with dark liquid in it. "Cognac!" Lena reacted instantly.

"Do you have to drink at home? Do you? I am asking you... Are you doing it on purpose? I know you hate me! You want to hurt me," Lena talked fast and dully as if she was talking to a brick wall. "You are always drunk. Every single day! Where do you get the money from?" Lena patted her dressing gown pockets checking if her poor savings were still there. "There is nothing in the fridge, we can't pay the rent or buy flowers for the grave. And you are still drinking... Now it's cognac..." She suddenly paused, turned her head to Michael and finished calmly, "You are a doctor, aren't you? Aren't doctors in demand now? No one is ill? Maybe you should look for a job?"

"No one needs doctors. There is a place in Tikhvin. But there's no money there," Dvorsky was making excuses.

Lena couldn't understand how he could do nothing for five months and just experience that "doing nothing". She was getting wages at a knitting factory working as a human resources representative. Even if the wages were extremely low, and she didn't receive them monthly, even if they paid them in striped vests... At least she could feel they owed her. If they didn't work anywhere, they would have to sell everything: an iron, kettle, dishes, wool socks... She was trying to remember what else she had seen in a long line of old women near the tube station "Peace Square", but she couldn't. Some tools... Ah! A file... Lena turned away from her husband and said quietly, "What if we didn't have this flat?" She started sobbing but there were no tears. "What would you do then? Where would you go?" Not waiting for the answer, she suddenly became calm and reasonable. She sounded like they

had just started talking and were discussing everyday problems. "What if we move to Sosnovaya Poliana and let this flat in?"

"We could..."

Mikhail was just adding to the problem with his answers out of place and continued mumbling, "I don't know", "We could". To blaster was out of poverty, they had to have money and be able to take risks. Vicious circle! Dvorsky had neither of that.

"Lena, stop bugging me! Do what you like. I agree to anything. But remember, my mum..."

"Your mum again! I'll change the lock. This is what I know!"

"Why are you saying that?"

"Because you won't be able to get into the flat, Misha. Don't you get it? Haven't you got any brains left? Just imagine: you come home from a bar, get the key out... Can you imagine that? Can you?" Lena shouted, grabbed the tumbler with the remaining tea in it and flung it on the floor. The tea splashed on the light green wallpaper and the glass smashed into pieces. "Here you go!" Lena calmed down when she saw her husband nod his head. "So you try to unlock the door with the key but you can't because I have changed the lock. So you have to crawl to your mummy and stay with her. This is what she dreams about, isn't it?"

"Lena! Why are you saying this? You won't do this, will you?"

"Why not?" Lena made a helpless gesture and pretended she was surprised.

"B-because I am your h-husband!" Mikhail said quietly and modestly.

"What does it have to do with the door?" Lena continued developing the idea of the lock changing.

Mikhail didn't know how to react to the silly concept of his wife. He went round in a circle and decided to launch the past and the future in the same time.

"Hang on... Lena. Listen. It won't b-be like this all the time. I will get all my friends together, Vitka Zavialov, Dobroserdov, the other guys from the laboratory and by Jesus, I'll think of something..."

"Exactly! Think of something, do something... the best thing to do is to shut up! Whatever you say is rubbish and lies!"

"You... are not like that..."

"People change for a good reason."

"You know very well it all depends on how you look at everything around you."

Dvorsky, usually sensitive to the moods of other people, suddenly wasn't able to hear his wife. His instinct let him down! But he suddenly started talking about unrelated things and lyrical recollections.

"Our happiness depends on us. Only the two of us! And not some circumstances. D-do you remember T-tallinn? We understood it there."

"What did we understand? You didn't even understand how to use the toilet! You can't even batter in a nail without hitting a finger. What are you now? What's left of you? Nothing's left of you, my dear husband," Lena was taking the mick. "Nothing at all! You didn't even remember about the baby..."

Lena suddenly stopped, gave a big sigh and held out her hands as if she was holding a baby. She was kissing and hugging it. Mikhail could hear her whispering or singing...

"When I was sitting at our baby's grave I couldn't leave. Was waiting for her to take me with her. But she wouldn't..."

A second later her face twisted with pain, she yelled, shook her arms over Mikhail's head.

"Don't look at me!" she hit him on his eyes and pushed him.

His glasses fell on the floor and broke. Mikhail bent down and kneeled searching for the chips. The telephone rang. Lena turned, kicked her husband and tried to squeeze between him and the wall of the narrow hallway. Mikhail found himself on the floor again but he got up. For a second their faces happened to be near each other. Her cold grey eyes full of hatred were looking at Dvorsky and her scalding smile ended up the soundless monologue. Lena answered the phone and carried on a conversation about where to go – Pavlovsk or Pushkin.

They had known each other for nearly a quarter of a century, from Year 1. However, when they couldn't understand or explain, there was a turn of a narrow mindedness, dependence on a trifle and shallow emotions. They had been saved somewhere deep in the heart, then they would boil in the devils' cauldron and it would be impossible to restore anything. Especially when there was no money or perspectives.

Mikhail was standing in the hallway without saying anything. Without realizing what he was doing, he took his black coat off the hanger, opened the door and shut the door behind himself.

Chapter 11

1

Three months passed since Mikhail left Lena for ever. They met twice, but accidentally. In December they got divorced. Dvorsky would spend time with his friends in a bar opposite Tavrichesky Gardens. That night they had been drinking to the end of the year for nearly three hours. The retired naval officers were drinking beer, eating dried salty fish and talking about money which must have existed somewhere but in a different dimension. One of them told about terrible financial problems of Zavialov, another – about the rich Dobroserdov, the third told them the freshest news. Their former Komsomol leader had lost all his money – rats ate all his dollars dug in the garage. They laughed themselves into stitches. Mikhail was quiet and drank, drank, drank... and tried to think about something.

In the corner of a fuggy room there sat a young brunet with a glass of beer “Martovskoye”. He was writing something in his notebook and often clicking the top of his pen. The ink holder of the metal “Parker” would come and go, as if in doubt whether it was needed at the moment. Mikhail saw the man and felt something familiar in his figure and the manner of fiddling with a pen.

It was Malkin. Leonid was the first to notice and recognize his partner from the business trip to Tel Aviv, he got up and came up to the table of the retired officers. He stopped opposite Dvorsky whose face broke out into an inane smile. Malkin didn’t disturb the company of the former colleagues, he just put his business card into the lapel pocket of Mikhail’s jacket. Then he turned around and slowly headed back to his glass of beer.

A month passed, then another one. All that time Mikhail had been living at his mum's in Sosnovaya Poliana. Anna Yakovlevna was really worried about him, she tried to calm him down and gently pushed him towards a difficult but necessary search of his place in a new life.

One fine day without any obvious reasons Mikhail suddenly stopped drinking, became active and reasonable. His room was again filled with new magazines in biology and pharmaceuticals and old notebooks with test protocols. He returned to his ideas and started thinking of new experiments. However, this didn't turn into anything functional and profitable. Then Mikhail remembered about Malkin, found his business card and rang him.

The old acquaintances' meeting was short. Businesslike and without any emotions, Leonid offered Dvorsky two matters. Firstly, to restore connections with foreign scientists, collect the original members of "Pharma" and start searching for new production capacities. As everything that used to be in Academician's company, had disappeared like cigarette smoke.

At the same time Mikhail and Malkin were to help businessmen who were having a break-down in relationships because of accumulated problems. They would get mature enough to understand the conflict and call for academician Maximov's help. Many people remembered about him, knew his story, sympathized with him and in spite of him living far away, outside Amsterdam, he was an impeccable judge and mediator.

Malkin called Mikhail to work together not because he felt sorry for him. He needed a partner. His former boss was giving him more and more mission tasks. He needed Dvorsky's particularity and prudence. The work was unpaid – they would get the money in the very end. Otherwise no one would believe in their recommendations. Malkin and Dvorsky were not just advisers, they were partners who took risks spending time and co-ordinating the completely different project members.

All those people were business people. They could create newspapers, melt metals, produce oil, make money out of money, but they couldn't pull themselves out of conflicts! Even if they were instructed how to do it, they couldn't!

The owners of the problem-solving business admired Malkin and Dvorsky's work. But only as long as their skills were directed against

their mutual opponent. As soon as the usual systematized process of making profit was resumed, those needed people got rejected. They would become dangerous because they could simply get a grip of company management if they wished.

Eventually Mikhail came to terms with a new role of a mediator, facilitator and moderator at the same time. This occupation didn't please him that much. He took time remembering all the words. He'd rather chat to his colleagues in bio-chemistry instead of struggling with unlucky businessmen. With a great joy, Dvorsky would swap his everyday stresses from communicating to self-centered people for enjoying at least one intelligent experiment.

But there was nothing else...

A year later he could already understand what crisis management was. He knew how to organize a cooperation between its participants in total uncertainty. He realized his ability to feel the slightest inclinations in the relationships and he learned to correct them, which was the most difficult thing. Now he just needed to be able to take responsibility for the decisions taken, which meant to become a leader. That was where Mikhail was no good. Apart from accuracy and preciseness, he needed intuition and the skill of waiting. To wait until a client understood everything and took an important decision independently. To wait for the waves to rush back, a problem to get pure, without any layers. That was what Malkin was good at.

Malkin had a golden rule – don't move an inch without investigating! To get information first, then to act! So he had his people everywhere, acquaintances, friends of acquaintances, agents planted in any structures. He had a rare opportunity of foreign data base access which used to be blocked by embargo. His requested information would get to Petersburg through the Israeli company "Marketing-business-intelligence".

Not many people at that time knew of the existence of that step-over the instructions, invented by the Western countries to control the USSR export, only Malkin and Spivak who introduced Leonid to the company's owner. The clients would come only on a tip-off, mostly security officials, criminals and "rich idiots" – all those who found themselves in the right place at the right time, scooped a large sum of money and didn't know what to do with it. They would turn up unexpectedly, without a phone call.

Today in the doorway of an information office with an unusually gentle name “Bluebell” a young guy in a sheepskin coat, without a hat, his hair short and on crutches under his arms turned up. He slowly walked along the narrow corridor and found himself in an office where Leonid usually sat. The visitor, either a bandit or a businessman, said the right password and named himself Ignat.

2

In May it quickly got light in Amsterdam. Early in the morning there were hardly any people outside the town. A rare car would drive through the flashing traffic lights, an empty tram would quietly ride or a cyclist with a bag on the back of his bike would ride along the cycle lane. Small shop owners were lifting the heavy metal shutters and opening beautiful window-sills with food, clothes, equipment on the lit shelves.

After her bad luck with the local police Maria Neludova couldn't recover herself for a long time. She locked herself in a mobile toilet, turned the light off and shivering of cold or fear felt her helplessness for the first time. What could she do now? Where would she go? She knew that if she came to a shop or someone's house she would be taking a big risk. She didn't know the language, she had no documents and no clothes. People wouldn't understand her or think she was begging. If she went to a police station they would keep her there and probably put her in a cell. They would sort her through later or they might chuck her out so they didn't have to deal with an illegal immigrant. What if they were all connected, like the police station near the park?

The worst thing was she was wasting precious time. The scumbags and the barge could disappear any time. The people she had seen near the police station were certainly raising the alarm and looking for her.

Maria understood that night, going through the park, that she was not in Poland or even Germany, she was in Holland. She didn't even know how to speak English... In this country they sounded like swans – it was impossible to understand them. She had done the right thing not going into someone's house. She had been told that people in Holland didn't stand any variations from the norm. Everything standing

out was contraindicative. Everywhere and always. In behaviour, work and even windows of all houses.

But the main thing was she had to quench her desire to punish her offenders. It couldn't be done so fast. Especially in a strange country. She couldn't relax! Nothing had ended yet. Any moment she could be found and caught. What could she do? Wait out! Get lost somewhere... Get some clothes and only after that set off to search for justice! She needed to get dressed... and have a wash! A wash? Exactly! Do they have a bath-house anywhere? She picked up an empty orange bottle and broke into a run. She was running fast and waving an empty fanta bottle trying to look like those men and women she had seen in the park. In two or three sections of blocks she saw a familiar word on a house wall "Sauna". She could recognize it in any language.

It was early. However, the loud-voiced Dutch were different from all other people, Maria remembered. They probably went to saunas any time of the day.

Climbing over a high hedge of prickly bushes of barberries, she found herself on an open-air ground with water barrels hanging on a long crossbar. They would turn over as soon as you pull the string. There were bushes of cade everywhere. Paths covered with flat stone were running from the hedge into the hall where she could see white clouds of steams were moving into the fresh morning air. She had to get warm and look around, see what was where. She had to understand where the sauna opened to know when to belt off. The steam-rooms were separated with a glass door. She couldn't see anything inside, just steam. Maria took off her striped clothes at last, entered one of the rooms and found herself in a Turkish bath.

Five naked men and women were silently sitting on the warm marble seats. On the ceiling there were small blue lights looking like the starry sky. At the entrance on the wooden hooks there hung white sheets and coloured robes. Maria felt like taking one of them, a warm terry robe... To put something on for the first time in a month, apart from those knickers and vest that she made herself. No, she shouldn't. It wasn't time yet. She wrapped someone's sheet around her body and went to another room with a fireplace in the middle of it. Around it there were deck-chairs with wooly soft blankets on them. Along the wall she saw glass shelves with fruits, juices and salads. You could eat as much as you wanted. Maria stuffed herself and lay to sleep.

The wood was nicely crackling in the fireplace and pleasant warmth was filling the room. She fell asleep straight away.

In a couple of hours, when her inflamed brain cooled down and she could reason calmly, Maria woke up and quickly decided what to do. To steal someone's clothes and find... legal rivals of that lousy barge. She had to talk to someone in the Red Light District. They would find this business profitable. They could do it for their image of the fair business...

Taking someone's clothes was not that easy. Metal lockers where the visitors of the sauna kept their belongings, were closed with a magnet key. The key looked like a small watch on everyone's wrist. She would need to take the key off someone's wrist and scan it at the exit. There they would identify whether you had used any facilities, for instance, the restaurant or the massage room. If you had, you would have to pay. Not knowing all the tricks against thieves, she could be caught easily without even starting the war for justice. If she broke a locker she would have to leave the same way she came in, through the hedge... Maria didn't want that. She must have feminized in the warm and clean place. It was not worth it to attract attention.

She walked through the corridors, looked inside the massage room and the hairdresser's, then she went into a room with no sign on the door. She was in a big room with shelves along the walls and one bulb in the ceiling. It was a Klondike! There were shampoos, gels, eau de toilette, make-up, terry robes of any colour... In the corners, on plain metal hooks there hung someone's clothes, probably belonging to the people who worked there. Behind the baskets with sheets and robes she saw another door. Masha carefully opened it and saw the lobby of the sauna where the visitors paid entrance fees and scanned their magnet tickets, where there were boutiques with underwear and sportswear. Here she could mix with the drilling Dutch who decided to wash off the orange paints covering their bodies from the night before.

Maria Nelidova put on some strangers' clothes, took bottles of shampoo and shower gel and headed for the exit. She left the sauna and set off to find the Red Light District. She didn't have any doubts she would be able to tell everything and persuade people to go to a police station with her, even though she knew neither the local language, nor English.

Masha found the biggest public house in Amsterdam. It was not difficult. All foreign tourists were going there. So she found herself in De Wallen Street. There, along the ground floor, several hundred red win-

dows were shining. But there was no one in the windows. In the back of the district, on massive wooden doors under an arch there hung a piece of paper with one word in English "Administration". Maria went in. The stairs were so steep she had to lean on the step in front when walking up them. There was only one door upstairs and it was wide open. She saw three men in the fuggy room. Two of them were snoring on the sofas in their clothes and one man in glasses and with long black hair was sitting at the table and making notes in a magazine. On a plate next to him there was sweet suet cut into pieces and a loaf of fresh brown bread.

A lot of women came to that "office" every day so the men were used to all sorts of divergence from a norm. But what the bloke saw this time made him burst into laughing, which interrupted the sweet dreams of the other two men. They stirred once or twice, shouted something incomprehensible and fell asleep again.

In the doorway there was a pretty young woman in very wide black trousers turned up to her knees and with a wide men's belt. She was also wearing a green t-shirt with some crooked orange letters on it and a men's broad-shouldered pink jacket without buttons. On her feet she had shoes with thick high heels. A big brown cocked cap was sitting on a pretty head with long fair hair. She would have looked like a clown if she didn't have a pretty face, bright blue eyes and shiny wavy hair. The woman smelt of expensive eau de toilette. She confidently entered the room, made an arm gesture for him not to stand up – he wasn't going to, anyway – looked around, saw a ragged leather armchair in the corner and sat on it.

"Hello," Maria said proudly and seriously and added, "Bonjour."

The black-haired man turned to the plump man lying on the sofa and pushed him, "Hey, Nickolay, maishka!"

Maria didn't expect to hear her name, she was surprised and pointing at herself, she chattered, "Yes! I am Mashka! I am Masha!.."

The man in glasses was from Yugoslavia and by one word he figured out the girl was from the former USSR so he decided to wake his partner who had come from the Ukraine to Holland two months before. He said "Wake up" in Serbian but Maria thought it was her name.

Nickola stretched, opened his eyes and burst into laughing when he saw the girl sitting opposite him.

"It's a clown from the Ukraine," the man sitting at the table explained.

When he calmed down, the Ukrainian asked, "Who are you?"

His voice was so hoarse that at first Maria didn't hear him.

"I am Masha. I am from Petersburg," she chattered again pointing at the man in glasses and being surprised, "He knows who I am."

"OK, you are from Petersburg, so what? Who are you from?"

"No one. I am on my own. Don't think I am looking for a job..."

"Well, be quick!"

"Will you listen to me? Promise you will."

"Damn! Who are you talking to? Are you mad, woman?"

"Can't you see?" the third man said, he must have been from the Ukraine, too. He woke up and now tried to understand what this friend had in common with that... "She's stoned or buzzed."

Nickola suddenly remembered the rules of the market economy, figured out the woman was not from the Ukraine and added, "What will I get for that?"

"First listen, then we'll decide. All you need to do is to listen."

"You are stubborn! OK, come on! But you'll have to work for me for a week. How about that?"

"Easy! Why a week? I could do longer than a week."

Stroking her blonde hair with her hands, Maria thought how monotonous that world was but she tried to let him see she was no stranger to what Nickola was asking from her.

Two days later the illegal rivals of the "Red lights" were found. The women were sent to a hospital, the barge was towed off and its owners, both nominal and real, were arrested. The guards opened fire on police out of Chinese pump-action shotguns and they were shot. Two minibus drivers and three policemen tied to the bandits were soon found and thrown into prison. Two girls who had been on the train with Maria agreed to become witnesses. The third girl had been pulled somewhere by the guards before.

As Nelidova was the first to inform of the crime, she was in the Witness Protection Programme. She got a residence permit and was offered to be hidden. Maria refused, she was healthy and could hide herself. What was the best place not to be found? Here, at Nickola's... in the "red light". Very nice! As if nothing had changed. Just more comfortable and she was given money.

The trials lasted longer than a year. The two witnesses the government helped to hide were not lucky. One disappeared. The law-en-

forcement authorities tried to find her in vain. Bandits found the other girl and tried to kill her. She survived but her thighs and arms would remember the blows with a rusty metal pipe.

All that time Maria was working by the ancient profession she had acquired in civilized Europe. She paid the rent of her window for three months ahead, hired a flat, married a young local artist who was selling his Amsterdam sketches near the museum of Van Gogh. Then everything span as fast as a kaleidoscope: she got a citizenship, had a baby boy, got divorced, got all benefits as a single mother and got a council flat outside Amsterdam, according to the Decree of Queen Beatrix.

3

“She’s belted off again,” Dvorsky thought about his and Malkin’s new secretary Katya Zakharova, when he left his room. “She’s either sitting in the cafe opposite or gone to the main building. If so, who is she visiting all the time?”

Malkin had hired her before the trip to Tel Aviv. After what happened to the boss, all the people left but she stayed.

“Well,” Mikhail though staring at the client stumping towards him. He had nothing else to do as to start consultation instead of the company boss. He silently pointed at the chair near the window away from Leonid’s big desk. It was filled with papers, as usual. Mikhail sat in the armchair opposite the guest. The guy shuffled and sat down. One of his legs was in plaster. He didn’t take his sheepskin coat off, still holding the crutches and being scared of everything in the world, he told Mikhail about his problems.

“It’s a usual thing – he is a “metallist”, Mikhail though about the visitor. “That’s probably why he’s got a broken leg. He is transporting metal abroad. Something went wrong. So now he is waiting for the leg bones to heal and he’ll be back to his occupation again.” The guy looked around and slowly passed Mikhail a piece of paper with a word “Contract” in English.

“Make sure no one knows, OK?” the limping guy murmured with a threat and appeal at the same time.

“So, if the deal fails, I will be the one to b-blame? I know everything now.”

The limp hesitated, screwed his face into a smile and said nothing. Mikhail started with the introductory basics. He had heard Malkin do it with his information applicants. Dvorsky even kept Malkin vocabulary.

"I d-don't want to show off but I'll have to tell you a little bit about good b-business custom," Mikhail quickly muttered the words he had learned off by heart, which Malkin usually said in the same circumstances. He knew very well that visitors like him were experts of tricksters' concepts. They could tie him up to a problem and he would be guilty. But "good business customs" and "tricksters' concepts" had nothing in common. If anything, it was vice versa. So for his own safety the director of a small unnoticeable company would always anticipate the conversation with a short tour of his own understanding of the situation.

"If the success of the situation depends on me," Dvorsky continued couching the invalid with the crutches, like a diligent pupil of an outstanding crisis lawyer, "then your coming here costs a completely different sum. That's the first thing. I just give information. You can do whatever you want with it. You can eat it or b-burn it. That's the second thing. The search of your subject will be deleted at your p-presence. Of course, I can remember certain things and give the information to your rival for money to fail the deal. I can, surely. This is the third thing. But now you'll have to strain yourself and try to understand that there is no use for me to do that."

The guy was genuinely surprised. He wanted to cross his legs by force of habit but he couldn't and showed his doubt by shaking his head and protruding his bottom lip. To answer the uncertainty of the client Dvorsky decided to explain, "After that no one would contact me. Small world... Mikhail kept quiet and looked at either the bandit or businessman. The guy seemed to switch on all his thinking resources trying to understand how one could know something but not sell it at the first opportunity.

Waiting for the reply of the temporarily disabled person, Dvorsky got up, went to the window and looked out. It was snowing. The new "Toyota Camry" pulled up to the entrance leaving a track of slightly snow-dusted asphalt. Malkin got out of the car and headed to the office with his stupid unnatural footstep. The car windows were closed. "He didn't forget!" Mikhail was surprised. He remembered Malkin

driving him in the car around the town and persuading him to start business together. That year April was hot and Malkin would open the window from time to time. At a tram stop in Sosnovaya Poliana “Toyota” stopped letting pedestrians cross the road. Dvorsky said, “Close the window. People...”

A moment later one of the passengers leaving the tram spat straight into Malkin’s face. After that accident Leonid never played with the buttons of lifting and dropping the window glass. The windows were always closed and the air conditioning was always on. Besides, he tried to drive not outside the town but in places where foreign cars were usual and there were no trams.

Malkin came into the office where the conversation had been going on for half an hour. The guy was pleased to see him. He must have known Leonid and had come to him with similar requests. But the communication must have failed to save him. Nevertheless, the guy had come for advice again. Malkin understood the eternal problem of the people greedy for quick money and butted into the conversation. “Ignat, I am glad to see you safe and sound... nearly. The leg is not a big deal, it’ll heal. Try to understand when you file petitions in court and ask the judge to solve your problem,” Malkin knew to clear up the situation through the common example, “the other side might do the same thing.”

“Oh, yeah! Of course. I would...”

“Then not a single judge would live a long life. Do you agree?” Leonid Malkin completed confidently. “The judge will surely comply with the first request but the situation can change and the case will be transferred into the town court. Then it doesn’t matter who the first is.”

“So what shall I do?” Ignat needed the answer immediately. Since his childhood he had got used to having the answers in the end of the book.

“You can only believe. Nothing else. As far as I know, you are doing it most of the time. And the password is important, it’s like opening the system.”

The last circumstance convinced Ignat eventually. Malkin turned his computer on and connected to the server in Tel Aviv. After five minutes of sitting in front of the monitor with digits, company names and surnames the injured businessman started shuffling on his seat. How could he do it with a plastered leg? A little bit longer – and he started

sweating, got nervous and anxiously started taking hundred dollar notes out of his trousers and jacket pockets. Similar to what blokes did in a strip-tease bar, he was putting the notes into Malkin's pockets.

Sure! The "limped" just named the "Swiss" who was going to buy his aluminum with "four nines after the decimal point" in pureness. And his moustached face of the buyer was smiling on the monitor not from Zurich but from Krakow. Then he saw the name of the real owner and the name of the director of the company with the same name he had on his piece of paper, then its offshore companies and the names of the banks where they had accounts.

As it was indicated in the contract, signed by the "Swiss", the metal pureness was checked at the arrival at the port of Antwerpen in a special laboratory. Everything would take place there, of course. The four "nines" would definitely shake, blink and turn into a dramatic "eight" or even "seven". That would be the end of it! He would have to transport his aluminium bars back. And even if they agreed to buy them with a discount, the "buyer" would pay nothing. He would not be a director of any company that the "limped" named. He could go into court. Not to the young Leonid's passions, but to the old port of Antwerpen. He would pay them a lot of money. The result would be the same – he would come home and the creditors would break his other leg.

"B-by the way, why do you agree for the metal control at the port of d-delivery?" Dvorsky asked even though he knew very well why it was done. He didn't expect to hear, "I thought he was a Swiss after all. Who can I believe if not him? I wouldn't believe Hungary..."

"What a mess," Malkin thought. "How does he manage to stay alive with this philosophy? But we don't have to deal with ignorant people and teach clients to play business games... Especially this one wouldn't be convinced with any arguments. He is already seeing green packs of dollars and smelling them. Someone else would start thinking what to do with the money but Ignat is one of those people who wastes it and doesn't think of consequences thinking he knows best. I do feel sorry. For his family. The leopard can't change his spots."

The client raised his head and looked at Malkin pitifully. Leonid continued to be aware of the fact that he was doing it for free. "They don't need metal, mate. They need you to make a bad shot. The metal is for show only. They will get it for free. You could transport carbamide or gas masks. They also have quality standards."

Explaining to Ignat the basic information operation, Leonid remembered about the court and judge for a good reason. Before he joined Maximov's project, he had often taken part in hearings as a claimant or defendant. He used to spend all his days there and learned a lot and in the time he just enjoyed the legal fuss. Even if it was a hearing of his case, he would turn his mobile phone on, listen and answer the caller.

Malkin loved that troublesome work and never refused criminal or civil cases. When he was told a problem of a company or just a person, he always said the same thing, "What's the house number? I know the road. Judges are in charge of different houses. There might be three judges in one road... If you tell me the number of the house of your company or where the passport of the defendant is registered I will say who the judge is. Then I'll know if I can do anything for you or not."

Leonid knew many judges, especially young women. He would send them a birthday card and often spent an evening with one of them. If he was in a male company his phone didn't stop ringing and his companions would be fed up hearing his "honey", "darling", "baby", "I'll ring you..."

It was the "fifth column" in the legal practice of Malkin. Actively using his female assistants, he could boldly sort out a case. He loved delaying gracefully for a month or even half a year questions on reinstatement of a stealing director. There was enough time for his client, a new legal director of a company, to be able to get the hang of things and dig in toes without wasting time on fighting with an enemy.

The former director was usually dismissed from the post correctly and legally but he was retired illegally. If they did everything legally they needed to give him a three-day notice and he would surely fall ill. Then, being ill, he would come to work and be in the way of a new director.

Now any phrase the claimant said in a fit of temper was caught by Malkin and used to postpone the sitting. He would demonstrate a document, "One second! There is a word in a foreign language. Your honour, an official translation is needed!" If the former director blurted out something about the new director being a cheat, Malkin would react, "Really, we need to check this! We'll make inquiries in the com-

pany or ministry.” Legal puzzles turned up in front of the affectionate lawyer and he solved them easily. Only now he spent more and more time with his own secretary. She also graduated from the law department of the university, but was ten years younger than him. She had worked as a district judge assistant. Usually they met in the evening and went to a cafe, then to her home, to have a glass of liqueur and discuss the unbearable easiness of existence relatively to peculiarities of execution of justice.

Malkin liked Katya. She was nice to talk to about something simple and plain. He didn’t have to pretend to be clever or stupid, he didn’t have to flatter or think over each word. Usually Leonid called her to “Cellar” in Lieutenant Schmidt Embankment or “Comme il faut” between Savushkin Street and Shkolnaya Street. Not many people knew the latest one. The cafe appeared unexpectedly in the district of two-storeyed houses with wooden floor structures built by the captured Germans after the war. However, the cosy interior reminded of the home warmth. The nice thing for Malkin was that the administration sometimes didn’t charge him because he was a regular customer and once he had given them good business advice. Sometimes, on a special occasion, Malkin really enjoyed it when the administrator came up to him and calling him by name and patronymic asked not to pay for the dinner. Especially if Katya or someone else was sitting near him. He even got a flip calendar with all bank holidays marked, even Dentist Day and the Day of the Sick. Those two days were one after another, one on the ninth, the other on the eleventh of February.

Katya’s parents had divorced. Her father took his eldest daughter to Moscow with him and the youngest daughter stayed with the mother. The sisters were good friends even though they lived in different cities, but the parents hadn’t met once since they divorced. The big empty flat put pressure on Katya’s mentality but the visitors had an illusion of happiness. After “Comme il faut” Katya used to invite Malkin round to her place and her mother usually was out. Prolonging the nice dinner, they would drink egg liquor or tequila, then move to Katya’s bedroom and give themselves up to sex. Two or three hours later Leonid would leave.

Katya’s mum, Ludmila Fyodorovna, was a Russian teacher and a private tutor for school children. She had a lot of pupils, she taught one after another until late at night in a small flat she rented for that

near a tube station. Her income was much higher than Katya's wages in court, in "Pharma" and then in "Bluebell" at Malkin's.

Sometimes Katya's mother was at home. Then she was happy to see Leonid, make him a cup of tea, light up a "Belomor" cigarette and tell him about her favourite occupation, funking accurate smoke rings.

"Hell on wheels! No one can write in Russian properly," the owner of the Stalin's flat would always start with the same thing. "Why is it like that? They do know Arithmetic and Maths."

The teacher's philosophy was simple. When you read a book in your own language everything was clear. On the contrary, in Arithmetic or Maths not everything was evident. It was not clear whether you understood it or not. Hence the conclusion: Philologists were usually confident people but mathematicians mostly had some doubts.

"What about the lawyers?" Leonid asked pointing at himself and Ludmila Fyodorovna's daughter.

"They are assheads!"

"Oops!"

"Yeah! There's no demand on them, so there's no money! Don't you agree?"

"Ludmila Fyodorovna, in big companies lawyers get a lot. Barristers..."

"Barristers... Defenders... There," Katya's mother pointed in the direction of the window, "they have barristers. But in this country... It's different with prosecutors."

"Prosecutors!" Katya butted in. "I know that sort. Young boys buy a diploma of a lawyer and a post of a district prosecutor assistant. After that they quickly beat back the investments. To open a criminal case is five thousand dollars, to close – fifteen, to start an investigating action is three thousand. It's not about someone specific. It's a fact..."

Katya went silent, then she told them the story of a double murder in the country house in Komarovo where she, a young judge assistant, had been invited to her colleague's birthday. It was a close call for her. The birthday boy, being a murderer, was still on the wanted list.

Ludmila Fyodorovna inhaled deeply, let out thick smoke through her nose and continued talking about what they thought was a different subject, "As soon as they let people steal, all sorts of bandits brought me their children to teach them Russian. I couldn't understand why. They wouldn't need it in England. Maybe, to write contracts? Anyway,

they were mostly dads, young, well-groomed, without education or rudiment of socialism. You wouldn't pull a word out of them, let alone money. I used to call them "blunt clams". A year passed. The same children came to me. But this time their mothers made arrangements with me. They paid decently.

Katya's mother gracefully blew the ash into a small tin with an en-crusted lid which she always held in her hand, then she got up, went to the window, looked outside as if waiting for someone. Then suddenly she continued proudly, "People are queuing to have my lessons, you know... Anyway, I asked those mothers, "Where's the father? Last year I was talking to him." They would answer shyly, "He's been killed..."

5

Malkin's main business he called Dvorsky for was gradually building up. Mikhail established communication with a dozen of foreign scientists from France, England, USA, Germany and Australia. Those worked in local universities, knew about the drugs invented by the young medical man from Russia and respected bio-chemistry of the former USSR. The former colleagues from the laboratory came back.

In the Soviet time the government institutes used to not care about their employees' inventions, they didn't put themselves to some bother of registering them in the Agency for Patents and Trademarks, paying annual fees... The important thing was – who was the author? They didn't care who a patent owner was. Everything belonged to the government. Anyone could be a patent owner. The accounts department would be only pleased, they didn't want to fill in forms and pay fees. An invention certificate was more like a Red challenge banner.

So academician Maximov grabbed the Red challenge banner. Being a laboratory leader on a voluntary basis, he, like a good producer, had felt the future market conjuncture and was boosting his pupils' inventions. He would register patents abroad on his own money to his name or his colleagues' and later on, when a chaos started in the country, he registered them on his company in Holland.

Academician started everything very well. As soon as Dvorsky touched the mixture of rights, technologies and science, an Australian

pharma company suddenly took up a license on using his patent, which was registered by Maximov somewhere far away, in another continent.

The money started coming. They got computers, wages, “clean rooms” and... coloured paper clips. Minsk pharma factory annually produced millions of medicines of different names synthesized by three patents of Dvorsky and his co-authors.

That couldn't help being noticed. Everyone was struggling but there they had high technologies. An American invited Mikhail to a “closed” conference in America. Once a year they gathered the most intelligent and advanced people in medicine, physiology and pharmaceuticals. Their sponsors were the biggest world companies, such as “Sony”, “Royal Philips Electronics”, “Boeing”... Those monsters could afford to keep a close watch on the slightest idea movements, especially in pharmaceuticals where a fourth of all investments of the USA went.

It turned out, Dvorsky was invited by the Central Intelligence agent who had promised to lift restrictions of COCOM from the analogues of the new Soviet line of drug synthesis in 1991. He invited Dvorsky to make a report in front of the crowd of the rich eggheads. At the conference Mikhail was approached by a respectable Swiss publishing house “Karger”, which had not published any scientist from new Russia yet, with an offer to publish his monograph on peptides.

Just over two years had passed after the accidental meeting of Malkin and Mikhail in the bar. Dvorsky now was already a co-owner and director of the joint-stock company of the closed type “Pharma-2” with benefit of two million dollars in 1995. Malkin was not registered legally in the company but, as a sleeping partner, he got his quarterly twenty per cent in cash from Mikhail. Dvorsky took part of the money for his own needs and gave some of it to his mother. Once he sent a postal order to his ex-wife. The rest of the money went to the scientific research and production development. Now, that the western companies recognized “Pharma-2” as a company similar to them, they queued for investing their money in it. They were like DNA molecules, whatever you did to them, only the principle “us-them” was working, and they were activating for “us”. The new drugs were produced very quickly and went like hot cakes. That was without any pre-clinical and clinical testing. They were being registered as nutritional supplements. That was easier – they didn't have to wait for the results of testing for years.

Academician Maximov was still living in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, enjoying the western civilization and stinking with wealth. He was happy he was free and he was especially proud of the rapid take off of "Pharma-2". He always appreciated and loved using clever and detailed bluff. The company name was the same, its legal owner was his pupil. Who will know the difference? He might still be his employee and it could have been him who had started the business while being in Holland. Many people knew by then, "If you want to do business in Russia, gather lots of money and leave the country!" That was what he did. He could have started all over again. That state gave Leonid Alexandrovich a chance to socialize with the rich and famous Dutch and represent himself not just as an "outstanding scientist" but also a clever businessman in high-tech solutions.

One of the new drugs of company "Pharma-2" was for patients suffering with diabetes. It was effective even when the injected insulin didn't change anything and the patient was going blind and could hardly see anything. Famous people, prime-ministers, presidents' relatives from different countries came to Dvorsky's clinic when nobody else could treat them. After a cheap injection in a temporal region it was possible to watch new retina grow and in two weeks the patient could see. Some time later he could see quite well.

In Mikhail's office on the wall he had an iconostasis – photos of famous people treated by his drugs. He was so proud of that fact that he could afford himself to tell everyone who came to him about his patients. Dvorsky understood no medicine could cure the illness. It could only stop the irreversible and fatal process. One was better, another was worse. If only he could have thought of a medicine when he had been fifteen... His grandma would have been still alive. And her photo would be hanging in the centre, among the premiers and ministers.

It was a usual work day in June 1996. Dvorsky was sitting in his office and typing letters to his foreign colleagues abroad on his computer. Knowing very well what each one of the addresses could do, Mikhail laid down a programme for them, working in London, Hamburg, Chicago or Bordeaux, and the programme consisted of specific experiments. Each of those famous in their countries scientists, living in those cities, voluntarily agreed to work out their part of the problem and team only with him, Dvorsky. Mikhail's scientific articles were

never published co-authored by all his foreign colleagues. That allowed him to effectively manage tender and delicate business which was called “research project organization”. Dvorsky didn’t like that phrase and preferred to emphasize the goal and complex relationship nature of all the participants of the scientific research and development. He used to always talk of “designing new opportunities”.

It was nearly midday. Mikhail Nickolayevich liked to look through the results of his morning work while he was having a cup of tea. He put pieces of paper with experiment designs and letters to his colleagues translated into different languages into different piles and was about to put them into big envelopes with art reproductions of Malevich. In moments like that his colleagues tried not to disturb him.

Suddenly the door burst open and about ten men came in. Most of them were colonels, they were wearing combat clothing and holding guns. The main person was a short middle-aged man with long swept back into a plait hair, he looked like a Televichok with round glasses. He asked politely if he could sit down. Secretary Katya Zakharova was standing in the doorway and showing helplessness and sense at the same time.

They couldn’t sit down all, many of them had to stand. It looked even more terrifying. The conversation was short, sincere and completely illogical. The visitors might have seen that as clear and natural.

“Your honour!” Televichok said calmly. “We need you to stop one of your drugs’ production. Yes. Just one,” he added, kept silence for a few seconds as if he was thinking if any other drug was in his way.

Dvorsky was quiet. He was looking at his unfinished tea and was thinking, “Why does it happen? Why does this dark brown liquid in a mug become a messenger of bad events so often? They are going to kill me now. I wish they told me why. Actually, what for? If they are walking round with guns... and don’t even think that’s wrong...”

Mikhail was bluntly staring at his tea and thinking of a mean fate but his body was instinctively trying to express respectful consideration towards his visitors.

“You know what drug we are talking about, don’t you?” the short boss of the unusual division of nine colonels went on. “We are bearing colossal losses. It’s not right!”

“Who do you mean “we”?” Dvorsky said at last and immediately got frightened of his too bold words. “If you d-don’t mind me asking...”

"You are so clever you should know that. The answer is exactly what you've just thought. Insulinic mafia. This is what some naughty people call us sometimes."

"What are those people in green here for? For me to know I couldn't refuse or they will shot me?"

"Don't say that! They are my security."

"Then I d-don't understand why I should..."

"Come on, your honour! It's important you understand you are in someone's way. It has nothing to do with your patients or their treatment, it's just the money."

Dvorsky still couldn't tune to the wave of the unexpected visitors. Televichok was saying something. Mikhail couldn't understand how it could be happening. He was a scientist. He had studied for a long time, worked, then invented wonderful medicine. He had a patent for it. There were patients who were in need for it... They were not in Africa... damn it! Mikhail tried his best but he couldn't help thinking differently.

The office owner confusedly and by force of habit pointed out at the wall with the photos. No effect! "Who has sent these aliens?" Mikhail Nickolayevich thought, puzzled, looking at Televichok, then at the green camarilla with guns.

"You haven't got all of them here, Doctor Dvorsky," said their boss suddenly noticing Mikhail's gesture. "There are many others. They are quite healthy. But they could decorate your wall by their status."

"They won't call any names," Mikhail thought. "When I need Malkin he is never here. They don't look like dorks. Anyway, when we started it was clear there would be competition with pankagen. Not just in this country. But everything seemed so good and smooth. No problems making tablets. Loads of consumers! Lots of profit. But no – there is a risk in every business. A risk like this one," Mikhail sat on his chair, put the envelopes with letters on the desk corner, as far from the main visitor as possible. "Something went wrong again. Why? When Maximov got arrested I wasn't just anxious – I was going crazy. Then in Abkhazia I was happy to break the order and stand in front of the cannon, I would do anything to stop it shooting the barge where my Lena might have been... Now I am offered to forget my childhood dream, the medicine I chose to be a scientist for. So what? What's so bad about it... morally? I am not interested in money now. I haven't

kept my dream... Why would I need to? It's been carried out. Grandma is not alive so no medicine would bring her back. I betrayed her memory? Give me a break! We need new ones. Forget about old dreams! Even if they were so wonderful."

6

Something didn't fit in Dvorsky's conscience and he couldn't make a decision. The situation was quite simple. "They look sincere," Mikhail thought. "They are not rude, they don't laugh and they are clearly explaining the problem. This is what it should be like in business. Simple and cynical. But I can't be like that and I don't like that! Plus should I get something for that? Or the existence in the world is all the compensation they can offer?"

"I got everything," Dvorsky said quietly deciding to gain time. "Where shall I ring?"

"You don't need to ring anywhere. We'll sit and wait here. If you need to work, carry on, you can do what you want. We'll leave your hospitable office at five. Five o'clock, you know."

Mikhail tried to ring Malkin or some "big men" but no one was in. He was seized with a feeling of despair and hopelessness. His mouth was dry and he could smell lead dust. Like a diabetic with sugar levels of fifteen.

"OK, I have figured out everything. I agree. I accept your offer," Dvorsky said quickly and sighed loudly.

"You are like Lenin..."

"What does Lenin have to do with it?"

"You are as wise as Lenin. People say, 'The more a person knows the more stupid he is in life.' I am talking about your former boss, academician. He was not wise."

Only now Dvorsky understood who had killed the business of Maximov, grudging just one drug out of ten.

Mikhail felt easy and calm. He had just made the only right decision and he knew what had turned his life upside down four years before. Not just his life. Dvorsky was listening to the instructions of the man with a plait and diligently writing down every word demonstrating his resignation and full respect.

"In practice it looks the following way," the "alien" was talking in a soft voice, "you are stopping the drug production in Minsk factory, handing the patent over to us, withdrawing batches of your product from the pharmacies."

"We'll need..." Mikhail had calmed down enough to discuss the procedure with its risks and expenses.

"You'll get everything you need," Televichok interrupted him rudely. "Indicate the amount and account and tomorrow you'll get the money. You can discount it as sponsor's help. Will you name the sum or will you need half a day again?"

Dvorsky nodded his head and pushed the buttons on the intercom, instructed his assistant and accountant. Half an hour later everything was over. No papers, no contracts. Just a piece of paper with account details, sums and Dvorsky's signature in the bottom.

The strain fell, Mikhail loosened up and smiled. Just a sequence of digits and a signature.

"Do you want it signed in blood?" he slipped out.

"It's not necessary," Televichok answered.

The next day "Pharma-2" sent orders to Minsk to stop pankagen production and write the cost off the company. The reason was indicated as finding mistakes in formulation. The company bought out all the batches of the medicine from the pharmacies not to ruin its image among the consumers.

But when it rains, it pours. A day later tax police came suddenly. They had an order from the Head of Department to check the facts of some stupid call, to withdraw documentation and so on... Big time. The new law allowed "to collect material evidence from a possible crime site". They didn't need any criminal case, prosecution service, supervising examination and investigation, no search or seizure of documents decisions. They seized a pile documents, contracts, reports of testing, checklists, loaded everything into a minibus and left. Did the company have all those documents? Only one person, named Ivanov, could answer the question. He was a simple police investigator from St.Petersburg tax police department. In the withdrawal certificate he had just file names and a general number of sheets. He could always return the files but the number of sheets was just a number. He could return the same number. What did businessmen keep as documents? Flyers, contract dummies from reference books...

Dvorsky found Malkin at last. He persuaded Mikhail to hide in a rented flat and wait. It was well-timed. The following day they came from the police station to take the director into custody. Not to arrest him (they would have to carry out a lot of work and serve charges), just keep him in jail for three days. He could have told himself then!

A secret flat was a wonderful creation of human mind. You could seclude yourself and write a monograph, meet important clients, house a visiting rich man or bureaucrat privately. You would feel comfortable to discuss the most important problems or spend time with a lady. The latest half a year Dvorsky and Malkin had been coming to the flat weekly for one of those reasons and every time they would top up the content of the fridge. Sometimes they would come here together and discuss various illegal aspects of business. To do it away from everyone was more appropriate and answered the discussed questions much better. How to pull the cash flow? Where to hide it? How to direct it into business again, increasing the open amount for an investor or creditor? The main question was where and how to open a company and what name to register it in.

Dvorsky had been sitting on a chair in the middle of the room for more than an hour and looking at the wall dully. In that unusual “telly” he could see a “rave of feelings” and imagine the acts put on in his company office. He could imagine giant muscled punchers in masks tumble in the hallway, batter down doors, point guns at slim laboratory assistants and accountants in glasses and make them lie on the floor with their arms behind their heads. Then they would walk around moving the scared women with their boots. Sure, they had been in cahoot with each other and were stealing every second! They were definitely trying to grab yet another pack of banknotes and tuck it under the skirt. Or dreaming to change a line in the balance statement... They needed to slap their hands, cut out the computers, take out units... Why being too soft?

The first day all the staff had been lying on the floor for more than two hours. The boss, of course, was looking for the boss. For him all that Bacchanalia was only a decor, a background for a coming conversation. But Mikhail was not there. What a pity! The boss of “machos” got upset! He must have been ordered to frighten the director, but it all went wrong. There was nobody to say “Phr-r-r!” He would need to start again tomorrow.

Of all people, Dvorsky knew very well it was all clear in the company. It was easier to pay the taxes than to be waiting every minute for those “fine fellows”. A week had passed, then another few days. Mikhail calmed down and was not waiting for any blows of fate. Of course, company “Pharma-2” fell down, several specialists retired. The sales fell, there were problems with the factory. Tax police had a dig at all cashing companies in town in search of any damaging information. They were looking for “Pharma-2” to flash.

Leonid was secretly visiting his partner and telling him about notary officers turning up in the office with witnesses and presenting bills to their companies. The bills were forged, of course. But there was no one to investigate. They had to pay first, then to go into court. The amounts on the bills were out-of-limit. To pay one meant to destroy the company. If only they presented the bills and immediately handed it over for payment! Malkin, being a company lawyer, authorized to check the document authenticity, would just gobble them up without choking. Instead they would have to sign the bill honour certificate. They could later go to court and try to prove that “Pharma-2” made a note for their good looks. If an applicant had an unpaid bill, the court delivered a judgement – to pay the bill. But if they only had a certificate it would be too late!

To involve the militia would not be that easy. It would be necessary to open a case, withdraw the bill for examination. Was there need to do that? No one really knew. What if they asked to give unspecified sum by cash to the Fund of the militia veterans help? And another sum – to the investigating officer and district assistant prosecutor. Did you want to initiate investigations? No problem! But it was possible to open an occurrence and say nothing. It was also possible to stand up and be counted, confiscate something, summon for questioning and do it the way for them not to turn up so next time to reconduct them, handlocked, directly from work. For everyone to see. What option would you choose?

Digesting all true stories and gossips about travesty of justice, Dvorsky tried to understand where everything dropped on him from. From the top, sure thing. But who from? He had been so loyal to “insulin-petitioners”, his new “friends” in pharm business. Nothing sensible came into his head. Malkin didn’t understand anything, either, he was only muttering about some “tsunami-business”. He said a new redistribu-

tion started and the town business was gradually being covered with a giant wave of repression according to the monstrous schedule. Now was the time of the first stage. It would be followed by the next stages... Usually it swept all unwanted people off and the “true sons” of the high and mighty would succeed by hook or by crook. No one would investigate how rightful those “relationships” were.

“Sod all!” Mikhail thought painfully. He remembered his officer-friends who hadn’t waited for his “success” and had loomed up on the dirty podium of home business. Zavialov had been appointed to run the town’s medical insurance. Dobroserdov was trusted Lipetsk’s healthcare with medicines, hospital food and clothing. How much would be at least ten per cent for a kickback? Quite a lot of money! Hadn’t they known they would be charged? As a result, they found themselves at a loss. Assassination attempts, slaughters and being in a hospital. A month or two later it was all over again. It was impossible to come out of the sinister circle of monotonous succession of events. Now Vitka Zavialov had leukemia, Dobroserdov had multiple sclerosis, three sites of damage in alba. All that was the result of everyday stress. They should have waited a bit then, in 1993. They could work together now...

Why together? They would be sitting now, staring at the wall and imagining someone in a mask kill every wish to work honestly with his dirty boots. The favourite pictures of liveliness of “faded curls” of a long and curly DNA molecule were only in a dream! Even there they were mixed with “thrillers” – harassment, checks and attempts of a “hostile takeover”. They were so right when they said, “It’s better to do a runner until it’s too late and come back as an alien”. No one would kick him then or they would get a rebuff from the “Western humanity”. Or should Mikhail send everyone away with a flea in their ear?

Dvorsky knew one simple truth but he was always breaking it conscientiously, he was breaking it forcedly with each of his steps, thoughts or actions. The nature provided only five per cent of people with a gift to do business. Those people would make three roubles out of two, then thirty three and would give jobs to others. The rest of the population could be professionals in what they were doing, but to make money out of nothing... Only the very few joined the mystery of the club. But everyone rushed into business. People were helplessly dabbling in the ocean of business, stumbling across sharp underwater stones, pow-

erful currents and storms, and like Zavialov and Dobroserdov, they would definitely find themselves in a trap. There was no way out. Their desperation would not delay to provoke any dreadful illness. Eventually they would lose everything they had – money, flats, families... And their life.

“Is this what’s waiting for me?” Mikhail thought. “Looks like it. I’ve never been able to understand people talented at business. For them, the more problems, the better. Money for them is a self-consistent value. They are made not to miss their money and not to give it to anyone else. They are not able physiologically to do it. It’s not important whether they are insiders or outsiders. They don’t waste their energetics on distinction identification. Their response is just not to give. That’s it!”

Dvorsky’s mentality had completely different peculiarities. If there were three or four problems he couldn’t think straight. When he got money and the problem could be solved with the help of money, he found it easier. If there were five problems, reasoning disappeared. If the sixth problem turned up, that was the end of the world. Even if that was a pen lying on the table and suddenly rolling towards the edge. All his body had been functioning before that moment, but now was going haywire. Anything could be done with Dvorsky in moments like this.

7

Someone rang the bell. Three short and one long rings. “It must be Leonid again,” Mikhail thought and went towards the door. Smiling “Saddam Hussein” stumbled in. The man had the same moustache, hair black as tar and an ultra-white smile. Mikhail was lost and moved back.

“Here you are!” the man said. “You are imperceptible! Nice to meet you. I am Lisochkin Yuri Mikhailovich – retired FSB colonel. I am your genuine fan and also an organiser and inspirator of all this Bacchanalia.

The FSB officer hissed through gritted teeth unnaturally but instead of the laughter Mikhail could hear a selection of sounds from “s” to “sh” through “f”.

Lisochkin got out his ID, held it in front of Mikhail's nose, saw his running eyes, got satisfied with that and calmly put the card into the inner pocket of his jacket. Then he confidently went into the room, rearranged his trousers not to mess the crease and carefully sat on the sofa.

"Tea, coffee or dance?" the former KGB officer said putting a bold face. There was no answer, bemused Mikhail couldn't understand what was going on, he didn't keep up with the reality. Only one thought passed through his mind and disappeared. "I am lucky with colonels..." According to the ID, he was a retired colonel. Dvorsky realized it was cool. Retired officers had big opportunities. They could hook up to any current Federal Security Service officers if that was necessary. The current officers were quite restricted in their actions. If they took a risk and got into some narrow specialized direction of work, it was for quick money – to frighten and disappear.

Lisochkin finished a quick inspection of his companion's secret base and stated the reasons of his visit. He described in detail the actions of the last two weeks which fell on Dvorsky and his business. He was doing that calmly and thoroughly – the way Mikhail liked to do things. The retired officer knew everything about the former medical captain. Nearly everything. He knew his favours, habits, conversation style and way of life. He even hinted he knew who his grandad had been.

"So, coffee then!" the colonel said, like a hypnotist, after he finished describing the latest events.

The flat owner obediently went into the kitchen and a minute later brought in two cups of instant coffee. Dvorsky stopped hesitating whether he could sit down with the unexpected guest responsible for his problems. The moustached man tried the drink, moved the cup away and quickly said without looking at Dvorsky, "I can call everyone away, return you everything and prevent it in the future. I can protect you from any enemies but two. The first one is "insulin-makers". You've met them now and hopefully you won't invent everything your mad and creative brain wants to. There are also some other people, they are from the President's environment. Later I will name them. Those are really dangerous. Because they are piggish and absolutely irresponsible. Oh, another thing! I will hand you over ten million dollars according to any arrangement convenient for you. Also, I will get twenty per cent of "Pharma's" profit quarterly. Kind of preference share," the colonel laughed again. The selection of sounds of his laughter

was wider now. "Whether you like it or not, you've got to give me twenty per cent. Nothing to other people. To me – imperatively. By the way, I am not asking for my "tenner" back. But if you decide to sell your business, we'll remember about it."

"Saddam Hussein" at last smiled with his pure white teeth and looked up at Mikhail who was still standing near the sofa. "Of course, the client was overripen hiding here and having no contacts. He must be expecting new harassment every minute," the visitor must have thought and he continued with his prepared speech.

"It's really nice. Do you agree, Mikhail Nickolayevich?" the visitor touched the cup again, had a sip, went silent for three seconds, then continued, "Hmm! It's not poisoned. Nice! By the way, you knew what to do with the guys from "insulin", didn't you! What's the matter now, Mikhail Nickolayevich?"

The dialogue started only in a few minutes when Dvorsky came back to life and was able to think again. "OK, the moustached prick has nothing to do with those cool visitors who came two weeks ago. That's good. It's best to use money where the risk is minimal. Today it's pharmaceuticals, insulin-free of course. Ten million is not bad. It will take time to gain a profit... I could give him a couple of preference shares. He can enjoy the right, vote at meetings and get his twenty per cent of declared profit. Regardless of shareholder meeting verdict," Dvorsky had a thought and suddenly he had inspiration, "For me it's even better than a loan! With a loan there's a fixed interest and it doesn't depend on the profit..." Mikhail kept thinking. He was surely good at reasoning. "This is definitely better! What's all this mess with searching, raiding and seizing for? It's enough just to whisper the offer and I will rush to accept it. Can't understand it. He must be made this way. He's not used to being refused."

"There's another thing. After six months of good work I might increase it to fifty. Then to one hundred..."

"Will the interest be the same? I mean twenty per cent off the profit..." Dvorsky butted in.

"We'll discuss it. Later. I assure you I can only offer beneficial possibilities. For both sides. Do you agree?"

Mikhail understood it was not a question but his new acquaintance's addition to his speech. Damn! Malkin was not there again. He was just a junior partner and didn't influence company management, but Mikhail

wanted to discuss the collision with him. He must have been at yet another court session or spending time with Katya Zakharova.

In both occasions which happened in the last month, Mikhail Nickolayevich Dvorsky didn't take any decisions. He just did what he was offered. First he stopped penkagen production, now he would take the "tenner". He would! What else could he do? He knew Lisochkin's offers wouldn't be beneficial all the time. But if the problems as complicated as this one fell on him in the future and he had to solve them quickly, his business could go out of the window. To be exact, his business would get rid of him. If the business were profitable, it would remain. The owner would change but the business would still work. There would be another person, able to take decisions. And he, Mikhail Dvorsky, would be left by his patent co-authors, colleagues, scientists from Russia and abroad. That was how it worked in "know-how" business. Not many people understood it but Dvorsky knew it. Oh, how much he lacked a partner with business genes or at least with the same responsibility as his! Malkin was different! Now Mikhail had this one – he wanted interest from the profit and everything else could go to hell.

In moments like that Mikhail usually fell out of action. His intellectual device would skid without enough information and with every second he could feel his nerve cells refuse to skip a pulse. The neurons must have been jumping from place to place and heating his head so much that any normal person would get a mental block. But Dvorsky had his own technologies of extreme overheat compensation which he didn't even know about. He switched off smoothly and could hardly remember anything afterwards. The problem would be solved with a wave of a magic wand.

Actually, everything had been sorted this time as well. Mikhail even felt a pleasant state of himself. Like in his childhood dreams: a bathhouse, cold water in a brook, grass... and his head was spinning.

8

Pyotr Mikhailovich Philipov had been free for five years, which happened the first time from 1964, his first prison stints. Usually his "free" breaks didn't last longer than a few months and went round in circles. The latest free-willed

walk around the tundra of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District was not easy. He was released to find necessary people and get his acts together in the oil and gas capital – Khanty-Mansiysk – all in short time. He had to sort out natural gas production and sales plus all the financial whirl of blue gold and common fund organizing in Cyprus.

He had managed everything. The insiders were happy. Philya didn't waste time. He now possessed a property in Spain, lived at the Bay of Biscay and pulled the secret strings only he knew about, managed the gigantic profitable enterprise which was prospering thousands of kilometres away from him, behind the Urals.

Philya's main assistants were from his childhood. They both owed him. When they were in Year 7 they got into the staff room at night and stole form registers. But the affair had aggravating circumstances. The disabled one-armed teacher was on duty at school and by chance came into the staff room. He tried to help Petka Philippov who was helplessly hanging from a tree but he lost his balance, fell out of the window and died. Philippov was figured out immediately. He didn't grass on anyone. He survived the trial, court sitting, verdict, juvenile prison.

Later, when everything went upside down in the country, he made an offer to both of his school friends which was impossible to refuse. Everything started spinning. Vovka Spivak, a mathematician and a former dissident, was transacting financial business. He was doing that living in Tel Aviv where he had escaped from the USSR in 1987 using a false passport. The other friend was a retired KGB officer Lisochkin Yury Mikhailovich, who was doing his usual work – intelligence, secret service, business protection from the government outrage. Ex-cons coped themselves with “hobnobs”.

Hardly anyone knew Spivak but Lisochkin (or Lisician, as Philya called him) was in the limelight. Any fuss in business, staff hunting and their checks were down to him.

Pyotr Mikhailovich worked with great enthusiasm and he lived jolly well. He loved being in control of people. One slight gesture made people do what he wanted and that was an expression of his personal power. He could be proud of that.

In time the closest environment of Philippov settled down, got money and started showing unnecessary initiative. Two sturdy fellows who had served time in prison with Philya outside Perm were in charge of adapting fresh gangs under famous Philippov's “roof”. Their work

was complicated, creative and it developed their imagination quickly. Without thinking long, they decided they were doing all the work and the money was going to their boss. They didn't like the idea so they decided to take everything to themselves. Pyotr Mikhailovich surely sorted out everything. Lisician was eating bread and black caviar for a good reason!

High-handed guys were got rid of immediately. A gap appeared in the system. No replacement had been found. So Lisochkin decided to take care of more or less decent companies and push them under the "protection" of his school friend. As he had the right of the "right hand" he thought he could use the fresh company for his personal advantage.

Pharmaceutical company "Pharma-2" was the first to get into his arms. Its owner, director and author of all inventions had been so much disturbed by the previous gangs that Lisochkin had to just dab him with one finger and he would surrender. However, Philippov wouldn't have become what he was if he had relied only on Lisochkin. Spivak had dropped a hint about the pharmaceuticals. He informed Philippov about Malkin, Dvorsky and Academician three years before. So he accepted the new company appearance as a thought-through decision. What was more, he decided to strengthen his authority of "justice control" and sent a message with Lisochkin for "Pharma-2" management with a strong request to appoint one of his people as a director assistant.

After the categorical offer from the "protection", Dvorsky realised at last that he didn't feel any risks and dangers and his business and he were too vulnerable for all sorts of troubles and haters. Mikhail burned himself. He knew he was helpless but couldn't think of anything useful. He rang Malkin.

"Leonid, we need to talk. Let's get together."

"Oopsy-daisy! Misha, what's the matter? What are you talking about? Don't you have better things to do?"

"Something like that. If we carry on like this, we won't have anything to do soon."

Malkin was quiet. He must have been thinking, "For Dvorsky it sounds very unusual, too simple. I've got to go along with him."

"You are good at persuading. One word – and I am ready. Where? In the flat?"

"No, that's not a good place. If Federal service security people have been somewhere, it's not a good place."

“How about meeting in Komarovo at mine?”

“OK. Tomorrow at 8.”

Two years ago Malkin, having done a good deal on some information for “dorks”, bought a cottage in Komarovo from an old academician. The plot was four thousand square metres – woods and a small cottage. There was gas, water and electricity but no one to live there. He was travelling all the time or spending time in the office and Katya didn’t like to go to Komarovo.

Leonid met his partner outside. He was standing on a path at the gate in some tattered clothes and holding a rake for taking leaves away.

“Misha... What’s the matter?” Malkin left the rake and spread out his arms for a hug. “Why are you so skinny? You look like Koschei the Deathless, just a bag of bones.”

“I have no appetite, don’t really eat anything, scared of everything, scared to be killed,” Dvorsky was gloomy.

They went into a big room with a round table in the middle. On the table there were cups, glasses, a sugar bowl and chocolates.

“Hello, my friend!” Malkin said sitting down at the table and pointing at the cups, while he merrily went on, imitating the latest visitor, “Tea, coffee, dance?”

“You’ve got good memory.”

The next day after Lisochkin’s visit Mikhail rang Malkin and told him in detail about the conversation with “Saddam Hussein”.

“Coffee, then,” the cottage owner filled the cups from the coffee-maker. “Come on, you can start now.”

Mikhail, convinced he was right, confidently explained new approaches to management and new expenses.

“To save and protect “know-how” we n-need m-money. Is it clear?”

“The protection will cost even more that the “know-how”, won’t it?” Malkin agreed. “I just have a small comment. We need to save not your “know-how” but our business. Patents don’t bring money. Neither do other assets.”

“Second thing. In the vertical power structure we need to put everything upside down. Do you know why?”

“Why?”

“In the legal body there should be nothing to attract raiders. Production plant will be... abroad.”

“And on lease,” Malkin developed the idea.

“The personnel will be leased from a recruit company. Every single one! From a worker to the general manager.

“No problem. Let them enroll, sack, pay sickness...”

“Also they will teach and be in charge of safety,” Mikhail added as a director who was fed up with all the leadership.

The friends began to plot. The medical scientist and crisis lawyer put themselves in a whirlpool of problems of production and sales, cash flow and minimizing the tax burden. Their “academy of arts” lasted for five hours. Heaps of paper covered the table. Next to them were cups of unfinished tea and coffee, glasses with water. On the edge of the table there was a glass teapot with cold tea. On the pieces of paper there were multicoloured tables and circles with company names, arrows and dashed lines meaning the country border.

Malkin poured cold tea into one of the tumblers.

“Any tea for you?” he asked Dvorsky.

Mikhail started shaking as if he had a fever and waved his hands.

“So do you want some? It’s not like I am offering you cognac.”

“It must be engram,” Mikhail said nervously and added, “a moment of pain. A reflex...”

“Well, if you don’t have a gram, don’t have a gram,” Leonid joked. “There will be more for me. My mouth is completely dry from all that chat.”

“Now, the m-main thing,” Dvorsky said loudly. “As a “know-how” owner, I must become invulnerable, like Koschei the Deathless. Especially when I look like him, as you say...”

“Give it a rest!”

“Just listen to me. It looks the same, really. Koschei can’t be conquered easily, with force alone. D-do you remember, his death is on a needle end. That’s me, number one. That needle is in an egg – that’s number t-two. The egg is in a d-duck, number three, the duck is in a hare, he is number four... Then comes a chest guarded by Koschei himself. It’s like a set of Russian dolls, matreshkas.”

“So?”

“Don’t you understand? I’ll try to talk your language. Who is the first at risk? The company director. Not me, but some “Uncle Petya”, which is a hare in Koschey’s scheme.”

“And no one can find that hare, can they?” Malkin always got quickly in the heart of the matter and developed the idea. “He has taken all

decisions, registered them and disappeared. Maybe, temporarily or maybe for ever... If death is not confirmed, he is alive and his decisions are valid."

"Moving along, who appointed the d-director? A shareholder. Not me again, but an "uncle Kolya". Do you follow me?"

"OK."

"He is a "duck". He's already issued a power of attorney. The main letter of attorney is for me to sign bank transfer orders in Cyprus where all the money is going. It's for an emergency. Otherwise he'll be signing everything himself or facsimile."

"Well and good!"

"I appreciate you don't mind. The main thing for you is to get money. But listen, it's important! Everyone around knows there is a genuine owner somewhere and one day they will start looking for him."

"They will..."

"But they will find someone else again."

"Screw you! Who will they find? Me?"

"No! Another nominal director! Nominal "real owner"! The "egg"! Did you get it? The "egg"!"

Malkin became quiet, shook his head like a bull and spoke in an untentious voice, "Misha, this is so cool! You are a genius of conspiracy. You are just wasting your time here."

"We've already got "Uncle Petya" and "Uncle Kolya". Now we need "Uncle Vasya". Someone who will always represent the real owners. He will sit at the negotiations informally, deal with contractors, in general, the person who gets our instructions and announces decisions in public."

"Who is going to think and instruct our dork? Pushkin?"

"You will..."

"What are you going to do? Sleep?"

"I will be a common person, a simple patent author. How about that? Of course, I will be thinking everything over, as I did before, and instruct through you... do you hear? I will instruct through you that nominal director. Here's the chain. He will be my informal assistant and he will contact everyone but me. Do you agree?"

"I have a person like that. By the way, his name is Vasiliy. He looks like you and he is quick but in a different area. He hangs around the office all the time. Once when you were out I saw him poke his

nose into everything. I thought he was from Lisochkin at first. I checked him, no, he wasn't. I've talked to him a couple of times. He's a bit rough. He is from sales and distribution. Or production. It's the hell of a mess there."

"Doesn't make any difference to us!" Mikhail concluded cheerfully. "Now we've got a nominal owner and a nominal director. Now we are going to make a nominal "real director" out of this bloke."

Malkin was satisfied with the last element of the new vertical of power, he poured himself more tea, gulped it and... fell asleep. Dvorsky was walking around the house for another two hours enjoying the details of the new management system.

Why was it the Cyprian company who got the money and not the ones who produced or sold the drugs all over the country? It had been initially designed that way and those connections between the firms were secured in loan agreements. In case of danger only Dvorsky could cancel them any time stopping all stock, drugs, money streams and pulling out sectors of the long chain from production financing to produced goods payment. Only he, a simple patent author, knew where the originals of all documents were kept, as well as shareholder meetings records.

Of course, all companies had their documents according to the law. But if they were withdrawn, as it had happened recently, or if they all suddenly burned, there wouldn't be any trouble for the business.

Now Mikhail lived and worked in Finland, in an unnoticeable rented house in Lappeenranta. It was close to a small airport, in a green road called Kesamaenkatu Street. It was an hour flight to Riga. From there all of Europe was "within walking distance" as realtors say. No one knew of the Finnish office, even Malkin didn't. Once a week a messenger with bank documents came there.

The main task of the messenger was not to bring a "tail". That was why he drove his car through Svetogorsk and not through the border check point "Brusnichnoe", which was closer. He had to ring Dvorsky's neighbour in Finland, say the password and receive a confirmation to come over. Then he would drive 160 kilometres from Petersburg to the border and another thirty from Imatra to Lappeenranta.

Bank documents for transfers signed by the director of "Pharma-2" and its legal branch, a Cyprus offshore, were brought into Dvorsky's office in Finland. He would study them, compare the information on cash inflow to the branch from "Pharma-2" contractors and after that

he would send a packet of all the documents to the office in Larnaca. The same day all funds collected in the branch in accordance with contracts as return of account payable, were going to the other offshore. It belonged to Dvorsky. It was from there that he paid to the “protection”, repayment of loans and to all obvious and non-obvious shareholders of “Pharma-2”.

The most important thing that Dvorsky really valued was that only he knew the ways of cooperation with patent co-authors. Only they knew what to do if someone tried to capture their inventions. The biggest patent holder was a Petersburg company which made drugs at the Minsk factory. It was surely vulnerable for capture. But what could raiders do with its patents? Nobody in the West would deal with a company without authors! Dvorsky was especially proud of his co-operation with the co-authors, more proud than of his offshore in Cyprus, “Uncle Vasya”, other nominal directors and his secret residence put together.

9

The bloke Malkin found for contacts with the outside world was called Vasiliy Fyodorovich Prokhorov. He was actually stupid. He had lost all his documents but managed to get new ones without a birth certificate. He was registered in the Leningrad region, in the village of Yermilovo without a street or a house number. In Petersburg he lived on his own, somewhere in the area of Grazhdanka in a hostel or hotel.

Prokhorov would often sit next to the first official body of the company and confidently ask questions to all those present. Then the “main boss” would confidently announce the decision. People around him thought he must have been the real company owner and called him Pharmacist.

Usually Pharmacist would turn up at the office of “Pharma-2”, feed the “machine” and disappear. He was like a multi-tasking accountant serving several companies. When he disappeared it was no use ringing him. He was said to have a schedule of a week work and a week enjoying himself either in his ancient village, founded by the Swedes, or at one of his friends’.

Sometimes he was seen at the theatre at an opera or ballet. But that happened during the work week. That was not love to art! Everyone knew the management had to visit parties, meet cool politicians and businessmen, in other words, to demonstrate culture of the organization and organized culture at the same time. The Philharmonic Hall was the best place for that. It was music that effected the sense organs. It was music, not words or paints. The short and unexpected meetings in places like that were always more effective than formal meetings or negotiations. Everything was direct both in music and meetings.

The rhythm of the “main nominal director’s” existence corresponded with the speed of the management’s life of the biggest pharmaceuticals company of the Northern West. They were like sleeping springs – pulsing for ten days, then going to sleep. After a week everyone would wake up and run at the drop of a hat.

Neither Malkin, nor Lisochkin met the “patent author”. They got their official money in the same place where the personnel, “protection” and dividends were paid. In other words, from Prokhorov. Of course, Mikhail would see his pseudo-partners, but in other places, abroad, fishing, somewhere away from their real business. He had never met Prokhorov and other nominal directors.

Six months had passed. Dvorsky was feeling good. Nothing was distracting him from science and nothing made him nervous. He used to think of going somewhere away from everybody. Now everything had changed. He was to look after the thin string holding all his business. And no contacts! Even the messenger, his old acquaintance, did his job without understanding who he worked for. Like a killer. There was an ocean between him and the client. Apart from him, just one person knew about the messenger and that was Vasiliy Fyodorovich Prokhorov. He usually took the documents from all offices and put them in a brief case. Then the messenger would turn up, take the brief case and disappear immediately.

Now Malkin was pleased with himself. He had always understood his partner’s condition, he knew Mikhail found it difficult to make decisions on his own without preparation and thorough studying of all the details, so in the very beginning of the re-organization he was looking for someone who didn’t give a toss. In appearance the “main nominal director” looked like Dvorsky but unlike the “patent author” he could take decisions without thinking of responsibility. If Mikhail

was more like an accurate and prudent “German” from an anecdote about missilemen of the Warsaw Pact times, Vasiliy was like a “Polish” who was shooting by guess. Leonid modestly considered himself a “Russian” who shot a rocket, understood it was going in the wrong direction, then shot another one but didn’t keep the interval between them. So the rockets were flying in the way of each other... But they hit the target.

When Dvorsky went from Finland to Petersburg, he travelled light, without a bulky schedule of meetings and conferences. He would always visit his mother. It was on his way and quite near Finland. It had been two years since Anna Yakovlevna moved from Petersburg to the house she had come with his mother to in 1955.

Every time he was going up the stairs of the porch of their old but recently renovated house, Mikhail was thinking about his father, local fishing fleet captain, and his school, endless colds, winter evenings he spent on his own there. He could remember every day, every book he had read, all his bright childhood experiences... But he couldn’t remember where he had been a week ago, who he had met. As if that had been completely cut off with a razor.

His mother was always waiting for Mikhail and met him with hot cabbage soup with brown bread and garlic. She would put aside the thick Talmud “Newest Botanic Encyclopedia”, heat the bath house. The day before his arrival she would turn the pump on, fill big reservoirs with cold water from the stream. Having their dinner, they were talking about his grandma, grandad’s friend Aristarkh, chatting about health and business. Anna Yakovlevna would ask him if he had a girlfriend...

“Mum, this is the best time of my life. Everything’s going well, nothing’s in the way. I’ve plunged into science, kept company with my colleagues. It doesn’t even feel like business at all,” seeing his mum shaking her head suspiciously, Mikhail stopped talking for a moment, then suddenly said loudly, remembering something important, “Yeah, I feel well. Honestly.”

“Every time you are different, Mishenka. One day you are enjoying your food, talking to me, another day you are sullen, as soon as you come you go to the bath house and fall asleep, you don’t even talk to me. Today you are saying something but your eyes are strange. What are you thinking about? You don’t feel comfortable...”

“It’s not the right word, mum. I just can’t... remember. Have I already told you about my dream last night?”

“No, you haven’t. What about it?”

“It was nasty. I saw myself come out of somewhere and look for my car, but it was not there. I looked everywhere, but couldn’t find it. I went to another road. Maybe, I left it there? I did realize I couldn’t have because it was too far. Then I went to another road... So I found myself so far, in another part of the town, but there was no car. I knew it couldn’t have been stolen. Would you imagine, I could not remember where I had left it but I knew it hadn’t been stolen. So I got a headache and I woke up.”

“Did you not find it?”

“No,” Mikhail deeply sighed.

“So is everything OK with the car?”

“Yes, here it is, under the window, everything is safe and the documents are under the sun visor.”

“It’s only a dream, it doesn’t mean anything. The car is safe, that’s the main thing.”

“Before New Year the same thing had happened. This time in real life! I went shopping. To that big shop in Slava Avenue, you must know it. They have everything there. I had to buy some treats for a special occasion. I was rushing, speeding up, breaking the rules. I don’t know why. Usually I drive carefully. Parked the car in a car park. There were about fifty cars there. Went into the shop, got a trolley and had been shopping for an hour, I think. After I paid, I came out with the trolley – the car was not there! I looked everywhere – there was no car. I pressed the buttons on the car keys, trying to switch the alarm on – nothing! Not a single car squeaked. That was when I decided it had been stolen. Just the right place for that. They could watch and choose, then get the alarm code with their little tool and take the car. Nightmare! What could I do? Ring the militia? My briefcase with the documents was in the car... Then I accidentally went further away and round the corner saw another car park. I ran there like a mad man with the trolley through the snow piles. The wheels on the trolley were tilting out... I left all the shopping and ran as fast as I could. When I got to the car park I tried to find the same place on the left, in the corner, in the second row...”

Mikhail even got sweaty telling his mother about the adventure, “It’s hard to believe. I was covered with snow and sweat when I found the car, as a lost child. And my head started aching as much as it had in

the dream. I had entered one entrance and left through another door. The other door was on the other side of the building. Would you believe that? Then I was driving like a drunk man, changing the lane, swerving, shouting at other drivers who were moving slowly... I couldn't recognize myself."

Anna Yakovlevna didn't say anything, tidied up the dishes and made the tea. Mikhail was quiet, he was looking somewhere trying to understand how it was all connected.

"You should go and see a doctor, Mishenka. Or talk to learned people. Your father used to remember nothing sometimes as well. But that happened after a booze."

"I know I should. But not here. They will start gossiping straight away. I will do it abroad. When I go to Holland..."

His mother calmed down. The medical system is good in the West, unlike in this country. They should be able to prescribe him something. They were having tea with strawberry jam and chatting about nothing. Mikhail was not in a rush. Anna Yakovlevna had never reminded him about his ex-wife, his baby's death, Abkhazia and hard times after his return from the hospital.

Late at night Mikhail would go into the bath house. He would have a long steam, pour cold water on himself, then have a steam again... He would sleep there, in the rest room, and early in the morning he would wake up, put his favourite suit on, take his documents, local mobile phone and disappear without disturbing his mother.

10

Malkin had been trying to persuade Dvorsky to drop everything and have a trip to Amsterdam, meet their former boss – Academician, get out and about in a company of rich "mates". It was easier to say than to do. They were both extremely busy. But one day, after Dvorsky located yet another payment from the "protection", he was able to escape from the triangle between Finland, Cyprus and Switzerland and flew to Amsterdam. Malkin was already there and meeting him at the airport.

"We are going to meet a billionaire tomorrow," Leonid cheerfully said without greeting him when they were getting into the car. "I went

to Maximov's yesterday. He will introduce us," Malkin turned to his friend and significantly raised his finger. "The billionaire, Soyfer, collects companies with assets. First he fills them with something graceful, like our patents, business-plans, investments, management, then he brings them out for an IPO...

"Brings out where?" Dvorsky had never heard that word before.

"So neglected, Mishenka! That's rudiments of the home business. Everything is upside down, no wonder you haven't got a clue! IPO is in English. It means initial public offering of shares. Would you imagine, he'll get all the rubbish, decorate it nicely and start offering it to everyone. Not the assets but shares."

"I remember that," Dvorsky said unwillingly. "About shares. Maximov was t-telling us. He was talking about that seven years ago... at a meeting of the Central C-committee. You were there together!"

"Exactly! Everyone was scared of private property then. So he was reassuring the General Secretary. He was saying, the company and assets would be ours and the shares, papers of the firm would be your private property. There is detestable private property, he was saying to him, but there are only papers in it. So what's happening now?"

"Now, Misha, other things are important. I am talking about Soyfer. You see, we've got to figure out who is asking and who is offering. Do we wait for his investments to our assets? Or is he offering us money and dreaming of our patents?"

Malkin had thought in advance, he had planned the conversation with Dvorsky, he even had written a script on a piece of paper. His goal was to prepare the patent author to do what he had never liked doing – finding money.

Leonid accidentally caught Mikhail's eye. His eyes were absolute indifferent to everything he was saying. No sparkle, no interest at all. Dvorsky was answering questions, somehow reacting, but his thoughts seemed to be far away.

"That's something new," Leonid thought. He hadn't seen such metamorphosis in his partner before. "This is blues! We've got to get rid of it, whatever happens! We've got an important meeting tomorrow!"

"That's enough for today!" Malkin said quickly. "We are going to leave your staff in the hotel and will go into town! I will show you the beauty of the free world. You've only been to Cyprus lately. It's much more interesting here," Malkin started clowning around. Knocking his

palm on the fist, he kept saying, "Do you want to?" Leonid tried to understand if his partner slept with any women at all. He knew Dvorsky was divorced. He hadn't seen any attractive woman next to him for two years. Or unattractive. He might be spending his time with a woman sneakily. No, that was unlikely. Leonid would have known. Why would he hide that? That meant Mishenka was either ill or the poor man was willing be in lack of use. Or he was just up in the clouds, like all mad scientists... Far and by, Malkin led Dvorsky to women.

The legal prostitution business struck Mikhail with its extend. Girls and women of all ages and sizes were standing in the windows of their "shops" offering one product – themselves.

"For as little as fifty dollars and twenty minutes they will help you to relax," the expert of all Petersburg female judges under thirty five tried to persuade Dvorsky. "They have a decent apartment there, everything is there: they've got a place of work in the cabin – a bed, a toilet and a wash basin. Three in one!"

Mikhail was more worried about the question, "What if twenty minutes is not enough? What happens then? Do you need to renew it?" He didn't receive any answers from Malkin.

The window girls looked not bad, definitely better than the ones outside Petersburg. Those tarts could bring you somewhere, get you drunk and rob you. Here everything was in full public view. People could see you going in and out. "But there is a problem," Dvorsky thought. "To shag them, you need to be aware you'll get a minimal set of services for the indicated sum. You can't touch them, kiss or turn round. Every extra service is probably another fifty dollars. To find it out in the process is not that nice. Every minute counts."

Usually thorough tourists made terms in advance and discussed every little detail of the intimate service. "It all looks completely spiritless," Mikhail shared his doubts with Malkin. "On the other hand, it's impossible to foresee everything. You've g-got to wait and see. The same thing as medicines. For instance, you take one as pain-relief and you hope it's for sleep, appetite and your liver as well. Actually, how cool it is! They are all registered, they pay tax, have insurance and in time they will get a pension, I am sure... Socialism!"

In the end they didn't do anything. The lonely scientific inventor got embarrassed. Malkin was about to negotiate but an agent in business like that didn't look clever.

So they kept walking. Now the customer of all hot spots brought his friend to a coffee shop for pot smoking.

"You've got to try drugs at least once," Leonid was trying to persuade him. "You are a scientist and don't know what it is." He would do it every time he came to Amsterdam. "But don't take anything with you, no parcels or wrappers. Dogs will sniff them at the airport."

In Amsterdam there were more coffee shops where people could smoke drugs than mobile toilets. The famous inventor of drugs was feeling himself committing a crime. On their way they would sneakily look at different coffee shops. They didn't like it there. Some were too foggy, some were full of black people. They didn't feel like sitting in a weird place with Black guys. They went back to the hotel but decided to pop into a plain coffee shop.

The music was on, everything was calm, but Dvorsky felt terrified. He nervously sat down on a little sofa in the corner and kept looking around, raising and lowering his head. He was looking for cameras on the walls. Malkin competently joined the noisy queue at the counter. The people there were busily and skilfully carrying little green packets, rolling cigarettes and chilling out. Leonid got two clear glass-tubes with yellow lids. Inside them there were carefully wrapped little bags worth five dollars each.

"Wow!" Malkin cheerfully livened up. "Here's prohibited stuff, we'll start now!"

Dvorsky clumsily poked his little bag into the bowl with a candle and lit up the cigarette trying to hold it elegantly between his thumb and index finger of his right hand. He started talking cleverly straight away, "Our mentality is ephemeral essence, it's unknown, unexplored, it's a blackbox. Amazingly, some weed and some s-smoke can knock the locks off this secret room. Inside there is kept some p-powerful hidden might, which is our subconsciousness."

"Well done, you are clever!" Malkin pronounced to answer Mikhail's lyric. He had already used nearly half of his five-dollar portion. "Exactly "Belomorcanal".

Non-smoking, delicate, prone to frequent colds Dvorsky's lungs refused dreadful tobacco smoke at first and Mikhail burst out coughing. Malkin, on the contrary, stayed casual and in some time put away the half of his bag and said he had had enough so far. That was the right thing to do. That was what would save the scientist-biochemist who was carried away with experiments over himself.

In spite of his cough, Mikhail kept inhaling smoke eagerly... Suddenly something flowed in front of his eyes. The walls and the tables disappeared, the bar with the people, coke bottles, glass-tubes and multicoloured bags flowed somewhere... The contour of his body disappeared. In front of his eyes some flashes passed. "Wow," Mikhail thought, "that's what glitches look like, I've got to write it down later." He emerged back and was about to tell Malkin about them when he flew away again...

It was not funny. He was being a molecule looking like a jelly-fish and flying near coloured chains of DNA. Those had stretched far to the right and left. The molecule kept sticking to one end or another. No! They wouldn't accept it. Then all of a sudden those long bickering chains started breathing, moving, turned around him several times like boa constrictors and were squeezing him. Dvorsky suddenly realized he didn't like it. He didn't like how the intensity of squeezing was growing, he didn't like his helplessness and he didn't like not being able to feel and control anything.

Mikhail emerged back again and the first thing he saw was Malkin's smiling face. He was saying something but Dvorsky couldn't hear anything.

"Let's g-go away from here," Dvorsky whispered with great difficulty. Malkin understood everything, put on his coat and dragged his friend to the hotel. In the room the beginning drug-taker started shivering, he was cold, he was sitting on the bed with the cover over him and weeping.

"I am feeling s-so sick," Mikhail pronounced distinctly. He sat there for a while, then took the cover off his head and wept again trying to say something clever at the same time, "I am feeling so b-bad... So bad. All my... hidden fears have come out. It's so scary there, oh my god! It's terrible there... It's sucking me in again..."

"I am scared," Dvorsky said to himself – or just thought – being on the other side of his conscience. He could clearly see and feel everything with each of his cells. "It's taking me into the slough... I am screaming, "Don't want that!" but no one can hear me. My conscience is split into thousand "me". They are all transparent, round, they are jumping like balls and bouncing off the giant and motionless molecule standing on hairy human legs... I've seen it already. It was strangling me... In the corner there is another "ball", a different one... It's interesting my

conscience if fine. I think it is.... That's my father, he's come up to me, he's saying something and giving me a cuddle... The same as thirty years ago. What has he got in his hands? A bath besom! There is no me, just a molecule... Such a shame! I want to hear him, talk to him... I want to be in the bath house... But I can't. My father has stepped aside, he's smiling and singing to himself. Now I can see the nominal director Vasiliy. I've never seen him, but I wanted to meet him and now he is here. Sitting at the table. It's negotiations... Yes, he looks like me. He's shouting something, waving his arms, trying to explain something to me. Or not to me? He's standing up. He wants to hit me... I can see his fist is getting inside me... Where? One of the clear, hardly noticeable molecules... I can see the fraction of "me", as a silent witness, watching everything happening, hiding, keeping silence and looking after everything. But here is another one now. This one is out of tune with the first one, they are arguing, the same as Vasiliy... All of a sudden the "ball" lying in the corner started rolling. It's rolling and rolling..." The big molecule got up and swallowed it. Everything started flashing and shining and on the floor there a peak was growing. It looked like Elbrus, humpy and inclined... A wild thought came into his mind, "Now I know what it's like to be crazy. I thought I was a complex creature but... A little sniff – and I cry, another sniff – and I laugh."

For some time Dvorsky had been turning from one condition to another, he'd been laughing, weeping, shivering, his legs or feet or hands had been shaking.

Malkin put something in a glass with water, mixed it and forced Dvorsky to drink it. Altogether Mikhail drank five big glasses of water with sugar.

"No effect, only my tongue got stuck to the roof of the mouth," Dvorsky was reasoning as if he was describing an experiment with a dog. "Also it's very difficult to drink, as I am a bodiless molecule, my hand seems to go through the glass without feeling its weight. It feels like I've just had anaesthesia having my teeth treated. If you start eating before its due time, you'll bite your lips in blood – and feel nothing."

In the morning Mikhail woke up. He moved his leg, then his arm – everything was there. He opened his eyes – they were swollen but he could open them and see. No headache. Only the redness of his weeping eyes reminded him of the nightmare the day before. Malkin came. They had a cup of tea in the room and went out. Maximov would ring

them soon and they had to be fit. The whole plan prepared in advance by Malkin was ruined. He couldn't understand what his partner was still capable of.

They had been walking for a long time to air their lungs. They found themselves far away. Dvorsky was standing on a canal bank in silence and looking at the white swans. He couldn't get an eyeful of them. A small motorboat passed. The swans swam aside without a fuss or wing waving. They didn't even turn their long necks towards the danger. Unlike the ducks, who immediately flew up as far as they could. Malkin was nearby, he was constantly disappearing in the little shops and didn't interfere with his friend's peace. They took a cab to get to the hotel in time. In the car Dvorsky gradually relaxed, remembered Malkin meeting him at the airport the day before, his words about the billionaire and thought, "His investments to our assets... Rubbish! What does IPO have to do with all that? No one will give anything to our country!"

The cab was approaching the hotel when Mikhail suddenly paid attention to a nice two-storeyed building opposite it. It was a counselor's office. Tomorrow Dvorsky had to visit it. That was actually the reason for him coming to Amsterdam. In Larnaca he was recommended a lady with a rare name Valta, she was either a psychoanalyst or a therapist. She had come here from the Soviet Union. Ten years before she had left for Israel, then she moved to Amsterdam.

Dvorsky fell into a muse because everything around him suddenly connected in his head and stood in a line of very similar events of their meaning and value. The doctor he was going to visit tomorrow, Vitka Zavialov whose funeral had been a month before, yesterday's dip into nirvana... And those swans...

11

Mikhail felt he needed to talk to his friend. Now or never! It was not good time, though. As always!

"You know, Leonid, I've always wanted to talk to you!"

"Sorry to ask you, what should I do?" Malkin understood that his partner was going to talk about his proud unwillingness to be engaged with patents promotions. To look for investors, customers to buy in-

vention licenses, to bribe for clinical tests of the new drugs, then to produce pills or ampules was below him. But Dvorsky pretended he hadn't heard the silly question.

"Permanent conspiracy and defences instead of the real business," Mikhail started, "protection against these and those and against ourselves. Permanent hopes for that g-guy who will save and take the decision. I have decided to talk to Vasya Prokhorov. I am calling him but he isn't coming. Who does he think he is? I need to t-talk to him. I can't do it through the messenger all the time. I can't talk through you. D-do you understand? It's the same as what happened yesterday with the tarts..."

"Is it my fault again?"

"Maybe... Only..."

"Only what? You should've sold yourself straight away, Misha. At the most expensive price! A usual deal of a usual pro. What's so bad about it?"

"You pulled me somewhere else..."

"I did? Academician would have hired you but you ran off..."

"I was ordered so I ran off."

"So you say!"

Malkin and Mikhail, gloomy and nervous, got out of the car and in the hotel doorway Leonid suddenly stopped, roughly turned Dvorsky towards him by his shoulder and shaking him shouted, "Listen, why did you start? Why did you start now? Do you want to spoil everything? Do you want to get into your bed and suck a dummy... with vodka?" Leonid opened the door and confidently walked to the reception.

Mikhail remained standing in the doorway. Not because he changed his mind. No! He was offended. "Like this, publicly," he was thinking. "What for?" He was dealing with all the stuff every day instead of breaking through in science. He could really invent a drug to shut down medicine with all its half-was things! Two of his acquaintances from the university clinic in Zurich knew that for sure. They knew, believed in his success and would do everything to find the peculiarities of the complicated formula of the new "stunning" medical drug.

"To forget about that? Never! I have got used to the stupid word "tolerance" lately. That's the thing! Malkin has just said the most important thing for me without even realizing it. This is what my life might depend on. Not just part of it, but all my life..." The intellectual process came to a standstill. He'd gone mad – "life", part of life..."

“Where’s Malkin? Skunk! He’s already stuffing the passports to the receptionist, both of them. When did he manage to nick mine?”

Dvorsky had started thinking about his mission. He was scared to formulate it categorically. “A salaried employee... Yuck! What sorts of words are they? They used to be like that. Now they are pulling faces at that. That’s all its fault! Private property! But it’s disgusting to work for people like Ignat with the crutches, Televichok with a plait or a former KGB officer with his pathological giggling. Today looks like Epiphany.” Mikhail remembered himself forgetting the word “professional” for the first time. “Exactly! That happened when this light and quick little lawyer from the Regional Committee turned up second time. Yes, he lifted me up, like a feather lost in a crack of the old dry wooden floor, blew on me and since then I, Mikhail Dvorsky, have been flying all over the world like a lost soul. Anyone can catch, swat me and hustle me in the crack again or navigate me in an opposite direction. Yes, he did pull me out. He got me out and threw me somewhere very high. Where there’s a lot of money. But a lot of money means lots of risk! And I need something nice and calm. Like those swans... Something solid and known... like a bilberry pie and fresh milk. And the pie should have those delicate light blue layers of sugar or wet batter soaked richly in bilberry juice. Wow! How nice! With fresh milk, not steamed, but cool... After the bath house.” Thinking about that, Mikhail even rolled his eyes estimating whether he would be able to eat all of the pie or just two thirds of it...

Pretty girls from the reception, a shop of clothes from Dolce & Gabbana, security in black – Dvorsky didn’t notice anything. “Wouldn’t it be nice for someone else to make those dreadful decisions!”

“Bear in mind, things can’t be done like that!” Malkin finished check-in and interrupted his friend’s sweet memories.

“What can’t be done? Where? Are you my p-partner? You are. I share my doubts and worries,” Dvorsky seemed to have sobered up. He started talking clearly and logically, “Do you want me to keep myself to myself and snap? Believe me, everything will disappear. We should think and seek for comfort for each p-partner.”

Going to the lift, where some people had already gathered, Mikhail stopped talking. Then, walking along the corridor, he went on, “What’s wrong here? You say, I started... Why did you start yourself? I know how nice it is for you all. For you and the colonel without his shoulder loops. What a life – just get your share every three months. Really,

this joint-stock company is a crap! As long as you get a piece of paper with the word “share” on it you can do nothing...”

They entered Mikhail’s room. Malkin opened the mini-bar, took out two small bottles of whisky and poured it into the glasses standing on the table next to the fruit bowl. They sat in the arm-chairs opposite each other.

The latest six months something strange had been happening to Dvorsky. On the one hand, he felt comfortable – there was no need to take sudden decisions, so horrid for his nature. All complicated and risky problems were being solved practically without his participation. At the same time, something new and unusual had appeared. He would switch off – he couldn’t work for long. His isolation restricted his communication, wouldn’t let him discuss his problems, he didn’t have anyone to share his thoughts and doubts. The non-contact way of management that he had thought of had become ineffective. In the first place it hit Mikhail. Not from good living he had decided to risk his safety and meet Prokhorov. As he was responsible for his business, he understood fast that apart from his science there were other things which effected the result.

Mikhail automatically changed the subject protecting his important idea of hired labour and professionals.

“Tell me why all the profit is g-going to shareholders? They did invest their money some time ago, but not their time and skills! By the way, what is joint possession? It’s f-fictitious capital! And what’s that? No one has ever known that. I am sure, in time the shareholders will abandon the myth of owning something...”

“Anything will come in handy for the poor. I wouldn’t refuse it,” Leonid gave a guilty smile. He wouldn’t give up and kept joking. Maximov would ring soon and they would go to the Dutch billionaire, but Dvorsky got an aggravation of reflexion – the usual illness of intelligentsia. “Are you mad? Some people are investing their money and some – their time and skills. What is not clear here? Money is an absolute value. Any business is for it!”

“For me the whole conception of a group of people turning ideas and relations into p-product being someone’s property is absurd. One blow – and there will be nothing left.”

Dvorsky stood up and made for the window. His eyes shone with confidence. Malkin drank his glass and the one of his companion.

"There's never a dull moment with you, Misha. One always needs to snatch something," with a smile Malkin pointed at the second empty glass and threw himself on the sofa stretching his legs.

"Keep your feet away from here!"

Leonid was shocked – that was too harsh for Misha who was very gentle in every respect. He moved a little and after a pause started talking, "You know what? Why don't you arrange a meeting of those hatred shareholders according to established procedure and try to unbosom feelings there. I'll see what it will end up with. I am sure you won't last longer than a minute..."

"Leonid, you are a lawyer, not me!" Dvorsky interrupted him. He seemed to know what was what. "Try to gather everyone. According to established procedure. You d-don't have a chance! What am I on about? As you say, in a minute there will be no nominal director. He's nowhere to be seen anyway! Would you find the owner? Let him s-sign a paper and go to a tax office with it to c-confirm his signature. Would he be able to do that? I am not sure! We have invented all that because we were scared of the outside forces. What shall we do with the internal forces? What if we break up? Everyone who got into a crisis and then asked for help, made the same mistake," wound-up Mikhail went on, "Did you forget? They couldn't stand documents, meetings and management. They believed there would always be a mess in the relations. But they called it friendship, trust and so on, even love. Now we are in their shoes. Is it true?"

"No, it's not! I have been working seven years with documents. I love them! They are my living!"

Documents were everything for Malkin so he fell silent. Mikhail looked at his friend's eyes and understood it was no good to carry on with the conversation. After a minute Leonid got in the arm-chair again and glanced mischievously at Dvorsky, "I can't believe you said about gathering a meeting..."

"You said all that..."

"That's not what I meant..."

"Hell with you, Leonid! It doesn't matter what you meant. I am talking about a different thing and you don't get it. Do you remember us working in 1994 on the crisis in... What is it called? Any worker there knew what screw to loosen and everything would go out of the window."

Malkin's mobile phone started vibrating on the table, then it started playing the tune from the film "The Shield and the Sword". The conversation was interrupted without it even getting started.

Leonid half-rose, stretched his arm unwillingly and looked at the phone screen. The number didn't pop up. In cases like this Malkin would press the green button and keep silent trying to recognize the caller's voice.

12

In Moscow, in number four in Ipatievsky lane in the Soviet time there used to be Central Committee administration. In November 1996 there dwelt other bureaucrats – President administration establishment. In spite of all the differences in motivations and life philosophy, religious confessions and upbringing, both sets of bureaucrats had one thing in common. Without appearing to do so, they influenced efficiently on resolving issues associated with big cities and business units of the vast country. It wasn't done on its own. Only one person could speak on behalf of those organizations then and now – the General Secretary or the President. The rest of them just made the decisions ready.

It was long and dreary to collect and coordinate everything that the leader was to deliver. It was much easier and more tempting to huddle a job through without waiting for the first person who would always be busy with very important questions. Just a small job. There were always principles for that. They just needed their specific implementation. Of course, there were local authorities for that. But the routine was sucking them in deeper and deeper and didn't let them execute the heaven-born in time to a good quality. That was why the responsible Administration officials, sometimes breaking the law and inside instructions – for the good of the course – had to show great initiative. Or, to be exact, to misuse their official powers. Soon phones would be ringing in the Ministry and Government departments, at the regional head, local Ministries of Internal Affairs and FSB administrations and Tax police. Informal "requests" would be pouring there from Moscow, covering with a muddy wave numerous official government instructions of the Council of Ministers vice-chairmen. Even though everyone knew a phone call was nothing, it

couldn't be clipped to a file and it would be better to let sleeping dogs lie... As they said, they couldn't help, but they would be happy to harm!

In the right wing of the eight-storeyed building there was the department of the Security Council. There they prepared the President's decisions on safety and security arrangements – government, defence and medical and public health care.

One of the department boss' office was on the third floor. In the same room the joint health and safety committee was gathering from time to time.

It was the first of November, Monday, the day of meetings. It was empty in the hallways, empty in the toilets, nickel-plated litter-bins were clean and shone like mirrors. Since the weekend the carpets on the floors were clean and had not absorbed the cigarette ashes. A floor below there was a canteen. There was no smell coming from it yet. The ventilation in the building was old, plenum, and usually people could smell what food had been delivered. The department employees tried not to make the carpet dirty and walked on the side of it in tandem, slipped into their offices and a moment later, having got the document files, gathered at their boss'.

First of all everyone would report their work results for the week. After that they would discuss a statement prepared especially for that day on some relevant and anxious topic. After the meeting the boss would be going to another one, where they would be listening to his report on accomplishment of a large number of the management's orders.

At the table there sat four leading experts and a deputy. The deputy always sat to the left of his boss. It was more convenient if the leader decided to hand over the receiver of the red telephone to him. The rest could sit where they wanted. To the left or to the right. Democracy! Two people had only come to the administration recently, straight after the secretary's deputies were appointed, so for want of habit, they were fidgeting in their seats, rushing to their chores, their unfinished inquiries and reports. They thought it was important. Before the meeting started, they had exchanged the news and now were ready to any questions and surprises, they were sitting, whispering and watching their boss' masterful work. Nice French eau de toilette always scented his office, dazzled and made everyone feel sleepy.

It had been nearly three months since a son of a famous Foreign Ministry officer and later one of the Russian President's speech-makers,

Mikhail Petrovich Alyabiev, had become the head of department. In the latest five years he had not changed much, he was still quite plump, with languorous eyes and black curls hanging down his big forehead.

Alyabiev gallantly put the phone down enjoying the demonstration, and started calling the shots in spite of unstoppable second phone ringing. The “red” and “white” telephones were quiet, considering the importance of the meetings, and the “Kremlin” telephone had not been working for a week.

Everybody thought Mikhail Petrovich was enjoying the fuss of day-to-day affairs and controlling not the main goal, but the things that involved responsibility – whether that was a document, words of a fact of presence. He loved to say, “If the problem can be solved, it’s not worth worrying about it. If the problem can’t be solved, it’s no use worrying.”

This sort of philosophy allowed Alyabiev to do several things at the same time and greatly enjoy them. The more matters he had to do, the easier it was to juggle them, managing to go to his favourite mountain resort in France. The main thing was to constantly keep the flow of events and to engage other people in it. The most important skill of a new leader for him was to keep a close watch on the continuously changing distribution of powers of authorities, with a profit of himself to build up patterns of a big number of people from the administration, his bosses, sometimes their bosses, connected between themselves “system” participants. Today they were listening to the report of the youngest leading specialist of the department, Konstantin Yezhelev. The reports of everyone had been finished without any variation from the norm, now the colleagues could relax listening to the report “of the dependence of the country’s safety on the development of the modern pharmaceutical production” or ignoring it. They could do their own things, carefully looking through their papers, pretending those were the materials that Yezhelev laid on the table.

“Pharmaceutical market formation in Russia started in 1992,” Yezhelev was muttering in a monotonous voice, “and has been going on in very specific conditions, which are defined with transformation of the centralized government health care system, giving its citizens a wide range of social protection...”

“Don’t, Kostya! Don’t mutter and don’t waste our time,” the boss stopped the young colleague roughly. “We don’t need all those essen-

tials. Especially when your phrase-mongering has been written and is in front of you on a piece of paper. Tell us clearly and in short – what to do, when and how?”

The department leader had already studied everything about the pharmaceutical industry. What was more, unlike anyone else in the room, he knew very well that the business area was the most attractive for investments and convenient for money laundering. He knew the answers to the questions without the silly report. But it was important for the answers to be pronounced by someone else at the presence of everyone. For example, by Yezhelev. Then it would be the information received according to established procedure. The employee had been getting ready for the meeting according to the confirmed plan before him, three months ago, he had officially inquired statistics, explicit data on pharmaceutical companies.

Alyabiev was waiting to hear the names of the companies and their “criminality” in front of witnesses. Later he would go to his direct boss, officially report of the analysis findings carried out by Yezhelev and ask for approval to confirm the information he had to get additional information.

“In short, we hardly have anything and they, in the States and Japan, have everything,” the leading specialist of the department instantly reorganized his report. “We’ve got good ideas, preliminary work of new drugs. Since the Soviet time. But we can’t produce them because of the lack of technologies. Export is unreal...”

“However, the companies in the centre and in the North-West are working,” Alyabiev’s assistant butted in, “and they seem to be prospering. We have one outside Moscow, “Pharmavit” and there is one in Petersburg, “Pharma-2”.

“They are effective as business units,” the leading specialist didn’t give up and clumsily continued his role as a spokesman. “But to get to the export market or to influence the public health...”

“Those pharmacists don’t have a good imagination, do they? The names are the same and primitive,” the boss demonstrated sincere surprise to hear supposedly new for him information. Then he went on talking in his velvet voice, smoothly as if he was lecturing students, “The government helps those who are effective. That’s the normal choice for any investments, isn’t it? If they are effective, why are they uncontrolled?”

“Exactly,” the deputy emphasized again. “Do you have anything about it? Where do they have investments from? Who protects them? What about their taxes?”

“No,” Yezhov answered quietly and dropped his eyes. “I haven’t got anything about that.”

“Pharmaceutical industry is 600 billion dollars a year all over the world,” the deputy tried to fail the speaker. “And you are saying you haven’t got anything about it.”

“What about Russia?” the boss asked.

“No data, Mikhail Petrovich,” the deputy said in a pleasing voice showing his participation in the current work of his colleagues. “We tried to estimate. It’s about zero point zero one per cent...”

“Why is it?” Alyabiev asked with interest. “As far as I know, pharmaceutical industry remains one of the most profitable. Its profitability of sales is nearly 17%.”

The colleagues sitting in the room decided they shouldn’t keep quiet as the boss was asking questions and they could demonstrate their interest in the national pharmaceuticals and nation safety.

“I’ll try to answer this question, Mikhail Petrovich,” the divisional manager spoke. “In these seventeen per cent two thirds are from the sale of cholesterol drugs, cardiovascular agents and asthma drugs. We just don’t have them. What’s more, we have nothing to do with those drugs.”

“God knows what!” Alyabiev thought. “What if they are in the loop already? This one has been working here a long time and is in good terms with the deputy. What if... No, I don’t think so. He’s just a bit afraid of me, so he has prepared. Anyway, I’ve been in business a long time.”

The red phone rang. Everyone stood up and headed for the exit. The head of department stopped them with his arm, pointed to his seat to his deputy to continue the meeting, took the phone, listened to his boss, then left his office and walked fast to the Security council assistant secretary.

Mikhail Petrovich’ new boss was short, quick, tonsured, with glasses in a gold frame, he used to be a scientist. He stretched his arm to Alyabiev and his palm was pointed down at a right angle. He had to grab it like a stick and shake it bowing his head in time with it.

“Tell me, Michael,” the boss asked him without ceremony, “when will the federal programme on pharmaceuticals start working?”

The deputy secretary amiably clapped him on his shoulder and Mikhail got frightened. They had not met before, he didn't say "hello" or "take a seat". He seemed to be sitting here and listening to everything that was happening in the offices.

"Boris Markovich, today we have listened to our colleague's report he had prepared on this subject. You rang me in the middle of our discussion."

"And?" the boss was persistent. "Taking into account your service hours, my report to the premier, agreement to all ministries... How long do you need? Pure procedural, how long?"

Alyabiev decided his leader was pushing him on purpose and putting the responsibility on him. So he started, "The market in this sphere, Boris Markovich, is remarkable for its high intensity of confluence, absorption and co-operation. Small pharmaceutical companies may have the new drugs but not enough sales and marketing powers. Alternatively, big corporations have spare powers in this sphere. Agreeably, both look for joint possibilities for capitalization raise by means of synergetic effect of cooperation..."

"I don't think you got it. Boris Nickolayevich took interest in this problem. I said a five year programme would be ready in a month. Am I not right?"

"As a matter of principle, you are right. It will be ready in a month. Only not many things will change in this sphere in five years. We need at least ten years! Because the percentage of the drugs being developed to be reaching the market stage of sales remains very low. In average, in the world it's only one or two for ten thousand."

The department head saw the boss fidgeting, so he tried to say something clever. To say and immediately ask for a sanction to contact the power ministries for seeking new information on home pharmaceutical companies.

"The total cost of the market launch of the new drugs has grown by nearly ten times. High risk of bad luck, long-lasting clinic tests and growing expenses for obtaining a permit from the government..."

"Alyabiev, stop talking cleverly. You are not at the Academic Board. You can do what you want but make sure you've got the programme in a month time. Keep everyone on their toes, spin like a top. You fail the procedure – I'll forgive you. The deadline is in one month!"

Boris Markovich waited a second or two, then added, probably because he had doubts about the new department head's possibilities,

“Go downstairs. There is “economic security” there. I will tell them to help you”.

Although the narrow and strict specialization was the foundation of any power department, Alyabiev, as a son of the President’s favourite speechwriter, had learned in the last three months everything about the economical department. For instance, he knew his employees worked not just with the Federal Security Department and Ministry of Internal Affairs administrations or organizations led by those respected departments, but also controlled semi-criminal elements. Everything depended on the purpose and timing. Today he would be able to get the main staff involved to the real business at last, to define the task clearly without any fear of being grassed on. How gracefully he had done it! It had only taken five minutes. He didn’t even have to ask the boss for anything!

“Well, my Petersburg friend! It’s your turn now!” Mikhail was so happy with his good luck that he forgot all about his employees and the meeting that was still taking place in his office. He called a car and without putting his coat on went to Chistye Prudy where Nelly lived.

13

“Hello, Leonid Alexandrovich, I haven’t recognized your voice. It’s a good sign – you’ll be rich. Dvorsky and I are already in Amsterdam. I was just about to ring you...” Malkin stopped talking and listened to Academician. Then he brown-nosed Maximov, “Oh, yes, Leonid Alexandrovich! How are you? How is your wife? Really? That’s wonderful! Yes, we’ll be there in a minute.” Leonid got quiet, twisted his head looking for Dvorsky and finding him in the corner of the room near the open mini-bar started making faces pointing at the phone. “Excellent, we’ll be outside the hotel in half an hour. Thank you, Leonid Alexandrovich, I appreciate it. See you soon.”

Malkin threw himself in the arm-chair and looked at him expressively to demonstrate his own significance.

“Can you believe it? Maximov will pick us up himself and take us to the “scissors-bill”. How about that? Not bad, is it? What did I tell you?”

“You told me the shareholder meeting would tear me to pieces...”

“Shove it!”

“You shove it! It’s not your room, is it? I am not sure which one of us should go to bed and learn to suck a dummy with vodka.”

“My goodness! He remembered,” Malkin thought and slowly left Dvorsky’s room.

At the time arranged a black “Mercedes” pulled up to the hotel. Academician was not in it. When Dvorsky and Malkin came out of the hotel, the cheeky driver flashed the headlights. They got in the car and he drove off. In twenty kilometres on the motorway A-200 they passed by Haarlem. Mikhail had been to Holland before but he had never found time to get into the small town. Now he didn’t get to see the town hall of the mid-fourteenth century and the famous meat market. They had been driving another ten minutes and got to the North Sea, to Boulevard Barnaart in Zandvoort. The famous beach was empty – it was autumn. The car stopped in a car park, near the sea shore. There was a small park nearby. In the air there were a lot of falling leaves. A blast of the sea wind was diluting their tangy aroma of fading. The waves were running into the coast, biting it and quickly going back. In the deep of the park there was a plain stall. A path covered with wet yellow leaves along the cold sea was running towards it. Under the red shades there was a plastic table and four chairs. Maximov was sitting on one of them.

As always, Academician looked very smart, he was wearing suede shoes, brown cord trousers, a beige shirt and an apple green jumper. On the table, on a paper plate there were untouched sandwiches with brown bread and fine pickled herring, which had no bones and was thickly sprinkled with onion rings. On seeing such beauty, Malkin only thought, but his body already pronounced loudly and confidently, “You can eat a lot of that!” Confidently – because he remembered and reasonably believed that only in small seaside towns in Holland you could try the fish caught a couple of hours before and cooked by the home recipe of a cafe owner.

The meeting of the countrymen started not as cheerfully as they wanted. Having seen Maximov, Mikhail instantly remembered his business trip to Israel and hard sufferings he had experienced when he learned about his scientific leader’s arrest. Maximov didn’t feel right he had not remembered of any of his assistants and pupils after he got released and left the country. Malkin had always taken it personally because Academician had never shared with him.

"I have decided to surprise my assistant," Academician said getting off the plastic chair. "I am sure, if the regular of all courts of Leningrad and its suburbs tried it, everyone will hear his favourite saying."

"I've just thought of it, Leonid Alexandrovich," Malkin said and sat at the table at once. Dvorsky came up to Maximov and shook his hand.

"Hello, Mikhail Nickolayevich. Glad to see you in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. You must be a Major now?"

"Thank you for the invitation," Dvorsky answered calmly. Suddenly he felt like a screen covered him, deafened him and made him talk rubbish. What was important – he didn't even remember what that man in a jumper had just asked him and why he and the company lawyer were here for.

"What, are you grooving here?" Dvorsky asked in a rude voice. "Are you here to gobble, Leonid?"

A minute later everything went back to normal. As if the wind blew here from the North Sea and the artificial shade fell off Mikhail.

"Is Soyfer somewhere here?" Dvorsky said as if nothing had happened.

"He is not far from here," Maximov answered. He didn't understand why Mikhail acted so strange, talked loudly and not to the point. He explained it by the peculiarity of the creative nature of Mikhail who was always immersed into his own world. "There is a small town not far from here. Famous and rich Dutch live there. By the way, I also rent a house there. It's five minutes drive from here. So are you going to try the herring?"

Dvorsky refused. He didn't eat vinegary food. Leonid didn't think twice, he took a sandwich and swallowed it quickly, then he took another one, put the bread aside and the rest in his mouth. He didn't talk, he let Dvorsky do that. Both Dvorsky and Maximov knew that Malkin loved eating and saying, "If you eat a lot, you can't tell lies!" Without getting off his seat, Leonid shoved all the sandwiches that Academician had bought, ordered five more and ate them up as well.

They didn't talk a lot and there wasn't any conflict. But the unsettled emotions, living inside them since the summer of 1992, were in their way all the time.

"Well, we'll have time to talk," Academician pattered, "Soyfer is waiting for us. Are you ready?"

The "Mercedes" was ready to drive off.

Five minutes later they were at the entrance of a giant muted white two-storeyed mansion. The billionaire was meeting them. He was around fifty, wearing glasses and looked like the former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, as tall as him, and very intelligent. You could see it on his high forehead. He was wearing a short white zipped jacket and trousers of uncertain colour. He looked like Maximov. Only his face was smooth, without any wrinkles, and his dark hair was combed back. They greeted each other but didn't shake hands, went into the house and found themselves in a wide hallway. On the high walls from the floor to the ceiling there hung five portraits painted in oil. Four of them were of Soyfer's sons and the fifth was of all the family.

His wife came to greet them. She was young, pretty and, as they could see immediately, well-educated. While the host was giving instructions to the servants, she took the visitors to the library and showed them rare and expensive books and originals of famous artists' paintings. Just the library on its own was worth fifty million. There they had champagne from big glasses on delicate stems and went out into the garden. It looked like the scenery for the opera "Eugene Onegin": benches, a fountain in a pond, swans and a pavilion. The swans, bench and pavilion where they came for a serious conversation – everything was white.

Everything had been organized immaculately. The wife disappeared and Soyfer turned up. Academician at last introduced his colleagues to him properly. They talked English and out of regards for Dvorsky a little French.

"Thomas," Maximov started, "on the way here my friends asked if their business interested you. Actually this is what I used to do, we started it together. You know..."

"Of course. Max," Soyfer called the corresponding member of the Russian Academy of science without ceremony, "I am interested in everything interesting people do. I know you. They are your friends. That's enough for me. One moment, I will turn the heating up, it's autumn." The host turned on two gas heaters.

The conversation was flowing naturally. Soyfer was definitely an expert of negotiations. The important issues were interspersing with divagations, all of a sudden they started talking about women.

"You should visit the "Red Lights" area. As you know, prostitution and brothels are legal in this country. The same as marihuana. It grows

on the window-sills nearly in each house. However, there is a criminal sex industry, too..."

Malkin and Dvorsky looked at each other but didn't say anything.

"I wonder if the extent could be measured," Maximov said for some reason.

"Of course, Leonid Alexandrovich," Malkin, being an expert in a women's question, joined in, "but it's difficult. Everything, you know, like the secret nature of trade, forcing women to keep silence, information uptake risks..."

"Nevertheless," the host went on, "the United Nations experts manage to estimate. According to them, all over the world, the volume of trade varies from seven to twelve billion dollars a year."

"Wow!" Academician imagined the mentioned sum. The billionaire was talking about the sex industry the way he would be reading a lecture or speaking of his main business.

"He must have tried it himself," Dvorsky thought of Soyfer, "for the risk is much lower than in drugs and the profit exceeds costs to buy women nearly twenty times. Mikhail learned about it when he was on a business trip to the Far East. He was told a Russian or Ukrainian woman earned from fifty to a hundred thousand US dollars a year for her pimp.

"Last year there was a judicial trial of the illegal sex service dealers, and a Russian woman was witnessing. She was even included in a Witness Protection Programme and given a residence permit. They showed the trial on many channels here. She was a very pretty girl, I should say. She was called Masha or maybe Dasha..."

"So what happened? How long did they get?" Maximov asked with a keen interest.

"I am not sure, but they were all locked up, including three coppers."

Maximov was a frequent guest at all sorts of parties of the local elite. People loved to listen to him. Firstly, he was an academician, secondly, he had been in prison. That was cool! That was beyond comprehension. Today Leonid Alexandrovich was playing a very unusual role of an agent. He tried to change the subject, which was closer to him and was leading to the main goal of their meeting: what to do with pharmaceuticals in Russia?

"As we are constantly talking of the country of four revolutions, without looking common, I'd like to say a couple of words about busi-

ness in Russia. If you can say this about the country where there is no concept of running a business." Everyone nodded in a placable way. "What's the difference between the Russian business and the Western one? You've got to know, feel and maximally use it when taking decisions. But there... In Russia two main lines of life philosophy collide..."

Malkin forgot about his eternal role of a mediator and facilitator and was yawning, covering his mouth with his hand. Dvorsky was relaxing and hardly understood anything from what Academician was saying in English. The host was sipping whisky and listening politely to the big physiology and biochemistry specialist's clumsy English.

"To live well is just half the battle. To live well and long – that is the goal," Maximov was looking just at one person and was throwing all that stream of consciousness just for him. "The difference between these two is in the psychology of power holders, in the form of current democracy. In Russia it's the simulated democracy, with powerful stratification of society for the extra rich and very poor. In the Western countries the democracy is developed. It has its own complicated problems, but one difference is doubtless. The underdevelopment of the Russian market, surrogacy of democratic institutions, wild usage of administrative intervention is always developing and strengthening only monopoly business in Russia... Only monopoly business."

"And for a short time," Soyfer added. "It's divisible by the length of time of the current power. When the next one takes over, repartition will surely start. We are now used to it."

"There will be no repartition in the West," Academician went on. "That's why the regime change goes by gently and doesn't really effect big and medium businesses. It's this sort of business in Russia that came into contradiction with its western equivalent rival."

Maximov kept presenting his ideas for a long time and drawing something on pieces of paper. "Thanks God, it's not formulae," Malkin thought. He was the only person who was reacting and responding to rare pauses in the speech and kept the necessary atmosphere of attention and respect. The Dutch turned to Dvorsky invisibly and trying not disturb Maximov said quietly, "Doctor Dvorsky, I am really pleased our mutual friend gave us a tour around the international business relationships." Soyfer moved his chair closer to Mikhail and changed to bad French. "That's the reason, Mr Dvorsky. Because the middle business in Russia came into contradiction with its western analogue,

we can't start joint business." The billionaire went silent for a minute and then continued, "I will be honest with you, I'd love to do that! But it's not meant to happen."

The Dutch looked at Mikhail closely. He wanted to see his reaction. Seeing Doctor Dvorsky was cool, the billionaire continued, "Have you ever been to Brazil?"

Dvorsky nearly jumped on his chair. The country which meant so much to him unexpectedly passed in the conversation. A year before he and his mother had been to Moscow. They had come to an appointment with one of the External Intelligence Service leaders who a former resident of Afghanistan and a patient of "Pharma-2" brought into contact with. He was really ill. Diabetes of some high stage! Only Mishka's ampules were helping. Mother asked about her father. The General asked them to wait, came out and in half an hour came back with a thin file. There was a copy of declassified decrees of Belkin Yakov Ivanovich' reward and copies of two personnel documents, filled in and signed by Belkin. They differed from each other. Even the signatures were different. Dvorsky's mother was surprised and asked, "Why does it say here he was born in a family of scientists, but in this document it says he came from a family of peasants? Here it says he had a daughter, but there it says he didn't."

The General shook his head, it had been usual practice. He brought to notice there was a full text of the resolution on rehabilitation of Mikhail's mother and grandma in 1955 and a photo of Belkin in a lieutenant-colonel uniform and his wife. Then he touched Anna Yakovlevna's shoulder and pronounced, "Reprising you and your mother was part of your father's legend. For everyone to know he was a traitor. But in fact... Those were the morals."

Worried Dvorsky could only say one thing, "Everyone knows there are a lot of monkeys in Brazil."

"Not just monkeys. They have oil and gas, they make metal, they have timber manufacturing and chemical industries."

"Are you leading me to the idea of beginning pharmaceutical business there?"

"Not a good guess. It was not for nothing telling you about prostitution. There is a link here..."

"Really? I don't get it."

"In Brazil I have a fund which gathers various clever things. So

I would suggest you sell yourself and your people to that fund. Everything included.”

The billionaire laughed. It was kind laughter. Thomas Soyfer liked the way he organized the conversation with his guests, mentioning a Russian girl and then offering Doctor Dvorsky to sell himself. Mikhail immediately remembered his conversation with Malkin in the hotel, then he remembered the times when he had worked in the Academy and pursuing science, then his grandma... Oh, those white swans in Soyfer’s pond...

“In your country only Korolev could be a scientist and an industrialist at the same time,” Thomas seemed to hear Dvorsky’s thoughts. “Even Max didn’t have a business. He coloured a picture, took the money from the government for it, then lost everything. Apart from the money, of course. In other words, he received his fee. You know, you can’t do business with a scientist. He hardly risks anything. If he put up his own flat or... a watch for example...” the billionaire kept talking but stood up, got his small notebook and started typing something. “Excuse me, Doctor Dvorsky, but I have found out something about you before our meeting. You are not a businessman, you are a scientist and you have succeeded. Mr Malkin is also from another category. He is an agent. I had a group of independent experts involved and they all have confirmed the unique character of your drugs. You are trying to set the business of intellectual property. That’s in the country where they have no clue of that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t worry. It’s the property I am talking about. There is enough intellect in Russia. What you got going in your business is just the beginning. You need years for this business not to be taken away, in your country anything can happen. No one will wait for you to surround your project with a few rows of barricades. Someone will come and take it from you. As if that weren’t enough, they won’t even get punished for that.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s obvious. Pharmaceuticals is the most science-driven direction for investments, isn’t it?”

“It is.”

“The States are throwing a lot of money into it. More than into computer engineering. In your country expenses for all science are lower. Look,” Soyfer got a thick gloss magazine out of the table drawer

and dabbed a table with his finger. Five Russian companies had been high-lighted with a red felt-tip pen. "The budget of five biggest pharmaceutical companies was fifteen thousand dollars, while only one Swiss company "Novartis" is nearly a hundred times bigger. What are we talking about? Here, have a look."

Maximov continued passionately speaking, drawing clever diagrams without even noticing the two of them were not listening to him. Only Leonid was pleasingly hanging on to his former boss' words and from time to time he looked at Dvorsky trying to understand something about his conversation with the billionaire. Soyfer turned the monitor of his computer to Mikhail.

On the screen of the notebook there were shining green numbers – one million US dollars a year for all of them and five hundred thousand for him. He had to live in Brazil, of course. If the rest of them wanted they could stay where they were. But the main thing was everything new that was going to appear in the researches would be only for him, for Soyfer. And he would think of the ways to deal with that, not to the prejudice of himself. And another thing was all connections had to be torn up completely and for ever. No liabilities.

The billionaire handed Dvorsky his business card with the address of his Fund in San Paulo and turning his attention to the sheets of Maximov again, said, "You don't need to decide anything at the moment. Here are my address and phone numbers. Remember, you are being waited for, I have made my decision but you still need some time," Soyfer paused, then he ended, "at least to clear off the criminal investments."

Their conversation had not lasted longer than five minutes. Academician had not even come to the middle of his story on the business in Russia.

And Dvorsky got a guarantee that the offer would remain in force for a long time. His thoughts of Philippov and Lisochkin were making him nervous, he was trying to keep his mind off them.

Malkin stood up, came up to the table and got a glass of water. Passing by Dvorsky, he said quietly, "I did understand the word "Brazil" but the rest must have been your French chat. Was it?"

Academician had been talking about the Soviet way of life, saying that he, as a corresponding member, was entitled to two hundred and fifty roubles a month of pension or bursary. That was a wage of a senior research scientist with a science degree! But that had been ages ago, in the Soviet time...

Chapter III

1

A man of about thirty five sat down on a long hard couch, leaned back and looked out of the window. There he could see electric poles, houses, trees flash fast before his eyes. Then he looked round the premises. He was surprised by the curtains drawn apart, a catch on the door to prevent people from getting into the compartment, a couple of heavy leather suitcases on the shelf above the door and a lady opposite him. Carelessly winding his head round, the man re-arranged the blonde wig and faced his companion. The middle-aged woman in glasses and with short hair was writing something in her writing pad. The carriage was jiggling smoothly from side to side.

"Here we go," the man started without any introduction, "my name is Vasiliy."

The woman raised her eyes, smiled and kept writing quickly on the large sheets of paper.

"OK, I will continue. You look like an accountant or a writer so much that I have decided it was probably fate. I will tell you everything. I might get into a book or a film. What do you think? You are not an accountant, are you?"

The woman shook her head.

"Thank God! So you are a writer!"

"Why do you think so?" the lady gave way.

"My dad is a professor, so I feel people like that. Would you imagine, he used to go to Petersburg every day and teach those... in short, he studied minerals," Vasiliy's face became serious as if he tried to remem-

ber their names. "My mother lived with me outside Vyborg. All the shelves there were filled with stones. Hm! What for? Do you know? Neither do I!"

The man suddenly stopped speaking, looked around and smirked. Before continuing he asked himself a question, if the tart aroused him. Having got an instant negative answer of his inner voice, he stopped thinking of different rubbish, like who was sitting in front of him and whether she wanted to listen to him or not.

Vasiliy started naming all his deeds loudly and in detail. The "stream of consciousness" was flowing out of his open gorge. Sometimes in season and out of season, usually when something was really close to his heart and made him anxious, he pronounced the sounds "h" and "m", and he pronounced them in quick succession. It sounded odd, not like a parasitic filler word or an interjection. He must have seen once in a book an interjection "hm" and now was using it all the time. But it sounded like "ha-ma".

"Anyway, they don't mean anything to me. But my grandad – he was some man! He used to be a soldier. He must have fought all over the world. That's what he said to me, "Vasya! Listen to me. The main thing is health. Where's the health, there's everything else." That's how it started. School – toilet, school – toilet. That was my childhood. What was really cool – lads! Also a sports club, weights, dumbbells, a punchbag. I am addicted to training...

"Why toilet?" asked the woman with interest.

"Oh yeah! Toilet is where everything starts. If I want to skip a lesson where shall I go? To the toilet. Smoking with a mate – again in the toilet. Thinking something useful... Where?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"An attic or toilet. In the attic there are always seniors. You can't take mates home. The old woman will pass out when she sees the group. Anyway! Eight years at school – that's it. But after that you've got to do something. Or they will say I am a parasite. Like that Jew, what's his name... Hm!"

"Who is that?"

"You must remember him... a writer. I didn't care where to go after school. I just wanted to do sports," Vasiliy proudly undid both buttons on his beige jacket and tried to demonstrate either biceps or some other muscles – but failed to, – then he re-arranged his bright green

tie with white dandelions with both of his hands and was satisfied with that. "So I went to a factory. In Yermilovo, where I lived, there was just one factory. After a year or two I was called up for military service. I was to go to the landing troops. Who else if not me? We were all so big! No rubbish like "silt – amphibole" in our heads. They could stuff them with whatever they wanted. If I had to I would punch any mineral with my head. Anyway, they sent me to Afghanistan. No, I won't tell you about the war. Another time!..

The woman didn't interrupt him and leaning towards the table continued writing some verses or notes in her writing pad. Curved lines were running fast across the sheets. Vasiliy tried to figure out what she was writing but he couldn't. At least they were not chemical formulae. That would have driven him mad – a tart being a chemist! Sometimes the woman looked up at him and considerately answered his questions. Vasiliy kept talking and couldn't stop. Now that he had sorted out his physiologic reflexes, he paid no attention to the woman sitting opposite him. He was constantly looking and trying to find someone else, he wanted to show her a witness of his tales so it upset him he couldn't find anyone and made his leg tremble.

"After the army I went back. Only everything had changed. No wages at the factory, no sports. Anyway, it's not the time of stagnation! The end of 1989! The lads had returned from Afghanistan... Not all of them... But Petka, Lyoha and Yuris have. After a year decided to go to Lithuania. Yuris was from there. We had to make money somehow. So, on the way to Lithuania Yuris suddenly stopped his "Zhuguli", took out his stripy trader bag and shoved there AA batteries. Hm! I think he shoved there a thousand of them, then cigarettes "Kosmos" in boxes, you know, 162 in a pack. He got them for 70 kopecks a pack. Then we stopped near the shop "Race" in Moscow Avenue and got a load of sweets "Chupa-Chups". You know, that was the name of the sweets. Have you tried them?" Vasiliy bent and stared into the woman's eyes. She was sitting quietly opposite him.

"No, I haven't," she said calmly.

"Hm! You are unlucky! You can eat them like potatoes. After ten of them you can go to sleep. Feels like you had a meal in a restaurant. So, by the evening we were at the Lithuanian border. Listen, what a border it used to be!" Vasiliy smiled foolishly. "You may say, it was the same country. But no! There was a barrier and the people were standing in

the same black jumpsuits, without guns but with truncheons. Not bats but hand-made truncheons. They called them “self-teacher”. They were from the Security Department of the region.”

“What region?”

“It doesn’t matter! But they charged twenty dollars a car. So we kept driving and saw another barrier. A feeble one. Near it there were geezers, shaven, in leather gloves and black boots. They just lacked swastika. If they had had, we would have got wound up. But then... Screw them! The rest was different – some were wearing shirts, some jackets, some coats. We didn’t even ask who they were. Ten dollars – and “go ahead!”.

Vasiliy thought the woman was not listening and he decided to check, “We could drive further, but it was dangerous. Along the road there were Germans. In helmets, with guns and in a combat uniform, they were all getting on, about sixty years old they were. It had been some time since the war finished. Next to them – other ones, on bikes. And they were shouting something, hm, in their language... Loudly, loudly... So you are not even listening to me. I am telling you porkies and you don’t even notice.”

“I am listening, Vasiliy, listening very attentively, honestly!” the woman apologized and continued to sneakily do her own business. “I thought the Germans were real. Why not?”

“OK, whatever. Really... Why would they be there? Actually it’s nearly West there. Poland is just round the corner. They had had market for over a year! We drove to the town of Lazdijai. There was a bridge across the river and on the other bank there was a Polish town of Lodz. Near the bridge, would you believe it, hm, there was a two-kilometre line of people with the same bags as ours. Women, men, old people... And they all had batteries, irons, vodka, cigarettes... Yuris got out of the car and joined them. We were laughing at him but he was all serious, looking everywhere,” Vasiliy started rolling his eyes trying to demonstrate how anxious Yuris was.

The further story was acted out by Vasiliy, he could do that well. If she hadn’t listened to him attentively she wouldn’t have understood – who deceived who or who won.

“Half an hour later there were only a few batteries at the bottom of the bag. The vodka and cigarettes had gone. “Did you throw them away?” we asked. “Learn from me,” Yuris said. “While you were doing

nothing and drinking beer and eating Caspian roach, two coaches passed by me and two girls walked past. I bet you didn't even notice. By the way, the girls took all our vodka, put five bottles each under their skirts and went back to Poland. There you are!" "Where's the money then?" "You will never find it" Vasiliy was imitating Yuris and speaking with a Lithuanian accent. "You can look for it, but you won't find anything! But I sold "Kosmos" five roubles a pack. Did you get it! What a profit! Ten times more!" While we were talking and looking for the money we didn't notice all the people disappear somewhere. In one second! And Yuris kept standing there. Then five cars with geezers came. Hm! They were all serious, in leather clothes, they found the people hiding in the bushes, talked to them about something and returned to their cars very happy. Two of them broke the boxes which served as a counter and came up to us. They pointed at Yuris and asked us, "Is he with you?"

"Hm! Yeah, he is," I answered. What else could I say?"

The woman was listening to Vasiliy's story and nodding her head understandingly. "He was with us! So, those two turned around, got into the cars and left. I shouted, "Yuris, bastard! What has it been? Who are they?" We couldn't understand what the fuss was about.

He said, "Wait a second. I'll sell the last ones, then find where we can sleep and tell you."

"It was getting dark," Vasiliy continued. "The area was near the border, but there were no guards. The houses were nailed up or we couldn't see the light in the windows. There were no people in there. So we found an old falling into pieces school. Broke into it thinking, at least we wouldn't have to sleep outside. Hm! But there were at least twenty people there already! Each of them hunky and with the only thought, "Tomorrow we've got to get more money! We'll take everything from them!" Thinking like that, they lay where they could. The gym was the most familiar place to them. So it was filled with snoring bodies. The geezers were sleeping in their clothes and we knew who was who at once. These were from the Security Department of the region and those were from Vilnius and Alitusk's racket. In the corner near the window, on the floor on a red cloth there was Lenin. No, not the big one. Small, just his bust, white, made out of... what's it called! What's plaster made of? Oh, yes, made out of plaster! Behind him on the lousy green wall there was a blackboard. Hm! As soon as I saw it I flinched,

as if someone racked the slide in my gun. Only it was covered with a red cloth. Over it there was a sign "The Red Corner" and the letters were this size," showing their size Vasiliy lifted his arms.

To calm down after his unpleasant memories, he took his tea, drank half of it, screwed up his face and moved the cold tea with the smell of bicarbonate of soda away from himself. The woman showed consideration and gently said, "Yes, school vary!"

Vasiliy appreciated her sympathy and went on confidently, "We made it through the lying Lithuanians into a separate room. It was for weight-lifters. The door was open and three geezers were sitting at a small table with bottles and rounds of lunch meat and boozing. It smelt of garlic and sweat. One of those three, the one who was the biggest, tore his head off the bottles and stared at us. He looked like a calf. The other two took no notice and continued drinking and chewing. The "calf" asked significantly, "Whatsit... where are you from?" Vasiliy imitated the Lithuanians and slowly, with pauses between the words pronounced those five words. I was like, "From the city on the Neva, labas vakaras." That means "good evening" in Lithuanian. So I started negotiating straight away. All night I was putting in something in Lithuanian. I kno-ow.

Anyway, those stags charged tax from everything that moved – from the coaches, cars, sellers on the board. They were like guards. And protection from the Polish frontier guardians. Those ones were letting through their striped barrier coaches and various tarts on their bicycles without checks. They said they had been to see their relatives for an hour. They had their share for that. The problem of those in black trousers was that they didn't want to share what they got. Hm! They didn't want to share their earnings. Most of them tried to push their luck. They had to be taught.

As soon as we got along with the local guys, a well-groomed guy in a military uniform and with a polygon instead of a service cap on his nut barged in. He headed to the Lithuanian boss.

"How are you, Racketeer sirs?" he said in the language that was difficult to identify. Sounded like Russian. They had been taught it, you know...

The head racketeer answered familiarly, "Everything's been according to the business customs" and held out a package of the old paper "Izvestia" with lunch meat in it to the "polygon".

Hm! He stuck the package under his uniform, saluted with two fingers, turned around and disappeared.

"Who are you feeding on the other side of the barrier?" the Lithuanian asked when the uniformed bloke left. "Or is it a secret?"

"Can't tell you, jokiū budu," which means "no way", I am imitating the boss again. I understood two things then. Hm! If you don't have anyone in Poland you'll have to share with that Lithuanian. Do you know why he bribes? For the Polish to let the buyers of those lousy batteries, irons, cigarettes and vodka. Hm! Mind you, they are not lousy," Vasiliy changed his mind, "one bag is a thousand dollars. Plus we didn't just have Yuris, we had at least ten people more from the thousand that were hiding in the bushes with their bags.

You know, in the morning people went up to us, "Take us with you. Take us... We'll pay you. Those are out of order. They are taking away nearly everything."

Hm! We are humane people. Especially when all that got to us casually.

When we came back to Petersburg, we dressed up a little and decided to explore the city on the Neva. As you can understand, there were their own "borders" and "protection". The "currents" were different. The life was as well. Hm! I would say it was shorter. Everything was solved quickly. Who – to who – how much? Or who – when – for what? Roughly speaking of course. Based on "FCF": "Floor, ceiling, finger". It was not in court after all.

Why am I saying all that to you? I want a film about myself. How about that? Oh, I haven't introduced myself. I am Vasiliy. Who are you?!"

"Marina Eduardovna..."

Vasiliy felt as if he was drunk and he forgot what he had to say in response, he just thought, "You are an old stick, Marina Eduardovna!"

"To make myself clear, I am a straightforward person. Hm! I like to keep it brief. My head starts hurting when I am thinking for the good of the cause or sitting in the theatre. I just switch off. But sometimes I have to. Because I work hard... In pharmaceuticals..."

"Where?" the woman asked him, "It has been so interesting but it got to some pharmaceuticals."

“What time intervals do you not remember? An hour, a day, maybe a week?”

“You know, I haven’t really thought what exact moment I can’t remember from. I never used to think of it. If I didn’t remember something, it was not a big deal. But recently I have got a feeling that a piece of my life has been cut off with a knife. I just didn’t have yesterday and that was it! No traces, no consequences. No headache after that or anything else...”

The session had lasted longer than an hour. For the week that Dvorsky and Malkin had been in Amsterdam, he was visiting the counselor for the third time and was completely aware that all those conversations and dosing on the couch didn’t give him any result apart from money wasting. “She is sitting pretty,” the former military doctor thought, “and there is no risk in it! You don’t have to come. But they say, people get addicted.”

“We have already discussed two examples of your memory loss: with the car and the shop,” the doctor was trying to find out the origin of amnesia. She could understand what had happened in his childhood and youth. His father used to beat him up, then he left the family. The boy had been isolated from his peers. It was followed by a wound, his child’s death, and a divorce. “In the last months or two have you had anything that made you really suffer, stress, have there been any really bad problems in your business?”

“Yes, a year ago. And before that. There were enough problems like that.”

“What about after that?”

“No. Definitely not. Like I said, it feels like a piece of life has been cut off with a knife. No problem with my business. I mean my personal p-problems. Those connected with some bad skills or unwillingness.”

“OK, I can see...”

Mikhail remembered his old story of the flight to Vancouver to an exhibition and decided to tell her. The doctor seemed to be ready to listen to him for ever.

“I was flying on my own. The group was already there and I was running late. I had spent two days in Europe, meeting my colleagues. Had a drink. Of course... sleepless night. Then a flight to New York. Couldn’t sleep again. Economy class, you know, I couldn’t stretch my

legs. At the Kennedy airport there was a change for the flight to Vancouver. I had an unconfirmed ticket . So I was waiting and waiting. The flights were full, some were cancelled. Especially when it was the 4th of July. A big day there. Another night at the airport. There was nowhere to sit there. Another day passed. At last, I decided to take a cab and go to another side of the city, to North Queens. There they had another airport, eight kilometres from Manhattan. Only four terminals but I was able to take the nearest flight to Seattle. That was very near Vancouver. So I got on the plane and fell asleep.

Suddenly someone was waking me up, pushing, nearly carrying me out of the plane. In short, I found myself standing in the airports, electronic boards were flashing: arrivals, departures, names of cities, hours, minutes... I could see "Seattle" written on the board. How could it be? Did I need to fly there? Where was I then? I thought I had to go outside the airport. But I needed to get to Vancouver. There were no flights to Vancouver. I looked out of the window trying to see what it said on the roof. What airport was it? Should I ask someone? They would think I was mad and send me somewhere. It would be difficult to prove I was not. I was very anxious and I felt I was in a world which was very difficult to get out of...

I can't remember how, but I found out I was in Cincinnati. Dear me! Where was it? Why was it not Seattle? I bought a map of the United States of America. Found it there. It was far, far away. I had a long way to Vancouver."

The counsellor was sitting in an arm-chair opposite Mikhail and making some notes in her writing pads. A minute later she lifted her head, put her notes aside and looked at her patient in a particular way, "Yes! Very interesting. I guess, it's a usual response to insomnia."

"It might be. But there's no fool there!"

"Who are you talking about, Mikhail Nickolayevich?" the counsellor asked in a soft voice and grew suspicious.

"Who, who! You know who!"

"And?"

"I am talking about your nature."

"At the moment we are talking about your nature, not mine!"

"OK, mine. Only unlike me it does have memory. It can remember what to do in certain situations. Forgot once, then twice. It could be amnesia. It will switch on its defending reaction. Without asking me..."

The doctor rubbed her temples – she was not ready to have a detailed discussion of the relationships between a certain human being and his “me”. Or, to be exact, the patient was not ready. Psychologists and counsellors hadn’t made a lot of progress in transcribing and structural imaging of “me”. They usually put the problem on the shoulders of their patients, offering them to think of various conceptions. Frau counsellor was against the idea of mixing psycho-physiological properties and collaborative mechanism of a human being with a personality. Although they were personalities they were not an individual.

“Mr Dvorsky, how long are you staying in Amsterdam?”

“Not sure.”

“We need to meet in a week. Will you be able to?”

“Of course, I can leave and come back in a week. I don’t think I can stay for a week. I have been here for over a week now and I am not doing anything. I’ve got to go.”

“Have you tried travelling by train?”

“How? Do you mean via Poland?”

“There are different trains. On the train you will be able to relax, think and try to remember... The train environment makes you think over the current situation. You could do it on the plane, too, but if you know the comfort will end in a couple of hours, your body won’t let you relax. On the train, however, there is wheel-rattling, rocking, lots of time, your companion might be asleep, so you have got to find something to do. It is important to feel the atmosphere.”

“Last time I told you about being travel sick when I was a child and later on in life. Of course, it doesn’t feel that bad on the train... But I will just fall asleep...”

“Try to think intensively, meditate, remember things. You must know that your memory loss might do you good. It is an extremely effective medicine. Sometimes it preserves the mentality. Try to imagine for a minute that dreadful events keep happening to you. Firstly, they are unusual to you, secondly, they disagree with you. You choke on them, drown, various inner protective mechanisms switch on – sweat, stomach pain, leg, arm or eye twitching. By the way, I have noticed, sometimes you tap your foot. From your heel to your toe, from your heel to your toe.. It is not possible to get out of those collisions on your own...”

“Sounds like crisis situations in business,” Dvorsky noted. “There you wouldn’t be able to pull yourself out of trouble...”

"I don't know. There might be something similar there. But there is another way out. You can simply forget all your problems and the behavioural abnormalities will disappear. However, there is something important here. It is not you who forgets it. It's your body and it starts working like that without your will. You shouldn't object to it. Otherwise it is dangerous. People with a memory loss can get a substitute of it by non-existent events. Which means you can mistake other people's acts for your own. This is dangerous."

3

"You see, they called me to work in pharmaceuticals," Prokhorov kept surprising the imagination of his companion, "old stick" Marina Eduardovna, "they gave me money. I haven't liked medicines since childhood, so I decided to take it out on them. I always have the company director near me. The company is called "Pharma-2". Have you heard of it?"

The woman opposite him was quiet. She had already got used to the rhetoric questions of her "companion". Vasiliy kept talking feeling cool, in a suit and slippers sitting in a first class compartment of the night train. From time to time he looked around trying to understand where the sour smoke was coming from, who was smoking in his compartment...

"I know the head of the company is a good friend or family member, tested in harassment and court trials... In short, he's been generally tested. His name was written in all bank and tax documents, he was in charge for everything. That's in front of the government..."

"Who else can you be in charge for?"

"Here we go! Administration people are not as important as some other people. As our director is wood from the neck up, he is not in charge for the company bills."

"Who is then?"

"It's me. Who else?" Vasiliy answered proudly. There is a special person, called Financier, for that, but no one from the staff has seen him. But they know that all the papers are prepared for me and for him. First I check them, then once a week I send them to the financial egghead with a messenger. The messenger is a friend either of Finan-

cier or the lawyer. His girlfriend is also in the business. The lawyer, Leonid, pulled me into the hell-hole with medicines. I have always hated them... I am sort of at the counter and the eggheads are somewhere... thinking of financial schemes, contracts, looking for money and so on. Not bad, is it?"

Vasiliy did care who were the real owners of the company where he announced the life-changing decisions every day. Yes, there was a patent author – some Dvorsky guy. Everyone knew that but they didn't have anything to do with him. "Really, it is weird," Prokhorov would say to the nominal director, "it shouldn't be like this in life. If I make decisions then I am the boss. If I am the boss, where is my money?" No one knew the answer to the question. In the company nobody asked questions like that.

Prokhorov paused a little, remembered some other moments from his life and went on, "After a week I disappear. Ready, steady, go – to the countryside. That's where there is real life. Drinking, grubbing and a bath-house. Or a steam room straight away. After that I don't care!"

He fell silent as if he was reminded of something nice. He got his brief-case from under the table, opened it and took a bottle of whisky "Glenfiddich-16" and a clear glass.

"I am not offering you. You won't drink it. I have got to take it. When it smells of tobacco I have got to drink whisky."

"Is anyone smoking here?" the woman shrugged her shoulders and waved her arms as if she was insulating herself from the alcohol. Being under the pressure of her companion's verbiage, she tried to remember everything she knew about pharmaceuticals...

Vasiliy gulped a plastic cup of whisky, poured some more, drank it again, then filled the third cup, waited for the warmth to go all over his body, then drank it, filled another one and drank it as well lifting his head high. After that treatment Prokhorov would always fall asleep.

Two days later Vasiliy Fyodorovich returned to Petersburg, to his home in Grazhdanka. It was something between a flat and a hotel room. He could cook in the kitchen, which he normally did in the morning using various supermarket tins and jars with beetroot soup or rice with pork.

Having had a nap after a sleepless night, Prokhorov got ready to go to the main office. At twelve o'clock there was to be a meeting with the German magazine "Spiegel". As other foreign entrepreneurs forcing

home medicines from the home market, they were interested in the history of the new pharmaceutical holding company. They had been asking for an interview with the patent author and the company owner. "No way! Even we can't see them no matter how much we want to!" the new head of security of "Pharma-2" was saying.

It was the director who officially saw those visitors. Katya Zakharova was serving coffee, slowly walking around the meeting area, laying biscuits and displaying booklets and leaflets in different languages used at the meetings. Vasiliy was present as if he was a member of the Mafia. "Let them think what they want!" saying this to himself, he was half-reassuring himself and half-inspiring himself for yet another deed. "Let them get confused, let them roll their heads not knowing who to listen to – the director or someone without even a business card or any contact details. The table is round, as usual. No one knows who the boss is among the Russians."

At eleven Prokhorov left his home. Fifty metres from his flat the blue "Ford-Orion" was waiting for him as usual. He opened the door and got in the back seat behind the driver – the safest place.

"Where is Volodya?" Vasiliy asked the man in the driver's seat unwillingly.

"He'll be at work tomorrow," the man answered quickly without turning to the passenger. "They didn't tell me what the matter with him is."

It was fine. The company was big. If the driver was ill, they sent him another one, one of the assistant's drivers," Prokhorov thought and unfolded a newspaper. The car pulled out, drove for a while and suddenly stopped. The left and right doors opened and two smart guys in expensive suits got into the car. One was wearing glasses. He started talking first, "Please don't worry, Vasiliy Fyodorovich, we won't hurt you. We just need to take you to see someone you know. He is waiting."

"Who is that?" Prokhorov put a brave face on but in a second realized what segment of the civil society had paid attention to him. "Pyotr Mikhailovich could have rung first..."

No one answered. All the way to Philippov's private office they kept silent. The "smart" guys were not authorised to say anything. Vasiliy knew the rules of the game very well. He didn't even ask where the driver was.

At that very moment everyone was in the office of “Pharma-2” and waiting for the boss. Yekaterina Zakharova, director’s assistant and secretary at the same time, was to demonstrate new drugs, imported equipment, “pure” rooms with just ten flecks of dust per cubic metre and other latest inventions to the Germans. But she had disappeared! She was nowhere to be seen! The director was dialing the numbers of Prokhorov and his driver. There was just a ring tone everywhere, no answer.

“What do you mean no one is answering? The negotiations were meant to start half an hour ago,” the director was nervously pacing up and down the reception and saying this to everyone he saw. He chose not to call the security deputy. Usually they were afraid to inform him, they didn’t want to get the raw end of the deal. He was to watch everything himself. To look for the boss was his direct duty!

While the director was suffering, the security deputy had already rung everyone he could – Vasilij’s neighbours and acquaintances. He found out when Vasilij had left his home, what car had been waiting for him and so on. In fact, he felt something was wrong and he informed the supervisor from the district security office.

It was clear something was about to happen.

4

“Hold him tighter, he is budging all the time,” Knave said to his apprentice in a calm quiet voice. He was thoroughly fixing the paper shredder and looking at recovered Vasilij, then his new assistant, then again at Vasilij... To be exact, at the fingers of his left hand. The young thug was trying to hold the guilty borrower’s arm stretched on the table but the client was twisting all the time and his arm was drooping down the table.

“Accountant, help the lad,” Knave led, “Do you still dream of him telling you the truth? Dream on!” the expert confirmed the undeniable fact with a well-known gesture.

For the two of them it was much handier. Vasilij was stretched on the table with his legs tied; his right arm and his body were tied with oiled straps. Pharmacist relaxed and feeling a cold sharp blade on his index finger’s skin, smiled. A moment later his finger fell on the floor.

No one picked it up. There was not much blood. Prokhorov was still smiling and looking indifferently at his torturers.

"Did you get it? I am not joking!" Knave broke down and shouted. Normally he was calm and confident with his exceptional qualities. "What shall I cut off next?" he asked his colleagues. "Are there any requests?" Knave didn't joke. The dazzling report act was being recorded.

"How about..." the newcomer suddenly giggled and dabbed the bottom of Vasilii's belly with his finger. "Will you?"

"Pyotr Mikhailovich is waiting for the answer to the main question, "Where is the money?" the most educated out of all of them said significantly. Standing near the shelf fixed to the wall, he was patting the keyboard of the new computer. "He is waiting for the result and not for a bucket with cut off limbs."

"Have you heard a lot from him?" Knave tried to prove the necessity of his advanced technologies of questioning. "He is either unaware of anything or he is some sort of a loon, then he won't live long! Whatever happens, I will deal with him!"

"He does know. That's why he's keeping silent," the assistant concluded, imitating his confident boss.

"OK!" Knave said suddenly. He thought he was the boss in spite of everyone knowing the main boss would ask Accountant first of all. "We'll have a break. I can't carry on without a drink. It's high time now." Knave touched his stomach and shouted to his assistant, "Give him his finger, let him play with it. We'll continue tomorrow morning."

They locked big iron gates of the garage with a round table in the middle and Vasilii on it, who was tied, covered in blood, with a gag in his mouth and he really had no clue where the money of the respected authority Philippov Pyotr Mikhailovich had gone.

The next morning the three men came back to the garage. Knave took the dirty rag out of Prokhorov's mouth, thoroughly examined and felt the straps checking if the captive had tried to untie himself. Surprisingly, there was little blood on the floor. The area where the finger used to be, had got dry and was hardly bleeding. Vasilii was still lying on the table. His eyes couldn't see, they were covered with swollen purple eyelids. His arms and legs had grown numb. He couldn't feel them. His beige suit, so smart the day before, was covered in blood and urine.

Suddenly the closed garage doors broke open as if they were made out of cardboard. Five people wearing masks and holding guns burst into the garage. Alexander Novgorodsky, the supervisor from the district security office, rushed to Prokhorov. The rest of them knew what they were doing and followed the instruction.

“Vasiliy Fyodorovich, don’t look, don’t look at them!” the short blonde senior lieutenant shouted, cutting the tough straps with a knife.

At the same time his lads had already chosen their primary target and were hitting him with buttstocks on his head. Knave quickly fell on the floor and went quiet. Knave’s assistant lifted his arms and ran to the garage wall not to get blows from everywhere. That was clever! Accountant tried to jig up and down trying to escape the sinister lads with three big white letters on their backs.

The captive was freed, his hand was bandaged, then he was pulled off the table. He accidentally looked at the red bandage on his left hand – there was no pain – then he smirked nervously, like he had done the day before, on the table, then he moved his legs and arms. He seemed to be sound and could move. He tried to stand up, but his legs wouldn’t hold him. He would have fallen on the cement floor if he had not been held under his arms. He felt pins and needles all over his body. That was the blood running along and widening the vessels. Two guys in uniform rubbed his legs and arms.

When Vasiliy was able to stand up independently, he was taken into the minibus, but Knave and his assistants were still “squeezed” in the garage. The lads tried to find out what they needed. Why? Who ordered? Where was the boss? Knave who had swallowed a lot of his own blood, kept silent and pretended to be senseless. It didn’t really work out. Blows rained upon his head. But no one heard a sound from Knave. Philya’s school!

Accountant was sitting on the floor, wiping steamed glasses with his jacket’s hem and giving a statement. The youngster was crying. He had a broken nose bridge and was wiping his pink of blood snot with the sleeve of his right hand, which was fastened to a cast pipe running through the garage. His left arm must have been broken and was hanging along his body like a whip.

Vasiliy Fyodorovich was in the minibus with the supervisor. After the sleepless night and the wonderful rescue he sat on the front seat, loosened up, his head kept falling on his chest and the horrible snore

would fill the bus. Then he would startle, wake up and pretending to be scared, listen to his saviour. In reality, after waking up, his brain would think, "What did Philya mean when yesterday he talked about changing "protection" and about record substitution?"

Usually Prokhorov felt danger in advance, like a good dog. But now something had happened that changed his relationships with Philippov and he didn't know anything. Philya was their "protection" and also a creditor. It worked out that now he was needed most of all by Philippov, but not by the people who snatched the business of "Pharma-2". That was quite enough for looking for a space in a decent cemetery.

In spite of his sharp pain in his dislocated collarbone, wet trousers and other discomfort, Vasiliy was contracting his forehead intensely and hurrying thinking processes in his head, which was not used to them.

"I need to disappear immediately," Prokhorov was thinking, "or.." He couldn't think what "or" was about. "But I have got to disappear so," the captive continued to think, "that no one would look for me. It's bad I don't know where the credit money is. This is when I would need it! On the other hand, it is good. If I had known, I would have told them. God knows what they would cut off in the morning... Maybe, I will be able to contact Financier? He did call me to meet him! I hope they won't catch him. They shouldn't. He's been well hidden!"

Pharmacist did all the buttons on his jacket up and put his left hand behind the lapel. It didn't hurt so much now.

"Vasiliy Fyodorovich," Novgorodsky said louder, "think what you are going to say at the inquest. OK? I will pop out for a minute, I want to check how it's going over there. Have they found out anything new?"

A minute after the supervisor disappeared behind the iron gates of the garage, Vasiliy got up quietly, stretched his legs and limped to the open door of the minibus. Looking around and pretending he was trying to find a place to pee, he got round the corner, squeezed himself through the gap between the garages, then gave a loud cry for the minibus driver to hear and coming out from the other side, started running towards the prospect limping on one leg.

What Vasiliy had always had at any circumstances was an access to an international passport with his name and photo and a dozen of different visas which got renewed every six months. He hardly went anywhere. Just to Finland and Holland, nowhere else. But he still had his passport and kept it in a small rented flat in the centre of the city. Not where he lived. If his arms and legs were alright, he could always go there and take his documents, money and credit cards from the safe.

Not losing a second, Prokhorov walked to the flat, had a wash, got changed, destroyed his mobile phone and SIM-card. Walking downstairs he kept thinking automatically, "Now the main thing is for them to think I have been kidnapped again. Why would I escape from the rescuers? Everyone must have learned now about Philippov's money, not taken into account anywhere, and is dreaming of finding it."

Vasiliy remembered one of the security men with three white letters on his back hitting Knave's head, then switching off the computer, taking it carefully, like a woman, and carrying it to the minibus. Not just a computer, but a photocopying machine, a fax machine and some other thing. Oh, yes, that was a fan. Pharmacist had foreseen everything right. The supervisor had returned to the minibus and on hearing the driver's report decided he had been kidnapped again. He already knew the answers to the questions which they had asked Accountant, so he was sure in his actions. They went to search Philippov's office. That gave Vasiliy quite enough time. Hopefully they wouldn't look for him on the border.

When he was at the prospect, Prokhorov re-arranged his new clothes and his favourite blonde curly wig, which had not been harmed. He caught a cab and was at the Finnish station, on the train "St.Petersburg – Helsinki" in an hour and a half.

After an hour the train was in Vyborg. Then in another half an hour Russian border guards left the train. Vasiliy breathed a sigh of relief. It would have been nice to go to his country house first, have a proper wash and to get rid of those parasites from Philya's garage but he couldn't waste time. Now even if they got him, they would need time. Straight after the passport control at the Finnish border he dropped off and woke up only in Helsinki.

He couldn't stay in Finland. Everyone was going to Finland first. He had to go to Amsterdam. Why? Who knows? All roads led there. Even the airport in Amsterdam was like a little town with its own underground, escalators, and buses. Multicoloured arrows on the walls showed directions where to go... For some reason Vasiliy felt like going there. He didn't know why and didn't seek for the answer. Some incomprehensible force was pulling him into the saving city. So that was it! Especially when he had been there once! He had never been abroad apart from Finland, but he had visited Amsterdam!

He got there at night. A taxi, a hotel, a room... Time to sleep!

The next day Prokhorov hired a "Mercedes" at the hotel. It was a sort of car security guards used when following some big boss. He loved that car-barrel with a high tall roof, he could get into it without bending down, without risking getting a back pain and without hurting his wounded collarbone. He was driving to a clinic. It was high time to get some medical help. As usual, he sped up, he forgot it was not Petersburg or Moscow. Straight after the turn there was a junction. Vasiliy braked sharply in front of the red light. He always drove a car jerkily and did everything like that – he was either working really hard, or he was not there, no one would find him. Something fell off the car roof, rolled to the bonnet and fell on the road in front of the wheels.

A second later everyone heard a dull explosion. "Mercedes" shot up two metres high, turned in the air and fell on its left side on the road. People running up to the car pulled out a motionless body of the driver. They couldn't see a lot of blood on his head from hitting the steering wheel. His blonde wig fell off and his natural ginger hair was concealing blood. The "Mercedes" was caught on fire, its front was smashed. The other cars drove off quickly and left an area in the junction with a small hole in the middle.

Two days earlier, after the security people broke into the garage, Philippov was reported about the incident, Knave's arrest and Accountant's as well. "That one has definitely blabbed everything!" Philya decided and immediately left the office in the unknown direction. He learned that Pharmacist had escaped. Unlike the special forces, Philya understood that the only way Prokhorov could go was abroad. "He is a "rat" after all! He has escaped with his "tenner". Where would he go? To Academician, of course! Where else! They are in the same team!"

He figured it out the same day, as soon as he was told the residence place of Maximov. To find Pharmacist was just paperwork. They checked the trains and flights. Sure enough! Vasya had left for Helsinki on the train "Leo Tolstoy". He was quick! Like a Gingerbread Man – he had escaped from an old man and an old woman, got on the train to Finland. But he wouldn't get away from the Fox! That's what the fairy tale told us. So that was how it was going to happen in real life. Philippov got a secret large mobile phone with a conversation code installed in it from a drawer and slowly dialed the number.

"Lisician?" Philya took pleasure calling Lisochkin that. "I will be short. Pharmacist escaped. I don't want to hear of him any more. Did you get it? You have found that company, you clear the mess!"

"Yes, sir!" the former colonel answered. He had been cursing himself for showing initiative. Getting companies under their "protection" was not what he was good at. To get them was half a disaster. He had also invested his money there!

Yury Mikhailovich Lisochkin had been in Poland for two weeks. He was very busy there. On behalf of Philippov and with his team he was plotting a safe route from Smolensk to Antwerpen, via Belorussia and Poland. They had to load important cargo and take it to a Belgian port. The route was the most important thing. They had to take the goods out carefully. That's why the former KGB man had already managed to go to two points, bring together the main local gangs and to fasten down the rest of them so that they had agreed to help him as much as they could.

On the 15th of May 1997 in Amsterdam a team of five people were waiting for Lisochkin. They had found out everything for money. They knew when and where the Russian national Vasiliy Fyodorovich Prokhorov had arrived, what room he was in, what he had had for dinner and who he had rung. In the morning there were two grey "Opels" near the hotel – they were waiting for the client. When Vasiliy's "Mercedes" left, they followed him. There were not many cars in the centre of Amsterdam so they drove slowly. Most people were riding their bicycles or walking. At one of the junctions, when all the cars stopped, a short lad in a light jacket and jeans got out of "Opel" and squeezed between the cars helping himself with his hands. In one of them he was holding a small object. No one noticed him put the object wrapped in a tape on the roof of the car driven by Prokhorov. When

the green light went on the people in the first “Opel” were watching the small package on the top of the car. The bald man with a beard in leather was holding a remote control. They turned right. Another junction. Red light again.

“Damn! It’s fallen off!” the man in the leather outfit shouted.

The driver got upset. He must have been the boss of the team.

“It doesn’t matter. Press the button! We won’t get another chance!”

6

Dvorsky had known about the small country of Malta since his childhood, when his father told him. On those rare evenings, when Nickolay Petrovich was sober and had finished repairing everything in the house, Mishka would quietly sneak up to his father having a cup of tea and keep asking him questions about distant countries. It was then that the father told him a story about a man falling into the sea from a pier in front of his eyes in the capital of Malta and the motor boats cutting his body into pieces with their screws. Afterwards on the sea surface swam bloody rags – what was left from his clothes. Dreadful! But what the little boy remembered most of all was that nobody had looked for the dead body. Why not? “There is a strong current there,” his father told him,” so everything flowed from the bay into the open sea. You can’t find anything in the sea! What would they look for, anyway?”

Today, on Tuesday 16th of August, Dvorsky somehow remembered that story. He had just been to his counsellor and was now waiting at the airport Schiphol for a flight to Cyprus, to Larnaca. There he was to change a lot in the transaction circuit of credit money. But nothing would happen without a good reason. Some inner emotions recalled the story about Malta from the bottom of his flawed memory. It was done for some good reason...

“What for?” Mikhail was thinking clearly and logically as if all that was happening to someone else. “OK, let’s think about it. Firstly, a week ago a messenger came. In the pack of documents there was information about strange behaviour of the company employees. The security hadn’t let the messenger into the reception of Prokhorov’s office. The director had not been there for two days, his secretary had spent

all that time in his office but hadn't answered the phone. Secondly, someone kept ringing my secret office in Lappenranta even though no one could have done it. It means they found my address and phone number. Also, when I rang the offshore company in Cyprus they informed me some strangers from Petersburg had rung them. And the last thing. The attempted assassination of Prokhorov. Everyone in Amsterdam was talking of a Russian man who someone wanted to explode. He has just been told about it in details by his counsellor. It's not a coincidence. Whatever happens, I've got to go to Cyprus and quickly sort out the ways of re-directing the financial assets from the recent credit."

Mikhail was sitting at the airport, waiting for his flight to Larnaca. He rang his Cyprian company from a payphone. He could hear endless anxiety in their voices. The pre-arranged communication procedures were breaking up. They had already got several calls from St.Petersburg, from the office of "Pharma-2" with the questions about the money.

If they were looking for the money, they must have beset him from all sides. What resources had they got? He could only guess. Dvorsky decided to ring the office of "Pharma-2" in St.Petersburg, breaking all thinkable and unthinkable communication schemes. He presented himself as Financier and asked to talk to the director. He heard the phone clicking and understood he was wiretapped or the nominal director had switched on the loudspeaker. However, without greeting or introduction, knowing how important the contact with the Financier was, the "nominal director" blurted out, "Vasiliy Fyodorovich disappeared two days ago, there are strange people in the office, they say they had bought out stocks. But we..." On the other end of the line a young sharp voice said, "Company director, Zahkarova Yekaterina speaking..."

Dvorsky put the phone down and stayed in the phone booth for a long time, taken aback, at a loss, holding the phone receiver. He had enough information. Their director had been suspended, the administration was being changed, the "hard" men were doing business and the secretary who Malkin had brought to the company in 1993 was now a director. It meant that Zakharova had been not only a secretary and not just a... Yuk! Disgusting! What a fool Leonid had been! He was having an affair and this was what it came to. She must have learned everything from him in bed and now she was enjoying herself with her partners. The creditors were surely aware. They were serious people.

They had just one goal – to return their money! They knew only Malkin and Prokhorov, provided they had already got Prokhorov. Malkin must have disappeared as always. He, Mishenka Dvorsky, had not been seen by anyone for over a year. What for? He was only a patent author... His inner voice was persistently saying, "Give them a little bit of time and they will send the original documents about appointing a new director and recalling all letters of attorney to the offshore company. You've got to rush. Then going to Zurick and disappearing. I've got to disappear as soon as possible..." Dvorsky put coins in the slot of the telephone again and dialed the number. "It's Dvorsky. Hello," then he said the password and some digits. Mikhail was talking to the offshore company representative, trying to stay calm and not show any anxiety. "Do you remember the terms and conditions of the contract?"

"Of course, Mr Dvorsky," he heard the answer of the office in Larnaca. They all spoke Russian there. "We can exclude your letter of attorney only after the current director of the main office in St. Petersburg arrives here, presents us all legal documents reasserting his authority at the presence of our notary. Don't worry, Mr Dvorsky. We'll do everything in due order. We have already received the documents from St. Petersburg of the new director appointment by express post. But we've got to translate, certify, apostille and only after that to read."

"Thank you. It must be a raid. It's common practice in this country. Can you please turn on the established check procedure and I will be with you," Mikhail looked at the giant shining board, "in five hours."

By the evening Dvorsky was in Larnaca. He was expected in spite of the late time. The offshore company employees transferred all the finances of the sub-company of "Pharma-2" to the personal account of Mikhail in due course. Why wouldn't they? They were returning just a small sum of the loan the Cyprus offshore company had received from Dvorsky. The truth was that all so-called investments from Lisochkin and Philippov were first of all placed into the account of his personal company and then shot into the Cyprus sub-company of "Pharma-2". Both accounts of Dvorsky were dealt with by the local employees. Mikhail immediately instructed them to transfer twenty per cent to Malkin's account and send the rest to the numbered account in Credit Suisse in Zurich. After that he opened his personal safe kept in the office of his company, took everything from there, said goodbye and flew to Malta.

“That is it!” Mikhail thought with a sweet feeling of satisfaction from the work he had done. “Now I’ve got to fly to Malta... Then Zurich again and Brazil.”

7

Five days later all the newspapers of the capital of Malta were writing about a terrible death of a Russian tourist with the documents of Vasiliy Prokhorov. He had fallen off the pier under the screws of the motorboats of the local hooligans rejecting navigation rules. The body of the dead was not looked for. A day after that tragic accident in Zurich a Czech national with the documents of Zbigneu Horeshowski ordered a transaction of roll-over from the numbered account in Credit Suisse to his personal account in a Brazilian private bank.

The biggest part had been done now. Dvorsky-Horeshowski had not expected himself to be so active. Now he could relax. It felt like a big weight of responsibility had been taken off his shoulders. He was to leave Europe now. He was to go where Soyfer had offered him to go.

Little things were pleasantly distracting his attention as usual and didn’t allow him to make decisions. Only now those little things didn’t effect anything and just nicely tickled his mind. A “Czech scientist” Zbigneu Horeshowski was sitting at the airport of Zurich and waiting for his flight to San Paulo. He had three hours before his flight. He was sitting in a bar in the waiting area and waiting for the whisky to be brought to him. He felt like texting everyone saying how great he felt. Something flashed below, under the table. “A cat!” Dvorsky thought. What else can a normal person with the rudiments of the Soviet reflexes think? He looked narrowly. Where was the cat? The wall next to his table turned out to be made out of glass, behind it there was a staircase leading down to another hall. Some passengers were going up and down the stairs. Suddenly Mikhail realized he didn’t have to text anyone. It would have been reckless after the latest events. Now some unknown force was dragging him downstairs, following the non-existent cat. He finished his drink, paid the bill and slowly went down the stairs.

Downstairs there was a small cosy cafe. Dvorsky went in. Peace and harmony disappeared. Opposite him, near the entrance there sat

Malkin. He was sipping a glass of light green liquid and to suppress the sickly sweet taste of the liquor "Chartreuse", from time to time he was drinking hot tea with salty peanuts. Mikhail left his bags near the door and feeling under hypnosis walked to his mate. He stopped two metres in front of him, confused. His first reaction was joy. At last, after the nerve-racking events he met a close friend. But he had not expected to see here any friends, especially Malkin. When there were problems, he usually was not there. Now the problems had nearly finished. It was true: Malkin was here.

They were not just partners, they were sort of friends. It was Leonid who had returned him to active life in the most difficult time for Dvorsky. When he had no job, his baby died, his wife left, his friends from the academy ran to their businesses, it was Malkin who made him look for his colleagues in science and revive Academician's business fallen apart. Leonid had already understood everything: the shareholder register and Yekaterina Zakharova. He had even realized that his girlfriend, nearly his fiancée, left him on someone's tip-off, his business had been lost and no trick of Dvorsky had saved him. He had just received his money and now was looking for Mikhail. Why? He didn't know himself.

The eternal patient of their clinic, former colonel of the Foreign Intelligence Service knew what was going on and told Malkin to look for Dvorsky in Zurich. The colonel was trusted. He usually didn't make mistakes. He used to get the newest injections in "Pharma-2" and they worked. In Afghanistan the helicopter which was taking him to Tashkent, fell in the mountains, everyone stayed alive, but he got a prolapse of the kidneys and his diabetes escalated...

Of course, in Zurich. So looking for Mikhail, Malkin did the right thing by flying to Switzerland. The Czech scientist was not known of. Malkin learned about the attempted assassination of Prokhorov in Amsterdam from the papers. He put two and two together and figured out that Prokhorov's "death" was another Mishka's idea. Nothing but a staging. They were walking somewhere together now and didn't give a damn. What motor-boats and piers did they talk about? Dvorsky and that range of attributes of the stupid death were absolutely incompatible things! He wouldn't make Vasya wander along the pier! That loon would definitely make mistakes! He had to calculate, walk about, look and swim himself... No! He wouldn't! He wouldn't do it

himself either! Because of the dreadful memories of the barges with tangerines and the blown-up pier in Sukhumi.

Malkin knew that for sure. But he didn't know the new name of his mate.

"Misha," Leonid said quietly looking around, "is it you?"

"No, it's not."

"Why not?"

"It's not me... Why are you here?"

Malkin seemed to not know the latest events. He was very light-some and non-strained. "It can't be!" Dvorsky thought. "He can't be with Katka." A moment later Mikhail chased the bad thought away and continued, "If it's you, Malkin, we shouldn't be here together..."

"As far as I understand, you are not Dvorsky already. Why? Are you scared of the new head mistress?"

"Honestly, you could have chosen a better place to meet."

"It was you who stopped and rushed to me like a loon. I am telling you – everything is clear here."

"I am not so sure," Mikhail said anxiously. He went red and his forehead was covered with sweat.

"I am not surprised. Everyone knows you are always in doubt."

"Have you g-got the money?"

"Yes. Much appreciated. Very handy."

From the outside everything looked unusual. One man was sitting with his head down and sipping the liquor, the other stopped half way to the table and not looking at Malkin was muttering something.

A young woman in a short floral dress who was standing next to them and didn't understand any language apart from Russian decided the man who was muttering to himself had gone mad. She had seen people like him before and she knew from her own experience that first of all she had to try and return him back to reality. He would probably be OK after all.

Pushing Dvorsky without any result, the woman realized it was useless, so she left the "patient" and rushed to the bar counter shouting in Russian and demanding a doctor. She was waving her arms, pointing at Dvorsky and her head. After seeing the local staff's dullness, she returned to the Russian man who was still talking to his mate and forced him to sit down next to Malkin. Mikhail clumsily fell in the chair and smiled unexpectedly. His smile only aggravated the diagnosis she set. However, being satisfied with what she had done, she walked aside.

"Sorry to trouble you, who is that Russian doll?" Malkin asked seeing how pushy the Russian girl was.

"Astronaut-pilot Tereshkova! Why are you asking? Or are you missing women already? Didn't you have enough of Katya Zakharova? This one could be from her team," Malkin's face changed colour. He must have been hurt a lot. He told Mikhail that straight after the seizure he remembered Katya's application form. That was when he knew who was behind her with the shareholder register, urgent changes in constituent documents, director's substitute and withdrawal power of attorney.

"What a bitch!" Leonid nearly shouted. "In her application form on the question 'family members' she wrote, 'Sister Nelly Zakharova lives in Moscow'. He waited for the terrible fact to go through his heart again, then he said quickly, 'Misha... This is President's administration.'"

"Where?" Dvorsky didn't get it and twisted his head looking for someone. "Do you mean that woman in a dress?"

"Don't play the fool! I know exactly who did it. I met him in 1990. He was working for Gorbachev, mummy's boy from the Foreign Ministry's family. I know him, his name is Alyabiev. I also know Katka's sister. Did you get it now? Took care of her... That was the first time in my life when I didn't collect the information."

Malkin went silent again thinking of something and then he finished in a calm voice, "They won't be able to do it! You'll see!"

"I don't care whether it's Alyabiev or someone else. I am leaving and I am extremely happy, Leonid! I have had enough! It's for the best. Soyfer told me that if I decided to join him I would have to tear off all connections. Especially with those scum bags Lisochkin and Philipov!"

Leonid looked at his friend with envy for the first time in his life. He imagined Mishka's new life. Just what he needed! No troubles or worries! The only job was to count molecules... Good money for that...

"Let's go together!" Dvorsky said quietly. "What's stopping you? You have no wife, no parents, no aunt... What are you going to do there? You've done everything you could. You can't take it all back, can you? We should have sold it straight away. A year after setting it up. But no – we wanted more and more! N-nice!" Dvorsky turned on his chair, looked around and calming down continued, "Evil got into pharma-

ceutics. The bureaucrats must understand there is no better place to launder money in the whole country. Philya wouldn't leave you alone either. See, Prokhorov is not alive any more. And no one knows where he is. He might be feeding worms now," Mikhail kept silent, then smiled. He was one tooth short so his smile looked strange and even sinister. "Actually, not. Feeding fish. Luckily our "real owner" didn't really know anything. Or we would have lost all the money. I was nearly late."

Malkin didn't interrupt and listened to the hints of Prokhorov's death. At the same time he was busy with a different thing. A dream to return the business was growing stronger. He felt like switching on the scheme for justice reconstruction in the relationships with bad customers. He was not used to being dumped by girlfriends. Especially in a cunning way.

"You know, Mishka, I will stay. At the end of the day, it all started because of me... I will try to change it all. I have got the money. Thank you... When you get rich in science, let me know. I will come to you and we'll organize something again. If you are not lucky, you are welcome back. You can always find me in court or in Stockholm or Tel Aviv. Everywhere the former female judges are waiting for me. I don't know the address but we'll look for an announcement in the main paper, won't we?"

Mikhail shrugged his shoulders and didn't answer. He remembered their old agreement to inform their location by writing about a sale of pankagen in the column of announcements.

"Why did you look for me?"

"To say goodbye," Malkin blurted out quickly, as if he had swallowed something. He hated emotional conversations and now got frightened of the sincere feeling inside him. Only now he understood how much it meant to be attached to the unlucky sailor and the ginger businessman, who had started getting bald and who was sick and tired of doing something he didn't want to. He hastened to get away from the lyric in their relationship and just looked at his friend sadly.

Mikhail Dvorsky was sitting opposite him cupping his chin in his hands and staring at the cold tea.

"Pay attention to "Tereshkova", she would suit you," Malkin nodded in the direction of the young woman in the dress.

The "Russian doll" was sitting at some distance, at another table, drinking coffee and had already forgotten about the mad Russian mut-

tering something to himself. She thought he was quite good-looking even though he didn't look like Alain Delon.

Malkin and Dvorsky said goodbye to each other and went in different directions. One of them went to board the plane to San Paulo, the other went to another floor where the planes flew to Russia, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine from.

8

The local airport Kloten disappointed the new Czech chemist who spoke only French. The flight to San Paulo was running late. He had to wait for five hours. "Zbigne" immediately understood the advantage of the wheeled bags. No other passenger had a bag like his, with over-the-shoulder handles. He found a trolley and put his luggage there. However, it didn't solve his problem. When he was walking from one lounge to another through to exit 38 he was being asked something all the time and he was confidently saying, "No". He was sure they were interested in whether he had anything prohibited on him. As he found out later, the staff were asking him to leave the trolley. On hearing harsh repeated "No", they would slow down but then grab the trolley and pull it to themselves. The Pseudo-Czech had to take his bags from the trolley and hang them on his right shoulder, not the left shoulder, which was aching all the time.

In the third lounge on the first floor there were only a few people and a lot of closed boutiques. That was probably why they were shut. "Horesowski" got another trolley and was relieved to place his bags in it. At last that was the last lounge. He had to have something to eat. But it was not to be! Only bars with sandwiches, coffee and drinks were open. The troubled traveller "Zbigne" confidently approached a barman and ordered a double heather honey whisky. He sat down and tried to calm down. He didn't need a stupid trolley, hot pizza, bandits or KGB men... Nothing! He got out his new mobile phone, turned the music from the film "Le Battant" with Alain Delon on, put the phone into his breast pocket and enjoyed the music.

The boutique opened. "Zbigne" got up and went to the shop, he kept pressing the "play" button on his phone. He picked up a travel document bag for the dearest thing he had – his passport of the So-

viet... – oh, no! – Czech scientist and went to the till. In front of him there stood the same “Tereshkova”, she turned around when she heard the familiar music, saw the “mad” man, gave him a smile, looked at the sales assistant again and holding a scarf in one hand, touched her hair with the other one and shouted, “I need a wool scarf, don’t you understand? Wool!”

“She is so spontaneous and confident! She will survive anywhere!” Dvorsky thought.

Another couple of hours – and he was in the plane. He had an aisle seat. That was good.

Next to him, near the window, was the same girl. “It must be destiny!” Mikhail thought. It was weird, she was from Holland as he understood from her passport. She looked twenty five. She held out her hand, “Hello, I thought you were a bit crazy.”

“Zbigne” as a true gentleman of Czech breed managed to squeeze her trendy multicoloured rucksack into the hand luggage compartment which had been already stuffed with his bags.

That was how the “Czech” and the Dutch nationals started talking. The Dutch girl turned out to be Russian, the Masha who Thomas Soyfer had talked about. She was single, or to be exact – divorced, and had a little son who had been born in Amsterdam a year before and was staying in a boarding house. The story about the Russian girl’s ordeal shocked Mikhail. But most of all he was attracted to the girl herself. She reminded him of his ex-wife. She had the same blue eyes and blonde hair. He could see she was kind, decisive, a little bit extravagant and a dreamer. She said she loved dreaming but she didn’t get upset when it didn’t work out. She would dream again and get excited over her dreams. One day she would be dreaming of seeing a Cayman lizard which swallowed shellfish, sometimes with pearls, another day she didn’t need anything except tobogganing down a hill. She had a rich imagination.. Dvorsky couldn’t fall asleep for a long time thinking of his new acquaintance’s adventures.

Yes, it was the Masha the billionaire talked about to prepare the scientific businessman to the idea that sometimes it was right and profitable to sell yourself and your skills. Now he, Mikhail Dvorsky, was flying to Brazil with the documents of unknown Zbigne Horeshowski, and next to him was the Russian who had suffered, escaped from the barge and had been brave enough to appear as a witness in court!

Why was Masha flying to Brazil? No one would have guessed. To get an unemployed single mother benefit in Holland, she had to queue and get checked every week in a job centre and present proof she had been looking for a job and fill in a lot of forms about spending the benefit money. In the form there was everything: window sizes, distance from the ceiling to the door handle, from the window to the opposite wall of the room where she lived, what the door was made of, what the wall was made of, the width of the toilet paper... What if she was wasting the money! In Brazil no one needed all that. Also it was warm there and there was a Cayman lizard.

It was hot in the salon of the plane. The air conditioning didn't work properly. It felt like the plane had been waiting at the runway for an hour, it didn't feel like it was ten thousand metres high. The seat in front of the "Czech scientist" was reclined and so was the telly fitted in the back of it, so he couldn't see anything. His neighbour had suffered for two hours until she found a cartoon and a comfortable position to sleep. After that she relaxed. She fell asleep wearing ear-phones, doubling up in her corner near the window. After what had happened to her she was always asking for a window seat.

Dvorsky couldn't fall asleep. He was looking at sleeping Masha, he could smell her slightly bitter hair, he could see her breathing smoothly. She had a few salty sweat drops on her white neck. She was wearing a thin dress hardly keeping hold of her seductive shape... She looked very feminine and Mikhail suddenly gently re-arranged a lock of her hair covering her eyes.

Before the passport control Maria disappeared. In spite of being attracted to his new acquaintance, Mikhail checked his bags. They were all there. Then he thought – it was like in the underground. If you were behaving strangely, for example, standing instead of moving, someone would come up and ask for something. Someone would ask for money, another would offer to buy a new grater file... Here it was the same. When people flew often, they had a stereotype of behaviour. Any deviations caused a chance of undesirable situations. It was not worth standing next to a stranger who you had been sitting with and chatting to before the passport control. What if he was illegal or carrying something prohibited? She had disappeared. What a shame! Mikhail had got used to her.

He had no doubts that if they had spent so many hours together flying to Brazil, to the other side of the ocean, she would be some-

where there. The ocean was big, so any country around it looked small. If they talked about the flood in Brazil, you would start worrying about your friends in San Paulo. And you wouldn't realize the flood was thousands of kilometres away from there, somewhere at the Amazon mouth. Everyone knew what happened to an object when it moved away: it decreased in size. The same with Brazil.

In the open air, outside, the temperature was thirty two degrees! It was twenty kilometres to the centre of San Paulo. But the "Czech scientist" stayed in a small hotel near the airport and waited. He was waiting for a week.

Dvorsky waited to hear from his mother. At last a telegramme of silly content came to the hotel addressed to Zbignev Horeshowski, "In May no one flies from London or Zurich. Love, Anya". He didn't need any explanations. He had always prepared everything thoroughly and thoughtfully, as he had done at school before his favourite lesson of chemistry. It meant his mother would fly to San Paulo before May finished by the flight from Barcelona. Moscow and Amsterdam had been eliminated. There were three days left before June.

Today in the arrival lounge of the airport there were few people. Most people flew by "France Air" or "British Airways". Not many used the flight from Barcelona though it was the cheapest. Dvorsky was waiting for his mother, he was nervous. From time to time he would take his left hand out from his gilet lapel. Instead of his index finger there was a white bandage with a plaster.

9

A week ago, on the 15th of August, an hour after the explosion at the junction the injured driver was brought into the clinic. All his injuries and scratches seemed to be the consequence of the assassination attempt. But the doctors couldn't explain the cut off finger.

Yes! It was an assassination attempt. That was what it said in the police report. They found the remains of the explosive device, controlled remotely.

"The Russian was lucky," the policemen who inspected the scene of crime said to each other. "If it had exploded on the roof of the car, everything would have burst into pieces. He would have been dead."

"Yes, he was lucky he braked in front of the traffic lights and the "bomb" fell down. But when did they put it there?"

"Must have been recently. They must have known it would fall..."

The patient was coming round and muttering something deliriously. They couldn't hear what it was, they wouldn't have understood it anyway.

"It's Amsterdam police. What's your name?" the man standing at the bed asked. He was an elderly slim policeman holding a switched on voice recorder.

The patient opened his eyes, stared at the person in uniform and kept silent. He couldn't understand what the "actor" with a microphone in his hand was saying. But seeing his face and hearing the same tune of his voice he suddenly remembered a policeman in a film who was bluntly and persistently bothering a victim, "Where and when were you born?" He didn't get an answer and kept repeating the same thing thinking that if he repeated the words several times the result would squeeze out of the lying person, "Where and when were you born?"

"Can you hear me? What's your name?"

The injured man said a word quietly and with a stutter.

"Sorry? Can you repeat? Who can justify your identity here, in Amsterdam? The documents of Vasiliy Prokhorov from Russia have been found on you."

The injured patient didn't understand where he was and why his body was aching. He couldn't help realizing he had concussion, a dislocated collarbone and a bandage replacing his index finger. But he didn't know whether it had happened a day or a week before. He tried to remember but he got such a headache that he decided not to think at all.

He couldn't get rid of one thought, "So I am in Holland again. If I tell them my name, a day later everyone will know, they will report in newspapers and on telly. I don't want that to happen. I need to fly to Larnaca urgently. What does Prokhorov have to do with all of this? Why his documents?"

"Valta... C-counsellor... Russian," the patient said at last in English and added, "Find her..."

The counsellor with a rare name was known to many people in Amsterdam. So the police quickly found and brought her to the clinic to identify the injured man.

“Yes, he is Russian, he is from Russia and he is my patient,” Valta blurted out without naming him. “Can I take him to mine? He will feel better there. I have his medical notes, his address, next of kin and so on. If you need them I will send them in.”

The policemen didn’t mind.

The Russian was transferred to the counsellor’s office and laid on a couch. His headache gradually went and his general condition improved. The policemen gladly left. Their shift had finished. When the other ones came they would sort everything out.

The next day in the same office Valta was sitting at the desk and looking through her notes made the day before during the latest session with the patient. She was recording the medical history. The couch was empty. This time the patient left so quickly he didn’t even say good-bye.

“Patient, Mikhail D., born in Russia in 1960, a scientist and businessman, has been observed for 18 months. Complained of frequent memory loss. His mental state is associated with a range of growing nervous disorders, especially the ones connected to the emotional shock in his childhood in relation to his father’s leave and later as a result of general anxiety at making complicated decisions in critical conditions. By means of memory loss the patient was able to displace the memory of traumatic events or problem period of life.

Thirty seven sessions of psychotherapy and hypnosis have been carried out. Phenomenon of dissociative identity disorder is present. The patient is clearly demonstrating a double personality. Every alternative personality has their own perception and environment interaction mechanism.

At present a suicide possibility is excluded, but the client is still not able to identify himself. Today he is Mikhail D. But during the same session after switching on a triggering engram, Mikhail becomes Vasiliy P. and vice versa. His facial expression, mimic, voice and speech change. The patient starts looking for a wig touching his hair with his hands. Fullness of shades of Vasiliy Prokhorov’s unreal biography confirms fully formed mental disorder of Mikhail D.

Outside the psycho-therapeutic sessions transitions “Mikhail D. – Vasiliy P.” took place weekly. Exactly the same length intervals disappeared from the memory accordingly of Mikhail D and his alter-personality, Vasiliy P.

The triggers of the start of the weekly transit were sharp changes of the temperature regime caused most probably by a steam room procedure. Mikhail D. had been getting steam procedures and then pouring cold water over himself for purposes of fortifying against cold for over twenty years.

Short transitions happened rarely. They were caused mainly by two engrams fixed in the patient's mind. The first was the patient's reaction for rocking. During the session hypnosis was applied and the patient, being "Vasiliy P." imagined himself in a train compartment. The second engram, far less the case, was his reaction to everything sharp or even mentioning spicy food and is likely to be connected to the patient's memories of doctors' conversations about needles, which he heard five years ago during an operation on his arm when he was semi-conscious under general anaesthetic.

On the 15th of August 1997 Mikhail D was admitted after a psychic and physical trauma associated with an attempt to his alter-personality, Vasiliy P. In situations of this kind the nature usually resists with all forces and the personality is integrated: the person who was admitted into the psycho-therapeutical clinic was not Vasiliy P., but the nervous disorder bearer. He didn't know how he found himself in Amsterdam, he didn't know anything about the explosion, the cut off finger on his left hand or his dislocated collarbone.

The patient is planning to give up business and pursue science, settle down and live a healthy lifestyle. Considering the decision of Mikhail D. being final and on eliminating the situation similar to the ones he had in the problem period of his life, the patient was given detailed explanations of his illness. His attention was drawn to the fact that even under favourable conditions his second personality will come out but not so systematically as before.

The patient was recommended to continue psychotherapy sessions."

After the last session at Valta's Dvorsky couldn't calm down for a long time. He knew everything about himself and his illness now but he kept sitting in front of Marina Eduardovna silently. He was looking around her office. His eyes were constantly looking for something: the wig, Prokhorov's passport, the cup of cold tea... His questioning eye sometimes stopped on the doctor, looking for a hint. He had a lot of thoughts but they couldn't answer a simple main question, "What will Prokhorov do now?"

Dvorsky slowly got up, went to another room, stood there near the window, then quickly turned, ran down the stairs to the ground floor and sneakily left the counsellor's office.

He left as a free person. He was free both physically and mentally. He was so free that he didn't even have any documents. They were in the rest room of the bath house outside Vyborg where his mother lived.

To buy a ticket to Larnaca he had to use the passport with Prokhorov's name. Their photos were similar. Only one had a wig with blonde curls and the other had short ginger hair with bald patches.

10

Someone called Perminov Nickolay Nickolayevich filed a petition in the Arkhangelsk town court. He sued Zakharova Yekaterina Petrovna for one hundred fifty thousand dollars. Perminov, or to be exact, his lawyer, announced that the applicant had known Zakharova by joint work. A year ago he, Perminov, being in St.Petersburg, lent Zakharova the indicated sum of money at her request. The agreement was concluded in non-documentary form. The applicant had a receipt and two witnesses. Their passport copies were enclosed. Zakharova had property in the form of one hundred per cent of shares of the pharmaceutical company "Pharma-2".

The cost of the company approximately matched the debt of the responder. Cost estimating of the company by an independent expert was enclosed. The applicant chose the court by his place of registration, in Arkhangelsk.

The invitation to the first sitting was sent by recorded delivery to the address of Zakharova's registration. But to send didn't mean to hand in. It was enough for someone to take a notification out of the post box and the work was done. Ten days later the notification went back.

The responder "ignored" the first sitting in court. She could be ill or late... The second sitting was in a month. The applicant prepared a request: as a precaution to seize the property of Zakharova. Namely, her shares in registered capital of the company. The responder didn't attend again. The court satisfied Perminov's request. Another month or two passed. Everything became clear. Two weeks later a decision of Arkhangelsk town court came to Court of registration of St.Petersburg

about transferring the property for shares in company “Pharma-2” to the name of Perminov Nickolay Nickolayevich.

The next day Perminov gave the company to the Cyprian offshore company belonging to the nationals of Cyprus Kusides and Photiadis. On completing the honourable deal, they came to St.Petersburg, invited the militia and the Cyprian ambassador, changed the director, accounts and security.

That was how the ill-fated business was returned to Malkin and Lisochkin.

Perminov, on whose behalf the lawyers in Arkhangelsk acted and two witnesses were prepared by Philya. He got two tramps with expired criminal records and six-month registration of residence. The complainant who had never been outside his native town was very proud that on a five-hundred rouble note there was a picture of the familiar Solovetsky Monastery. The two witnesses lived outside Petersburg or in prisons, but had never been to St.Petersburg.

No one argued with the Court. Everyone understood that to make business of the company would not be real. No one would even talk with the new owners without the author patent. Yekaterina Zakharova returned to her job as a judge assistant. Mikhail Alyabiev who nearly killed the most important business for the country, continued his career in Old Square. It didn’t work out this time. “It’s life,” he would repeat Nietzsche’s words. “What does not kill us makes us stronger.” He kept going to Saint Pierre Chartreuse every year and would stand at the top of the mountain in beautiful expensive equipment watching everyone go down the slope, fall, get up, go down again...

Philippov who had been a child prodigy, played the violin and had done for seven years in Leningrad French-language school, and often emphasized that he was very fond of everything French. This time he decided all the story was not “comme il faut”. He had been dumped at his people’s presence. In business it shouldn’t happen and Nietzsche-Alyabiev’s motto couldn’t accidentally get into his head. On the contrary, after Prokhorov’s disappearing Philya would say in public. “A & B were sitting on the roof. “A” fell off, “B” disappeared. Who was left?” And he answered himself, “Malkin, the partner of the brain-box Dvorsky! They must have shared the money. Dvorsky and Vasiliy have disappeared. I am not going to chase their bodies!” Philippov turned to Lisochkin and asked, “Lisician, my friend! Has the lawyer helped you

to return what was left after the outrage of the bureaucrats from Moscow?"

"Looks like it," Lisochkin answered. "Not all of it, of course. Some has disappeared. Whether he helped or not we need to figure out. Without the patent author we can only carry on for a couple of years. It won't last long. That's how it works. Oh, yes! The director was Malkin's tart..."

"My world!"

Philya looked at Lisochkin attentively, shook his head as if he wanted to say, "Aren't you simple, Yury Mikhailovich!" and changed the subject. People close to him understood that look of his without any words.

Malkin was not a nominal director now, but a real one and he owned the same twenty per cent of the company "Pharma-2". Leonid was not scared of his new role and was still driving "Toyota Camry". From one court to another, from one to another... He grew unaccustomed to his former unlucky partner. He had a share in "Pharma-2" and it brought him quite a lot every month.

"Toyota" was running along the avenue. There were just a few cars. At the junction of Lermontov Avenue and 13th Krasnoarmeyskaya Street the car turned right. When it was approaching the building of Lenin People's Court, suddenly "Zhiguli-6" came out across. A dull swat could be heard as if a tyre had punctured. "Toyota" drove a little bit further, got to the curb and sputtered out. Malkin was sitting at the steering wheel. His left arm with a turned up white sleeve was hanging over the opened window. The mobile phone on the floor was still talking in a sweet female voice. Leonid was sitting up straight. Only his chin was touching his tie. On his head there was a small black dot on his temple.

Epilogue

In a summerhouse covered with passion fruit lianas a hammock was swaying. A man was lying in it. His face was tanned, his eyes were half shut. He was chilling out after a morning swim and a promenade along the sandy beach. Nice!

Beneath, near the ground, where the sun was not hot, on thin stems there were a few flowers left. Multicoloured hummingbirds, as small as bees, were hanging there. They were sucking sweet nectar from the bright violet stamens with their long small tongues. The fresh wind from the ocean coming through the sandy-dunes and low hills could hardly be felt here. It was indifferently turning the pages of the monograph "Gerontological Aspect of Peptide Regulation". On the table there lay big envelopes decorated in Malevich' prints. The ripe, smoothly cut guava fruit pieces in a big bowl were emitting a gentle but strong smell.

In the kitchen a young blonde woman in a short dress hoisted on her tummy was cooking dinner. A little boy was playing with a plastic toy dirk on the floor. His grandma's brisk voice was coming from the room, she was repeating the words in Portuguese after a dictaphone. On the chest of drawers between the neat piles of books there was an old photo in a frame. It was of a lady in a simple dress and a man in the uniform of a lieutenant-colonel of the Red Army, smiling to each other.

Gradually a doze was filling the man's consciousness and switching off his mind. He was feeling like he did in his childhood. He was in the village bath house. While his body was hot, he ran and jumped into the cold brook. Then he came out and sat on the bank, on the green grass without thinking of anything. His blood vessels were tightening, he was feeling dizzy and he forgot everything in the world...

The hammock rocking had increased. All the smells had disappeared. Apart from one. He was chasing a man everywhere and would stay with him forever. It was a dreadful mix of ripe tangerines, heavy odour of drunk and sweaty human bodies, stench of fresh blood and sour smoke of Cuban cigarettes “Ligeros”.

*Primorsk, Manola (Russian Federation, Leningrad Region),
Florianopolis (Brazil), 2011–2012*

Historic Reference

March 1985 – M.S.Gorbachev was elected as the General secretary of the Central Committee of CPSU, beginning of the “reconstruction” policy.

February 1989 – Withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

March 1990 – Lithuania was announced independent.

July 1990 – Agreement between the USSR and FRG about the union of Germany concluded.

April 1991 – Georgia declared independence. Autonomous republics of Abkhazia and South Osetia announced of non-recognition of Georgia’s independence.

April 1991 – Military establishments of the Warsaw Pact dismissed.

August 1991 – State Committee of the State of Emergency formed, coup.

December 1991 – Belavezha Accords signed, USSR stopped existing.

January 1992 – Price liberalisation started.

August 1992 – July 1993 – Georgian-Abkhazian war.

October 1993 – Russian Federation Parliament execution.

June 1996 – B. Eltzin was elected Russian President in the nation-wide voting.

October 1996 – B.Berezovsky appointed Deputy secretary of Security Council of the Russian Federation.

February 2011 – Government Decree of the Russian Federation (No.91, 17.02.11) about the federal special-purpose programme “Pharmaceutic and medical industry of the Russian Federation development for the period up to the year 2020 and further perspective”...

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