

Irina Malenko

Soviética

Part 3. Willemstad

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...How often we are being told that the Soviet man is nothing but utopia, that he never existed, doesn't exist, will never exist and cannot exist! Read the book of a modern author who spent many years in "flourishing" Europe, and you will see that it's not truth. The Soviet man is alive and well today! He doesn't measure life by money and personal success. He is compassionate; he lives in work and struggle...

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my comrades **Eugène Edward Godfried Presilia** (1952-2009), patriot of Curaçao, political activist and broadcaster and **Joceline Clemencia** (1952-2011), leader of *Partido Independensha Curaçao*, director of *Instituto Kultural Independensha* who both sadly untimely passed away after I have completed his book..

Irina Malenko (December 2012)

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Preface to my Korean readers

My dear Korean friends!

In addition to what I have already said in the preface to foreign readers about the history of writing this book and the reasons that prompted me to take up the pen, I would like to address you directly with all my heart.

Korean readers are very special for me. Not only because the book, which tells the story of what the Soviet people were like, today cannot be understood anywhere in the world, as well as in the DPRK. There is also the exceptional role played by your great and wonderful country in today's world. It is a magnet and a beacon of hope for all the progressive forces of humanity. I am not afraid to say in a straightforward manner that the DPRK today is the only country on our planet truly and selflessly devoted to the ideas of socialism.

It has been five years since that memorable day when I first set foot on Korean soil. And since that day my life has changed forever. Now I'm not afraid of any intrigues of our mutual enemies. I laugh into their faces when I hear their angry rants and lies about your and my socialist Motherlands. Every evening when I go to bed and every morning when I wake up, my first thought is about your country, and it is not just nice words. Every morning when I wake up thinking that there is Songun Korea in this world, I feel a warm glow in my heart. But this is not a relaxing kind of warmth, like being next to a warm stove in winter: it is a sacred fire of the Revolution, a living blaze. You kept this blaze in the darkest years for the socialist world and you passed it on to us, those who carry an inextinguishable guilt for what has happened to our country, for the fact that we have weakened our class vigilance. And now for us to redeem this guilt, we have to give our everything to the sacred cause of the restoration of socialism in our homeland. This also includes the wholehearted, unconditional support for the Korean revolution and the Korean people in their struggle to build a prosperous, powerful socialist nation.

"Lude, milovaljsem vas. Bdete!"

"People, I loved you — be vigilant!" — with these words ends the book "Notes from the Gallows" of the hero of the Czech resistance during World War II, writer Julius Fucik (1903-1943), who wrote this book, his last will and testament, after he was jailed and tortured by the German occupiers in Pankrác Prison in Prague.

My book provides a look "from the inside" of how and why we in the Soviet Union lost our class vigilance, which eventually led to the collapse of socialism and to incalculable tragedy for millions of people around the world. I was very honest in this description and analysis, even when it was hard to speak frankly about many things. It was important so that you, comrades, would be able to draw important lessons from our tragic experience.

I was also very frank in describing the capitalist reality as it is — behind the false facade of full shop windows and mythical "freedoms." The things that I wrote were not just general words of condemnation of capitalism; in my book you will find concrete examples that show what the inhuman capitalist system does to people, how it deprives them of intelligence, of dignity, of a worthy life.

Dear Korean comrades! I love you, be vigilant! Having learnt from our example, always remain vigilant in the face of manipulators and seducers of the "free market economy" and the alleged "human freedoms."

Today the DPRK is the proud and unbending Prometheus of the world's socialism. Not only for me personally, but for many of my friends in different parts of the world in the most difficult moments of

our lives your country has become a breath of fresh air when we were choking in the atmosphere of rotten capitalism, it has become firm ground under our feet when we were drowning in a capitalist swamp, it has become our spiritual support, warming our souls, and our guiding star. And now Songun Korea is like a little glowing sun, which we will carry in our hearts for the rest of our lives.

Thank you for the fact that you do live in this world!

Thank you for your guidance.

Irina Malenko

December 2012.

Chapter 20. Provo¹ came out of the brume...

“The Moon once came out of the brume,

A sharpen’d dagger had that loon

«I will cut you, I will beat,

Anyway you have to lead!»

(A Soviet nursery rhyme)

“Because you are speaking not the things you’re thinking and have to think what you don’t really think - that’s why you are sitting in cages. Generally speaking, I’m watching all this bitter nonsense...”

(Soviet film “Kindza-dza”)

Kids are the most excellent and effective cure for unrequited love. Earlier, when I was young, I couldn’t realize it. With youthful maximalism in my own time I listened to my Mum reading the letter from her friend from the Institute, Olga, who had a reckless love for a Frenchman, which ended up tragically (I don’t know the details) and who found powers in herself to forget him and marry (*“not for big love, just because I had to do it”*, as she wrote) and bear three children to her husband. “How could she?” - I asked with disgust, - “To marry without love? And even more so - to bear three kids? Phew, how bad! Surely she should have to be true to her emotions and stayed alone!”

Now that I’m more than 30 years old with one unrequited love behind me, I realize quite well how she was able to do it... Haven’t I had my twins now, I’d have continued to suffer and be exasperated because of a man, who (let’s call things with their names) has rejected me. Crying at nights in your pillow and drinking at weekends. Kids don’t allow you to do these foolish things. Sleep is a wonderful luxury, so when you get to the pillow you fall asleep instantly. And you wake up with one desire - to go to sleep again. If you have woken up at night only two or three times, you are lucky! In the morning you jump out of bed accompanied to by your baby’s cry as some steadfast tin soldier. You already have neither romantic dreams, nor fleshly desires but the only one aspiration – to have a good sleep! Generally you don’t feel like a woman and sometimes even like a person. You turned into something formless with a loose belly and with drooping eyelids from permanent lack of sleep. It’s only some Madonna or Victoria Beckham can afford working it out in gyms and shaping, getting shaped and

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lifted whatever they wish for. You have no money, no time, and no strength to do it (you don't have a platoon of well-paid baby-sitters at your beck and call, you know)!

And it isn't the Soviet Union, too: the real grandmothers you could rely on there died out here like dinosaurs long ago! The life of an ordinary young mother is harsher than training in the US army. From dawn till dusk you function as a serving machine for everyone who needs you at home. But you have no time either to think or worry about it. You are in a vicious circle: feeding-pampers-walking-bathing with crying as your bonus. And there is no way out of it, even if you run away to the kitchen and lock everything up from both sides – out of the blue, on the window shelf there appears a miaowing cat demanding food. You put on a saucer some fish for it and you are quite happy that the cat doesn't need the nappy to be changed!

What kind of love-pangs would survive it! What torment is more painful than suffering from lack of sleep? If you had energy to philosophize, you might even find something masochistic in this new state, some kind of freewill expiation of your own sins. But there is no time to philosophize: the pasta may boil over and burn on the kitchen-range, and you have to take clothes out of the washing machine. Meanwhile your offspring crash and break everything in the living room. After taking pasta off from the saucepan, you face the everyday portion of crawling along the green carpet attempting in vain to clean off the cherry jam drops, which resemble blood shed on a battlefield...

One who had experienced all these would never ask stupid questions, such as why in the human history women haven't made as many groundbreaking discoveries in chemistry and physics, or haven't created as many music and poetic masterpieces as men. I wonder how Tolstoy's "War and Peace" would have come about, if Lev Nikolaevich had to babysit all his twelve kids day and a night? And if after writing 10-15 lines every time he had had to run to the next room in response to demanding baby cries?

By evening I was usually feeling like the sergeant major Vaskov in the final scene of the film *Dawns here are quiet...*, when he is escorting the captured fascists through marshes, trying not to fall down of tiredness. And every day like this - seven day a week, for a number of years. For chronic shortage of sleep for the first time in my life I started to look my age. Well, wasn't all that my real goal? People refer to this shock-therapy as "fighting fire with fire..."

...But anyway, it would be a lie to say that I'd forgotten Oisín altogether. It would have been a kind of wishful thinking. But, thanks God, I just had neither time, no strength to nurture my self-pity. Still, for a long time there was not a single day without recollecting him - usually, at night, before sleep. "Oh God, please, help me to eradicate him out of my thoughts!" - this was the usual start of my nightly prayer.

There are no miracles in this world. Of course, he must have got married. Of course, he must have already had a child. Of course, now he even didn't remember me. But what did I expect from that man? After all, he had just worked towards his assignment. Well, having a bit of fun in the meantime... He isn't a robot.

For a long time I still hated myself for having given free rein to my passions. I hated him because all that time he was only "adding fuel to the fire." I hated the Irish liberation movement veterans because they were importuning me, although I hadn't given them a good excuse - without regard of age difference, of their families. I hated them for viewing me as a charmer, although I didn't try to be one. I absolutely didn't need all those "attractive old bones." While my charm wasn't enough for Oisín, who was the only fish in the sea...

I didn't even have his photo as a keepsake. It was just against the rules of conspiracy. I couldn't ask anybody about him. And when I heard by chance his name I was all too afraid that someone would notice how much he was important to me.

Sometimes there are things one shouldn't know about, I thought. For example, it is better not to know that a person whom you adore is "*just a lazy lout*", and even more, that he is from a "*bad family*." It is better not to know that he has a wife suffering from neurosis, who had already buried before him another fiancé who had died of an incurable disease. It is better not to know that his brother had beaten his ex-wife, who had been in prison and given birth to a baby, being almost handcuffed...

What for is that kind of knowledge? To prove yourself that you were lucky that he wasn't with you?

And who said that all of that was not just somebody's personal point of view on him and his life, and it was not less subjective than my adoration of him? It is not in vain that Chavez²' favourite song is

« *No soy monedita de oro*

pa' caerles bien a todos

asi naci y asi soy

*si no me quieren, ni modo*³.»

Or, to paraphrase it with a Russian saying, "I'm not a ten-rouble banknote, that everybody should like me." Chavez is a strong fellow. He knows what he is talking about.

Oisin lived his usual life somewhere, earning his living by repairing furniture. His wife, surely, even didn't know about me. She could sleep well; I was not one of those people, who made no bones about ruining others' families. Just not my style.

In all those years I caught a glimpse of him only once: in the Dublin airport through the glass window. I was flying away while he had just arrived and was walking along the next corridor in the opposite direction. That situation seemed very symbolical to me... It sounds strange, but that meeting particularly helped me to calm down finally and to overcome myself which I had previously felt as an impossible thing to do...

... He didn't see me, but I was confused and realized how much I wanted to hide. After him some quite commonplace girl marched with a typically Irish sweeping-swaying gait, her face so blank that I'd never recognize it if we meet again. It didn't escape me, though, that she had narrow hips, prominent beer belly and bosom, peasant broad cheekbones and flaxen hair tied in a ponytail. But I didn't waste time on inspecting her, since I only had a few seconds to reload the picture of him in my memory... By the way, Oisin hadn't changed at all. He had only put on a little weight from family life – a normal thing to happen.

I am not Yekaterina Sheveleva⁴, whose heroines call their daughters Tatiana after "the happiest woman in the world named Tatiana" (the wife of her favourite hero). On the contrary, when I saw that "happiest woman", I finally felt the long-awaited disappointment in Oisin to appear. Not only because there was no air of happiness around her... True, the song claims: "prettiness makes no pottage", but her face expressed too obvious intellectual poverty to need any comment. Of course I quite conceded, that our "Tatiana" could cook the Irish stew well. Or even that she was a Ph.D. in a very special and

² Hugo Chavez Frias (b.1954) - current President of Venezuela (since 1999), initiator of many progressive social reforms

³ "I Am Not a Gold Coin" - popular Latin American song

⁴ Soviet poetess, journalist and writer (1916-1997) who was fond of the Soviet leader Yuri Andropov. Tatiana was the name of Andripov's wife

narrow area, like those tailors that specialize in sewing on buttons but don't change the general picture. Had I had a chance to chat with her a couple of times about the weather and baby diapers over a pint of beer in some pub, the romantic picture of Oisín would have probably finally blurred in my mind completely!

*Et tu, Brute*⁵?... There is some irony in the fact that the men, involved in the reshaping of this world, choose women of this kind: not interested in anything save soap operas, shopping, crocheting, etc.. While our shares accrue to no more than men who would just make the best matches for those commonplace women. Although I tend to think that such numblers as Oisín generally don't choose anybody of their own accord. In this respect he is like Shurek⁶. Those ones are just objects of somebody's choice.

I also didn't choose. The fate threw me onto Kieran Cassidy like a gale throws ashore a boat that has miraculously avoided been drowned by the tenth wave. He was just at the right time in the right place. And he behaved in the right way... I was lucky with the one who became the father of my children. Actually Kieran reminded me of a big and reliable lifebuoy. That was the role he played in my life. When you felt that you were drowning, it was enough just to embrace his long neck and close your eyes...

You remember, I told you that married couples in modern Russia mostly remind me of two people clinging together just to survive? They are together not because of their great love, they are far from being equal partners, travelling through life hand-in-hand with self-esteem and confidence in the future, as it usually was in the Soviet years. No, today even in the street they hold on to each other, as if they are afraid of being driven apart. Like if they unclasp hands, the wind – the infamous “Wind of changes⁷”, advertised so much by group Scorpions - will immediately pick them up and carry them in different directions like balloons. This song sounds like huge mockery for the Soviet people today.

And of course, those couples we have today are hardly allies, seeking together the way to make the world better, as was the case in the USSR. “Beggars are bad choosers!” - is written on their faces. Still, guided by my Soviet ideals, all my life I had been looking for a companion, a comrade. And Oisín awakened in me the illusion that I had finally found one...

I'd never thought that I would pair up with someone for sheer survival - and the only thing Kieran and I tried to do was to survive. After all, it's easier to do it together than alone.

For a long time I hadn't been considering him as my match, even already expecting children by him. Firstly, because I didn't want to burden him with my troubles, as I didn't want to burden anyone with them. But he somehow easily and naturally took the part of them on himself, not forcing me into his lifestyle or his decisions, as Sonny had used to do.

Secondly, because we probably were more friends than passionate lovers. *Maatjes*⁸, as the Dutch say. I could talk to him openly about anything - maybe even about my feelings for another man - and he wouldn't be offended and understood. But, of course, I was not talking about such things: because

⁵ *Et tu, Brute?* is a [Latin](#) phrase often used to represent the [last words](#) of [Roman dictator Julius Caesar](#) to his friend [Marcus Brutus](#) at the moment of [his assassination](#). While it can be variously translated as "Even you, Brutus?", "You too, Brutus?", "Thou too, Brutus?" or "And thou, Brutus?," the most literal translation is "And you, Brutus?" Immortalized by [Shakespeare's Julius Caesar](#) (1599), the quotation is widely used in [Western culture](#) to signify the utmost betrayal

⁶ Heroine's uncle (see “Soviética. Part 1”)

⁷ “Wind of Change” (1990) is the title of a song written by Klaus Meine, vocalist of German heavy metal band Scorpions. The lyrics celebrate Glasnost and Perestroika in the USSR, and the widespread fall of Communist-run governments among eastern bloc nations beginning in 1989

⁸ Mates, pals (Dutch)

Kieran became dear to me in his way, and I didn't want to offend him or hurt his feelings. I suspected that somewhere deep inside he also hid unrequited love, but I didn't disturb his soul. Instead, we just fulfilled together our family responsibilities, worried, laughed and were happy, supporting and replacing each other when our powers were dwindling away.

I never insisted on anything and I demanded nothing from him. He harnessed himself into the family yoke, with all the assiduity of a Taurus. Kieran was a certain workaholic: he couldn't sit quietly even one minute, except when smoked. When there weren't male duties at home, he went for women's chores: vacuum cleaning, wiping windows, washing dishes, cooking. If dinner was ready, he cooked something for the future, for the next day. This, of course, was also a kind of escapism, but it was much more useful than my endless buying books and other things. Kieran wasn't afraid of Lisa's illness, he viewed her just as a normal human being of full value, deserving respect. He was always saying without any affectation in his voice that we had three children.

After a busy day in Kieran's room there was a smell exactly the same as it used to be once upon a time in the kitchen of my grandfather after he had weeded potatoes in the vegetable garden and chopped firewood. It made him even closer. He had big brown and slightly greenish eyes behind the thick glasses and a long aquiline nose. His height was not Irish, he was like Uncle Styopa⁹, the kind giant militiaman from the famous Soviet tale by Sergey Mikhalkov. And he had consummately funny, sarcastic sense of humor, giving no quarter anyone. To those overly lyrical about vegetable salads, for example, he said, thoughtfully:

- Well, I've been thinking looking at you... I wonder *who will clean your cage?*..

He didn't accept anything new or unknown at all, like most Northern Irish. He didn't try unfamiliar foods and didn't listen to unfamiliar music. For years he was eating, drinking and watching on TV the same things. Why hadn't he been afraid to get involved with me? It remains a mystery forever.

It was obvious that he wasn't looking for a home-keeper: to my shame, he coped with many household duties much better than me. More than that, for him – a confirmed bachelor that he had been, the family life was a great lifestyle convulsion. But he never once complained about anything, even when he was very tired. And he wasn't overly concerned about the physical side of family relations: to my delight, he was free of those morbid fantasies that excruciated Dermot so fruitlessly. In this area, as well as with foods, he didn't experiment. There is a healthy mind in a healthy body. *Wat een opluchting!*¹⁰

Kieran grew up in Belfast - unfortunately, in a seriously dysfunctional family, like many Catholics from the western part of the city during the Troubles. Emotional and psychological effects of "The Troubles" for the natives of that ghetto were approximately the same as for the Indian tribes pushed into reserves. Among Kieran's siblings there were schizophrenics, alcoholics, chronically depressed ones and Catholic bigots - the devotees of Padre Pio¹¹. Sometimes a number of these qualities were rolled in one person. The most normal person in the family was his elderly mother - a nice, well-dressed, "Merry Widow"¹², who had buried her second husband not so long before and was going to marry for the third time. She wasn't like any of her own children in her style, nor like most Catholic Belfast women. Perhaps because she was of Protestant roots in spite of her own dedicated Catholicism.

⁹ Uncle Styopa ("Дядя Стёпа") was a series of poems composed by the Russian children's poet Sergey Mikhalkov. The poems centered around a *militционер* (policeman) who was unusual due to his very large height.

¹⁰ What a relief! (Dutch)

¹¹ Saint Pio (Pius) of Pietrelcina (1887–1968) was a Capuchin Catholic priest from Italy who is venerated as a saint in the Catholic Church

¹² *The Merry Widow* (1905) is a very well-know in the USSR operetta by the Austro-Hungarian [composer Franz Lehár](#).

If I complained to Mrs. Cassidy that I was tired and hadn't slept enough because of the children, she advised me quite seriously to seek help from... the Holy Spirit! "The Holy Spirit will protect you." It was very difficult to listen to it, keeping a straight face...

None of her eight children had got a reasonable education, although it was compensated for by the fact that some of them including Kieran were smart from nature. (The Irish in general are a nation of talented, but not very educated people because of the historical colonial causes.) But life requires knowledge besides the innate intelligence, and, alas, degree certificates. None of them had either the first, or the second, thus the way "up", out of the ghetto, was closed for them to a smaller or larger degree.... It was a typical thing for the Catholics of their generation. They haven't worried very much about it and for generations "stewed in their own juice", helping each other to survive (especially Republicans), including economically. Sometimes it seemed that all of them had married each other: a few more generations living such life and their descendants would have genetic diseases because of that.

Kieran easily grasped everything, could do plenty of things at home from the repairing of any equipment to plastering the walls – he was a beggar for work!

He knew the inside of people with their intentions and thoughts, since he had learned them so well not from books, but by the experience of his own life. "When the whole life somebody tries to make use of you or cheat, one day it just clicks with you." But he didn't hate people for that, on the contrary, Kieran was able to look at things from different angles and evinced good understanding. Notably, however, that being so capable in putting himself in other people's shoes, Kieran preferred to imagine what he would do in place of the American or British soldiers in Iraq, rather than the rebels, fighting there against the invaders...

Kieran didn't let anybody twist him round their little finger. Old birds aren't caught with chaff. Despite all the external amiability, jokes and flexibility, he was an obstinate and stubborn guy.

Kieran almost never read books, but if he did, he was running his finger over the lines, and his lips were moving, repeating what he was reading. When he had to fill in some official forms, it demanded from him a great mental effort. At such moments it was impossible to say a word – that was confusing him. Should I be surprised that, like Sonny, Kieran asked me, a foreigner, to check if he had written one or another document without errors in his native language! Kieran was absolutely unable to do things that were easy and normal for me - multi-tasking. That sent him into panic.

In terms of politics, there was an incredible mess in his head. On the one hand, the Republican origins and the passed youth of a fighter were important to him – as well as the deeply-rooted intrinsic sense of equity. On the other hand, he was strongly resolved that from then on he just wanted to live quietly and provide for his children "a decent future" (have you noticed that when our coevals, brought up under capitalism, talk about "decent life", they inevitably imply only the financial "advantage"?) - While at the same time he despised Republican politicians for the fact that, after all, they just wanted a "piece of the pie for themselves." *"The difference between me and Sinners is that I don't continue to pretend being a revolutionary, getting Crown's shilling!"* - he said. It was difficult to argue against it, especially after the "revolutionaries" had finally stopped paying attention to the needs of the population, like all politicians. But at the same time they kept singing self-praise songs about how much they were unlike other politicians...

Kieran didn't know the exact difference between Cuba and Colombia and objected to calling his son Fidel ("someone could think that we support terrorism"). While at the same time he talked

enthusiastically about their local freedom-fighters - such as Dominic McGlinchey¹³. Fortunately, he wasn't embarrassed by my two university degrees and by the fact that I knew things about which he had no idea. Because he knew that there were things about which, in my turn, I had no idea. For example, about what kind of emulsion exists for painting the walls, and how to choose the most suitable sort. (That was certainly good, because too many alliances had been broken up because of inferiority feelings of one of the parties! I didn't need to go far for examples). So we complemented each other well.

Sometimes it seemed to me that our alliance was a kind of social experiment. But personally I'd got attached to him. Kieran wasn't gagging me, like Sonny, but listened to me open-heartedly, even with interest... He wasn't afraid to admit behindhand, if he had been wrong. And most importantly - I could always rely on him in a difficult situation! It was a classic case of "*doesn't offend me*" and "*doesn't run away from me*"¹⁴. And I tried to reciprocate him in kind.

Kieran's childhood had been accompanied by the whizz of bullets and the sounds of explosions. Before learning the wisdom of physics or chemistry, he had already known how to make homemade "napalm" (it was necessary to use detergent for the napalm effect), and where exactly it was better to throw Molotov cocktails at British convoys (in the middle of the column to block both its beginning and its end). In contrast to rattle-brain like Geoffrey¹⁵, he neither boasted, nor told epic stories about his deeds. He was just quietly proud of the fact that *Brits* had never managed to arrest his brother, who fought together with him. His father, an old Republican, who spoke only Irish, was in his own time imprisoned on the ship Maidstone¹⁶ during the war. He died from a medical mistake when Kieran was about 20 years old. The family was traditional: his dad worked (when he wasn't in prison), and his mother took care of the children. The children saw their father only at weekends, and his basic function in the family was to keep good order. Nevertheless, all of them started smoking or drinking at the age of 11-12, and a bit later tasted everything else... Kieran started smoking at the age of 11 and by the age of 40 he smoked two packs a day.

Life with the victims of the conflict in Northern Ireland involves some niceties. In my opinion, judging by the variety of mental health problems, the majority of the population there can be easily classified as victims. They shouldn't be annoyed because they are very irritable. And it's not due to their aggressiveness - not at all. They just get mad quickly and unpredictably - in such cases, they can do anything - from committing suicide by hanging, to making anonymous phone calls on you to the social services. Despite the fact that traditionally they have been dragging delators in tar with feathers.

Honestly, I feel pity for them. It is difficult for an outsider to understand why, for example, it is easy for people in Northern Ireland to commit suicide. It seems that any trifle can trigger them running to poison or drowning themselves. Even though they look so cheerful, so light in spirit... To understand the pressure on mind they have experienced growing up, you must be born here. The rope is being stretched-stretched, and finally it bursts...

To understand this there is no need even to talk about suicides: one should look at least, *what* makes here the living of those, who continue to live... We'd see the unemployment that lasts for years - so long that a person finally finds the top of their bliss if nobody disturbs them with job offers and lets

¹³ Dominic McGlinchey (1954 – 1994) from Bellaghy, County Londonderry, Northern Ireland was an Irish republican paramilitary with the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).

¹⁴ Hint at the song "I want a man like Putin" (2001)

¹⁵ One of the heroes of part 1 of *Soviética*

¹⁶ HMS Maidstone - In 1971, she was used as a prison ship in Belfast as a place to hold political internees without trial. She was moored in Belfast harbour 20 feet from the land, entry to the jetty being guarded by sand-bagged army emplacements

them continue on their usual living on welfare - with sleeping till noon and carousing after midnight. Of course, welfare provides with very little luxury, in that case the legal money compensations help. Had you fallen into a pit in the street, sue the local administration for not sealing it; had your car been burned, apply for compensation from the State because you have weak nerves; had you had a boozy fight with someone, sue your opponent, for the same purpose...

This is the lifestyle here. Disability Living Allowance causes envy, and it seems, people don't realize that there are those who get it because they are actually disabled... They remind me of Vyrikova from Fadeev's novel *The Young Guard*: "... - *You know, Olga Konstantinovna, I have TB – that is, do you hear? - And Vyrikova was demonstrably breathing on Nemchinova and a thick German corporal, who had recoiled in his chair and stared at Vyrikova with his round rooster's eyes. In Vyrikova's breast something was really wheezing. - I need a home care, - she went on, shamelessly looking now at Nemchinova, then at the corporal, - but if I could get a job here in town, I'd be happy, really happy!*"¹⁷

It is beyond the comprehension of a Soviet person how one can wish his child were branded "disabled", solely for the sake of getting a couple of hundred pounds a month. But Northern Irish do. And then they proudly say: "My son has autism [attention deficit disorder, schizophrenia - underline the applicable.]" Not only for money, but also because it relieves them from the responsibility for the behavior of their offspring. "*And she should have said: not healthy... There, on the commission, the doctor is Natalia Alekseevna from the town hospital; she gives a medical excuse or incomplete workability to everybody, while the German is just a paramedic and doesn't understand anything. She's a fool, a real fool! And I will now serve in the former office of "Zagotskot" [livestock department], more than that, a ration will be given me...*"¹⁸ - Indeed, Vyrikova was just like a Northern Irish person of the "peace process" times!

However, nobody knows, how we would have conducted ourselves if we had been under occupation not for a couple of years, but for the entire 800! But we were just lucky: we had socialism, the Communist Party and the people, who were not eager to have "consensus" with the occupiers¹⁹: that is why such a situation didn't happen!

Here many children at the age of 5-6 already take anti-depressants, those drugs are prescribed to them by doctors. In schools, which, by the way have a chronic shortage of funds, they have a practice of making up special needs files on completely normal children from poor families. They work hard seeking for abnormalities, where there are none. A whole bunch of psychologists and psychotherapists are assigned to find defects in these children, to label them as "autistic", in order to receive additional funds for school to hire an extra teacher... But when a child is really sick and really needs all kinds of professionals, they only shrug shoulders – otherwise they'd really have to provide such child with care and do something...

So people live like this - from Wednesday to Wednesday²⁰, hardy enough to pity those at whose expense all of us (including those who work) actually live here – the residents of the Third World countries. "I'm so lucky that I was born in a *civilized* country!.." "How I sympathize with the poor Africans!"

¹⁷ *The Young Guard* (1945) - novel by Alexandr Fadeev about a Soviet resistance organisation during the World War II, composed mainly of teenagers

¹⁸ *Ibidem*

¹⁹ Hint at WWII and the Soviet victory over Nazis

²⁰ Wednesday - day of payment of unemployment benefit in Northern Ireland

The longer I lived there, the more I started to feel myself among them like Lightning McQueen among the Radiator Springs' inhabitants²¹: «*Don't leave me here! I'm in hillbilly hell! My IQ's dropping by the second! I'm becoming one of them!*»

Please note that I mean not only the unemployed residents of the town or people without any formal education. I remember a political activist, a graduate of History Faculty at the local university, who liked to compare himself to Bobby Sands because he also was 27 years old. This audacious young man was sure that Prague was the capital of Hungary. "*London is the capital of Paris, and Paris is the capital of Rome, and Rome...*", as Alice in Wonderland used to say. And these people even dare talk about Darfur or Kosovo!

Earlier it hadn't been so visible and hadn't born such importance to me. I admired not only the reckless courage of local people and their devotion to ideals, but also their sense of mutual aid, their ability to find a quick solution to many problems by some sixth sense, despite the gaps in their education. And most of all - the fact that **they did care about what was going on!**

But if earlier, during the military conflict, in times of crisis, people demonstrated their best qualities, now that the peace by Trotsky's scenario has come (I already mentioned this scenario – "*neither peace, nor war, and demobilize the army!*"²²), they, as if by a magic touch, started to turn into narrow-minded philistines - like Cinderella's carriage, which turned into a pumpkin by midnight. "Let them give us something more!", - that is their new credo.

And what will happen to Northern Ireland when today's young generation turns adult – all the joy-riders and other *flowers of the peace process*, denoted by the collective name "*hoods.*" Those who prowl the streets in packs at night like hyenas' hordes, *the generation that has chosen American investments*. It's even scary to think about it. It will be worse than an earthquake, mark my words. I think it would be similar to what happened to the pride of the local shipbuilding in its time – the Titanic. Sure enough, they're really proud even of it, although we all know the results of this "craftsmanship."...

This piece of Ireland reminded me of a big army division demobilized from war and densely settled in one place, in a "Potemkin village"²³ of the world imperialism; of rebels, brought together to serve as an illustration for all the other rebels of the world how many carrots will fall on them, if they submit to their lot. But, housing those demobees, they had forgotten to bring a therapist in a helicopter, to help those settlers to recuperate from the post-traumatic stress disorder...

You can't tell them about it audibly, because it causes hysterical screams: "Do you want to continue the war? Are you against the peace process?!" "I want nothing from you at all; it is you who will have to choose: *either to take off your cross, or to put on your knickers.*"²⁴ Either you are the followers and admirers of Che and Ho Chi Minh, or you greet the American investments and George W. Bush on your land, whose blessing of your plans you want so desperately. And teach the puppet administration of occupied Iraq "how it is necessary to conduct the peace process.".. What the result of such sitting between two chairs is, we've learned well enough from our own gorbo-perestroika...

²¹ Phrase from the Disney Pixar cartoon "Cars" (2006)

²² Trotsky's phrase expressing his position during negotiations of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk - a peace treaty signed on March 3, 1918 by the Soviet Republic and Germany

²³ Potemkin village - in modern usage, is any construct, physical or figurative, intended to deceive outside people into thinking that something is better than it actually is. In such context, the word *Potemkin* has become a synonym of "fake" or "false"

²⁴ A phrase used by Dmitry Rogozin towards Madonna, but was actually taken from a Soviet joke about a Jew pretending to be Russian, in a sauna

Imperialistic experiments on the human psyche created a whole generation of people with a deeply defective state of mind, who are ignorant about their own mental degeneration. Now in our country the same is taking place. People just haven't realized it and continue to think by inertia that our current compatriots, who, to put it mildly, behave in an inadequate way, are just some isolated phenomenon: either "because of their nature", or "they have to blame themselves for their condition." 10-15 more years of "democratic reforms", and they'll finally realize that direct and immediate link between the social system and the state of mind and psyche of the population!

The example is not far to seek: in England Professor Charlton still keeps asserting, at the beginning of the 21st century, that "the working class has a lower IQ than people from higher social strata²⁵." And if you live in Northern Ireland, you can take his word at its face value. If you don't know another reality, which indeed opens people all the roads in life. For some incomprehensible reasons, in the Soviet Union, in Cuba, in other socialistic countries kids from the workers' families easily make academicians, professors, pilots, navy captains, top military officers and politicians. As it was calculated in one of Stalin's reports: "*80-90 percent of the Soviet intelligentsia are from the working class, peasantry and other workers' sections.*"²⁶ We have our own intellectuals, we do not buy them cheaply from around the world in order to save money on mass education in our own country - which is the routine in your Britain, Mr. Charlton! Or perhaps it's only British workers' IQ that is so low by nature, Herr Professor? It would be better to explain why, in this case, their level is quite sufficient to recruit them as cannon fodder for Iraq and other countries you wage wars against...

... It was sad to observe the subsistence of Cassidy's family. I would not go into detail, but mention a few things. Closest to us was Kieran's older sister, Liz, Mrs. Devine after marriage, with whom I at first sympathized. She was a woman worn-out by life, with a small head, resembling a picked chicken, staled on the counter. Her life was a mess. Liz was deeply frustrated over the years of family life with a husband who beat her and sons in their teens who openly called her "old whore" and were well-known in town for supplying minors with alcohol. When her sons were beating each other, Liz - a true Christian, locked herself in her bedroom with Mother Teresa's biography and a bottle of wine: "Let them kill each other!" Almost every week she called the police to drive these sons out of her house, but two days later she was always letting them back and even ordering a Broadband Internet subscription for them... She was angry with Kieran for not beating up her elder boy, as she asked for.

- Liz, I can't do that. This is called "assault", and I can be imprisoned for doing that, - Kieran told her.
- And I'll tell them that it wasn't you! - Liz answered artlessly. But Kieran rejected this honour anyway.

When all of this overly annoyed Liz, she used to simply leave her children alone (her husband worked at odd night jobs and slept in the daytime) and escape for several weeks to Tunisia, or even to her sister in New Zealand... Some unemployed in Northern Ireland could afford that.

For a long time I thought that Liz at least knew something about other cultures and people, and made her favourably different from the rest of our relatives and neighbours. In her youth she had almost married an Algerian named Abdullah and was still recollecting him with tenderness. (Honestly, it's a pity she hadn't!) There was a Dutchman, and even a Chinese among her admirers in youth.

²⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/7414311.stm> ("Working class people have lower IQs than those from wealthy backgrounds and should not expect to win places at top universities")

²⁶ Сталин И.В. О проекте Конституции Союза ССР: Доклад на Чрезвычайном VIII Всесоюзном съезде Советов 25 ноября 1936 года - http://grachev62.narod.ru/stalin/t14/t14_40.htm

Liz had a remarkable ability, the Dutch called it “*zichzelf in de nesten werken*” (“to corner herself”). She was a virtual walking calamity. Something was always happening to her. When her children were hired to work in summer by some restaurant, she asked the owner not to hire one of their friends because he had been teasing the youngest of her sons. But it wasn't enough for her that she did it. She began to boast about it and kept chatting until it reached the ears of the boy's mother. The local five-ton-weighting lady named Bernie immediately came to Liz to beat shit out of her, and not alone at that - with her eldest son... For half an hour squeals and swearing were filling the air of the whole street, until Kieran woke finally up and came out to see what was going on...

The view of fist-fighting women is disgusting. Bernie had to be literally torn off Liz. It was a pity that Kieran didn't have a hose ready at hand. Kieran, of course, came to the defence of his sister and later did not go into detail about who and what was doing. And the next night someone smashed our (not Liz's!) window with a brick... That's the way ordinary Irish have fun in their leisure time...

Before it for several years Liz had been busy driving her neighbours out of the house after having an argument with them. And she gained her ends: they sold their house. That fact was also the subject of her pride. I used to believe that the guilty party of the conflict were her neighbours, so she had represented it to me. But later I got a closer view of Liz... She didn't quarrel with us, actually Kieran was her favourite brother and she helped me to look after the kids and constantly expressed her woman's sympathy:

- Oh, I know well what it is like not to get enough sleep! Men are callous and don't understand it... They think only about themselves. They are selfish. And I tell you: although Kieran is my brother, he can be quite obnoxious too!

Liz constantly assured me that I could ask her for help in any weather and at any time. Once I had a bad backache, it was so strong that it took me not less than half an hour to get out of bed. Of course, I got up, with moans and cold sweat on my face, but I wasn't able, for example, to wash the floor in that condition. I asked Liz for help, she was very friendly. But a few days later an unknown woman knocked at my door.

- I'm from the social service, - she said, - We have received an anonymous message that there are some problems with your children.

- With my children? - Thunder and lightning wouldn't have struck me more than that statement.

- Yes. Please, sit down, sit down, now I'll read you a list...

- A list???

And she read it. Really it was a list from which I was surprised to find out that:

- a) I have regularly added sleeping pills into baby milk;
- b) I don't feed my children with anything other than chips, candies and pasta with rice;
- c) I fling books at kids and then blame them for doing it;
- d) In the kitchen there are some mysterious black pills “from Russia” in my locker (it was pronounced in such a tone of voice as if it was nothing short of polonium! In fact, it was only activated charcoal);
- e) I have a dirty house, especially under the bed.

But the most horrific was the accusation that I... beat Lisa! It really caused my breath to stop.

At such moments you start to think feverishly who it is who hates you so much and why. But I hadn't had any quarrels with anyone and hadn't created problems for anybody. I generally preferred not to have too close relations with my neighbours: my motto was "*leven en laten leven*²⁷." I don't poke my nose into other people's business and don't tolerate gossip at all. When someone approached me in the office to gossip about somebody, I usually nipped such topics in the bud. However, I had almost instantaneously realised who the mysterious anonymous was and that discovery left me speechless: none of the outsiders had visited our kitchen, where the ominous "Russian pills" were kept (I wouldn't have let even my children there)...

What's Brute... Brute had never even dreamt of such things! Even the famous serpent-tempter from Liz's favourite book couldn't hold a candle to her.

Kieran, of course, also immediately understood from whose mouth that horrible lie had come. I wouldn't have even talked to Liz about that, pretending that nothing had happened, and would only have made some conclusions for myself. But Kieran went immediately to have the whole thing out with her. In ten minutes, Liz rushed to me:

-Zhenya, Kieran thinks it's me...Oh my God, how could you have come up with a thought like that!

I watched a middle-aged mother of four children who had already a need for dentures, insolently lying with wide-open eyes and I felt such disgust that sickness surged to my throat.

- Liz... No one had visited our kitchen except you. Nobody knows what sort of pills we have there, - I said softly. - I have boiling milk on the stove, sorry...

And I went into the kitchen. When I came back, Liz was gone...

Two days later she confessed to her brother. But Liz continued to assert that she had committed charity. Why hadn't God wanted her just to help me with washing the floor - if she didn't like its condition - instead of sleeping till 2 p.m. every day and why God had wanted from her the fib, which could have had fatal consequences for the children she pretended to be concerned about, remained beyond my comprehension.

Absolutely horrible three weeks passed by. I felt myself so betrayed and humiliated by Liz, as if I had been flogged in the square publicly on a trumped-up charge. I felt a kind of suffocation and couldn't live in that place any more. I woke up from nightmares. During the day both of us – Kieran and I, were walking as stunned and dumb, as if someone had dealt a blow on our heads with a log. And he almost took to the bottle, although he had completely stopped drinking ten years before. There were a lot of phone calls and visits from various social workers, doctors and so on, until they made sure that the children, of course, were all right. It was great that I had already had, because of Lisa, my own social worker, who had known me very well...

Several times when Kieran was drinking beer, I seriously feared that he would commit suicide. At such moments something erupted inside him, all his phobias, pains and fears, that he was usually driving away by work, showed clearly. For whole evenings he was narrating about Siobhan in such moments...

Siobhan was the youngest Kieran's sister, even younger than I. She had died a year before, from alcoholism. I knew her but briefly, but even in that short time I did Siobhan impressed me so much that if I close my eyes now, she stands before me, as if she were alive. I can't believe that she is dead...

²⁷ Live and let others to live (Dutch)

She was a very sunny and overall good person, there is no other way of putting it. In spite of all her problems, that had eventually buried her before time, Siobhan had been one of those who would share the last piece of bread with you, even without any reference to Mother Teresa and Padre Pio. When I saw her for the first time from a distance, I took her for Liz, who had turned 20 years younger and prettier for some reason. In all the nearly ten years of living in Ireland, both in the southern and northern parts, I had never met a woman more beautiful than Siobhan Cassidy. If not more beautiful, then at least more pleasant. It was so sad to watch her slowly killing herself.

Kieran and Siobhan were very close spiritually - among all his brothers and sisters, she was his true soul-mate. And that's why he particularly blamed himself for not being able to prevent what had happened to her. Although, strictly speaking, no one had tried to do it properly: all the relatives were busy with their own lives and, of course, there is no compulsory treatment in the "free world" (not because it may be contrary to the individual liberty, but just because it costs money!).

For Siobhan everything started just as for Sonny and me – with disagreements with her husband, who was a kind of control freak (she had got married very early in life, as it is customary here, and they had four children). It was followed by debts and having drinks together... Her husband was able to stop in time, and her nature appeared to be weaker... Gerard (her husband's name) had tried every means to deprive her of independence and subjugate her: he prohibited her to drive a taxi, then took away the sewing machine, on which Siobhan used to sew hair rubbers for sale. When she started to use her neighbour's machine for sewing, he reported her to Sinners²⁸, saying that Siobhan sewed not only scrunchies²⁹ of the Irish flag's color, which were particularly good for the Easter sales, but also the same scrunchies, only in red-white-blue colours for Protestant customers. After that Sinners refused to buy her rubbers. Siobhan didn't give up and began to work as a hairdresser; she made haircuts brilliantly. But Gerard threw all the scissors out of the house...

When he realized that she would not submit to him, he used her weakness against her: he kicked Siobhan out of the house and took away her children, claiming that she had an alcohol addiction. After that, life turned meaningless for Siobhan. Not every person is a fighter by nature, but it doesn't mean that one should strike a drowning person's head with an oar!..

...A lot of things about her life we had learned only at the funeral. That she had slept in the forest, and her neighbour, an old lady, who remembered how Siobhan had driven her in a taxi to the centre and back for free, brought her hot soup to eat there... That periodically she had been beaten up by others, the same unlucky people of both sexes: Siobhan was small and slender as a reed. That once she had been raped. That the older children had refused to communicate with her and that she had waited secretly for the younger kids - a boy of about 8 and a girl of about 5 - near the school, to pet them and to pass them some gift, which she had bought with her last pennies... The more such details came out, the more dismal and lonely Kieran was turning. After that he bought Amy Winehouse³⁰'s disk and all nights on weekends was listening to the same song -"Rehab":

«They're trying to make me go to rehab

I said no, no, no

Yes I been black, but when I come back

²⁸ Sinners- members of Sinn Fein, Irish political party

²⁹ A scrunchie (or scrunchy) is a fabric-covered elastic hair tie, commonly used to fasten long hair.

³⁰ Amy Jade Winehouse (1983 – 2011) was an English singer and songwriter known for her deep contralto vocals and her eclectic mix of musical genres including , R&B and jazz. She had severe alcohol addiction problems

You won't know, know, know. »

In the Soviet Union I had been brought up in such a way that I despised drinking women. But then, there were almost none of them in the Soviet Union, because there were no social reasons for women's drinking. One could, for example, always put a monstrous husband under control – with the help of the Party committee or the trade union at his enterprise. No one would allow anybody to kick you out of the house. Finally, if you needed to obtain a mandatory anti-alcoholism treatment – you'd have received it.

But I realised that to despise a Northern Irish woman for drinking was like to despise the local Catholics for writing or speaking with grammar mistakes. This isn't the Soviet Union, where you had all the necessary conditions to learn and to become educated.

The last time Siobhan visited us at Christmas. Of course nobody knew that it would be her last visit, but she did look unhealthy. Her stomach had already begun to swell, but she still refused to admit that she had a serious problem. She was joking and tried to be cheerful, talked about some nonsense, about waiting for a restitution payment - for the fact that someone had almost broken her leg - and how she would invite us to have dinner on that money and then she would go sunbathing in Spain. Siobhan liked the sun a lot.

Then I also saw her in the street, on a bench, with a three-liter bottle of the cheapest cider in her hands. It smelled bad from her and respectable old men passing by were turning their noses away quietly.

“Tomorrow is my Nora's birthday... She would have been 7 years old now,” Siobhan's voice was trembling. Nora was her stillborn daughter. “And here I can't even talk to anyone. *Me ma is doing my head in. I just can't cope without me wee drink.*”

Really nobody needed her. She impeded her mother from living handsomely, engaging in charity work and visiting holy places (she could have taken Siobhan to her home, but what if she had broken or spoilt something? Liz had complained that Siobhan had once spewed on her sofa (although nobody said a word of reproach to Liz's sons, who were regularly doing the same, and for the same reason...). Kieran was busy with his own children. Sometimes he gave her some small change or old cigarettes, but he had no time to speak to her cordially...

Only then, in March, when blood went out of her throat, and the ambulance took her away, the family took alarm. One sister came from New Zealand especially for Siobhan, that sister was a prison guard by profession. Another sister from Belfast roused the newspapers to find accommodation for Siobhan. Kieran's mother and Liz didn't leave the hospital, all her children also came there, even Gerard did. The eldest daughter, who had refused even to talk to her, was crying, doing Siobhan's hair and varnishing her nails. But nothing could already have saved Siobhan and she was placed in a special wing of the hospital to die. She was dying for a long time, for a few weeks. Her body slowly got filled with liquid and swollen. But life was still glimmering in her as long as that process didn't reach her head. All her body was covered with the marks of injections: only morphine was able to alleviate her pain. Kieran couldn't look at such suffering. He had mentally already said good-bye to her, come home and only called the hospital every morning, asking if there were any changes...

She died on Paris Commune³¹ Day. Sometimes I think she wanted to appropriate her own death to see at least on her deathbed the children again, to feel being cared about and loved... Evidently Kieran had the same thoughts. *“What a rotten death the wee girl had.... She didn't deserve this.”*

... Two years later Kieran also died. Cancer... This page of our life I prefer not to tell about.

I recollect him with great warmth. He has taught me many things and opened my eyes. For example, that a normal family life was only possible with a man whom you don't love like in novels. Sometimes, because he didn't sleep enough (he suffered greatly from what the Dutch called *“ochtendhumeur”* – bad mood in mornings) or for some other reason, Kieran snubbed me in a way, that if a man I loved like Oisín had done it, I would have just died on the spot of a heart attack. I realized that possibly for the same reason, setting aside all the others, my marriage to Sonny was doomed from the beginning... *“He doesn't love me!”* - you think automatically with pain when being screamed at. But then it comes in upon your mind suddenly: *“Yes, but do I not love him either?!”*, and it feels easier. And you can continue to live under the same roof and do the necessary duties together. Educate children, earn money for living and so on. After all, that is exactly what the helpmates - and parents - have to do, rather than sit the rest of their life in the garden, snuggling shoulder to shoulder and admiring the stars... Only now that he isn't with me, I realize that it is also love, but love of another quality, the love that cannot be crammed into the Procrustean bed of *“feeling butterflies in the stomach”* from ladies' novels.

He was no idealist or adventurer and didn't approve of *“cruising for bruising.”* He taught me the thing, which nobody had managed to teach me before - a careful attitude towards money. And if Kieran had been alive, probably what happened later wouldn't have happened.

... After all that Liz had done to us, we both could not keep living near her. Kieran sold a part of the house he had inherited, and I sold mine, in which I hoped to live the rest of my life. We bought a small ramshackle farm and moved to the mountains. Away from the *“touts”*³² of civilization.”

... From the farm windows there opened a panoramic view of a jagged mountain with a romantic name Devil's Tooth. It's not easy to get there, even in good weather: in the mountains you shouldn't miss one of the small ground tracks off the side of the local provincial road, then go down along the slope and walk about a small pine grove.

A traditional Irish cottage, dark inside (Irish peasants used to pay taxes for *“using sunlight”* in the past: the larger the windows in a house, the higher the tax!), with a fireplace and a stairway leading upstairs in the middle of the living room. Only there, upstairs, there is a modern part, built-on later.

The mountains overflow with the yellow colour twice a year, when gorse is in blossom. In August they turn purple: it's time for heather to bloom. But in winter - when larches defoliate - they become partially *“bald.”*... In the mountains there goes on a perpetual struggle between the red and grey squirrels. The Greys have been winning so far, thus the local Sinn Féin activists have already given a claim for shooting them.

It is dangerous to live on the farm in spring and summer times: local young people climb the mountains out of boredom setting fire to gorse, which fills every space around. It burns like cotton wool... Firemen can reach these places only with a helicopter. There is no way to get out of those

³¹ The Paris Commune was a government that briefly ruled Paris from March 18 to May 28, 1871. It existed before the split between anarchists and Marxists had taken place, and it is hailed by both groups as the first assumption of power by the working class during the Industrial Revolution

³² Touts - informers (Irish English)

places in winter after a snowfall until the snow melts. Therefore it's helpful to have food in store, as well as firewood and an electric generator.

In any season there are thick, jelly-like clouds continuously "pasturing" across the yard - I do not exaggerate! And it seems that they are going to talk to you like in the fairy tale "Raggity and the Cloud"³³. Being brought up in a valley I was sometimes very surprised to see the sun shining at one side of the house and the rain pouring at the other, provided that the house is not big. We also have two fields, which Kieran used to lease to those who had horses, but did not have pastures.

There are tourists wandering about the mountains in summer, in other seasons only the British soldiers come here. They have their trainings here - there are also mountains in Iran, for sure... Some of them climb the summits even at night. One of these adventurers was killed by lightning on the slope of Slieve Donard not so long ago³⁴. If they drop in the farm, I have a feeling, that they are about to ask me in broken Russian: "*Where is the road to Moscow?*" And after that they will ask for watermelons and chocolates, as one of the American military phrase-books teaches to do. Whenever possible, I pretend that nobody is at home and silently let out our fierce dog into the yard...

In spite of the peace process and demilitarization, widely advertised in press, early in the morning one can clearly hear the reverberations of machine guns from the British military base in Ballykinlar³⁵. Yes, British soldiers don't patrol the streets of the Northern Ireland towns and villages nowadays. The peaceful process permits them to concentrate on major objects. In Ballykinlar, for instance, these goons are training now for the upcoming patrolling of "independent" Kosovo. And probably they are very grateful to Irishmen that the latter have given them a full scope. If the Iraqis also did so, the war would already move to Iran...

We are actually lucky. Not a big deal, shooting machine-guns in the morning! In Tyrone British helicopters fly over the villages at night, practising attacks on populated areas of Iraq. But the current sepulchral silence on the Irish "freedom fighters" stuns a way more than the helicopter blades. Evidently, they are more interested in grey squirrels.

In summer I lease a room to tourists and have even learned to cook Irish breakfast, so that no one can tell me from Irishwoman. Many tourists believe that I'm a native and the most insightful think I'm German or French.

Nobody else comes to us, but I'm even glad. If strangers try to initiate a conversation with me, I show them the portrait of Putin. I don't believe in God and I don't want to offend the feelings of the religious, though this photo used to be for me like a cross in a house of a medieval citizen: to scare the devils away. It was nice to show it to people dropping in the house and watch their reaction: "Keep off! Keep off me!".

It took me a lot of months of diligent auto-suggestion to distance myself from things I used to be devoted to so earnestly. To tear myself away from communicating with the people among whom I was like a young pioneer³⁶ - *always prepared*, ... but nobody needed it. To say that I was amazed at the quickness of the ensuing events (the disarmament of the IRA) after my communication with Oisín -

³³ Raggity and the Cloud - children's Soviet book by Sophia Prokofieva

³⁴ Ballykinler or Ballykinlar is a village in County Down, Northern Ireland. Ballykinlar is the site of a major British Army base. In 2008 it was announced that the 2nd Battalion of The Rifles based at Ballykinlar would be deployed to Kosovo to "combat fresh violence between ethnic Albanians and minority Serbs.

³⁵ The man believed killed by lightning in the Mourne Mountains was a sergeant in the Royal Signals, the army has said (2006) (<http://www.ukweatherworld.co.uk/forum/index.php?/topic/43725-man-killed-by-lightning-in-the-mourne-mountains-northern-ireland/>)

³⁶ Soviet analogy of boy scouts

would be to say nothing. I felt emotionally abused. I was not amazed, since I had been tired of being amazed by such things in my life. Today they keep puffing claims for “more socialism!” - and the next day raise the prices for bread. They say today: “The current generation of Irish people will live in a united Ireland”, and the next day, through the back-door, they shyly push out of their ranks those who have been truly dedicated to Irish independence all their lives – for “health reasons”, “personal reasons” or without any explanation at all...

The current events - not some single occasion, but everything in total - that I was observing around, convinced me finally: if these people were freedom fighters, then I must be a trolleybus... *Armani Boys*³⁷ are the same kind of “freedom fighters” as Gorby was “a communist of the Lenin type.” Now they will greet George Bush, because he – in person! - will come to approve of our local reforms. Their motivation is the same as that of good old Maggie Thatcher in the mid 1980s: “We have to talk to these people.” And of course, it's desirable, to get something from them, too...

It's even beyond them to resent – come on, are we an American colony?! Well, you can do as you like, guys...

One spring evening canvassers came to my hut: the elections were coming. Well, thank you for remembering me, *mo chairde*³⁸ ... They said good words about integration and protecting the interests of migrant workers, repeating almost every word from what I'd told them roughly five years before, but at that time they had swept it aside - they hadn't seen any necessity for it. I was trying to behave like a rabbit from Winnie-the-Pooh (Do you remember? “But what the rabbit was thinking about it, no one appeared to know, because the rabbit was very polite”) But when they expressed a strong desire to protect my interests, I could stand it no longer. I did not consider myself a migrant worker any more. I didn't need being led by the hand like a child from a kindergarten. I am not going to give up my language, my culture and my views, which I have had to hide for a long time, so as not to scare all those educated in the spirit of zoological anticommunism by some prehistoric - like dinosaurs - priests. And I'm not going to entertain anyone by telling stories about the life in my country, as it is expected from me, as if I were a new clown in the Irish circus. *Awor esei ta basta*³⁹! – It is enough for me!

I don't want to get integrated into you any more. Am I clear? And you don't need to protect me from anybody. I will do it myself somehow – *Mé féin*.⁴⁰

They stayed with their mouths open. But afterwards I was expecting for a long time that my window would be smashed...

...The worst thing about children being brought up in a foreign country is that they don't reply to you in your native language, even if you speak to them in it, because they don't hear it from anybody else. Talking to your own children in a foreign language is worse than torture, and it doesn't depend on your language skills. Not only because you want to be yourself at least at home, but also because you start to view your own kids as strangers.

Claims that it's necessary to ensure that your children do better at school are meaningless. To do that you must first learn to think well in your own language! What benefit can a child get from a parent,

³⁷ Comes from *Tiocfaidh ár lá* (Irish pronunciation: “chucky ar la” - an Irish phrase which translates as “our day will come”, the hoped-for day being that of a united Ireland. Was turned into “Tiocfaidh Armani” - mocking Sinn Féin's move towards respectability from the peace process. Armani Boys - Sinn Fein leadership in this context.

³⁸ My friends (Irish)

³⁹ Now, it is enough! (Papiamento)

⁴⁰ I myself (Irish), Sinn Fein - we ourselves.

who shows flowers in the field, but doesn't know all their names without a dictionary. If you want to teach a child a language, it's not enough to speak it fluently - you should think in it. I don't think in a foreign language, it is just a tool of communication for me. I am pleased to speak the other languages when I enjoy the interlocutors. Sometimes I think in Dutch, but only when I'm in a sarcastic mood. And I think in English, when I am going to tell something to an English-speaking person.

As for education... I learned Dutch for a year, as an adult, and I graduated from a Dutch university with my average score higher than that of the Crown Prince of Orange!

Since the death of Kieran, I felt myself in Ireland more and more like a moose which got stuck in a swamp. I didn't have any connection with that country anymore. Ireland faded in my eyes, and nothing could have restored its initial innocent charm after the things that Liz and other Irish windbags of all kinds had done. As if that country had been violated by Bush, Blair and the moneybags from the Irish diaspora.

*Porkeria*⁴¹ had gradually overwhelmed Ireland - first slowly but surely; later faster and faster, exponentially, like an ulcer captures a stomach. I felt it every time going down to the town for food, seeing the boozy teenagers and children, from 7-8 years old, hanging around in the streets. Neither their parents, nor the police cared about them. If somebody was complaining to the police, they were just driving them out from one place to another. While doing that they looked as if they were making a great favour to you. The elected "people's representatives" even protected hooligans from the police and were pleading their human rights. It was impossible to imagine that a few years ago. Well, the progress was visible... I felt relief every time leaving the town behind - with its dirty fences, covered with graffiti "Rest in peace, Squinty!" (Squinty was a local teenager, who had died of drugs), or «Recking force" (those well-literate ones didn't even know the correct spelling of the word «Wrecking»). At these moments the blue majestic mountains were again soaring behind the car window...

But even in the mountains it was getting increasingly difficult to hide from the all-absorbing swinishness. Everything from what I had run away when I left the Netherlands, now was flooding here, like a stream out of a broken sewer pipe. When a truck with a picture of a naked female bottom and inscription: "Buy sanitary pads with wings of our brand!" swept past during my walk with kids in the mountains one day in spring, I realized it was enough of Ireland to me... It was time to get out of here! If, at least, there were some paces to escape in the world.

I was badly trapped. It's not so easy to move away with three kids. But even harder is to go on living, applauding and pretending that everything is as it should be.

I lived mechanically, I was missing Kieran. But even more, I was missing the Soviet Union. It ended up with me crying after watching any old Soviet film, even the most cheerful comedy - so sad it was after that full-blooded life, which I remembered so well, after those kind, intelligent, outstanding people, to find myself in the surrounding reality with all its poor Squints and illiterate university graduates.

I tried not to think about many things. But I knew this couldn't go on forever.

... It happened one winter morning when I didn't expect anything. There had been a heavy snowfall at night, the electricity was cut off, and the roads were snowbound. Children stayed in bed, because it was physically impossible to take them to kindergarten and to school. I got up early, fired a fireplace -

⁴¹ Swinishness (Papilamento)

because the heating system with oil didn't work without electricity. I went out to walk around the house to breathe some fresh air. The snow was so seldom here that watching it was delightful to me.

There was nobody in the street, of course. The breeze was blowing from the sea, wiping away the night snow heaps from the trees. The snow crunched crisply under my feet, - so closing my eyes, I could have imagined myself at home on the New Year holidays. I decided to walk to my favourite place - a small bench on the fringe of a pine forest, around the corner, to wipe snow from it and to sit there a little bit.

But there was somebody on the bench. When he saw me, he rose up towards me leaning on a cane. My heart sank and I felt sick at heart. It was Dermot Kinsella, nicknamed *Lame Crutch*.

- Zhenya, *slan*⁴²! Take a seat! - He said it as if we had parted with him only yesterday as close friends.

- Why?- I asked. I felt very uncomfortable. Not because I had vanished from his sight, just as suddenly as I had appeared, but because I remembered all too well his mercilessness and cruelty if somebody stole a march on him. It is not very nice to meet a person of this kind tête-a-tête in a forest of winter morning after having fallen out with him. Especially after reading the British tabloids...

-We need to have a chat, - Dermot was calm.

-I think I have already told you everything.

-No, not about *that*. Don't worry about that.

-Then about what? And how have you got here, by the way? A helicopter?

-Something like that... And by the way, do you miss those old days sometimes?

-See, there you go again...

-No, I don't mean *that*... I'm talking about politics.

- To be honest, I do miss you in an intellectual way sometimes. I'm tired of people, who don't know Pushkin and can't tell Cuba from Colombia. Not even mentioning the fact that there is no one to talk about the civil war in Chad and the Juche Ideas. But if I was you, I wouldn't raise my hopes based on that...

He laughed – a sharp, short laugh and shook off the snowflakes that had fallen from the fir tree on his forehead.

- It is good that we understand each other so well. Do you think I'm stupid enough to still have the illusion that you can feel anything else for me?

-No, I know that you're a very intelligent man. And I respect you for that.

-Then tell me, why did you depart from us in political way? You don't like the results of the peace process? I have never had a chance to talk to you and to explain our strategy ...

-Is there anything to explain? The results, in my opinion, speak for themselves. - I was surprised how calmly I was speaking about things that had caused such strong feelings in me a couple of years before.

⁴² Hello (Irish)

-Why do you think that I don't like it? It is a big deal to become British citizens with equal rights. It's an achievement in itself. Probably it worth sacrificing 35 hundred victims for that. By the way, who am I to judge? I do not have any right to do it. I was not living here during the war. I'm not Irish, even from the grandmother's side. According to your ideas, it's a major handicap. We are not the same blood, you and me. This is not my country. And this is, of course, your business, how you want to live here, which citizenship to have, and what priorities to adhere to in life. That's why, it is all right! No hard feelings.

He had a puzzled expression in his face; probably he expected that I would start to denounce the Republican opportunism with fervor. He had prepared a speech for that case. But he didn't have any answer to my words. I felt even a bit sorry for him.

- I bear no malice, believe me. I have just been taking the current events here too close to heart. But it was a waste of time. It took me almost a year to distance myself emotionally from the local events. (*«It took me ages to detach myself emotionally from your whole shebang!»* - had flashed across in my mind, but I restrained it.) And now that I have managed it, I feel better. No frustrations any more. And I would like to keep it this way.

“And no more illusions about the true revolutionaries existing in Europe,” – I added in my mind. “They have died out like dinosaurs, and it's meaningless to be disappointed about it. I have just to admit this fact and go on living with it. You can keep suffering forever, but what good does it make? I wanted to find real comradeship... all I found was a sect of blinked experts in boasting and chest-beating.- I bit the remark back just in time.

-Have you got anything to add?

- I have something to say, but what for? Your position won't change, and your arguments will be directed towards its justification. And where you can't find any reasons, you'll use some far-fetched ones. Otherwise it may occur, that you've lived for nothing. It's cruel to deprive a person of such an illusion. I think, I shouldn't do it. But your arguments will not work with me. And we both know it. What is the use in the debates?

- This is a very sober thought of yours – he said finally in such a tone, that I couldn't understand whether he spoke seriously or sarcastically. - Many things can look absurd to a stranger. Even friends are a little sceptical sometimes.

Well, that's the savour of a revolutionary – he never doubts his rightness! And he is sure that everyone with a different opinion is wrong.... Alas, on these terms, I won't ever make a revolutionary!

- Thanks for the confirmation of the fact that I'm a stranger to you, - I said, with my heart bleeding. Although I had known it was so, none of them had told me it so openly yet. - The only thing to blame you for is that you gave me a false sense that you needed me. When in fact my help was not necessary to you at all. This is called “emotional abuse”, my dear fellow. But this is also not worth a discussion. It had been and was gone. *Zand erover*, as the Dutch say.⁴³

Now, if he dares even mention Oisín, I'll...

But instead of answering, Dermot smiled broadly and clapped loudly his hand over his fat thigh.

-That's about it! But at this moment, we just need your help.

⁴³ To sand something above – to forget

- Again your "*Tales from the Vienna Woods*⁴⁴? Again "*From Russia with love?*" - I was angry.
- No, this time it is going to be totally different," - he turned serious. -We need our person on one of the Caribbean islands.
- I beg you pardon ?
- Our Venezuelan friends know that some trouble is cooking again against their country and they asked us to help with information. As you know, Venezuela has two U.S. air bases quite near. When we were informed, we thought of you immediately...
- “We”? “We” - who? Your bearded dendrophile⁴⁵? Or is it just that “the soldiers recollect their past days⁴⁶” ...?
- Exactly! Consider that you are asked for help by *The Old Boys Brigade*,- he winked frivolously at me. -Well, more precisely, it was me, who thought about you. You're already familiar with the region, you know the languages...
- Well, so you can trust me again? I obliterated myself from all your lists voluntarily long ago. I don't attend the meetings, I am no yes-woman. I don't even vote for you any more - and make no secret of it.
- We trust you, because you don't conceal it. And the key part is that you've obliterated yourself not only from our lists. You're completely out of the sight of Brits. Now, that you don't deal with me and don't vote for us, they believe you to be merely another foreign adventurer, who was attracted by Irish exotics. And your own behaviour... Hmm... it only helped to support this legend. But don't rush at me: it's not my opinion. It's even good, that they have such an opinion. Just wonderful. We have checked on you through our source of information and found you are the kind of person that we need. They know all our guys who know Spanish without exception, or have at least some contacts in the region. You were taken away from the accounts. We will prepare you in a neutral country. You will go with our fellow, but he'll be in the shade. He will just be like a mentor, he has a great experience, not abroad though...
- And what should I be doing there, in your plans?
- You will just live there. And watch. Observe, communicate with necessary people and pass information. That is all. That will be enough. Your help can be irreplaceable!
- So, what about my children?
- Don't worry about them. You'll see them at least twice, no - four times a year. They will be secure, live in a neutral country, and we will bring your mother to them. Or we will hire a nanny, if you want. They'll receive a first-rate education. Neither should you worry about the farm. We will look after it.
- Dermot, you speak it in such a way as if everything had already been decided for me! I haven't said that I agree! – I was outraged. – If you just dare say that I can make a lot of money of it, I will tell you to go to hell... you know me, don't you?...

⁴⁴ *Tales from the Vienna Woods* (German: *Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald*) - composed in 1868, *G'schichten aus dem Wienerwald*, op. 325 was one of six Viennese waltzes by Johann Strauss, very popular in the USSR

⁴⁵ Person who loves trees

⁴⁶ Slightly changes words from A. Pushkin's *The Song of Wise Oleg* (1822)

-I can guess! - Dermot laughed. - I know you quite well, Zhenya. And I know that you might refuse us, but not to the brotherly people building socialism...

Chapter 21. Miracles do happen!

“Damn it... Some people know how to live. They fall in love. Go to the theatres. Go to libra...to libraries....”

(“A Man from Boulevard des Capucines⁴⁷”)

“Have you still got rivers on your planet?

Yes, seas and rivers, and even decent people!.”

(“Kindza-za!”)⁴⁸

... He was right. He knew me quite well...

Several months later, here I am, in "a neutral country", getting off the train.

A medium-sized, just slightly taller than I, swarthy with an orange tinge stranger is waiting for me on the platform. He has sparkling, cheerful, shiny anthracite-like eyes and a heavy, slightly protruding jaw which doesn't spoil his looks in the least. He also has rather short, slightly bowed legs, which do not spoil his looks either. He is quite an attractive man of about my age. A few early grey hairs show in his short black, stiff, spiky hair. He is dressed in a black shirt made of some unusual crisp translucent stuff, wearing it loose over his black trousers. There is a small round badge on his chest. The sleeves of his shirt are rolled up to the elbows, his tanned, almost black arms are strong and muscular. He firmly shakes my hand with a slight bow, and says in a husky baritone in good Russian: -Welcome to my country! My name is Song Ri Rang. I'll be your guide and interpreter during your stay here.

Actually, there are two guide-interpreters. A young spectacled girl named Lee Jong Ok, and Comrade Song. The girl, curiously enough, reminds me of my childhood friend, Zhenya Nikolaeva. Perhaps, that's because she looks just as serious. But that's where the likeness ends; this girl is very pretty, graceful like a birch-tree, with a round face. She has long, thin fingers, like a piano player. She wears a casual, but elegant suit. And the same indispensable badge. She also speaks Russian perfectly, although for some reason she adds the short “right?” almost after every word, as if she wants to be convinced that she is understood. But it sounds very cute.

They lead me to a minibus, Comrade Song smiles radiantly, comrade Lee smiles too, a little restrained. And I... I am stunned by all the colours, by the calmness, the cleanness, the green streets and the cheerful and chaste faces of people around me. It is as if I suddenly found myself in a fairy tale.

I saw the landscape of this country before: I remember the glossy pictures in the magazines "Korea Today" and "Korea" from my youth. For some years I had run a subscription for them back at home. But I didn't trust them fully, because in our magazine "Soviet Union" the views appeared somewhat more picturesque than in reality. Even when I took pictures of my city myself, they looked somewhat brighter than reality. Since that time many years have passed, I have heard a lot of horror tales about life in Korea. Though I know how the Western mass media lie about all countries that dare stand up

⁴⁷ *A Man from the Boulevard des Capuchines* - a Soviet Western comedy film of 1987 with nods to silent film and the transforming power of celluloid.

⁴⁸ Soviet dark comedy film (1988) where capitalist society is shown as an anti-utopia on another planet

against imperialism, some sort of sludge was left in my head after that. I imagined this place to be gloomy: like bleak autumnal Moscow of Mikhail Gorbachev's time. But what presented itself to me, was a virtual *spring of mankind!* Korea was as beautiful as in the magazines from 25 years ago. And even those beautiful photos did not do it justice. This discovery amazed me, as if I had got out of a spaceship on Mars in a spacesuit, but it turned out that there was oxygen there!

...The landscape changed dramatically as soon as the train crossed the Korean border with China. No, I do not want to say anything bad about China: it, too, is very beautiful, in its own way. But there was no such keen tranquillity in China, as there was in Korea, after the Western-style frenzy; and how could there be any tranquillity in a country that is, before our eyes, turning into a superpower?

The train has crossed the bridge... The Korean land lay in front of us, and instead of the harsh mountains overgrown with trees, mixed with grey, steaming cities, I suddenly saw dazzling green rice fields, neatly separated by rows of potatoes and corn, spreading out to the horizon. Korea is a mountainous country, there is not much arable land here, and you get the impression that everywhere possible something is planted, including on the steep mountains slopes where seedlings of maize and a variety of vegetables are growing in terraces, sometimes at such an angle that it is impossible to imagine how the local farmers climb on them. A tractor wouldn't be able to get there, so the ground would have to be dug by hand or ploughed by oxen... There are no weeds on those fields, not even on those farthest from the roads. They are perfect fields.

From my very first moment here I got a feeling that this is not "a poor, god-forsaken dictatorship of the Axis of Evil", as the "democratic" press tries to convince us, but a place *celebrating its well-being*. I have not seen tree trunks freshly whitened with lime for already about 30 years⁴⁹! Trams and trolleybuses here look much newer and cleaner than the ones on the streets of my fly-blown by "democracy" hometown in Russia. And there are no broken seats in them. Nobody writes dirty words on the walls and fences: neither in the native language nor in English. People can still bathe in rivers and drink spring water (which may come as a surprise for stray Westerners fallen on these shores!)

... Our bus was driving around the Korean capital, and I forgot all about my fatigue from the road, looking out the window. Many buildings and local sights I had already known, thanks to the aforementioned magazines I had subscribed to. There was yet another source of my knowledge: a Moscow bookshop called Books of Socialist Countries, with a special Korean book department, where in my student days I used to purchase Russian translations of classical Korean novels, such as *Sea of Blood* and *Flower Girl*. So, I had a pretty good idea of what I was about to see.

Incidentally, Korean magazines were very popular with my student friends, in particular, because of the Russian language there. The articles were written with perfect grammar and punctuation (and let me tell you that the Russian language is very difficult, even some Russians themselves write with mistakes!). But the style... It was so special, so flowery, that it could not be compared to anything. All those various Russian idiomatic expressions in Korean magazines acquired shades of meanings quite unusual for us. For example, "He looked at us, beaming with the radiant smile of *a regular lad*." Or "People respect her efforts and hold her up as an *assiduous slogger*." Or "the athletes went to the start line, *without feeling the share of mental distress*." You couldn't think this up, even if you really wanted to. It was not from their lack of knowledge of Russian, but because their language was *too good*. I guess that came from the desire to translate as vividly and as accurately as possible. Probably all those

⁴⁹ In the Soviet Union until mid-1980s whitening trees trunks half way up with lime was done every spring. It is meant to keep certain insects and diseases away from the trees. I have never seen it done in the West, and in capitalist Russia they stopped doing it too.

turns of speech were translation loans from the Korean originals. Such special expressions exist in every language. In Russian there are plenty of imaginative idioms, beautiful pithy turns of speech, so hard to render in English. And strong language, too, is different from English. Just try to translate correctly into English, for example, Khrushchev's "We will show you Kuzma's mother⁵⁰"/"We will bury you⁵¹." Or even Putin's "bump off in the toilet."⁵²

Anya Bobrova was crazy about my Korean magazines. She was born in China, where her father was working at that time. That's why she felt close ties with the Far East. Every month she eagerly anticipated me to bring her a new issue and met me in the classroom loudly asking:

- How is the Great Leader doing? And the Dear Leader?

...Pyongyang appeared to be a very green city. It looked like a huge park, with mainly willows and poplars growing in the streets, and lots of water (there are two rivers in the city, with several islands in the middle of them). And I also saw for the first time in my life really original and all different multicolored tower blocks! I have never thought that a modern city, with almost no old buildings can be so beautiful...

People who walked in the streets were well-dressed and neat. Many of them wore rubber boots, which was no wonder, because it had been raining. No one was throwing rubbish in the streets, and so the streets did not even have bins! That reminded me what a plaque on the wall of one of the Soviet canteens said: *"It is clean here not because of the cleaning, but because no one litters."*

People's faces were friendly and cheerful. There was not much transport on the streets. (Despite the energy problems of this small country, which was left in the lurch by its major allies, it survives and not just remains independent, but also develops, in spite of all adversities!). Many people were walking or using bicycles. There were no obese people on the streets, but no one was overly skinny either. I remembered how things are back where I lived in Ireland. One in four children is overweight in Ireland today. And for adults, they advertise on TV: "Please, move for at least half an hour a day! That should be enough to maintain a healthy lifestyle..."

I suddenly remembered what Wendy had told me after her trip to Belarus. "The main thing I understood when I visited there, is that I began to value how many things I have and how little they have."

And what actually have you got? What have you got, that Koreans or Byelorussians haven't, without which it is just impossible to live? How about free education and health care, guaranteed job places, guaranteed and almost free vacations at resorts and rest homes, free apartments into ownership, passed on to one's heirs, with a trifling monthly rent for the facilities, almost free automobiles and other durable goods, high culture and ethics, collectivism, freedom of development and creative endeavour for all? Only don't speak about the mythical human rights or freedoms, of speech, above all – these are no more than fiction in a bourgeois society. Your rights are not actualized, your voice is not heard – conditions are built up in such a way that your circumstances become an impenetrable wall for a change. What then? The maniacal consumption?

⁵⁰ Kuzma's mother or Kuzka's mother is a part of the [Russian idiomatic expression](#) "to show kuzka's mother to someone" which means "to teach someone a lesson, to punish someone." The closest English equivalent is "to make it hot for someone."

⁵¹ "We will bury you!" was a phrase famously used by [Soviet](#) premier [Nikita Khrushchev](#) while addressing Western ambassadors at a reception at the Polish embassy in [Moscow](#) in 1956. The actual [verbal context](#) was: "Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will dig you in" In his subsequent public speech Khrushchev declared: "We must take a shovel and dig a deep grave, and bury colonialism as deep as we can."

⁵² *Мочить в сортире* – *To bump off in a toilet*. One of the earliest "putinisms", made in September 1999, when Putin promised to destroy terrorists wherever they were found, including in toilets.

I recall a Dutch writer, Kees van Kooten, matching himself with his wife's Romanian friend: "*And I - I've got everything! Apart from my radio, video, audio and TV set, I also have a trombone, a synthesizer, a drum set, my collection of stamps, my garden, my library and my aquarium, my skis, my boat, my barbecue, a shredder, a fax, a copier and an answering machine, my car, my dog, a saw and a racing bike, a mountain bike with handlebars for triathlon, a skateboard and roller skates, ordinary skates and a billiard table, my travel iron and a telescope, my scuba gear and my swimming pool...*"⁵³

Well, so what? And what next? How much more are you going to purchase to feel happy for at least ten minutes? If only you could understand that this delusive feeling that you chase all your life consuming more and more, is not happiness, but merely a brief after-meal satisfaction, similar to what a cat feels after gobbling up a drumstick, thrown to it after Christmas dinner....

People in Korea looked neither hungry, nor poor or unhappy. So much unlike, for instance, our stereotypical ideas of starving African babies and Ethiopian / Rwandan / Congolese / Darfurian refugees, whose images European charities of all sorts exploit to greedily whip up money from sentimental public.

Who told you that these people here are unhappier than you? Your TV?

Watch these children playing in the streets. They haven't got expensive Barbies, mobile phones or modern gadgets which enable their Western peers to chat (possibly, with some pedophiles pretending to be kids of the same age) on the net. These Western "lucky guys" spend hours in front of their computers without even going outdoors, and from an early age they learn to thrill with delight at the images of bloodthirsty and refined destruction of an imaginary enemy (well isn't it a good practice preparing children for the future Iraqs and Afghanistans!)...

Did I have imaginary enemies in my childhood? Certainly, I did. But I have never dreamed of blowing them into pieces or decapitating them. The height of my imagination was to give them a good kick in the butt!

A Korean girl walks down the street; reading a book as she goes. It is clear that she is so absorbed in reading that she can't tear herself away from the book. Modern Western children (and many Russian children are now being brought up like that, too) neither read books, nor can empathize with the heroes even of their favourite films. They are interested only in special effects. Even a whole sea of blood already doesn't excite them enough, except for the wish that every new film should be more and more gory than the previous one. They won't be hooked up otherwise, or their interest will quickly flag. People have long been made emotional impotents since an early age. In my time I was shaken by some scenes in our Soviet films, where the actual murder was not even shown. In the film *Nobody Wanted to Die*⁵⁴ where a boy is strangled by one of the "forest brothers" in the forest - we only see his rabbit left behind. And another scene with a boy who is ringing up the police in the call box and is caught by a gangster in the film *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed*⁵⁵... The scenes of their murders are off-screen, but it does give you shivers. We, the Soviet people, felt moved and upset for a long time after such scenes. Because we were able to *empathize*. But there was obviously some chaff at the time, too, some future New Russians already went to cinemas to see some kind of low-standard Legend of

⁵³ Kees Van Kooten. *Zwemmen met droog haar* (1990)

⁵⁴ *Nobody Wanted to Die* - a [1966 Lithuanian film](#) made in [Soviet Lithuania](#) and directed by [Vytautas Žalakevičius](#).

⁵⁵ *The Meeting Place Cannot Be Changed* - a 1979 Soviet 5-part television miniseries that has achieved status of a cult film in the USSR

Dinosaurs⁵⁶ and whispered avidly in the back row: “it’ll gobble him up now”... In the West such fans of “gobbling up” are sadly in the majority. When I read early Alexandr Zinoviev⁵⁷, insisting that most people in the West are highly cultured, I cannot hold up a chuckle: surely this dissident professor communicated there exclusively within the Academia.

When those “lucky ones” who live in the West are aged 11 or 12, drug traffickers are already waylaying them at the school gates. By the age of 13-14 they think themselves duty-bound to sleep with somebody - even if they don't want to do it - otherwise “what will my mates say?”. (And relevant “artillery preparation” begins long before this: in British shops, for example, bras and strings are sold already for 8-9 year olds!) And they drink cider and beer. In Northern Ireland they start drinking on average already at 11 years of age.

On Christmas or birthday, these children stamp their feet if they are not presented with the latest model of a mobile phone or a quad bike. They are ready to kill themselves, literally, if they don't have the whole range of gadgets which somebody else has...

Who should really envy whom, that should be the question!

But, of course it is hard to expect that *Homo Occidentalis*⁵⁸ will envy whole-heartedly the life of spirit we used to live. Or, for example, wish to live the lives of Africans who are “poor”, by their estimates (but who do not starve, as they show on Western TV).

Yet this does not mean that any of us need their pity.

It's simply that there are some things in the world which they can neither understand nor appreciate. The problem is that *Homo Occidentalis* is used to seeing the world only "from here to there", like a horse constantly wearing blinkers. Only within the framework of things which they own (or somebody else owns, if it comes to evaluating the degree of “happiness” of somebody else). Or how much they can afford to own. And even if somebody tries to take those blinkers off them by fiat, they, as a rule, will already be unable to see anything beyond their bounds. Only rise upon their hind legs in fear and plead to be brought back into their stable...

A typical *Homo Occidentalis* simply *can't imagine happiness* without accumulation of things, or, for that matter, money to buy those things.

The British who sob on television after they have lost their 3,000 pounds, with which they wanted to buy a house in Bulgaria (“we aren't able to have property in our country, let us at least have something abroad”), where they were predictably conned, stir up no sympathy, but only disgust. The same disgust as one feels when a 70-year-old former Soviet beauty Natalya Fateeva⁵⁹, who used to be Yeltsin and Chubais⁶⁰'s personal friend, now airs her anger with the Soviet system, under which she became a popular actress, because “all her life she felt there were not enough commission shops” in the USSR for her⁶¹. This behaviour is worse than animal's, for animals seek only necessities of life. And a human

⁵⁶ *Legend of Dinosaurs and Monster Birds* (1977) - a Japanese science fiction film which was shown in the USSR

⁵⁷ Aleksandr Zinovyev (1922 – 2006) - a prominent Russian logician and dissident writer of social critique. Zinovyev emigrated from the USSR, but after some years of life in the West returned to Russia to expose and castigate the aggressive Western policies.

⁵⁸ Western Human (Latin) - as opposite to *Homo sapiens* (Wise Human)

⁵⁹ Natalya Fateeva (b. 1934) - popular Soviet cinema actress

⁶⁰ Anatoly Chubais (b.1955) is a Russian politician and business manager who was responsible for [privatization in Russia](#) as an influential member of [Boris Yeltsin](#)'s administration. One of the most hated figures in modern Russia.

⁶¹ Shops that were selling rare second hand items, often imported (any citizen could sell goods through such a shop, after showing his documents; the shop received a small commission for it)

being, a real one, not an excuse for a man with a thick wallet, is distinguished by the aspiration for spiritual development, finds richness in human relations and knowledge of the world.

How can one explain to a *Homo Occidentalis* the dream of lying in a field, on freshly mowed grass, and gazing at stars? Or bring it home to him that a little tag game gives more pleasure than all those computer murders. That the innocence of childhood is so much happier than having sex at 13. That the idea of perfect happiness is to contribute a stone to the foundations of building a better life for all the peoples of the world - in strenuous effort and at the expense of one's life, if need be - rather than smugly toss the needy a pair of old unwanted shoes. That *to live life not in vain* doesn't mean buying two houses and three cars, but entering a fight with those who suck the blood out of mankind, - bringing closer a victory of the real people over their surrogates.

Being a modern *Homo Occidentalis* - Western philistine - is the same as being deprived of taste, smell, colour, not feeling the fresh air on your skin. Maybe this is why, ever since I lived among such people, spring have no longer smelt like spring, and the streets smelt only of grilled chicken?

A person with the mentality of *Homo Occidentalis* is most of all hurt, when "he has got everything", but nobody is jealous. After all, he thinks, everyone should be! But you cannot help feeling *sorry* for such a person, who even has no idea what he is missing. There is so much more happiness in *being* than in *having*, that one who possesses *being* feels only pity for one who only covets and has...

As the Soviet poet Boris Slutsky wrote:

But it really did not matter

What we ate, where we slept in the end,

We could witness in radiant splendour

Future life through these papers transcend.

Our red banner proudly flowered,

We set out the new trail to blaze

And our conscience gave us power

To dictate existential ways.

...The bus squeaked on its brakes and came to a halt. We were at a hotel which had an unfamiliar, complicated Korean name. For some reason it reminded me of the building of our local Party Committee in my hometown. The bus door opened, and I plunged outside into a warm spring evening. The fragrance of blooming trees almost knocked me down: over the past twenty years I had become accustomed to roses, grass and even the spring earth that had no fragrance.

Twilight was creeping over the city: creamy blue, with a tint of gold in the sky. Comrade Song gave me his hand when I stepped out of the bus. I had so long not expected such kindness any more, that at first I did not even realize what he wanted. The last time in my memory it was done by Vitya Gandelman, when we were in the fourth year of our student life: when we went from the dorm to the metro station by bus in the morning, he always got out of the bus first and offered his hand to every coming out girl student. Since then I hadn't expected such treatment from anyone, I was already happy if I wasn't pushed aside by somebody on the bus.

The hotel didn't look like our city party committee building on the inside, of course. The only similarity was in the majestic marble staircase. Some people with visible pleasure watched TV where a local heroic film was shown. I was sorry that I did not know the Korean language: it was very beautiful to listen to and the tones of the heroes were so dramatic, that tears almost welled up in my eyes without even understanding of the meaning... Then the film ended and the news began. It was very much like our news in the Soviet times: the heroes of this country were workers, peasants, soldiers, children, rather than gangsters or pimps with their regular showdowns, moguls with their new purchases or divas with her vulgar parties...

Comrade Lee took my passport away with her: I usually don't give it to anybody and I worry very much if I don't have it with me for more than an hour. But this time I was absolutely calm. I was just sure that it was in good hands and it wouldn't be lost, and if that it was the way it was supposed to be done, then so be it. When in Rome, do as the Romans do...

-You must be tired, Comrade Kalashnikova? - said Comrade Song (*comrade? Did I mishear?*). -There is nothing on our agenda for today. There will be dinner at the hotel and you can relax. Your comrades will come only in two days. But here is our cultural programme for tomorrow and the day after...

And he gave me a typed paper sheet.

- Thank you, Comrade Song. I'm really tired. Of course, it would be interesting to see the city, but... tomorrow is another day!

-If you really want to see my city and still have some energy left, we can walk after dinner to the Tower of the Juche Idea⁶². It's not far from here...

"Juche" is pronounced quite differently from its Russian transcription. Apparently, there are just no such sounds in the Russian language. It's not "ch" and it's not "ts", but something in between them.

Who of those who remember the silhouette of this Tower almost since childhood, would refuse such an offer?! I swallowed my dinner in haste, not even noticing how Korean food is different from all that I have ever tasted.

Comrade Song was waiting for me in the street, smoking. It was almost dark, and in some places lanterns began to light up, but not everywhere: probably the energy crisis was still felt. There was no light in some streets, but people walked about casually and freely. Nobody was afraid that he or she would have their handbag snatched (it was the first thing I witnessed in Dublin, when I first got there!) or that somebody would put a knife against their throat and demand their purse, or anything worse. No one drove cars in Korea on the sidewalks. (Once I was almost run over by a foreign car in my hometown which some *free-and-easy lad* wanted to park on the sidewalk. I ignored his driving on the sidewalk behind me and his beeping, although our "reformed", "free" people in the street tried to pull me away to the side, in horror. "*The master of life*", unfamiliar with the elementary rules of the road, was forced to bypass me and cursed loudly.)

The residents of Pyongyang walked unhurriedly, just like Comrade Song. I had to adapt to his speed of walking because in the nervous "civilized world" I was used to running down the street almost in a gallop. Some people lit their torches to see the road. And Comrade Song also took out a torch. It seemed that the whole street was filled with flying fireflies.

⁶² The Juche Tower (officially the Tower of the Juche Idea) is a [monument](#) in [Pyongyang](#), DPRK. The tower is named after the principle of [Juche](#), developed by Kim Il Sung ; it was completed in 1982.

- How beautiful! - escaped from my lips.

Comrade Song smiled.

- *Just you wait*, you have not seen our city in the morning yet! And April is one of our most beautiful months.

He started telling me about April Spring Friendship Art Festival. He was talking to me, I was listening and was amazed at his almost impeccable Russian language. Our modern semiliterate and inarticulate TV presenters should listen to him! He knew so many things and recounted them so quickly that unaccustomed people would moan and groan. But it was to my liking. I had a feeling that the wheel of my mental mechanism, which over the years had become sluggish due to the lack of stimulation, finally started at full force. The longer I heard Comrade Song, the more I was surprised: at last I'm with someone who instantly understands what I am talking about. Where do such people come from? Or they are all like this over here?

Juche Tower suddenly opened in front of us - on the other side of the river, and it took my breath away. The bright light of its scarlet torch was seen afar, from its great height. We both had fallen silent: we did not need words. The Tower was *overwhelmingly* majestic: I instinctively felt that such monuments were not built just for show. It embodied belief and inspiration, similar to the monument *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman*⁶³, which was created by Vera Mukhina. Clearly, it is because of the incredible strength of the spirit of this socialist symbol, that it was taken away so quickly from the Exhibition of Economic Achievements of the USSR after the destruction of socialism⁶⁴!

We stood silently for ten minutes, admiring the Tower. I did not even want to leave.

But it was awkward: it was already getting late, and I was certainly not the only one who was tired...

- Please tell me a bit about yourself, - I asked Comrade Song on the way back. He became shy.

- What can I tell you? Well, for example, I'm a member of the Pyongyang Boulders Exchange Society.

- Of what?

- Of boulders. You should see them, there can be such big stones. Beautiful ones. I am 44 years old. I finished school, graduated from university... I worked in different countries. I'm familiar with the realities of different cultures, not from hearsay. I have also been to the Soviet Union, it is a pity that it was at its late stage, but not earlier! The whole world was caught up in the whirlwind of "liberalization" then, in many countries their distinctive national features in different areas of societal life were being erased. Seeing these realities on television and in print has only reinforced the Koreans' determination to pursue and implement our precious national traditions and heritage.

⁶³ *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* is a famous landmark of monumental art, "the ideal and symbol of the Soviet epoch", that represents a dynamic [sculpture](#) group of two figures with a [sickle and a hammer](#) raised over their heads (⚒). It is 24.5 meters (78 feet) high, made from [stainless steel](#) by [Vera Mukhina](#) (1937)

⁶⁴ The sculpture was removed for restoration in autumn of 2003 in preparation for [Expo 2010](#). The original plan was for it to return in 2005, but because the [World's Fair](#) was not awarded to [Moscow](#) but to [Shanghai](#), the restoration process was hampered by financial problems and re-installation was delayed...It finally returned to its place at [VDNKh](#) in December 2009 ("Soviética" was completed in January 2009, before that). The restored statue uses a new pavilion as its pedestal, increasing its total height from 34.5 meters (the old pedestal was 10 meters tall) to 60 meters. It is now very hard to see the actual monument because of the height of its pedestal.

And now I talk about my country to our foreign friends here, so that they can better understand it. We are often misunderstood, unfortunately. If you know someone else who is interested to see the DPRK with their own eyes, tell them. Let them come. We will be glad to see them.

He paused and added:

-And I also like to sing. Have you already decided which song are you going to sing?

- ??????? - I probably looked bewildered...

- In Korea both guests and hosts are expected to perform a song during the official dinner.

- Even if I haven't got a good singing voice?

- It doesn't matter. *I sing like hell myself*. Here, listen...

And, absolutely unexpectedly for me, he broke into a Russian song, in a pleasant low baritone voice:

-Now listen to my story

Of Winter the White Fairy,

Who on the forest fringes

Lived businesslike and merry,

Pickled snowballs in a birch tub,

Spun yarn and weaved white wools

And forged ice bridges over

*frosty rivulets and pools...*⁶⁵

I felt that if he continued singing just a little bit more, I will just faint on the ground unconscious....

I have not heard this song for about 20 years, if not more!

I looked at my interlocutor once again and, to my own surprise, picked up the refrain:

-Icy ceiling, the door creaking huskily...

Thorny frost outside hovers duskily...

Step inside - rough white walls rimed about,

And the vapour of blue oozing out.

The Fairy went on hunting,

And bezelled diamonds bright,

And in a crystal bucket

She put the moon's sickle white,

She made fur coats for bushes,

And blazed the sleigh-road fine,

Then hurried to the forest

⁶⁵ Winter Was Living in a Hut (1970) - Soviet pop-song by E. Khanok and S. Ostrovoy

To her hut beside a pine.

Icy ceiling, the door creaking huskily...

Thorny frost outside hovers duskily...

Step inside - rough white walls rimed about,

And the vapour of blue oozing out!

And we laughed happily without any words.

And those Western idiots are trying to describe these people as some kind of *tortured and frightened robots*?

When we were not far from the hotel, lashing rain came down in torrents: the clouds gathered in the sky in front of our eyes and burst out in a heavy thunderstorm. I didn't have an umbrella and I was even taken aback by the speed with which we were hit by this natural phenomenon. But Comrade Song kept a cool head, he had an umbrella with him, and he had opened it before I got wet. And the thunderstorm rumbled already above our heads.

- Shall we run? – Comrade Song asked me, *as if we had attended the same nursery school* and weren't just seeing each other for the first time in our lives.

- Let's do it! – I agreed. And we leaped over puddles together. By the time we stopped under the awning in front of the hotel door, despite Comrade Song's umbrella, I had already soaked up. He was soaked too, but went on smiling anyway.

- That's a good sign, - he said, opening the door in front of me.

- What exactly? That we've got soaked?

- No, that it had suddenly started raining. With a thunderstorm, by the way. This day will undoubtedly bring us good luck.

- I'd most like to believe it, - I answered, recalling about my forthcoming mission. I looked at Comrade Song and suddenly realized that he wasn't joking. He really meant that.

- Sleep well, Comrade Kalashnikova! – said Comrade Song with a semi-bow, seeing me to my room.

I wished him good night, too, and entered the room. I was really tired after such a long journey, but I couldn't fall asleep for some reason. And I don't think that it was because of the jetlag: there were just too many impressions.

I had taken my kids to Mum's. All three of them. It would be a lot of work for her, but, for a while aunt Zhenya could help her. And then they would come here and wait for me here until my return. There are plenty of nurseries in Korea - even twenty-four-hour nurseries, if necessary. And Lisa can be treated with traditional Korean medicine.

Of course, I couldn't tell Mum exactly why and where I was going. I told her that I was asked to work in another country temporarily, but there were no suitable conditions for the children there, and that I was going to work there for some time and then come back. Mum is wise and she realised right away that it was a ruse. One thing had especially amazed her: that she would have to wait for me, with the children, not at home, but in Korea. We knew just a little about Korea as a country (although since

Mum and Shurek's childhood they had a book of Korean Tales by Garin-Mikhailovsky⁶⁶ at home, which I loved very much), but my mother was always a little bit wary of Asia. I think it's because of the large population in China. But it is not China here...

- What did you get yourself into again? – Mum grumbled. – You are asking for trouble... It's all your guerillas, I just feel it!

- I didn't get myself into anything, Mum. Everything will be OK...

- Yeah, *and the wedding will crown it all!*

This was a kind of our common speech embellishment.

Far and by, it was quite hard for me to persuade her, but I finally managed. The thing is that mum, with her vehement, stirring nature, was constrained by retirement. You probably know what a Russian pensioner's life is like nowadays... well, if you don't, you are the lucky one! Because of this life one would be prepared to move away not only to Korea – even to the North Pole...

So, I had brought the children to her and came back to Ireland: to sort out everything that was necessary before my departure. A young Republican family that still didn't have their own house, stayed on the farm to look after it. They were very glad about it.

On the day of my flight I woke up when it was still dark outside. It was quiet too. I went outside and looked at the silhouette of our mountains on the horizon. "Is it possible that it's the last time that I see you?" – I addressed them in my mind. Something made me feel that I would never see Ireland again, and I was sad because of this feeling. Even breathing was painful. However, there was no feeling that something irreparable was going to happen.

Ireland had become an integral part of my life forever. Of course, I could say the same about the Antilles and even about Holland (without a long stretch of imagination!). But Ireland took that special part in my heart. And I was very upset that it had been losing its unique flavour right in front of my eyes. Probably, by the time my mission were over, it would have become another plastic-concrete-genetically-modified monster, like the rest of Europe. Poor, poor Irish people! At the moment it seemed to them that they gained something for themselves by switching to that mode of life: like that girl - from the film *Shores*⁶⁷ about a noble Georgian outlaw, Data Tutashkia⁶⁸ - who undressed herself for some vile merchant to get ten roubles. That silly girl was glad to get it, without understanding that she had lost something much more important, something that she would never be able to recover.....

Well, let their God be their judge... Especially since they believe in him.

Kieran left for me a plot on the local graveyard, nearby his. (The Irish even have a tradition of making a proposal in such a way: "*Would you like to be buried with my people?*") Although it never came to proposals in our case, because we both carried the baggage of our past injuries - but would I really sleep in that grave?... At that point I had to stop myself: one shouldn't start a journey with such ideas!

⁶⁶ Nikolai Garin-Mikhailovsky (1852-1906) - Russian writer and explorer. Korean Tales (1898) were collected by him during his journey in Korea. Despite the poverty of the population and the monstrous socio-economic backwardness of the country, Mikhailovsky liked it, and in his notes he appreciated the intellectual and moral qualities of the Korean people. For the entire trip he did not find a single case of a Korean not keeping his word, or lying. Throughout the expedition he encountered the most warm and welcoming attitude.

⁶⁷ *Shores* (1977) - Soviet Georgian TV film in 7 parts, based on the novel of Chabua Amiredzhibi "Data Tutashkia" (about Georgian Robin Hood-like figure from the early XX century, around 1900-1910)

⁶⁸ See above

But the thoughts of Ireland haunted me. Everything that had happened during all those years rushed through my mind: both grievances and joys. What path will Ireland choose? Will it reunite? And if yes, what will it be like then?

Probably I was brought up with different principles that make it difficult to understand many of the issues there. For me, you can “come to a consensus” with your friend with whom you share the same general goal, but have different views on the ways of achieving it, for the sake of this very mutual goal. But you can’t come to a consensus with your enemy. That would not be a “consensus”, it would be a “compromise.” And that is a forced measure, not something that you would want to parade as your wisdom. *To come to a consensus with your enemy in fact means to capitulate*, to give up all your goals and principles. A true Soviet person has a different set of values. For example, I could never understand, even now, why in the US the pilots who had been captured in Iraq during the first Gulf War, were met as heroes upon their release. When they were captured, they said on Iraqi TV everything that was required of them, in order to save their skins. I’m already used to the thought that physical survival is the main Western criterion of heroism. But I still don’t understand it and can’t accept it for myself. How can you live with a safe conscience after that? Unless you don’t have conscience whatsoever... The main aim for this type of folks seems to continue their deadbeat existence. They don’t know what honour is. All they think about is how to save their precious lives.

Can you imagine Zoya Kosmodemianskaya⁶⁹ or the Young Guards⁷⁰ behaving like this?

Can you imagine that there would be monuments erected for them after that?

Can you imagine that the ordinary schoolgirl Zoya, instead of saying “*You’ll hang me now, but I am not alone. There are two hundred million of us. You can’t hang us all!*”, would begin condemning the actions of the Red partisans at the scaffold bottom, to propitiate her tormentors and make them set her free? Faugh, it’s terrible even to imagine anything like this...

In the Soviet system of values, “*uncompromising*” and “*staunch*” were qualities which you ought to be proud of, as well as “*modest*.” Likewise, you ought to adhere to the civic stand “for myself and for that guy”⁷¹. And keep to the old Russian proverb, “once you pledge, do not hedge.”

“*Flexibility*” and “*impartiality*” are cultivated in the capitalist system of values. But if you translate them into the Soviet language, it will be *weakness* and *unscrupulousness*.

And I evaluated everything that I saw in Ireland very much from the Soviet point of view.

Certainly, “when among wolves, howl like a wolf.” And my example of Americans wasn’t exactly the case in point - they would have never become heroes anyway, even if they had died there under tortures, for the simple reason that *their cause was not righteous*. They were aggressors and gangsters on a global scale. I think, today fewer and fewer people on our planet have any doubts about that.

⁶⁹ Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya (1923 – 1941) was a [Soviet partisan](#) and a [Hero of the Soviet Union](#) (awarded [posthumously](#)), one of the most revered [heroes](#) of the [Soviet Union](#). Before being hanged by the Nazis, her final words were “Comrades! Why are you so gloomy? I am not afraid to die! I am happy to die for my people!” and to the Germans, “You’ll hang me now, but I am not alone. There are two hundred million of us. You can’t hang us all.”

⁷⁰ The Young Guard was an underground [anti-fascist Komsomol](#) organization, in the [German](#)-occupied [Soviet](#) city of [Krasnodon](#) ([Ukrainian SSR](#), now [Luhansk Oblast](#) of [Ukraine](#)). They were active during the [Great Patriotic War](#) until January 1943. They carried out several acts of sabotage and protest before being betrayed to the Germans. Most members of the *Young Guard*, about 80 people, were tortured and then executed by the Germans.

⁷¹ The civic stand and movement in the Soviet factories in the 1970s where workers voluntarily fulfilled the plan norm not just for themselves, but also for those who perished during the war. “For that guy” was a popular song by Mark Fradkin and Robert Rozhdestvensky.

But anyway, I had some bad aftertaste in my heart. OK, you don't have enough forces at the moment. OK, you say to yourselves: "Eat what they give you, or they won't give you anything." But, for example, when our army didn't have enough forces to defend Moscow in 1812, and Kutuzov retreated, leaving Moscow behind, he still *didn't hand the keys of the city over* to Napoleon. Do you get the difference?

And would he had been be a hero, if he had brought those keys to Napoleon, making *a compromise* with the invader and feeling proud of himself for that?...

Certainly, if I'm mistaken concerning the rise of opportunism that is taking place in Ireland, I will only be glad. But I still do not see where I am mistaken. No matter how much I'd like to.

...The taxi beeped outside, it was time to go.

The driver was a typical Irish man: talkative, not well-read, but clever and inquisitive. At first he told to me in Polish:

- *Dzien dobry!*⁷²

And I answered him in Polish.

- Are you Polish? - he was delighted and started telling me how he had learnt a bit of the Polish language. It was pleasant to see that some local residents educated themselves.

- No, I'm not Polish, - I said.- *Rozumiem trochę po polsku*⁷³

- Can you guess, whether I am Catholic or Protestant? - he asked me, mischievously. It was very courageous of him, but I think that he dared it only because I was a foreigner.

- Is easy to guess, - I said, - Of course, you're Catholic.

- How clever, - he was surprised, - And how did you guess? By to my name?

- I even don't know your name! - it was my turn to be surprised. - I've guessed very easily: I hardly got into your car, when you've already started to talk... Protestants are not so talkative.

- It's a prejudice about the Irish that we're talkers...

- Aren't you? Well, on average, of course... But don't get offended, I rather like it.

- And what do you like about us, the Irish, most? - he asked.

- Your *unpredictability*, young man ...

It probably inspired him, and he started to tell me about a philosophical book which had caught his fancy recently (I felt that he remembered it, most likely, because he didn't read that many books), and he began talking about all sorts of things ... He started to argue whether there was God, then he talked about karma and reincarnation. I listened to him and thought how much better he would have been for a thorough Soviet education! He, like many Irish people, could have achieved anything he wanted with a proper education!"

- And what do you dislike about us most? - the taxi driver continued when the reincarnation theme had been exhausted.

⁷² Hello (Polish)

⁷³ But I understand Polish a little bit (Polish)

–Dislike? Changeability. A person shows you certain signs of attention and shies away, when he sees that he has caused exactly the reaction which he, it seems, was bargaining for... Would you explain this to me, because I don't understand this trait.

-Aha, – he said. – I'll give you an example. I have started to go out with a woman. I liked her very much. And I still do like her. But I have talked to her and realised she was not my kettle of fish. She's too *refined* for me, do you get me? We belong to the different social groups. We don't have much in common. Do you see what I'm talking about? And I was scared, just as you say... I think that in your case it was the same.

Has the level of my education really frightened Oisín? Or the fact that he was a carpenter, and I was a chief of department? My God, that's so silly! After all, education is acquirable, but the ideas ...

– And how did you live during that dictatorship.... well, don't get offended, but here they say so, that it was ... With all those limitations and prohibitions... How was that? - The taxi driver interrupted my thoughts.

I didn't get offended. They just really don't know anything else. And it's good that he at least recognizes it!

– You simply know that *there are certain things you just don't do*, and that's it, – I tried to explain. - I do not see any drama in it. It's for the common good, see? Well, you're taught here too: thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal and so on. And you don't you rise against all those norms to prove that you are "free", do you? So, why should we then rise against our precepts of virtue?

-Look at that! – he said on some reflection. - And I have never thought about it ...

So, now you'll have something to think about, I smiled to myself.

The rest of the journey I reflected as well. I was thinking of the impossible emotional immaturity of the Westerners who collectively behave as if they were all teenagers, protesting against "what parents told them to do." Not because parents have told them anything wrong but just because they wanted to prove that they're already adult. It's we, much more emotionally and intellectually mature people of "dictatorships", who don't need to prove anything to anyone!

And their "freedom" is childish, teenage-like rebellious, thoughtless of the consequences of their actions for other people. This is why the heroes of Western books and films are generally not positive, decent people, but rather those who do something "naughty" and "cheeky" all the time. The audience likes it. It justifies their own behavior and makes them feel good about themselves.

In the meantime, we had already arrived at the airport

When I got onto the plane, I took a farewell look at Ireland through the window. It was raining, as if the country was crying. But I didn't want to cry any more. Before, when I had departed from here, I always used to say to Ireland through the window: "I'll be back, can you hear me?" But now I suddenly didn't want to say anything...

I was sleeping on the plane almost the whole journey. I woke up only late at night when we were already flying over Russia. Below me under the plane Kazan⁷⁴ spread its golden lights among the darkness of the night. I had never been there. It looked like a relief map model made of brilliant mica. You could even see the bridges over Volga. They were like toys.

⁷⁴ Kazan - one of the biggest cities on the Volga river, capital of the Tatar Autonomous Republic

And after a while I saw Ural behind the window, and then Siberia ... Huge spaces and rare sparks of lights in them. We were flying and flying, and Russia wasn't ending ... Oh, how many things I hadn't seen in my native land yet (not to mention other Soviet republics ...)! A whole life won't be enough to see them all!

Well, and then ... then there was Beijing. But it is another story. Now it's time to sleep....

I don't remember, how I fell asleep, but I woke up early because of vigorous, cheerful, though faint music outside. I looked out through the window: good gracious! It looked as if in Korea eight days a week were like our May the 1st!..

I fell in love with Korea at once, definitively and irrevocably.

Miserable old Nice in France with its artificially suntanned pensioners was nothing in comparison with it!

The streets of Pyongyang were showered with pink cherry blossoms, like a bride in her festive attire. The streets were extremely clean (before holidays small children help their parents to sweep the main streets and squares of the city, according to their ability - and it's nice that they at once get used to the collective and to work!). There were joyful scarlet flags on columns and on houses. People's faces expressed uncommon tranquillity and pride for their city and country. And the sight of kids of kindergarten age walking along streets with flowers in their hands was charming.

In Northern Ireland children don't even present flowers to their teachers on the 1st of September. When I had asked an Irishman, why not, I got an indignant reply: "*Is my boy a queer*⁷⁵, to walk with flowers down the street?" Imagine, to what degree these people's brains are turned inside out! Can they imbue their children with any love for beauty and fine arts with such mentality?

I just couldn't stay in my room on such a day. But, to be honest, it also wasn't required of me. My day had been planned in detail. Already on the first day I had on my schedule a visit to President Kim Il Sung's native house in Mangyongdae, which I had also known from the Korean magazines of my youth. I also had to visit three or four places of interest.

I went down the marble stairs with a strong intention to see as much as I could on that day and to learn something about the country to which my destiny had brought me. All the hotel employees whom I met, smiled at me natural human smiles. Not artificial professional ones.

And the waitresses in the hotel restaurant were angel-like. So feminine, modest, decently dressed. (Now, in our country they are sometimes dressed so gaudily that you often can't distinguish between a waitress and a representative of "the world's oldest profession"). When they were laughing, they were shyly covering their mouths with their hands. Very few people spoke foreign languages here, but I quickly learnt to understand them without words.

Breakfast, lunch, dinner helpings weren't as large as in Europe - in Korea it is customary to get many small dishes rather than one big one - but they were surprisingly substantial, that I never felt hungry between meals. I wasn't ever hungry at all. Korean food, unlike Chinese, is not fried in oil, but usually stewed or steamed, so it is healthier. The taste is often not like anything we're used to, but it makes it so much more interesting. After all, you go to another country to see another culture, other traditions, customs and different lifestyle. And today they force feed you more and more frequently anywhere in the world with the same hamburgers, French fries with ketchup and Mickey Mouse...

⁷⁵ Homosexual

Down with that rubbish! Enough spoiling the remains of the world, you idiots! If you were given a free hand, you would have already rolled the whole planet under your asphalt concrete!

My new comrades – Song and Lee – had already been waiting for me. Our driver's name was O Gil Bo. He spoke only Korean. There was serene Korean music playing in the bus. A little bit unusual for a European listener, it made me feel halcyon.

I had read some “horror stories” of Korean guides following in the tracks of some “free persons”, preventing them from communication with the local population or going where it is prohibited to. I had no problems with the second matter, because one should respect their hosts: if you aren't allowed to go to some place, so be it! It's as clear as day. After all, I'm not like those, who no sooner show up out of nowhere, than brazenly open your refrigerator for refreshments without your permission!

As for the first matter, I realised very quickly that you need to speak Korean in order to communicate with the population, in the first place. You are nowhere without the language. But my guides always let me talk with anyone I wanted (on the move, as we often had too little time because of our busy programme). I was always able to do that, and they offered their help.

As for faces... I have never met such sincere, genuinely cheerful and witty people as these two, who, by the way, joked in different languages. The laughter on our bus almost never stopped. We were quiet only when visiting important places, for instance, museums dedicated to the tragic war days or memorial cemeteries of the revolutionaries. But it would have never occurred to me to laugh in such places, anyway.

When we rode in the early morning on a bus around Pyongyang we could see crowds of people flow into the central stadium from all directions. There were rivers and rivulets of school children and students, sometimes breaking into songs. They were going to their rehearsals for the famous mass athletic games, slated for late August through October. In the evening, when we went back to the hotel, they were still practising, - without a trace of weariness, happy and blithe. Some of them were waiting for their turn sitting on the grass, lively talking and laughing. Others were performing acrobatic volte-faces on the pavement. Wasn't that a fantastic spectacle!

So, about our journey to Mangyongdae. From my Korea Today magazines of 25 years ago I could picture what I was going to see there. But nothing could prepare me for the sight that opened up before me. The majestic solemnity of that museum under the open sky, wrapped in flower-embroidered gauze, the special aura of the small traditional rural Korean house that roused deep spirituality in the faces of visitors, dressed in their best holiday garments. It seemed that people were coming in one endless stream. Whole working collectives, school classes, military units, all going there.

The house was standing at the foot of Mangyong Hill at the top of which a beautiful pavilion was located from where the riveting city view was unfolding. I could see lots of newly-wed couples being photographed there, in memory of their wedding day. My first astonishment from what I've seen (for example, a giant panel, portraying the two Leaders, in the hall of our hotel) transformed into increasing admiration.

It's too difficult to express in mere words, to explain it to somebody who has never been to Korea. He or she will think that it is some kind of “propaganda.” But anyway, I'll try.

I think what prevents us, Russians, from properly understanding Koreans nowadays, is not cultural differences, but the fact that we are accustomed to evaluating the world around us on the basis of our own experience. Unfortunately, the experience of downtrodden socialism and capitalist realism during

the last 20 or 25 years made us into complete cynics. In order *to sense* Korea you need to push aside your cynicism and try looking at the world with a fresh eye, believing in the best human qualities.

That was what I was thinking about by midday, when I was already slightly dizzy from the abundance of monuments and new information. But, as I have already said, that was blissful dizziness! The Arch of Triumph⁷⁶ in Pyongyang, bigger than European ones, and built in the national style, the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum⁷⁷, Chollima⁷⁸'s monument (Chollima is a winged horse from the Korean folklore, the symbol of high-powered work in new Korea), the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital - it went on and on.

I noticed that Koreans reluctantly answered inquiries of foreigners about the amount of their wages, quite understandably: some too curious visitors would immediately start to compare that amount with the payment they received back in their own country, in purely monetary terms.

And to compare them was silly: first, in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea all taxes were completely abolished already in 1974 (it was the first country in the world to do this), secondly, making such a comparison, one should consider all the benefits that are provided here to the people by the state - free of charge or at purely nominal prices. And then consider workers in capitalist countries who, upon receiving their allegedly "high" salaries, are in fact skinned alive by their respective states - through taxes, by rents and exorbitant prices.

The supply of the main foodstuffs is guaranteed to all citizens. Cotton doesn't grow in this country, and most clothes are made from a fabric called Vinalon, based on special fibers made of anthracite. Everywhere in Pyongyang I saw numerous sewing studios, while in our country they have practically disappeared, having left many thousands of women unemployed. School uniforms, footwear and textbooks in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are given to students and schoolchildren once in every 2-3 years absolutely for free, and the rest of the time at half-price. Clothes and tools for work are also given to workers for free. Compare this with Ireland, where every construction worker has to buy all overalls for himself with his own money, and that costs quite a lot. The Korean government gives premium payments and present people with gifts on the occasions of revolutionary and patriotic holidays. Medical aid is totally free of charge. The cost of health care per capita annually equals two average monthly worker's salaries. People can have a holiday for 30 days in resorts for free. The state pays the bills on rent: 90 % of the rent in one-storey houses and 75 % of the rent in high-rise buildings. Peasants in general pay nothing at all for the homes provided for them.

The pension age is 60 years for men and 55 for women (in the "developed" countries it is 65 for both, and now the pension age is starting to increase up to 67 and more, while the youth unemployment takes epidemic proportions!). Widespread is the movement of youth voluntarily taking care of old people who don't have relatives (and they do not simply visit these old people and help them around the house, but actually take them to live with them and look after them as after their own parents!). Another well-known movement is when young girls marry military men who have become disabled on military service. It is considered to be a display of patriotism and close links of the army and the

⁷⁶ The Arch of Triumph in Pyongyang was built in 1982 to commemorate the [Korean](#) resistance to [Japan](#) from 1925 to 1945. It stands on the Triumph Return Square at the foot of [Moran Hill](#) (Moran-bong) in the [North Korean](#) capital city of [Pyongyang](#), the monument was built to honour and glorify President [Kim Il-sung](#)'s role in the military resistance against [Japanese rule](#). The structure is modelled after the [Arc de Triomphe](#) and is slightly larger than the one in Paris. It is the world's tallest [triumphal arch](#), standing 60 metres (197 ft) high and 50 m (164 ft) wide.

⁷⁷ One of the best museums in Poyongyang, dedicated to the Korean War (1950-1953)

⁷⁸ Chollima (literally "thousand-[li](#) horse"), is a mythical [winged horse](#). This winged horse is said to be too swift and elegant to be mounted (by any mortal man). The Chollima Movement is a shock workers movement in the DPRK intended to promote rapid [economic development](#) that was launched in 1956

people. Westerners can't understand this unselfishness, and consequently are sure that Korean girls are "forced" to do this. After all, in their opinion, people don't make sacrifices, it is abnormal. In the West, an average person would voluntarily rather lie around by their TV-set with food from a local fast food joint and a can of beer.

The working day in Korea is 8 hours, but for mothers of three children or more it lasts 6 hours. Work for children younger than 16 years is forbidden by law. And, finally, for those who didn't know: there is an actually multi-party system in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. There are three political parties: the Workers' Party of Korea, the Korean Social Democratic Party and the Friends' Party, founded by the adherents of the Ch'ondogyo faith...

And the National Palace, numerous theatres, stadiums, clubs, children's palaces! For some reason people still think that Korea is some isolated country, but Koreans, while enjoying their own national culture, also know the whole world's classics - far better than Westerners or modern Russians ... And can you seriously imagine discussing *Duetto buffo di due gatti*⁷⁹ of Gioachino Rossini⁸⁰ with anybody in Ireland, as I did it with Jong Ok?! Most people there have a very vague idea even of his famous *Il barbiere di Siviglia*⁸¹ !

Looking at life of the working masses in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, saturated with culture and art, you become convinced once again in the correctness of Chekhov's words that "*everything should be beautiful in a person: his face, his cloths, his soul, and his thoughts.*" But here it is more than that: you become actually convinced that this not only *should be*, but also *can be* in any person!

When we returned to the hotel, I hastily ate my lunch, but there was no time for much rest: Comrade Lee was taking me to the circus. I have noticed that some of the Western visitors in Korea first don't express a particular enthusiasm about it. "Circus? We are not children!" - and they disparagingly wave their hand. I did not tell them anything. I just decided to wait when they would see with their own eyes what is meant by a *real* circus. The majority of circuses in Europe are not stationary, as we had in the USSR, but travelling, and the quality of their performances leaves a lot to be desired. And since the majority of Europeans can't even imagine any other circus, they think of it as something only worth children's attention.

But it is art par excellence. Foreigners from my hotel looked at the famous Korean gymnasts and acrobats that evening with such wondering and admiring eyes! The circus in Korea is world-class. Similar to our Soviet circus and in some areas even better! And there was also *our* familiar socialist atmosphere there: kind and relaxed. Among the spectators there were families with children, including all three generations. There were whole army units, too. There was cheerful laughter at the tricks of a clown (the Korean clown pulled out from the audience two spectators and made them arrange a match in taekwondo with each other!), and there was also sincere gasping a-ahs during high wire acts of gymnasts, and encouraging, supporting applause, when one of the gymnasts didn't succeed at the first attempt. When we left the circus, the foreign visitors' eyes glowed with delight. Such kind of circus

⁷⁹ Duetto buffo di due gatti ("humorous duet for two cats") is a popular performance piece for two sopranos which is often performed as a concert encore. The "lyrics" are somewhat unusual, consisting entirely of the repeated word "miau" ("meow").

⁸⁰ Gioachino Antonio Rossini (1792 – 1868) was an Italian composer who wrote 39 operas as well as sacred music, chamber music, songs, and some instrumental and piano pieces. His best-known opera is *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (The Barber of Seville).

⁸¹ The Barber of Seville, or The Futile Precaution (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*, ossia *L'inutile precauzione*) is an opera buffa in two acts by Gioachino Rossini. The libretto was based on Pierre Beaumarchais's comedy *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775), which was originally an opéra comique, or a mixture of spoken play with music. The première (under the title *Almaviva*, or the *Futile Precaution*) took place in 1816

they had never seen! And they didn't ask any more questions about why they were given tickets “for some performance for kids.”

I came across lots of Koreans from Japan and even South Korea in the circus and in other places. They were brought on a school trip with whole classes from Japan (Koreans in Japan have their own schools where instruction is in the Korean language, but they are still not naturalised citizens of Japan, even if they there were born there: approximately the same as it is now for Russians who were born in Latvia). Foreign Koreans differ from Koreans of the DPRK by their hairdos and clothes, sometimes even by hair colours. Among Southern Koreans there were a lot of people who were overweight (that's *love of hamburgers*, I bet you!). During my stay in North Korea I met some of them in different parts of the city so often that eventually I would almost greet them as someone I knew!

On the way back Comrade Lee quickly told me that I could call her simply "Jong Ok." Then she sat next to me, and we started to talk about Korea, Russia, Europe, about socialism. Still a very young girl, she spoke two European languages perfectly. I told her that before my arrival I saw a couple of European documentary films about Korea: *A State of Mind*, *The Game of Their Lives*.

- It is very important, to produce such films, – she told me. - These people know our country well – and understand our mentality – and at the same time they can *transfer* it so that people in Europe may understand us as well. Our culture does differ from the European culture, right? And we do not really trust journalists because, unfortunately, there were many cases when some people came to our country only with the purpose to slander it. When it is impossible for them to find something appropriate for that purpose, they contrive various fibs. For example, one reporter left his hotel in the early morning on Sunday when everybody was sleeping. He climbed up a television tower, made some photos of Pyongyang from there and later published those photos with a heading “Pyongyang is a dying city”! Or some journalists, who have never been to our country and just bought photos from naive tourists who have visited Korea, start to invent their own stories, having only selected the least attractive pictures! But never has a ordinary, normal, impartial person who visited our country after that continued to trust Western propaganda about us. Here people can see for themselves that we are the same normal human beings, with our own merits and shortcomings. The most important things in all cultures are the same for all the peoples, right?.. Peace, interesting work, family, friendship, love... We saw how people live in other countries – including countries in Eastern Europe today. And whatever people say, we are certain: our system is the best for us, for our future, for our people and our country.

I told her what I was thinking about. Even though I knew quite a bit about Korea from the Korean magazines since my youth, sometimes I had a thought that perhaps everything that those pictures showed looked there a little bit better than in real life. But no, now I'm here and I can see that everything is just as beautiful, as in those photos, and sometimes even better!

I hastened to express what I felt for her country, and sadly I didn't have enough words to do it. My feelings were too overwhelming. What is happening to me here? Could it be that I was becoming the same as Koreans, who “*easily become happy with warm feelings and can just as easily shed tears*”⁸²?

But she understood. She understood me without words and took my hand into hers, crossing our fingers. After so many years in Europe, where similar gestures “mean something indecent”, I was supposed to jump up to the ceiling and to pull my hand away. Undoubtedly, in Europe I would have done just that.

⁸² One of the characteristics given to the Korean people by the President Kim Il Sung

But here I felt warmth in my heart because of that small, simple gesture. It was a gesture of friendship: sincere, from the heart, not the kind of friendship when you “go shopping and have coffee together”, and even that only by prior arrangement.

- I am very glad that you like being here! – Jong Ok said to me at parting. – I hope when you see more, you are going to like it even more. Good night, right?

- And her small heels clattered along the corridor ...

...In Korea I was supposed to meet Dónal and Hilda. They were to arrive in two days. Hilda was a South African working in Pyongyang and Dónal was her Irish husband who had his own business in China and constantly went *from pillar to post*. He was the Northern Republican Irishman - that's how far from home his destiny had brought him. They were supposed to give me instructions on what I was to do next, and Dónal was supposed to prepare me for the forthcoming trip comprehensively.

Dónal was waiting for me downstairs in the hotel lobby after my daily round of excursions. I recognized him by the newspaper which was in his hands. *Irish Times* – of course, nothing more original could have been invented! Plus, his appearance was such a... My Northern Irish neighbour used to say about such people: “He will be arrested at once when he crosses the border: just for his face!”. In Dónal's face I could see from miles away that he was a Republican.

-*Dia duit, a chara*⁸³! - Dónal greeted me when I came up to him.

- *Dia's Mhaire duit!*⁸⁴

I introduced myself. Unfortunately, like many Irish, he could not pronounce my name and so he decided to call me Eugenia. I did not like it, but I said nothing. “Yeah, it would make it harder to guess my name!”⁸⁵ - I thought. Aloud, I said:

- In this case you can better call me Jenny!

- I heard a lot about you from Dermot. Only good things, - he hastened to add, looking at my concerned face. - The plan is... You take a rest for now. Do a bit of sightseeing in and around Pyongyang. Comrade Song will look after you here. We'll also join you later so that it shouldn't be so apparent that you are always shown around the city alone, without a group. And then we'll go with you to lake Sijun⁸⁶, to a sanitarium where you can get mud treatments. You'll get healed there, while Hilda and I will look after your training.

I already knew that on Curaçao I was going to be called Saskia Duplessis. It was a real person, a woman a little bit younger than me, a South African who had lived in Zimbabwe. She died while vacationing in Thailand, during the infamous tsunami. Her body had never been found, but her passport was (I was never told by whom). Nobody noticed her missing and no one looked for her remains. She had no time to check into a hotel: she came on that fateful beach right from the airport... I wonder how they found all that out?

And now I was to become her.

- What if she has relatives somewhere who could confirm that I am not her? - I asked. - And what language should I speak - English, or perhaps Afrikaans?

⁸³ Hello (Irish)

⁸⁴ Reply to hello (Irish)

⁸⁵ Russian expression

⁸⁶ Lake in the Western part of the DPRK known for its medical mud baths

- Do not worry, Jenny. Everything is checked. Saskia Duplessis' parents had died five years before her. She has a brother, but he has emigrated to Australia and has long been in no contact with his sister: they were at loggerheads since the time she decided to move to Zimbabwe: he saw it as "support for the Mugabe regime." Well, and to check out anything in Zimbabwe, they will need to have some guts! As for the language, your English is just a bit with that South African accent. A real South African, of course, will immediately spot the difference. If you accidentally bump into such a person, you can say that your speech was strongly influenced by life in Zimbabwe. But Hilda will try to coach you in the language properly, so do not worry! Afrikaans, she will teach you too, but only to understand and speak a little. She also will train you on aspects of life in South Africa and Zimbabwe: in case someone would you ask something. Well, I'll start with you on the technical side of things: what information is needed, how we will communicate, your contacts in place, your "story" and so on. And other... technical skills that can be useful. Comrade Song will also be with you at that lake all the time - as a translator and your connection to the outside world. If there are any problems, or questions, don't be shy, that's what he is there for.

- And how long will all this training take?

- Six months, not less - we have limited capabilities. Yes, before I forget, I should say: when you arrive at the location of your mission, try not to show that you understand the local language. Dutch is OK, but the local one - no. It is so rare a case, that people will start wondering if you have been there before. But still your knowledge of it will be useful: you may hear something that people would not say if they knew that you could understand them.

- What about my family? I do not want to leave without being sure that they have everything in order.

- This is what Comrade Song is dealing with at the moment. He is a reliable guy, trust him. By the way, he is actually a military interpreter, a Major. But I didn't tell you this.

Ah, those Irish babblers! What if he says something about Saskia Duplessis, too, casually like this, somewhere?

I didn't know yet that my Irish comrade was supposed to play the role of my husband. I did not know anything about him, except that he was "a man of experience." Or, as Comrade Song would say, with his indestructible love for Russian proverbs and expressions, "*an old file*."

I did not even know his name. I was told that we would be introduced later, in Beijing. His cover story was as follows: he was supposed to be a Scot (this was because of his strong Northern Irish accent, owing to which he was supposed to do a lot less talking to people there than I!), by the name of Alan Ramsey. (I did not ask whether there was a living person called Alan Ramsey or whether he had drowned or fallen from a balcony. I already had too much information to digest). I had allegedly met him when he was vacationing in Namibia...

- Namibia! - I exclaimed. - But I know next to nothing about Namibia, except for Sam Nujoma⁸⁷, the Kalahari Desert, Bushmen and Hottentots⁸⁸.... And the fact that its capital is called Windhoek....

- Stop, stop, stop, Jenny! This is already more than most people know. Do not be so worried. Hilda has been there, she will tell you.

⁸⁷ Samuel Daniel Shafiishuna Nujoma (b.1929) is a [Namibian](#) politician who was the [first President of Namibia](#) from 1990 to 2005. He led the [South-West Africa People's Organisation](#) (SWAPO) in its long struggle against [South African](#) rule and took office as President when Namibia obtained independence on 21 March 1990.

⁸⁸ Native people of Namibia

On Curaçao I was to establish friendly relations with the U.S. and Dutch military stationed there. Friendly meant business. I immediately made it clear that I was not going to pose as some Mata Hari⁸⁹, I'm no good at this.

- That's not necessary,- assured Dónal. - Just make friends with their wives, for example.

- Why are we here? Why Korea, may I ask?

- We are here so that no one may interfere. Here, there are not only no American spies, but not even a mouse can slip in! Koreans do not have anything to do with our business, do not disturb them with it. We are here just to relax. You are a foreign revolutionary, whose health has been undermined in the course of the struggle. And feel secure from the Western intelligence services, which are definitely not here.

- Oh! What are you saying! What health? And what kind of a revolutionary do I make?

- And what else are you? - Dónal laughed. - Well, look at yourself!...

And he said goodbye to me until the next time.

The next morning Comrade Song brought me to the Tomb of King Tongmyǒng⁹⁰, the founder of the Goguryeo kingdom. Jong Ok was a little bit late that morning. Gil Bu dropped us off near the site entrance and we went to it.

To tell the truth, the tomb itself was *not exactly my cup of tea* (I'm simply interested in more modern history). But what a wonderful pine forest was spreading around it!

It was a hot day, absolutely summery. Bees were buzzing, some giant black-blue butterflies were hovering, and what sweet aroma richly wafted from the trees! We walked leisurely on the spring green grass, where invisible balm-crickets were chirping. Everything was alive in the warmth, and life seemed boundless and endless.

- Comrade Song, may I lie on the grass for a while? – I asked suddenly, to my own surprise.

Comrade Song seemed to be confused.

-To lie? On the grass?

For a moment I thought that he was about to get a dictionary from his pocket.

- I just have such a dream, you see? To lie on the grass and watch the sky. I haven't done that since my childhood.

- There're big ants here, Comrade Kalashnikova. They'll sting you.

- Oh.... Sorry, I didn't know.

He glanced at me as if weighting this matter in his mind.

- But if you want I can *flap them away from you* for a while...

Now it was my turn to be confused.

⁸⁹ Margaretha Geertruida "Margreet" Zelle (1876 – 1917), better known by the stage name Mata Hari, was a [Dutch exotic dancer, courtesan](#), and accused [spy](#) who was [executed by firing squad](#) in [France](#) under charges of [espionage](#) for [Germany](#) during [World War I](#)

⁹⁰ The Tomb of King Tongmyǒng is a mausoleum located in near P'yǒng'yang. The tombs contain the remains of Tongmyǒng, the founder of the ancient Goguryeo kingdom, northernmost of the Three Kingdoms of Korea

- It means that I may?

- Try to.

I threw my jacket (which I didn't need because of the heat anyway) on the grass, stretched myself out on it, and closed my eyes. The sun was tenderly stroking my face like in my childhood. The cool wind was offsetting the heat from the sun. The pines were exhaling their perfume. All grievances and concerns seemed to be taken thousands miles away. I took a deep breath to get all my fears and doubts out of my head, and...

- Ouch!

Someone smacked me on the leg. Not painful, but I could feel it.

- I'm sorry... it was an ant, - I heard. – But it won't disturb you now.

I opened my eyes and saw Comrade Song's smiling face. He was looking at me with understanding.

- So, Comrade Kalashnikova? Is this like Russia?

- Honestly, not really. But it's wonderful anyway. I haven't felt so good for a long time. Thank you. For that ant as well.

- Let's go and drink some spring water, Comrade Kalashnikova. How about racing to the well? – he proposed suddenly. - Who's quicker: you or me?

Comrade Song turned out to be quicker. He was lighter and more in shape than I. But being a gentleman, he let me win.

We sat on a stone and he offered me some spring water. If a European were there, he or she would ask: "Is it safe to drink it without boiling?"

A flashback of the railway next to my house came to my mind. The railway ties smelled of pitch: unlike the new concrete ties on the railway for Moscow. Our railway was a reserve one, freight trains went on it more often than passenger trains. Those used it only during summer. So only two vicinity Diesel trains went past our house per day.

One day an unusual train passed our house: all its windows were shut, but it was possible to see some almost unearthly twinkle shining from the inside.

- Mum, look! What a train! What is that? – I asked.

At that moment we were picking Colorado beetles from the potato bed. Mum raised her head:

- Ah, surely this must be President Kim Il Sung's train.

And it was. In those days he was visiting the USSR. By train...

For the reason that trains didn't often happen to pass there, I was allowed to walk on our rail track, with adult supervision. I had observed the last solar eclipse in our region in the 20th century from that rail line: early in the morning, at about six o'clock. I had got up especially for that.

When I was eight years old, my granddad once told me:

- Let's go to the Stone Place.

- What and where is it? – I had never heard such a name before.

- You'll see for yourself. Let's go tomorrow morning.

And we went, along the railway track, eastwards.

The way wasn't long: half an hour, not more, but it was so interesting! Almost as interesting as making *archaeological excavations*, when Granddad was digging soil in the garden for planting potatoes. I enjoyed collecting pieces of broken china cups, convinced that I had real museum antiquities in front of me.

Those days I remembered as a keepsake how many steps it took between every two ties on the rail track. I could also leap from one to another. The rails were smeared with black oil on the sides, and it was better not to touch them. Sometimes you could find some interesting things that had fallen out of freight cars, for example a transparent blue stone, which my chemist grandfather called "silica." It was transported with the slag from our steel mill by train. It seemed to me like a moonstone. It oxidized in the air, and from time to time you had to wash the white film from it.

To the right of us potato beds were stretching - from the dam and to the horizon. Behind them there was the impassable forest of American maples planted here under Khrushchev (speaking of the Devil: it would have been better if he had planted corn⁹¹ there instead!). That forest separated us from the river. And on the left side of the railway tracks there were our houses and gardens, followed by a yard of a small local factory. It was there that Marusya's mum worked. Behind it there were other houses closer to the line; when they ended, the park started, overgrown with giant poplars and with a couple of benches in it, and from there we had to go over the railway bridge across a local stream, flowing into our river, which was popularly called *The Rotten Dnieper* - due to the fact that much of it stank of hydrogen sulphide. God knows what was poured into it by the local plant. Our river stoically endured that industrial waste, but in my lifetime people were already afraid of swimming in it.

On the other bank of the *Rotten Dnieper* we usually came down from the railway on its other side. There was my most favourite, most dangerous and mysterious place on our way, which I nicknamed *Open Wells*. The fact was that there on a small area on the hills in the grass there were a lot of sewer manholes, which, probably, because of their out-of-the-way location, had no lids. If you stumbled you could easily fall into one of them. That was what made this place so thrilling for me! I found more and more new "wells" there. Most of them were shallow in depth, but it still was possible to break your leg. And the most exciting for me was to yell echo into the drinking well, the top of which had been completely demolished, to hear my echo. There was only an undisguised ten meter deep pit with completely smooth walls. Later it was completely and tightly sealed - it was a dangerous place.

Behind the *Open Wells* there were the thickets of "wolf berries", which looked so appetizing, but in fact, as my grandfather explained, were poisonous. At the end of these, the *Stone Place* itself stretched in front of you.

It was a tall, steep riverbank, from which collective farm cabbage fields were clearly visible on the other bank, flat as a plate. The city on the left was still stretching on, and on the right side of the river it broke sharply off.

From the steep chalk and clay bank I wanted to fly like a bird. But since it was not possible, I ran down the narrow path. Ran, because it was so steep that I couldn't walk down it at a measured pace. I liked to throw a ball down the slope, though there was a great risk that it could forever disappear into the river. Under that slope there was another one, a little bit smaller, and springs were hiding under it,

⁹¹ Nikita Khrushchev actively advocated the cultivation of corn in the USSR, even in unsuitable climate, which was the subject of numerous jokes.

their water wallowing with noise from the clay insides of the earth. The water was pure and sweet and so cold that it made your teeth ache. My grandfather always took a little can and he let me fill it up to take it home. And afterwards we sat on the slope, basking in the sun, and ate tomatoes and boiled potatoes with bread, washing it down with spring water...

That was what I was thinking about as I was drinking this, so similar in taste, Korean spring water. And tears appeared in my eyes unexpectedly.

Comrade Song looked at me attentively with kind of a *rapier glance*. He gently touched my hand with the very tips of his fingers.

- I see that you have experienced much in your life, Comrade Kalashnikova. But you needn't be so sad, please don't be. *Happiness stands side by side with trouble, trouble hides itself in happiness.*⁹² If you happen to need a heart-to-heart talk - just call, I'll be there for you, ok. Call at any time, day or night. Please remember what I've said, yes?

- Thank you, Comrade Song. It's very considerate of you.

Why did my heart suddenly start pounding so fast?

During that day – endlessly long! – I learned from Song many interesting things, including that “*representatives of the fraternal parties charmingly expressed their satisfaction with the high level of organization in our country*”, that “*swinging on the swings has been held since ancient times across the country, though it was more popular in the north-western regions. When women swing in beautiful national costumes of chima and jeogori, flaring long ribbons, it strengthens the national emotions of the audience.*” He also said that “*a woman who won the contest at the folk festival was awarded a household basin to keep her household well.*” Well, lastly, that when his mother fell ill, Comrade Song, “*in a state of complex psychic emotions had not noticed it was time to leave work and did not remember how he got to his house .*”

It would be enthralling to have written down every word he said: he spoke Russian in such an interesting way.

After dinner we went to Mansu Hill, the well-known huge bronze monument of the President Kim Il Sung. Comrade Song and I were standing in front of the monument, viewing it, though it was hard to do it, because of the sun striking at my eyes.

Comrade Song became thoughtful; he put his hand to his chest and tried to explain to me how he felt in that place.

– It is very difficult to describe in words the feeling I have as I am standing here. Perhaps, perturbation of mind and heart, but it is not enough. It's so profound, *to the bottom of my soul*, you know? After all this is the Father of our nation; he gave us his whole life ... This place has been chosen for his monument very appropriately. He can see the whole city from here and he's never alone. I look at him and I feel that he's alive, that he's with us, you know.

I was looking at him and I saw that he was speaking neither once memorised phrases nor because of some fear, but from the bottom of his heart.

The giant bronze statue of the Leader looked from the hill at the widespread fruits of his work with sublime tranquillity. There was solemn, soft, slightly sad, but serene music playing. That music took away my equilibrium which I was trying to keep all that time in accord with the learnt European habit.

⁹² Korean proverb

I was watching the mix of profound sorrow and joy in Comrade Song's face, listening to the music, when I felt that, in spite of all my effort, two tears rolled out of my eyes treacherously. Then another one, again and again...

Comrade Song noticed that as well, took me aside and started to console me putting his hand with care on my shoulder.

- That's OK, that's OK, our comrade... Everything's going to be fine.

- You don't understand, Comrade Song... It's not about me... You're here, I'm here, but my country... You remember Comrade Ok showing us on the bus the video with a concert dedicated to the 65th anniversary of our Victory? That video plainly demonstrates everything that isn't right in Russia now. We've lost all our really important achievements. Just in order to let some crooks buy villas in Nice. The contemporary Russian culture is celluloid; it's a pathetic culture, disposable like toilet paper. A day-fly.

- I understand everything, dear. Everything's going to be OK with your country. It's certain because there're people like you there, those who aren't indifferent.

-We're so guilty, so guilty towards our country... and towards the whole world as well!

Two young Russian girls unintentionally interrupted our conversation. It seems they were brought there as members of some solidarity group with Korea. As the case often was, they probably they had influential fathers and had longed to see an exotic place. But in reality, they didn't give a damn. They were dressed up as if they came to apply for a job in Amsterdam's Red Light District: extremely short skirts and vulgar gilt shoes with spike heels. And they looked kind of seedy: it is instilled in girls' minds in Russia today, that a really cool girl has to look like that in order to attract men. They didn't look at the monument but snapped with their eyes looking for a foreign prince: not a Korean, of course, but perhaps some Western tourist...

- Sveta, I'm tired, I can't stand it any more...,- said one of the girls, - Are they going to carry us around all these statues and deceased forever? I'm so bored and exhausted.

-They'd have better taken us to a market! – echoed the second one. – You can't go here, you can't go there. They have nothing here apart from their "*accursed past*"⁹³... There are not even mobile phones here⁹⁴. This is like the Stone Age.

I exploded.

- Yes, real people have both the past and the future, but people like you have only the range of life *from Snickers to Tampax!* – I said, my blood boiling.

The girls got confused and disappeared in haste.

It often seems to me that I live in an upside-down world - a world where it's normal when a person sells himself or herself or where you can be offered a money compensation for the lives of your relatives. And they seriously think that by doing this they can atone for their guilt. It is the world, in

⁹³ Term of Russian so-called "democrats" for the Soviet part of our history

⁹⁴ Book's actions in the DPRK take place in spring and summer 2008. In December 2008, a new mobile phone service was launched in Pyongyang, operated by Egyptian company Orascom, with current plans to expand coverage to all parts of the country. As of May 2011, 60% of Pyongyang's citizens between the age of 20 and 50 have a cellphone. Foreigners are banned from bringing mobile phones to the country; they can leave them at the airport and collect them on the way back.

which professional babblers from PR-offices and marketing firms insolently teach people, who have lost their normal jobs. “If you work hard, you’ll get the bucks!”, saying this with such an air, as if there’s a slightest benefit to the society from their own “hard work.”

“*The rebels*” rule in this world. They stopped in their psychological and mental development at the stage of permanent adolescence. They don’t realize that it’s not 1989 any more and that we have long been fed up with their immature “rebellious” nonsense. They don’t realize that a normal person stops grinning, playing the fool and “*challenging society*” when he or she becomes adult. That’s why our information space is still being flooded with “*confessions of the rebel*”⁹⁵. They plague us with their complaints about ordinary human life and ordinary normal people who are preoccupied not with “haircuts in intimate places” or Oksana Robski⁹⁶’s latest opus, but with how to provide for their children and give them a proper education.

This immature perception of life is common for spoiled idlers who cringe squeamishly at the sight of “people with hoes in the fields”, because they are subconsciously sure that bread grows in trees: just lie under a tree, open your mouth and wait until bread falls into it... Besides, they’re sure that bread grows in trees exclusively for people like them, the one and onlys. They assert themselves and their ineradicable belief in their own uniqueness, as they desecrate the great Russian language by proudly saying: “*I don’t give a sh** about all these prohibitions.*”

Their desperate craving for the neglect of “prohibitions” tells much more about those wishing to neglect them, than about the prohibitions themselves or about their character. For example, it’s written on an electric transformer pillar “Danger! Keep out!” Isn’t it for our own safety? Or shall we jaywalk, not wear helmets on construction sites, not fasten seatbelts in cars, not wash our hands before a meal, just in order to prove the world that what fearless and free heroes we are?...

“*You shouldn’t enter an alien monastery with your own consuetudinary*” – says a Russian proverb (the English version of it is “when in Rome do as the Romans do”). So *when in Korea do as the Koreans do!* Guests must respect their hosts. If you can’t do that, don’t come as a visitor.

Our “free individuals” keep on “challenging special services.” A kind of mini “*dissenters' march*”⁹⁷ on the Korean territory. It’s not our world that is upside-down: it’s the people standing on their heads who try to implant into us the idea that their world vision is the only right one.

When you stand on your head (“to challenge special services”), you see the world upside-down. You can’t see it differently from such a position. So it is in this – upside-down – way the DPRK is described by these pathetic “acrobats” and grimacing “clowns”, of whom there are such plenty in our society at present.

Wake up, the circus has long gone away! With that President dancing twist⁹⁸. But they have somehow forgotten to take the “dissenters” along. Or nobody intended to take them anyway. So why on earth do we have to take these clowns seriously? Why do people still conjure their picture of the world according to these miserable clowns’ opinions? Just look at them - you don’t need any other characteristics.

Those two little *clowns* have gone away but I still couldn’t calm down.

⁹⁵ Name of Boris Nemtsov’s memoirs book. Boris Nemtsov (b. 1959) was one of the most extreme anticommunist politicians in Yeltsin’s Russia.

⁹⁶ Fashionable writer in post-Soviet Russia

⁹⁷ Opposition marches in Moscow had that name

⁹⁸ Boris Yeltsin did this during presidential elections campaign in 1996, “in order to become popular with young voters..” It became subject of numerous jokes.

- When guests come to you, you don't tell them, showing them about your house: "This is my basket with dirty socks." You show them what is dear for you, what you're proud of. For example, your father's portrait on the wall, some good books, your diplomas. You invite them to sit down to table but not in the pantry. It's like this with foreign guests, too. What is so hard to understand here? – I raged.

-Thank you, Comrade Kalashnikova! – said Comrade Song with a joyful astonishment in his voice. – But don't feel upset, please!.. What a sharp tongue you have! *They're nervously smoking in aside....*

“At Home Among Strangers, Stranger At Home⁹⁹!” – I joked not so merrily.

-We aren't strangers, – objected he. – We're brothers and sisters, if not by blood, then by our spirit. Ask any Korean what he or she think of *Soryon*¹⁰⁰ and you'll understand even those of us who don't know a single word in any foreign languages!

Is it true that I can become even just a little bit *one of their own*?

... Dónal and Holda joined us the next day, and we went to Sariwon¹⁰¹. Sariwon is the centre of a province with the population of about 250,000 people. It's not far from Pyongyang.

It had been raining since morning. You could smell the fresh scent of wet poplars even through the bus windows.

We were driving and driving, and on both sides of the road where flowers were planted on curbs, endless rice, cabbage and potato fields were spreading, receding up the terraced mountains. Many of those fields were adorned with little red flags. I decided to ask my guides later on what those flags meant. Calabashes were growing on the roofs of peasant houses, just like in Garin-Mikhailovsky's *Korean Tales*. Of course, you couldn't see the fruit yet because it was too early. But still, they reminded me of the Korean legends I had read in my childhood. People were riding bicycles, going in the back of trucks, just like we many years ago when we went to collective farms: fast, exhilarating, blown over by fresh air. And they all had those calm, happy, serene expressions. Maybe, because besides social security and the opportunities to develop intellectually, the Koreans possess one more human right: *the security from the dirt of immorality*. For a person who has never visited the People's Democratic Republic of Korea and hasn't immersed themselves into its culture, the Korean feature films, for example, may seem a bit wood-note, naïve. But it's not the films that are like that here, it is the people: and they aren't naïve, but pure of spirits and thoughts. For example, hemp grew everywhere along the road, but it didn't attract anybody. In the same way, in my mother's childhood our people fed birds with hemp seeds, and nobody even thought that it was a drug. Certainly, "every family has its black sheep", and some selfish types exist here as well, but generally, people I met were really very much like characters from those Korean films: open, modest, even shy, and sincere. And I began to envy, in a good way, the romanticism of the relations of the *An Urban Girl Gets Married*¹⁰² characters, as they furtively glanced at each other with love, while doing jobs on the farm together, such as cleaning duck dung! How much more pleasant it is to view them, rather than overly made-up Little Vera¹⁰³s whom somebody grabs under their skirts all the time!

⁹⁹ At Home Among Strangers, Stranger At Home (1974) - Soviet film about the Civil War in Russia

¹⁰⁰ Soviet Union (Korean)

¹⁰¹ Sariwon is the capital of North Hwanghae Province, DPRK. The city's population is estimated to be 310,100 people.

¹⁰² *An Urban Girl Comes to Get Married*- romantic DPRK film (1993)

¹⁰³ Little Vera (1988) - late Soviet film that has introduced sexual scenes into Soviet cinema. The title in Russian is ambiguous and can also mean "Little Faith," symbolizing the characters' lack of hope

Save in the USSR, I haven't seen countryside cinemas in any countries. But here I did. They were also decorated by hand painted posters the way we used to have it in the Soviet days (there was an artist especially for that purpose on the staff of each cinema).

Factory clubs, too, were wonderful. I recalled the condition they are in our country now (the English word "dilapidated" describes it well) and how their administrations try to survive: by renting out the club premises for shops and night clubs - and I felt very sad again.

It stopped raining, and at once people poured out into street in each small village: to clear it of the rain water and dirt. They did it in an organized way, and there were no obvious instruction providers. Everyone simply knew what he or she had to do and carried out his or her task. I thought socialism is really possible if people treat their duties like this.

It was just the country where people loved their land. That's why it was so beautiful. It was so well-groomed that you couldn't stop watching it with wonder. A feast for the eyes! And we – the Russians - have apparently forgotten how to love our country. Maybe because *it's not ours anymore?* Not the country of the whole nation...

*Korea is the Russia that we have lost*¹⁰⁴. And before laughing at this simile, go and visit that country yourself. As for me, I now do envy the Koreans!

We stayed in a hotel in Sariwon that had such a homey name: The 8th of March¹⁰⁵ Hotel. Hurray! Down with Hiltons or Radissons!

There were heavy pieces of furniture inside, with gilding, in the rococo style; huge floor lamps in the shape of African figures, the marble floor and a huge panel with the image of Comrade Kim Il Sung greeting the representatives of different nationalities. The marble staircase almost matching the one in the Hermitage ran upwards.

I had a balcony in my room. There was a tub filled with water in the bathroom, a TV set, a fridge and a huge bureau on which there were two thin candles – in case of power cuts.

In the afternoon I had no time to think about possible power cuts, because we had planned excursions to the local hospital and to the garment factory (well, in which of those so-called "free" countries will you be allowed to visit such places on an excursion?!). I was amazed, especially with the latter, because I had already forgotten when I had seen a woman-factory director for the last time (I hadn't seen any in the West for sure!), and because that woman rose to that position having passed all the way from a simple worker (back in the Soviet days none of us would have been surprised by such biographies, but now they seemed fairy-tales!). I was also amazed by the cheerful music playing in the shops, and by many other things.

When we returned to the hotel, it was already dark, and in the lobby a group of the newly arrived Chinese had gathered. Just as I got the duty key to my room, the lights went off! I was taken aback, because I had to go up to the second floor on the staircase which was the size of the Hermitage one, and in the dark one could easily break one's neck. But Comrade Song didn't lose his composure: he quickly seized my bag, then my hand and said:

- Follow me, Comrade Kalashnikova, and keep up with me, please!

¹⁰⁴ Refers to Stanislav Govorukhin's anti-Soviet documentary "Russia that we have lost" that praises the Tsarist Russia of the XIX century. By using this term, author of the book refers to the Soviet socialist life as opposed to reactionary views of Govorukhin.

¹⁰⁵ 8TH of March is International Women's Day

For some reason it was almost thrilling for me to follow him up the dark stairs by touch. And I was thrilled, it seems, not in the slightest because I was afraid to stumble...

We got up to the room without an incident. I never even stumbled. He brought me to the door, helped me to open it and disappeared into the darkness.

There was no point in trying to do anything in this darkness before bedtime. You could not even have a shower, although there was plenty of hot water. I sank down into bed and fell asleep...

I woke up at about 1 a.m., as if from a sharp jolt. I woke up and was surprised: I did not feel any sleep at all, I was *wide-awake!*

It was a sultry airless night. So sticky that even a fan was not much help. I opened the window and went out on the balcony, hoping that outside there would be at least some fresh night breeze.

But instead of breeze I felt the smell of cigarette smoke. There was a slight cough. I looked out. On the balcony next to mine, very close, Comrade Song was standing and looking at me. I could barely see his face in the dark. He had a cigarette in his hand.

- Oh, it's you... - I said shyly.

- Yes, it's me. You cannot sleep, Comrade Kalashnikova?

- I can't, Comrade Song... - I sighed.

- *Let's stay awake together* - he offered. - Come here.

- Really?

- Of course. Or no, it is easier for me to do it, - and easy and noiselessly, as a reindeer, he jumped in the dark over the railings onto my balcony. - Let's dream a little together about something good to come. About the future of humanity, for example.

Nothing like that had ever been proposed to me. I had even got used to the fact, that men would try to shut me up when I attempted to raise these issues. I fell into shy silence.

- Life is like a garden, - said Comrade Song. - If you do not look after it, it will become overgrown with weeds. You need to weed it, till and fertilize the plants, uproot the weeds and tie the weak plants, and loosen the soil for new seeds....

I listened to him with my breath held. Comrade Song hit the bull's eye: our life is like a garden, and the way it will be depends on what kind of seeds we have planted, and on how we will look after the seedlings...

But he, in turn, wanted to hear what I think.

- How did you like our excursions today? What do you think of my country?

And words just burst out of me: the ice was broken.

- I was amazed that everyone here knows *not his place*, as under capitalism, *but his role*. This is a huge difference, - I said heartily.

- Good point, - his voice sounded a bit surprised.

- Have you noticed, Comrade Song, that Westerners do not understand why a factory needs a conference room? And why workers would engage in arts and cultural activities after work, they don't

understand either, it seems. And they don't even understand at all *what kind of a beast* "factory amateur performances" is *and what they can be eaten with*¹⁰⁶! Poor, poor Westerners! - I exclaimed.

At this moment suddenly the lights came on, and Comrade Song, it seemed, for a brief moment pulled back from me a bit, although in my opinion, we were not that close to each other.

I continued:

- You know what I find better in Korea than the way we sometimes had it in the Soviet Union? The fact that both the factory club and the factory's nursery are located right in its territory. This is far more convenient for the workers than to have to trudge across the town, when they are picking up their children after work, and also participate in the amateur performances after work. And those fountains and rabbits within the factory site (and this is not in the capital, but somewhere in the province) - that's just fantastic!

The lights went off again. And for a moment I thought that Comrade Song slightly relaxed.

- You see, only here I understood it so clearly that it was not only our Politburo¹⁰⁷ who were to blame for what has happened to our country, but all of us. Our passivity, our indifference and even the desire of a few to break, pull apart and steal all that was not guarded.... Why can't some people behave normally without a so-called "dictatorship"? For example, I do not want to break or steal, and not for fear of someone, - I said.

- You have answered yourself your own question: people can behave themselves properly without any stick, - said Comrade Song, - if they are brought up in a proper way.

The lights turned on again.

- If we had a different attitude to what we've got... You're absolutely right - I had time to read here some Korean books on the subject - this one, look - and I opened a book purchased in Pyongyang.

- *"The ruling party did not pay adequate attention to the development of the citizens as subjects of social development and to the enhancement of their role in the governance, and ultimately they were unable to withstand the imperialist subversion"*¹⁰⁸ - I turned over a few pages, - *"In these countries due attention was not paid to the ideological work of educating the masses, their main efforts were directed towards the economic construction alone... The ruin of socialism in European countries has left a historic lesson, that when the decisive role of ideological consciousness in the social development is not understood and neglected, people, the party and the state get ideologically corrupted, everything socialistic degenerates and eventually the socialist system itself becomes doomed..."*¹⁰⁹

- Absolutely. Socialism has no ready recipes, - said Comrade Song. - But in order to build socialism, we must all do our best. Without this, there is no way.

In the meantime lights went on an off, on and off again, with unpredictable frequency. Think of such a situation in your country, while some *overseas meticulous ass* dictates to you whether to build a nuclear power plant or not!

¹⁰⁶ Joking Russian idioms, meaning "what is this affair..." and "what should be done about it."

¹⁰⁷ A politburo is the executive committee for a number of communist political parties, including the Soviet CPSU

¹⁰⁸ Jo Song Baek. The Leadership Philosophy of Kim Jong Il. Pyongyang, Juche 88 (1999), quoted here in the reversed translation from the Russian language edition, p.16

¹⁰⁹ Jo Song Baek. The Leadership Philosophy of Kim Jong Il. Pyongyang, Juche 88 (1999), English language editon, p.20

- *Let's turn off the lights completely and not suffer any longer*, - offered Comrade Song, - Of course, if you have completed the quotation from the book.

If he knew how ambiguous this sounded in Russian, he would be very unlikely to have said it.

We turned off the lights and went back to the balcony.

*Do you know a Korean night? No, you do not know a night in Korea*¹¹⁰...

Bright stars gleamed in the perfect darkness of the de-energized streets. Here and there among the trees there were occasional flickers of torches: some people were returning home.

- Tell me what else you are thinking about. It is so interesting for me to hear you, - said Comrade Song, lighting a cigarette.

- I think that here I've begun to understand much of your life that used to be difficult for me to understand before...

"If I had such a life now, after all my experiences abroad and at home," - I thought to myself, - "I would also be grateful to my Leader. Yes, it is the people who work, who produce all the material wealth, but without the right direction of the development, without a principled, honest leadership nobody would be able to go far..."

How to tell him this so that he could understand what I mean?

- I am talking about the role of the Leader. If I do not understand something, please correct me, OK? I think, Comrade Song, that people do need real heroes in the society! Heroes, not just "somebody engaged in his business", with the emphasis on the word "his." Say, under the roof of my house a spider sits in his web (he's even made it himself, created by his own honest hard work, rather than merely "privatized" it!). He is engaged in his business. Quite successfully. And he knows clearly what he is going to do. He has no problems with his moral orientations. So what? Do you think I'm interested in watching him all day long? Or would I take him as a role model for my own life? But we in Russia – and in other countries for a long time - have been offered as heroes exactly these types: all sorts of businessmen...

People want heroes, not spiders! People are not against the "cult", if there is a real, worthy personality! But there is currently a shortage of worthy personalities in the "civilized world". Only some *super DJ's* occur sometimes.¹¹¹ And people are already ready to settle for much less: for somebody who at least "*would not hurt*" and "*would not run away*".¹¹² But even in these words of despair there is a deeper meaning, if you think of it. The desire for those heroes to be near, those who are reliable and kind, the ones who won't betray you, when it's needed for their "own business." So, there you have it... And the Russian media have finally realized it, too: as one newspaper wrote, "for a young man who is just starting his life, who should serve as a role model? Verka Serduchka¹¹³, violently shaking her fake bust?"¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Reference to Nikolai Gogol's famous words from "May Night or the Drowned Maiden" story (1831) ("*Do you know a Ukraine night? No, you do not know a night in the Ukraine. Gaze your full on it. The moon shines in the midst of the sky; the immeasurable vault of heaven seems to have expanded to infinity; the earth is bathed in silver light; the air is warm, voluptuous, and redolent of innumerable sweet scents. Divine night! Magical night!*")

¹¹¹ Reference to Putin Super DJ – a Russian pop-song of Andrei Gubin

¹¹² Lines from *I want a man like Putin* (2002) :

¹¹³ Andriy Danylko (better known as his drag character Verka Serduchka, is a Ukrainian comedian and pop and dance singer. In the role of Serduchka, he represented Ukraine in the Eurovision Song Contest 2007 and finished in second place.

¹¹⁴ This quote was taken from Russian newspaper Trud

Comrade Song softly snorted into his fist.

- I've read that article in your newspaper Trud. Let me remember... - He thought for a second. - "A cry of despair from our Russian contemporary man: "After whom to make life?"¹¹⁵ After a pop star?" ... Starting with the liberalization reforms, we have turned our life to another extreme. Today, nobody is waiting for a young man with a degree, and to his question where to go television suggests the answer: become an oligarch or a star of the show business. And if you can't, rejoice on beer or vodka, like modern screen heroes. Very few films today manage to avoid the clinking of glasses. The obsessive, aggressive advertising of money and carefree life is degrading to a human being..." "I would like to hear from television, how our ordinary fellow citizens live today... To hear advice on how to find the strength to endure the trials of life." Yes, but what kind of heroes does this "free society" offer modern young people? Here you are."The bright historical example of a gamble on shares going down, which has allowed to amass a fortune of 50-60 million pounds, is associated with the name of Nathan Rothschild. During the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, he spread a false rumour on the London Stock Exchange about the defeat of England, and the shares of the government fell sharply. Rothschild himself hurriedly bought up the discounted worthless "scraps of paper" for a nominal price. But the official announcement of the victory was not long to come. Shares rate rose sharply, and... his artful plan was executed brilliantly!" So, such are the heroes they suggest making one's life after, those who've become millionaires at the expense of others, with their so-called "intelligence..." No, the question that was posed by your poet - "After whom to make life?", is not idle. It is very important. Even fundamental, whether we like it or not. A real hero does not need "mountains of muscles", a "cool" gun or even a sharp sword...

- The point is that we are not spiders, but humans. For the majority of us it goes against our conscience to weave a web and sit in it, sucking somebody's blood, no matter how they have tried to hammer the cult of Bill Gates into our heads. Hence we are longing for a Hero, and sometimes, unfortunately, are even jealous of those who do have such heroes. How can this be? We've got all our "great educations" and with our moral values, again, everything is all right: just look, what a big cross hangs around our neck, and how expensive it is! But still, there is something lacking in our lives, our hearts are still longing for something. Today we live in a society without moral authority, we can rest on nobody as an example to emulate. And there is no one to advise us on how to "just find the strength to endure the trials of life." That's why we need heroes! We want to have them, oh how much we do!... Not just me, but most of us. We grieve for them, but they still don't appear. All of them have remained in the "damned totalitarian past." Even our president, no offence to him, no matter how many times you embroider his image in cross-stitch, or how many times you brand after his name some canned eggplant mash, he only succeeds in getting to the status of a super-star, but still doesn't make it to being a hero... Upsetting for us! And people who aren't frustrated, nostalgically review old Soviet films recently released on DVDs, and the rest, instead of looking at themselves, get exacerbated with Pavlik Morozov, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya and - North Korea. And in despair they begin to cling meticulously to every word in the stories about the Korean leaders: this simply could not have been, ah we know a thing or two about these people... You know what I understood in Korea, Comrade Song? That a real Leader is not only a man, but also a symbol. The symbol of hopes of the people, of their aspirations. The point is not whether or not the Leader wore exactly that particular pair of old shoes. Those who are fixated on such things refuse to see the woods for the trees. The thing is, what kind of life, thanks to his work and his leadership, among other things, have the people in the country. And again, when comparing people's lives, compare them not with those of Abramovich, Gates or Sonka

¹¹⁵ "After whom to make life?" - Vladimir Mayakovsky

the Golden Hand¹¹⁶, compare them with the lives of ordinary working people in other countries, with those people that are similar to you!

- Fair play to you, Comrade Kalashnikova, that you have come to these conclusions. In 1998, when the Russian people were trying to survive the 84% inflation, for the truly "good cause": building a "pluralist market economy", which would, in the long term, create a 22 (!) times gap between the richest 10% and the lowest paid workers, here in Korea 17 young soldiers, including several girls, died heroically rescuing from fire one of the most important revolutionary relics: the trees, on which anti-Japanese guerrillas had written patriotic appeals during the struggle for independence. Nobody gave these soldiers the order to sacrifice their lives, just as no one had given orders to your Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya to make her fiery speech before her execution by the Nazis...

- Yes, I've heard about this in the museum! I admit, when I first heard this story, I shivered. Because only at that moment I realized how far we have moved away from genuine, selfless heroism: to the point that for many of our people this would be just too hard to understand!

- It's not that we should necessarily all die to become heroes. It's not even so much the question, which army soldiers are more likely to defeat the enemy in a battle: the ones who can sacrifice their lives for the symbol of the Revolution, or the ones who only join the army when they are promised for this a bonus of \$ 20,000, like in the US. It is also about respect for your own people and its history. In which country would you prefer to live: where soldiers hero receive deserved honour, or where defenders of their Motherland from enemy invaders are publicly called "bastards¹¹⁷" on TV and movie screens?...

-That is, it is not only about saving trees, it is about the very fact that life is especially good in a place where people are capable of such acts, where they are able to sacrifice themselves! It is not scary to live in such a place, - I continued. - In such a place you know that there is always somebody's reliable shoulder next to yours, that people will not pass by, if they hear a desperate cry for help, that they will not be afraid to stop a bandit or a thief, if one appears. That you are not alone here. That people here do care, because they don't think only about themselves. It's amazingly sad how quickly we have forgotten such things - that until recently have been viewed as the most elementary, essential things. And you know what is shocking? That while there is such mass suffering, as we have now, while people are dying not from saving revolutionary relics, but at the hands of thugs, killers, rapists, speeding drunk drivers on the roads, of perfectly curable diseases - just because they now can't afford the treatment, not a single "civilized" "human rights activist" is interested in this. Probably we are not humans to them? Perhaps only noise-makers like Politkovskaya, or Kasparov¹¹⁸ are entitled to human

¹¹⁶ Sofia Blyuvshtein better known as Sonka the Golden Hand, was a legendary Russian Jewish thief who lived in Russia during the second half of the 19th century. Roman Abramovich (b.1966) is a Russian-Jewish business tycoon and the main owner of the private investment company Millhouse LLC who is largely considered as a crook by the majority of the Russian population, just like other so-called "oligarchs." He is known outside Russia as the owner of Chelsea Football Club.

¹¹⁷ Refers to "Bastards" - a grossly anti-Soviet and anti-Russian film about WWII (2006), based on a fictional story. Many people see it as the "state-supported anti-Soviet propaganda." While the movie won the MTV award for 2007, the famous director Vladimir Menshov refused to hand over the award: "Mr. Menshov gasped as he read the contents of the envelope, looked up and said: "I'm not going to hand over an award to a film that discredits my country, let Pamela Anderson (another of the evening's presenters) do it instead." After the movie was shown in Russia, the Federal Security Service responded with a press-release, stating that archives of security services of Russia and Kazakhstan do not have any documents confirming the existence of "kid saboteur schools", and that there are no archive documents about missions to send saboteur groups consisting of teenagers into the adversary's rear. Although they did state that there are archive documents evidencing the use of kids in saboteur purposes by special services of Nazi Germany.

¹¹⁸ Anna Politkovskaya (1958 – 2006) was an American journalist, known for her opposition to the Chechen conflict and President of Russia Vladimir Putin. Garry Kasparov (born Garik Kimovich Weinstein, b 1963) is Russian (formerly Soviet) [chess](#)grandmaster,

rights? But oh, how concerned the same “human rights activists” are with the Korean “personality cult”! Just up to convulsions in the limbs and foaming at the mouth.

Comrade Song smiled with his lips.

- You just look at the Korean people: healthy, happy, hard-working, proud and brave, loving their country and respecting their Leaders, - I continued. - And then listen to those spiteful critics of them from the ranks of “human rights defenders” ... You know what I want to say to them? I want to address them with the words from Gaidar’s *Timur and his Squad*¹¹⁹ which were said by one of the characters, Kvakin: “*He’s... proud, - Kvakin repeated hoarsely, - and you... you are just a bastard!*” Can’t be said better about those “activists”!

- You know, - said Comrade Song after a pause - You are an extraordinary person...

- I think it’s just that people who come here to you, have gained their understanding of socialism through suffering. Oh, why we don’t have such people as you? - I sighed.

- Who told you that you don’t? Surely you do! You just haven’t looked in the right place.

- To be honest, I wasn’t looking at all.

- You see, that was probably a cardinal error on your part. But that does not matter now. We learn from our mistakes.

It began to dawn slowly outside. Somewhere a pig squealed, and then we heard a distant factory whistle.

- Oh, you and I have sat up through the small hours! Go to sleep, it is already almost time to get up,- said Comrade Song who clutched at the railing, intending to climb back to his balcony. - Oh, by the way, are you from Vladivostok, by any chance?

- No, why do you ask? Actually, my father was born in Primorye¹²⁰...

- That explains a lot.

- What?

- I do not know whether it’s true or not, but a friend has told me: when the Russians explored the Russian Far East, at first there was a strong predominance of men, and then your authorities decided to make people stay in the new place and sent a lot of serfs girls out there. They selected the most beautiful ones.

- Is this a compliment?

- What compliment? *Did you see yourself in the mirror?*

- Well, what a tongue you have, Comrade Song! *I will be the one who will be nervously smoking in aside*, though I have never smoked in my life!

- What did I say? Well, good night! *Morning is wiser than evening*¹²¹....

a former World Chess Champion, writer and political activist. Both shared liberal. Pro-Western and anti-Soviet views and were actively supported by the West.

¹¹⁹ *Timur and his squad* (1940) - a popular in the USSR children’s book by Arkady Gaidar (1904-1941) is a captivating account of an altruistic pioneer youth gave birth to the mass Timur movement among Young Pioneers and other children’s organizations all over the Soviet Union.

¹²⁰ Primorsky Krai , informally known as Primorye , is a federal subject of Russia (a krai) near Chinese and Korean border. *Primorsky* means “maritime” in Russian. Its administrative center is in the city of Vladivostok. Primorsky Krai has the largest economy in the Russian Far East.

And he disappeared into his room. The “wiser” morning - it was already outside.....

But I was not able to sleep. Korea seemed to have lifted up all the best in my soul, like a magnet, and swept away all the superficial as through a sieve. I did not recognize myself...

... On Monday, I had a medical check-up for the admission to the sanitarium. Since I had left the USSR, I had never passed a proper medical examination: usually they don't give a damn about people's health in the West, unless they can make big money out of it. I was wondering if there was any difference between Korean and our Soviet medical check-up. I found out that in Korea, it is done more frequently than it was in the Soviet Union: once every quarter, rather than once a year.

During the check-up the doctor said that I had many very tense muscles, apparently, due to stress, and suggested that I should have a good traditional massage. Korea is famous for it, as well as for its own traditional medicine and acupuncture.

No sooner said than done. They dressed me up in hospital pajamas (probably the largest that they could find), placed me on the couch with a pillow roll¹²² and called a masseur. It was a sturdy chap of about 60.

The masseur grunted and began to flex my spine with his bent at the elbow arm. Five minutes later it felt like I had not a single unbroken bone in my whole body. I had no even strength to cry out: it was so painful. And he wasn't stopping, turning me this or that way and grabbing my muscles into his stranglehold: legs, stomach, even that place which the Dutch call *achterwerk*¹²³. He seemed to have especially liked to flex it there with his elbow.

I lay on this couch, he massaged me, and I was thinking about Saskia Duplessis. What was she like, what did she love, what did she hate, what did she expect from life?... No one would ever find out now. And I thought to myself: I would like to live my life not in vain, to leave a good, proper trace after I'm gone!

It was still painful. I bit my lip and decided to endure.

And, as it turned out, it wasn't in vain! The pain gradually went off, and I felt relaxed, like after a sauna - a weak comparison to describe, in fact, something much better!

Outside Comrade Song was waiting for me, smiling, it appeared, mischievously...

- Well, how did you like our Korean massage?

- Very stimulating. It's a pity it wasn't you who did it to me. That would have rejuvenated me for at least twenty years, - I countered.

But Comrade Song was a real master of sports¹²⁴ in *slagging*¹²⁵. He would outdo any Irishman in this.

¹²¹ Russian expression, meaning it is best to decide or do something in the morning with fresh energy rather than in the evening, while being tired and unable to think clearly. The closest English equivalent seems to be “take counsel of your pillow.”

¹²² In Korea traditional Korean style pillows are made in the form of hard rolls

¹²³ Buttocks (Dutch)

¹²⁴ *Master of Sport of the USSR* equates to national champion, in accordance with the Unified Sports Classification System of the USSR, a document which provided general [Soviet](#) physical education system requirements for athletes. The classification was established in 1935.

¹²⁵ Slagging - in Irish slang means “Making fun of someone, generally good-naturedly - e.g. "I'm only slagging you”

- I can treat you with suction cups, - he suggested generously, from the heart, - or prick you with needles. Which would you prefer?

- Comrade Song, I am myself a civil defence nurse. For example, I can fix a dislocation. But first *we'd have to dislocate something to someone*. And I am also good at clysterising...

Comrade Song blushed.

- I've told you already, a sharp tongue you have, Comrade Kalashnikova! *A thoroughbred rattlesnake!*

- Then perhaps you preserve me in alcohol, in a bottle of your Adder Liquor¹²⁶? That would protect you from me...

- Yes, it's a good idea. So that I can put the bottle on my window and admire you in the mornings. This would improve my appetite.

I have no idea how this verbal altercation would have ended, had Jong Ok not appeared in the door at that moment.

- The documents for the sanitarium are ready, - she told me. - But first, you still have a trip to Kaesong. There we have a hotel where you can stay overnight in a traditional Korean house. We sleep on the floor, traditionally, right? The traditional floor is called ondol and is heated from below.

As soon as she left, the second half of our verbal match began.

- Tomorrow I won't be here, - said Comrade Song. - Tomorrow I have a *subbotnik*¹²⁷.

- If you could you take me with you... But please, promise not to laugh at me if I do something wrong. You're such a tease.

- Who, me? Nothing of the kind! Can anybody dare to tease such a woman? It's dangerous. *She will grind you to tooth powder, make no mistake.*¹²⁸.

- Here, you are at it again..

- But I'm not laughing, - he took me by the hand. - *By the sign of the cross*, as your people say! Or would it be more correct to say "*I bet my tooth*"? ¹²⁹? Such a woman isn't cut out to be laughed at - she is cut out to be *wrapped in cannon-wool*¹³⁰!

I wanted to hide somewhere when he said it. And he stood by and watched my embarrassment with curiosity.

- You are a cruel man, - it escaped me. - You enjoy watching me being embarrassed by yourself.

- I do enjoy it, I must admit, - said Comrade Song. - But not because I'm cruel -

He did not finish saying why. He was called to the telephone.

¹²⁶ A DPRK alcohol-based drink (60% pure alcohol). Snake liquors are considered powerful cures for a wide array of illnesses, ranging from impotence to hair loss. These drinks are found in the markets of various countries in East Asia.

¹²⁷ Subbotnik (from the Russian word "subbota" - Saturday) -days of [volunteer](#) work in the USSR. Subbotniks are mostly organized for cleaning the streets of garbage, fixing public amenities, collecting recyclable material, and other [community services](#).

¹²⁸ Expression "grind to powder" in Russian means "to pulverize." Tooth powder was widely used in the USSR until 1970s for brushing teeth, but has nothing to do with this expression

¹²⁹ Betting your tooth on something (Russian slang expression) -is used to reinforced the promise like 'I swear' but without a religious context.

¹³⁰ Malapropism

To my great surprise, he did take me to that *subbotnik* with him! It was on the construction site of a new residential building.

When Comrade Song and I came there, for a second I was even scared: so many eyes were staring at me. People here were not used to foreigners. Well, maybe just to those flashing behind the windows of tour buses, but not on a construction site in working clothes.

And I was also scared when I saw how hard and fast the Koreans work. Would I be able to keep up with them?

But I remembered my grandmother's favourite saying "*your eyes fear, but your hands just do it*"¹³¹. And that Comrade Song had pledged that no one would laugh at me.. There were two or three laughs from the crowd, but Comrade Song said something in Korean, and they stopped.

- *Soryon! Soryon!*¹³²- rustled through the construction site.

- *Nanun soryonsaramimnida*¹³³, - I confirmed with a phrase learned from Comrade Song's conversation book. It was a Korean synonym of the Cuban "*Soy Soviética*"...

I looked around. Throughout the whole construction site vivacious music flowed, but it did not come from the radio. Right there, on the site, the sound system with huge speakers was installed, and several guys and girls, dressed in khaki uniforms, were playing the accordion and singing some upbeat songs with fervour. Such songs brought you in the mood for enthusiastic working, even though I did not understand the words. And this took place on every building site, each working day. I think there was nothing like that in the USSR. At least, not within my memory. True, there was music at holiday manifestations: there were orchestras on the streets, we also used to sing to music on the radio, players and tape-recorders. Sometimes someone took with him an accordion, and his colleagues danced and sang on the move, marching in columns. But that used to be on holidays, and here it is every day, at work... It was so great!

- What shall I do? - I said to Comrade Song in Russian, waving to my new colleagues.

- For now, we will put you in the chain to pass on the bricks, - said Comrade Song. His head was wrapped in a Korean towel, which made his face even more attractive.

I was placed in the human chain between a pretty girl and a short young man in a uniform. We looked at each other and smiled.

An hour later, sweat was rolling off me like hail. But looking at the Koreans - seemingly so fragile, small, but so strong - I wasn't going to give up. And in the end I got what is called "a second wind."

Some of the Koreans understood a bit in Russian, and one even said at parting:

- *Molodets, tovarishch!*¹³⁴

I felt that Comrade Song too, was pleasantly surprised.

The further it went on, the more I began to feel a kind of pleasant confusion in the presence of Comrade Song. It was a long-forgotten feeling: so long that it took me a lot of effort to remember from

¹³¹ Russian expression meaning "no task is too big if you are not afraid of it"

¹³² Soviet, Soviet Union (Korean)

¹³³ I am a Soviet person (Korean)

¹³⁴ Well done, comrade! (Russian)

where it was so familiar to me. And when I did remember, I got genuinely scared. It was the same feeling that struck me when I was 20, and in Krylatskoye velodrome someone's distant voice called out a guy who was sitting in front of me, making him turn around:

- Volodya Zelinsky! - and the voice added teasingly. - You're *up for a doping control!*

... I tried not to show much interest in him. But Comrade Song seemed to feel that this interest was there. He always waved his hand at me from a distance when he saw me, and smiled so wide, so warmly, as if his whole life he had been waiting for my appearance in it. At any event he always sat next to me. I told myself that it was simply because he was fulfilling his duties, but some sixth sense told me that this was true only in part.

Finally, when we were examining the ostrich farm together and stood. with a dozen of ostriches around us, in the paddock, pending the appearance of the state farm director, Comrade Song decided that it was time to *declare his feelings*.

- Koreans are such a people who *overflow with emotion from within*. I feel a *special familiarity towards you*, - said Comrade Song. - With you, I don't need special ceremonies¹³⁵.

An ostrich nearly pecked him on the head when it heard this: Comrade Song barely dodged away.

Frankly, I was about to do the same as that ostrich! Who does he think he is, eh?

- In what way? - in disbelief, I asked cautiously.

- You are like a chrisanthemum, which will not break even if caught with frost... *So very resistant one*.

I felt my cheeks burning, not so much from how I had at first misconstrued his words about "needing no special ceremonies with me", as from what he actually meant.

- But you do not know me at all...

- I just feel it, right?

There was a silence, but it didn't last long.

- What are you thinking about? - asked Comrade Song. I wanted to tell him frankly: "About you," but did not.

- About ostriches, - I said the first thing that popped into my head.

- And where does your husband work? - asked Comrade Song suddenly.

- I do not have a husband, - I got almost angry again. What business was it of his?

- Or your loved one?

- Comrade Song!...

- Sorry, I did not want *to gut your soul*. I just do not know *how else to ask, if you are attainable*.

If he was not so much to my liking, I would say back something rude to him. But I realized what he was trying to say, and his attention touched me.

-Oh, Comrade Song... I'm too old to be asked such questions, - I tried to laugh it off. But no such luck.

- So then, you have already got your *intended one*?

¹³⁵ Implies in Russian "unceremonious", which has the same meaning as "brusque."

So persistent, that lad!

- No, I have *neither intended, nor a groom..* I am a mature woman, with children, I honestly have more important things to think about. My main task is to bring up my children. Are you happy now?

- Thank you. I most certainly am! - He said seriously. - Ah, there comes the director of the farm...

He finally looked embarrassed and ran to meet the director.

I followed him with my eyes and suddenly laughed, joyously, like a child. In my head it was playing:

How I wish you would suffer no more,

Oh, Georgiy, my own crown of thorn!

And my love to your heart's full content

Freely drink from Amalthea's horn!

This comic poem I once read in a humorous section of our newspaper "*Nedelya*¹³⁶" - it was a weekly newspaper which was so popular that it was often difficult to buy! And though this verse was from a humorous column, when I was 15, I perceived it quite seriously.

Georgiy was a friend of my second cousin Grisha, that very one of whom I have already told you. Together they coached a group in karate, which was then still only coming into fashion, and few people knew of it.

Georgiy was a Soviet Korean from Uzbekistan. 17 years older than me, short (I was probably half a head above him), which no one even noticed. To us at that time he seemed almost an epic hero! He had the same cheerful eyes as Comrade Song, and the same slightly protruding jaw. And also huge muscles on his arms, rolling under his bronzed skin. Together with Olesya, another cousin of Grisha (I was from his mother's side, and she was from the side of his father), we admired him greatly. He was our idol, we looked up to him. And not just us: our entire city almost carried him in their arms! It was enough to mention his name, and people cleared the road for you with respect. His sports glory *thundered* through the whole district. One night, vandals tried to remove the wheels of his car. Theirs was a very lamentable end.

Georgiy graduated as a mining engineer. But he decided to engage himself with what he liked most in life - martial arts. He settled in our city, married a Russian girl (we desperately envied her, though neither of us would confess this even under torture!). It was rumoured that her father had a heart attack when she told him that she was going to marry Georgiy. "What an idiot!" - Olesya and I whispered to each other indignantly. Then he brought into our city some of his relatives, and some of their acquaintances also followed - so quite a few Korean families settled among us. Thus into our life came Sasha, Rudolph and Rosa Benseevna. It was a very close-knit community: they were always and everywhere together and they all helped each other.

But Georgiy overshadowed them all. About me, he first learned from Tamarochka, who, as you may remember, worked at the local Sports Committee.

- Zhora¹³⁷, my granddaughter has requested your autograph! - She said to him once when he came to the Committee for business matters.

¹³⁶ Week - a weekly newspaper that was very popular in the USSR and could only be purchased in kiosks, there was no subscription for it.

¹³⁷ Zhora - Russian short version of Georgiy (George)

Georgiy was surprised: he did not consider himself a celebrity at all. But he still signed the photo, and not just with a simple signature, but with "to Yevgenia from Georgiy," as for an adult.

Later he learned that we were his best friend's relatives. By the way, Grisha was then a completely different person – such one, that it is pleasant to recall. His name was also well known in our area, and all the boys in my class, having found out that he was my relative, begged me to introduce them to him.

One day my mother and I walked down the street, when suddenly in front of us a car stopped sharply. The driver didn't just simply stop: he reversed all the way to us, for the whole block of houses! Just as we started to wonder what was going on, Georgiy came out of the car and said, with a smile broad as the sun:

- You are the Ilyichevs, right? Let me you drive you home!

He called us by my mother's maiden name, because that's how Grisha was calling our family. We only realized it afterwards. When I heard his offer, it just took my breath away. I looked at my mother imploringly, and she agreed:

- Well, OK then...

All the way I was shyly and furtively looking at him. And he talked to my mother. I think, he probably fancied her (I do not know any man who didn't, but I never had any sort of rivalry with her in this respect: I gladly yielded to her the garland of victory, as I truly hated any attention of the opposite sex. It seemed to me something obscene and embarrassing.) At parting, he gave us both a hand and after that I did not wash my palm for probably a whole week...

That's how my interest in our Koreans started. Even before I got to know my penpals Sashka Kim and Eliza Chen. Actually, I was looking for Korean pen pals, because I wanted to learn about them as much as possible. They seemed to be the most mysterious of all the peoples of our Soviet land. It was not often that I could find anything to read about them. It was as if they existed and did not exist at the same time. Another, unknown, mysterious world emanated from them. When the season of watermelons began in August, I was looking for them among the vendors at our market. And I refused to buy watermelons from anybody else.

- Mum, let's buy it from Koreans!

It offered a small opportunity to talk to them. They spoke Russian in such an interesting way - almost like Comrade Song, although they did not know the Korean language. Once a Korean man who sold watermelons, saw my mother tapping them out, smiled shyly and said:

- *And they're all the same, by the way!*

When I finished my seventh grade, we went to see the first summer championship in karate in our region, where both Grisha and Georgiy were referees. Grisha took me and Olesya right to the arena, where the athletes were, and we watched the competitions at close range. The Koreans, of course, won every possible prize at those competitions. Their skills surpassed all the other participants. Those were two great days! We walked on air with joy.

Most vividly I remember the *guttural* cries of our Koreans during the bouts: from a low "ho" to a thin wail coming, it seemed, somewhere from almost the bottom of their stomach. And they also issued soft, but scary snake hisses. When they landed on the floor after a jump, the floor beneath us in the arena shook like during an earthquake. They were just great. None of our Russian guys could have achieved such a level in karate fighting, no matter how much they exercised. They just did not have

the same natural grace. (Grisha does not count, he had some Asian blood in him.) Actually, looking at Georgiy and then at them, I just could not take them seriously. "Amateurs!" - I thought - "*Those born to crawl will never fly*"¹³⁸."

And then something terrible happened. Well, actually, it was nothing really terrible, but back then for Olesya and me it seemed to be the end of the world: Grisha did not pass the state exam in English at his Institute, he was expelled for academic failure and then, of course, he was drafted into the army for two years. Most of all aunty Zhenya was afraid that he would be sent to Afghanistan, but this *thunderstorm passed him by*. One could say he was even lucky as he ended up in a construction battalion in the Moscow Region, not very far from home. And for the first time in my life he was gladly writing letters. To me! (Admittedly, I myself wrote to him more often: almost every day! But for a soldier in the army letters are very important, aren't they!)

Still, for both myself and for Olesya it was almost a tragedy *of universal scale*: because now we were for the whole two years cut off from the world where Georgiy and his friends existed!..

Even worse, just at the time martial arts were announced forbidden - allowed only for police officers and paratroopers - and clubs closed. And the coach's vacancy was taken by another coach, a Russian, of whom Grisha said: "*He's such a blunt iron...*" We almost hated that new coach and thought that everything that had happened was the result of his evil machinations. After all, the disciples of Georgiy had always beaten with a bang - ugh, I've already started expressing myself like Comrade Song, in my own language! - I mean, by a wide margin, the pupils of that Blunt Iron...

Georgiy tried to teach his disciples privately (thus illegally) and nearly got himself imprisoned. But all ended well. The club was opened again, and when I was still at school, preparing for the upcoming exams, the first in my life (and was terribly scared of them), Mum took me for inspiration to Georgiy's evening class: to watch them practising in Mum's factory club.

It was the end of May. I remember even now, it was the birthday of *Joao Carlos de Oliveira*¹³⁹ (back then I knew such things by heart and even celebrated them!). In the hall, which was situated on the same level with the pavement, all the windows were open, and curious boys were hanging from them. Georgiy was pleased with our (most likely, my mother's!) attention. For two hours we sat there with him, in one breath, and then he also posed for our camera... At home, I hung his photo on the wall. And after that I passed my exams brilliantly! Thanks to Georgiy!

We had all sorts of little nicknames for him. For example, we called him Georgiy the Victorious¹⁴⁰. Or with the words of a silly old song: "*Come on, Zhora, hold my mac!*"¹⁴¹ In his honor, *Ica Veron* shot an adventure feature film *The Mysterious Korean*, in which a police inspector Dertie Mirano was investigating the disappearance of her colleague Balthazar Emilio (this implies the mobilization of Grisha!), of which *Blunt Iron* falsely accuses his rival, the mysterious Korean. At the end the villain Iron is punished, Balthazar is alive and well, and the truth prevails... Funny now to recall it all, but it was a good laugh.

¹³⁸ Maxim Gorky (1868-1936)'s "Song of the Falcon" (1894)

¹³⁹ João Carlos de Oliveira, also known as "João do Pulo" (born May 28, 1954 –1999) was a Brazilian athlete who competed in the triple jump and the long jump. De Oliveira won two Olympic bronze medals. His personal best of 17.89 metres, set in 1975, stood as the world record until 1985. In 1981, he was in a car accident near São Paulo in which he lost one leg. Afterwards, he became a vocal advocate for the rights of the disabled. He died in 1999 from complications of alcoholism.

¹⁴⁰ Saint George the Victorious is one of the most famous saints in Russia, the patron saint of Moscow city

¹⁴¹ Odessa-originated song (in slang), best-known in the variation of Arkady Severny

Georgiy, of course, had no idea about any of this. The next time I saw him was when Grisha returned from the army, and we were celebrating his demobilisation. We sat at the table at Aunt Zhenya's. (There were such wonderful parties at their house, cordial and home-felt, and with delicious meals!) And when Georgiy came in, Olesya and I almost had a secret fight as to who would sit down next to him. It ended, however, in peace: we just surrounded him from both sides!

Georgiy had already taken a sip from his glass, when Aunt Zhenya noticed that we were short of one glass on the table, and fetched one from the kitchen. It so happened that while the setting of the glasses was going on, Georgiy's glass was moved over to me and I grabbed it quickly, before anybody saw it, and began to drink from it.

- Oh, Zhenya, it's so embarrassing, - Georgiy said to me with his unique charming accent in Russian. - Awkward it turns out, because I've already taken a sip...

I assured him that I did not mind. And myself, I secretly turned that glass of his in my mouth slowly, so that my lips would for sure touch the same place, which his lips had touched... I really hope (even now!) that he did not notice it. But Olesya looked black as a thundercloud.

She calmed down later on, when Aunt Zhenya said that we, the girls, had already got so grown up, and Georgiy, with a wink, said to both of us:

- Yes, you young ladies are very beautiful! Especially in spring.

Nobody had ever called us *young ladies* before, and we both blushed horrendously...

It's probably true that all that we love originates from our childhood. That's what I thought when Comrade Song came up to me with the director of the farm...

As we arrived in Kaesong¹⁴², the dusk was already gathering over the city. Behind the traditional high gate a row of traditional houses built especially for tourists stretched along the creek. Each of them had a heavy door with a high threshold on which you could easily stumble in the dark, which led to a courtyard, surrounded from four sides by hotel rooms in Korean style, on high wooden decks, where you are supposed to take off your shoes and leave them outside. Inside the room, whose windows were made of traditional strong paper, there was a mat on the floor, a wooden chest to store blankets, a Korean cushion – a hard roll under the head and a Korean blanket, soft and fluffy. There was also a TV, but there were the same problems with electricity here as in Sariwon, and I decided not to turn it on at all.

I was to leave for the training at the lake in the morning, but the anxiety for my kids, whose arrival in Korea I had been waiting for, and still did not know when it would come, pestered me. Dónal had told me that I shouldn't bother the Koreans about it, and I hadn't.

But now I could not sleep for worry, and my heart was dreary. All my fears that I had managed to drive deep into the subconscious, began to rise to the surface again. I felt that I was starting to choke on them. Possibly Comrade Song would really listen to me, as he had suggested?

¹⁴² Kaesŏng is a city in North Hwanghae Province, southern DPRK and the capital of Korea during the Koryo Dynasty. It prospered as a trade center that produced Korean [ginseng](#), which is famous internationally. It is now the DPRK's light industry centre. It has a population of 308,440 as of 2008

I hesitated for a long time and walked outside a couple of times into the courtyard. It was quiet there, the moon shone brightly, and crickets were chatting loudly. From the room of our driver Gil B I could hear his powerful snoring through the paper window.

Finally I couldn't stand it anymore. When the moon hid behind a cloud, I got out the door barefoot, throwing a shawl over my shoulders, and slipped into to the door of Comrade Song. There are no locks on doors here, which nobody wonders, by the way.

I did not know exactly what I was going to tell him when I saw him. I only knew that it was very hard on me, and I really needed to see him. For some reason I was sure that he wouldn't be sleeping.

He did not hear me enter: the bamboo door was slightly open. Through the dungeon-like darkness, I was able to make out Comrade Song sleeping, as he was supposed to, on the floor, having tucked in the corners of his blanket like an envelope, tidily, in a soldier's way. I suddenly felt terribly ashamed and even scared that I had got such a wild idea, to disturb him with my nonsense. He might have just said that out of politeness. I remembered my favourite Lisa Brichkina¹⁴³ and, to avoid such a situation and not to burn with shame, I turned back to the door. But I did not calculate it properly in the darkness and pushed the table from which a book fell on the floor with a mighty thud.

The same second Song was right on his feet, just a few inches away from me. He had a white vest on, similar to what my grandfather used to wear, and long white underpants, which I had only seen in the movies. Apparently, he was accustomed to the dark, because, to my horror, he immediately recognized me.

- Comrade Kalashnikova, what has happened?

I felt ready to vanish under the traditional floor ondol¹⁴⁴. What could I say to him? That I needed some human warmth? That I felt lonely?

- Nothing's happened... Please, excuse me, Comrade Song... It's just that you mentioned that if I needed to talk heart to heart... I'm sorry, I did not realize that you were sleeping... - I myself felt what nonsense I was coming up with, and because of that, I got more and more shabby in my soul. Shabby to such an extent that I could take it no longer. Tears of shame gushed from my eye as a fountain, I turned away and headed for the door.

- Comrade Kalashnikova... Yevgenia... *I am already awake. No need to run away now.*

He called me *by my first name*? I have not misheard it?

I didn't have a chance to realise anything yet, when warm, strong hands caught me and embraced my shoulders. Not with some stupid "passion", as in novels, but as a human being, with kindness, with a brotherly hug. And a second later I was already weeping silently into his strong, trained shoulder. And Comrade Song stroked my hair, softly repeating with a pleasant accent:

- Don't worry, don't worry, Yevgenia, my joy, everything is going to be just fine. *We'll still light up our cigarettes from sunrays!*

Oh, that Russian idioms' knowledge of his!

...The rest of the night I spent at his place. We hardly slept. I was telling him about my life: more frankly than I would have talked to a priest in confession, if I were a religious person. And he listened: with his whole soul, like very few people can listen, without interrupting, without asking too many

¹⁴³ Refers to a similar scene in "The Dawns Here Are Quiet" film and book (1972)

¹⁴⁴ Korean traditional floor with underfloor heating system

questions, not judging me. As a professional agent. From time to time he commented on or clarified something, and each time it was like a nail on the head. I felt that this was a man with great life experience.

It was such joy - to speak in my own language, not worrying about whether you picked a right word to express the tones of your feelings!

We lay on his mat, cuddling together under the thick and soft Korean blanket: I don't even remember how we got there, but there was nothing indecent between us. Next to a man like this even such thoughts wouldn't come to mind: next to him I felt just so natural and so at peace in my soul! I snuggled against his shoulder as it was a shoulder of someone close and dear to me. And Comrade Song was embracing me with one hand while stroking my hair with the other, all this time. He smelled of almonds and cigarettes simultaneously. And with each his touch, shivers went all over my body. But they were not cold shivers; they were *the warm ones*, if you understand the difference.

We fell asleep only close to the morning. And when I woke up, he was not there. The blanket was neatly tucked in around me as an envelope again, as if a caring mother had done it...

I got very worried that he might be in some sort of trouble because of me. About myself I was not thinking. After all, it was I who had made all that mess and I was prepared to bear my responsibility for it, if needed. My God, how had I dared to have come to him, just like that! How had I got such idea! And what would he think of me now... Oh gosh, how embarrassing!

In the state of complex inner emotions I did not notice that it was time to get up... Blimey! I now speak like him too!

I carefully stuck my nose out of the door... The yard was empty, and judging by the places without shoes at the door, all were gone for breakfast.

I quickly ran across the yard on tiptoe to my room and began to dress.

I went to the breakfast room, not feeling my feet under me. What if he was already sitting there? How can I look him in the face after this?

But I was lucky. Comrade Song was not at the table, there was just Jong Ok who was already finishing her meal. She greeted me warmly.

- Good morning. And where is Comrade Song? - I could not resist asking it.

- He got up early and already had his breakfast. He said he slept very well last night. And what about you?

At this quite an innocent question, blood almost froze in my veins. Can she know what had happened?

- Couldn't be better,- I said hastily, trying to prevent my voice from trembling. I could not get a piece of food into my throat...

...When I saw Comrade Song near the bus, I felt so hot that it began to seem to me as if the whole street saw how I feel. And knew where I had been last night. From the wall the portrait of the Great Leader was looking at me reproachfully.

Comrade Song saw me, smiled - with a warm, good-natured smile, and slightly patted me on the back, when I climbed into the bus. But he said nothing. And what could he say?

All the way back to Pyongyang, Comrade Song was sitting on the seat before me, and I couldn't tear my eyes off his cropped-haired nape, his tanned, almost black neck. Sometimes he turned to the

window, and then I could see a small part of his proud, manly profile. Then I just felt like hiding my face. And I hid it: in the book. Only to sneak more looks at him, benefitting from the fact that Kaesong was quite far from Pyongyang.

But once Comrade Song suddenly turned around and caught my glance. Before I even got scared, his face lightened up like a wick in an incandescent bulb, and I almost physically felt his returning glance: as if he was X-raying me.

Goodness me! What is happening? Are we both becoming crazy or what? It's time to end this disgrace.

I noticed that I was starting to tremble like a sheep's tail and pretended that I was sleeping. I did not notice how I actually really fell asleep...

I woke up when the bus suddenly stopped. Already at the hotel, and the doors were opened. As a bullet I flew out of it, not looking at anybody.

Walking past me in the lobby as I was taking the key to my room, Comrade Song leaned towards my ear and said:

- Yevgenia, I'll sort out that situation with your kids right away. You can call me simply Ri Rang now. Agreed? *Only we will know, you and I.*¹⁴⁵

- OK, - I managed to squeeze out of myself, - and you can call me just Zhenya, would that do?

And my heart began to pound as if after a hundred-metre race.

...In the evening at the hotel bar, where we usually sat and talked, Jong Ok and I were telling each other about our lives. Of course, I told her only one-tenth of what Comrade Song knew about me now. He wasn't with us for some reason, and I caught myself feeling sad without him.

- What about Comrade Song? - suddenly escaped my mouth against my will, when Jong Ok had finished her story. - Girls must be queuing up to get acquainted with him. Such an egghead, handsome, good-natured; it simply cannot be that he still remains a bachelor!

- Comrade Song is a widower, - Jong Ok said ingenuously.- Already for five years. He has two little daughters.

¹⁴⁵ Korean proverb

Chapter 22. Ah, Ri Rang!...

“Today, everywhere in our Motherland, the characteristic emotions and romanticism of the Songun era are visible.”

(Kymsungansan, issue 5, 97th year of Juche)

I was on the 47th floor of the *Yanggakdo* hotel¹⁴⁶, in a revolving restaurant, observing Pyongyang from a bird’s eye view and awaiting Ri Rang. The restaurant was revolving slowly, almost imperceptibly, and when I saw the same building appear at a different place from where it had been just 15 minutes before, I felt dizzy.

It was almost three months since I came to this amazing country. After the first two introductory weeks Dónal and Hilda brought me to a mud cure resort at lake Sijung, in a deep pine forest, where, according to Ri Rang, *‘wrinkled roses were blossoming on a sandy bank.’* The roses didn’t appear to me that ‘wrinkled’, but I could hardly take anyone to task, because this time, of all the Korean guides; only Jong Ok was accompanying me. Ri Rang visited us in the resort only during the weekends. I even thought that someone had found out about our short encounter in Kaesong, and thus he was purposely kept away from me; and this thought made me worry a lot.

But he didn’t actually disappear for good, and one day he even came to stay, bringing my boys with him! Mum and Lisa, it turned out, were not coming yet as it was time for Mum to renew her foreign passport.

I was so happy when my boys rushed to me with hugs and kisses! By that time they were four. I imagined the distance from Moscow to Pyongyang, and this scared me.

- But who brought them here? – I asked Ri Rang.

- It's top secret, - he smiled. – Don’t worry so much. Jong Ok and I will take care of your boys, and you take care of yourself. Get well soon!

‘Get well soon’? Ah, yes, right... I almost forgot about my status here.

Surely, I had no time to give it much thought: the training programme, which Dónal and Hilda had worked out for me, was very intense. This was much more than Dónal had told me about during our first meeting at the Pyongyang hotel.

Can anyone tell me, for example, why I was taught to dive? Or ride a horse? There were some other things which made perfect sense, but I preferred not to think that I might need them in reality. The training occupied my whole day, starting right after breakfast and continuing well into twilight, and sometimes even after. The only rest I could get was during mud baths; I would close my eyes, and fall asleep immediately. Sleep was a luxury for me here. Hilda would wake me up even at weekends at about 6 a.m. to run once again through Afrikaans irregular verbs declension or to ask me about the most popular discos in Capetown. I saw Fidel and Che only early on Sunday mornings. Luckily, there were so many new and exciting things there for them, that they didn’t feel too upset about seeing me so rarely. Yet, I wished their Granny could come sooner and relieve the KPA¹⁴⁷ major of the honourable mission of taking care of them, as I felt very uncomfortable bothering him with all that.

¹⁴⁶ Yanggakdo International Hotel is one of the largest working hotels and the second tallest building in North Korea, after the Ryugyong Hotel. The hotel is located on Yanggakdo (Yanggak Island), two kilometers to the south-east of the center of Pyongyang, the nation's capital. It rises to an overall height of 170 meters and sports a slowly revolving restaurant on the 47th floor. The hotel is said to contain 1,000 rooms and a total floor space of 87,870 square meters.

¹⁴⁷ Korean People’s Army

After a while, I began to have dreams of Ri Rang in my sleep. In the dreams, I saw myself at a party meeting, being severely scolded for my unhealthy, exaggerated interest in him. But I also dreamed of his large bronze shoulders and his laughing ink-black eyes, his shining, burning gaze, his soft low voice and his strong, warm arms. Each time I thought of him, I blushed like a 17-year-old girl, and got angry with myself for that, but I just couldn't help it. I was absolutely charmed by this major-translator, gallant and smart, especially since I started to get to know him a bit better.

He knew how to do everything: ride a horse, parachute-jump, shoot MANPADS and cook *sinseollo*¹⁴⁸. He mastered tae kwondo, spoke four foreign languages, sang folk songs – brilliantly! - and played the accordion. He never lost spirit or self-control. He had travelled around the whole world. My children, in just a week after coming to Korea, admired ‘uncle Ri Rang’, who enthusiastically played hide-and-seek and horses with them. He had two absolutely charming little daughters, aged 5 and 7, who sometimes came to the resort together with him; they looked like little porcelain dolls, and bowed and said ‘*Kamapsumnida*¹⁴⁹!’ each time I treated them to Russian sweets.

On Sundays, all of us (the above-mentioned and Jong Ok, but not Dónal and Hilda, who were relaxing by themselves, obviously too tired of me during the week) had picnics at the lake; we ate unpeeled potatoes, kimchi¹⁵⁰ and rice cakes, to which Fidel took special liking. The girls – Hye Sun and Myong Hui – sang songs, and my ‘*paddies*¹⁵¹’, trying to impress everyone, went running and screaming around the lake bank.

In the end, they would get too carried away, so I had to shout at them angrily:

- Che! Fidel! You behave yourselves now! *It's not Ireland for you here!*

Then the girls would start playing some Korean children games with them,- it was a complete mystery to me; how they managed to understand each other, but they did, and it gave Ri Rang and me some time to walk around the lake. That was when I got to know him a little better.

- It's a pity it's not autumn, - Ri Rang would say. – In autumn, persimmons growing around the lake get ripe and tasty. The place is so beautiful on a moonlit night! We have a folk song...

He closed his eyes, tuned up and started to sing; then translated it for me:

'You will feel regret not seeing the plant of eternal youth on the Rende mountain, You won't get tired of admiring the moon over the Sijun lake ...'

I don't know whether it was a hint that we should admire it together, but I got too tired even without admiring the moon; I hoped he understood, and didn't get offended.

Sometimes we walked to a nearby collective farm. Don't ask me if he told the farmers that we were coming in advance, for I don't know. But I really felt at home there!

I actually started to feel at home in DPRK almost as soon as I came. And it was not because (or, not *only* because) the streets in Pyongyang were as wide as in Moscow, and there were lots of Soviet cars and other transport; or, because Korean military officers' uniforms looked very much like the Soviet ones, and blocks of flats were also very similar to the Soviet ones (though, unlike ours, they are

¹⁴⁸ *Sinseollo* is an elaborate dish consisting of [meatballs](#), small and round [jeonyueo](#) mushrooms, and vegetables cooked in a rich [broth](#) in [Korean cuisine](#). The dish is a form of [jeongol](#) (elaborate chowder-like stew). It is served in a large [bundt pan](#) shaped vessel with a hole in the center, in which hot embers are placed to keep the dish hot throughout the meal

¹⁴⁹ Thank you (Korean)

¹⁵⁰ Kimchi is a traditional [fermented](#) spicy [Korean dish](#) made of vegetables with a variety of seasonings. It is Korea's [national dish](#), and there are hundreds of varieties made with a main vegetable ingredient such as [napa cabbage](#), [radish](#), [scallion](#), or [cucumber](#)

¹⁵¹ “Paddies” - nickname for the Irish people (Patrick is the most common male name in Ireland)

painted various beautiful pastel colours); or, because the cinemas, like ours in the past, were still decorated with hand-made posters portraying film characters. No, the main thing was the people and their way of life.

Everything was so *easily* recognizable: school and factory excursions to museums and circuses, community work days, boards of honour – the things which are difficult to explain to a Westerner, but for us, who had grown up in the USSR, are as natural as breathing. Simply, we have forgotten them a little, but after just a couple of days spent here the memories start to come back in sweeping waves, nearly bringing back the very scent of home where I have grown up... The feelings came back too: those which in the ‘liberated’ world were made ‘illegal’, those which you had to suppress in order to survive, and pretend they had never existed. For example, love for people or the desire to be of use for the society; and, surely, the faith in *good* in people, something that we have almost lost in the decades of living with suspicious minds, in the world where people are really wolves to each other, easily doing – and expecting - all kinds of harm.

On the way to the collective farm we came across people virtually marked by a *Soviet-like innocence*. They were deeply attractive to me because of their simplicity, naturalness, modesty, diligence... They seemed to have merged with the nature surrounding them. The rivers here were so clean that you could swim and bathe, and wash your clothes, if necessary. The roads were not perfect, but at least they were better than those in rural Russia today. There were enough cars, but not too many; the people here had no idea of what a traffic jam was.

Children were waving at us. Dogs ran together with them all along the village streets, and nobody hunted them “for food.” Peasants working in the fields, sat right on the rails to have breakfast (it was more or less dry there compared to the rice fields, and trains were infrequent, so you could quite often see people sitting like that). Now I knew why trains in Korea gave warning signals so often! I also remembered a picture which I once saw on the Internet: a girl resting like that, right on the tracks, captioned ‘a homeless girl in North Korea’. It is you who are ‘homeless’, you, sold-out lying foreign scribblers!

At the collective farm that we were visiting, there was a local clinic, with a pharmacy, maternity department and infirmary; five doctors worked there, as well as a dentist and a midwife. All that was meant for only 3,500 residents! There was a kindergarten, and a school too. Again I couldn’t help comparing what I’d seen in Korea with our Russian villages, which are now abandoned, desolate, more often than not without even a shop, let alone kindergartens, or hospitals! (I think, it would only be logical to leave out of consideration those dachas - mini-palaces built very recently: those are a totally different story!)

What a contrast with the DPRK! Here indeed everything is done to provide those working and living in rural areas with comfortable conditions so that they don’t have to constantly shuttle to the city. The main street was paved, and the side streets were clean, unlike those in Russian villages.

The kindergarten was surprisingly clean and well-ordered, and the Korean children impressed me with their musical talents. After the village children finished their performance, their teachers decided to demonstrate their talents too, and sang a song for us all together, playing the accordion.

Ri Rang brought me to the local school as well. It was a lunch break. Children in Korea go home for lunch, leaving their schoolbags at school. I don’t know how you feel about it, but it was a striking discovery for me! There were boards of honour on the walls, and not only A-students were mentioned there; all the children were ranked according to their progress. One doesn’t feel exactly happy being the last, but at least, there is a strong motivation for self-improvement.

Most of all, though, I was surprised, having noticed a text book on one of the desks; Ri Rang said, it was called something like *The Basics of Moral, Ethics and Social Behaviour*. That – for third- or fourth-formers! Maybe because this subject is taught so early, Korean schoolchildren demonstrate such great behaviour and self-discipline, which can only cause envy in Western teachers and society in general.

Then the peasants asked us to dine with them; we refused politely, but they were forcing the fruits and vegetables which they had grown themselves, into our hands. By the way, it turned out that Koreans eat tomatoes with sugar, and not with salt, as it is customary for us!

Everything in this land was in order: peasants and soldiers were working in the fields, schoolchildren were returning home from school... It was go great, so heart-warming to see all that!

I noticed that the average tourist from the so-called ‘free’ world goes to other countries, subconsciously hoping to prove to himself that ‘*back home everything is better*’, or ‘oh, I’ve got so much more compared to them’; these thoughts make them happy. It is for their self-confidence, just like our bald singer Kobzon¹⁵² needs a toupee. They cannot feel happy without observing other people’s troubles, as they have nothing to be particularly excited about. (They feel even happier when someone begs them for money, even though they would never tell you this openly!) For such tourists, a visit to Korea will be like having a bucket of cold water thrown on them. True, North Koreans do not have the newest *Mercedes*, or smartphones – but for Western tourists it is not enough to feel their habitual short orgasm at the thought of their material possessions at home, so outnumbering those of “totalitarian, third-world” Koreans. They experience a big letdown, a deprivation of the feelings of superiority, because they sense with their gut that for these Koreans their material ‘treasures’ are not their focus in life. So, the expected joy from such a tourist trip simply evaporates.

- When our Korean friends visited us in the West, we actually thought, ‘They will ask us for political asylum next thing, after they see all that we’ve got here. Besides, these Koreans are young, educated, they know languages, they won’t perish here!’ – Hilda told me, having lived in Germany with Dónal for a long time. - Yet, we were completely taken aback when we saw them horrified with what they had seen in Europe and dying to get back home! ‘Streets here are dirty, there’s noise at nights, drunkards and drug addicts are hanging around, women are selling themselves... How can you live in such conditions?’ And we had no ready answers!... They weren’t impressed with our shops either!

Nobody says, of course, that their life is easy and carefree.

- Just imagine what would happen to the Irish economy if it had lost its relations with Germany, Holland, France and Britain overnight! This is what happened to our country at the beginning of the 1990s, - Ri Rang told me.

Several natural disasters struck the DPRK during the same period, which led to the loss of crops. But the country eventually managed to overcome all the difficulties, despite all that, combined with the US-imposed sanctions. So, when you visit the Exhibition of Three Revolutions (the Korean equivalent to our VDNKh¹⁵³) and see the machines produced in Korea, and a whole pavilion dedicated to the first Korean satellite (the successful launch of which Americans are still denying – (*This cannot be, because this can never be!*¹⁵⁴), you become very impressed with the courage and perseverance of that comparatively small nation.

¹⁵² Iosif Kobzon (b.1937) is a Soviet singer known for his crooner style

¹⁵³ VDNKh - permanent Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy in Moscow, established in 1935

¹⁵⁴ A.Chekhov “A letter to the educated neighbour”

Here nobody sells seats in spaceships for millions of dollars, or their own historic documents. Korean scientists work for their country's well-being. They would not turn into forced prostitutes, selling themselves to the highest bidder, like our own scientists do, with our state playing the role of a pimp.

Being care-free is not at all the equivalent of happiness. As Leo Tolstoy said, "*Contentment is moral treason.*" 'Leave me in peace!' is the favourite motto of all egoists and careerists of all times and places. But content and confidence in the future are two different things; and this confidence can be clearly felt in every Korean street!

Maybe our own country was also like that in the 1950s; unfortunately, I know about it only from Mum's stories, I wasn't that lucky, I was born too late. And then we all of a sudden got 'bored with building socialism', like Ostap Bender,¹⁵⁵ and turned instead to dreaming about white trousers, mulattoes and Rio-de-Janeiro¹⁵⁶... The consequences were quite lamentable for our country.

Koreans, however, are really *not* bored building socialism! Do you get my meaning?

Looking at Koreans - small, sometimes so fragile in appearance, - who line up in a chain along the road at a volunteer clean-up to dig a trench for electric cables for several kilometres, or tirelessly work in their rice fields until late evening, sometimes even at weekends, I involuntarily recall the lines of Nikolai Tikhonov: "*If nails could be made out of these people, there would be no harder nails in the world!*"¹⁵⁷ They really have a loving attitude towards their work - if you can imagine what it is like.

And one more thing: Koreans live like one big family. To a person who knows only bourgeois society, this would be something very new.

"Oh, they just work like slaves and have nothing else in their life!" - howl our *shirkers* today, dreaming that "their money will work for them", as the advertising of every fraudster promises them, and whose idea of happiness is to lie on the beach in the Bahamas. "*That's why... you live in cages!*" - as Gedevan Aleksandrovich from the immortal film *Kindza-dza* used to say¹⁵⁸. In Korea, by the way, I have never seen windows with bars. Or iron doors, as we have today in Russia. There is simply no need for them.

They have everything necessary in life, don't worry. There are theatres, there are museums, there are circuses, gyms and swimming pools, houses of culture and leisure parks, - and all this is accessible to everybody. A girl in uniform reading a good book while walking along a rural path. Children playing musical instruments, dancing and laughing (in the "civilized" Irish town where I lived, their peers in their free time die from overdoses of drugs, steal cars or set somebody on fire). Young boys playing chess. Old people having a rest in the park on benches - with dignity, not robbed by currency reforms, like our Russian pensioners. And young couples walking on the embankments, holding hands and gazing tenderly at each other, instead of drinking beer from cans on the go and then lying somewhere in the bushes...

I saw quite enough in the DPRK to get a good idea of the local life. You won't convince me that it is especially for me that all the passers-by were well dressed, shod and fed along the road of our journey, including in the countryside, that a strict order to smile at me was issued to them, and that it was just

¹⁵⁵ Ostap Bender - crook hero of satirical novels "12 chairs" and "Golden Calf" by Ilf and Petrov

¹⁵⁶ Rio de Janeiro was a dream city for Ostap Bender who "was bored to build socialism"

¹⁵⁷ From the poem "The Ballad of Nails" (1922) by the Soviet poet Nikolai Tikhonov (1896-1979), which tells the story of human endurance. This image is used for an association with the expression "iron character", "iron will" and so on: Figuratively: the human resistance.

¹⁵⁸ Soviet cult science fiction film, parody on capitalist society (1988)

for me, that people kept the streets in cleanness and order, not only in Pyongyang, but in all the cities and villages through which we have passed.

People! Just look around! Look, how we have transformed our own beautiful, beloved, unique country into a dirty, smelly dump! All of us, not just such villains as Berezovsky¹⁵⁹ (frankly, it was we who have allowed him and his likes to let loose!). Into what have we turned ourselves, in the name of that contagious "new thinking" in which there is nothing new - just ordinary egoism and covetousness! Look, how we have transformed our Russia into one huge junkman's bazaar, into one huge "second hand" shop. Don't you feel sorry for her? Do you really disrespect yourselves to such a degree?

So how did the Koreans manage to survive and develop, keeping their society of social justice, despite such limited resources in comparison with our huge country with its innumerable natural resources? And why have we fallen into such a chasm, that on our streets today there are hundreds of thousands of homeless children, our men are dying before they reach 60 years of age (the average lifespan in the so-called "starving" Korea is 72 years!), our women abandon their babies or even kill them, and our population is decreasing by nearly a million people per year? What is the Korean secret?

To me, the answer is simple. It's Juche.

There is no need to deride this short "exotic" word, which mystifies many people. "... The Juche idea means that you are a master of your own fate, and that in you there is also a force to decide your own destiny." I explain to those who haven't got it yet: do not sit back and wait for the "good uncles from overseas" to invest in your industry the same millions they have robbed from you in the first place. And do not think that you can't rely on yourselves and do anything on your own, because these uncles are allegedly "more civilized" countries (their self-proclaimed definition).

We do not understand what is happening in Korea because the ghost of "dear Leonid Ilyich"¹⁶⁰ hovers before our eyes. And we automatically project our own life, with all its merits and – let's admit it – shortcomings on everything seen and heard by us in that country. Is it so difficult to understand that Korean communists' children and grandchildren aren't brought up in the same way as, say, the son of the author of words of the National Anthem of the USSR, who in the post-Soviet era dreams of becoming the Tsar of All Russia¹⁶¹? An Englishman, Michael Harrold, not a sympathizer of the Korean communists by a long chalk, blurts out in his book, *Comrades and Strangers*, that as soon as any misbehaviour of children of high members of the party and government is noticed in the DPRK, they are immediately sent for labour re-education! I wish we had done the same with ours, decades before...

Long ago, back in my childhood, I read the words in *Korea Today* magazine, which have stayed in my mind ever since: "President Kim Il Sung said: if a man is beset by adulation, it will make him a fool, if a party is beset by adulation, it brings a mess to the revolution and construction, and if a nation is beset by adulation, it gets ruined."¹⁶² And I think that what has happened to my country in the past 20 or even 40 years is a vivid example of this!...

¹⁵⁹ Boris Berezovsky (b.1946) is a former Russian oligarch living in exile in Britain. Berezovsky made his fortune in Russia in the 90's when the country went through privatisation of state property and robber capitalism. In Russia he was convicted in absentia of economic crimes

¹⁶⁰ Reference to Leonid Brezhnev, Soviet leader between 1964-1982, who in the later years of his life wasn't taken seriously by some of the Soviet population.

¹⁶¹ Reference to Sergei (1913-2009) and Nikita (b. 1945) Mikhalkov, the former being the famous Soviet poet and the latter – a film-director, who is politically a complete opposite to his father.

¹⁶² http://naenara.com.kp/en/juche/course_juche.php?juche+3+3-03

Korea is such a quiet, peaceful, calm country. Perhaps, because people here want peace so much, but are ready, if necessary, for war. Only once Ri Rang and I were stopped by a military patrol on a road to check our documents. I reacted normally and was not even surprised. The soldier was very polite. While he spoke with Ri Rang, I noticed a big caterpillar crawling peacefully over his machine gun.

- People who have visited us don't believe any more that our country has aggressive intentions or other Western propaganda, - Ri Rang once said to me.

Indeed, how can we believe it, comparing Korean soldiers, who plough the soil and work on construction projects in their homeland, with the soldiers of the U.S. and NATO, who torture and murder civilians in other countries?

Finally the chapter "At the Lake" came to an end in my life, and we returned to Pyongyang. Here I was going to spend another couple of months. Soon Mum would arrive, and she would live here with the boys and Lisa until my mission would be completed. I wanted to make sure that she gets used to it here and would not be torn apart by homesickness, as it happened back in Ireland. I couldn't afford to fly half way across the globe to deal with her "Russian spleen"!

Ri Rang had become for me a symbol of his country. The embodiment of all that I had seen here. And that's it. That's how I tried to explain my feelings for him to myself. But it was getting more and more difficult for me to be certain of it.

When I first came to Korea, its people seemed to me so different that I didn't even think whether anybody here might like me. Even after a couple of compliments regarding me, I took it for mere politeness. They were very nice, but they lived their own lives, by their own rules: in a way, a bit like aliens. It was possible to observe that life from outside, and we could kindly envy them in many ways, but it was impossible to become a part of this life. This was not Ireland - it's pure and simple. "*We are strangers, Shura, at this party of life...*"¹⁶³

But since he took me by my shoulders that night, Ri Rang suddenly stopped being *a creature from another planet* and became just a man for me. And the more I looked at him and talked to him, the more I liked him. He was so reliable, serious, and at the same time good-humoured, so very masculine, – and at the same time he wasn't a macho. And I felt so light at heart from his smile that I was shining like *the Ilyich lamp*¹⁶⁴!

He was a true revolutionary: with deep convictions and principles, with no "new thinking", contrived with Soros's money. He was, in fact, precisely the man I was looking for, for so long and so vainly, among descendants of the African continent! It was such an irony of fate that I have found him just then - and there.

It was not love in the classic sense of the word - it was sheer admiration.

¹⁶³ Catch phrase from the novel *Golden Calf* by Ilf and Petrov

¹⁶⁴ What hides behind a romantic term, "the Ilyich lamp" is in other words a household incandescent lamp with a socket freely hanging from the ceiling without any shade or abat-jour. The first ever Ilyich lamp was lit up by a d.c. generator in a small village of the Moscow region in 1920. The name stuck as it became a symbol of the Soviet people's achievements, making their life lighter and brighter. Nowadays Ilyich Lamps are usually mentioned in connection with the so-called GOELRO plan – the plan of a major restructuring of the Soviet economy based on the total electrification of the country. (GOELRO is the transliteration of the Russian acronym for "State Commission for Electrification of Russia). Lenin was behind the plan and took its implementation close to heart - he believed it would eliminate the gap between the rural countryside and cities. So when the Soviet Union became widely wired up with light bulbs, they enlightened and changed millions of peasants' lives. Calling them the Ilyich lamps was a way of remembering the man who had brought the future into backward Russian homes.

I realized that my thoughts about it were nothing but empty fantasies, that he would never in his life see in me more than "*our friends in other countries*"¹⁶⁵." And I tried not to drive those thoughts away.

I remembered the time when my feelings for Oisin, like the beauty of a flower that nobody needed, gradually faded and turned into a festering thorn in my soul. I didn't need a sequel of that!

Unrequited love is similar to the untimely death of a loved one. The relentless pain hurts you inside: it could still have lived on and on, but...

The most painful thing in this love is not the sense of humiliation at being turned down. That's a mere trifle. The most painful is the feeling of *not being needed*.

You are ready to make miracles, to move mountains for the one you love, you feel able to fly and to get the stars from the sky, but you hear just a dry explanation that you should not do this, because it is unnecessary. When your love is so deep that at any moment it is ready to sweep away both of you, when you feel that you can generate electricity with its help, when you know that you can make him so happy, when you want to open to him an unfamiliar world, to share with him all the spiritual wealth that you have gathered from different cultures, when you want him also to love all mankind as you do, but all he wants is a plate of spaghetti Bolognese in time to watch his Sopranos¹⁶⁶ on TV, there is a reason to despair.

Remind yourself again, Zhenya Kalashnikova: "I loved him, but he did not feel the same for me." That's all. And nobody on the planet can help you. And it makes no sense to complain about it to someone or to be offended - well, not about this- but about giving a false hope – for sure! For such things one may well be *given a blanket party*¹⁶⁷!

And I had already prepared to imagine how I am *arranging the blanket party* for Oisin, when a familiar husky voice called me:

- Zhenya, *what are you dreaming about so vividly?* We have to go. Soon the *mass celebrations* will begin!

I turned around. Ri Rang was coming towards me out of the elevator with such an engaging smile in his face that I smiled too.

It was a national holiday. In comparison with the Soviet Union, where demonstrations and parades began early in the morning, in Korea they start only in the afternoon. Maybe because the day is so hot?

I had a lot of free time on that day. Dónal and Hilda were having a rest (hurrah!), and in order to take me to any museums or exhibitions (there was no sense sitting in the hotel, when I could see and learn so much!), it was first necessary to find out which streets were closed for the time of the preparation for the celebration. So, Ri Rang and Jong Ok spent most of the day running between me and the telephone. I felt like a *posh lady*, and this was embarrassing. For a moment I thought that foreign tourists in the Soviet Union must have felt like this. But Dónal, who came to us for breakfast to congratulate Ri Rang and Jong Ok on their national holiday, disagreed with me. He visited the USSR as a tourist in the early 80's, and when I shared with him my thoughts on this subject, he said:

¹⁶⁵ Name of a children's story from a textbook for 2nd graders in Soviet primary schools

¹⁶⁶ *The Sopranos (1999-2007)* is an American television drama that revolves around the Italian-American mobster Tony Soprano and the difficulties he faces as he tries to balance the conflicting requirements of his home life and the criminal organization he heads. It was popular in the UK and Ireland in the early 2000s.

¹⁶⁷ "To arrange the blanket party"- to beat somebody up under circumstances that do not allow the victim to see his attackers: in the dark, or covering the victim's head with a blanket (Russian slang)

- Not everything was the same. In the USSR, many people were already becoming cynical, especially among the officials. The Soviet guides could not answer properly our questions about politics. They were more interested in imported nylon stockings, than party documents. And one of the Soviet officials even directly explained to us a difference between public and private property: "Look, here's a bench on which I sit. This is public property, and I do not care about it. And this is my umbrella on the bench. This is my personal property, I do care about it." Some internal decomposition was beginning to be felt in the USSR. In Korea it is not present. I had visited this country for many years and I see that Koreans are sincere telling us about their socialism and its achievements. Perhaps the reason why it is difficult for people in other countries to understand Koreans is their own cynicism. And I am glad that you have begun to understand Koreans better now. People who can really tune into the mentality of Koreans and into their feelings, are rare, and your stay here will be more valuable with this ability.

I had never been in the USSR as a foreign tourist, of course, nor had I ever had much contact with foreign tourists in my country, I only occasionally saw them on the streets of Moscow, and I was much less interested in them than in students from developing countries. So, it was difficult to me to object to any of his points. I can only say for myself and for my family and friends: none of us ran after foreigners, haggling with them for chewing gum or jeans. Moreover, such a thought would have never occurred to us. Tamarochka sometimes used to bring us some chewing gum: she got it from sportsmen who brought it from abroad as a souvenir. Later, the USSR began to produce our own chewing gum, coinciding with the Moscow Olympics Games. It was such a trifle, such useless nonsense that I wouldn't even think of it for longer than a couple of seconds. And the very idea of chasing someone for it? What a soap bubble instead of brain such people must have! And the absence of labelled jeans did not prevent me in the slightest from enjoying life. The concept of fashionable brands was - and remains to this day - deeply alien to me. I'm not one of those who cannot live without *some beads, mirrors and company's brand badges*. And I felt very good among the Koreans. It was pleasant that noone ran after me on the street trying to sell a souvenir, as it frequently happens in many countries (I know that people in those countries do this not because they want to annoy, but out of need - but it is still a very qualmish thing to see). Here in Korea, people were so indifferent to the issue of buying and selling, that my heart rejoiced.

When I first came to the capitalist world, I had long been utterly shocked by this specific constant viewing practically all aspects of life through the prism of money: "*And how much will it cost us?*", "*This building will cost so much...*", "*For a taxpayer it will cost so much*" (small wonder that this phrase is never used when a war is being unleashed somewhere at the other end of the world: it is reserved exclusively for those cases when it comes to costs of social or public projects needed for the people!). But query: where does money come in, if something is really necessary, if it really helps to make the lives of most people easier and better? If something needs to be done, it needs to be done! None of these "political commentators" in the West care a damn about how much yet another yacht of Abramovich¹⁶⁸ cost for the working people! Or how much people have lost because of yet another "bonus" for some banker, or how many hospitals, factories and kindergartens could have been built for all that stolen money!

"Don't put profitability to the fore, when it goes about the people!"¹⁶⁹ And that's it. Golden words. My Goodness, how free, how good it feels when there are no greedy tongues popping out of the walls at every step, screaming the words: "*Santik! Santik! Santik!*"¹⁷⁰! No, this Korea is a land as it should be!

¹⁶⁸ Roman Abramovich (b. 1966), owner of Chelsea, Russian oligarch (see previous notes)

¹⁶⁹ Jo Song Baek, *The Leadersip Philosophy of Kim Jong Il*, Pyongyang, Juche 88 (1999), p. 102

In the afternoon, Jong Ok found time to bring me to the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery on Mt. Taesong. This final resting place for heroes was chosen in a very symbolic way: from the height they seem to be watching over the city, as if protecting the people and viewing how the new society, for which they gave their lives, is being constructed in their homeland. Comrade Kim Il Sung rests on the opposite side: in the Kumsusan Memorial Palace¹⁷¹ and he also faces his comrades-in-arms. I visited the Kumsusan's Memorial Palace immediately after we returned to Pyongyang from the lake. Previously, it was the Kumsusan Assembly Hall - a parliamentary building, but after the decease of the Leader of the Korean Revolution, it was decided to leave the building as a place where the Great Leader President Kim Il Sung will lie in state, and the offices moved elsewhere.

In Korea, almost everything has a symbolic meaning, much deeper so than in our culture, and in this case the Great Leader is so alive in the hearts of the Korean people, as if it were real, as if he were still working in his office, in this impressive building. And he will work there forever.

The building is much greater than the Lenin Mausoleum. In contrast to China or to our country, to visit it, you need to schedule it in advance and come strictly on time. Inside you need to walk slowly, with measured steps. At first, it was a bit unclear to me where exactly the Dear Leader Kim Il Sung was: we passed through the room with his statue, with his photographs, through the Hall of Tears, which embodies the sorrow of the Korean people after they've learnt of his passing away. And only then we find ourselves in the room, where the first and eternal President of the country of morning calm lies in state. Covered from the waist with red cloth, Comrade Kim Il Sung, about whom I had read so much in my childhood and adolescence, really looked alive. He had a calm, confident expression on his face.

Bronze monuments in the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery reproduce the faces of real heroes. Each of them has its own story, and Jong Ok told me a few. Of a young woman-guerrilla who had left her 2-year-old child to his grandmother and had joined a partisan squad. She later died in Japanese prisons. Of a grandmother, who gave all her sons to the Revolution... And then we saw Kim Jong Il's mother, Kim Jong Suk, who passed away very young, at age of just 32 years (he was only 7 years old then).

During the same day Jeon Ok and I visited the Botanical Garden, the Kim Won Gyun Conservatory¹⁷² and the Pyongyang underground, which is smaller than the Moscow Metro, but matches it in beauty. There are only three lines crossing each other, and stations are named with beautiful, proud names, like Victory or Prosperity. And all of this we visited within half a day.

I was already accustomed to busy Korean days and was particularly surprised when in the afternoon Jong Ok took me to the hotel Yanggakdo, which is on the island. She took me to a restaurant on its top floor and asked me to wait for Ri Rang there for a couple of hours. Probably all other places were already closed because of the holiday.

And suddenly I had two hours of free time. An unprecedented luxury. Enough for reflecting on what I had to think about and even on what it was better not to think...

¹⁷⁰ Description of a cheap hotel in "Dunno on the Moon" by Nikolai Nosov (1964), symbolic of capitalist society, where, like in "1 Pound Shops" or "1 Euro Shops" or in flights by budget airlines, everything looks cheap, but you have to pay separately for every little thing which totals a substantial amount (in the book, "Santik" is a currency unit on the Moon).

¹⁷¹ Now Kumsusan Palace of the Sun - formerly the Kumsusan Memorial Palace is a building located in Pyongyang that serves as the mausoleum for President Kim Il-sung, the founder of the DPRK and now also for the General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea Kim Jong-il who succeeded him as the country's Leader.

¹⁷² Named after a legendary Korean composer, the Conservatory is the latest addition to the 30 odd higher education institutions in Pyongyang. It opened in the fall of 2006.

What will happen next? What awaits me out there, where I will soon have to go? Can I handle it? My first mission - years back - has not exactly been accomplished, even though for reasons beyond my control. But this was little consolation for my conscience.

Now I felt that my whole life was a movie. Except for my life in the Soviet Union. That was my only full-blooded real life, and now, by some ridiculous coincidence, I was forced to play this strange, improbable role, written by an unknown writer.

Life became similar to that in the American film *Back to the Future*, in its second part, when something went wrong, and life has really become like the ravings of a madman. Ah, why doesn't a time machine exist in real life?

It was great that Ri Rang came! My ghosts of the past dispelled with his arrival like a vampire at the sight of the first sun rays. I jumped up to greet him.

- You sit down, Zhenya! It's still early. Have I got you out of your reverie? We still have time to sit here *the whole circle*.

- What circle? - I did not understand.

- The Tower of the Juche Idea is now right in front of you. Let's talk until it appears in front of you again: it will be *a victory lap around our own axis*.

- OK, - I did not argue. In this country, I never had any desire to rush somewhere or to argue with someone. I have learned again what had once been as natural for me as breathing: to trust people.

- Your mother and Lisa will come in 16 days, - said Ri Rang. - By that time we will move you into a more permanent dwelling. There your family will wait for you until your return.

So he knows that I will go away soon? And he speaks so casually about it? I felt a slight sting in my heart.

- I only know that you are travelling on a mission, - added Ri Rang, seeing my facial expression. - I do not know, though, for how long or where, but I will not ask you this. I want to ask you something else... - and he stopped short.

- Yes, what is it? - I came back to Earth.

- What are you going to do when you come back? - he asked me - a totally unexpected question, which I was afraid even to ask myself. - Would you like to go back to Ireland?

- Don't say that! How can I like to go back to the land of *keen-on-beer school dropouts*. Now that you are in the world: you who read Pushkin and the Timur and His Squad... I'm just happy to know that you exist in this world, no matter how far away you're from me.

Though it might have sounded jocose, I was not joking. Still, I gave Ri Rang a chance to verbally fend it off, as he used to. But this time he did not joke in response. Instead of it, Ri Rang suddenly became very shy.

- And for me that's very important... - he whispered so softly that I could barely hear him. And as usual, I did not immediately construe him properly. - So, you do not want to go back to Ireland? Why?

He surprised me with that question, because I was still trying to understand what exactly was so important to him.

- How can I explain to you briefly? - I thought for a moment, - If it's about me personally, I'm very lonely there among people who do not read books, and are not interested in anything except eating,

drinking and shopping. And the movies that they enjoy are just an insult to my intelligence. There is no one around me there who could understand me as you do. When I talk to them, they think I'm almost from another planet. But I know that I am on my home planet! Although all that is dear and important to me has been carried many light-years away... For example, once I asked a very close relation of mine when he was going to read at least one book, and he said: "And what's the gain?"

- What's the gain? - Ri Rang did not understand. - Knowledge, as they say, is power. It's clear enough.

- No, he had in mind the "material" gain, - I said. Ri Rang's Korean almond-shaped eyes became as large as good-sized saucers.

- Poor Zhenya... How have you *plunged head-on into it*, eh?

I managed not to laugh at his words.

- I have often wondered myself...

-...Do you love him? - this question was even more unexpected for me.

- He died two years ago... Well, as for the boy... The local education there is a huge disaster. I want to cry when I think that they will be deprived of all the knowledge, which my school had given me at my time. It's so much better to learn about *congruence relation of figures that is reflexive, symmetric, and transitive*¹⁷³ (you see, I still remember!) than be given superficial knowledge of a few things, with religion and prayers into the bargain!

Ri Rang smiled with the tips of his lips.

- Yes, education is very important. And it is not just purely mechanical volume of knowledge, but the ability to think - and spiritual wealth. We say: "*If a tree is allowed to grow by itself and it grows crooked, then it will be too late to straighten it.*"¹⁷⁴

- Maybe you could tell me this secret – how to bring up the younger generation properly? – I picked up his thread. – My boys have been going to your nursery school for a week now; it would be wonderful if they become so disciplined and knowledgeable as Korean kids, who never cease to amaze me. Or it is in your genes?

- No, Zhenya, certainly not. This is *from the Juche idea*. See, a person's roots always go back to his childhood. Nursery schools in our country are named after the revolutionaries. And how do they name them in Northern Ireland?

I tried to remember and gasped.

- "*Little Rascals*" and "*Cheeky Cherubs!*" Probably, that is why such "cherubs" grow out of them: at the age of 10 - 12 they entertain themselves by smashing other people's windows, by glue sniffing, by stealing cars, followed by their ritual burning, by bullying classmates and attacking animals (up to their hanging or setting their dogs upon cats)... And the favourite pastime of the Northern Irish youth is, of course, what is couched in a beautiful expression "*recreational rioting.*"

- And what is that? - Ri Rang was sincerely interested.

- That's when they call for an ambulance or a fire brigade for fun, and when those arrive, they throw stones and other heavy objects at fire-fighters and ambulance workers.

¹⁷³ From the Soviet geometry textbook for 6th graders of the secondary school

¹⁷⁴ Korean proverb

- Why? - his eyes again turned into saucers.

- I do not know. They think that this is funny. Those "little rascals" quickly grow into *accelerats*¹⁷⁵, who keep themselves busy with beer, drugs and cigarettes, with grabbing the likes of themselves of the opposite sex somewhere in the bushes, with all the natural consequences of that. Under the cheerful rattling of beer bottles. And any other kind of life the majority of local young people are unable to imagine.

– It’s quite impossible in our country! And nobody stops them?

– No, they don’t. Parents don’t care. They are glad that children spend their time outside and don’t bother them while they are watching their favourite soaps and drinking beer. And the police are limited by law as to what they are allowed to apprehend teenagers for and can do nothing (oh, if only these ‘cherubs’ had committed crimes against the government or against the private property of some of the 33,000 Irish millionaires, then the laws should be enforced at once!). And politicians only make humble calls from the TV-screens for those good-for-nothing parents to at least “know where your children are and what they are doing.” The circle is closed.

Ri Rang was still unable to utter a word. Thus I continued.

- It was said in the USSR, that in our country there was only one privileged class: children. In your country they are called “the flowers of the nation and mankind” and “kings and queens of the country.” What I have seen here, is true care about children, the future of the country. And that’s the difference: in Western countries (and East-European ones that have declared their aspiration for values of the former) the governments don’t really care about new generations. So what, if somebody becomes a drunkard or dies at the age of 15-17 of a knife-attack, drugs or crashes to death in a stolen car? If they need, they can bring workers from Poland, Lithuania and the Philippines. Those are better educated, too. Why invest money into these local “cherubs” then? Why organize special centres and hobby groups for them in sufficient quantities and affordable for everyone? They’d rather profitably invest that money elsewhere - in arms contracts and export, for example.

Ri Rang was slowly coming around.

- As a matter of fact, everything starts in maternity hospitals. Even in rural hospitals in the DPRK I saw well-equipped, however small, delivery rooms and professional medical staff. And the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital! There is a little park around it, with a fountain... Air conditioners are set up for patients in every room. Apart from delivery suites, there is, for example, a dental department, where expectant mothers can fix their dental problems. The floor in the main building is laid out with precious and semi-precious stones. There is the newest medical equipment in every office. There is absolute sterility: visitors are given slippers and robes, they are not allowed to touch newborns in order to keep hygiene; but relatives have the opportunity to see them and talk to new mothers through special videophones. What a contrast with Western hospitals, where practically every day sneezing, coughing and loudly-speaking relatives and friends hang about the wards in their dirty boots. They don’t care that patients need rest and clean environment. And then we have journalists fussing around shouting, “Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*¹⁷⁶ is spreading again in our hospitals!”

Ri Rang couldn’t help himself and chuckled.

¹⁷⁵ Russian word for teenagers whose physical development happens faster than their mental and intellectual development.

¹⁷⁶ Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a bacterium responsible for several difficult-to-treat infections in humans. It is one of the most common dangerous germs in British hospitals lately that caused many deaths.

- The scourge of British hospitals is their “financial savings” system, where outsourcing companies take over cleaning duties because it’s cheaper. Dirt is everywhere, especially in the toilets because nobody maintains the sanitation properly, and the outsourcing companies’ staff just want to finish their work faster and hurry to another place of work. Infections with such “cleanness” can’t be avoided. There are fatal outcomes with patients already successfully operated on caused by such “saving.” In the Korean hospitals all medical help, complete with hot meals, is free. I was trying to ask doctors, “If visitors are not authorized here, why have you allowed us to visit?” The reply came immediately, “Don’t worry, after you leave, we’ll disinfect everything at once.”

- Yes, and special care is given to mothers of triplets, - Ri Rang took up. – They are provided with a special ward, and triplets get presents from the government: clothes, blankets and food. When they become older, they will be given cloth for wedding dresses and costumes in the future. Till they become 8 years old, a special welfare payment will be paid them. From the Leaders of the country they also get presents: boys get silver swords and girls get rings. As for upbringing... A Korean proverb says that the habit acquired at the age of 3 is preserved till the age of 80. That’s why we pay a lot of attention to the youngest ones. Crèches and kindergartens are for children aged 1 to 4. As you used to have in the USSR, there are kindergartens at mills, factories, collective farms. You saw in Sariwon, that they are set next to the premises of work, so that a mother at any moment of her break may drop in there and be sure that everything is fine with her child. If parents wish, they may send a child aged 2-4 to a free round-a-clock kindergarten, which takes care of children five days a week. Generally, such kindergartens are created for the convenience of mothers who have irregular working hours: journalists, party workers, teachers. My younger daughter went to such a kindergarten in Pyongyang.

At these words Ri Rang apparently recalled his late wife and a shade of sadness crossed his face.

- In that kindergarten there are four doctors for every 100 children. There is also a little hospital in the kindergarten itself, in case a child gets ill and has to be isolated. There's a swimming pool, different game rooms, musical instruments, a dining-room, bedrooms, bathrooms, a playground with amusements and the Room of Revolutionary Glory. In that room children, sitting on little chairs around the table with the model of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung’s house in Mangyongdae, tell revolutionary stories. In order to grow up as a real revolutionary, one has to get a proper education since early childhood.

-Yes, recalling my own Soviet childhood in the 1970s and comparing it with what I have seen in Korea, I believe now that political upbringing of my generation had started too late at the time. Until primary school we knew but little either about the political system of our country or the history of the Revolution. And about Lenin we mostly knew that he was a “grandfather.” And what did we turn out to be? The generation that had sold our native country for a bottle of Pepsi?

- You know, even more attention in Korean kindergartens is paid to imparting skills of living in a collective, skills of taking other people into account and helping them, love for one’s country and language, learning good manners and behaviour. Look at Korean children of all ages, and you practically won’t see anybody yelling loudly, or pulling at other children, or throwing something on the ground... And Korean children are not intimidated into behaving this way, they naturally behave in a very lively and spontaneous way, according to their age. This is due to the fact that they were brought up the right way since early childhood. They just have no desire to be naughty. It just doesn't appeal to them.

- I wish I could send here all the young generation of my Irish town for re-education.

- Education here is free for all the 11 years of studying (1 year of preschool preparatory education and 10 years of comprehensive schooling), and this started in 1972¹⁷⁷. Schools are set up in every place where there are children, regardless of whether there are many of them or not, even on an island where only the family of a lighthouse keeper lives.

- Is it really so? In Ireland, British authorities are going to close down many schools, including primary schools with less than 140 pupils and those secondary ones where there are less than 500 pupils! Moreover, the population of Northern Ireland is just 1.5 million people, while the population of the DPRK is 22.5 million.

- According to our Comrade Kim Il Sung, if compulsory education is not free, it will never become compulsory in practice, - Ri Rang continued. – Text-books, uniforms, various cultural outings: all these things are free in the DPRK and provided by the state. A school day usually consists of two halves: the lessons themselves and afternoon out-of-school activities (different hobby- groups, sport, music, drawing, research classes: it depends on interests and talents of the pupils). As in the former USSR, there is a well-developed system of summer camps in the DPRK - not only for pupils, but for students as well. Camps located in the mountains or on the sea coast are popular. We also have an international children's camp in Sondowon, a bit like your Artek¹⁷⁸.

- You know, Ri Rang, why I believe that the revolution of the DPRK has a solid future? Because I can see how children are being brought up here. And what kind of children are growing up here. Unlike in our country, there is no generation gap in the DPRK. It is probably so because children are being brought up in the spirit of respect for the older generation of the Revolution, which have ensured that they have such a childhood.

I recalled again a Korean book which I read every night before going to sleep. *'The collapse of the Eastern European socialist countries shows how important and serious the question of respecting revolutionary forerunners is. In the past in some socialist countries the opportunists and quack politicians who were in leading positions in the party and state tried to defile the revolutionary forerunners and denigrate their contributions. They also committed other treacherous acts, which sullied their honour and the image of socialism and eventually brought the socialist system itself to ruin. This proves that the standpoint on and attitude toward revolutionary seniors present a very important question related to the fate of revolution and the development of the socialist movement'*¹⁷⁹.

And to think of the words of Comrade Kim Jong Il that he said after the passing away of the President Kim-Il-sung, *"After President Kim Il Sung's death", - he declared to the world. - "don't expect any change from me!"*¹⁸⁰ ...

From the point of view of a man of Gorbachev's type it seems that nothing could be simpler: just start the "democratic market reforms" after the death of your predecessor - and set up accounts in Swiss banks for yourself and buy yourself a villa in French Riviera! But the Leader of Korea is neither Gorbachev nor Yeltsin. He is a true communist.

¹⁷⁷ Since 2012 it became 12 years compulsory free education

¹⁷⁸ Artek is an international Young Pioneer camp near Gurzuf, Ukraine. It was established on June 16, 1925. The camp first hosted only 80 children but then grew rapidly. In 1969 it had an area of 3.2 km². The camp consisted of 150 buildings, including three medical facilities, a school, the film studio Artekfilm, three swimming pools, a stadium with a seating capacity of 7,000, and playgrounds for various other activities. Unlike most of the young pioneer camps, Artek was an all-year camp, due to the warm climate. Artek was considered to be a privilege for Soviet children during its existence, as well as for children from other communist countries. During its heyday, 27,000 children a year vacationed at Artek. Between 1925 and 1969 the camp hosted 300,000 children including more than 13,000 children from 70 foreign countries

¹⁷⁹ Jo Song Baek. *The Leadership Philosophy of Kim Jong Il*. Pyongyang, Juche 88 (1999), p.179

¹⁸⁰ Idem, p. 184

And it's great that there are such people and there is such a country in the world, where the word "uncompromising" still means a positive human characteristic!

- My daughters will perform at the Mangyongdae School Children's Palace tomorrow. The elder will play the kayagum¹⁸¹ and the younger will dance. Take your kids with you, and let's go see the performance there!

- With pleasure!

-What's more, – Ri Rang became serious, - it's very important that children should be taught the same values at school and at home. There is nothing worse when a child is taught one thing at school while he is told another thing at home. And a little person feels confused, he turns into a cynic, he starts disbelieving people. That's why it's very important to educate entire families, too.

I recalled some of my compatriots of the same age as I: those who went to the very Soviet type of school as I did, but grew up into Khodorkovsky¹⁸² or invaders of the school in Beslan¹⁸³. So I fully agreed with him.

- You can't make miracles happen if you don't believe in miracles yourself! – Ri Rang said. And he smiled as if he was one of the greatest kind magicians in the world. – Well, we have already completed our circle around the axis.

I looked through the window. Indeed, the Tower of Juche Idea could already be seen right in front of me. The world's first monument to the ideas.

Time passed imperceptibly, and the sun was already going down. Ri Rang took my hand and decisively said:

– It's time to go to the Parade!

Perhaps, some of you have seen the fragments of festive military parades in Pyongyang on TV. But in reality it was the performance of such beauty that it took my breath away. It's no less a magnificent performance than the world famous Korean mass gymnastic games Arirang¹⁸⁴. They were not just simply soldiers marching before the tribunes – they were proud, strong soldiers who deeply loved their motherland. Like our soldiers in the parade of 1945. Like both my grandfathers; no matter that one of them didn't make it to 1945, having been killed liberating Poland in 1944.

This feeling of love for the motherland perhaps can't be seen on TV or in photographs. But here it literally floated through the air.

¹⁸¹ *Kayagum* is a traditional Korean zither-like string instrument, with 12 strings. It is probably the best known traditional Korean musical instrument

¹⁸² Mikhail Khodorkovsky (b. 1963) is a former Russian oligarch and businessman. In 2004, Khodorkovsky was the wealthiest man in [Russia](#) and one of the richest people in the world. He was a typical turncoat, working his way up the Communist apparatus during the Soviet years, and began several businesses during the era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. He is currently in prison on charges of fraud and tax evasion.

¹⁸³ The Beslan school siege (September 2004) lasted three days and involved the capture of over 1,100 people as hostages (including 777 children), ending with the death of over 380 people. The hostage taking was done by a group of armed separatist militants, mostly Ingush and Chechen, occupying School Number One in the town of Beslan, [North Ossetia](#). Shamil Basayev, the organizer of the siege, was born in 1965 and thus went to a Soviet school at approximately the same time as this book's author (born in 1967)

¹⁸⁴ The Grand Mass Gymnastics and Artistic Performance Arirang are held in the Rungrado May Day Stadium in Pyongyang, DRPK. It is an annual two-month gymnastics and artistic festival that has been held from August until October since 2002-2005, and 2007 until the present. In August 2007, the Arirang Mass Games were recognised by Guinness World Records as the biggest event of its kind.

After the parade there was a little pause: Kim Il Sung Square was rearranged for the mass dance. As Ri Rang told me, students and office workers of Pyongyang were taking part in it. And any foreigner may take part as well, if he or she wishes. There were a lot of Japanese Koreans among them; they, of course, knew quite well how to dance Korean dances. I envied them a bit, secretly.

The pause was short: we only had time to warm up our tired legs after sitting on the tribune: we had squatted there in the Korean way.

The square was overcrowded. There were women in variegated national costumes (why don't Russian women wear *sarafans* and *kokoshniks*¹⁸⁵ during our celebrations?) and men in white shirts and dark trousers, and everybody whirling in an incredible, indescribable dance: the mass of people in one breath, like a single body.

- Shall we dance? – Ri Rang suddenly asked me, playfully.

- Oh, but I don't know your national movements! I'm good only at Latin American dances... And at quadrille and Tsyganochka¹⁸⁶.

- Our movements are very simple. Look, – and Ri Rang started dancing, rhythmically moving his arms from side to side, and pulled me out into the dancing crowd. – Just do what I'm doing, and you'll be fine.

Full of fear lest I should disturb the internal harmony of this mass of dancing people with my clumsiness, I started repeating his motions. They really turned out to be more simple than it seemed from outside, and suddenly I cheered up.

- It is so splendid here! I have heard so many times in the West that you have abducted people in the past, – I whispered to Ri Rang on the move. – If it's really so, Ri Rang, why haven't you abducted me? I would have been so happy.

His hand touched my elbow during the dance, and it seemed to me that he held my elbow a bit harder than I expected.

- I think it's not too late yet, – his bronze face was absolutely imperceptible as usual, and it was unclear if he was serious or joking. – Zhenya, *step by step I feel more magnetic attraction to your sincerity*.

My heart beat so fast again that I was startled.

We were mentally connected so much that it was stunning. Nobody has ever understood me better than him, in any country, despite the unusual way in which he expressed his thoughts and feelings.

I had noticed it some time before. By the time we found ourselves in Kim Il Sung Square in that exultant crowd, that attraction had reached such a point that it seemed to me that I could see electric sparks in the air between me and him along the whole track between us. Those sparks cracked between us more and more frequently, and it seemed incredible to me that nobody had noticed anything so far.

I often pinched my own hand and asked myself if I was dreaming, as Ri Rang had still talked only about Revolution to me. But, to tell the truth, that was exactly what was so wonderful about him!

I have never experienced sensations of such strength and acuteness, even when I was in love with my imaginary Bobby and could indue him with any qualities I wanted.

¹⁸⁵ The kokoshnik is commonly used name for a variety of a traditional Russian head-dresses worn by women and girls to accompany the sarafan (traditional pinafore dress), primarily worn in the northern regions of Russia in the 16th to 19th centuries.

¹⁸⁶ Quadrille and Tsyganochka (Little Gypsy Girl dance) - popular Russian folk dances

No, no, it just cannot be, I said to myself, Zhenya, it is all your imagination. There are language and cultural differences, you have probably misunderstood him. But every time, every time I stayed alone and recalled him - somewhere on a bench waiting for Jong Ok and others - I heard his measured steps behind my back: Ri Rang hurried to talk to me. You remember Prince Andrei from *War And Peace*¹⁸⁷ making a guess that if Natasha first comes to her cousin, she will be his wife? It seemed as if he wished to lose not a single minute of precious time for us to be on our own.

When he would by accident touch me or take my hand on the dance, I had a feeling as if sparks began to dart out of my eyes. Apparently, Ri Rang himself experienced something similar, because, in his turn, he ran somewhere aside and started singing. Not loud, and in Korean, so I didn't know what it was about, but he sang with such a feeling that it sent shivers down my spine. I recalled Adriano Celentano in the film *The Taming of the Scoundrel*¹⁸⁸ who at such moments started splitting wood with his axe. But what Celentano did was comic and somewhat banal; but when I heard Ri Rang singing, my own soul just *turned inside out*, as he would say.

...Once after such a tête-à-tête, Ri Rang suddenly took the steering wheel from Gil Bo and started driving the bus by himself. He drove swift as the wind and in half an hour he drove the bus to a dead halt, of which he was greatly embarrassed. We had to alight and catch a passing car, and Gil Bo, downright angry, stayed to repair the bus. After that Ri Rang didn't look at me for the rest of the day. But what's remarkable, nobody understood what had got into him. Nobody, but me! Oh, the sweet secret...

As for me, I wanted to sing, laugh and soar in the air like a bird! I bloomed like a flower, from his every word, his every glance.

I looked at Korea and I just wanted to die of happiness - also in order not to return again to that rotten, addled, rude world of 'the golden billion.' And, at the same time, I wanted to live: because there is such a man as Ri Rang in this world, and there is this incredible, unique, amazing country. If only these *transatlantic scoundrels* would leave Korea in peace!....

I don't remember how much time we danced so. The time had just stopped for me.

But the music toned down and people started gradually going away. We strolled to the hotel, making our way through the jolly, brightly-coloured, laughing and still singing throng. On my way I thought if I would dare to tell Ri Rang what I'd like to say. Would his reaction be similar to that of Nikita Arnoldovich back in Moscow in the Perestroika time?¹⁸⁹

I hesitated. What if he didn't understand me properly? Though, when was it that he didn't understand me? Me misunderstanding him - yes, this did happen several times, but he... Sometimes it seemed to me that Ri Rang was just reading my thoughts.

- Ri Rang, if you want, you can call me with the informal "you"¹⁹⁰. If you, of course, don't think it's too familiar on my part, - I hastily added.

The expression of his face just struck me.

¹⁸⁷ *War and Peace* is a novel by the Russian author Leo Tolstoy, first published in 1869. The work is epic in scale and is regarded as one of the most important works of world literature.

¹⁸⁸ *Il Bisbetico Domato* (1980) - Italian romantic comedy film with Adriano Celentano and Ornella Muti

¹⁸⁹ Refers to an event in Part 1 of "Soviética"

¹⁹⁰ In both Russian and Korean, just like in French, there is a more formal and a less formal addressing in 'you' which does not exist in English

- Thank you, thank you so much, Zhenya. I really hoped you would say this. You are like a bright spark in our big revolutionary bonfire.

Confused and suddenly shy, I kept silence, and we just walked on and on. And I wished that this road would have no end.

-Zhenya... I will not ask you where you're going or why. I just want to know what has made you take this decision, - said Ri Rang to me already near the door of our hotel.

I thought for a second: how best to express it in words.

- Because I can no longer sit and watch without any action how our planet is being taken over by the scab.

- The scab?

- Well, that is a contagious disease in plants. In our garden back at home we had some pear trees. At first, just one tree's leaves became covered with black spots, but none of us paid any attention to it. A year later, all the pears on it were already covered with these black spots, and they became uneatable. One of the neighbours told us, "That's not a big deal, you still have another pear tree, behind the house." Indeed, the disease has not yet spread to that one. "No," - said my grandfather - "If we do nothing now, then the next year the healthy tree is going to become ill too."... Do you understand, Ri Rang?

He nodded:

- I understand.

- The matter is not only that I want to feel useful, to help people who do need my help. For that I could just have become a nurse at a hospital. The matter is that the time has come to put the scab that has captured our gardens, back in its place. The time has come to get back the control of our gardens from it. Step by step. You may ask, why don't I do it at home then? It's a very painful question for me but still I will answer to you. I wouldn't want anything more than that in my entire life! But lots of people back at home are still in the condition of hibernation: it's easier so for them because it's too scary to wake up. Dreaming, you see, can be something pleasant. But the youth now are starting awakening. They are becoming interested in our history, real, not the one written in the Soros-sponsored textbooks. They start asking questions, they start thinking. Thank God, they stop believing that the West is Heaven on Earth, and that 'market democracy' is the panacea from all the troubles. We need time for this. If you shake awake a person who is deeply sleeping and say to him that he ought to do this and that, even if you are absolutely right, do you know, where he, half-awake, will send you to? Let him wake up first, look around and only after that start working out a plan of combined operations. But do I really have to sit idly by that time, when I myself have already awoken? Or shall I help those who lead a fierce battle for their own garden, slowly winning it back from parasites? Do you remember Lenin's doctrine about a weak link in the chain of imperialism? My country was such a weak link in 1917, but nowadays other countries have become such links. To help their people to break this chain, even if your help seems to you insignificant, is a sacred case.

By this time we were already going up to my hotel floor, not having waited for the lift. Ri Rang smiled.

- Remember, in a Russian fairy-tale a family needed the help of a mouse in order to pull the turnip out? Everything was in vain without that mouse.

- Well, if you wish, you may think that I'm that mouse. But the main thing is not to sit twiddling my paws. Well, my fingers, I mean. I'll certainly come back home to sort it out, don't you worry!

When I said this, I could see that Ri Rang turned somehow sad.

- Did I say something wrong? – I became anxious.

- No, it's all right, Zhenya, it's absolutely all right. You are not that mouse from the fairy-tale at all. You're Elena from Turgenev's novel *On the Eve*¹⁹¹.

But the expression of his face remained sad. I felt like saying something nice to him.

- Ri Rang, but if only your country needed me, ever, I would... Since you have recalled Elena Stakhova.

He didn't let me finish.

- Zhenya, oh, you *my spring swallow!*- he said so touchingly. He shook my hand heartily and, lingering for a couple of seconds, ran down the hotel stairs.

Ri Rang was gone, but I couldn't calm down for a long time. That was because of his "swallow" as well. Ri Rang, without knowing it, touched a very perceptible string in my heart. What would happen when my mission in Curaçao came to an end?

...I knew only one thing now: that the Irish saga in my life had come to an end. Violet, the veteran-guerilla, once said that "satisfaction must be found in finding the way to withstand what surrounds us, wherever it is." She was right, under the condition that you don't feel betrayed by those whom you thought were your comrades.

Strictly speaking, it wasn't a betrayal as such. I just took them not for those whom they turned out to be. Almost as I did with Said once. Somebody said that a Russian woman will always find a trap to fall into it again.

They betrayed not me: it was the betrayal of their own ideas for the sake of *American investments*. But in my opinion, the betrayal of ideals could be somehow understood, somehow justified but it could never be forgiven. It's the same as the betrayal of a human being, of your comrade.

However, when Dermot asked for my help, I was puzzled. Maybe they were really just pretending drummers^{192?}

I was lost in conjectures. But I had neither time, nor opportunity, nor the wish to interrogate him. In such conversations Dermot was like a slippery and twisting sea-eel. I felt that, anyway, he wouldn't tell me all the truth. They don't tell the truth to anybody, whether they be presidents, prime-ministers, or even their own electorate.

After all, did I really need that truth? I knew the part of the garden that had been picked out for me. The part that I was trusted to protect. And I knew that if something happened to me, they wouldn't

¹⁹¹ *On the Eve* (1860) is the third novel by famous Russian writer Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883). The story revolves around Elena, a Russian noble girl. On the eve of the Crimean War, Elena is pursued by a free-spirited sculptor (Shubin) and an uptight student (Berzeniev). But when Berzeniev's dashing Bulgarian friend Insarov meets Elena, they soon fall in love. Secretly marrying the Bulgarian revolutionary, Elena invites the ire of her parents, who had hoped to marry her to a more respectable suitor. Insarov falls ill, but partly recovers. On the outbreak of the war, Insarov's call home only complicates matters further. Insarov returns with Elena to Bulgaria, but dies on the way in Venice. Elena continues to fight for his cause in his home country.

¹⁹² Reference to *The Drummer Girl* (1959) - Soviet theatre play by A. Salynsky about a clandestine resistance fighter during the WWII.

leave me in the lurch. Wasn't that true comradeship? Just as they hadn't left Fionntan alone in the jungle....

By that time he had already come back to Ireland – actually, in secret, because the hot Latin American court had sentenced him and his comrades to 20 years of imprisonment, without any additional proof.

(Latin American courts remind me of Unionists with their suspiciousness: '*We believe that this z-z-z is not by chance*'¹⁹³. But the Irish who had been released on bail after the first stage of the trial, simply disappeared. They materialized only back at home. And they did the right thing.)

Before I had left, I persuaded Dermot to let me see Fionntan, although Dermot objected and said that it might attract additional attention to me. But I told him that those people would have been much more surprised if I suddenly decided not to meet Fionntan, especially taking into account the level of my friendship with him.

Nearly at the same time the farmer Frank suddenly died. About a year before that I had seriously squabbled with him because of some non-political stuff which was not worth a two-pence. I often imagined how we would reconcile. I thought I had lot of time on hand. I didn't know that he would die!

Frank died in Portugal. He had never in his life gone for a holiday abroad. But that summer he suddenly made up his mind to go. Maybe his new girlfriend, a wealthy widow, had persuaded him. He felt sick already in Dublin airport. But with stubbornness peculiar to him, he decided to fly anyway. He wasn't used to heat and in hot Lisbon he was taken into intensive care straight from the plane's gangway. It was a heart attack. When I learnt about it, accidentally reading it in the Internet, I felt awful. I closed my eyes and saw Frank as if he was alive, and it seemed that I heard again his '*Wait till I tell you, Missus!*'...

The awful injustice is that he died when he was just 60, he died and he would never see the United Ireland which he had devoted all his life to. It *ate my heart away*. It's strange, but it was his death that brought me back, as Ri Rang would say, *to the embraces of the party*, though the party itself never knew it. I just remembered Frank castigating his party comrades for their opportunism – with all his might – but he never even thought of leaving their rows. It means that he continued to think of them as his comrades! And in the memory of him I continued to consider them to be my comrades too. Though biting my lip.

Fionntan had already known about Frank's death and was just as upset as I was. He lost weight and became older during the years that I hadn't seen him. My heart just sank when I saw how he looked. Though he had been helped to get out of his trouble, he was removed from all the tasks. He didn't give political education to the party's youth any more – all he was left to do, was to write his memoirs. In one moment he and Violet turned into dismissed honorary veterans of the national liberation movement.

We hugged in silence. I didn't want to ask him what he had been doing in the jungle and I couldn't tell him that soon I was going to almost the same place. I recalled old Tom with his drunken dramatic "*It*

¹⁹³ From the Russian version of Winnie The Pooh (cartoon); the expression refers to a person who is looking for something suspicious in everything.

is me who should have been in his place!” with which he tried to make an impression on me when Fionntan was languishing in torture-chambers of “*the best friend of the American elephant*¹⁹⁴”. Well, really,— “just get drunk – and you will be there!”

- Are you leaving, Zhenya? – asked Fionntan.
- Yes, I am.
- For good?
- We’ll see how it will turn out.

We went silent again.

- Well, I ought to come back again! – I tried to relieve the tension. – You haven’t said to me yet how to solve the main question: what to do with the community which doesn’t want “to be empowered”? What to do with people who don’t want to decide their fate themselves? Who do not want to live and work for the common good? What to do with people who don’t give a damn?
- If I knew, - Fionntan laughed, - I could be given the Nobel Prize.
- You are not right here, – I objected, - because it’s given only to pro-Western scoundrels who make the world “peaceful” on Western terms and conditions.
- Let’s better have tea.

We were sitting in the pub *Buck’s Head*. I couldn’t force myself to say to him what I was thinking of the modern party policy and what kind of a consumer deadlock we had reached under its ‘delicate’ guidance. It would have been abusive for him, even if he had agreed with me at heart. And it would mean that he had lived his life in vain. But Fionntan, he certainly had lived his life not in vain! That’s why I kept my thoughts to myself.

If I didn’t return to Ireland, I would never see Fionntan any more. He couldn’t leave Ireland now: in any other country he could be arrested and extradited to Latin America. But to think of returning to Ireland at that stage of my life was too much for me. Maybe, it would pass, if I had a little respite from it?

- Do people recognize you on the streets? – I asked Fionntan.
- Yes, sometimes.
- And... how do they react?
- They haven’t been hostile to me yet. Sometimes they come up to me and shake my hand.

The same way now I wished to shake Joe Dresnok¹⁹⁵’s hand in Korea.

¹⁹⁴ Soviet political joke: when French published a book about an elephant, it was called “Elephant and Women”, when Americans published such a book, it was called “Elephant and Business”, when Bulgarians did the same, they called it “Bulgarian Elephant is the best friend of the Soviet Elephant.” Refers to close relations between the two countries. County in question that is meant here, is Colombia, known for its ties with the US.

¹⁹⁵ James Joseph Dresnok (born 1941) is an American defector to North Korea, one of six American soldiers to defect after the Korean War. Dresnok worked as an actor and an English teacher in Pyongyang. He was featured on the CBS magazine program *60 Minutes* on January 28, 2007, as the last United States defector alive in North Korea, and was the subject of a documentary film entitled *Crossing the Line*. Unlike other Americans, he settled well in the DPRK and stresses, for example, that he is happy his son born in the DPRK, is able to attend university: something he could never afford in the US.

- I don't have time now to go to Frank's grave before I'll leave, – I said to Fionntan. – Will you bring a bunch of flowers from me for him?

I was leaving Ireland not in search of a better life, but in search of comrades-in-arms. That's what I lacked there for happiness. True comrades. And not only some heroic individuals.

The thought of Fionntan and Frank haunted me the next day, when Ri Rang and Jong Ok drove me and the kids to the Schoolchildren Palace in Mangyongdae. The famous Children's Palace in Mangyongdae (we used to call it the Pioneer Palace) is really a palace, in the full sense of the word! In front of its entrance stands the Flower Cart of Happiness - a bronze sculpture, representing the happy childhood of Korean kids. Two horses are yoked in the cart, which only kings could afford previously, carrying eleven children, symbolizing (everything symbolizes something in Korea, nothing is done without purpose there) the eleven years of education, compulsory for everyone. A huge indoor swimming pool adjoins the main building. The palace consists of six eight-storey buildings with hundreds of rooms for practising very different and extremely interesting activities, ranging from playing national musical instruments, such as kayagum, to artistic embroidery and taekwondo. There is also an auditorium for 2,000 people, an ice-skating rink and even a track for driving lessons. 5,000 children visit the palace every day, and 500 teachers teach them. All the courses are free of charge and available for everyone interested.

We walked through the rooms, admiring the talents and industry of Korean kids. Later they performed an incredible concert for us which is difficult to describe in words.

Everybody knows that Koreans readily show visiting foreigners how talented, artistic and athletic their children are. It is almost impossible to visit this country without being at this or that kids' concert. "Well, it is possible only in the capital, of course! They choose the most talented and create the right conditions for them!" – say cynical foreigners, irritated with the easiness with which the children of this small and supposedly "poor" country recite poems, dance, sing, play musical instruments, draw and do acrobatics at the age at which their own, "civilized" children still wear nappies, have dummies in their mouths and only start to speak (I'm not exaggerating, it is really so!)

But the cynical foreigners are wrong. You will see the same bright and diverse programs in the countryside kindergartens of Korea, as in the capital. And the countryside kids have no disadvantages in development in comparison with those from the capital! Most surprising for the Western guests is that they teach children *to trust people* in Korea. In the West, it has become dangerous for children to even play in the streets, not to mention trust strangers. Kids aren't even supposed to sit in Santa Claus' lap on Christmas holidays, for Santa may well be a disguised paedophile. The picture of this modern civilization is very miserable, while USA & Co try to "unite" Korea with it.

If anyone still remembers, we used to have a children's part included in every spectacular show during the Soviet time too. Pioneers with bows read poems ("literary montage"), sang together and danced. But we only had it as a part of the show, not as the whole concert. And our children looked like sweet amateurs (except for very professional pioneer choirs, which were many, though), while the Korean kids appeared to be really advanced professionals, every single one of them who performed, and in every possible genre.

I saw the pride in the face of Ri Rang, when Hye Sun appeared on the stage among the kayagum orchestra, and her inspiration when she struck the strings. And when little Myong Hui wearing a red dress and carrying a jug on her head ran out on the stage to dance, I felt tears rolling in my eyes. She reminded me of my Lisa: the way she used to be before that bloody illness that ruined her life!

Foreign guests gazed at the stage for the whole 1.5 hours, without looking away: so high was the artistic level of the Korean schoolchildren, most of whom were younger than 8 or 9. When the kids came back for the bow, and the huge portrait of Comrade Kim Jong Il, surrounded with flowers and looking as natural as if it was he himself in front of us, suddenly appeared behind them, I saw a lady from a group of Westerners suddenly applaud energetically. She stayed in our hotel, and just the day before expressed her boredom with “all this talk about the Loved Leader.” But now there were tears in her eyes. Here you go, one more person is “hooked on North-Korean propaganda”! – smiled I. And my Che suddenly stood up and yelled in English

- The Leader! It is the Leader!

And the whole audience began to applaud even louder: this time also to him!

During my stay in the DPRK I visited several public schools, conservatories, different libraries, including the People's Palace of Culture¹⁹⁶ and the new, recently opened electronic library where I was shown a computer operating system created by Korean programmers, which is used there as often as Microsoft Windows. It is called The Red Star. All the main academic institutions and libraries are connected with intranet. We happened to visit a class of Russian language in one of the linguaphone rooms of the library of the People's Palace, where unexpectedly I heard a compliment to Russian women in Russian from one of the Korean students: “*Russian girls are very beautiful.*”

The People's Palace is not just a library. You can also attend various video-lectures in a study room specially equipped with television sets. Also a big group of translators and interpreters work in the Palace, and there is a big collection of audio records from different countries as well. And the usage of all these cultural treasures is also free of charge for every citizen of the DPRK. Many people here continue to study during their whole life at the evening or correspondence courses.

There was only one place in Korea I didn't want to see: that was the Kaesong “free trade” Industrial Zone.

- So, you *don't want to go there out of hand?* - asked me Ri Ran before the tour. Dónal just dreamed of going there. It was he who insisted on our trip to that bloody place.

- *Just out of hand and out of my very heart!* - I said.

I tried to be strong, but when we entered this industrial monster, I felt really awful. There was no sign of any kindergartens near the mothers' place of work, and it was forbidden to take photos in the sections. It was the South Koreans who banned it, because they were the managers there. And when I saw the advertisement attached to the wall – with the slogan of the firm invading this peaceful country - “*Opening the way*” (in English!!!), I felt such fury that I said to myself that I wouldn't go to their presentations even if they try to force me. I fell into a “*coca-cola*” mood, as I call it. I cannot be excited about how good it is “to open the ways.” Because we know very well for whom exactly it is good!

But you cannot refuse anything right away in Korea: you may insult your hosts. And I used the method that Koreans themselves prefer to use in situations like this: I pretended to feel unwell. And actually, I really did.

South Korean managers were running around me and squealed in their masters' language:

¹⁹⁶ People's Palace of Culture is the most important library and public studies place in the DPRK. Located on the Pothong River this is a conference facility with 60,000 square metres of floor space and some five hundred (500) rooms, including a 3,000 seat conference hall and a 1,000 seat banquet room. This facility has numerous socialist-themed art and hosts concerts and dance troupes.

- Would you like some water?

And I pretended that I didn't speak English. After all, we were not in the USA, nor in Canada or Britain, not even in Tbilisi of Saakashvili¹⁹⁷ epoch, damn it!

They brought me iced coffee, but I didn't drink it. "Not a single drop of water in the enemy's house", just as the Count Monte Cristo used to say¹⁹⁸!

- Well, did they say whether you should bring your own Mickey Mouse along or the trade union will supply one?¹⁹⁹ – I asked Ri Rang angrily when our small group returned back to the bus.

Ri Rang started laughing and so heartily that he almost fell on the floor.

- Oh Zhenya! – he had tears from laughter, – *where have you landed from, such a sweet darling?*

- I don't think it funny at all, – I said. – That's how it all starts. Don't you see it? I realize that your country needs money, but don't make me see this pornography.

Ri Rang became serious. He sat down by my side and took my hand.

- Zhenya, believe me, my dear comrade, we'll never let them do what they want here. We have everything under our strict control, – and all the way back to Pyongyang he was describing to me the details: when they were going to introduce the union control there and what will be done with the money from this area, and so on. – Look, it's like a reservation here. And they won't come out of this reservation. Let them dream if they want, with all their slogans. We know it better anyway...

He was so convinced in what he was saying and he used such strong arguments that by the time we were near Pyongyang, I started to believe him, almost 100%.

There were only three weeks left before my departure, and I still didn't know who my companion was going to be. I was nervous. What if we don't get on well?

Hilda, who didn't know herself who it was going to be (Dónal went to Beijing at the time to find this out), presented me with a book about Koreans, just to make me feel better.

The book was about the differences in Korean and American cultures. It was actually about the South Koreans, but Hilda said that the Koreans were still one nation indeed. Many norms, habits and traditions were still the same in both countries.

The more I was reading this book, the more I realized that in spite of all the differences we had more things in common with the Koreans than with the Americans. Even with Southern ones! And Americans now appeared to be a *dead-end branch of human development*. And it would be so great if they didn't destroy the rest of humanity along with them!

Soon the kids and I moved from the hotel into a flat: a vast flat, filled with sunlight. It was on the 20th floor. I imagined going up with the kids during a blackout and felt disturbed a little. After the childbirth I had become quite plump and it annoyed me a lot. Although I had never been really slim,

¹⁹⁷ Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili (b. 1968) is known for his particular love of America and hostile policy towards Russia. Tbilisi is the capital city of Georgia.

¹⁹⁸ The Count Monte Cristo - main character of the French adventure novel by Alexandre Dumas (1844) who is taking revenge on his enemies. The book is considered a literary classic today.

¹⁹⁹ Reference to a Soviet political joke, ending with: "Shall we bring our own rope or will the trade union supply it?"

according to the Western beauty standards, and never bothered to be like this, by now I had got really heavy, and it was physically inconvenient. However, I couldn't lose weight however I tried.

-“*Russia that we had lost*²⁰⁰”! – I joked to Ri Rang once, showing him my photograph of just five years ago.

- Well, what's the problem? *We can find it again*, – answered he seriously.

Since then Ri Rang picked me up every morning to go jogging in the park. Soon I lost ten kilos at least due to my trainings with him. I thought that it was not only because of the physical exercises, but also because I subconsciously wanted to make an impression upon this inscrutable Korean man.

The passing people looked back at us for we were rather an unexpected combination.

Having been running for an hour we usually began to walk and in some 15 minutes sat down on the bank of the pond to rest. Ri Rang squatted in the Korean way²⁰¹. At first I was shy to follow his example but later I started to sit like that myself.

That morning we were squatting as usual, and the branches of weeping willows were hanging around us almost touching the ground.

- Every Sunday I spend time with my daughters *in different cultural-emotional activities, according to our Family Recreation Plan*, – said Ri Rang. – But I haven't been to visit Mangyongdae for a long time.

According to my book about Koreans it meant: why don't we go there?

- When? - asked I.

-When what?

-When would you like to go there?

He laughed at my shrewdness.

-Why not today? At half-past-four, if you don't have classes of course. Classes are of primary importance.

The day passed easily: we had been to a shooting gallery, then Ri Rang showed me some very basics of taekwondo, then came dinner, then the tour of the captured American spy ship “Pueblo”²⁰². Finally it was time to go to Mangyongdae.

After one more time going around the small house of comrade Kim Il Sung which was drowning, not in blossoms as it was in April, but in the green leaves of the trees, Ri Rang turned to Jong Ok and said something to her. She turned around and headed for the bus.

- Lets go to up to the pavilion, Zhenya, and Jong Ok will wait for us in the bus. Let her wait: she needs to relax. She's expecting, if you didn't know.

²⁰⁰ See previous reference in chapter 21

²⁰¹ Koreans often sit on the streets in a squatting position

²⁰² US spy ship “Pueblo” was arrested in the DPRK waters by Korean navy in January 1968. it was a major incident in the Cold War. *Pueblo* is still held by the DPRK today. It is currently moored along the Taedong River in Pyongyang, where it is used as a museum ship. It is the only ship of the U.S. Navy currently being held captive.

I was not surprised (Jong Ok had been married for more than a year) and I slightly envied her, but in a good way. I, with my kindergarten at home and at my age, wouldn't even dream of things like that.

We reached a small pavilion on top of the hill rather quickly. The city and its outskirts had a wonderful outlook from that point (ten scenic views of Hwachon included the landscape of Mangyongdae in spring, a night view of three islets lit by the moon, fish-catching in Pongpho, cows grazing on U Hill, smoke curling up from chimneys in Kwangchon village, sailing boats in Sokho, the green foliage of Mt. Yang, the red cliff of Mt. Wonam, a view of sowing seeds in Chugyo and a view of seeing guests off at the Tongrim Ferry - at least, the legend says so)...

I was sure that Ri Rang was leading me to that pavilion, but instead he headed for a small balcony under its top, which was almost absolutely hidden from the outer world by the pine grove. Bewildered, I followed him. What was he going to see from there? Which "scenic views"?

-What a nice place, - I said, not without irony, rubbing the scratch on my forehead where a pine branch had brushed me. Ri Rang kept silent. I wanted to add "The Great Leader knew where to be born", but I was afraid to say something wrong, something that might hurt his feelings. These words would mean the approval of the place for us, but Koreans are very sensitive and who knows how he would understand me.

I noticed a chipmunk jumping along the tree trunk. Ri Rang didn't notice my irony.

- Shall we stand here for a while? - asked Ri Rang.

- OK, - I agreed although I still couldn't see why we had to stay there instead of standing in the pavilion itself. And the view from there was much more spectacular.

There, in the shade, nobody could see us and we could see almost nothing. The pine-trees, heated in the sun during the day, bent their branches low above us: so low actually that we had a difficulty edging beneath them, - and they emitted a pleasant smell.

The silence lasted too long. I started to feel awkward. This wasn't at all like Ri Rang, who was a keen talker usually. I could see that something excited and embarrassed him at the same time, but I couldn't get exactly what it was. When our sleeves touched accidentally, Ri Rang almost jumped - only the stone ceiling above us restricted him - and said quickly:

- Do you like it here, with us, in Korea?

- Very much, - I said sincerely

- Do you think you could live here?

- Of course! What a question! Only no one had offered it to me yet, - joked I.

- Let us wait till the moon rises, - said Ri Rang

I didn't mind, even though I wanted to ask him what was going on. It was becoming twilight, and we stood there, in some thicket, nobody knows what for. And what was the matter with the moon? Mosquitoes would attack us any moment now...

A pale moon appeared unexpectedly in the sky. We could hardly see it through the thick of branches. And just as unexpectedly Ri Rang took my hand inside his hands, paused, and then said in his smooth warm voice:

- Look, Zhenya, Zhenechka and in some ways perhaps, even Katyusha²⁰³. We both have common thoughts and the common way²⁰⁴. *Come on then, marry me!*

The soil of the sacred hill of Mangyongdae quivered under my feet...

- But I don't even know how to make kimchi! – I protested weakly.

He took my hand into his once again, looked at me tenderly and said seriously and reassuring:

- *We'll teach you!*

Chapter 23. The Last Briefing

"They say that every person has his or her views and tastes. Thus, one has one's own view on woman's beauty. It is not accidentally that people reason: "She is as beautiful inside as outside", "It is not her face that we like but her work", "She is more attractive by her knowledge than by her appearance" etc. And I believe that the real beauty of a woman is in her ideas and her spirit."

(The head of Women's Department of the Association of Koreans in China)

"I will never be able to put down my class weapon, so don't even think about my demobilization. And you, being my wife, should go with me."

(Choe In Su "Kim Jong Il, The People's Leader" v.2, p.301²⁰⁵)

- Oh! – it was the only thing I was able to say.

- *Oh yes or oh no?* – Ri Rang wanted to clarify.

- Maybe you just feel sorry for me? – I asked, still unable to believe what I've just heard.

- *People "tow"²⁰⁶ somebody they feel sorry for, not propose to them...* – Ri Rang was offended. – Do you think I would take you to such a place just for a joke?

I looked around once more. No, it was definitely *not a place where you would take someone for a joke...*

- So, do you really... – I couldn't finish because of the lump in my throat. It was just like in Korean magazines. I had never experienced what it was like to have a lump in my throat.

- Yes, of course, *really very much so*, – confirmed Ri Rang. – So, have you decided? If I have to wait, I will.

Instead of answering, I took his hand. And I felt how in the very tips of his swarthy fingers his heartbeat pulsated.

²⁰³ *Zhenya, Zhenechka, and "Katyusha"* (1967) (*Женя, Женечка и "Катюша"*), a Soviet romantic comedy/drama set in 1944, during the war. "Katyusha" - multiple rocket launcher, a type of [rocket artillery](#) first built and fielded by the [Soviet Union](#) in [World War II](#).

²⁰⁴ Korean proverb

²⁰⁵ The quote is given from the Russian language edition of the book, in reverse translation

²⁰⁶ "Tow" in Russian means giving help, support (for example, a good pupil can "tow" somebody in maths). Zhenya and Ri Rang speak in Russian to each other.

- Well, I guess, it's "oh yes", then... – my voice was hardly audible, and I felt as if my own heart was about to jump out of my chest and to roll down the slope, covered with cicadas in the twilight, like a ball.

The other hand of Ri Rang reached for my waist softly and quietly. At that moment I felt I wouldn't like to leave this magical thicket of pine trees at all.

A distant voice shouted something in Korean language. Time to go? It was, of course, just my guess that the voice in question shouted this.

Ri Rang pulled his hand away at once, but his face was glowing.

- I did it, – he said. – I was afraid that I wouldn't dare to ask you before we have to go back.

I walked as if on air when we were going back to the bus.

- Did anything happen? – asked Jong Ok when she saw me. And Ri Rang was just radiating happiness all over. I was even scared to look at him: I was sure that it was so obvious to anyone that something had happened between us. Our bus driver Gil Bo obviously knew about Ri Rang's plan and smiled understandingly. But Jong Ok didn't get it yet.

- Have you sprained your ankle? – she continued to worry.

Did I really look so miserable? For there was *a symphony* sounding in my soul at that moment! I helplessly looked at Ri Rang: come on, tell her something!

He caught my look, smiled even brighter and said something to Jong Ok.

- What did you say to her? – I whispered, watching how Jong Ok sat on her seat and calmed down, smiling.

- I said that you've been scared by a chipmunk! – Ri Rang whispered right into my ear, touching my temple with his hot lips.

And I suddenly wished that everyone else in the world would disappear, except me and him! Not for long, just for a couple of minutes...

...The next few days went like in a dream. It couldn't be happening in reality! I had often heard from foreign comrades that Koreans were not allowed to marry foreigners...

- Every rule has its own exception, – Ri Rang said, smiling mysteriously. – Yes, it is not our custom, just like it wasn't yours during the Soviet time. Remember? Foreigners have different culture, different traditions, and it is not easy to live with a foreigner as it is with one of your own. And we, Koreans, too, do not get married if we think "Big deal! We'll divorce if it doesn't work out." We're serious about it. And in such a case, we need permission. But it doesn't mean that such marriages are forbidden.

- And you think you would be able to get permission?

- Yes, I do. You see, it is not only about me (although my service record is long enough), but about you as well. And you are a worthy comrade. That's important.

- Are you sure? We haven't fought together at the same front yet, I think. I haven't even been able yet to demonstrate my abilities properly...

- Don't be too humble! The Irish comrades've told us all about you.

Anything to make it tougher! What did they tell him, I wonder? I knew all too well how the Irish could tales? They are like Bulychev²⁰⁷'s characters: one should “*divide by ten whatever they say*”²⁰⁸.” But I didn't dare to ask him.

I wouldn't say that I didn't hesitate at all. On the one hand, it was doubtless that I had the most tender feelings for Ri Rang. If I were 20, I would jump into such a marriage headlong without much thinking it over. However, having gained some experience by now, I still worried a bit: sure, we have the same ideals, but our cultures are so different... Could we be happy considering these factors? I couldn't help revealing these thoughts to Ri Rang.

- You know, if we were to decide only for ourselves... but we both have children... I'm not sure if I would be able to, not being a Korean...

- Zhenya, do you think I haven't thought about it before opening my heart to you? – he said softly.

- But I don't even know all your traditions, habits, rituals, not even the language. You know much more about our traditions than I know about yours. It is embarrassing.

- Learning a language is only a matter of time, especially for you. As for traditions: well, it is natural for a human being to learn something new and unknown every day. Don't worry, nobody's going to expect that you would automatically know the tradition of the New Year's bow²⁰⁹. Or that you know how to use the Korean Swing. People learn these things gradually.

- But have you ever thought that I must leave soon? And probably for a long time?

- It's not a big deal. Wives of our patriots, long term imprisoned in South Korean prisons had been waiting for them for 30 years and even more.

“Bite your tongue!” – I couldn't help exclaiming, at least in my thoughts.

- What matters is that you want to come back here to me, *my swallow*. And I'll wait for you. I am very patient.

And so, I surrendered. How could I resist such persuasion?

Having lived here for only about six months, I thought that I probably still didn't know enough about this country. Perhaps, I idealized many things. But I was sure about one thing: I was not going to be disappointed in it. Because no matter how hard life could be economically or in any other way, there is one most important thing here: people here *live like humans*. They live worthy lives. They help each other, take care of each other, and support each other. It is not like the “free world”, where life resembles a jungle, where despite having every newest gadget, everyone is interested only in his own survival and cares only about himself. I think such life is unworthy of human beings in the 21st century, and to hell with those “civilized two-legged creatures”, their gadgets and bank accounts.

(By the way, Ri Rang wasn't joking: they *did teach me* to make kimchi. His mother and sisters did.)

By the end of the week, Mum and Lisa arrived in Korea. Jong Ok and I went to meet them at the Pyongyang airport. This airport is small and kind of cozy, somewhat like the airport in our town used

²⁰⁷ Kir Bulychev (1934 – 2003) was a pen name of Igor Vsevolodovich Mojeiko, a Soviet Russian science fiction writer and historian. His magnum opus is a children's science fiction series *Alisa Selezneva*, although most of his books are adult-oriented.

²⁰⁸ Quote from Bulychev's book *Alisa's Birthday* (1974)

²⁰⁹ New Year's Bowing Ceremony: celebrating Korean New Year, children wish their elders (grandparents, aunts and uncles, parents) a happy new year by performing one deep traditional bow.

to be in its best days (in Soviet times it was buzzing, you could fly from there to half of the country, but nowadays there are no flights at all to our town, and the airport is closed).

I felt really nervous. Those of you who remember Mum's personality ("*That's my nature, dear fellow, I will stand no trifles indeed*"²¹⁰) – was one of her favourite songs) and our previous debates, would easily understand why I had decided to break the news to her only after I see which reaction she'll have about the country itself. Knowing her critical attitude, I should have been ready for anything.

Mum came out of the doors of the airport, having lost a lot of weight and still looking very pretty despite her age. She was holding Lisa's hand. Lisa was the same height as my mother already: time flies! She recognized me at once, although she hadn't seen me for half a year, and smiled happily. And Mum looked around, took a deep breath of fresh Korean air and said:

- Oh, it is so good here! It's even hard to believe.

And I relaxed at once..

Of course, Mum was still her usual self - later she told me off in the apartment: the floor we lived on was too high, she didn't know how the heating worked here (Korean flats also have *ondol-flooring*²¹¹) and she didn't sleep on a mat since my childhood when Tamarochka stayed with us for New Year's night...

But I was already eager to share my joy with her.

- Mum, – I paused for a moment. – I have been proposed to.

- *Again?* – said Mum dryly. – And who is this dare-devil?

- I'll soon introduce him to you.

Mum measured me with her eye from head to toe.

- He's a Korean, I bet?

- Yes, Mum.

- So... Well, we didn't have any Koreans in our family yet, *by the way*²¹²...

- And he didn't have any Russians in his family either.

- That means, the score is 1-1.

²¹⁰ Katya's Song from the Soviet film *Girl with a Character* (text by Ye.Dolmatovsky) (1939):

I have packed my things for travel o'er the country far and wide,
Dozens of roads ahead unravel, trains race by from every side.
Vast expanses are my challenge, nothing can my course impede,
That's my nature, dear fellow, I will stand no trifles indeed.
I have said good-bye to noone and come out of the door,
Wind of roaming ruffles my hair, calls me vastness to explore.
It'll be hard to seek me out, so give in and just accede.
That's my nature, dear fellow, I will stand no trifles indeed.
If I go off on a journey, it'll be hard to foll'w my trace,
I can trav'l the world around at a light and easy pace.
I advise you to keep out of mischief if you choose to follow my lead
You may think me rash and wayward, but I stand no trifles indeed.

²¹¹ Ondol, in Korean traditional architecture, is underfloor heating which uses direct heat transfer from wood smoke to the underside of a thick masonry floor. In modern usage it refers to any type of underfloor heating, or a hotel or sleeping room in Korean (as opposed to Western) style.

²¹² See page 61

The doorbell rang.

- "*There he comes, postman smart of my native Leningrad*"²¹³! – said Mum confidently – Well, what are you waiting for? Go open the door!

It was really Ri Rang standing at the door. He was in his uniform. And with a bunch of flowers.

- Dear mother-in-law! – he started in Russian.

-Have you heard this! Mother-in-law already! – Mum was surprised – And he speaks Russian too... Look at him!

-*Foreign language is a weapon in the struggle of life!*²¹⁴ – said Ri Rang without any accent. Mum grabbed her chest, and he went on:

- My name is Song Ri Rang, I have proposed to your daughter and she agreed. Now if our authorities agree as well, we'll be relatives soon...

- Well, I'll be...! – said Mum – You already need an authorities' approval in order to become my relative...

Very soon she came to love Ri Rang almost more than I did. You just cannot dislike him if you get to know him properly.

By the evening, when the children fell asleep and I managed to make Mum tipsy with *the Adder Liqueur* which is 60% percent alcohol (Ri Rang had taken out the snake the previous day- especially for Mum to be able to drink it. He didn't drink alcohol at all), the three of us came out to sit on the enormous balcony. Back in my childhood I could only dream of one like this.

Huge, red and still summer-hot, the sun came down to the horizon. On top of the building a pigeon fancier launched his birds.

Ri Rang and Mum already talked to each other like old friends (I think it was due to the liqueur, but Mum's heart melted down completely when I told her that Ri Rang kept deep inside of his soul the fondest memories of our book *Timur and His Squad*²¹⁵ which he had read when he was a child). He even showed her how the *ondol* flooring worked.

- Tell me about the Soviet Union. What was your life like in your childhood, in your adolescence? - Ri Rang suddenly asked my mother.

- Really, please, do, - I supported him - Grandma's never talked much about her youth because "who would be interested in it?" And now she's gone, and we would never know so many things about her life. And it's so important to know about that time, even the smallest details! Every word you say is a historical source, Mum!

- Oh guys, come on... What kind of a narrator am I?

But we didn't give up, and finally we persuaded her.

- Well, I really don't know what to start with, - my mother said hesitatingly, - Maybe with 1964? At that time I just finished school and was taking entrance exams to our Polytechnic Institute. In 1964, when they decided to dispose of Khrushchev, they first of all designed to show the people that he couldn't rule the country. (Well, actually, it really was so - he made so many stupid decisions in his

²¹³ Children's verse "Post" by Samuil Marshak

²¹⁴ Quote from Karl Marx

²¹⁵ See one of the previous notes. Famous Soviet children's book by Arkady Gaidar (1940)

few years in power!). All the food down to bread and milk was withdrawn. Bread was brought to people's homes according to the list. That was the only time in my memory. As you know, Khrushchev was successfully removed in October 1964. And immediately everything appeared again in the stores. By the time you were born, it was almost true communism; there was an amazing abundance and variety of products, and everything was natural. And it lasted until the Olympics in 1980. Everything else you, Zhenya, should remember yourself. Of course, I forgot the exact prices for some foodstuffs, but the "city roll" (weight about 300 grams) cost 7 kopecks²¹⁶, a loaf of white bread - 22 kopecks, 23 kopecks or 18 kopecks (depending on variety), white bread (a loaf weighing 1 kg) - 22 kopecks, *peklevan* (now there is no such a bread, but people liked it, it was white, but slightly sour, like rye one, and it didn't crumble, the people called it "*paklevanka*", it weighed 1 kilograms, too) - 18 kopecks. Borodino bread (800 gram loaf) - 18 kopecks, rye bread - either 14, or 9 kopecks, I don't remember exactly. There was a higher fat content milk (5.6%), normal fat content (3%), ghee, cream, yogurt, "little snow"²¹⁷, ryazhenka. Unbottled milk was worth 28 kopecks per litre (2.1 pint); 1,5 litre (3.2 pint) bottle of milk, I think, cost 30 (empty bottles were worth 15 kopecks, those you could take back to the shop for recycling). A curd cheese bar with raisins was worth 10 kopecks. Recycle the bottle, add another 5 kopecks – and you can buy two curd cheese bars. The meat in the store cost about 2 roubles, although there were too many bones in it. If my mother wanted to save money, she went to buy meat at the market, where you could buy it cheaper, and choose a fresh piece, because there was meat from the people's own household, there weren't any go-betweens on the market at that time, as it is nowadays. Sugar cost from 90 kopecks to a rouble and ten kopecks per kilo - depending on its whiteness. Caramel without wrappers sold by weight was worth from 65 kopecks to 90 kopecks per kilogram, in the wrappers - one rouble thirty, my favourite soy candies were Caucasian, they cost one rouble forty-five per kilos, chocolate bonbons - about 3 roubles, those with waffles or nuts inside (Bear in the North, Little Red Riding Hood, Little Squirrel) cost about 4 roubles. The chocolate bar Alenka or Teddy Bear was worth 80 kopecks, other sorts - from rouble ten to rouble thirty for a 100 gram bar. Bananas were worth one rouble ten kopecks a kilogram (remember, we once bought 10 kilos, barely being able to drag them to the house?), the same price was for mandarins, but oranges cost one rouble twenty kopecks, apples (Bulgarian and Hungarian) - one rouble fifty, and at the market you could buy our apples from 30 kopecks to one rouble a kilogram. Berries (gooseberries, black, red and white currants, raspberries, cherries) - 10 kopecks a glass, strawberries - 2 roubles a kilo in the market, in the store it was cheaper, but there you had to stand in a queue for a while, grapes - 90 kopecks a kilo, pears – 50, watermelon - 30. Cookies cost 90 kopecks per kilogram, 1 kilo cake - one rouble twenty-seven... a 2 kilogram weight cake, made to order was worth three-thirty. Vodka had a red and white top on the bottle (the wax was of such a colour), the price of 2.52 and 2.87 per half litre (1 pint), Stolichnaya was worth 3.20...

- In my time, I remember, there were bottles for 3.62 and 4.12....

- Well, it's already in your time...A bottle of red wine was from 90 kopecks to one and half rouble, champagne - from 3.60 to 4.20. Fish - 90 kopecks per kilo, potatoes - 10 kopecks, beets, carrots, etc. - 5-6 kopecks per kilo... Green onion was 10 kopecks per kilo. Ice cream - from 6 to 18 kopecks in our town, and in Moscow there were varieties which were more expensive - for example, 22 kopecks. Cheese - from 2.30 to 3.60, there were a lot of sorts in my time, and all were very different from each other. Remember the case of Vyrusskiy²¹⁸ cheese?

²¹⁶ Kopeck - One rouble is divided into 100 kopecks

²¹⁷ "Little Snow" ("Snezhok") - Soviet sour milk drink similar to Bulgarian yoghurt

²¹⁸ A type of Estonian cheese in the USSR. Vyru (Võru) is a town and a municipality in south-eastern Estonia.

- You bet! This can't be forgotten!

That was somewhere in during the Olympics, when the choice in the shops had become more modest. One customer in front of me asked the shop assistant in a grocery store near the cinema "Spartacus", what kind of cheese there was in the showcase.

- Vyusskiy - she said, with emphasis on the "u." This is from the name of the Estonian town of Vyru. So, it would be more correct to emphasize the "y" (vyusskiy).

But the buyer was totally confused, he hesitated and finally stammered:

- Well, yes, I am Russian²¹⁹... But I asked you, what sort of cheese you have...

...The tram was worth 3 kopecks per ride, any destination, the trolleybus - 4, the bus - 5. The fare for a suburban train to Moscow was a rouble and a half, later two, the fast train - about eighty roubles. And now the first-class train fare costs 300 roubles. For your kindergarten I paid 12 roubles a month, but that was the maximum, because I was well paid. Cleaners, secretaries, accountants and cashiers had the lowest salaries. 57 roubles, and then the government raised it to 80, the same money received by low-skilled labourers, apprentices of different trades. Working people who have graduated from college received 90 roubles a month (just a salary, but in fact there were extra pays and bonuses), after institutes of higher education - about 100. The head manager in our department received 140-150, the head of our department - 200-220, chief engineer of a large plant - 350 roubles per month. Moreover, nobody concealed their salary, there were no secrets. A professor received 600 roubles, an Associate Professor (your father" half-baked"!)-320. Furthermore, there were pieceworkers, so at our factory on an assembly line pieceworkers received up to 700 roubles a month! I had a salary of 140 and, with bonuses, received about 300 roubles a month. A movie ticket cost 10 kopecks for children, for adults - from 30 to 50 kopecks. The rent was about 5 roubles a month (and now it's around 2000 roubles, although my pension is 4500!). For the radio we paid 50 kopecks a month, and it was a highly cultured, highly informative, high-quality broadcasting. And now we pay 30 roubles a month for vulgar, primitive, false, and reactionary garbage. Now from every corner (on the radio, on TV) you hear how "badly" they lived during the Soviet era, that there was nothing, they were poorly dressed. And in that time a meter of calico was worth 65 kopecks, satin - 90, crepe de chine - 2.70, wool was very good - from 3 to 3 and a half, and fabric for a coat was from 4 to 6 roubles per square meter! At first I thought they lied, and then I guessed that they had lived in the villages. If they wanted to live easier, steal, not work too hard, they just chose the most suitable village Soviet (counsel) chairman for this purpose: a drunkard, a thief that stole and drank, and allowed to do the same to the others. A bit like Russia's first President. And then they scream that we have to blame the Soviet power for the way they have lived! I'll show you a newspaper with the information on price reductions during Stalin's time. Here, take a look... - and my mother took the newspaper out of her handbag. Did she bring it all the way here especially for me?

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СССР — страна народовластия Весна 1950 года

О новом снижении государственных розничных цен на продовольственные и промышленные товары

Постановление Совета Министров СССР и ЦК ВКП(б)

В связи с новыми успехами в области промышленного и сельскохозяйственного производства в 1949 году, с ростом производительности труда и снижением себестоимости продукции Советское Правительство и Центральный Комитет ВКП(б) сочли возможным осуществлять с 1 марта 1950 года новое — третье по счету — снижение государственных розничных цен на продовольственные и промышленные товары массового потребления.

Совет Министров Союза ССР и Центральный Комитет ВКП(б) постановляют:

1. Снизить с 1 марта 1950 года государственные розничные цены на продовольственные и промышленные товары в следующих размерах:

ЖИРЫ, СЫР И МОЛОЧНЫЕ ПРОДУКТЫ

Масло животное	на 30,0%
Сыр советский, швейцарский, голландский, плавленый и прочие сыры	на 20,0%
Местные сыры и брынза	на 15,0%
Молоко цельное, сливки, простокваша и кефир	на 10,0%
Сметана, творог, сырки и прочая молочно-кислая продукция	на 20,0%
Молочные консервы, сухое молоко	на 15,0%
Мороженое	на 20,0%
Масло растительное	на 10,0%
Маргарин	на 35,0%

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By the way, for all my life I recall just 3-4 poems or songs with texts about Stalin, and I have a good memory. I remember everything that I was taught and I read. It means that they didn't impose on us anything about Stalin, which is very contrary to the lies one hears in the West.

Recently I saw a remarkable film on TV -The Red Square, not that modern vulgarity²²⁰ but the old one, with Stanislav Lubshin in the leading role. In the film his hero - a sailor tells about his primitive life: "Drinks, fights, love for sale..." (just like in Russia today!), and then he began to read, learn and work on developing himself: "In the time of revolution one must be strong and solid as crystal", - I think those were his words.

And if you look now at our so-called "democratic nation"²²¹ - we've rolled back into the 19th century, pre-reform²²² Russia, downtrodden, cowed, people dressed like God-knows-what, grey, dark, backward, always swearing in the streets (in my childhood, for such a thing militia picked them up - and that was right: do not offend nearby people by your own lack of culture!). Base language! There are no jobs in town. The only things they care about today are eating, drinking and urinating at the corners, because there aren't fences in the city, they were all carried off for firewood.

They say that nobody is properly engaged in the educational process of the youth, but who was particularly engaged in it in our time? We ourselves went to the field, but not to sniff glue, - to play football, lapta... Even adults from mills and factories went to a pitch after work to play football. And what debates we had, often quite spontaneously – what deep and global humanistic issues we discussed! And today you only hear what they have bought, what they still want to buy, what they have eaten and what they still want to eat. What utter boredom! How they live like this, I do not understand. Worse than insects. Insects at least keep to themselves and don't talk about food out loud...

- Hmmm... The Irish are like that too. And the Dutch as well... But they still do have "debates", you know. On such burning issues as, for example, whether they should shave off their pubic hair for shooting a movie or not... Apparently we have now finally "joined this civilization", – I couldn't help making a sarcastic remark.

- Oh yes, you know what I forgot to mention? Durability! It seems that all the vaunted Western things came down from the pages of that science fiction story The Flimsy, Frail and Fragile World²²³...! You can "once use it and toss it." Just buy a thing and it is almost immediately broken. At home I had an ordinary Soviet light bulb from the 1980s in the kitchen: it worked for 15 years! And here comes some Philips company, which forces us to close down our factories in order to sell us their junk! Understandably: production of bulbs that can work for up to 15 years is not profitable for them! They make bulbs that burn out quickly, so that people will have to buy them as often as possible!

My three aunts and my mother wore patent leather shoes, made by local cobblers, artisans. Those shoes were very beautiful and varied: carved, with flowers, with some pistils, and finished with coloured lacquer, all seamlessly made. These shoes would stand any amount of hard wear. It's been a long time since my dear relatives were gone, but, although they had lived a long and glorious life, the

²²⁰ "The Red Square" - original Soviet film was made in 1970. It was a film about Red Army, consisting of 2 separate stories. New film of the same name was made in 2004 and has nothing to do with the original story (it is an anti-Sviet thriller)

²²¹ Reference to the post-collapse "turbulent 90s" and early 2000s in Russia.

²²² Pre-reform means "backwards", before the abolishment of serfdom in Russia. The Emancipation Reform of 1861 was the most important of liberal reforms effected during the reign of Alexander II. The reform, amounted to the liquidation of serf dependence previously suffered by peasants.

²²³ A short story by the Soviet science fiction story by Boris Zubkov and Evgeniy Muslin.

patent leather of those shoes is still intact. And you, Zhenya, how long does a pair of Western shoes last for you?

- A year at most. And even that is rare.

I remembered that, as a schoolgirl, I used to be bought a winter coat for some three years - until you grow out of it and would need a new one. I would have never even thought of being bought a new coat every year - just because of styles changing. And it perfectly withstood those years, after which my grandmother handed it over to Marusya's sisters. And they also wore it for some time. We didn't buy new coats or boots every year, not because we were kind of "poor", but just because what's the point of buying stuff every year? Clothes for me were something functional. For instance, a coat was to protect me from the cold. And my Soviet coat did an excellent job. Its appearance was also quite nice and suitable for me.

- My mother sewed all our clothes for us, up to coats. Sometimes Dad reared pigs, sheep, geese, but our staple was chickens and we always had eggs. We didn't kill the chickens, because I knew all of them by looks and treated them as pets, and Dad did not want to upset me. We did it only in case of serious illness of someone in the family - when you needed fresh chicken broth. We always had either fish or meat at home, as well as milk, cheese, cereals - in other words, we always had proper meals. Sometimes we baked rolls with poppy seeds and sweet pies. We always looked forward to New Year's celebration, there was always a resplendent New Year fir-tree²²⁴, with tangerines, candies and nuts hanging in it... All the year round we ate sausages, cutlets or chops - big and juicy; galantine, sausage; on New Year's Day we had red caviar, cold boiled pork, different pickles. Tomatoes and cucumbers were from our own garden, we made our own jams for the whole winter. And the pickles had a special taste, you won't find anything like that today: probably the barrel's wood played a crucial part in that wonderful taste. I remember pretty well the fish shop in Communards Street, in which there were two large aquariums, with very beautiful fish.

We paid a lot of attention to and spent a lot of time at sports. Every single weekend we had a tournament of some kind of sport: in summer it was cycling, athletics, volleyball, basketball, lapta, gorodki²²⁵, tennis. At the water-station on the river there was swimming, diving from the tower, rowing and canoeing. I was engaged in athletics and rhythmic gymnastics, our Shurek was keen on chess. Football... one street played against another, a school against another school, a factory team against another factory team. We didn't have professional sports at that time, and, by the way, footballers weren't adored by women. There was even an ironic saying: *"A father had three sons, two were smart, and the third was a football player."* At winter time the most popular sport in our city was skating, but there were also skiers, figure skaters and hockey players. We played mostly Russian style hockey: with a ball instead of a puck (now it seems to be called Norwegian hockey), always outdoors, in any frost - and before thousands of spectators!

We, the children, despite the fact that only a couple of years passed after the end of the war, all had sleds, skates, skis, bikes (well, actually, there was one bike for the street, but everybody learned to cycle). Our favourite rest-spot was the river, where in that time there were different fish and huge lobsters. At the weekend there wasn't an inch of room on the river banks: it was like sprightly and populous Sochi²²⁶ of the 1970-1980s. At weekends, of a summer morning, everybody went to the river with their family with a day's supply of food. We played volleyball and catch on the beach, boated on

²²⁴ Russian name for a Christmas tree

²²⁵ Russian national game, where you should throw a stick with purpose to break down different combinations from smaller sticks

²²⁶ Sochi - most popular Russian resort on the Black Sea

the river, and went into the woods to pick berries, to the abatis where there were wonderful ponds. Often in the forest we found the trenches remaining after the war, and we, children, felt scared - but we quickly forgot our fears... And all the children knew how to swim!

- Not all! Shurek still doesn't know how to swim!

- This is it because of his stubbornness. I wanted to teach him. And he started yelling for the whole street "Leave me alone, I'll tell Mum!" Otherwise I would have certainly taught him... Everyone listened to children's programmes on the radio which were very interesting and educating, at the weekend went to football matches, in the evening – either an opera or Theatre at the Microphone²²⁷. We tried not to miss anything. TV appeared in our homes approximately in 1954-55. It was enthralling to watch, the more so because we had already known all the actors by their voices on the radio. We went to the cinema, too, those of us who are a bit older, still remember the war trophy movies²²⁸. We were ones of the first to see Kuban Cossacks, Chuck and Huck, Far from Moscow.²²⁹ The first foreign film in my memory was the Indian film Tramp²³⁰ with Raj Kapoor²³¹.

It's more difficult for me to tell about life during Stalin's years, because I was too young at that time. I started going to school in the year when Stalin passed away. I remember myself somewhere since a year and a half, that was in 1947. I was very afraid of beggars, who appeared immediately after the war. Gradually, life became better, and they vanished. Theft and robberies were virtually non-existent. I remember the fireworks of 1947, when we stood near a canon behind our railway line; I remember seeing flying stratospheric balloons and airships in the sky. All my childhood I was looking at the sky, as aviation meant to me the same as cars to your Che. I wanted to be a pilot when I was a child! And in 1997, in Dutch Katwijk, when I saw NATO planes taking off every five minutes, practising in the sky over my head, I came to the point of understanding: we don't have any of this any more, while we did have it still only yesterday, and how! Under Stalin, the children of all our leaders were connected with aviation, not with glamour parties.

In March 1953, Stalin felt ill. We were eager to hear the updates about his health, which routinely were broadcast on the radio: both adults and children gathered around the radio receiver. And suddenly we were told that he had passed away! As I said, in the very same year I started school and I remember that a few years after that, on January the 21st and March the 5th²³², there were black mourning bands on flags and Pioneers' scarves. By the way, we had never had a single monument to Stalin in our town, what "cult" is it that they are always ranting about? Yet the workers did their best to save the monument to Tsar Peter the Great²³³, even during the war. That's how it was, under "the dictatorship"! And now our monuments are dismantled or stripped down for scrap metal. And we call it "democracy"!

²²⁷ Popular radio series on the Soviet radio, transmitting whole theatre plays, which made the art of Moscow' best theaters accessible to millions of Soviet citizens in the era when there was no TV yet and later.

²²⁸ Foreign movies brought by the Soviet army from Germany as a war trophy that were shown in post-war Soviet cinemas.

²²⁹ Popular post-war Soviet films.

²³⁰ *Awaara* (meaning "Tramp") is a [1951 Hindi film](#) directed and produced by [Raj Kapoor](#) who also plays the leading role. The film became an overnight sensation in [South Asia](#), and found success abroad in the [Soviet Union](#), [East Asia](#), [Africa](#), and the [Middle East](#).

²³¹ Ranbirraj "Raj" Kapoor (1924 – 1988) was an [Indian film](#) actor, producer and director of [Hindi cinema](#), immensely popular in the USSR. He was the winner of nine [Filmfare Awards](#) in [India](#), and a two-time nominee for the [Palme d'Or](#) grand prize at the [Cannes Film Festival](#) for his films [Awaara](#) (1951) and [Boot Polish](#) (1954).

²³² Days of demise of Lenin and Stalin respectively

²³³ Peter the Great (1672-1725) - Russian Tsar, one of the most important figures in Russian history; among other things, founder of the Russian arms industry and Russia's first arms plant in Tula (1712)

- You know, Nadezhda Ilinichna, - said Ri Rang, who had respectfully put out a cigarette and attentively listened to my mother. - Your words really touched me. A lot of Soviet books and movies have left indelible memories in the Korean people's soul. Even today, Koreans like to watch Soviet movies, cherishing in our heart those glorious days when socialism covered the biggest part of the globe. And all those personal feelings for the Soviet Union you have enmeshed in your memory are equally precious and shared not only by me, but by all the progressive forces of humanity. Don't take me wrong, but it's still difficult for me to comprehend how such a catastrophe could have occurred with such a great people, who have defeated the Nazis and kept in fear the United States for several decades. It is well-known that the only language understood by the imperialists, is the language of force, and eventually they can do nothing but submit to the will of mankind. Today, the capitalist world is trembling in the face of its own fatal crisis. The world does not belong to them, and the decisive victory will not be theirs, I'm sure.

He gave this speech in one breath, and his face was honest, open and confident. It was evident that he wasn't pretending, and he said all this not out of fear, not in order to please someone or make a career. He said this with an open heart. His words may have sounded somewhat strained in the mouths of a man from the late Soviet years (and that's why in the USSR even I, who would have undoubtedly signed my name to Ri Rang's words with both hands²³⁴, would still have been embarrassed if I had to express my feelings and thoughts by saying such words aloud. I would have been afraid that other people would think that I was pretending and wouldn't believe me, without that usual irony which was already in the air in our daily conversations in the 1980s. By the end of the 1980s, against the will of people of honour, this irony broke into a repulsive mainstream of dumb and arrogant sneering and scoffing at everything and everyone who still retained the purity of soul and the faith in their ideals.) But in the mouth of Ri Rang all these words sounded perfectly natural: just like the very human breath. And these things about the DPRK's Koreans always pleasantly amazed me. I remembered Anya Bobrova and myself, when we were 20: that we found it funny reading the words: "from today on, every citizen of Pyongyang will have one egg per day." It seemed funny to us, two spoilt well-fed Soviet girls, who had never been in need in our lives - although we had had no idea either of the level of economic development of this country before its people had chosen the socialist path, nor what hard life they had after the destructive war of 1950-1953... And now I felt ashamed, so ashamed that I even wanted to beg Ri Rang for forgiveness - although he didn't even know about that ugly episode from my spoiled youth.

The street was already in twilight.

- Well, I have to go... - said Ri Rang with a sigh and began to prepare to go. - It's really nice to be with you, comrade ladies, but *numerous tasks are still awaiting me at home.*²³⁵

Mum took the empty cups and carried them into the kitchen: she had been teaching Ri Rang to drink tea in the style they do it in my native town the whole night long. "We are *tea gulpers*" - my aunt Zhenya used to say, pouring herself her twelfth cup of tea for the night. And she also used to call us, the indigenous residents, "*kazyuki*"²³⁶ - because a long time ago our ancestors, gun-makers - were State-employed workers...

I hesitantly looked at Ri Rang.

²³⁴ = Turn up thumbs on

²³⁵ From the Soviet war time Song of a Driver at the Front by Mokrousov and Laskin ("It is too early for us to die, numerous tasks are still awaiting us at home")

²³⁶ Kazyuk - "State's Man" (local dialect of Russian) - a gunsmith attached to a government weapons factory

- Maybe you'll stay? We have a lot of room here, and it's dark outside... How will you get home?
- What do you mean how? - wondered Ri Rang. - Across the bridge, and then through the park. I have a torch with me.
- It's too late after all, who knows what...
- Zhenya, have you forgotten where we are? This is not Amsterdam for you. The park now is still full of people. They walk, play sports. If you wish, we may go together, and then I'll see you back to the house?

To walk with Ri Rang in the evening park! Of course, I liked this idea, but unfortunately my mother interrupted this. Mothers, they are all alike: for them you are still a child even if you are almost fifty.

- Come on, Zhenya, it is already late. And comrade is certainly tired for the day. You'll see each other tomorrow.
- Sure, I'll see you, Zhenya! I forgot that today you had a busy day: I'm such a blockhead! – said Ri Rang. - Tomorrow's Saturday. I promised to Hye Sun and Myong Hui to take them for a ride on a boat on the river in the afternoon, and then we'll come to your place *with my family team* and will teach you how to make rice cakes. Do you have a hammer or should I bring one?
- Probably we don't, - I said even more embarrassed, - at any rate, not the type that is needed for the rice cakes. I saw it in a picture.
- Okay, we'll bring it then. And then we'll arrange some karaoke.
- Oh, that is in Mum's line! She doesn't have a great voice, but she loves singing. And many years ago she worked at an accordion factory during her practice. Once she was sitting there, testing the keyboards and singing a Russian folk song:

"Let my eyes, oh fellow bright, in full consume

Your pale face and comely eyes in youthful bloom..."²³⁷...

... I raised my head, - Mum said, - and there was a tall African man towering over me! He was looking at me very seriously. You see, a foreign delegation had a tour at our plant!

Also there were two Azerbaijanis and an Armenian named Aristonik working with the girls who were having practice there. Mum's friend Katya once had lunch with Aristonik in the plant canteen, and the Azerbaijanis said: "We won't speak to Katya. She has sat at the table with this filthy Armenian, Aristonik." You should see how Mum with the other girls attacked them! "Look how "clean" you are yourselves! Come on, take your words back, or we won't speak to you any more!"

Mum still stretched the evening out and continued sharing her memories with us.

- And my brother, Zhenya's uncle, was called up for the reserve duty training exercise after graduating from his institute. Higher school graduates were not liable for the actual army service, because there were military departments at institutes, but after graduation they were called up for reserve duty and immediately given the officer's rank. So there was our newly-made officer, bound to give a command to his platoon. But the right word just slipped out of his head - he had just forgot it, what can you do? Enough to make one weep! He stood there for quite a long time, staring at the soldiers. He had to say at least something to them... There were already whispers among the ranks. He thought hard and then suddenly shouted at them: "Leeeeeeets go!"

²³⁷ Russian folk song There Is Blizzard Blowing On Along the Street

- And once I scared my mother to death: I was waiting for her after work at the factory-gate, but I came too early and, to relieve the tedium, began to count buttons in the booths with workers' passes - there were booths, and every worker coming to the plant, pressed a button, took out his pass, showed it at the checkpoint and walked to his workplace - so, I started to count the lines of these buttons and multiply them in my mind, and by the time my mother finally came out, I calmly told her (pleased with my mathematical abilities): "There are about 10,000 people working at your factory." I saw how her faces changed: "How do you know? Who told you? This is classified information!"

Ri Rang laughed. And memories of our Soviet life - pure, nice, homey memories of different small occasions, accumulated in our minds, occasions, which had at the time made up the texture of our lives - suddenly gushed from us in a continuous stream. I unexpectedly recollected things that I thought I had forgotten completely. All those things, which I preferred not to remember - not because the memories themselves were painful, but, on the contrary, because it was so painful to return to today's reality after thinking of them. From which hidden cozy memory corners did they come, and why did they suddenly get back? Probably because finally someone appeared in my life who could understand and appreciate it all. Someone to whom I didn't need to explain such things as a war veteran, a challenge pennant of the pace-maker and what a workers' dynasty²³⁸.

By the time Ri Rang finally left for home, a bright, huge, almost orange moon had risen in the sky.

- Look at the sky, Zhenya, - said Ri Rang, parting with me, holding both my hands in his, - and make a wish. Just do not tell me what it is.

- Well, of course, I won't tell you! Don't you even think of it!

And I made a wish... no, I won't tell even to you!

Saying goodbye to my mother, Ri Rang gallantly bowed to her in the Korean way.

-I expect that you will be in good health and will spend happy days in my country.

And when Ri Rang was gone, my mother followed him with her eyes for a long time, and then asked me with an approving surprise in her voice:

- Where did you find such a fellow?

... The next day my mother insisted upon going to the local market.

- The guests are expected to come, and we need to treat them on something delicious!

She has this small non-Soviet weakness. For me, since my childhood, walking to the market was worse than any punishment: I just hated to go there. I have always thought that the bazaar is a den of iniquity. I had nothing against the bazaar products - fresh vegetables, fruit and other products from almost all over the country, sold not by some second-hand dealer, but by those who have actually produced them (that's why they called it the "collective farm market", people brought there their personally-grown stuff to sell) - local honey, sour cream, milk, curds and meat, knitted mittens, valenki and hats. It's just unpleasant for me to look on a bunch of the philistines gathered there, for whom these Sunday visits there were almost the purpose of their lives. I, myself, not only do not get any pleasure from the process called: "bargaining": I can't stand it. If I hear the price, I either pay it at once, or if it seems for me too expensive, I just walk away to another seller.

²³⁸ Workers dynasty - several generations of the same family working on the same plant or factory. It was very respected and encouraged in the USSR.

Moreover, it was the place where, much to philistines' joy, the products of our "shadow economy" were sold: all those T-shirts with tasteless, vulgar portraits of pop stars, bags with their photos or just their photos alone (a large black and white photo of Bobby copied from a coloured page of a German teenage magazine - blown up and laminated - was worth a rouble, approximately five loaves of bread.) Mum, of course bought it for me, but the feeling from this part of the bazaar was no less awful because of that: as if I dealt with people engaged in something illicit who made a fortune without actually lifting a finger. What earned income are you talking about?! I disdained them just as much as those black-marketers - LP sellers.

Sometimes they bought photos of some star, when in fact they didn't even know who it was, but whoever it was, they paid for the photo just because it "*looked like somebody from the West*"²³⁹." Although pornography or "erotica" (if there is really any substantial difference between them!) wasn't on sale openly, there were some plastic bags with slightly naughty pictures of some Polish pretty girls, and we heartily laughed, seeing some granny in a panama hat²⁴⁰ load such a bag with potatoes and a pretty girl's forms stretch in an ugly way after that. In my bags with Boney M. I didn't carry anything: they were kept in my closet. Sometimes I took them out, looked at the pictures and put them back.

.. I wonder whether anything would have been different in the history of our country, if we hadn't bought all that useless nonsense and hadn't allowed those black market traders to get their "seed capital"?.

Generally, trade in the Soviet Union was an almost despised occupation, something for people who could do nothing else. Sellers were just tolerated as a necessary evil, with all their freaks, such as rudeness, cheating in weighing and shortchanging. If some distribution centre manager was ever considered to be an important person, that was only by the same kind of people, whom we disdainfully called "*veshchichnik*"²⁴¹, or by some professional party apparatchiks and the YCL leaders, like Lida's Vlas²⁴², who regarded the Party and influence attained thereby as a sort of feeding trough. Usually only mediocre pupils chose trade. I had a classmate who went to work in that area, despite her good grades: and she almost immediately became the head manager of a market.

Everyone understood the mediation, the auxiliary function of trade compared with the role of producers - and the Soviet state would never have allowed the shopkeepers, as we called them, to cheat on prices, as they do today. Obviously that was why they decided to destroy it.

The unholy alliance between shopkeepers and party functionaries, who couldn't resist getting their hands on things which didn't belong to them, ultimately destroyed our country. We all saw that alliance developing, and realised that it wouldn't do any good in the long term. I sometimes wondered what would happen when the quantitative changes in our society transformed into qualitative ones. But nobody could imagine that it would happen that quickly - in the historical perspective. Literally, it happened before our eyes - and without any serious attempt of anybody to stop it...

And that's why I did not want to see a Korean market. I was afraid that it would remind me of all that. For me, a market has been and still remains a necessary evil that must be kept under control. And one should be constantly on the alert with it.

²³⁹ For the philistines it was a symbol of 'being cool'

²⁴⁰ Common summer hat in the USSR in the 1970s. It wasn't the same as Panama Hat known in Europe and the US.

²⁴¹ Person who sells or buys things/ philistine/ person for whom things are more important than people. In Russian "vesch" means "thing"

²⁴² See part 1 of "Soviética": a hero of part 1, local communist youth leader in the mid 1980s

Jong Ok had asked us not to photograph there. It was the only place in Korea, where she asked us that. By the way, I didn't really understand why, when I saw that market.

Pyongyang market was full of goods and full of people buying those goods. It looked cleaner and tidier than the majority of Russian markets. Korean "entrepreneurs" were allowed to sell their products manufactured over the plan quota. But there were a lot of Chinese goods too, about the same range, as in Russia. By the way, the market opens in late afternoon, so as not to divert people from work. And, in my opinion, it's absolutely correct! It's in Russia that people have already no job to be diverted from...

Later I realized that they asked us not to take photographs not because of how the market looked, but lest bourgeois scribblers, once they laid their hands on those pictures, should attach to them their own anti-Korean comments, as they usually do. If they concoct tall tales to photos where Koreans are just working in the fields, you can imagine what a priceless source for their tales would the photos of places associated with the commodity-money relations be!

I strolled along rows, abounding in goods, crowded with buyers and counted sheep in my mind. Not to fall asleep - but to withstand the torture and not tell anyone anything harsh. Including my mother. But she didn't pay any attention to my emotional distress and bought whatever she was going to buy.

But the evening proved to be wonderful. We did a lot of mallet rapping on the rice dough, ate my mother's pies and Ri Rang's *sinsollo*, sang and danced quite enough. To be honest, it was Hye Sun and Myong Huiwho, who did most of the dancing. They really delighted my mother:

- What cuties!

We finally managed to persuade them to stay, and all the three of them spent the night with us.

Ri Rang stayed in the kitchen and didn't go to sleep. When I woke up in the middle of the night and went there to drink some water, he was still there, bending over a book. He had thin glasses on that made his smart and inspired face even more attractive. The book must have been very interesting: his thick eyebrows rose, and then frowned, and from time to time a smile appeared on his lips. He was indescribably appealing. I even closed my eyes: am I really so lucky - to spend the rest of my life with this person?

- What are you reading with such interest? - I asked him.

- A novel. Its title is *Always Cloudy Sky*. A fascinating book. I know that in the morning I have to get up early, but I can't tear myself away from it. It's a pity that I have it only in Korean. But don't worry... *Just you wait*, Zhenya, you will learn the Korean language and then... You'll see yourself how much better you will begin to understand us. You will be amazed.

- That's what I want: to learn to understand you better.

I hesitated a bit, not knowing how to express what troubled me a bit. And, of course, I started it with something silly.

- Haven't you changed your mind, Ri Rang? I mean, about us...

- Why should I? - he wondered and took off his glasses.

- Well, for instance, because, I'm an absolutely disastrous housewife...

- Zhenya, have you ever heard of such a thing... wait a second, what do they call it in Russian? - Ri Rang thought for a moment. - Ah, I've recollected! "*Factory Kitchen*²⁴³"!

- Of course I have. And not only heard: I remember it. Grandma used to buy there curd pancakes, which you only needed to warm up a bit. And fried liver. And doughnuts. And various semi-finished products - for example, ready dough for pies.

- That's right. Even though your grandmother was a good housewife, wasn't she? And here we also have something similar to such kitchens. Of course they don't replace housewives at all, but still it's a great benefit. Actually, we can both do all the chores on schedule. It's everyday routine. So, please, don't think that we will be a burden on you.

- Well, thanks!

Whatever I asked, for any of my doubts, it seemed that he always had a ready answer. Ah, Ri Rang...

- How do you picture it: our life, our future? - I asked

- I can picture it very well,- he responded. - Both of us will work, we will be engaged with our labour of love. Our children will be brought up in a revolutionary spirit. They'll be worthy people. We will help each other and advise each other. We will help those who are in need. We'll have a lot of good friends. At the weekend we will go boating on the river, in winters we will go skating. We will visit theatres, cinemas and opera. We will travel around the country – when we have the opportunity. We will share problems with each other. We'll be *companions-in-arms* to each other. And we will be very happy. Perhaps, we will even have some more children, who knows.

He looked at me and again took my hand in both his.

- I know Zhenya, that you pine for the Soviet Union. If I could, I would get a star for you from the sky. And although I can't resurrect the Soviet Union, I want you to know: *your pain is mine to care about too, and your pleasure is my happiness*²⁴⁴. And together we will lay the foundation for the building of the new Soviet Unions – even if they will be called differently. I promise you. Ah, your eyes are completely closing! You're very tired, *my little sparkle*, and I am giving you a bad example by my reading at night. Go to sleep. Good night, my swallow...

And he touched my forehead with his lips, and disappeared behind the door. And I was left standing there in confusion.

His words sounded like a fairy-tale... no, not a fairy-tale – because a fairy-take is something, that can't come true, but this was a million times better! I couldn't dream of it even in my adolescence. But... is it true that he loves me, or am I only his companion-in-arms?

I had got used to Africans and their *rate of the development of personal relations*, so to speak. Never mind Africans... Take any average man, to whose proposal of marriage a woman has just said "Yes." How would he act when he is with her? You see what I mean?

²⁴³ Factory kitchen - a large, mechanized catering business that became widespread in the 1920s and 1930s in the USSR. It was closely linked to the fact that in the 1920s women were being liberated from the "shackles" of the household and getting involved in the production. From an architectural and socio-cultural point of view it was a unique type of construction. On the first floor of the factory-kitchen there was usually a store selling semi-finished dishes, to make housewives' life easier, and a snack cafe. On the second floor was a place for a canteen, on the third floor - for banquet and celebration halls. As a rule, factory kitchens were built in areas of the largest concentrations of industrial enterprises. Their main purpose was to supply the plants' canteens with lunches. By their mass production of semi-finished dishes factory-kitchens really helped to facilitate employment of women

²⁴⁴ Korean proverb

But Ri Rang didn't try to make any advances.

Autumn was setting in gradually. It was still hot and stuffy, but red pepper and corn, collected from the fields, were already dried on the roofs of rural houses. And from their walls ripe pumpkins were hanging, and they reminded me of Garin–Mikhailovsky's Korean tales²⁴⁵.

- Can we travel to Kaesong once more before leaving? I would like to keep in my memory what Korean houses look like, – I asked Ri Rang with a sinking heart, when very little time before my departure was left.

- I think it is no problem, - Ri Rang assured me.

That evening there was no light in Kaesong again. And for once I was glad about it. We had been wandering all day long about ginseng plantations. By the evening my feet were already worn. I was sitting on a mat on the floor in my room after a long excursion day, when Ri Rang called me from our inside yard – for supper.

- Zhenya, it's supper time. There is honeyed ginseng for supper tonight

- I don't want anything, – I responded not opening the door. – No offence, but I'm not hungry today.

- Are you sure? Anyway I'll bring you something, – he replied. – You mustn't have an empty stomach all day long.

And he brought me a hot cooked ear of corn after supper, which was given to him by local farmers.

-Thank you! – I said tucking into the hot side.

- Would you like to sit outside, looking at the stars? – asked Ri Rang. Night had just fallen, and it was indeed quiet and starry. – I know people in your country also make a wish, but not when they see the moon, but when they see a star falling from the sky. And now it's time for this. I also want to make a wish; maybe, by your beliefs, it will come true soon?

- Won't we disturb anyone if we sit here?

- Who can we disturb in this place? – said Ri Rang rationally.

He led me out into the street, or rather, not quite on the street. We were still on the premises of the Ethnographic Hotel, but not in one of its inner yards, but on the banks of a little stream, overgrown with vines. Beneath them there was a small bench. We sat down and began to count the stars, vying with one another who would count more.

Far away, in the stark darkness, somebody was playing the accordion, and somebody was laughing.

- Well, looking at the Milky Way, I really want to sing, – said Ri Rang softly. - Especially a song for you. Your Soviet one.

“Sunset brings every thing to a standstill,

Not a door squeak nor flicker of light.

Yet there's music somewhere in the distance:

An accordion straying all night.

²⁴⁵ See previous notes. Korean folk tales collected by a Russian explorer in 1898.

*Now he passes the gate towards the cornfield,
Now he comes all this way back again,
As if looking for someone out there
In the dark, calling out in vain.
Night-time freshness blows in from the cornfields,
Apple-trees shed their blossoms so pure,
Please, speak out, young accordion player,
Say for whom you are searching, demure?
Maybe your happiness is quite near,
But knows not it's for her that you wait.
Why're you straying alone all night, dear,
Keeping all the girls out there awake?²⁴⁶“*

This song (when I was a child Mum used to sing it to me as a lullaby), was so harmonious with everything around us, that I was struck once more by his amazing inner intuition to create such harmony.

- I also know one of your songs, but I have a terrible voice, – I said.

- First of all, it's not true that your voice is terrible, and secondly, don't be shy, I want to listen to it, – encouraged me Ri Rang. And I sang to him *The Soldiers' Answer* which somehow reminds me of our Polyushko-pole²⁴⁷, the favourite song of my mother's "Red Director"... From the second couplet Ri Rang began to sing softly along with me, and we finished the song together.

“In the march of the approaching lines.

The leader turns to the soldiers and asks:

“Comrades! Are you ready for the coming battle?”

And the men answer that they will win!

He says, he is glad of this meeting,

The soldiers reply to him:

“Our commander is a pledge of our victory,

Always to be with him is our destiny”

So they told him from the heart.

And even the terrible roar of the guns cannot drown

The words of the great oath of the victorious troops.

²⁴⁶ Soviet song “Lone Accordion” (1947) by Mokrousov and Isakovsky

²⁴⁷ *Polyushko-polye* is a [Soviet](#) Russian-language song. *Polye* means "[field](#)" in Russian, "*polyushko*" is a [diminutive/hypocoristic](#) form for "*polye*." It is known as *Meadowland* or *Meadowlands* in [English](#) (music by [Lev Knipper](#), lyrics by [Viktor Gusev](#), 1933.)

And when he says: “Homeland believes in you!”

The soldiers reply: “Our Leader and our Homeland are one!”²⁴⁸

- Wow, I even didn't know that you know our songs! - Ri Rang was genuinely surprised.. – Let's sing together something else.

All this was like a movie. Never in my life have I met yet such a pure and honourable man. Recollections of Dermot's perverse imaginations had remained somewhere in a bad dream. I felt I myself was becoming purer and nobler next to him. And, perhaps, even more feminine.

- *Well, the old tree has broken out into blossom*²⁴⁹... - said Ri Rang having in mind himself.

No, perhaps both of us have!

I couldn't even think that it could be so wonderful: just sitting together watching the stars! That's how traumatically the post-Soviet time had hurt me.

Feelings were overpowering me. Because he had disclosed all these simple, but so exciting things to me, which I hadn't experienced in my life in due time, I couldn't resist the temptation to move closer to Ri Rang.

- Zhenya, if you are doing it for me... I'm a patient man. I don't run ahead of time.

I was embarrassed.

- I just wanted to say goodbye to you. We don't know when we meet again... How can I explain it to you? There, where I live now...

I got lost in words and became silent. But Ri Rang understood me anyway.

- Zhenya, let *them* live as they want. But *you*, you are a Soviet person. Please, always remember that!

Oh, how he can make me blush...

Meanwhile clouds hid the stars and suddenly it started to rain. It was tropical rain, a continuous, impenetrable wall. It seemed to be pouring through a hole somewhere up in the sky. Within a split of a second we both got drenched and in a gallop rushed through the heavy door into our inner yard and then into his room - the nearest to us. But anyway it was too late: the rain had soaked us all through.

- Zhenya, here is a dry dressing-gown, put it on, - said Ri Rang. – Sorry, I want to change my clothes, too, my shirt is soaking wet. *You can't find a dry thread in it for love or money.*

He turned away from me to change, and in a moment his shirt was hanging on the chair. But to me, this act seemed protracted in time, like in a dream I watched Ri Rang pulling off his white shirt - slowly, fluidly. I felt dizzy: he was so close, so dear to me, and yet, so unreachable. Like a cliff in the sea overgrown with rare flowers: it seems not far from the beach, but you can only get there by swimming through the raging waves. I hesitated a bit and finally *dared to dive*: gently, almost without touching him I ran my fingertip along his wet spine. Ri Rang gave a start and turned to me sharply.

- Zhenya, please... It's so difficult like this. It is *as if I have a raging volcano in here*, - said Ri Rang, slowly taking my hand and pressing it to his chest near the heart. He said it simply, homely, without showing off. He was even breathing just as before - quietly. Only his eyes quaintly sparkled in the dark. I felt him slightly step back from me and then move towards me again.

²⁴⁸ Rough translation of this song from Korean. Zhenya sings it in Korean, by just memorizing the words.

²⁴⁹ Korean saying

- But if you think that I'm not awaiting that day as much as you do... Don't you have any doubts... *Saranghae*²⁵⁰, – he added quietly, finally embracing me tightly.

Instead of replying I pressed myself to him even closer, and Ri Rang softly gasped.

-Oh, Zhenya... *We'll live together until black hair start looking like white rootlets of onions*²⁵¹... *My dove*...

My heart palpitated from the quiet sound of his low voice. And he whispered to me many unknown, but beautiful Korean words.

It appeared that all that was happening to me for the first time in my life, and it was even a bit scary. And when he kissed me for the very first time, I felt as if the Earth has lost its orbit! Ah, Ri Rang!...

... And then... then we put over our heads waterproof military capes (yes, he had found them too!) and until dawn were wandering barefoot through the puddles, holding hands. And we talked and talked: about our countries, our families, our lives and most of all, about our Revolutions... I have never been so happy as that night. It was incomparable – the same as his country!

-*To die even a hundred times is no matter, as long as we are together!*²⁵² - Ri Rang said tenderly pressing me to himself when the clouds scattered and the morning sun rose over Kaesong.

That morning on the bus I slept like a log. The journey was quite long: from Kaesong to the Myohyang mountains! During such time one could have a proper sleep. I had dreams about all kinds of places in South Africa and Zimbabwe - tourist destinations and those not very much for tourists - which I had watched almost till I was dizzy at the urging of Hilda, on those DVD's she had chosen for me. I "rewound them in my cortex"²⁵³, according to Lednyov's method from *The Long Recess*²⁵⁴. Just in case.

Even in my dreams I practised Afrikaans. Probably in the same way Nikolai Kuznetsov²⁵⁵ was once preparing for his mission behind the enemy lines. But he was a true professional special service agent, and what am I? Just an amateur, hopelessly an amateur.

- For God's sake, please stop showing me your national parks! - I protested at Hilda's persistence. – All these lions and hyenas... I have them up to here, - I pointed at my throat. - Where did you Westerners get such a big interest in animals? Can you indeed show me anything about the people, the indigenous inhabitants of your country? About their culture?

But Hilda just mumbled something to the effect of:

- *It's hard in training but easy in fight*²⁵⁶, – and I was given yet another disc.

²⁵⁰ I love you (Korean)

²⁵¹ Korean expression

²⁵² Korean expression

²⁵³ Stepan Lednyov - hero of *The Long Recess* Soviet mini-series, tried to do his homework by learning it by heart during a sleep.

²⁵⁴ "The Long Recess" - a popular Soviet 1972 TV comedy miniseries in 4 episodes, loosely based on Georgi Sadovnikov's novel "Walk towards people", about a night school for adults.

²⁵⁵ Nikolai Ivanovich Kuznetsov (1911- 1944) was a Soviet intelligence agent and partisan who operated in Nazi-occupied Ukraine during World War II as a German Oberleutnant Paul Siebert. He was in charge of several complex operations involving assassinations and kidnappings of high-ranking Nazi officials in the Rivne and Lviv regions, such as successful operations against the German-appointed chief judge of Ukraine, the vice-governor of Galicia, the imperial adviser to the Reichskommissar of Ukraine, three German generals and others. Kuznetsov was also the first intelligence agent to uncover German plans to launch a massive tank attack in the Kursk region, information about German V-2 rockets, as well as about Operation Long Jump, Hitler's plan to assassinate the heads of the USSR, USA and Great Britain during the Tehran Conference.

Then she blushed and admitted:

- You are right, an average white South African is really much more interested in lions and monkeys on safari than in his fellow countrymen: Zulus or Xhosa... Alas... But you should really try to be like an average South African!

- Shall I perhaps tell you about that Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg once more? – I said in an unctuous voice when it really became quite unbearable. And it worked flawlessly: Hilda changed in the face and replied that it was time for us to have an advertising... excuse me, lunch break²⁵⁷...

That morning she asked me, when we had boarded the bus:

- Well, did you learn yesterday what Limpopo Province is famous for?

“For Doctor Aybolit²⁵⁸!” – I thought angrily. I was awfully sleepy after my sleepless night with Ri Rang. “*Limpopo... and Filimonov*²⁵⁹” – obligingly began to play in my head.

-Yesterday there was no light, - I reminded her, not without pleasure, – I couldn’t read.

- Why hadn’t it occurred to you to take an electric torch with you? Shame on you, *Pasionaria*²⁶⁰!

-Why bandy about the names of heroes? – I said. - It would be much better to think up for me my own nickname, wouldn’t it? *Araucaria* of some kind.

- Araucaria? What for? Doesn’t *Soviética* fit you?

...The bus drives on, and through the open window fresh breeze is blowing...

... *Zimbabwe is divided into eight provinces and two cities with provincial administrative status... Bulawayo... rugby... Ian Smith... Joshua Nkomo... mbira... museve*²⁶¹ ...

I am nodding off, and in my head somehow that annoying song starts to play: the one by Leon Schuster, from the movie *Kwagga Strikes Back*²⁶² – “Here comes UNTAG”²⁶³. Hilda also saw to it that I got familiarized with the favourite films of an average white South African. One thing I had really liked about this film, was the way an average Dutchman was depicted there: “*Moeder! Ik wil niet een bok dragen in Africa!*”²⁶⁴ Very close to reality. At first his dream is – in an aggressive way -

²⁵⁶ No pain, no gain (Russian variation of it)

²⁵⁷ “And now, we’ll have an advertising break!” - common phrase on Russian TV said before commercial breaks in a programme.

²⁵⁸ Doctor Aybolit is a fictional character from the children's poems *Aybolit* and *Barmaley* by Soviet author Korney Chukovsky. The name may be translated as "Ouch, [it] hurts!" The origins of *Aybolit* can be traced to Doctor Dolittle by Hugh Lofting. In one of these poems Dr. Aybolit travels to Limpopo river to help sick animals.

²⁵⁹ Popular in the 1990s in Russia pop song by the band Dyuna

²⁶⁰ Pasionaria - Isidora Dolores Ibárruri Gómez (1895 – 1989), known more famously as "*La Pasionaria*", was a Spanish Republican leader of the Spanish Civil War and communist politician of Basque origin. She is perhaps best known for her defence of the Second Spanish Republic and the famous slogan *¡No Pasarán!* ("They Shall Not Pass") during the Battle of Madrid. She was a great friend of USSR and her son Ruben died at twenty-two in the Battle of Stalingrad.

²⁶¹ Zimbabwean city, most popular sport, politicians and music

²⁶² Leon Schuster (b. 1951) - South African comedian; “Kwagga Strikes Back” (aka “Oh Schucks... Here comes UNTAG!”) (1990)- is a South African comedy film and Leon Schuster's big screen debut about a rugged farmer named Kwagga 'The Lion-Killer' Robertse having to deal with a corrupt major in the UN peace corps.

²⁶³ Theme song from “Oh Schucks... Here Comes UNTAG!”, music by Don Clarke, lyrics by Kalla Bremmer

²⁶⁴ Kwagga, hero of the film, tricks an incompetent soldier, a [Springbuck](#)-obsessed [Hollander](#), *Hendrick van den Ploes* by faking his killing of a Springbuck and then covering him in animal blood so animals chase him into the base. “*Mummy, I do not want to carry a buck in Africa!*” (Dutch)

“*een bok schieten... dat is een droom van mij... heerlijk*²⁶⁵!” And then he is in a panic – “Mummy, I don’t want to carry a book around in Africa!” Now they are experiencing something similar to it (and it seems, they behave in a very much the same way!) in Afghanistan’s province of Uruzgan²⁶⁶...

... *Ek prober Afrikaans leer... Ek kom van Suid Afrika*²⁶⁷... mmm... sleep...sleep...sleep...

“*Don't sleep, get up, my curly-haired...*

In factories' beat,

The country rises glorious

*A new day to greet!*²⁶⁸” – suddenly sang somebody softly in my ear in Russian.

I opened my eyes and saw Ri Rang’s face over me. Tenderness shining in his eyes spoke more than words. And I understood why Koreans used the expression “a lump was in my throat” in such situations. I had never experienced that before, but now...

That morning I looked at Ri Rang with new eyes. When we left the bus I whispered to him:

- Please just don’t feel guilty, Ri Rang! You’re so...so wonderful!

In reply he just sighed barely audibly:

- Zhenya, my beauty! I just feel so awfully good with you!

We planned a picnic in the Myohyang mountains²⁶⁹. Jong Ok had supplied us with everything we needed. She had bought food for our picnic on the way: in a store, which for some reason (some stupid tourist would say, “*for security reasons*”), was called “Flowers.” The Korean countryside on this warm, still almost summer-like day was uniquely beautiful: as if it was trying to show itself in all its glory so that I would never be able to forget it...

The name Myohnayg means “quaint and fragrant.” And indeed, the air there was unusually fragrant, and the landscape was just breathtaking! Just a place for shooting movies!

At the approaches to this mountain range there was a building of a local hotel that resembled the Solnechnyi Motel, built in the vicinity of Moscow for the Olympics.

And there was the International Friendship Exhibition²⁷⁰ at the foot of the mountains. Here is a description of this magnificent piece of Korean architecture, built in 1978: “The building is not wooden, but it looks as if it is built of wood. It doesn’t have any windows, but it seems that it has. Under the roof angles there are jingling bells, swaying in the wind.”

²⁶⁵ To shoot a buck is my dream... delicious! (Dutch)

²⁶⁶ The [Netherlands Army](#) Task Force Uruzgan (TFU) was part of NATO's [Regional Command South](#), [International Security Assistance Force](#), during the NATO's occupation of [Afghanistan](#).

²⁶⁷ I am learning Afrikaans, I come from South Africa (Afrikaans)

²⁶⁸ Song about the Encounter (1936) - popular energetic Soviet song by Shostakovich and Kornilov

²⁶⁹ Myohyang (“Mysterious Fragrant Mountain”) is a mountain in the DPRK. The mountain is named after the mystic shapes and fragrances found in the area. Myohyang is a tourist attraction and visited by many national and foreign tourists.

²⁷⁰ The International Friendship Exhibition is a large [museum](#) complex located at [Myohyang](#) mountain, DPRK. It is a collection of halls that house gifts presented to the Leaders [Kim Il-sung](#) and [Kim Jong-il](#) from various foreign dignitaries. The protocol of gift-giving is well established in [Korean culture](#). Built in a traditional style, the halls opened on August 26, 1978 and consist of over 150 rooms covering a total area of between 28,000^l and 70,000 square meters. The building offers the impression that it has windows, though it has none.

Gifts for the leaders of North Korea from foreign delegations were exhibited along the halls in the geographic sequence. Among the Soviet and Russian gifts there were quite a few which were made in my hometown. How proud it made me to see them displayed there, so far from home! And it did feel so strange to see a part of Russia in this remote country! I admired the skills of our artisans, and the Song of Tula, my home town, called itself to my memory.²⁷¹

In a separate room there were two Armored Train cars: given as gift to the Great Leader Kim II Sung by our Comrade Stalin and by Chairman Mao Zedong.

Looking at them, I remembered how, many years before, I had actually seen the train with President Kim II Sung passing by my house... Ah, those glorious days! When life was on an even keel, with the same kind and sympathetic people, as there are today in Korea. But now... Yet you can't justify yourself with the words of the legendary Kamo²⁷²: "*Mum, it's not me who is bad, but our Tsar!*" Because it doesn't remove the responsibility from us for what had happened to our country.

²⁷¹ Standing on the Upa Tula spreads around.
It is not too low and not too high on ground.
But if in Tula you have never been,
Trust me, you've never Mother Russia seen.
Our samovar heard a mile ahead,
In the mouth melts honey gingerbread,
Sellers trade away subtle bits of art,
Armourers make arms with a facet cut.
There are many lovely places,
Where we can leave our traces,
In the end we come back here,
Tula-hometown, sweet and dear.
The Tulans have a taste for craft and art,
They are facile in everything they start.
Leskov's Levsha lives on in craftsmen free,
Able to horseshoe the devil, if need be.
Tula's hundred streets, old and narrow, wind,
But our hearts are fair, broad is our mind.
Fellow countrymen give you aught indeed,
Take off their last shirt, if you are in need.
There are many lovely places...
Since then have passed a hundred years odd,
When Levsha a steel flea divinely shod,
We've altered, but however years creep,
The secret unto us bequeathed we'll keep.
Wise and homespun truth is that secret old.
Put your heart in work, give it to the world,
Be it needles or saddles, guns or samovars,
Or the spaceships proud bound for distant stars.
There are many lovely places...

²⁷² Kamo, real name Semeno Arshakovitch Ter-Petrossian (1882-1922), was a [Georgian revolutionary](#) of [Armenian](#) descent, and an early companion to Soviet leader [Joseph Stalin](#). From 1903-1912, Kamo, a master of disguise, carried out a number of militant operations on behalf of the [Bolshevik](#) faction of the [Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party](#), mostly in Georgia, then part of the [Russian Empire](#). He is best known for his central role in the [1907 Tiflis bank robbery](#), organised by Bolshevik leaders to raise funds for their party activities. For his militant activities he was arrested in [Berlin](#) in 1907 but simulated insanity both in [German](#) and later Russian prisons, eventually escaping from prison and fleeing the country. He was recaptured in 1912 after another attempted armed robbery and sentenced to death. The death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment as part of the celebrations of the [Romanov dynasty](#) tricentennial. Kamo was released after the [February 1917 Russian Revolution](#). He died in 1922 after being hit by a truck while riding a bicycle in Tiflis.

In one of the halls the portraits of Kim II Sung with various world leaders hung on the walls, and at the sight of so many familiar faces, their names, too, surfaced in my memory. *Samora Machel, Jose Eduardo dos Santos, Ahmed Sekou Toure, Didier Ratsiraka, Mengistu Haile Mariam*²⁷³... We, the Soviet people, all knew them by their faces. Dónald and Hilda looked at me with eyes wide open, when I unhesitatingly named all those names. My memory even prompted me the national holidays in each of those leader's countries, and what progressive reforms had been carried out there back then...

Who is out there screaming about the Red Terror of Colonel Mengistu? And how about this: "*In 1995 the literacy rate among adult Ethiopians reached 35.5%. That was the result of the nationwide literacy campaign, begun back in 1980, when only 10% of the adult population could read and write.*"²⁷⁴ And no matter how you try to twist it, that was the result of the Mengistu's governance! In Venezuela, illiteracy has been eliminated under Chavez within a few years. But the current "democratic" rulers of Ethiopia, apparently, have very different priorities: Mengistu was ousted from power already 16 years ago, but, with literacy, things are still very much the same.... Now the Ethiopian troops pull chestnuts out of fire for the US in the neighbouring Somalia! In today's "free and democratic Ethiopia" compulsory education is only for six years, and the budget for education is only 4.6%²⁷⁵ of the total budget expenses. True, even that budget is more in percentage terms than in "free and democratic" Russia, where it stands at just 3.8% of the national budget. For comparison: in Cuba, educational expenses make up more than in any other country in the world - 18.7% of the budget. On Korea, I have no budget data, but the literacy rate in the DPRK was estimated even by its enemy's CIA as 99%, and the whole country, from young to old, continues to study, as there is an extensive network of evening schools for adults, of correspondence courses, etc. The compulsory education DPRK is 11 years²⁷⁶... There you go, you poor "democratic" Ethiopia!

- Could I see some gifts from Ethiopia? - I asked.

- Of course, - Jong Ok was a bit surprised. – Have you ever lived in Ethiopia?

- No, never. But at one time I studied their language and I hoped that I could contribute in some way to the Ethiopian revolution. Only I was too late...

Here they are, they look at us from their portraits: young, full of strength and resolve, resilient... "Yea, were there men when I was young, Bold tribe of whom shall songs be sung: They'd fight,– you're none as good"²⁷⁷... Such leaders, whom people were not afraid to follow into fire and water. Such, in honour of whom children can be named. Could they foresee that they would be so shamelessly betrayed?... By us, their allies, after we have succumbed our own socialist country...

At the top of the building exhibition there is a huge outdoor balcony. Fresh breeze blows through the building, the bells tinkle softly under the roof. When you look from there in all four directions - at the bright green of the mountains and the babbling waterfalls, at the soldier with a Kalashnikov, just like the one we had met earlier at the lake, down the barrel of whose rifle a caterpillar crawled peacefully, at the joyful pioneers, at the feminine and gentle Korean women, shyly covering their mouths with their hands when they laugh; at the brave and modest bronze sunburnt Korean men; at the old grandparents, whom they carefully support by the arm - a love for the people, a desire to change life on our planet for the better engulfs you so strongly, that if you were told you could feel this way

²⁷³ African leaders of Mozambique, Angola, Guinea, Madagaskar and Ethiopia respectively in the 1970s-80s

²⁷⁴ <http://www.109.com.ua/stran/164.htm>

²⁷⁵ <http://www.nationmaster.com/country/et-ethiopia/edu-education>

²⁷⁶ Since 2012 - 12 years

²⁷⁷ M. Lermontov *Borodino* poem

before your arrival in Korea, you probably wouldn't believe it. Oh, how unpleasant they probably feel in this country - all those so-called "liberals" and "democrats" - with their puffed-up "healthy cynicism"! Something gnaws at them, like the itching caused by scabies, but why and what it exactly is, they themselves do not understand...

After the exhibition we went to the mountains for a picnic. There were special places for picnics fitted along the mountain stream, and all of us, Koreans and foreigners - we were all together here, nobody separated us from each other.

The river gurgled delightfully. On the opposite bank of us was sitting a group of South Koreans whom we had already met before (and some of whom had so shamefully snored during that extraordinary children's concert at the Mangyongdae Children's Palace), and the wind brought us a delicious smell of barbecue... Our foodstuffs were a little more modest, but we couldn't complain: kimchi, cold chicken, fish, rice balls wrapped in seaweed, sponge cake, lemonade and beer...

- We are leaving the day after tomorrow, Jenny - Dónal said suddenly, - (he hadn't learned in all this time to pronounce my name correctly), and I was taken by surprise to such extent that I almost choked on the rice balls. - Today I've got a message that our friend whom you are going to meet, is leaving for Beijing.

My heart sank. Yes, I knew that this moment would come soon, but emotionally I was totally unprepared for this yet. Especially not after the last night... To be honest, I did not want to go anywhere now. Especially not even knowing with whom. I was bewildered and helplessly looked at Ri Rang. He stared at the ground, not lifting his eyes, just mechanically rolling a rice ball with his fingers so that no one would notice his reaction to this news.

- We will meet tomorrow at 10 a.m. in our old hotel; I will give you a final briefing.

- OK, - that was all I said.

The rest of the time we were silent. Jong Ok, who did not hear clearly what it was all about, at first still laughed and tried to talk to Ri Rang, but he just sadly looked at her and only said another old Russian proverb:

- *When I eat, I am deaf and dumb*²⁷⁸...

After the picnic it was possible to walk at leisure round the mountains and, by the way, without the guides (who is there saying that "In DPRK one cannot be anywhere without a guide?").

But I did not want to go anywhere without a guide, my guide to this country and my beacon in life. And, evidently, he didn't want to go anywhere without me, too, because Ri Rang came up to me and asked:

- Shall we go for a walk? There is a very beautiful bridge over that river.

The bridge was indeed gorgeous. It hung high as a arc above a raging mountain river stream. But I did not want to stand on it. I went down to the river bank and sat down on a stone.

Ri Rang followed me and sat down next to me. We were silent for another ten minutes, trying to collect our thoughts. And then suddenly tears gushed from my eyes. I wanted to hide them and forced myself to turn away from the Ri Rang, but he took me by the shoulders, turned me to him, and I broke down and buried my face into his strong shoulder.

²⁷⁸ Don't talk with your mouth full (Russian expression)

- I do not want to leave you! - I whispered, wetting with my tears Ri Rang's new light-blue shirt. He took a deep breath:

- *You have to, Zhenya, you have to!*²⁷⁹

- I know myself that I have to, I just so desperately don't want to go away from you...

- But I'll always be with you, always. Do you believe me? Just close your eyes and you will see me, wherever you may be. I will not just be thinking about you: I'll protect you from a distance. And during your absence, I will get the permission for our wedding, and...

I could not help laughing, remembering ours - my mother's and mine- old favourite saying:

- "Everything will be fine, and the wedding will crown it all"?

- Exactly. Just only so.

He radiated such confidence: not arrogance, but calm, firm belief - that I, too, gradually calmed down. Indeed, I gave my word to comrades.

- *Weigh your word with care, make it never vain: keep it, once you give it, hold on, once refrain*²⁸⁰ - reminded me Ri Rang of our proverb.

And - most importantly – it is needed for the people! They are waiting for me, they pin their hopes on me. And I do not have the right to get mushy!

So Ri Rang and I were sitting on that river bank, dangling our feet in the icy mountain water, until the time for our return to Pyongyang came.

And when we returned to the bus, for the first time we held hands openly, and for the first time we sat next to each other on the seats, and for the first time I dared to put my head on his shoulder, when I felt I was dozing off.

Gil Bo was already aware of what was going on, Jong Ok by now had also guessed, but Dónal and Hilda, seeing us, went speechless for some time.

- Zhenya, is it serious between you two? - Hilda whispered to me from the seat behind when she thought Ri Rang was asleep. But he turned to her and answered, instead of me - in English:

- *Can it be otherwise with people like us?*

You can assuredly say you know another culture not only when you can predict a particular people's behaviour, but when you actually begin to understand why they act in this or that way. And, according to this criterion, after six months of my stay in Korea, I was closer to the understanding of Korean culture, than I have ever been to the understanding of the Dutch or even the Irish culture...

Yes, I had spent in that marvellous world only six months. And it seemed to me a whole life.

Yes, I was sad. But it was bright sadness - like the pure white trunks of jolly birch trees in a Russian forest. I would not want to leave - even if in my life there were no Ri Rang. It's just that for six months I had lived *in another dimension*. In a place where people live real life and life does not pass you by like in our world now. From the first day in Korea I had begun to count the days remaining till the end of my stay here, but not in the way "May it end sooner!", but in the way "Thank God, I still have a whole month!" And in these last days I almost felt like mourning.

²⁷⁹ Russian popular expression from the film *Operation Y and Other Shurik's Adventures*, a 1965 Soviet comedy film.

²⁸⁰ Russian proverb

We were returning to Pyongyang, the sun was shining, and the summery wind blew in through the window of the bus. I did not want this day to end... I inhaled the aroma of Korean land, trying to remember it forever. And I even took a handful of its soil with me...

A little piece of advice to tourists: if something is forbidden here, just don't do it and do not ask questions. Be tactful. Do not be like those Western overgrown young ignoramuses who begin to stamp their feet: "Why not? But I want it! " That's an ugly way to behave as a guest. Do not lower yourself to such behaviour. Respect yourselves and your hospitable hosts who want to show you all the best, everything that they can rightly be proud of in this country!

...Dónal was waiting for me the next morning, with such a non-Irish-like punctuality, in one of the "red corners²⁸¹" of the hotel. When I came in, I felt right at home: all of employees recognized me and greeted me joyfully. In fact, the hotel became my second home during those couple of months.

- Jenny, I'll repeat to you everything again. You'll arrive there and begin to work at a local PR firm – we have got a place for you already, we have our own person there. Accommodation is also ready for you, but you will have to sign a lease yourself, when you are on location. From us you will get news once a month: through our person, an Irish woman, who works on a cruise ship. By the way, her name is Saoirse²⁸² - very appropriate name! Once a month her ship calls at the port of Kurako...

- It's not Kurako, it's Curaçao! -said I and remembered Sonny. - What if someone recognizes me? I had many friends there, even though it was more than 15 years ago.

- Is your ex-husband there?

- No, he is in the Netherlands.

- His parents?

- The same.

- You'll manage the others somehow. If you have that problem, say to them that you only seem to look like their acquaintance. In addition, in Lisbon you'll change your hair colour and style.

- Wha-a-a-t?

- What do you think? This is for your own safety! And the passport of Saskia you'll get there too, with your new photo.

I have always had just one hairstyle all my life. And I just dyed it my natural color to hide grey hair in some places...

- Yes! And do not argue. You'll become blonde!

- You do not know the Antilleans. They wouldn't ever leave a blond woman in peace!

²⁸¹ Traditionally, the Red Corner (krasnyi ugol) was a place in a Russian house for religious icons. In Soviet times, as part of eradicating religious superstition, the name was changed to Little Red Corner (krasnyi ugolok). Such rooms were established in every enterprise, school and institution. Their content varied from place to place; it might be a little museum with portraits of shock-workers (udarniki), war veterans or exemplary pupils, but universally it was a place for the propagation of Soviet ideas and local information. The wall would have texts, portraits, and wall newspapers (stengazeta). In this context, it refers to a similar kind of meeting room in a Korean hotel.

²⁸² Saoirse- freedom (Irish)

- At least, you'll suffer for the good cause.

I almost gritted my teeth. But there was nothing I could do.

-Your family will pass you their news through...- Dónal hesitated for a moment, – your boyfriend. And you'll receive it from Saoirse and deliver all the news to her: about the actions of the U.S. soldiers on the island and people's attitudes to them. If it is possible, you'll also deliver news of their relocation. In general, any military information is worth its weight in gold for us. There is a great threat to Venezuela.

And he began to list where and when I shall see Saoirse, in what form I'll send messages, the password and other attributes of a spy-thriller.

- And contact us in case of emergency through...

I found it hard to concentrate, my thoughts were occupied with my family and with Ri Rang. How would they be there without me? Would they miss me? What if Mum decided to return home with my kids? Ri Rang assured me that he would arrange for them such a great cultural program that Mum would never want to leave anywhere!

Would he be allowed to marry me? And even if he would, could we be happy together? As happy as we would like to be...

I shook my head to come back to reality.

- Sorry, Dónal... What were you saying about the emergency?

- Jenny, stop having your head in the clouds! Listen and remember. On this depends not only your life but the lives of many others!

Dónal was right to be angry, of course. And I started to listen to him as I should have from the beginning...

My mother and I decided to say goodbye in the house. To be more precise, in the apartment that had become our new home.

- The longer the farewell, the bitterer the tears, - she said. - And when your children scatter along the platform, how would I catch them?

-You are strange, Mum. There are so many people there: do you really think that nobody would help you catch them?

- Anyway... And they would just be upset for nothing. I'll tell them that their mother went to buy them some classy toy cars. After she buys those toys, she will immediately come back.

It was a lucky idea, especially regarding Che. Even his first word was "car", not "mum." Looking at the way he was arranging racing with his toy cars on the floor, Mum, an avid fan of Formula 1, often rejoiced:

-He is going to be a new Schumacher²⁸³!

²⁸³ Michael Schumacher (b. 1969) is a [German Formula One racing driver](#), a seven-time [World Champion](#) and is widely regarded as one of the greatest [Formula One](#) drivers of all time.

The only thing that was missing here for her was Formula 1 on TV... I was just lucky that Schumacher had already quit by the time, if he were still in the car racing, I'd probably not have been allowed to go anywhere...

Early in the morning, while the children were still asleep, I approached them on tiptoe and gently kissed their cute faces. At that moment I felt very guilty about my going away, although I knew that they loved their grandmother, as well as she loved them, and she would probably spoil them rotten during my trip.

We sat down, as is our custom before a long journey.²⁸⁴

- Mum, they promised that I will have holidays twice a year and that we'll see each other then. I do not know where or how it will be, but you'll find out. Ok? *Wait for me and I'll come back*²⁸⁵. See you after six months. And wish me, please, neither fluff nor feathers²⁸⁶....

- Neither fluff to you, Zhenya! Just do not get into shootouts, and please do not blow up anything! - Mum joked.

- Go to hell²⁸⁷! - I replied with feeling.

The melancholy didn't leave me at the station. It even intensified when I saw among the passengers my "*compatriots abroad*", taking into the train car an incredible amount of boxes with goods, perhaps, to resell them in Russia at bloated prices. Their greedy faces. They were noticeable from a distance by their red cheeks, painted like clowns in the circus, their cold look and tufts of dyed hair. Was it a kind of fashion among them?

Looking at them I even thought I understood that Belarusian girl, patronised by the NGO Chernobyl's Children²⁸⁸, naively hiding under the table in Ireland just not to be sent home - to what they had been turning our republics into since the downfall of the USSR. But, despite her unreason, she was still lucky to be sent home to her parents. And where was I going?

The point was that, unlike that Belarusian girl, I was going not home, but back into the "belly of the beast"... In fact, my home was gone. More than 20 years ago I left my home merrily and thoughtlessly. It is typical for the youth to want to "see the world." But now I don't have a home to return to. And I remained in the belly of that big, greedy imperialist beast - to which my country, just like the DPRK, was, and still is, like a bone in its throat, despite the fact that our Russian rulers were doing their utmost to please the West.

And how tired I was of living in the belly of that beast! No matter how much fat on it, the belly was just a belly, and that's it. And the trip to Korea was to me like lifting my head above sea level to breathe fresh air. That trip had shaken me, cleared me from the capitalist "shell" that had built up on my heart against my own will over the years, reminded me what was really important in life, and what was rubbish. And it gave me belief that if people like me, our children and grandchildren, pushed on

²⁸⁴ Sitting down for a moment before departure is an old Russian custom that is still valid today.

²⁸⁵ "Wait for me, and I'll come back!

Wait with all you've got!" - famous war-time Soviet verse by Konstantin Simonov (1941)

²⁸⁶ In Russian, it is a way to wish someone good luck, and literally translates to "neither fluff/fur nor feathers." Figuratively, it's the equivalent of "break a leg" because when someone went hunting, in order not to jinx him, one wished for him to catch neither animals with fluff or with feathers. The traditional response is "к черту!" (k chortu) or "go to hell!" and the only time it is polite to say so.

²⁸⁷ See above

²⁸⁸ Japan is not that important to them as was the USSR, so - no Fukushima's Children - understandably.

that ugly beast from the other side - from the inside - that “bone” would fly out of his stinky fanged mouth...

Ri Rang, Jong Ok and I stood on the platform. Around us walked groups of spiritedly singing children and energetic marching soldiers, cheerful music played. And I suddenly understood why imperialists of all stripes are afraid so much of this small and nonthreatening country, the country of womanly women and manly men. Because here you can feel with your skin ***how much power people really have when they are one!***

When I had to finally say goodbye to my Korean friends, I gave Ri Rang a hug, despite my acquired reserve of Korean etiquette.

- Ri Rang, my sunny! Wait for me, I will definitely be back! Take care of my family, it will be difficult for them in the new place.

Both of us weren't shy to wipe away tears. The only difference was that he shed *man's scarce tears*, though in Korea it is not thought embarrassing for a man to exhibit his emotions.

- Zhenya...- obviously, he was so worried that for a moment all the Russian words had gone out of his head. - *Urunun ramp sunrihalkosida. Hochzhago nemsimhamen mothenel iri opsumnida.*²⁸⁹

- Well, it's time! - he wiped his tears and hugged me again. - *There can never be enough air to breathe before death.*²⁹⁰

- And which of us is going to die? - I said, smiling through tears. - Especially now! No way! Thank you for reminding me how beautiful life can be!

Behind him Jong Ok was wiping away tears.

- Your country is the only country in the world, where people cry seeing me off. In other countries they usually only rejoice! - I made a joke, to cheer her up. And I jumped on the step of the train.

I ran through the whole length of the car, because our places were in the last one, and managed to catch a glimpse of their rapidly diminishing figures. They long waved to me. Then they became a distant point on the horizon. I waved to them, while some Russian women on the car who saw Ri Rang and me weep in each other's embrace, looked at me with a deep sense of reproach. But I really didn't give a damn about it.

... And here I am - back in China... The Korean land had come to an end so unexpectedly - after a short stop at the border, where we warmly said goodbye to the Korean border guards. (I had learned a few words in Korean and made a great impression on them by this!). Our train crossed the bridge that separates the DPRK and China. Already in the middle of the river we saw pleasure boats with idle crowds. On the other side of the river, the train went faster. There were newer rails and sleepers there. But on the windows of houses bars began to appear - the same way they do in Russia, - and I understood: it was really already China...

So it was. From posters and billboards, the silly faces of American-like teens looked at us, with their hair in style (that is, looking as if they hadn't brushed their dyed hair for a week), with faces

²⁸⁹ We will definitely win. If you dare do something, there is nothing unachievable in the world (Korean)

²⁹⁰ A well-known Russian saying meaning that there is no point in trying to do many things on the very last minute, if you haven't managed to do them before. For example you can tell this to a student, trying to learn everything that was taught during a semester in one day right before an exam.

expressing elation about the acquisition of one or more new pieces of some rubbish. The fields, though neat, were occasionally interspersed with huge dumps that stank. There were new houses, built for peasants, shaped like barns or the cow-sheds of my friend, the farmer Frank, only with satellite "dishes" on top of the roofs. And where they were not like barns, they looked like some soldiers' barracks. And our train car was immediately powerfully filled with the sounds of electronic games: it was the Chinese who couldn't wait to switch on their mobile phones...

From the train window China looked like a huge, but quite ugly construction site. Here and there among the corn fields and peach orchards wide roads were laid, trenches dug, skyscrapers erected (in contrast to the Korean new buildings, the Chinese ones were totally devoid of national character). But everything was done somehow *without a spark*. Apparently, people felt that even though China was a superpower in the making, the future that was being built there, was not destined to be for everyone...

Some inscriptions in English flashed on walls continually, trying to convince the "sponsors" that they were not mistaken when they had chosen China. It was such a sad picture! Especially depressing to see was the official motto of the future local Olympic Games: "One World, One Dream!" *I do not have the same dreams as Condoleezza Rice! We know what dreams this "unipolar world" has...*

I always feel upset whenever in any country poor people, who are forced to earn a living, desperately try to sell you something. The DPRK is the only country, which I know, where nobody tries to sell anything to you, not even the officials. In China it begins already in the train: after crossing the border "walkers"²⁹¹ try to sell you Korean postal stamps or banknotes (all of these "walkers" are Chinese, although the train car is full of Koreans from the DPRK: the latter are quietly engaged in their own affairs: read books, have meals, talk while standing at the window, joke...). Well, at the exit of the station in Beijing, you almost get torn to pieces by the drivers offering you a taxi. On the streets there are rickshaws of all sorts, and vendors of tea and of Mao's Red Books almost pull you by the sleeve. They all try to curry favour with foreigners. And one always has to bargain with them.

Dónal and Hilda rejoice: they finally returned to their familiar "civilization." But it's disgusting to me. It's disgusting to see that people have to earn money for their living in this way.

And in Beijing I just did not want to go out at all. I even did not want to see the famous Great Wall of China. With all my respect to the new superpower, after being in the DPRK, China depressed me. And I wanted to go on a mission in good mood!

For this reason, the next day I went to the airport a full 12 hours before the first meeting with my future comrade on the mission. The Mao Mausoleum was closed, and I didn't have strength to see the other sights of "*Beijing, the City of Contrasts*"²⁹².

Within ten minutes of walking around on one floor of the airport I was offered a massage four times and three times cajoled a visit to a restaurant.

At the airport I saw enough "new Chinese" that were flying abroad. Chinese people of my age and older were very polite, attentive and unobtrusive. But the Chinese youth and children in particular were the brash generation that "*chose McDónalds*"²⁹³. For a full hour children of both sexes tried to demonstrate me their knowledge of English ("my mother is"- then went some Chinese word,

²⁹¹ Traditionally, an elected person sent by farmers somewhere to apply for something; here, sarcastically, people who walk through the train trying to sell something.

²⁹² Variation of "London is a city of contrasts", from the Soviet comedy film "Diamond Arm" (1969), used for sarcastic description of a big capitalist city from the Soviet point of view

²⁹³ Variation of the Russian expression "generation that chose Pepsi"- sarcastic reference to the Soviet youth of Perestroika time based on the commercial slogan of Pepsi Cola

apparently indecent, because they immediately began to laugh), "my father is"... (another Chinese word, apparently of the same kind). Young Chinese spoke English, trying to imitate the American accent, which jarred on my ear. Then they were chastised by their parents and came to treat me to some corn.

I noticed that in China, unlike in the DPRK, a tangible gap has already formed between the young and the old generations. It's the same kind of gap that has killed my own country in the past. This was evident from the way young people behaved, dressed, and whom they tried to emulate. "*The process is started*," - as Gorbachev used to say... Everything else is only a matter of technique for imperialists. I do hope that I am wrong, but I just saw this process in other countries far too many times.

Please don't try to catch me on my words: I do not have any anti-Chinese feelings. We need to be friends with this country. China is the strong, independent, proud country that can act as a huge counterweight in our planetary pendulum, and it is impossible not to respect it only for that. But will this country remain socialist? I saw the guarded elite settlements behind the fences outside the city- and the urban homeless... And it just strengthened my doubts.

China reminded me of a cartoon of Herluf Bidstrup²⁹⁴ about the economic progress in an exploitative society where over the centuries working people are gradually becoming more decently dressed and some of them are even content with their lives. But at the same time the incomes of "the masters of life" have grown in astronomical proportions.

Is there any point in the economic progress, if its results are already from the beginning designed to be "not for everyone"?

In China, there was no feeling that the people were owners there, that you worked for a common cause. There was no wish to switch off the light in the public toilet, to close the water tap or switch off the air conditioner. There was no desire to work hard just "for someone else's uncle" at a Subbotnik. There was none of that inner feeling that does not allow you to throw rubbish on the streets. It seemed that you did not care about the people here and they didn't care about you (if they couldn't get any money from you, of course!) or about each other.

But, by and large, in international politics, I'm on the Chinese side. The West had better keep mum, with all its electoral farce of "human rights." And if I were Chinese authorities, I would have deported somewhere to "free" Iraq all these Americans, British and NATO puppets squawking for "freedom for Tibet"! Let them try and squawk there, among daily civilian casualties, and reap the reward of their own doing!

But China certainly comes short of the DPRK, which has shown me that "another world" is possible. But for that people have to change themselves. Putting aside the national specificity of North Korea (which is very important for its identity and makes it as strong as it is, but unfortunately, often prevents people from other countries from properly understanding its reality), the main thing is that that society brings up a special type of people – *the people who do care*. They do care what happens around them, they do care about the lives of others. The New Man for whom the main thing is how all people in a society live and what must be done to ensure that no one would suffer. And for the sake of this he is ready to reject any fashionable accessories and gadgets, any luxuries and extravagances, and from his point of view, it is not a sacrifice. They are really of no importance to him. And that's why he

²⁹⁴ Famous in the USSR Danish communist cartoonist (1912-1988), for this particular cartoon see: http://img0.liveinternet.ru/images/attach/c/2//72/836/72836449_1301510165_untitled.jpg

is an immeasurable number of times freer than we, who have become slaves to things and money. He is freer and happier.

... But our comrade didn't show up. Dónal told me about the change of plans; we would have to meet him the next day at a place known to Dónal, near the Great Wall of China. Was it really necessary to bring me here in such a hurry?

.... I fell asleep at the Beijing Hotel, and I had a dream about the Korean morning: with whistles of locomotives, with a starting almost at dawn emanating from the street choir of children and the military, with sounds of boot heels of people going to work... It was a morning when you'd want to get up. It was like that Soviet song which Ri Rang sang for me on the bus:

"Don't sleep, get up, my curly-haired...

In factories' beat,

The country rises glorious

A new day to greet!²⁹⁵"

Exactly like that.

I woke up with a sense of peace in my soul and the quiet inner happiness that I had not felt in years. And that happy feeling reminded me of something else, but what exactly I just could not figure out. When I finally did realize it, I was amazed: Am I so deeply in love? Only not just with one person, but with the entire nation, with the whole country! This has never happened to me before...

Korea, my love! I can only believe in you, just like in the USSR and Russia, really, I can only believe²⁹⁶.

²⁹⁵ See note on page 116.

²⁹⁶ You will not grasp her with your mind
Or cover with a common label,
For Russia is one of a kind –
Believe in her, if you are able.. (Russian 19th century poet Fyodor Tyutchev)

Chapter 24. Dushi Korsou²⁹⁷

«Here! Here he is! This insidious civil-looking type!»

(Soviet cartoon «Three from Prostokvashino»)

«You will always be my friend. You know too much.»

(Northern Irish joke)

... Actually I seldom have good dreams. Mostly I dream huge pigs turning somersaults on the fly, threatening to fall right on my neck, or the ocean raging just below my windows. There is also another nightmare, *a generic one*, for all ages and nations. This dream is about a maths test at school for which you are totally unprepared. The last time I had a good dream was when I dreamt starting to work for the Cuban intelligence services. Afterwards I woke up with a smile! But usually you wake up, and the unbearable nonsense of what is happening around strikes you again and again, right into the heart. In Korea I stopped having this feeling when I was waking up, but here it struck me again.

When I awoke, I remembered with regret that I was not in Pyongyang. The day before Dónal had taken me out to dinner with one of his Chinese business partners. Before I saw China with my own eyes, I actually respected its chosen course as a variation of the NEP²⁹⁸ – especially in comparison with the Russian disastrous neoliberal course chosen by our "father of Russian democracy" Yeltsin and his followers, who had virtually eradicated our domestic industry and agriculture.

Yes, the game with capitalism is not without dangers, I thought, and it is necessary to maintain a balance; yes, it is necessary for the party to retain control over the process, and for the State to participate in the distribution of newly created wealth – at least, to such a degree that none of its citizens would be fearful of their future (provided it is not yet possible to establish conditions sufficient for basic survival, let alone for the personal development of each citizen, and you've resorted to using capitalist methods and incentives for the sake of economic development)... But what I saw in China made me deeply doubt the socialist perspectives for the chosen path. And if strong economic development of a country heads in such a direction, that even after 20 years of this development there will be lots of beggars and paupers, along with the "owners of life" who brazenly park their posh cars on pedestrian-ways near banks, just like in capitalist Russia, then such economic development loses all its meaning, and in any case, any appeal.

Less economically developed than China, Venezuela and Cuba within a short historical period of time provided for their people the essential core of their rights: they eradicated illiteracy, made it possible to have free education and medical care, and began social construction. In China, I was told, primary education only recently became free (I wonder what kind of "socialism" it really was all these years, if parents had to pay for their children to be able to learn even elementary reading and writing?). The heart of its capital still has some quarters looking close to what some African countries look like, even though, right next to it, day and night giant skyscrapers are built for banks and offices of Western

²⁹⁷ Sweet Curaçao (Papiamentu)

²⁹⁸ NEP (New Economic Policy) was an [economic policy](#) proposed by [Vladimir Lenin](#), who called it [state capitalism](#). Allowing some private ventures, the NEP allowed small businesses or shops, for instance, to reopen for private profit while the state continued to control banks, foreign trade, and large industries. It was officially adopted in 1921, but was abandoned after a couple of years, when economy was restored after the war, and when it became clear what dangers NEP held in it for the socialist course. Nowadays, various revisionist forces use NEP as a smokescreen for activities undermining socialism, referring to it as something universal, without reference to it in concrete Russian circumstances of the 1920s. They also fail to mention that Lenin constantly stressed the nature of NEP as *a temporary step back*.

corporations and McDonald's pop up like mushrooms. The only thing, as far as I could understand from Dónal, that was done during this time for the residents of these slums was asphalt on the streets and the construction of public toilets on almost every street corner. On the whole, I must admit that in general the Chinese are very clean people, and the streets even in the slums of Beijing are clean.

Dónal, a big fan of and expert of China, showed us with great pride these public toilets, as if the main achievement of China's new economic policy was the fact that earlier these slums hadn't had toilets, and now the locals could use them (free of charge or not, was unclear). While he told this to us, a naked cute three-year-old ran out of the gateway and immediately began to do his small need right in front of us. Dónal pretended not to notice him.

Yes, of course, public toilets are important, especially in such hot and humid climate, where any kind of infection is easy to spread. I grew up in the USSR in the 1970s in a district where there were no public toilets (only privies), and yet, when I imagined that my family and I would have to use a shared toilet with our neighbour aunt Nyura, thanks to the care of the authorities, I was not particularly charmed by this achievement.

The district, in which our hotel was situated, seemed to be in a permanent state of selling something, similar to Russia of Yeltsin's time: people were dressed anyhow, selling everything that could be sold. Even the variety of goods was similar to ours of Yeltsin's times. Actually, I didn't see in Beijing anything that I would like to purchase as memento of this country, because all the same stuff was sold in the Russian supermarkets and markets in my hometown. The Chinese are known for their hard work, but I saw a lot of people loafing about or leaning against the walls of their houses (of course, it is not their fault. There was probably just no place for them in this "prosperous economy"). To be honest, in Cuba I saw only one such socially poor district - Old Havana, but even there it was getting better.

Speaking about more differences between Chinese and Cubans, I should say that Cubans have a thrifty attitude to electricity and the Chinese seem to waste it. Yes, it is remarkable, that almost everyone, even in the slums, has air conditioners (in the local climate it is a necessity), but then air conditioners work in the hotel all day, even in empty rooms... I can not imagine such a situation in Cuba where local staff would carefully turn them off.

Even Dónal, despite his enthusiasm for China's reforms, was forced to admit that lately the Chinese have become "spoilt", with more instances of them trying to cheat, and it became not very safe in some streets...

- In the past, you would throw away an empty battery, and someone would bring it back to you: what if you had done it by mistake? And now they try to double-charge you in many places... There is no such thing in the DPRK, people there remain very honest.

By the way, during the dinner with Dónal's Chinese friend, a businessman, who was fluent in French, I mentioned where I came from to Beijing, and his face twisted contemptuously:

- Were you prepared mentally to see what you have seen there? This completely warped mentality... a very poor country... China was like that probably in the 1950s... We offered to supply them with electric power, but they do not even have the technical capacity to accept it - no modern communication networks, no gas line... Every citizen is assumed to have only two decent suits to wear when they go out. I strongly support our reforms - look at what they have given to our children!

I looked through the window into the street, where it was already warm twilight. And I saw the homeless arranging for themselves a place to sleep on the sidewalk... Not yet in such quantities as

around Rotterdam Central Station in "highly developed" Holland, of course, but the young people who were passing by (it must have been those "children" of whom he was speaking) did not give a hoot about the homeless, in a completely Western, "civilized" way... They were hurrying to the disco, from which local pop music rattled, to the tables of restaurants that served them fatty carcasses of force-fed ducks...

Were these reforms really worth it - for the sake of achieving this sad state of things?

Once again, I carefully looked around and saw nothing that could make my heart rejoice. There were giant ugly skyscrapers, spoiled landscapes, smog that didn't lift from the streets²⁹⁹, the "new masters of life" who behaved like very poor people, who had "finally made it" and now hastened "to live their lives to the fullest", disregarding everybody else...

The atmosphere was not humane as in Cuba. People were too busy for being humane, too busy with their "business." Two worlds existed here, parallel and independent of each other: the world of those seeking to fill their stomachs with force-fed roast duck, and the world of those seeking how to survive on the margins of the quarters benefited by public toilets.

By the way, I still desire to come back to Cuba. Cuba was like a breath of fresh air. Contrariwise, I really had an impulse to leave China on my first day there and never return.

- Wait! You just need time to get used to China! - said Dónal to me.

But I was not sure that I wanted to get used to what I saw there. With all my deep respect for the hard-working and polite Chinese people, I felt terribly sorry for them. And this pity was growing by the minute.

- Are there any homeless in the DPRK? - I asked my arrogant Chinese interlocutor. He pretended not to hear my question, - as if because of noise on the construction sites of the "new China"...

Possibly, in this country, with its huge population and difficult history, it is not simple even just to feed people - almost a heroic deed. It's not for me to judge. Because we, children of the 1970s, spoilt by the easy life in the flourishing socialist society of the Soviet Union, have been used to taking many things for granted like air, and therefore did not appreciate them until we were confronted with the reality of the "free market" and "universal values."

I sincerely tried to understand what was taking place in that country at the moment, but probably I knew too little about it for that. But what I saw and heard just wasn't close to my heart.

Sometimes it seems that everything that happens today is sheer madness. This isn't about China any more, but about the current deadlock in the development of mankind. Let's consider our Russian people at present. How could those who just yesterday were normal, reasonable people, suddenly start to look at our own history and at what we should be proud of, through the enemy's eyes? Can we seriously believe that this ugly reflection in the hall of distorting mirrors is how we really look? But somehow many really believed that we look like this, hence all their painful hang-ups in relation to the October Revolution. Not long ago, in Belgium, at a festival called Europalia, there was an exhibition of our country, prepared by our own people. A Belgian friend of mine who had visited it, was shocked:

- In the exhibition leaflet of Europalia it says that the Romanov dynasty gave Russia "peace, prosperity, and welfare." But in fact, before the revolution of 1917 Tsarist Russia was the most

²⁹⁹ The description relates to 2007, the smog situation has improved since

backward, the most barbaric country in Europe!³⁰⁰ The average life expectancy for Russian people was only 32 years, and the majority of the population could not read or write. Communism implemented an economic miracle. In the 1930s, the industrial growth averaged 16.5% per year. In 1930, the collective farms had only 25,000 tractors, but in 1941 - already 684,000. Due to this economic and social revolution, the USSR became the first country in the world where workers were given an eight-hour working day, guaranteed free education and health care, and the right to a vacation. In 1931, the labour exchanges were closed because there was enough work for the entire population. Schools were being built in villages everywhere...

If it is remembered even by Belgians, how could we have forgotten it ourselves? How could the Ukrainian singer Ruslana Lyzhichko³⁰¹, better known as simply Ruslana (probably she had to give up her surname, because it was too difficult for her European sponsors to pronounce!), who had received free music education in the USSR (and had nothing against getting it from those “Moskals³⁰²” and “communists”!) and excellent free education at school in her own native language, lower herself so much as to travel to the headquarters of the modern fascist block – NATO - "in order to participate in the briefing and discussion of the links between Ukraine and NATO... and discuss the main issues of further cooperation"? I wonder what kind of cooperation it is about? Is she going to produce a pin-up calendar with her photographs for the NATO soldiers, including Ukrainians in Iraq?

The Lithuanians sold into Britain as sex slaves by Albanian gangsters weep on the BBC. But this propaganda channel drones on how Lithuanians and Latvians were “oppressed” by Russians “in Soviet times.

"Oh, the Baltics - they are not like us, that's the West," - many of us thought about the Baltic Republics, keeping up to the centuries old Westernism of ours. Well, and what was western about the Baltics? Yes, people talked more softly in public transport there: they have a different temperament. What else? Scented candles, cocktails that you could drink through a straw, and "hot guys" who were so “advanced” that even under socialism they collected pornographic photos.

One such "hot guy" named Eric promised me his help in starting correspondence with foreign countries. He said he would publish my address in some western journals, for a price (he was not some “Soviet”, but a man of the world!), which meant he would do that in exchange for those very pictures. And from where did he think I would get anything like that? Not to mention the audacity of asking a girl for such a thing! It was similar to the “cultured” Nazi German soldiers who made no bones about urinating before our peasant women, to the astonishment and disgust of the latter.

³⁰⁰ It is clear that this Belgian's view reflects the traditional prejudiced European attitude towards Russia, which, in fact, is not unlike racism. Europeans' views on Russia have prevalently been but superficial, based on trivial and demeaning myths. Yet Russia was neither 'barbaric', nor 'backward' among European nations; in many ways it was more cultured, noble, spiritually profound, humane and harmonious society. Russia's economic development in the 20th c. was brisker than anywhere in Europe. The life expectancy figure quoted is dubious, it might have been thus defined following one of the famines or epidemics. In fact, life expectancy in Russia is quite compatible with the life expectancy in European countries at the time: cf the data from the reference-book by S.A. Novoselsky (1916, p. 154), which reveal that, for instance, in 1891-1900 England and Wales held the first place in Europe as to male death rates in the cohorts of 40-50 and 50-60 y.o.; Russia's figures were medium for all the cohorts, except for the child mortality rate. Also cf the data of male life expectancy for 1920: Russia – 41.9 (with WWI, the Revolution and the Civil War, the post-war havoc); France – 52.2; England – 55.6 years (data by N. Mendkovich, http://actualhistory.ru/golod_i_revoluciya).

³⁰¹ Ruslana Stepanivna Lyzhichko (b. 1973), is a World Music Award winning and MTV Europe Music Award nominated artist, and the winner of the [Eurovision Song Contest 2004](#), holding the title of People's Artist of Ukraine. She is also a former MP serving as deputy in the Ukrainian parliament Verkhovna Rada for the Our Ukraine Party

³⁰² Derogatory term for Russians used by Ukrainian nationalists

The very idea of those things was profoundly alien to me. I suppose that even our medical faculty teachers underestimated how innocent the vast majority of us were at the age of 18 and even 20. I remember the lessons of medicine - in the 2nd year - when for the first time they talked to us about the means to avoid pregnancy - by abstinence on certain days. The teacher - a doctor, a retired military man, said bluntly:

- You will have about ten days left in each month. That should be enough for you..

Ten days should be enough? Enough for what? I did not even understand what he was talking about. And if I did, I would have been offended to the core. Did he seriously believe that it is something without which I cannot live? Did he think that I would need sex just for the sake of itself, without being deeply in love?...

In short, when Eric gave me such terms of "cultural" exchange, I decided to make fun of him and sent him some topless pictures of African women from different tribes - for whom that was a natural way of things anyway, and no one up there had any morbid desires except for perverted Western tourists. For some time he did not suspect a trick (is there really some truth in that it takes them too long to get the idea³⁰³?) And when he suddenly realized it, it was too late: my address had already been published abroad... Eric finally appealed to me: "I do not need pictures of Niggers!" In response, I pointed out to him that in the "civilized" world, the word "nigger" was a bad word, avoided by decent people, whereupon Eric exploded - he decided that I was making fun of him because of his poor use of the Russian language (sometimes small nations have such deep complexes and sensitivities, that we are not even aware of them!): "I do not have to know this *bear language* of yours!" - he wrote to me. Provided it was still the Soviet time, although the Gorbachev- Sajūdis³⁰⁴ anti-Soviet propaganda was rife and undermining our country, I was still genuinely surprised by such a fierce reaction: "What's our language got to do with this? I am speaking about American English!"

And you say, "why will the construction of Tallinn never be completed?"³⁰⁵... This is why it won't.

Did the Russians sell you like horses on the market, as the others do to you today? Or is this precisely the kind of independence you were looking for? The independence to sell yourselves as soon as possible?

However, the topic of buying and selling is important not only to the former Soviet republics.

"How can possibly we win, if we're bought so easily,

How will we be able to win, if we're sold so cosily?" - complains Oleg Gazmanov³⁰⁶, sensing a change in people's attitudes since his Yesaul³⁰⁷.

³⁰³ Refers to the series of Russian jokes about "hot Estonian guys" who have a far too slow reaction to everything

³⁰⁴ Sajūdis (established in 1988) is the political organization which was supporting the idea of Lithuanian independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

³⁰⁵ Tallinn, capital of Estonia, is squeezed between the Tallinn Bay and a lake Ulemiste. This lake is on the northern margin of a limestone plateau, while the city is below. According to a legend, on the darkest autumnal night each year a mysterious old man climbs out of the Ulemiste depths, knocks on the city gates and asks whether the construction of Tallinn has been completed. The little man has sworn that, should it one day be finished, he will release the lake's waters and drown out the whole city. The knowing guards therefore always answer, "No, good sir! There's still a great deal of construction taking place. Please be so good as to come again after a little while." That's why Tallinn will never be completed.

³⁰⁶ Oleg Gazmanov (b.1951) is a Russian pop singer, composer and poet, singing, among others, patriotic songs that glorify Russia and Russian history

³⁰⁷ Pro-Perestroika song from the early 1990s

How? Very simple: just stop selling yourselves.

Dreams, dreams, obsessive dreams... A cold day, pillars of smoke from the chimneys of our log cottages, fancy patterns on the icy windows, looking at which one could forever fantasize what they depicted by the efforts of ingenious Father Frost, Anatoly Alexin's book *Vacation That Never Ends*³⁰⁸, a plate of hot buckwheat porridge with butter on the table, waiting for me after school, sparkling lemonade on holidays, because if everything is there just every day, there will be no sense of celebration on special days; our inserting the second window frame for winter and taking it out when spring came - and that was the mark of the onset of real spring... Cheerful people - lunching together in the field during their work on the collective farm, singing songs together on the bus on their way home... Long kolkhoz³⁰⁹ beds of cabbages along the floodplains of the river, on which stately passenger boats sail to and fro. The non-consumerist time, when we had no idea that to properly wash your hair, shampoo alone was not enough, and you needed a separate "conditioner." Because our ordinary Soviet shampoos on the egg basis washed your hair so well without any need for conditioners (probably in the West they have deliberately removed some ingredients from normal shampoo, so that after washing your hair with it, it will be tangled and dry, and people will have to buy a special conditioner to repair the damage!)...

No... it was not a dream. There was such a country – the USSR. There was such kind of life - worthy of human beings, not beasts.

It was the best time not only in our lives: it was the best time in the history of our planet, the time of hope. And now, after this refined communist Renaissance, the planet has turned back to some obscure new Dark Age thinking. We are witnessing mass insanity. A time when for many it doesn't seem absurd to accept "the lesser of two evils" (imagine the newspapers of World War II reading: *Yes, the Nazis are, of course, evil, but partisans are no angels either? Or: In this war, no one wins*^{310?}), or the fact that the national championship in football is called "*The Coca Cola Championship*." A co-worker of my mother's, upon the tenth wave of post-Soviet defamation and fact spinning, screamed foaming at the mouth how much better we would have been to live now, if we had been defeated in the war by Germans. My mother just told her with a calm smile:

- Well, Margarita, some might have lived better, but some would have been in for gas chambers.

Remarkably, this Margarita's surname was Grinberg³¹¹!...

How could such grandfathers and fathers as ours have begot descendants with this kind of thinking? This is a mystery of our century. Perhaps we have lost spirit and morals because they have spared us everything they had been through themselves, or perhaps they had no time to bring us up properly, being so busy with building a new, bright life, and were just hoping that we would learn to understand and appreciate everything ourselves... They could not have imagined even in their worst nightmares that we would grow into "people of unlimited appetites", the likes of *Prof. Vybegallo's cadaver*³¹²,

³⁰⁸ Popular Soviet children's book by Anatoly Aleksin (b. 1934) - about a boy who wins as a prize New Year's holidays that last forever.

³⁰⁹ Collective farm in the USSR

³¹⁰ Description of a "new Vietnamese" feature film about the Vietnam war.

³¹¹ Jewish surname in Russia

³¹² Artificial creature with unlimited appetite from a popular Strugatsky Brothers' science fiction novel *Monday Begins on Saturday* (1964)

who was so wonderfully portrayed - probably in the image and likeness of the Strugatsky brothers' relative Yegor Gaidar³¹³ - in our classic science fiction book.

You remember the story by Leo Tolstoy³¹⁴, where a little boy's parents decided to make the old grandfather eat behind the stove out of a wooden wash tub, instead of having him eat with them at the dinner table, in order not to hear or see his difficulties with eating, and then they saw their own son making a tub out of a piece of wood to feed them behind the stove from when they get older?

This wooden wash tub is already in the making for all of us, too. By the hands of our children, deprived of everything that was given at birth to all of us. The day will come when they come to us and say: "Shame on you! How could you have dirtied and destroyed with your own hands everything that other people in the world could only dream of, for the sake of what people had been sacrificing their lives for centuries? And you think we are going to give you a seat at a nice dinner table now?"

Our old age is doomed to be bleak. We will finally listen to recordings of old songs of the communist time and understand what we had not understood about our parents and grandparents, because our own brains swam with the fat of stupidity and greed, and we were unable to dream and love the way they had done. And that we are not worth to hold a candle to our robbed and ridiculed grandfathers, the builders of the new world, who at a great cost to themselves made an unprecedented breakthrough in human history – a breakthrough to happiness.

...Dónal knocked on the door of my room: it was time to go to a meeting with my future partner - to the Great Wall of China! Ah, those Irish! They could have thought up a meeting in the Mausoleum of Mao just as well.

We travelled to the Wall for about an hour, in an air-conditioned cab. The Chinese driver explained to us with gestures that he would be waiting for us for two hours and then went to lay down at the back seat.

To get to the Wall of China from the inside today is, perhaps, not easier than it used to be for the enemy to break through to it from the North: you feel as if you are in a crowd of gypsies. Dónal did not use the elevator, instead we started going up *manually*... ugh! Ri Rang had really muddled my head with his linguistic structures!... - *on foot*, of course! And all the way up you were almost grabbed by the flaps of your clothing by merchants trying to sell you Mao caps and silk robes. Just like our gypsies on the market, "*gild my hand, sweetheart!*"

When we, heroically fighting off these *carriers of free market relations*, finally got to the middle of the mountain, and the Wall itself was still not in sight, Dónal suddenly spotted someone. And pulled my hand.

On the mountain, away from the stairs leading to the Great Wall, a tall man wearing a baseball cap and an olive fleece sweater was sitting with his back to us at a little stone picnic table, with pheasants walking about in the nearby bushes - a glass of tea and a thermos in his hands, hunched over a magazine for anglers in English. It looked so comical, that it reminded me of a Soviet joke: The doorbell rings: "Do they send to space from here?" - sounds the password. - "*No, from here they send to hell! And your spy Ivanov lives two stories up!*"

³¹³ Yegor Gaidar (1956-2009), who was son-in-law of Arkady Strugatsky, was a Soviet and Russian economist, best known as the architect of the controversial shock therapy reforms administered in Russia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Most Russians hold him responsible for the economic hardships of the 1990s that resulted in mass poverty and hyperinflation as: his "reforms" initiated full-swing capitalism.

³¹⁴ One of the most famous Russian writers (1828-1910)

That was the man Dónal led me to.

- Here you are, Jenny, he is going to be your spouse for the next few years...

Dónal, apparently, thought it very funny. I also decided to make a joke on the subject, in order to defuse the situation, and already opened my mouth, when the man in question turned around and looked up at me with his blue eyes. He had thick, 'zibeline' eyebrows, slightly joined at the nose.

It was even more unexpected than the marriage proposal made by Ri Rang. In front of me sat Oisín Rafferty, in person.

Do they really suffer from such staff shortages?

Could they not have found anybody else in all 32 counties³¹⁵?

Have all the others collectively retired on pension?

But I quickly pulled myself together. What was I to do - turn around and exit gracefully? Like a child in a teaser: "*give me back my toys and never pee into my pot again?*" What about Venezuela? No, let me leave it to him to quit, if he found it unpleasant! And my task was clear, I could go to Curaçao alone

.

Oisín choked on his tea when he saw me, and I experienced a kind of malicious pleasure when I patted him on the back, which went all tensed at my slightest touch." *Well, wherever I go, this man is always there for me,*" - I recalled the malignant whisper of Lida Basina³¹⁶. As I recalled that, I unwittingly started smiling.

I quickly glanced at Dónal. It was obvious that he was unaware of our knowing each other, the more so in the capacity we did. Well, of course, there was no need in giving him any extra information. It was clear that apart from Dermot and some unknown messenger between him and Oisín, no one else had an idea of our little adventure of old in the course of the Irish peace process. And even they knew far from all of it...

- Zhenya, - I said, holding out my hand cupped - but if it is hard for you to pronounce, you can call me Eugenia.. Or Jenny. If it is easier.

He slowly began to recover, but was still nervous.

- No, why should it be difficult... Zhenya, - he said with a strong Northern accent. - It's disrespectful to people - to mispronounce their names. Oisín, - and he gave me his hand, without looking me in the eye.

- Thank you, that's very nice of you - I said to him with a faint sneer. "Zhenya, stop acting up!" - my inner voice nagged at me.

- Everything is ready for the departure, - said Dónal, who did not notice any of my taunts or Oisín's confusion. - You are flying tomorrow, to Paris. In Paris you'll change for a flight to Lisbon. From there you will get to Cascais (I'll give Jenny a guidebook for Portugal, you can read it on the way). In

³¹⁵ Island of Ireland consists of 32 counties (26 in the Irish republic and 6 in Northern Ireland). The name "32 counties" is used by the Irish Republicans to stress the unity of Ireland as a country.

³¹⁶ See part 1 of *Soviética*.

Cascais you will stay for three days. Jenny will prepare Oisin, tell him about this island... what's its name?

- Curaçao. Three days would not be enough to prepare for this, - I heard my own voice. Why do I have such big mouth?

- Of course, ideally, we would have arranged for you to live under the same roof for a couple of months. So you can get used to each other, and work together well. Maybe even begin to like each other...

- Dónal! - I and Oisin cried indignantly in chorus.

- Sorry guys, I did not mean anything... I just wanted to say that, unfortunately, we are pressed for time. There is some alarming news coming from Venezuela, a...

Yeah, I heard - or rather, I read about the alarming news related to Curaçao. Not long ago, Eva Golinger visited Curaçao and later wrote that during the recent military exercises in the Caribbean Sea just off the coast of Venezuela there were eight U.S. warships, of which the aircraft carrier George Washington alone was carrying 85 combat aircraft and 6,500 soldiers. And all in all in these exercises more than 10,000 U.S. troops were involved - plus 40,000 located in Latin America. Those ships spent 2.5 months near the Venezuelan coast. It was the Dutch government who supported Americans in the region, far more than the Antillean one. Who would doubt! It is, after all, the European Tabaki jackal number two, after Britain. It cannot live quietly without barking from behind the back of Shere Khan³¹⁷.

Curaçao is located less than 40 miles off the Venezuelan coast, and in good weather from some places on the island Venezuela can even be seen. There is a state-owned refinery there - one of the few industries in Curaçao - leased out to the Venezuelan oil company until 2019. It produces much of the oil consumed in Central America and the Caribbean. The *Refineria*³¹⁸ that I remembered so well from the time of my stay in Curaçao, is of great economic and strategic importance.

"Washington is trying to persuade the government of Curaçao to terminate the contract and sell the refinery to an American company." All the major companies in the fields of infrastructure, water, gas, electricity, telephone on Curaçao are in the American hands. Now they want the refinery too... From Curaçao, you can easily launch a missile at Venezuela...Golinger calls Curaçao 'U.S.'s Third Frontier.

"Until February 2005 Curaçao did not cause much trouble for the Venezuelan security because there were only 200 soldiers on the U.S. FOL base. That all changed when the U.S. aircraft carrier Saipan arrived in Curaçao unannounced "... One of the main vessels for the transport of the invasion force, it arrived there with more than 1,400 marines and 35 helicopters on board. When the Venezuelan government reacted to this unfriendly gesture, the U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield said that the blame was on the "gap in communication", while at the same time saying, "our desire is to make more visits of ships to Curaçao and Aruba (which is just 15 miles from the coast of Venezuela) in the coming weeks, months and years."

This veiled threat came to fruition in April 2006, when the port of Willemstad was visited by, among others, the aircraft carrier George Washington, accompanied by three warships, with the total of 86 fighters and more than 6,500 marines on board. In addition, at about the same time, an American nuclear submarine was off the Venezuelan coast - to intercept messages from Venezuela. And in June

³¹⁷ Tiger and jackal from Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book"

³¹⁸ Refinery (Papiamento). All information given here, comes from works of Eva Golinger.

of that year, on the shores of Curaçao military exercises called Caribbean Lion were held, the aim of which was declared to be "capturing a fictional rebel leader Hugo Legrand.". Could anybody still have any doubt after that about the plans of the U.S. military?

Thank goodness that neither my mother nor Ri Rang knew into what kind of Wolf's Lair I was being sent *by the party*. Otherwise they would have been terribly worried about me. When I thought about them: my mother, the kids, Ri Rang, I felt warm at heart.

... -And so, you only have three days, - said Dónal.

I looked at that hapless Irish lover of fishing.

- What do you know about Curaçao?

He shrugged his shoulders

- Nothing. I saw where it is on a map.

- Well... - I looked at Dónal perplexedly.

- Jenny, I've already explained, the lack of time, lack of resources. We were going to send another man with you, but he changed his mind at the last moment. He had just bought a new house, you know, it has to be furnished, redecorated... Well, it took us some time to find another suitable comrade...

"Oh, well, *I should be so lucky!*" - I thought angrily.

- Well, you understand?

- No, I honestly do not, - I said and thought to myself: "Well, of course, *the boys* have grown old and ran out of adrenaline!."

But Dónal ignored, in a very Irish way, everything he did not want to hear:

- But you have even lived there once, I'm told! What else do you need?

- Dónal, but that was more than 15 years ago! Everything's changed. Compare your Belfast now to Belfast 15 years ago.

- By the way, it's not *my* Belfast, I'm from Crossmaglen, - he said. - First, there on the spot there are some of our people who will inform you of all the news. Only they do not have the access to those sources that interest us. They are not the kind of social and racial strata, to get there. And for you this will be the first and most urgent task. Well, the main thing is that you know the local people and their mentality well. This is a very suitable combination.

"Yeah - I thought sadly, - I know their mentality... One day when I was already living in Ireland after my divorce, I read in a Dutch newspaper that in Rotterdam a teenage boy rode a bike on the footpath. A Dutch woman made a remark about it to him. He went home, took a gun and shot her in the leg... I have not finished reading the article yet when I said to myself, "This boy must have been Antillean!" And I was spot on. I do not think that all Antilleans are bullies. I just sensed with some sixth sense that when she had made the remark, that boy must have felt the same as Sonny in his relationship with me: *«Don't mess with me!»*

- So, where was I? You keep interrupting me! In Cascais you, Jenny, will change your appearance into Saskia's and both of you will be given new passports. Oisín knows where and by whom. Well, then, are we done here? Let's go down quickly, Jenny, or our Chinese will leave without us!

I went down with Dónal. And Oisín remained on his tree stump with his thermos.

- See you tomorrow, - I told him, smiling sweetly, and I saw with pleasure him panick.

However, I too was very uncomfortable, despite my cheerful smiles.

That night I tossed and turned for a long time in bed in the hotel room. A burning sense of grief which I had been pounding deep into my soul with all emotional and rational brooms and sticks, had resurfaced. Grief that was not only caused by Oisín, but by all of them, those fans of "*revolution of investment*" with a "*market face*." Who dare as well to adopt the names of the dead heroes! And to justify their own opportunism they say: "*If he had lived in our time*³¹⁹..."

... If Che Guevara hadn't been killed in Bolivia in 1967, his portrait would not be flaunted today in such numbers on the T-shirts of "rebellious" Western youth. Moreover, the same youth who snap up these T-shirts would most likely stigmatize him for being so "undemocratic", for the fact that he, "along with his accomplice Fidel, is a dictator."

Yes, if Che were alive, he would definitely be not *their* hero. He would be a "dictator" for them, like Fidel or Chavez. They prefer Che to Fidel, precisely because he is dead, and Fidel is alive and continues to build a new life in Cuba. They love only those revolutionaries who were killed and feel a fierce hatred towards all the remaining revolutionary survivors. Because they are dead, it is always easy to say that they would not do this or that: anything that does not fit into those well-fed "rebels" comfortable childish fantasies of a *bloodless revolution*, in which, as in the end of fairy tales, all "live-happily ever after", getting more and more material possessions. Of revolutions that occur spontaneously, like a spring rain, which suddenly pours out of a passing cloud. Of revolution that satisfies everyone, including traditional oppressors and "cool" thieves and robbers of all stripes.

This *made-up* Che is the hero of those who never bring anything in life to an end and are never conscientious at anything, except for the realization of their own, often so swollen, personal ambitions. Of those for whom the form is more important than the content. Of those for whom the struggle can be only "with a gun in hands" (preferably, in the hands of *someone else*, whom they will just admire from a safe distance or, at the most, support with slogans).

They are also unable to sacrifice themselves - without hysteria, with dignity, for the cause, to which all their life was dedicated, like Che. Just try to touch them, and they will shout their heads off about their "human rights" and "repressions" so that it rings in your ears. How they love to portray themselves, *the one-and-onlys*, as "victims of totalitarianism." Our intellectuals - "victims of terror" certainly have such attitudes. They don't give a hoot about Communists and Komsomol members who went to their death, without saying a word, like the "traitor" Pavlik Morozov³²⁰, or urging people to fight, like Zoya³²¹. Or like my grandmother's brother, who after 20 years in the camps only cheerfully waved with his hand: "*We got just what we were looking for!*" and remained until his death a real Bolshevik.

According to those who love to show off in the West today, wearing black berets and T-shirts with the famous face, all of this just did not exist. Gulag existed, the Russian revolution - "*the most terrible event of the twentieth century*", according to an Irish Republican newspaper³²², did take place, but, for

³¹⁹ Sinn Féin activists often speak like this of Bobby Sands (1954-1981)

³²⁰ Pavel Morozov (1918-1932), better known by the [diminutive](#) Pavlik, was a [Soviet](#) youth who denounced his father to the authorities for his anti-Soviet activities and was in turn viciously killed by his uncle and grandfather, along with his 8 years old brother. After the dissolution of the USSR capitalist media denounced him for "being a traitor."

³²¹ Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya (1923-1941) - see previous notes.

³²² Such description of Russian Revolution really appeared in the Irish "An Phoblacht" in 2004, in an article written by a certain Matt Treacy.

example, the heroic resistance of the Communists in the Second World War in Europe - didn't. Nazi camps existed, of course, but they were exterminating only "Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, the disabled and the Socialists", Communists aren't even mentioned (if we listen to the Irish "left").

Some undefined "progressives" and "socialists" were in those camps, but "reactionary" Communists - weren't, end of story. Just like the Jews were well in the camps, but the Slavs weren't. Who organized resistance in the enemy's rear and uprisings in the occupied territories? It must have been homosexuals. Or Roma. And not one of the gentlemen in Che T-shirts and berets would even dare express aloud such a "blasphemous" idea: that in fact many Jews were both Jews and communists - fighters against fascism. Jews are assumed (by Spielberg, whose films replace history books today) to be the victims of fascism, and maybe even fighters against it, but *there is no way such intelligent and gentle people could ever be "those nasty Stalinists,"* to whom, in fact, belongs the real victory in the war against fascism.

They love so much to cackle about the Soviet "gulag", but oh, how they hate to remember what their own imperialism was engaged in at the same time - the imperialism that had for centuries been providing them and their idol George Orwell with his favourite Indian tea, strong tobacco and red and white wine, with which it is all too nice to dream of revolutionary changes. And apartheid in South Africa, against which Mandela, without whose presence they cannot hold any pop concert nowadays, fought personally, also appeared once *just on its own*, as if in a vacuum. Who stood behind it, who supported it, God only knows. Well, surely, not the same decent people - heads of their states and businesses, who now go on a mandatory pay-of-homage visit to Mandela, like Muslim pilgrims to Mecca!

They do not hesitate to trade in pictures of funerals of their former comrades - the ones who like Che have sacrificed their lives in the struggle. At 17 pounds a piece³²³. "*For the good causes,*" as Karlsson On the Roof³²⁴ used to say, collecting in a hat candies for himself from children... They do not mind that every time they start giving a public lecture about their memories of their close friendship with these untimely deceased fighters (year by year this lecture begins with the phrase "*He was just an ordinary fellow, the same as you and me...*"), no relatives of those deceased are anywhere around: because they are too sick to be present at the *sale of the memory* of their loved ones... It was their "public representatives" - steadfastly fighting for the reunification of their own country (which, at least, they claim, as their purpose)- who have "expressed support for the return to Kosovo of Roma refugees", "the right to self-determination for the Kurdish people", "the unification of Cyprus", "the self-determination for Kosovo and Montenegro."... Why is there such a mess in their imperialist-socialist half-empty heads? Why do they believe that the unification of Cyprus and Ireland is a good thing and progress, but that it is OK to finish off Yugoslavia to the end, so as "not to rock the boat"? Their leaders praise German reunification - that is, on capitalist terms. But not a word from them about the reunification of Korea! *That would damage the American investments in Ireland*, you see...

And not a word about the history of Yugoslavia, nor of Serbian refugees from Kosovo, as if they are either not human or do not exist at all, not a word that "self-determined" - with the support of Western imperialism, that is!- Kosovo has become a brothel slave-market and supplier of heroin on the European scale.... To tell them this is useless. "*We are the heirs of Che Guevara! And, besides, he had an Irish granny,*" - they'll tell you with thrust.

³²³ Sinn Fein offices in Belfast and other places really sell framed funeral photos of the Irish hunger strikers of 1981.

³²⁴ Main character of three famous Swedish children's books by Astrid Lindgren. "For the good causes" for Karlsson meant for himself.

When you are a child, it seems so easy to become your favourite hero. For example, Zorro. Just put on a black cloak, pick up a toy rapier, wave it - and off you go! Some people stubbornly refuse to grow up. They are already in their 20s, sometimes even in their 30s, but continue to feel the need to put on a black beret and a treasured T-shirt - and they would immediately become just like *Comandante*. But Che is not Zorro, not Robin Hood or even Stenka Razin³²⁵. Che was *a communist*. One of those same people whom those self-declared “left” so passionately hate. And they constantly and persistently forget about this fact.

"In this life

it's not difficult to die.

To make life

*is more difficult by far”*³²⁶, - said V. Mayakovsky. Yes, and it is particularly difficult *to make life for others*, for the people. It's a hard, thankless, seemingly endless, - like a never-ending weeding of a garden - exercise. Bullies in berets and T-shirts believe heroes do not weed gardens. That “boring” occupation is left to “dictators.”

Their Che does not imprison or shoot “business people”, who “just wanted to do business” (at the cost of others), he does not check the work of various organizations in the country. Instead, he runs around in the jungle with a gun, or lies, shot, on the table, looking at them with the eyes of a suffering martyr. That’s what they would like him to be.

Their Che, *Che of the T-shirts*, is not the Che who ran Cuban banks, not the one who was involved in the Cuban industry, not even the one who chopped sugar canes in the fields and definitely not the one who wrote to the mother of one of the “victims of the repressive Castro regime,” Lydia Ares Rodriguez: “...but I have to tell you that I personally think your son must serve the sentence, because to commit a crime against the socialist property is the worst offence, despite any circumstances that may exist. I feel I must tell you this, and I am sorry for the pain it will cause you, but it would not be doing my revolutionary duty, if I didn't do it with complete frankness.”³²⁷

I wonder what they would call *this* Che, if he happened to turn up in Russia today?...

...Dónal, of course, did not accompany me to the airport. His mission on this was completed, and it would be even better if no one saw us in his company.

At the airport, I did not wait for Oisín, but got to the registration desk and went to the gate. In the end, we would be flying in the same plane anyway. We would get off together in Paris. Did I really need to sit next to him for as much as almost 10 hours?

But some bad luck did not let me get rid of him: our seats happened to be next to each other! In the middle row of our Boeing. To my left sat a Cuban athlete with a disability, who was apparently returning home via Paris with his team from the Paralympic Games, next to him - a young blond beauty, an English girl, and to the right of me - that *hero of the national liberation struggle, miho konosi komo*³²⁸ *manager in repairing old furniture.*

³²⁵ Stepan (Stenka) Timofeyevich Razin (1630 – 1671) was a Cossack leader who led a major uprising against the nobility and Tsar in South Russia, symbol of a Russian rebel.

³²⁶ Vladimir Mayakovsky “To Sergei Esenin”(1925)

³²⁷ Che Guevara a Lydia Ares Rodriguez, La Habana, 30 de octubre de 1963

³²⁸ Better known as (AKA) (Papiamento)

I did not look at Oisín, tried even not to come anywhere close to his shoulder. I did not breathe. The aircraft rolled out on the runway. I did not hear the usual briefing of the stewardesses. Would I be able to work with him after all that had happened? To live with him under the same roof? Well, there you go...! I was mad at myself for even thinking that I wouldn't be able to.

The first half an hour of the flight we were silent and did not look at each other.

I decided not to talk to him first. Oisín finally broke the silence, leaned over to me and softly said:

- Well, hello! How are you doing? How are your kids?

- I'm fine, thank you. What do you care about my kids?

- Nothing, - Oisín looked at me surprised. - It's just after you disappeared, I asked our mutual friend, what had happened to you. He told me that you've got more children. I asked, who the father was. But he didn't answer anything, only looked at me in a strange way...

Did he? Well, of course, because Dermot had probably decided that...

It was funny, up to abdominal cramps, and my irritation gradually vanished.

- I disappeared not because of children, but because the situation had changed. And what you and I were doing, was no longer of use for any of you. And I had already realized it back then.

Oisín gently pushed me with his shoulder, for me not to say too much. But I wasn't going to say too much.

- Let's talk about it later, OK? - he whispered through clenched teeth. I just shrugged: he was the one who started the conversation. If you want to, we'll talk, if you don't want to, we won't. I have nothing to hide from you.

Meanwhile, to the left of me a little human drama was unfolding.

The Cuban liked his pretty neighbour, *blond Josee*³²⁹ from some Dorset, and he, of course, tried to compliment her in a Cuban way. God forbid, he didn't harass her - he just made tokens of attention to her. But she did not understand Spanish. Plus, it was difficult for him to talk because of cerebral palsy, and I think this was exactly what frightened her most. *Josee* looked at him almost with disgust and was quietly trying to move away from him.

When I saw how that silly pretty girl reacted to an athlete with a disability, a handsome dark-skinned guy who would attract girls of all ages and nations, had he not sat in a wheelchair and had he not spoken with so much difficulty, I thought of CIREN³³⁰, remembered dancing Cuban doctors, and my heart sank. What a silly little British scoundrel!

- Let us swap places,- I offered her. She was surprised and delighted as if I was a knight on a white horse to save her from the horrors of hell:

- Oh, really? Are you sure? Thank you, thank you very much!

Empty sillyhead.

³²⁹ Blond Josee - character from the Soviet adventure film *Elusive Avengers* (1966), this name is used for a sarcastic description of blond ladies who think too high of their own appearance.

³³⁰ International Center for Neurological Restoration in Cuba (Zhenya's daughter received a free medical treatment there, see part 2 of the book)

- What's wrong with her? - the Cuban asked me perplexedly when I sat down next to him. – I didn't tell her anything, except that she was beautiful...

I waved with my hand:

- *Los ingleses*³³¹ ... – what can we expect of them...

It wasn't really easy to understand him. Especially with my scanty knowledge of Spanish. But I tried. And the guy started to blossom in front of my eyes. When we flew over the Sayan Mountains³³², and I remembered our Soviet lemonade of the same name³³³, he reproduced by heart some revolutionary poem and quoted Che, Camilo Sienfuegos and José Martí. And then we chanted Katyusha and Hymn of the 26th of July³³⁴. One of his team-mates, passing us by, saw us singing, winked at my Cuban neighbour and, with an approving expression, said to him:

- Ma-a-acho!

And Oisín, sitting next to that English girl, completely sank down, closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep...

... - Zhenya, we are only just beginning to work, but you've just almost betrayed yourself,- he told me when, 12 hours later we changed in Paris for a plane to Lisbon.

- Why? There is still a long way to Curaçao.

- You can never be too careful. And you show such interest in Cubans.

- It's not interest, it behaving like a human being, do you understand, *Tin Woodman*? - I was angry – Didn't you see how that little nasty girl had almost reduced the guy to tears? Do you know how important it is for a disabled person to feel that he's treated like any ordinary person?

- I know, – Oisín interrupted me unexpectedly and added more gently. - I'm surprised at you, Zhenya. I have never experienced such idealism in my life. Only in books. A revolutionary must be practical.

- Aye, you really succeeded so much on the revolutionary path with your practicality!, - I could not resist the temptation to tell him what I actually thought, - especially in Poleglass and Twinbrook³³⁵. It's just *the vanguard of the world revolutionary movement* now. A little bit more, and all people will run away from there.

- I'll explain to you now...

- Don't explain to me anything. *Don't teach me how to live, fellow*³³⁶. And if you are not satisfied with me, then perhaps they had to send with you a couple of your "*rising stars*"...

- Sh-sh-sh... - he grabbed my arm.

I was so outraged that I took it from him.

- You're a funny girl! Well, don't be offended so much, but we'll have to restrain ourselves, considering our job...

- And I do restrain myself. Otherwise you would have already flown through the plane window!

³³¹ The English people (Spanish)

³³² The Sayan Mountains are a mountain range between north-western Mongolia and southern Siberia, Russia

³³³ Sayany - popular Soviet lemonade in the 1970-1980s

³³⁴ Soviet and Cuban songs respectively

³³⁵ Depressed and socially deprived working-class areas of West Belfast

³³⁶ Expression from the Soviet satirical novel *12 Chairs* by Ilf and Petrov (1927)

Ri Rang would have known what to say to this. But Oisín only silently flushed and turned away. "Downer," - I thought. - "Just to think there was time when I liked him!"

For the rest of our way to Lisbon, we were not talking. Great start for working together! Probably I should have kept silent. Sometimes it seems that women must always be silent; and that it's the key to success for a woman in any of her relations with the opposite sex, no matter if it's business or friendship or even personal relationship. But no, it doesn't have to be so: because I could talk to Ri Rang about everything without any fear of his reaction... The greatest thing was that I could talk to him, even about very sublime subjects, without fear of getting a response full of cynicism and misunderstanding. ...*Ri Rang, Ri Rang, where are you now? When will I see you again...?*

When we arrived in Lisbon, it was already getting dark. It was still quite warm, though it was already the latter half of autumn. The Portuguese language, which we heard everywhere around us, really reminded me of Papiamento. I understood a lot, although I had never learnt Portuguese.

Neither I nor Oisín had any luggage. We passed through the passport control, customs, and, coming out, questioningly stared at each other in silence. I gave in first:

- And what now?

- And now we'll rent a car and drive to Cascais. Do you have a driving license with you?

- Could you not ask this earlier?

- What, do you mean you haven't?

- I do. But I haven't been driving for a long time. And besides, I was taught to drive on the other side of the road! Maybe you would like to drive?

Oisín hesitated:

- I don't have a driving license. I have never had it.

- Excellent.

We stood there for a few minutes wondering what to do.

- Well, - I said, seeing that the case was not moving forward. - Ok. I'll try, but if something happens...

- Just drive slower. I do not like fast driving at all, - advised me *the brave performer of escapes from British prisons*. But this time I held my tongue.

When asked what kind of car to rent, I just shrugged my shoulders. It's only in childhood that you really want to sit exactly on a red seat at the window on a tram. I remember how I sulked if I couldn't get such a seat, and the adults couldn't understand it. For many, this recurrence of childhood apparently persists as a chronic disease, and when they grow up, it is expressed in new forms: they necessarily need cars of only a specific brand and model, otherwise they begin to let bubbles out of their mouths and to stamp their feet.

-Just don't distract me with talking, - I warned Oisín. - Better check the map where we are going and tell me. You will be my navigator.

Oisín nodded.

These 20 or so miles to Cascais took us probably almost an hour to drive! I was very uncomfortable, but fortunately, didn't have enough time to take thought to it. The road was so tortuous that it went dark before my eyes from time to time.

- There's no negative without something positive in it, - I coaxed myself out loud. - I will probably have to drive on Curaçao because we will hardly go far by public transport there! So I need to get used to rough driving.

Oisín looked at me with surprise: he never saw me talk to myself before. And I often do it: I got used to it during my marriage with Sonny, when no one listened to me anyway.

When we got to a hotel in Cascais, there was a suite with a single bed in it. This was really too much.

- I'll sleep on the floor! - Oisín blushed as he saw my face.

A wise guy, Oisín. I should have expected him to do exactly this. But could he really think that I was still interested in him? Besides, this was not Korea for him, nobody would stack up mats on the floor!

- You'll get a backache, - I muttered angrily. - We can sleep dressed, by the way. And don't you worry, I won't touch you! But if you want to contrive sciatica, it's your choice.

He gave a nervous laugh, but did not run away, just lay down on the blanket at the edge and curled up. I mentally shrugged shoulders, lay down with my sweater and pants on covering myself with a plaid blanket, and fell asleep almost instantly.

... I slept so deeply that you could shoot cannons³³⁷, perhaps even launch a ballistic missile, without waking me. I finally woke up, not at some noise, but to the smell of coffee: fresh, strong, which they just can't make in English-speaking countries, where even tea is diluted with milk.

"Fu-fu, it smells like the Romance spirit³³⁸!" I thought joyfully. Oisín still slept, with his face down, his jacket and even shoes on. I did not wake him up and went for breakfast alone. I would love to go somewhere on my own for the whole day, but it was impossible.

After breakfast, I mustered myself and went back to the room. Just in case, I knocked on the door. Oisín, sleepy and disheveled, opened it about five minutes later.

- Oh it's you!- he mumbled sleepily, letting me into the room.

- Were you waiting for someone else? - I could not resist being sarcastic again. And then relenting I added: - Good morning! Have breakfast quickly, and we'll begin our lecture on the tropical subjects.

I drew a thick book on Curaçao from the backpack. Of course I was not going to read him this book; I only needed the illustrations there.

Busy with the conversation about Curaçao, we sat there till noon. Oisín listened to me very attentively, but asked only a few questions, and it gave me the idea that those who thought him a "lout" were probably right: I got the impression that he was too lazy to think outside the frames within which he was asked to act.

- Well, *may God be with you, goldfish!*³³⁹! - I took pity on him as I saw his eyes shut automatically, the conversation drawn out after lunch. - Enough for today, we cannot grasp the immensity, go to bed. And I'm going to Lisbon for a walk and a bit of sightseeing.

- Why? - he was surprised.

³³⁷ Russian expression "You could shoot cannons" means "Sleeping like a log"

³³⁸ "Fu-fu, it smells like Russian spirit!"- expression in Russian fairy tales, usually said by a witch. In this case, the word "Romance" is used, because Portuguese is a Romance language (coffee is more popular in France, Italy, Portugal - Romance languages speaking countries than in Northern Europe)

³³⁹ Refers to Russian expression "May God be with you, goldfish!" from Puskin's verse "The Tale of The Fisherman and The Fish" (1835)

- Well, I can't stay in Portugal and not visit Lisbon, can I?
- And what if I also want to visit Lisbon and see sights? - Oisín tossed his head stubbornly of a sudden.
- If you want to, let's go together.

This time round, we wisely went by bus.

Lisbon was calm and warm. I got used to the almost hurricane-like winds on the Northern Irish coast, but it was perfectly silent here. The city was very beautiful. It only irked that it was so easy to slip and plop down on the tiles laid out on the streets. And also I was struck by two things: the number of religious manifestations on the one hand, and the communist graffiti on the walls of the other. In older areas, it was also very beautiful, but quite dilapidated. People in the Portuguese capital were mostly petite, but I remembered that Portugal had once been the empire and those people held almost half of the planet at bay.

- Let's take a ride by tram, - I suggested. – There, up the hill, to the old town. I saw it so many times in movies!

- OK.

The tram started climbing the hill at such an angle and with such creaking, that I even closed my eyes for a moment.

- Let's sit down somewhere, - Oisín suggested when we got off at the top of the city.

- I don't mind.

- So, do you still live in the six counties³⁴⁰? - Oisín asked me after we sat down on chairs in front of a small cafe, and he ordered for us two glasses of red wine not even asking me.

- No. Not anymore. I hope not. - I corrected.

- Is Kieran dead?

- You knew Kieran? - I was surprised.

- A long time ago, only nodding. In our childhood. He and I grew up in the same neighbourhood. Having fun and running amok together in the streets when we were kids.

- Oh... I see! Yes, he's dead.

- Sorry. Well, where do you live now?

I did not want to go into detail for him.

- Far away, - I said.

- And exactly?

- *In the Land of the morning Calm*³⁴¹, - I was getting irritated and was confident that he won't know what it means. Or he would think that I was joking and implied the Irish *Tír na nÓg*³⁴². And so he did.

- So, do you have somewhere to go back to after our trip?

- I think I do. Don't you? - I asked him directly, but he did not answer.

³⁴⁰ Six Counties is a term for Northern Ireland.

³⁴¹ Poetic epithet for Korea

³⁴² Tír na nÓg is the most popular of the [Otherworlds](#) in [Irish mythology](#), the Land of Eternal Youth.

- Why did you decide to leave the Six Counties? Of course, if it is not a secret.

- Do you really want to know?

- Yes.

- And you won't get offended? You know, there is a Soviet joke. The joke itself is irrelevant, but its last phrase really describes my feelings in modern Ireland: "*While they were sitting on me, I tolerated. While they were making love on me, I tolerated. But when they started carving their initials on my rear end - I could not stand it!*"

-?? – I think Oisín really got scared again.

- I'm fed up with people who know much less than I do (because they were given such a poor education), but still try to teach me how I should live. If a baker taught me how to bake a cake, I would tell him "thanks." But when people who themselves live in such a way that one can only feel sorry for them assume an air of importance and begin to give you advice how you should bring up your children, or how the social system should be arranged in your country, you can tolerate it only to a certain point. It is most irksome when somebody talks to you as if you were uneducated - just because you speak with an accent or I have a different passport. And it is outrageous when somebody treats your kids (I do not mean Lisa) as "handicapped" - just because they are different from the majority. I myself used to be different, too. I did not like to play with other children - it was more interesting for me to socialize with adults. And Kieran quite seriously said: "*They just didn't diagnose you in time!*"

There had been a war going on in your country some time before, so I closed my eyes to many of these things, I thought it was not the fault of the people that they did not have broad outlook: they were just not given proper education. But now that peace had come, I began to realise all the swagger of the people who not only know nothing, but actually don't even want to know anything, and believe that they already know everything they need... for me it is really like carving your initials in some of my body parts inappropriate for that!

Guys, you have a deeply morbid society, where evil has become so routine that it is the norm for you, but you think that anyone who differs from you, is morbid. In this case, three-quarters of humanity are morbid! And you are still searching for what medicine we need in order to become the same as you. You do it with maniacal persistence, taking any marginal person from our countries who shares your views as the "true voice of the views and interests of their people." You don't realize that this marginal person can't expect anything but laughter and scorn in our countries.... But I could also ask you the same question. You have also left the North, I heard. Why?

- It's a long story... - Oisín hesitated - Honestly, I was ashamed when I had to deal with people. When I had to ask them for help, like before - for our *army affairs* - and in response they were mocking us into our faces, those people who had previously helped us for years: "Why, guys? We thought, you don't need our help anymore..." And that when people ask us for help - in west Belfast it's impossible to live because of *the hoods*³⁴³ - but we had the instructions that hoods now can't be touched because of the peace process. And the police never touch them, as you know. And you know the result.. I felt cheated...

"And you're not alone, my dear!" - I thought.

-... There is no sense in joining the dissidents: they do not offer anything constructive, and they lead nowhere... Their motto is "*forward and only forward, and then we'll see!*"

³⁴³ Youth with anti-social behaviour

"Well, just like our dissidents!" – it flashed through my head.

-. So the only way for me was to turn my back on all of this. No matter how painful it was... You know, what was the last straw for me?

- What?

- My niece.

- Your nephew? - I queried, nauseously remembering his nephew Pat. What has he done this time?

- No, my niece. Bridget.

Are his nieces even worse than his nephews?

- She is 21 years old. She decided to join the Navy.

I have just returned from the DPRK and for a moment, I couldn't realize, what was wrong with joining the Navy.

- The British Navy!,- Oisín suddenly fervently exclaimed. - The granddaughter of an Irish republican! It was as if the Germans won the war, and you would sign up to join SS. The same sort of flayers who have humiliated her grandfather in prison, would be her future comrades in arms.

- How could she do it?

- The Peace Process! She studied at an English University, she was the first who got a university degree in our family. A sociologist. Her motivation? She wants to "see the world." Through the scope of a British machine gun? Bringing other people the same "democracy", which they brought to us? And the most disgusting thing about this story is that her mother, my sister, who had visited me for almost for 10 years in a British prison, and who was also subjected to various indignities there because of this, doesn't see in this decision "anything wrong"! "Bridget is not interested in politics. At least she tries to achieve something in her life, to get a job; not like the rest of my rascals!" - she says. To achieve what? To pay with her blood in order to protect the interests of the British half-dead Empire which should have already been in the dustbin of history? To bring death and misery to other peoples after we were allowed to pick up the crumbs at the master's table?:

He grabbed a glass of red wine from the table and drank it at one gulp. And I was sure that Oisín was a teetotaler!

- I can't. I just can't tolerate such things. Can't see and accept them as something normal. Just few years ago, such stupidity would not even come up in her head. Have we started the peace process for that, have we disarmed for that? For our children and grandchildren to become cogs in the system of British imperialism? Have I...

He stopped. Apparently he wanted to say "have I spent 12 years in prison for that?", but he felt uncomfortable talking about himself, when he was talking about such large-scale events. Although 12 years of life, cast down the drain, certainly wasn't a joke....

Indeed, due to the peace process, the number of Irish recruits in the British army (even the Irish lads from the South!) raised several times. But for the children of republican families to be among them...

This I encountered for the first time. "More is yet to come, oh-oh-oh!" - as Alla Pugacheva³⁴⁴ sang at her time...

- That's when I finally realized that we had wandered off down a wrong path, - Oisín finished and stopped.

I felt deeply sorry for him. If even I for a long time took so painfully what was happening in Ireland in front of my eyes, how hard must this have been for him: for a man who had dedicated his whole life to the liberation of his country from the shackles of imperialism, and who had spent in jail his best years because of this?

But if he understood everything it and has distanced himself from them, then how come they send him here with me? How did they entrust him with this business, and why did he agree? Perhaps, he just did not want to see what is happening at home? Home... Wait a minute, what about his family? His wife, his child? Did they just let him go?

Perhaps it was because he and I, our views and ourselves, we were just somebody, whose loss they could always dismiss, deny that we have any links with them, just wash their hands off us? "*These people are not members of our organization, and even do not share our views.*" We've heard all this before.

But I did not ask him anything; it was clear that he was upset. After a glass of wine it has become even more clear. I even moved up to him my own glass, if that would help. I lost the desire to mock him. Oisín was a victim of the peace process-the same as Fionntán. They were lucky they got off easy. I gently touched Oisín's shoulder.

- Sorry, I did not know. If I told you that I sympathize with you, you probably won't feel better. I understand you. We're on same side of the barricades.

Oisín smiled sadly:

- Thank you. Let's at least try to help those people who want to change their lives for the better, not by becoming servants to thugs and looters. I didn't know that you will be going with me. To be honest, it was a pleasant surprise for me. I blamed myself that nothing came out of our past operations. Forgive me that I behaved so idiotically...

Don't start about this, Oisín. Please.

-It was I who behaved idiotically - I sighed, remembering everything I'd done between that distant day in April, which I still prefer not to remember, and my trip to Korea.- What can I tell you? Give me five!

And we shook each other's hands.

The bell rang from a tram that came to the square. Oisín suddenly pulled me from my seat, paying off the waiter on the move: to jump into that tram just on time. In three jumps, we got there.

- What, is there a "tail" behind us? - I joked when we started to breath normally again. Oisín took my question in a Dutch manner - literally:

- No, there isn't any "tail." I just wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible. Otherwise I would have wanted one more glass, then another, and...

- I see, *Alan*.

³⁴⁴ Alla Pugacheva (b. 1949) - the most famous Soviet and Russian pop-singer

- Alan?

- Well, yes, we have to get used to the fact that we are now Saskia and Alan. How are things in your native Scotland?

Oisín only smiled with the corners of his lips.

- Where do we go now? Home, I mean, back to the hotel?

-Are you tired?

-Not really.

-Do you want to see something local? Have you ever been in Portugal before?.

- No.

- And I haven't either. Then it's even more interesting. When will we come here again? How about an evening of traditional music, fado? Don't worry, this is with dinner.

- I do not know... To be honest, Zhenya, I mean, Saskia, I have never been anywhere outside of Ireland and England. Once I was in Spain, that's all. So I'm not very accustomed to all these other cultures. But, I'm glad that people like you come to Ireland - he hastened to add, apparently fearing that I was offended.

- You don't have to be used to it. Isn't it interesting to see what kind of people are in other countries, how do they live, what do you have in common and what differentiates you?

- Of course it's interesting. But what if I won't like this music?

- You do not have to like it. It is not necessary. It just will be something different and unfamiliar. Then you will be surprised: well, how music of different people can differ! But you'll know what it is like. Well?

- Well, let's go then... And what do Portuguese have for dinner?

- Honestly, I have no idea. But this is exactly what's interesting.

An evening of *fado* music³⁴⁵, combined with a restaurant meal in Portugal is typical entertainment for foreign tourists. I really have never heard that music, only read about it. And also I remember the song of Lolita Torres³⁴⁶ – “*Coimbra ciudad de divina*”³⁴⁷, since my childhood. It is a song about fado, though this song itself has nothing common with fado. But I liked it very much when I was a child. I even begged my mother to find castanets³⁴⁸ for me- the same ones like Lolita had.

Among the tourists in the restaurant there were a lot of rich Latin Americans - apparently, that kind of people who so cartoonish-emotionally hate Fidel, Chavez, or Fionntan with his guerrilla comrades. Well, let me look at them here today: it will help me to prepare better to what is waiting for us on Curaçao...

³⁴⁵ Fado is a Portuguese form of music characterized by mournful tunes and lyrics, with a characteristic sentiment of resignation, fatefulness and melancholia

³⁴⁶ Lolita Torres (1929 – 2002) - artistic name of Beatriz Mariana Torres Iriarte, [Argentinian actress and singer](#), who was very popular in the USSR.

³⁴⁷ Coimbra Divina (Divine Coimbra) - Lolita Torres' song from 1954 film “[La edad del amor](#)” (The Age of Love) popular in the USSR. Coimbra - city in Portugal

³⁴⁸ Castanets are a hand-held [percussion instrument](#) used in [Moorish](#), [Ottoman](#), [ancient Roman](#), [Italian](#), [Spanish](#), [Sephardic](#), and [Portuguese](#) music. The instrument consists of a pair of concave shells joined on one edge by a string. They are held in the hand and used to produce clicks for rhythmic accents.

We were sharing the table with a pretty lady from Chile, a lawyer who had a daughter of about 10 years of age. Both spoke English well. I told them that we were Belgians (it wasn't time to be Saskia and Alan yet). The Portuguese food was tasty, but most of it was fish and also in everything, even in fish, there was a lot of garlic. Except for the desert, of course.

Oisín tasted these new and unfamiliar dishes as a typical Northern Irish man would: he looked as if he was drinking tea from the same cup from which drank Litvinenko³⁴⁹. I had to tell him that he shouldn't fear everything unfamiliar so much. His wary appearance, in combination with his slightly elegant picking with a fork in a plate could attract unnecessary attention.

A singer, dressed in black and wrapped in a black shawl, came to the small restaurant scene, and suddenly, without warning began to sing in a low mezzo-soprano - in such a dramatic tone that there was no one in the audience to fully appreciate it. My Korean friends would appreciate. In Korea they speak in a similar tone when they read the news on the radio.

Daughter of the Chilean lawyer suddenly burst out into a fit of laughter, loud enough for the whole restaurant.

- Carmencita! – Scolded her mother, pulling her by the sleeve, but she was unstoppable. She covered her face with a napkin trying to conceal the cackling, muffled sounds – that's how funny she found this dramatic Portuguese song about unanswered love.

And suddenly, to my horror, I realized that exact the same sounds were coming from the corner on the other side of me. It was Oisín: no matter how hard he tried to hold it in, when Carmencita started to laugh, he could no longer resist it...

I sat there, red as a lobster, fanning myself with a fan given me as a good bye present by Ri Rang, and pretended that I was not with him. And then my cursed memory obligingly slipped to me my mum's story about how she, in my absence, took our *cycling god* Volodya Zelinsky to the opera for the first time in his life. He was also, incidentally, Capricorn. And his reaction in the first minutes following the end of the overture when the curtain rose, was exactly the same...

When I imagined to myself Volodya laughing to the sounds of the aria of Zaporozets Ivan Karas³⁵⁰ at the Odessa Opera House, I suddenly too, was consumed with laughter. I was choking with it, it was bursting out of my chest like an explosion, and I gasped, trying not to allow it to escape.

Carmencita's mum looked accusingly at us again - and with new strength snarled at her daughter:

- Carmencita, look what you've done! Because of you these people...

The answer to her was a new burst of our laughing.

Only by the second song we finally pulled ourselves together, and the remainder of the evening passed without incidents. Oisín really enjoyed the Portuguese folk dances, which completed the evening.

On the way back to the hotel, he even tried - clumsily, - to repeat some of the dance moves. I looked at him with new eyes: and I always thought that he was all so serious and impenetrable!

³⁴⁹ Alexander Litvinenko (1962 -2006) was an ex-KGB officer who fled to the UK and worked as a consultant for the British intelligence services MI6 and MI5. He was poisoned in London by tea mixed with Polonium

³⁵⁰ Hero of "*Zaporozhets za Dunayem*" (1863) (translated as A [Zaporozhian \(Cossack\) Beyond the Danube](#), also referred to as *Cossacks in Exile*) is a [Ukrainian comic opera](#) with spoken dialogue in three acts with music and [libretto](#) by the composer [Semen Hulak-Artemovsky](#) (1813–1873).

We came down to earth when on the way back we went into a small souvenir shop, which was still open. His owner snarled at potential buyers the way it can only be in the world of free competition...

- Do you want to buy our famous tiles? Or our national shawls - look, madam, they are so similar to those from your home country...

When I saw these shawls - pretty, reminiscent of the Pavlov-Posad³⁵¹ ones - and it dawned on me what he said, my heart sank. Not because this Portuguese had guessed that I'm Russian: because if he had guessed it, it meant that the others could guess it too... It was silly to ask him how he guessed this, but I still did.

-O... I do not know exactly, we just have a lot of Russian customers here in our store. And I also have a Russian wife!

Well, I could only hope that in Curaçao I will not meet Russian wives' husbands. Particularly among the U.S. military. Although currently it's very difficult to be sure of this...

After that we were silent the whole way back. Only when we got to Cascais and entered the hotel room, Oisín asked me:

- You do not regret that you have taken up this task?

- No, - I said, quite frankly - I would have regretted if I did not take it up. And you?

- And I'm not either,- said Oisín - Now I'm definitely not.

Although we were tired of the long day, both of us for some reason could not sleep.

- Maybe you need a bedtime story? - I joked, when once again I heard in the darkness Oisín turning from side to side.

- I haven't been told any tales at bedtime since my mother died - said Oisín seriously - I was already too big for fairy tales then. But still too young to go on living without a mother...

- Then I'll tell you not a fairy tale, but a true story, all right?

... In 1795, the island of Curaçao was seized by the slave uprising led by Tula. That was the name of one of them. In Bandabau, in west of the island - the place with the most beautiful beaches, I will definitely bring you there sometime - slaves constituted a majority of the population. There were about 5000 people. Tula began to prepare his uprising in advance. He knew that on the island of Haiti, there was a revolution that freed the slaves.. He also knew that in Europe at this time, France invaded the Netherlands. It gave the right to freedom for the slaves in Curaçao, he claimed. In the morning of 17th of August about 50 slaves, led by Tula revolted on the plantation Knip of the slave owner Caspar Lodewijk van Uytrecht. They gathered on the square in front of his *hacienda*, and informed him that they will no longer work for him. The slaveholder told them that if they have a complaint, then they should submit it to the Dutch governor at Fort Amsterdam (this fort stands until now in Willemstad). The slaves went from Knip on another plantation, where they freed 22 of their comrades from prison. And then - to a nearby sugar cane plantation, where they were joined by another large group of slaves, led by Bastian Karpata.... And so they came and went, from one plantation to another, freeing on their way other slaves who joined them. In fear the slaveholder fled to the city - on Curaçao there is only one city - and began to prepare to suppress the uprising.

³⁵¹ Pavlov-Posad woolen shawls - most famous Russian traditional shawls. Pavlov Posad is a small town near Moscow with a shawl factory that was opened in 1812. Portuguese shawls really do look similar to Russian, the only difference, as far as I could see, was that they more often have yellow color.

Tula put forward three demands to the authorities: to put an end to collective punishment, not to work on Sundays and freedom to buy clothes and other goods not only from their masters...

- Look, just like our guys with Bobby Sands³⁵²!- said Oisin.

- The first attack of slaveholders was on August the 19th, but the slaves repelled them successfully. The slaveholders became afraid even more - especially when the slave Pedro Wakao killed his white master on the Fontein plantation. The governor and the slave owners gathered a well-armed squad of 60 riders led by Captain Baron van Westerholt, who twice asked the slaves to surrender. But they were not going to surrender - because even if they would be left alive, they remembered all too well what kind of life was waiting for them back on the plantations. In combat, the slaves were defeated, but only about 20 of them were killed, and the others managed to escape.

After that they began a guerrilla war: they poisoned wells, stole livestock and provisions. On September the 19th a traitor helped the enemy to get both Tula and Karpata. They were taken prisoners. On October the 3rd, Tula was publicly executed, tortured to death. Executed also were his comrades. After that the authorities issued the first law, which stipulated the right of slaves. August the 17th is celebrated annually on Curaçao as the Day of Struggle for Freedom. There is now a monument for Tula on the island, on the south shore, near the Holiday Beach hotel. That's the place where he was executed.

Ironically, the 17th of August is also the birthday of my Lisa. And the day when Tula was captured was the day when she fell ill and became disabled... How not to believe then in the deep symbolism of what is happening, the way Ri Rang believed in it? But I did not mention this to Oisin. It was too personal...

- It turns out, that there too...

- Is there at least one country in the world where people did not fight for their freedom? Of course not...

- Only for some reason, those who become heroes after their death, some centuries later, in their lifetime are usually called "terrorists"! - Oisin smiled.

- And who calls them that? Their evaluation is not even worth paying attention to it. *A guilty mind betrays itself.* By its Stars and Stripes...

- Tell me one more story, only with a good ending. So that I could dream good dreams - asked Oisin.

- I think, a story with a happy end, you and I will have to create ourselves, when we'll be there, - I said

- Do you think we will be able to?

- Together with you? For sure!

A minute later he was in heroic snoring.

This time it was Oisin who woke me up in the morning.

- Good morning! Time to check out of the hotel and change our appearances....

³⁵² One of the main demands of the Irish Republican hunger strikers in 1981 was the right to wear their own clothes in prison.

I shivered. I did not smile at the idea of turning into a blonde - and not because of some prejudice against the level of their intellectual abilities, but because it didn't suit me. I just knew that. I tried it once and then I did not know how to get it washed off as quickly as possible.

But what choice did I have?

Three hours later Oisin and I were knocking at the door of a small, rickety hairdressing salon, whose owner's husband was an Irishman. Well, wherever they don't have their own people! They are almost like the Chinese.

- Me and Paddy will sort out the passports, and Eliana will take care of you.

And Eliana - a small, slim brunette, resolutely picked up a pair of scissors and a bottle of hair dye.

I never go to the hairdressers because I long noticed: every hairdresser seeks to recreate on your head a copy of her own. And even if she herself has very nice hairstyle, it does not mean that it is going to suit you. For example, I have Slavic round cheeks. And Irish women's faces often are sharp, fox-like... The most terrible thing is that for some reason they never listen to you if you try to explain to them what you need. And now I was looking at Eliana almost with horror: she had short hair, a la Mireille Mathieu³⁵³, and to get such a hairstyle for me would just turn me into a real joke...

Eliana, meanwhile was already approaching me with her scissors. Like Babbs Babberley³⁵⁴ I decided: "I won't give up easily!" And I took a Portuguese phrase book from my pocket...

... Sitting in front of the mirror, for a long time I was afraid to open my eyes. But Ri Rang was right: you can't have enough air before dying³⁵⁵; and I finally opened them...

I wanted to remove my head from my shoulders, together with the hair! The only thing that I liked, was that I became ash blonde, not reddish, and not an albino-like blond like Christina Orbakaite³⁵⁶. Most of all I was afraid that Oisin will laugh at me. But he came through the door, and said as if nothing had happened:

- You look really cute!

- Don't you dare to make fun of me! - I almost cried.

- I am not mocking you. You really do. How did you say that yesterday: "*And you do not have to like it. It isn't necessary. It will just be something different, something you haven't tried yet.*"

I almost threw a hairbrush at him.

- I wonder if you're going to do something yourself to disfigure your own appearance?

- Sure! - confirmed Oisin. - Don't you see: I've already started to grow up a beard ?..

In such a state I could not return to the hotel and it was decided not to go into any other. Our last night on Portuguese soil, we spent in a garret under the roof of Paddy and Eliana. Thank God there were two beds!

³⁵³ Mireille Mathieu (b. 1948) - famous French singer who was very popular in the USSR in the 1960s and 1970s

³⁵⁴ Main character of B. Thomas' play "Charley's Aunt" and the Soviet film "Hello, I'm Your Aunt!" (1975). This quote is from the film.

³⁵⁵ "Перед смертью не надыхаешься" is a well-known Russian saying meaning that there is no point in trying to do many things on the very last minute if you haven't managed to do them before. For example you can tell this to a student trying to learn everything which was taught during a semester in one day right before an exam.

³⁵⁶ Christina Orbakaite (b. 1971) - Russian singer and actress, daughter of Alla Pugacheva.

- Do I snore? – asked Oisin anxiously.
- You do, and awfully!- I could not resist saying. But he got back at me.
- Well, excuse me... But by the way, you do, too!

... On the plane to Curaçao, I could not relax. Not only because I was traveling with a false passport and an ugly haircut on my head into the very lair of the enemy *as an unofficial observer of the “United Nations.”* I worried more how my favourite island which I had not seen for so many years, would look, how it would meet me.

The last time I met *a yu di Korsou*³⁵⁷... was in a Northern Irish prison, the same one where I met Nikolai and Boris.

But Emilio was imprisoned not pre-emptively: he was a drug courier. I've heard a lot about people like him: the poor people from Curaçao, who borrowed money from some goons, and now in this way had their debt repayment. But I came face to face with one of them for the first time. In Curaçao they are called «*mula*» - mule. I remember how I was particularly upset with a story about a young Antillean student, who also got into debt and flew from Holland back home with cocaine balls in his stomach. He was found dead on the road in Curaçao - one of the balls burst inside... Even his parents did not know that he was at that time on the home island: they were sure that he attended classes in far away Holland.

Emilio was an elderly man, probably a grandfather in his daily life. Very dark-skinned, with boxing complexion and with warm big eyes. And although what he did was 100% bad, however you looked at it, and he himself was to blame for getting into jail, I still felt sorry for him. The more I listened to him,- for example, his stories about how the Northern Ireland security guards refused to exchange a mattress for him for months, while he was suffering from radiculitis, and while his white neighbour got it changed the same day, - the more unbearable it was becoming for me to do this interpreting job. Because I knew better than anybody else the local medieval racist attitudes and was certain that he was not lying or exaggerating.

- I just want them to tell me why they behave like that! - He complained - Why don't they let me meet with the prison's governor, as though I'm not a human being.

I just sighed:

- Don't even hope for an answer. They will never admit that they behave like this. Complain about it to your solicitor, ask him to write to the ombudsman.

The fact that I was feeling sorry for Emilio does not mean that I condoned his actions. I just sat next to him in court, translated what he said to the judge, and thought: if this grandfather was living in the Soviet Union or Cuba, he would not need to make a living in such a way, just to survive. Information for all the indignant righteous people: social security benefits on Curaçao are miserable, jobs are scarce and water and electricity rates there are some of the highest in the world.

I don't know much about courts, because in our family there were neither defendants nor victims of crime. But before the war, my grandmother worked in a Soviet court, as one of the people's

³⁵⁷ Curaçaoan; born on Curaçao (Papiamentu)

assessors³⁵⁸. Judges in the USSR (as well as their assistants) were elected at the general election in order for them not to get used to their position and not to become corrupt. But most importantly - in the Soviet Union a lot of work was conducted by a whole system of *crime prevention*.

Mum told me that a couple of years after the end of World War II in the Soviet Union there was no more homelessness, and orphaned children were all placed in orphanages. In Moscow gangsterism was eliminated, and after 1955 street theft practically disappeared from small and medium-sized cities. I've already talked about the Institute of district policemen. Local policeman knew all the people in their area, they knew their family problems, they knew who recently returned from prison, knew if someone shunned socially useful work (for mothers-housewives that, naturally, did not apply), knew who was drinking, knew if somewhere moonshine was brewed, and the houses of the gamblers (gambling for money was not allowed) - and they were taking measures to make sure that the situation does not spiral out of control. Within the police departments there were "children's rooms" where teenagers with what they call now "*challenging behavior*" were registered. It was considered a great shame if someone was registered there (fortunately, these were very few). In their work, juvenile inspectors relied on the Komsomol and Pioneer organizations in their school district. They tried to keep children busy with various activities after school, so that they wouldn't get an idea to engage into something silly out of boredom: there were free interest groups and clubs for them in the Pioneers' Palaces, special children's sessions in theaters, especially during the holidays, free of charge all-day afterschool - for those whose both parents were working and who did not have grandparents to look after them. There was the system of patronage of plants and factories over schools, including arranging different excursions for the children. (Some of the kids went after school to work at those factories, and the factory could later send them to study in college- with a scholarship from the factory, which was higher than an average stipend.)

On the streets in my mother's time there were traffic regulators. For the post-war children they were friends. "We had a traffic guard - Uncle Nikolai," - told me mum - " he was standing at his post near the district hospital, and I with my school friends, first-graders, walked around his post, while he told us about the war, about his life before the war and all sorts of interesting stories. I remember him - a tall, handsome, intelligent man - and I think: it is such a criminal offense to call people like him with this nasty word "*cops*"!

For minor offenses offenders were not brought to courts because their work collective was sorting them out. Including the offences that took place in their free time.

For re-offenders *comrades' courts* existed in enterprises. For example, my mother told me how in the 1960s in our city's accordion factory in one of the workshops there was a meeting of a comrades' court, discussing the behavior of one worker in the local library. He deliberately threw several books on the floor. The court decided to oblige the worker to apologize to the library staff, to take him on comradely bail and to conduct educational work with him - until he reforms. And in fact, that worked, he never did anything anti-social again!

The real criminals were an exception in the society, because people did not need to get involved in crime and the majority had conscience, knew "what is good and what is bad" and not just because of the fear of punishment. Over in America they continue to have the death penalty, but crime is still increasing. And there are so many religious fanatics there, but that still doesn't help. They are trying to convince us now that in order to avoid such level of crime it is necessary for some reason, to have

³⁵⁸ In the USSR The People's Court handled cases by a collegium consisted of a people's judge and two people's assessors. The people's assessors had duties similar to jurors, but decided both any objections and the verdict along with the judge

religion, but religion is based on fear of punishment by some Lord Almighty, not on knowledge that you will simply stop respecting yourself if you will allow yourself to behave in a certain bad way.

In the song sung by Lev Leshchenko³⁵⁹ - its hero, a Soviet policeman - says:

"He will not ever win from me

Will never get away, no matter how dark is the night

Because he is alone, always alone,

And my whole country is with me! "- This is exactly the way it was.

This is exactly what it was - *"if someone of us doesn't want to live honestly in some places, sometime...»*³⁶⁰. It was only a "someone" and just in "some places" and it was only "sometimes"...

In my opinion, it is demeaning to any decent adult person to behave well only out of fear, as a child: a good fit of conscience of any normal human being is more powerful than the threat of Hell. I will not throw paper on the street instead of a bin, or paint graffiti on the walls, or steal, - not because I'm afraid that I "will not go to heaven." But because if I do that, then I simply cease to respect myself. Because I do not feel any need or any urge to do such things.

... - Ladies and gentlemen! In 20 minutes we are going to land at Hato³⁶¹ airport! – said the friendly voice of a flight attendant.

And in a few more minutes under the wing of our airplane I saw such familiar, like old friend, red rocks: Tera Kora³⁶². *Mi dushi Korsou*, where I had hoped to come for so many years. Although not quite in such role as now....

³⁵⁹ Lev Leshchenko (b. 1942) - popular Soviet singer

³⁶⁰ Popular Soviet song, a theme from the detective series "The Investigation Is Conducted by Experts" (1971-1989). The song is indicative of low crime level in the USSR; a crime was something shocking, something exceptional in the daily life of an average Soviet citizen.

³⁶¹ Hato - name of the airport on Curaçao.

³⁶² Tera Kora (Red Land in Papiamentu) -a district on Curaçao near the airport where the soil is really of red color.

Chapter 25. Grab the bull by the horns

“A miraculous island, a miraculous island

It’s very easy and simple to live there

It’s very easy and simple to live there

Chunga-changa

Our happiness is constant:

Chew coconuts and eat bananas

Chew coconuts and eat bananas

Chunga-changa

(“Chunga-chunga, from the Soviet cartoon Little Cutter)

When the plane’s door opened and we walked outside, I noticed how Oisín, having inhaled the hot humid Curaçao air, grabbed his hand to his chest: he didn’t expect that it was so hot here, just like I hadn’t expected that 16 years ago.

-That’s OK, you’ll get used to that in a moment.- I told him. But Oisín kept on grabbing the air with his lips as if he was a fish just taken out of the water. He was drowning in this viscid sticky heat. I rushed to take him to the airport building where air conditioning was on.

-Is it always like this here?- whispered Oisín weeping sweat off his forehead.

- It is, – I confirmed.- Haven’t you been warned? Have you forgotten how we got to know each other in Namibia? It’s much hotter there. The deserts Kalahari and Namib...

-How do these poor people live here?

-You know, my relatives who are from here, had asked me the same question about the Irish, when they came to me to Ireland for a visit... Quiet!

We were approaching the passport control. I remembered that Uncle Patrick worked somewhere there at the customs, and I felt somewhat tense. What if he would see and recognize me despite of my dyed hair and 16 years passed since my last encounter with Curaçao?.

Antillian girl at the passport control smiled at us friendly and I could hardly contain myself of saying ‘*Bon tardi!*³⁶³’ Things went going smoothly. Five minutes later we were already waiting for our luggage. And 15 minutes later we headed for the exit. Nobody stopped us and there was no sign of Uncle Patrick hereabout.

We were being expected at the exit. There was a beautiful young woman with coffee coloured skin, huge black moist eyes and few subtle hairs above her upper lip which didn’t spoil her appearance the slightest. She had a board in her hands with ‘Saskia Duplessis’ on it. And though an inexperienced person might have mistaken her for an Antillian, I straight away felt that she was not a local. There was something painfully familiar in her almost portrait-like beauty.

-Good afternoon! My name’s Saskia,- I said.

³⁶³ Good afternoon! (Papiamentu)

-Nice to meet you. Tyrunesh Francisca,-' she introduced herself. -We're going to be working together'.

Tyrunesh? I wasn't mistaken. There was an Ethiopian in front of me. But with an Antillian surname (Ethiopians do not have surnames at all³⁶⁴). How on Earth did she get here? Of course, it wasn't appropriate to ask her right away. But she later told us herself. When we got into the car, Oisín sighed with relief: air-conditioning was on here too.

- I don't know much about you, Saskia, Alan,'-Tyrunesh said.-And I'm not going to ask you more than I know. Now we'll get to your hotel, go to the restaurant and I'll tell you a little bit about myself.

This hotel didn't exist when I was last time on Curaçao. It was located just in 15-minutes' drive, in the very centre of Willemstad. And it had an Antillian-like name - *Kura Hulanda*³⁶⁵, though it belonged to an absolutely true Dutchman, who had a very typical Dutch views on Antillians. But obviously money doesn't stink. For him, it was well worth it to put up with doing business here and with the non-Dutch name.

It was a whole little village consisting of beautiful, brand-new houses of Antillian Dutch colonial style. It was occupied almost exclusively by 'real Aryans'. Blond-haired men and women of giant height thought they were the masters there. They went to eco swimming pools, plunged themselves in Jacuzzi and strolled along paved little streets. Some tipsy individuals tried to dance *polonaise* – not, not Oginski's one³⁶⁶ but that one which is called '*polonaise*' in Holland and which is called '*parovozik*³⁶⁷' in our country. The 'blacks' were here to serve them dinner, change their bed sheets, clean their toilets bowls and massage them: just like during the colonial time. Very rarely someone among the guests stood out from the crowd by his or her skin colour, and 'Aryans' were staring at such person. The same way a Dutch carpenter was staring at Peter the Great at the dockyard in Zaandam³⁶⁸. When we came into the hotel territory, everyone started to gape at Tyrunesh because she was dressed too smartly and looked too confident to be a casino worker or a room maid.

In two seconds the receptionist checked us in, and a strong muscled Antillian porter took our bags to the room. The room had high ceilings with wooden beams painted in pastel shades. There was a fan and a tiny balcony looking out at the square.

-Cool furniture!- Oisín noticed professionally.

Tyrunesh stayed in the restaurant to wait for us. We left the bags in the room and hurried on to her.

For some reason the restaurant was called *Astrolabe*. Straight away I recalled Ostap Bender with his '*Who needs Astrolabe? Astrolabe on sale, very cheap! Discounts for delegations and women departments*³⁶⁹!' I hardly could help laughing. You can't even translate it properly... It won't be funny. For it to be funny you have to know who Ostap Bender is!

³⁶⁴ Instead of surnames Ethiopians use their father's first name

³⁶⁵ Dutch Courtyard (Papiamentu)

³⁶⁶ Oginski's Polonaise -famous Russian classic tune

³⁶⁷ Little train (Russian) - Dutch dance called "polonaise" is a chain of people holding each other's waists with one hand and waving with another, while the human chain moves around the room

³⁶⁸ Peter the Great, Russian Tsar (1672-1725) studied shipbuilding in [Zaandam](#), Holland (the house he lived in is now a museum, the [Tsar Peter house](#)) later put this learning to use in helping build Russia's navy. In Holland he caused a lot of curiosity among Dutch people and allegedly punched in the face a man who was staring at him too much.

³⁶⁹ From "12 chairs", satirical novel by Ilf and Petrov (1927). Ostap Bender is its main character, a charming crook.

-What would you like to drink?- asked our new friend as if she was a real Dutch woman³⁷⁰.

-I don't know...- said Oisin.- Some beer if possible. It's very hot here.

- And you, Saskia?'

-Can I have *Ponche Kuba*³⁷¹? I haven't...,- I stopped short.- I mean, I have never tried it before. I've heard so much about it.

In the palm shade it wasn't hot at all. On the contrary, it was rather pleasant. All the more so because the sun was going down. But pale-faced Oisin who wasn't accustomed to heat was still suffering. I felt sorry that I couldn't offer him my Korean fan. It's OK for a man to use it during the heat in Korea, but here... If someone sees a man with a fan here, he'll surely be understood wrong. And not only Dutchmen, but also Antillians which can have some grave consequences for the person in question...

Tyrunesh sipped her cocktail by such little sips that her lips hardly moved. And she started her story in a soft voice.

- I'm the owner of the PR-company Francisca Public Relations. It isn't big but it has a good reputation. We have many well-known clients. Saskia, you're going to be my partner. You've been recommended to me. Have you ever worked in our field?'

I thought about an answer. Shall I tell the truth or...?'

- I've been PRO³⁷² for a political party,- I said honestly recalling my days in Dublin. But I was not sure if I should tell her that all the messages we had to pass on to the media, had been the same all over Ireland: '*** announced that'. With a short review of the party policy towards this or that issue that followed. Each local branch only had to fill in the name of their representative. I don't know how nobody ever noticed that different members of the party were speaking exactly the same words simultaneously all over the country. Surely, only because nobody read those press releases at all.

Oisin guessed which party I was speaking about and started to wink with both eyes. But Tyrunesh asked me nothing.

-Excellent! - She said. 'I'm sure we'll work well together. *Awi huramentu*.'³⁷³

That was the password!

I quickly looked around. There were a few "Aryans" and all of them were busy with their own things. They were roaring with laughter at their own vulgar jokes.

-*Tula warda, no wak ainda*,³⁷⁴' - I said hastily.

Tyrunesh broke into a smile. A child-like, open smile. And half an hour later we knew everything about her. If not everything, then at least, the most important things.

Tyrunesh was daughter of the Ethiopian Derg³⁷⁵'s member. She was ten when the government of Mengistu Haile Mariam³⁷⁶ in Ethiopia was overthrown, soon after that her family had to escape from

³⁷⁰ In Holland it is common to offer visitors a drink, but not food.

³⁷¹ Ponche Kuba - 9% distilled spirit drink, cream with a rum base and light spices, popular in the Antilles

³⁷² Public Relations Officer

³⁷³ "Sworn water" (Papiamentu) - rum mixed with powdered goat's horn, drink, used by slaves during uprising of Tula in 1795

³⁷⁴ "Tula, wait, do not look yet" (Papiamentu)

³⁷⁵ The Derg or Dergue ("committee" or "council") is the short name of the *Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army* that ruled [Ethiopia](#) between 1974 to 1987

the country. After long wanderings they found themselves in Somalia, adopted new names and moved to the Netherlands as refugees. Her father died already in Somali, and her mother who was left alone with four children managed to assure the Dutch authorities that they were ‘ *victims of the murderous communist regime* ’ (because those wanted to believe such stories).

Tyrunesh never forgot her father and what he had been fighting for. She also remembered well how her elder sister, after having studied in Moscow of what she was very proud (the Mengistu’s government intended to give higher education to as many women as possible) came back already under the new regime and wasn’t able to find any job. The “new” Ethiopia needed no educated women. It returned to feudal a-woman-must-cook-and-clean customs.

Her sister suffered from bitter depression after that. She got married, gave birth to a child but kept on dreaming about the life which could have become possible if she had been able to work in her field. It could have, but it didn’t. And one night Tyrunesh’s sister jumped out of the window...

- And what chance brought you to the Antilles? – I was really wondering about that.

- When I became adult in the Netherlands and left school, I started to study at an university. There I met an Antillean student... He is my husband now.

Arlone Francisca was from a very prominent Antillean family. From local political circles. So to speak, from local elite. But, according to Tyrunesh, he was simple and nice guy. Only absolutely not interested in politics.

I sighed. History repeated itself...

At this moment two GI³⁷⁷’s dropped into the restaurant. They were exactly like those I saw long ago, in my childhood on caricatures of Herluf Bidstrup³⁷⁸: impudent, unduly familiar (cheeky, pert?). Thinking that the whole world should lick their boots with pleasure. Like the ones from whom Mother Denmark was vainly trying to close her door³⁷⁹. «It could be expected. Just slightly opened a door, and now you will not be able stop them any more! » - wrote the great Danish caricaturist prophetically under this drawing...

I felt uncomfortable. Not because of fear: I felt only quickly growing sense of disgust. When I was in Curaçao last time, there was no sign of them whatsoever, and now, bah, they are on the loose as if at home. Even "Aryans" simmered down watching them.

Only once I saw them face to face before. At Panmunjom³⁸⁰ in Korea, on the 38th parallel... There they behaved not so thriftily. Those Duboloms of Urfin Juice³⁸¹. And I remembered that I spent my last 11th of September in a very suitable place for this purpose. In the museum which exposes

³⁷⁶ Mengistu Haile Mariam (b. 1937 or 1941) - [Ethiopian](#) politician who was the most prominent officer of the [Derg](#), the [Communist military government](#) of [Ethiopia](#) from 1974 to 1987, and President of the [People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia](#) from 1987 to 1991

³⁷⁷ US soldiers

³⁷⁸ Herluf Bidstrup (1912 -1988) - [Danish](#) communist cartoonist, very well known in the USSR. In addition to political cartoons he produced other works depicting everyday life and human foibles. He is still very popular in Russia.

³⁷⁹ One of the caricatures of Bidstrup depicting Denmark’s NATO membership

³⁸⁰ Panmunjom, is a village on the *de facto* border between [North](#) and [South Korea](#), where the 1953 [Korean Armistice Agreement](#) that paused the [Korean War](#) was signed. Its name is often used as a [metonym](#) for the nearby [Joint Security Area](#)(JSA), where discussions between North and South still take place in blue buildings that straddle the Military Demarcation Line.

³⁸¹ Soldiers made out of dub (oak) wood from a Soviet fairy tale of the same name, by Alexandr Volkov

atrocities of the American troops on the Korean soil... With a moment of silence, of course, for its victims' memory.

... We were warned by knowing people that a museum in Sinchon - Museum of American War Atrocities - is not for the faint-hearted. I used to visit museums created in a place of fascist concentration camps in the USSR (Salaspils³⁸² which today is almost declared in modern Latvia to have been "a scout camp"; the 9th Fort in Kaunas³⁸³) and thus considered myself to be rather prepared for visiting this museum. After all, would we, who know only too well from our own tragic and heroic history what those fascist monsters are capable of, really turn pale and faint in such place? But the reaction of my Western companions was exactly that -after what they had seen and heard in Sinchon, even despite the preliminary warning...

It's not because in Western Europe fascists behaved with much less brutality than on the the East front, among Slavic «subhumane» people », while in Western Europe often only separate groups of the local civilian population was subjected to this brutality (at the Western European during history lessons men talk very selectively about gas chambers and a Holocaust, often without even mentioning the role of communists in the resistance or the fact that in Eastern Europe all ethnic groups were subject to mass-murder, not Jews alone). The real reason for this attack of nausea in the museum was because subconsciously an average modern Western person, even a progressive one, can hardly get used to the idea that the United States of America, - so to speak, the embodiment of modern Western "democracy and freedom", - in practice is the same «world gendarme» as Hitler's Germany at the end of the 1930s- first half of the 1940s.

One thing is to know that it is "the Empire", theoretically, according to Chomsky books and anti-globalist slogans, and completely another thing is to see with your own eyes its «democracy tools» as they are put into practice. Such tools, for example, as the metal objects collected in the Sinchon museum that were found in skulls of Koreans who have passed away from American torture, including women and children. Or a collection of hair that has been cut off corpses of Korean women killed by Americans. Or a heap of footwear of those murdered in the American torture chambers.... Those very people about whom an order October 17, 1950, issued by the American Lieutenant Harrison said: « *My order is the law. Outlaws will be shot to death. Destroy all red bandits to free North Korea from the Communist monsters. Hunt and kill all the Communist Party members, civil servants and their families. Kill their sympathisers too.*».³⁸⁴

We have met in that museum one of those «communistic monster» who managed to survive by miracle. At that time he was just 5 years old. American " *Kulturträgers*"³⁸⁵ violently tore off Sinchon's children from their mothers and burned all of them alive - in 2 separate locations... Only two children have survived. Standing under the arches of building from which he managed to escape alive by a sheer miracle more than 50 years ago, this short wrinkled man who was easily recognizable from his childhood' photo at the stand, told us how he managed to survive and to climb out, over the corpses of

³⁸² Salaspils concentration camp was established by the Nazis at the end of 1941 at a point 18 km southeast of [Riga \(Latvia\)](#). It held many children and is known as children's concentration camp.

³⁸³ The Ninth Fort ([Lithuanian: Devintas Fortas](#)) is a [stronghold](#) in [Kaunas, Lithuania](#). It is a part of the [Kaunas Fortress](#), which was constructed in the late 19th century. During the [occupation of Lithuania by Nazi Germany](#), the fort was used as a place of torture and execution of prisoners.

³⁸⁴ <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1917/19170650.htm>

³⁸⁵ "Culture Carrier" (German), "civilizer" in the Nazi/Imperialist sense of the word

more than 100 same kids as he was... In another building, nearby, his mother was among 400 young mothers who have been burnt alive,...

In January, 1951 Lieutenant General Ridgway issued such order to the armies of the United Nations (under a banner of the "neutral" United Nations massacres of civilian population and other war crimes were widely committed in Korea!): «*Shoot any civilian suspected of being a Communist - do not take him prisoner. Chinese and Koreans in their looks are only slightly different from the animals. Using such human scum, the Soviets destroyed our people, while maintaining their own*»...³⁸⁶

But, unlike the Hitler's swells, none of the "heroes" of this war was - well deservedly! - hung... Should we be surprised after this Koreans have songs like «15 million will become bullets and bombs» and «Who provokes us, will not escape death!»? How would we feel today if Nazi Germany hasn't been destroyed in 1945, but continued to exist till this day and to threaten our Motherland?

I would say that Sinchon Museum differs from the Soviet military museums by the way of presentation: if in our museums they only mention in words what tortures were fascists subjecting Soviet patriots to, here all of this was visually represented - by means of photos, various objects and pictures...

Dónal became paler and paler in each new museum's room. He had such look as if he was about to become sick. I didn't feel sick, but the feeling of indignation and thirst of justice inflamed in my heart stronger and stronger...

On that day the museum was overflowed by school children. Well, if you don't show to children who threatens their native land today, with what sort of types they might have to deal, - without hiding all horrors, - evil will not disappear by itself from hiding this. It is necessary to tell and to show them everything - in order to fight against it. You can bury your head in the sand, convincing yourself that today Americans «are not like that», that, as they try to convince us in Eastern Europe today, Americans «became our partners» that they «are human too» - the essence of the United States of America as a state doesn't change from that. Another 10 years, and they might open just the same kind of museum in Iraq... And it is better to face the truth.

Americans like to repeat that the Korean War is "Forgotten War." It might be "forgotten" for them and for their European allies " (they surely would like to forget their shameful defeat!), but not for us - we know about it very well!

The truck full of children-pioneers passed us by when we said goodbye to our guides in Sinchon. Pioneers cheerfully waved to us hands. And I looked at them- such cheerful and happy kids, - and in my mind I saw Korean kids stabbed with bayonets in far 1951 by those American *remnants of a cake of soap*...

Americans impudently came to another country in 1945, allegedly for its "liberation", refused to leave, made a mess out of it, insisted on dividing it in two, having turned their occupied part in their semi-colony; and after all of that they are still surprised, why Koreans dislike them? Yes, Americans would

³⁸⁶

<http://s-kps.by/node/202?page=3>, http://badnews.org.ru/news/zverstva_amerikancev_v_koree/2010-03-05-206

The civilian massacre by the U.S. military in Shinchon was particularly extreme in its cruelty. The U.S. set living fire people on fire; buried them alive; cut their ears and noses off; pulled out their eyeballs; skinned them alive; dragged them by their noses; burned their hair, breasts and sexual organs with heated iron; destroyed their five major organs with axes, picks, and shovels; tore their legs and arms apart; sawed through their bodies; drove nails through their heads and backs with their bodies hanging upside down on a tree; and let dogs tear them to pieces. The cruelty of such deeds is simply unimaginable. U.S. forces slaughtered 1,550 civilians in the Shinchon region over the course of three days beginning on October 17, 1950. During their temporary occupation of the region, they mercilessly massacred a total of 35,383 civilians, amounting to one fourth of the regional population.

like for this war to become "forgotten." But crimes of invaders, as well as heroism of defenders of their native land aren't and can't be forgotten!

From Sinchon we went to Panmunjom where we visited the demilitarized zone and the demarcation line separating Democratic People's Republic of Korea from South Korea. All those who still shout very loudly about the Berlin Wall which has ceased to exist long ago, and about «the executions of deserters by Honecker's regime», do not like to remember about the continuous existence of this place.. And no wonder; the very same people don't like to speak about the wall erected today in Israel for separation from Palestinians... Just as about the fact that the number of “peace walls” between Protestant and Catholic communities in Belfast has multiplied since the beginning of so-called “peace process”: from 22 to 48, more than doubled!³⁸⁷

You can only get to the demilitarized zone accompanied by military guides. They are responsible for your safety. The situation there is rather tense. American or South Korean military make provocative actions rather often: “test the ground”, watching what reaction will there be from the DPRK. Well known incident at the border occurred in August, 1976 when American soldiers decided to cut down a tree in the joint security area without a warning, destroyed a barrier and a post of the DPRK. They received a swift response: border guards of the DPRK chopped two provokers with their own axe...

And when you stand here, in that small pavilion where the "border" passes right through the middle of the table, you can see with your own eyes who is behind the tragic story of division of the Korean people; if there were ever any doubts in this respect. Soldiers of Democratic People's Republic of Korea are on guard of the border by themselves, as the guards of their country's sovereignty. But from behind the backs of South Korean border guards you can physically see their American "guides" who are constantly “keeping an eye on them”, as a teacher keeps an eye on unreasonable kindergartners. And how mockingly, after all of this, sounds even the name of the American AKA South Korean pavilion facing the territory of Democratic People's Republic of Korea: it is written on it in Korean language «Freedom House».. «Freedom house» is decorated with a large quantity of the cameras fixing faces of all who visits the demilitarized zone from the DPRK side. It is a pity that they can't take fingerprints and DNA samples from a distance!

Standing there, for the first time in a literal sense face to face with the main enemy of mankind today, you cannot help asking yourself a question: when will the time come for this gangster state to appear before the most severe court of the nations on our planet? And whether it is enough for “progressive Americans” just to participate in protests in order to consider themselves having the right to be absolved from responsibility for the actions of their government? Is it enough to soothe their conscience? You can't buy yourself free from the court of history by only just protesting...

... I looked at the blossoming Pyongyang from the deck of the American espionage vessel "Pueblo", arrested by brave Korean sailors in the territorial waters of Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1968, - a vessel that found itself to be placed in an eternal haven on the bank of a quiet Korean river as a trophy ... And the haughty American “gendarmes” who were impudently walking about along the demarcation line, became in my perception miserable and ridiculous. «The king is naked!»- that's is about them.

And when September 11 will come again, I will refuse to observe their moments of silence again and to grieve for the nation of cheerful infanticides. Until that state will cease to be the state of those.

³⁸⁷ <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/peace-walls-are-still-necessary-16215986.html>, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-19715791> Source: NI Peace Monitoring Report, Sept. 2012

... Yes, there is a state on our planet which has already surpassed Hitler's Germany in cumulative number of barbarous atrocities and massacres committed by it throughout its history in the XX and XXIst centuries. And when it will cease to exist, and there will be other, normal state in its place, our planet will sigh more freely. It would be happiness to make it during my life time.

... Some noise was heard from the street, a sudden sound of air let out of tires of a car. And loud children's voices:

- *Pa Churandy! Esei ta pa Churandy!*³⁸⁸

GI's exchanged glances.

- Those little black bastards! - one of them yelled, and they run rushing in the same direction, from where they came, without having even reached the bar. In a few minutes we heard whistles of stones in air, a roar, someone's modulating laughter and shouts- tasty abuse in English and children's voices again:

□ - *K *** jo bo mama, merkano loco! Esei no ta Irak pa bo! Mi ta dal bu un skop!*³⁸⁹

Oisín understood nothing: neither what had been said, nor what had been happening. But I seemed to start realizing...

Churandy Martina³⁹⁰ actually became the national hero in Curaçao during the Beijing Olympic Games. To understand the importance for Curaçao of his second place in the final of 200 meters men's race, one should know that all the Olympic team of the Netherlands Antilles on these Olympic Games consisted of 3 persons. No Curaçao native has ever achieved such success at the Olympic Games (there was one Olympic medalist earlier from the Antillean team: in sailing, but he was a Dutchman who had moved to Curaçao and that's something quite different). When he ran, I cried out as loud as I could: «Churandy! Churandy!». And when he has crossed finishing line as second, I jumped with joy, together with all the Antilles, despite the fact that I was at the other end of a planet. And my mum jumped too...

In my heart I was just in seventh heaven, full of joy and pride, though Churandy wasn't my own compatriot, not even a relative. But after a couple of hours, I learned that he was denied the medal: and that's when the official results have already been declared, and on Curaçao a spontaneous carnival has almost started. The thing was that the American who came 3rd, was disqualified for stepping onto a different track. You actually could see it with a naked eye. He almost moved to another track all together.

³⁸⁸ For Churandy! This is for Churandy! (Papiamentu)

³⁸⁹ F*** you, crazy American! This is not Iraq for you! I'll give you a good kick (Papiamentu)

³⁹⁰ Churandy Martina (b.1984) is a [sprinter](#) from [Curaçao](#), currently (2012) representing the [Netherlands](#). Previously, he represented the [Netherlands Antilles](#) until its dissolution in 2010. In 2008 in Beijing he originally placed second in the 200 m at the Olympics, finishing behind [Usain Bolt](#) with a time of 19.82 s. This would have been both a national record and the second-ever Olympic medal for the Netherlands. However he was disqualified an hour after the race, allegedly for a lane violation. American [Wallace Spearmon](#), who had initially placed third, was disqualified moments after the race for having stepped on his inside lane line during the race. The American coaches appealed the decision and upon viewing their own footage of Spearmon's offence they accused Martina of committing the same infraction. They dropped their appeal for Spearmon in favour of a successful protest against Martina. The Netherlands Antilles filed an appeal to the [Court of Arbitration for Sport](#) to reinstate Martina's medal, arguing that the American protest came after the 30-minute deadline for protests and appeals set by the [International Association of Athletics Federations](#) (IAAF), and also that they have their own video footage showing that Martina never left his lane. In March 2009, the CAS rejected the appeal against Martina's disqualification. [Shawn Crawford](#), who had been awarded the Olympic silver medal, later gave his medal to Martina.

But Yankees wouldn't be Yankees if they would have left in peace the fact that they had one medal less - especially when they lay themselves out to such degree in order to overtake the Chinese in the general offset (at least on total of medals, as they haven't got enough golden ones). And in turn, they submitted a protest concerning Churandy - that he had supposedly also stepped on the next track. By rules they could make such protest not later than in half an hour after the announcement of results, but in this case already an hour and a half has passed.. It is the first thing, and second thing is that for disqualification of Churandy at the American request the judge have used not official videorecord of running, but a record, given by Americans (ha, remember how Colin Powell showed to all the planet a picture with Saddam's 'mobile weapons of mass destruction'?!). Personally I haven't seen any film on which it was absolutely visible that Churandy had broken rules. But Americans have already broken rules twice themselves while submitting this protest (see above). But they always do so: all the time, everywhere, from politics to sports, under the motto «*there isn't a bus stop, but there's one for me, for driver of the bus is my best friend*»!

And after all that they have the impudence to cry out that «you should have won by the rules»!. Did you attack sovereign Iraq "by the rules"? Did you bomb Yugoslavia "by the rules"? And who is making those rules? Who dares to speak about honesty, - the nation of champions who admitted some 10 years after their career termination that all their sports life they have been on steroids? Have you run out of steroids now? And now you can't win at all without using some false tricks?

For days after I was being gloomy and couldn't eat or sleep properly. Once many years ago in a children's book I have read such expression: «He felt so sick as if he has eaten a kilo of plums together with pits ». I was in more or less such condition. Ri Rang saw that something was happening with me, but I didn't tell him, what exactly: I was afraid that he wouldn't understand. But he probably would have understood. That it was not about that I support fellow countrymen of my ex-husband: this case was just extremely unfairly and nasty of Americans as Churandy has really won with such advantage from their sportsman that has finished only 4th and now, unexpectedly for himself, became silver Olympic medalist, that no stepping on any other tracks could have given him such huge advantage. If only that new 'prize-winner' had a heart, he would have refused to take such a medal³⁹¹. But an average American and a conscience are *as incompatible as genius and villainy*³⁹², Two entirely different things...

It was impossible to describe Antilleans' feelings after that. Antilleans, whom the Dutch are pushing here and there all the time, trying to convince them that all of them are criminals, drug addicts, loverboys or at the very least, idlers. And just as soon as they got a hero whom their youth would want to be like... I almost felt like crying aloud when I saw this Antilleans' petition on internet:

«The population of Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles would like to thank the USA for the protest of minding our Churandy Martina submitted on August 20, 2008. It led to his disqualification and deprivation of his deserved silver medal on 200 meters, only two hours later after disqualification of the American athlete Wallace Spermon.

The population of Curaçao, the Netherlands the Antilles would like to thank the USA for that you deprived us of our fine dream: silver medal for Churandy Martina in Beijing - 2008.

Can you explain us value to this one medal for you, in comparison with many, many other which you have already received in your Olympic history? We had only one athlete running with three athletes

³⁹¹ . [Shawn Crawford](#), who had been awarded the Olympic silver medal, later gave his medal to Martina.

³⁹² "Genius and villainy are two things incompatible"- Alexander Pushkin, "Mozart and Salieri" (1830)

from the USA. Do you really believe it was fair? Or is it a problem that we're a small country (only 444 square miles; located at the coast of Venezuela), who could overcome the powerful USA?

Being small country with only 150.000 inhabitants, we are happy and very proud of that we have the chance to donate to you, the big and powerful USA, this extreme form of ALMS: The SILVER MEDAL on 200 meters in Beijing - 2008!

We have only one request to the world gendarm, the USA: PLEASE DO NOT FORGET THAT there is the ALMIGHTY GOD who is ABOVE ALL in any country! We will meet again in LONDON 2012 and if it isn't so difficult for you: please, be honest, pure and fair and at least try to win the medals honestly! Remember: many centuries back, there was a person named David who won from the big awful Goliath!»³⁹³

Therefore, of course, you don't need to be surprised after this case there was a growth of the anti-American feelings on the island. Moreover, some Antillean newspapers addressed their readers: please, be more kind, as our Churandy still has to study in the United States... All this Tyrunesh explained to Oisin now.

-Little boys now cut open the tires of Americans' cars, as soon as Americans look aside. They throw stones at them. So far, there were no victims yet on either side. But it would have been a shame not to use such splash of anti-American feelings among our apolitical, as it seemed, youth, - at these words she came to whisper, - And that's what our comrades do: we identify those teenagers who are especially active in such things, find out who they are, and then have a proper educational chat with them.... I never thought that we'd be helped in our work by the Beijing Olympic Games! As an expert in public relations I can tell you: these Americans are noodles (patsies?)! The majority of Antilleans were likely to prefer them to the Dutch before this story with Churandy, but now... Some haughty idiot, submitting that protest, seemed to have decided: «Such a microscopic country! What could it possibly do to us in retaliation?» But they should have learnt the geography, those gentlemen. Should have also known what's happening in the world. And only then they should decide, was it worth to do this or not.

Indeed, that's what those Americans from their Athletics Federation absolutely forgot - where is their American FOL situated...If they ever knew it at all, of course. And that's this base has key value in the complicated relations of the Americans the Bolivarian Venezuela of President Chavez....

When American military base is supposedly not a military base? When it is called '*Forward Operating Location*'. ..³⁹⁴

When in 1999 it became obvious that the United States would have to leave Panama pretty soon, the American military immediately started to look for alternative location for their Air Force base Howard³⁹⁵ in this country. They began negotiations about using the existing airports in Central America, in the Caribbean countries and in the northern part of Latin America as a platform for American «anti-drug operations». According to the contracts, the bases called by the American Ministry of Defence «*Forward Operating Locations*», are placed at the airports which continue to belong to the country, where they are situated. And the American planes which are engaged to detect

³⁹³ Thank you U.S.A. for taking away our DREAM, but we are PROUD!!
http://www.caribbeanchoice.com/forums/printer_friendly_posts.asp?TID=79249 -

³⁹⁴ More about the FOL - see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forward_Operating_Site

³⁹⁵ Howard Air Force Base is a former [United States Air Force](#) base located in [Panama](#). It was closed on 1 November 1999 as a result of the [Torrijos-Carter Treaties](#) which specified that United States military facilities in the former [Panama Canal Zone](#) be closed and the facilities be turned over to the Panamanian government.

and combat drug-trafficking, are situated on «FOL» along with a limited number of the American military and customs officers who are servicing these planes. In Washington it was decided that three FOL will be necessary for replacement of the base Howard: one in Central America, one in Latin America and one on the islands of the Caribbean Sea. Each place chosen for an FOL should be suitable for flights at night and in any weather, be served by air traffic controllers, it also should have a runway in length not less than in 8000 feet, and to be capable to accept small, average, and heavy planes. It also should have conditions for refuelling and system of fire-prevention safety. Such agreements were signed with 3 countries: FOL were placed at the international airport Ela Afaro in Manta, Ecuador, at the international airports 'Queen Beatrix'; on Aruba and Hato on Curaçao (in the so-called «northern zone of drug sources») and in the international airport in Comalapa, El Salvador.

The agreement about creation of FOL's on Aruba and Curaçao was signed for 10 years with the Netherlands in March, 2000. It was also ratified by the Dutch parliament in October, 2001. The American military planes and the American customs officers appeared to Curaçao even before it - in April of 1999. As a matter of fact, Antilleans were given very little powers to decide anything: Antillean "autonomy" doesn't extend on questions of defense and foreign policy. All is decided by some *heren Joost & Jan*³⁹⁶, or if you wish, by *Henk & Ingrid*³⁹⁷ in the far The Hague. And to Antilleans it was said that they should just rejoice: Americans will bring with themselves «considerable investments in infrastructure», will create «new workplaces» (and other nonsense which they usually tell to the people, while persuading them to sell themselves). For the FOL on Aruba Americans allocated 10.3 million dollars, for the one in Curaçao - 43.9 million. The money came from the American budget as part of the «Plan Colombia».

Residents of Aruba were not overjoyed with the uninvited guests. Arubans have long discussed among themselves the real reasons which have forced Americans to place the military on their island. And when the flights of F-16 started over Aruba, Arubans were finally convinced that it wasn't a question of only «supervision over drug-trafficking» - that's why they required for these flights to stop. The planes were strongly disturbing people's everyday life, especially in Oranjestad³⁹⁸, and frightened off the tourists.

Unbelievable, but true: even the Dutch almost never used military planes of this kind on Aruba. People were also unhappy about the fact that often American jets came back to the base with some technical problems, and then the alarm raised at the airport, disrupted the schedule of commercial flights, with numerous tourists.

They managed to shut Aruba's population up - as well as most of the world - only after September the 11th. Sometimes it feels like it could justify anything: for example, in Ireland, a radio station had stopped funding the work of reporters-migrants, referring to the same reason, the same September 11th! Apparently, they did it so that we would finally feel in this country "like at home." However, after this we were graciously invited to Dublin to a farewell dinner party with the female head boss of the radio - probably they thought it would be a great honor for us. I wrote to them - copying this email to all my migrant colleagues - that since the radio really had such serious financial difficulties, we would rather not spend their already limited funds for a dinner. As a result, my colleagues had ignored this dinner collectively - to the great displeasure of the Dublin office...

³⁹⁶ Gentlemen Joost and Jan (typical Dutch names)

³⁹⁷ Ingrid and Henk are also typical Dutch names, this expression means something like "Joe and Jane" in English

³⁹⁸ Oranjestad - capital of Aruba

In recent years, though, U.S. forces in Aruba gradually minimized, but only because Americans have shifted their main attention to Curaçao. At the FOL on Hato constantly 2 large, 2 medium and 6 small American military aircraft were located. Officially, it was forbidden for them to have assault weapons on board during reconnaissance missions. Agreement with the Netherlands stipulated that only a certain type of flying were allowed to Americans, and that it should be possible for the Dutch observers to be present on board of the US aircraft: "for coordination with the authorities of the host country during the operations." Between 200 and 230 U.S. military personnel were serving this aircrafts. They were entitled to observe the suspected in drug trafficking aircraft and ships and then to report them to the authorities of the port to which they were sailing or flying.

How can a super-fast F-16 be used for "monitoring of drug trafficking", remains a mystery. Dutch military already had some permanent bases on the island for a long time. American FOL was located in Curaçao next to the only civilian airport on the island. I saw on the internet its description as "a small village with 12 comfortable air-conditioned tents, with a team of 8 people placed in each of them."

Now I had to see this base with my own eyes, in reality and to get to know its "comfortable tents" inhabitants: the U.S. military were one of the most enviable clients in the portfolio of *Francisca Public Relations*. And after the Beijing Olympics, they begged Tyrunesh to help them to improve their image in the eyes of Antilleans. So, that's what we were going to do.. Let's grab the bull by the horns!

It was Friday. I agreed with Tyrunesh that I will start working from Monday.

And the next day we had to move from hotel to the house that we were going to rent for the time of our stay here. Tyrunesh already picked a house for us, and its owner, she said, was just waiting for us to sign the contract.

- And what is your spouse going to do, Saskia? - Tyrunesh asked me at parting. I looked at Oisin: do not be silent, answer something!

- *I am an expert in the restoration of antique furniture*, - Oisin said, and his tone was as if his whole life he has revolved among the "cream of society." - Do you have a demand for this sort of things?

- Oh, do not worry! In recent years many wealthy Dutch retirees moved to live in Curaçao (here they are called "*penshonado*"), for which there are very favorable terms of settling here - if they will take their money with them, of course. And the owners of "Kura Hulanda", perhaps, also would not mind to get such furniture! - Exclaimed Tyrunesh. - I'll talk to my husband's family that you will get a work and a residence permit as soon as possible. I already have it for Saskia.

... Again, I could not sleep for a long time that night. My head was buzzing, and I wanted to sleep, but it did not work.

Curaçao! Dear, close to me, *dushi isla*³⁹⁹! A place, with which so much good memories - and once were also such great hopes and dreams.- were associated.. Am I really here?

I'll have to drive around the island over the weekend, to see what has changed here. Definitely will visit Bandabau - my favourite beach, Kleine Knip. Oisin will like it... I'll have to treat him to *Bolo Pretu*⁴⁰⁰... How deliciously Mai baked it! May... it's pity that it is impossible to visit her grave at the cemetery... this could betray me. She died a few years ago. In recent years, she had her leg amputated -

³⁹⁹ Sweet island (Papiamentu)

⁴⁰⁰ Bolo Pretu - literally "black cake", an Antillean specialty, dark, very sweet fruit cake made with pruns, dates, raisins and some alcohol (recipe of Portuguese origin)

because of diabetes. Sonny's relatives - and they are not communists! – took her to Cuba for medical treatment. And then they could not praise enough the Cuban doctors, Harold told me. Without them Mai could have died 10 years ago...

I wanted to escape from thoughts of death and doctors. Oisín slept. Quietly - so as not to hinder his sleep – I turned on the TV. And for some reason I got to the children's channel that showed a cartoon about a fire engine called Finley. The cartoon had just begun. And it was called, much to my surprise, "*Gorby Gets the Hiccups*"!

"*Gorby is a dustbin lorry. Gorby loves his job - to collect garbage in Friendlyville. He always feels hunger when he sees garbage...*" - said the screen⁴⁰¹. It was a miracle that Oisín did not wake up from my reaction to what I saw! He must have been so tired after the trip.... What a cartoon! It must have been created by one of my fellow countrymen!

... If I was in Dublin on that day, when our "labeled"⁴⁰² *dustbin lorry* was proclaimed to be its honorary citizen (interesting why there?), I certainly would have repeated the act of Latvian schoolgirl Alina Lebedeva, who symbolically struck British Prince Charles on a face during his visit to Latvia with "a flower of revolution"⁴⁰³. But I would limit myself to red carnations: I would rather choose roses. And the ones that would be as prickly as possible. Our dustbin lorry wouldn't be surprised by this: it has already happened to him at home, in Russia, where he almost doesn't come today. Somebody told me that once a girl, handing him a bouquet of roses, suddenly and sharply turned them upside down and slapped him with those roses across the face. And a young man who has lost everything, because of all for what the West is so grateful to the former Soviet president, - work, confidence in the future, possibility to get free education, free medical care, decent human future for himself and his children - slapped him across the face, with the words: "I was dreaming of doing this for a very long time!"⁴⁰⁴

In Russia, the two "terrorists" attacking that "mister "who once called himself a communist, were cheered when they did it. Including by many policemen.

People in the West - even those who consider themselves leftist - in most cases do not understand why. "It is pity that you did not give Gorbachev to finish what he has started!" – we hear continuously from Westerners, representatives of different nations, but they usually have no notion of our life: nor before Gorbachev, nor during his time, nor after. Many of them, however, do not even want to know about it. Like this it's more convenient for them to think that they are hosting an outstanding historical figure who has done something good. (good *for whom*, that is the question!).

What good the so-called "democratic" reforms have brought to our nation, except to the rogues of all kinds, about whom we now tell jokes in order to console each other? The population in even what was left of our country⁴⁰⁵ is being reduced by 1 million a year. (the Irish, if you remember your infamous "potato famine" and your own immigration, with bitter tears and broken hearts, can you at least understand how we feel?). Premature deaths, huge number of murders, suicides, civil war, immigration... in Moscow alone, according only to official statistics, there are about 50,000 homeless children, something that did not happen even in the most difficult post-war years.

⁴⁰¹ One of the series of Finley The Fire Engine cartoon for small children

⁴⁰² Labeled - mocking nickname of Mikhail Gorbachev in Russia due to the dark port-wine stain on his head

⁴⁰³ In Soviet Union carnations were considered to be flower of Revolution because of their red color and because they bloom late in the autumn

⁴⁰⁴ <http://kommersant.ru/doc/131819> (it happened in 1996)

⁴⁰⁵ In Russian Federation, one out of 15 Soviet republics

Even the incidence of syphilis in Russia in 1999 increased 43 times compared to 1989.

"Freedom of speech", you say? Yes, it is such freedom when *"Tom harks, and lunches at his ease."*⁴⁰⁶ ... I have always said aloud what I thought, also during the Soviet times, and nobody sent me to the Kolyma⁴⁰⁷ for that. And besides it, as you know, *"Fine words butter no parsnips"*⁴⁰⁸.

The figures can fill many volumes. Just read the "White Book" by Kara-Murza⁴⁰⁹ - that's the kind of books that they should use for teaching the Dutch "experts on Russia" not to blabber nonsense about its current "prosperity"!

I could try to tell the Irish how a majority of our nation survives today only on "pasture forage" each winter: on their own grown potatoes and gherkins. But the Irish do not see direct and immediate link of this with the economic policies that began during Gorby time, our infamous Nobel Prize winner who has destroyed everything and has created nothing during his life but a powerful mafia, a useless fund of his name and personal bank accounts abroad. Even though who, if not politicians, are to blame for the plight of their people?

Before giving Gorbachev the title of an honorary citizen of the Irish capital, you should ask our Russian women what words would they use to describe this "Godfather" of modern Russian mafia state, those of us who still remember that until 1988 it was perfectly safe to walk our streets at night, nothing could happen with you : that is, until our men became "enlightened" during his reign that "erotica is a part of world culture." After that it became impossible to walk down the street or to work in the office without somebody grabbing you under your skirt... Today - thanks to *Gorbachevshchina*⁴¹⁰! - 50,000 of our women and children are annually sold into sex slavery in brothels around the world. And the Russian media assure us with shyly lustful smiles that *"the ladies themselves want to do this..."* It is also the legacy of Gorbachev.

Oh, what praises the Irish media were singing during those days to a person who continues to disgrace our country abroad: about democracy, which we didn't appreciate because we're "not mature enough" for it. And does any of them even remember Gorbachev time's shootings of innocent people in the Baltics? Or to the West that has got from Gorbachev everything what it had wanted, these people are only a "collateral damage", just like people of Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia?

And I remember the arrival of the former head of our state ton Rotterdam, when I had lived there, and him "selling himself" for cash to those very few Western businessmen, who didn't find it a waste of money to spent it on a dinner with him⁴¹¹. By persistent rumors among the Russian community in the Netherlands also insisted that Mikhail Sergeyevich even pleased his sponsors by singing old Russian songs with a guitar accompaniment...

Based on recent press evidence, our dustbin lorry had fallen in price. Bill Clinton still takes almost 100,000 pounds for dinner with him, but when Gorby had advertised himself at an online auction site,

⁴⁰⁶ Quote from the famous Russian fable "The Cat and The Cook", by Ivan Krylov (1769-1844), Russian poet, author of more than 200 fables. The Cook left the Cat in charge of protecting his food from mice. Upon his return, the Cook discovered the Cat eating the food. Instead of intervening, the Cook yelled and yelled while the Cat finished off all the food.

⁴⁰⁷ Extremely remote region in Siberia, known as a place for exile

⁴⁰⁸ Words alone are useless, especially flattering phrases or fine promises, and you should judge people by what they do rather than by what they say. In this context, freedom of speech is meaningless without socio-economic rights that only Socialism can guarantee to people.

⁴⁰⁹ Kara-Murza S., Batchikov S. The White Book. Economic reforms in Russia 1991-2001. Moscow, 2003. - gives details statistics of the disastrous results of "free-market" reforms in Russia in comparison with economic development in the USSR

⁴¹⁰ Derogatory term for Gorbachev's regime in Russian

⁴¹¹ http://robertamsterdam.com/2007/11/the_price_of_dinner_with_gorbachev/

nobody wanted to supper with him for more than 8000⁴¹²...That reminds me of an unflattering epithet, which Vladimir Ilyich Lenin used to describe such politicians⁴¹³... Have you not tried yourself in a striptease yet, Mickey? Maybe some perverts would tuck a couple of hundred dollars under the elastic of your boxer shorts..

..

The number of Russians votes submitted in the presidential election in 1996 for M. Gorbachev: 0.51%... And he was going “to return to the Russian political life”?

No comments.

I can say a lot about it. I had a lot of “warm” words for the "honoured guest." But I only want to recall now an old Somali refugee, whom I met at the train station in the Dutch city of Tilburg. The old man had lost his whole family, including seven young grandchildren, during the civil war and American military intervention in his country. And he called our "*Teddy Bear*"⁴¹⁴ all the names in the book. "*There is no balance now in the world; there is no stability, because of Gorbachev. Americans were able to invade our country, because of what he did.*" Recalling the tears of this old man who against his will found himself in absolutely alien to him country at the end of his life, among people absolutely alien to him who had lost everything what was the meaning of life, I want to ask the Irish: what has Michail Sergeevich Gorbachev done good for your country? Permitted the Irish Ryanair to open duty free shops in Moscow airports after some Irish and Aeroflot officials drank vodka and went to the sauna together? Well, you could erect a monument to him for that!

You're complaining about influx of refugees to Ireland and about “unscrupulous economical migrants”, about people like me (though your economy can't do without us). How blind one has to be not to notice direct and straightforward connection between what Alexandr Zinovyev⁴¹⁵ has called ‘catastroika⁴¹⁶, and the catastrophic growth of the number of people who run from their own countries to yours!... And it's becoming visible personally for you, on your Dublin streets.

Well, come on, say your ‘*go raibh mile maith agat*⁴¹⁷, to Michail Sergeevich for the fact that we are here, with you, today! Those who have always been dreaming of emigrating from the USSR, are probably grateful to him too. But how many of such people did we have among us, in comparison with the vast majority of normal ordinary people, who had no thoughts of emigration, until he had made their lives unbearable?

If I were him, I would wake up in cold sweat every night, because the lives of hundreds of thousands of those who have died in the course of civil and international conflicts started in the world due to the consequences of his politics, are on his conscience. As for my personal account, this man deprived me the main thing in my life. He deprived me the opportunity of choice. Well, I wouldn't have my farm in Ireland without him. So what? I would have needed it as snow in harvest, had it not been for his politics!

⁴¹² Author saw this herself on one of the bidding websites back in the late 1990s

⁴¹³ “Political whores” was the term that Lenin used

⁴¹⁴ Mishka (Teddy Bear) in Russian is also a short name for Mikhail

⁴¹⁵ Aleksandr Zinovyev (1922–2006) was a prominent Russian [logician](#) and [dissident writer](#) of social critique. After the [Collapse of the Soviet Union](#), Zinovyev became a [Stalinist](#) and wrote a book “[A Russian Tragedy](#)” about the USSR's collapse, calling it a catastrophe. In his later life, he championed the Soviet system and regarded post-Soviet Russia with disdain.

⁴¹⁶ Catastroika is his term for Perestroika (from the word Catastrophe)

⁴¹⁷ Thank you very much (Irish)

I have lived in the West, unfortunately, almost half of my life by now. I know it inside out. I don't want to live such a life where man is a wolf to man and the only joy is a pint of beer and a new gadget or a car. People *did have a choice earlier*, when two world systems existed. Nowadays they force upon me a kind of lifestyle which is absolutely alien to me; and they assure me that it is real freedom. And I see long faces of my Irish acquaintances when I say to them again and again, that I would have gone back to the USSR if it had existed now. I wouldn't look back, leaving behind everything they aren't able to imagine their life without.

Well, as it was said in an old joke, '*we have to start from the beginning*'.⁴¹⁸

It doesn't frighten me.

As for dustbin lorries, let them do their direct work. To collect the dust. Of history.

Now I'm not afraid and no longer tired to live. I remembered Ri Rang with his guileless smile and his pure, flaming soul. For the last twenty years I got used to a thought that such people as him exist only in books. Many feelings died down in my soul for all these years. It happened so not only because they were not required in the capitalist world, but also because they were bound, covered with a layer of cynicism, indifference, pessimism and unbelief. Just like the frames of ships left on the land that used to be the dried up Aral sea, are being covered with salt sand.

That's why I didn't even realize for some time who I am in this world. Just a Russian? A "new Dutch"? A migrant worker who came to Ireland by a whim of the Celtic tiger? A Russian abroad? Sometimes I tried to be someone else, someone who I'm really not. I tried to reconcile myself with the way of life which are deeply alien to me. I tried to adjust to what is unacceptable for me.

When the Soviet Union ended its existence, the Dutch (I almost physically felt malicious joy experienced by them) sent me a notification that since that day I was "a person of unknown citizenship": because the Soviet citizenship existed no longer. And I believed in it: that because there is no more Soviet Union I was no longer a Soviet person.

Now I'm deeply ashamed of this.

Cheerful Cubans, who had called me '*Soviética*', despite all my delusions, opened my eyes to the fact which became beyond any doubt for me after I have been to Korea. I am a Soviet person, despite what had happened to the Soviet Union. I was born a Soviet person, I was brought up by Soviet people, I grew up among them. I remained and I will remain a Soviet person until my last breath, no matter where my fate will bring me. I have to live in the way worthy of my heroic Motherland, so incomprehensible and causing such hatred by those who lead primitive, *stomach-centered* existence on our planet.

It seems that after Korea a fresh spring wind has blown in the desert where I had lived so many years. This wind blew away and dispelled the sand of cynicism and other plagues of the 'free world' with which my soul has been covered for so many years as the land with debris of a building after an earthquake. It seems an abundant shower has fallen in this desert, covering it with first spring flowers. I was surprised with myself, how did I get so much energy, strength, confidence in the future. And from now on, I will let no one to devastate my heart anymore!

⁴¹⁸ One of the Soviet political joke criticizing corruption in the 1970s: Soviet scientists revived Lenin, but after spending 2 days wandering around Moscow he disappeared, leaving behind a note: "Please don't look for me. I am in Switzerland. We'll have to start everything (Revolution) from the beginning"

I haven't noticed how I fell asleep with these thoughts. I dreamt of my grandmother, grandfather, Little Tamara, Shurek, my Soviet relatives, friends, mother, Lisa, Fidelchik and Che. In our old wooden house which was still board up outside, but on the inside all the same, it was just like in those days when I had lived there. Ri Rang sat among those dear to me people at our 1st of May holiday table. I don't know how all these people could sit at it in our small house, but they were all present. Even my mum's '*red director*⁴¹⁹'. Even an unknown to me grandad's colleague, by surname Buzgan whom he compared us all with to measure if we were worthy people (if a person seemed to him shallow and light-minded, grandfather said to him with regret, 'No, you're not Buzgan!').

It smelled with sticky buds and with lilac that just began to blossom in our garden. There was so much fuss and racket in the room. And I was so happy in this dream – though even while dreaming I realized that it was just a dream, that happens too! I was happy because our house was on its former place, our garden blossoms lush, I would say, fiercely like a construction brigade from the Soviet song⁴²⁰ ...

I brought Ri Rang to the porch and his radiant smile burnt my heart like a fire.

- Look, Ri Rang! That's how we live!

He looked around, breathed fresh smell of spring, and I heard his slightly muffled and stentorian voice as clear as if I was awake.

- It is good. Really good!

It was the last thing that I heard before Oisin woke me up.

- Zhenya, Zhenya, wake up!

I could hardly open my eyes. My dream didn't want to leave me and I didn't want to let it go. Oisin stood over the sofa where I had my nap.

- It's time to get up. Your Ethiopian (it was apparently hard for him to pronounce her name) has already phoned. She will pick us up in an hour. We will have to go to sign the lease for the house.

I rubbed my eyes trying to dispel Ri Rang's image and to come back to the reality. But he didn't want to let me go, he didn't want to leave me... I continued to see him as if he was right in front of me, in person...

- We already agreed that you will call me Saskia... What time is it?

- 8 o'clock. As far as I understood, everything begins here earlier than back at home?

- You got it right. It's not so hot in the mornings, you see. Though they may have a *siesta* in the afternoon.

- Your Ethiopian has already given me the address. I looked on the map; it's not far. Jan Norduynweg...

- Jan Norduynweg? – I woke up in an instant. - Did she tell you the house owner's name?

- Just imagine, his name is Patrick. I haven't even thought that there are people with Irish names here! Mister Patrick Go-se-pa...

⁴¹⁹ Term of the 1990s describing directors of major Russian plants and factories of Yeltsin time who remained loyal to the Communist ideas and were trying to safeguard socialist principles within their factories

⁴²⁰ "Fierce Construction Brigade", by Alexandra Pakhmutova and Nikolai Dobronravov

- Well, - I said to Oisín, - you will go to sign this lease alone. I have food poisoning after yesterday's beefsteak, I spent all night on the floor of the hotel's bathroom, and now I'm making up for my lost sleep. Why do you look at me like that? You're a capable person, Alan! You may sign this lease alone.

- What happened? What food poisoning?

- Oisín, - I lowered my voice. – Don't say this even to our charming Tyrynesh. Mister Patrick Gosepa is my ex-husband's uncle. And, by the way, he is a great fan of the USA, so try to praise that Stripes and Stars at his house. He will like it.

To Oisín's honour he understood everything in a moment and didn't ask me silly questions. He didn't try to persuade me that no one will recognize me in my new look. There was too much risk. It's one thing to face with someone of your old acquaintances in the crowd bumping into him by accident and quite another to sit face to face with a person who knows you well and to talk.

-We have to think what to do to avoid you meeting with him in the future. – Oisín said thoughtfully. - Maybe we shouldn't sign this contract? Shall we look for another lodging?

I shook my head.

- It may cause suspicion. He is already waiting for us. Well, it is a really good house. I passed it many times and back then, to tell you the truth, I wanted to live in it very much. But some Dutch people were renting it from uncle Patrick. It is bad that he lives not far from that house. I hope he won't drop in our place in the evenings for a cocktail. If he does, you will have to entertain him without me.

- Will it surprise him?

- Well, I can appear for a moment in the kitchen, briefly... To serve you with *pina colada* and to disappear again. I hope it won't surprise him. If you try well and depict a jealous Scottish macho who is very afraid that your wife might fancy Antilleans...

- Do I look like a macho? – Shyness came over Oisín.

- Take it easy. I'm just joking! We have to be on the alert. I will try to spend more time at work in the evenings. Sign the lease for a year, no more. If we stay here longer than a year, we will definitely move to some other place after that...

Oisín left, and I went to the bedroom to sleep. But I didn't dream of Ri Rang any more on that day...

Oisín came back in the afternoon. His face has become red as a beetroot from the Antillean sun but he was cheerful and happy.

- Our Ethiopian sends her regards to you! – he exclaimed from the threshold. –And that uncle of yours too. She provided us with the car of the company. There are no problems with the lease, we can move to the house today.

And with these words he waved the keys both from the house and the car in front of my face.

-Well, how did you like my ex-relative? – I asked Oisín.

- Very nice old guy. Despite his pro-American likings, - he answered.- He was very upset that my wife had a food poisoning at the hotel and invited us to a barbecue sometime.

- And you, of course, said yes?

-Of course, I did. Some day...

In any case, the immediate danger has passed for the time being and I sighed with relief. After Lisa got sick, I stopped torturing myself with thoughts of what might happen (or might not!) as I have understood a certain worldly wisdom: if the day has passed, thank the Lord⁴²¹! Yes, I must think about what I should do, if my fears come true but I should not tear my heart into pieces by constant rolling of these thoughts in the my. It is not only pointless but even harmful: if your nerves are tense, you can make a real mess of things... You should preserve your nerves, especially when other people depend on what you do.

... Towards the evening we settled in the new location. The house, that uncle Patrick let to out, was quite comfortable inside. Within those 16 years, that I was absent from this island, a real mature garden has grown around the house; was it grown by Haitian Jean? But through the palms we could still see the road that leads from Willemstad to the west of the island.

In the afternoon the streets of Mahuma⁴²² were so hot that Oisín and I didn't go outside. Only when the sun started to set I said:

- Let's go for a drive and see the island...

- Are you not afraid to drive here? –Oisín said sarcastically.

- No, here I'm not... In fact, I probably should. There are a lot of reckless drivers and accidents in Curaçao. But the roads here are less forked and complex than in Europe. Previously locals earned quite a good money by teaching the Dutch to drive; here the Dutch passed exams to get driver's license very quickly and thus it turned a profit to the local treasury. Most of this was taking place not even in Curaçao but in Saba where there is only one road.. But the Dutch government did not like such competition and made an end to it. Now in order to get driver's license here you must have lived in Antilles at least six months. Although it is officially the territory of Netherlands and no one requires from you, for example, to live six months in some Eindhoven before being able to take a driving test in that particular city. Ostensibly this was done because in the Antilles to drive a car and to pass the test too easy and later such drivers would be a danger on the Dutch roads. In the Netherlands lessons are very expensive and by the time you'll pass your test, you would had already been as a sheep among the shearers.. Only for some reason I have never seen the statistics on how many of the Dutch drivers who got their licences here, actually were to blame for accidents... I don't think that the Dutch roads became safer after the introduction of these new rules. But from many people their means of livelihood were taken away ... In fact, I think there was another reason for it: as soon as something starts to render a profit to the locals in the Antilles, the Dutch will certainly take away from them "the goose that lays the golden eggs." It's always been the case and it continues to this day.

But still, of course, after you take driving lessons in Dublin or Belfast, Curaçao is a children's playground. And that's why I was not afraid to drive there. The main thing is to make sure that nobody would crash into you. So look around and pray if you're a believer...

-I'm not a practicing believer, - Oisín looked down.

-Well, anyway... I'm an atheist all together...

It was too late to go far. I equipped myself with the map and decided to bring Oisín to the beach in Sonesta, where once I was knocked down by the waves, where we jumped in unison with those waves and where Sonny's cousins buried him laughing in the sand... At that time the hotel was only being

⁴²¹ Old Russian expression

⁴²² Mahuma - district of Curaçao, close to Hato airport

built, but now I heard it's become a five-star hotel and the Dutch complained about its high cost. This beach was seen from the balcony of Monsignor, who once had baptized me. Perhaps, he would have been very disappointed that I'm not a believer. But I have already said that during the confusion in the 1990s I often tried to be who I really can not be... And many of my fellow countrymen are still trying!

-Let's go to the beach? - I asked. Oisín again somehow got embarrassed, but said nothing. Nothing, except:

- I don't want to stay at home all the time...

We drove slowly: not only because I didn't remember the road but also because I really wanted to see what has changed in Curaçao during these 16 years. First of all, I noticed that the police, were armed, all lock, stock and barrel, that the number of bars on the windows has incredibly increased, that there appeared to be more of affluent houses, but almost all of them were like in Haiti or Russia behind high fences, often surrounded with barbed wire and under the watch of security guard. Probably now it was the most popular profession: just like in our country, "an achievement of the free market." And almost exclusively white and foreigners lived in such "gated communities", as it was called: just like in South Africa. Saskia Duplessis surely would have felt like at home here...

The number of *chollers*⁴²³ has increased drastically. Among them were a lot of immigrants from Latin America who spoke only Spanish and who weren't going to learn Papiamentu (do they actually care about it, if they just tried to survive?). At first sight it was unclear if they were chollers or just the poor illegal migrants. Among migrants there were many Jamaicans and Haitians. The locals avoided them cautiously. About the same situation was in Moscow where people avoided the Uzbeks, in Holland where the Dutch avoided the Moroccans, and as well as in Ireland where the Lithuanians and the Poles were avoided

... The streets were packed with people and many of them tried to sell something. Many of the traders looked quite pitifully. But I couldn't look even at those who seemed quite well-off at first sight: they chewed take away meals somewhere in the corner, they looked gratified and they needed nothing more. I didn't feel like stopping the car not because of fear of being robbed but because it was very difficult for me to watch the local *miseria*⁴²⁴. The words of my mum's friend came to my mind. They described very precisely the life of residents of any capitalist country, from from Haiti to the United States, (I guess she would forgive me for the literal quotation but she has hit the nail on the head!): "*It is hopelessness, a life without a future for millions of people who found themselves under the umbrella of the capital. This is the life of plants: you were born, gained a small habitat, lived there for several decades, crouched to the ground during the financial storm, straightened up and... the years have passed you by already. The fact that they live like plants is well concealed from them. And they accept this life as a normal state of things: that a parasite grows up and spreads out near them, but it doesn't even occur to them to remove it. For them the parasitic capital that stifles all their lives is a norm. They just don't understand and don't want to understand that the capital takes out all energy and that if they remove it, the life will be easier. But for that you should be able to think and even more importantly, to act... And those millions of people don't want to take it up even in the name of their lives. That's the most dismal about it. A genuine involvement in life in these countries can only be for those who have money. That includes a good profession, and participation in politics, and the best houses and education for children.... For others, there is only a roadside.*"

⁴²³ Homeless people (Papiamentu)

⁴²⁴ Misery (Papiamentu)

And they, really like plants, are snuggled to this unweeded and unfertilized soil. They are happy if at least nobody would mow them... That's all their "freedom."

Meanwhile, U.S. warplanes circle over Antilleans' heads. Since they have located on the Antillean land, at the airport Hato, right at their location, 40000 ecstasy tablets, for example, have been found at a time. They have been brought to Antilles not not from "terrible drug country" Colombia, but from the affluent Netherlands... As long as these "fighters against drugs" fly over Colombia and Venezuela for the reconnaissance of "bad communists"(using the terminology of Haitian Jean), drug trafficking is snowballing, not in Colombia but actually right under their very noses. But they are nor averse to experiment with drugs themselves: the Dutch recently hushed up the scandal about drug taking by their own troopers located officially on Curaçao... for drug traffic control...

In Russia for some reasons people still think that in such places like Antilles life is a paradise. Probably, because we were all brought up on such cartoons as "Little Cutter" with its song "Chunga-Changa" (by the way, Sonny has regarded it as racially themed!):

Chunga-Changa blue dome of the sky

Chunga-Changa summer year-long

Chunga-Changa such a happy life,

Chunga-Changa, let's all sing a song!

Chunga-Changa there is no better place!

Chunga-Changa troubles we don't face!

Chunga-Changa, who'd been there once,

Chunga-Changa, won't leave ever us!

Well, you can perhaps still sing like that about Cuba, but not about the rest of the tropical countries...

Maybe my fellow countrymen think that these places are a paradise for the residents of those villas behind the fences? What kind of a paradise it is, if you are living under guard's protection and behind the barbed wire with alarm? I don't recall that something like that was said about paradise in the Bible!..

We left the car and stood just barefoot on the warm sand. Above our heads the first stars lit up. Fresh breeze blew from the Caribbean sea almost the same like 16 years ago when I was here with Sonny...

-Listen, it's so great in here! – Oisin exclaimed in surprise. I have forgotten that all of this was a novelty for him.

I looked around. Fat tourists were lying around us, in all four directions, looking almost like beached whales if they weren't so big-nosed. Local children grimaced in front of them on the sand for coins:a new generation was growing up for Campo Alegre⁴²⁵... And an Antillean waiter with an obsequiously learnt face expression rushed to us:

-What would you like to drink? – he rattled off without a pause in 4 languages.

- Nothing, thank you! – I answered in the first language I remembered. I couldn't stand it any more, so I turned around. Oisin didn't notice the change in my mood: he still admired the Caribbean landscape which he saw for the first time in his life.

⁴²⁵ Campo Alegre - local prostitution base on Curaçao

- May I go and swim for a while? - he asked me so as if he was a preschool kid, and I was his mother.
- Go ahead, - I answered him in a mother's tone. – Be careful, there are strong waves out here.

Han to the sea as he was: in a T-shirt and long shorts.

And I looked around, and *the longing for the General*⁴²⁶ grabbed my heart even more impetuous...

Yes, here it really could be paradise on Earth. But for those 16 years that I haven't seen the Antilles, life here only became harder for the majority of the population. The prices have risen up to heavens. New taxes were introduced by the Dutch authorities. And even those modest protective measures for local people in sphere of employment (providing primary granting of workplaces to indigenous population) which had earlier limited the influx of the Dutch on the island, have been almost abolished. Globalization has rushed on these fine beaches and into rural kunuku on Curaçao like a fetid stream from the drains burst opened. And hereby I don't mean Jamaicans and Haitians at all...

After a couple of minutes Oisín returned absolutely wet. It seems he was swimming as he was: in a T-shirt and shorts; I do not know why. And I felt it was somehow inconvenient to ask him.

- What a warm water is! Like a fresh milk! - He didn't cease to be surprised, shaking water out of his ear. Though it was clear that the water here should be warm. - And why are you so gloomy... Saskia?
- Nothing. You won't understand, anyway.... -I have sighed.
- Maybe I will try, will you explain?

I have sighed once again, remembering, how “well” his fellow countryman Kieran “have understood” our film «*The dawns here are quiet...*»⁴²⁷

- Well, you see...

Here a small portable radio that we had with us, appeared to the aid of me: the news program begun.

"According to a law recently introduced in the UK, hundreds of thousands of people that have entered into a relationship with a new partner, will be able to check in the police database, whether their new partner has been convicted of sexual offences, in particular, for paedophilia..."

- Yeah, that's what I mean, - I said, - That's what just kills me here, do you understand?

His reaction was just as I expected.

- What's wrong with that? It's very good: that children could be protected.
- I already said that you won't understand me... First of all, what kind of a "partner", is it whom you don't know enough to trust him, and how can you allow him to get close to children and even to yourself, if you think you might need to check his criminal record? Isn't better not to rush with such "partnership"? And do people have any head on their shoulders, not to notice if there is something pervert about a person? And secondly, don't you see that the authorities are deliberately stirring up paranoia and distrust between people in society, trying to convince them that they cannot live without police databases?

⁴²⁶ In this context - missing the DPRK (General - Dear Leader Kim Jong Il)

⁴²⁷ Refers to chapter 19 of part 2 of “Soviética.” “The Dawns Here Are Quiet” is a famous Soviet film (1972) based on the eponymous book by Boris Vasilyev, the film is set in Karelia (North-West of Russia, near Finland) in 1942 during WWII. In a beautiful and quiet wilderness far from the front-line there is an anti-aircraft artillery point, where corporal Vaskov is stationed with a group of many young women in training. One of the women while sneaking from camp to visit her young son sees two German paratroopers. Vaskov takes five of the women to stop the two paratroopers, but finds sixteen paratroopers instead, leaving the small group of patriots to engage the enemy in an unequal fight.

- But if the place is really full of perverts?..

-Is there anybody, who tried to find out the causes for it and to fight against those causes rather than just symptoms? Did anybody ever think, for example, why for 5-year-old children who are not even able to read properly yet, is it so necessary, according to innovations in the British education system, to learn medical names of genitals? In what way can it “help to prevent unwanted pregnancy”? Or is it only meant to make children curious about things which didn't even come to their mind before that? If everybody has to be checked, then I am all for checking what the computers of authors of such school programmes contain, in the first place! I think that the police could find there much stuff it would be interested in!... It just kills me that I came back again to a society in which all these things are considered almost as something normal, do you understand? It doesn't even surprise or shock anybody.

- Came back from where? Can it be differently anywhere nowadays?

- Yes, can you imagine, it can!! Of course, you won't believe me because you have to see this with your own eyes... But if it was already difficult to me *to breathe* in your society even before, then now it became simply unbearable. It is unbearable for me to suffer all this absurdity and to argue with a serious kind about alleged insolubility of problems which can perfectly be resolved! It is unbearable to spend energy and time on discussions about all sorts of quite easily resolved rubbish.

- Well, how this would have been resolved in your country?

- In my country? You mean, in the Soviet Union? We'd root out the reasons for it; but if we are talking about something that just disturbs people's lives to such extent that we cannot wait till the cause for it will be eliminated, then men would deal first with the expressions of the phenomenon in question, while driving against and fighting its causes at the same time. You need examples? For instate, recovery of the economy after the war long term - and the ration supply system for everybody, for as long as the products are still limited. And do just simply work on restoring the economy, saying to the people: "You can bear it yet and wait till we'll be done!" And if we had such hooligans as you have in Belfast, our police definitely would not have invited them to an evening meeting, where they would have been asked what do they, little darlings, want, if you please, and what they do they need to make them happy.. At first they would be removed from the streets so they do not kill the locals by screwdrivers for fun⁴²⁸. We would make them to clean toilets or to sew pillowcases (we had re-educating labour, not as in Britain, where criminals sit all day in their cells and do nothing, if they wish, but ours wasn't like in America, where prison labour is a profitable industry, and the more people you jail, the higher will be the profits made: we normally paid them for work, but the money was left in a savings account: you get released, you receive your money. It was enough to start a new life...). And while they were engaged in sorting out the streets, others would have already begun to uproot the causes for those guys to embark on such behaviour. They'll get free, and those causes are no longer there.... But your Sinn Fein's *musi-pusi*⁴²⁹ with the bullies...

- I am not a member of Sinn Fein...

- Well, then your IR.....

Oisín closed my mouth with a palm of his hand. It was his first touching of me over the last 5 years, and I felt awkward. It was so awkward and unpleasant that it went that far.

⁴²⁸ Refers to the murder of Harry Holland in West Belfast that has shocked the community

⁴²⁹ Attempts to please (Russian slang)

- - I'm sorry... I'm attacking you as if this everything is your fault. I know that you personally have absolutely nothing to do with it. It's just that such a thing I can only pour out to real friends: because with the enemies it makes no sense to talk! But only few of my friends do realize that I behave this way with them precisely because I trust them... Sorry... I spoiled all your swimming for you...

- Never mind - said Oisin - You did not spoil anything. You explained to me well what had happened. Now, if you did not explain, I would have not guessed myself, really. I would just think that you can't stand me for some reason.

- Who, I? – I was confused by that simple frankness of his.

- Yes, you...

- No, why do you think that...

We both felt awkward, and we fell silent.

- Maybe you are hungry? - I asked finally.

- I'm starving! - responded Oisin happy.

- Then let's go!

We quickly got to a little kiosk on the street in Punda⁴³⁰: here you could buy local Creole take away means. I stood in queue among the Antillean men and women, although Sonny in his time would have never let me do that (even though back then it has been much calmer and safer in the streets than it was now, or so it seemed). Oisin helplessly looked at the menu, not knowing what is what. He was still wet, though I offered him to change his clothes after the swim. Antilleans looked at us with a mischievous glint of understanding in their eyes: maybe they decided that it was I who pushed him into the water!

- *Stoba di kabritu, por favor* - I said, forgetting Dónal's advice not to use the native language, for a second.

- Oh, *senorita* knows Papiamentu? - exclaimed the seller happily. - *Senorita* is from Venezuela? Or perhaps *Dominicana*?

I had to shake my head and quickly paid my bill. My tongue will certainly lead me to Kiev. Or maybe even to Tbilisi.⁴³¹..

- Hmm... It's delicious! - Praised Oisin the food. He could not resist it and started to eat before we even reached home. - What is it?

- It would be better if I'll tell you after you finished...

The plastic fork stuck in his mouth.

- What, is it a frog? Or a dog? Or a lizard?

- Well, why such extremes? - I laughed - It's just a stewed goat!

⁴³⁰ Central part of Willemstad, capital of Curaçao

⁴³¹ In 999, a man named Nikita Schekomyaka from Kiev got lost in the endless, steppes and got to the Kipchaks. When they asked him: Where are you from, Nikita? He replied that he comes from a rich and beautiful city of Kiev, and described to nomads the richness and beauty of his native city so vividly, that their Khan pinned Nikita with his tongue to the tail of his horse, and rode to conquer and rob Kiev. So, Nikita Schekomyaka came home with the help of his tongue. In this context: talking too much. Kiev and Tbilisi are the capitals of 2 ex Soviet republics (Ukraine and Georgia) who had most anti-Russian governments in 2008 when this book was written.

Sunday passed imperceptibly, and then came my first working day.

It turned out that the whole office of Tyrunesh consists only of her and of her Antillean secretary, Marilena. But I was even more glad about that. "*The less people there are, the more oxygen there will be*⁴³²."

- I never thought I would do PR for the U.S. Army! - I said joking, a little nervously.

Although this was not a joke. And instead of the word "army" I really wanted to use the word "military clique." But I could not find a really suitable translation - neither in English nor in Dutch...

- I also never thought of it! - Willingly responded Tyrunesh. – Now it is neither the time nor the place to tell you all about it. But at the weekend please do come to us with her husband, and then we can talk about everything, okay? Also about this. But for now, here, look... This is for you an example (sample?) of what we are doing here. Although it is not a very good one, I must say.

I picked up a piece of paper she held out and read:

"U.S. Air Force's FOL in Curaçao donates two buses and one truck to local organizations that have agreed to accept their gift. These vehicles will be used to meet the needs of education and to improve the welfare and morals..."

Truck and two buses in order to improve morale? I raised my eyebrows. Even my Korean friends would not have thin of something like this. But they don't need to: they have their moral in order without any American trucks, all right!

"...These vehicles are in excellent condition and are just being replaced with new models..."

"Take from us, O God, what we don't need to,⁴³³" - I thought.

..". On Friday a small ceremony marking the transfer of these vehicles will be held. The ceremony will take place at the police station in Rio Canario at 4:00 pm. Members of the press are invited to attend this ceremony for reporting and photography."

- So who is the creator of this masterpiece about the need to improve morale by used vehicles? - I asked.

- Colonel Weterholt. From the Dutch army. He is responsible there for contacts with the Americans and for the joint operations with them. He thinks he knows the English language very well, but in fact, he is one of those Dutch, who would translates the Dutch «ondernemer» into English as «undertaker»⁴³⁴... Oh, there he is! Speaking of the devil..., - whispered Tyrunesh.

The door opened, and a tall man walked in, in a military step. He was exactly two heads taller than me, and even taller than Oisin: a Dutchman in a military uniform, of about 50 years old, with a small beer belly, somehow reminding of Jeroen Krabbe⁴³⁵.

- *Goede morgen, dames!*⁴³⁶ Where from did you get such a creature here, Tyrunesh? How is it that I have not seen her before?

⁴³² Russian satirical saying

⁴³³ Russian equivalent of "[A thing you don't want is dear at any price](#)"

⁴³⁴ In Dutch, "ondernemer" means "businessman." "Onder" means "under", and "nemen" means "to take", hence, some Dutch people translate "ondernemer" into English as "undertaker."

⁴³⁵ Jeroen Krabbe (b. 1944) - well-known Dutch actor

- It is Saskia Duplessis, my new assistant, Colonel. I was just thinking of giving her to deal with that new campaign of support to our American friends... But Saskia only just arrived, so she will need a little time to get herself into the work, to get to know the people and the local situation...

- Nice to meet you, Colonel - I said in Dutch, holding out my hand. I well remembered that the Dutch are obsessed with shaking hands with women. It is almost as a test of loyalty to the ideals of democracy and free market for them: if you do not want a man to shake your hand, then you can only be a Muslim extremist...

The colonel smiled, hearing his native language

- I am too, very pleased. Really, very much so.... Are you Flemish, Saskia?

- No, I'm from South Africa. But my mother was Dutch...

I even began to sweat, inspired by my own lies.

- Good day, Saskia! Welcome to Caribbean hole, damn it! Well, how did you like my work? - Colonel Weterholt nodded at the paper in my hands, - When I will retire, I will come to work for you, we will promote our American friends together!

And he laughed smugly.

- I hope to live up until that bright day, Colonel! - out of habit, I responded with humor, as I would have reacted in Ireland. I forgot that in front of me was a Dutchman, and not only a Dutchman who perceived everything literally, but a double Dutch: a Dutch and a military.. This Dutch Skalozub⁴³⁷ grinned and became more complacent.

- And I'm here, you know, Saskia, suffering such losses because of that Icelandic bank... You've heard of it, perhaps? My stupid wife had persuaded me to invest our savings there. Well, it's just as well that I was not as stupid as she would like me to be, and put there only 15,000 euros. She wanted me to put there as much as 120,000! What a stupid country it is, this Iceland! Have you ever been to it?

- No, - I said, - never. I love warm countries.

And I remembered that in addition to the meeting of Gorby and Reagan in Reykjavik, there was also such a fact as the Icelandic political asylum for the chess player Bobby Fischer, whose only crime was that he had played chess in Yugoslavia⁴³⁸. Because that's what their great freedom is like in the United States! And what a great example for its bright PR...

Although it was Bobby Fischer to whom hospitable Iceland granted political asylum, but our former compatriots run away from it. And in such a way that they even request.. political asylum in another European country... based on their alleged persecution there.....

⁴³⁶ Good morning, ladies! (Dutch)

⁴³⁷ Colonel Skalozub is a hero of "Woe from Wit" (1823) play by Alexandr Griboedov, a symbol of a dumb and self-praising military man in Russia

⁴³⁸ Robert James "Bobby" Fischer (1943 – 2008) was an American [chess Grandmaster](#) and the 11th [World Chess Champion](#). He is widely considered one of [the greatest chess players of all time](#). In 1992 he played a chess match in [Yugoslavia](#), which was then under a [United Nations embargo](#) instigated by the West.. This led to a conflict with the U.S. government. Fischer never returned to his native country. After his U.S. [passport](#) was revoked over the Yugoslavia sanctions issue, he was detained by Japanese authorities for nine months in 2004 and 2005 under threat of deportation. In February 2005, Iceland granted him right of residence as a "stateless" alien and issued him a passport. When Japan refused to release him on that basis, Iceland's parliament voted in March 2005 to give him full citizenship. The Japanese authorities then released Fischer to Iceland, where he lived until his death in 2008

Tonya and Igor are Ukrainians, a couple. At the first glance, they made the same impression as the vast majority of couples today, in post-Soviet times, in our former Soviet Union: of people who are not together because of the great, book-like, love, but because they seek refuge with to each other, as a boat stuck to an island, for at least some something reliable and mutual protection, in this unreliable and scary world. They walked along the street, gently holding each other by the hand, as two frightened sparrows hiding behind the cornice, as if afraid that they will be spread in separate directions by the wind...

But Tonya and Igor are not going to be blown by wind in different directions, that's for sure. They know what they want out of life: to settle in Britain, and they know how to do it. On the chaff these sparrows can't be fooled.⁴³⁹

Their life (at least what they told me about it) was full of adventures and confusing to such degree that it wouldn't be solved even by Sherlock Holmes, never mind those British bureaucrats of immigration services, vainly trying to perform given to them by the government rules on how to "keep them off and do not let them in"⁴⁴⁰.

The two were both born in Western Ukraine, Tonya lived for some time in the Eastern Ukraine, during her first marriage (in her words, her first husband was either a veteran of the Afghanistan war, or the hero-rescuer of Chernobyl, but in any case, he died, leaving the young Tonya a widow), and then she happened to get abroad, where she met Igor who was also divorced by then.

Energy and acumen of Igor are hard not to admire, for example, almost without knowing English and without even a lawyer, he has managed several times smash to pieces in court (with iron-cast arguments and references to the relevant UK and international law, which he picked up on internet) unsuccessful attempts by the representative of the authorities to deport them. That representative, apparently, in a typical British arrogant, way, relied on the fact that if a person does not know the English language, he does not have a chance to know his rights and government's responsibilities. Igor elementary proved to him that there was nowhere to deport him and Tonya to: both were Soviet citizens, with the disappearance from the map of the USSR they became stateless, as they did not have any new nationality of any of the CIS countries, so that, according to his assurances, neither Ukraine nor Russia would take them: why should they?

"Let them search..." - Igor grinned. Tonya was also smiling. "Let them ask the embassy, at the end of the day. I had another family name before, anyway. So let them look. They won't find anything. Not a thing! "

Within a few years, this couple had stayed in several European countries, choosing where it was better. Iceland gave them the asylum (I do not know what kind of story Igor told there, but it was easier to convince the Icelanders than the British). But they did not like it over there.

"Yes, there is a whole colony of our people there already" - said Igor, - "There were Bulgarians and Czechs - we all still cling together over there, all of us, like brothers. But it's just so cold out there, damn it, even no trees do grow there, only lichen. Well, what kind of life is that? Boring, with no place to go... and they eat garbage. Once Tonya cooked our bortshch - so, these Icelanders turned up their noses at us: "Oh, what is it? What a terrible color for a soup! ", And the smell of garlic just scared them. Then they have offered us their own delicacy: slightly rotten whale meat... br-rr! I still

⁴³⁹ Expression meaning "experienced people who can't be fooled easily."

⁴⁴⁰ Expression from a satirical XIX century story by Nikolai Saltykov-Shchedrin in which there was a city mayor whose whole vocabulary consisted only of these 2 expressions

remember it with a shudder! No, Iceland is not for us. And everything is expensive, damn, how expensive it is! "

That's how fussy are those who "seeks asylum for humanitarian reasons, from political persecution"...

After Iceland our couple ended up in Ireland, but there it was even worse: the refugees don't usually get any cash at all; instead, they get only vouchers for food, and housing is communal... Well, what kind of life is that, really? Even in the Soviet Union it wasn't like this!

It ended up with Tonya and Igor sleeping in open air, without roofs over their heads and, apparently, this inhumane treatment angered them so much that they rushed to Britain, where they surrendered to the authorities, saying that... they demand political asylum not from Russia or Ukraine, but from this very bad Ireland which has grossly violated their human rights... With such a way of looking at things local blockheads of Immigration service, apparently, were not familiar yet and weren't ready for it. And that was what Igor had expected...

Their case lasted a long time. But they did not lose their time for nothing: they were already familiar with the place to such extent already (still with almost no knowledge of English!) that they knew whom of the lawyers or politicians to contact with what: they knew exactly who was a Catholic and who was a Protestant unionist, and accordingly, with whom should they talk in which tone, and about whom to whom to complain, in order to get their way...

For example, to a local Unionist MP they told a plaintive story of how they were threatened by... the IRA: that Igor "out of patriotism" (!) has placed in the window of his apartment a British flag and then he started to receive threats. How incredible this story really was, is clear from the fact that Igor and Tonya lived in fact, in a Protestant-Loyalist "den" of the city, where the IRA would never even show up, and where all around was decorated up to the nausea exactly with those very flags, which, according to Igor, he was forced to stop hanging out of his window... He did not hide it from me, that he has made it all up.

One would say, of course, what's the difference? What harm could this have done and to whom? People simply want to stay here, and for this, they say, all means are good, and British bureaucrats may not know exactly which part of the city they live in (you need to be here to know the place.) But the fact is, such politicians as the one whom Igor and Tonya asked for help, use their imagination in their own political purposes (knowing themselves, of course, that this story is implausible!) - to undermine the local peace process. And now the raging loyalist mob attacks located opposite Tonya and Igor's house flats in which, as they are convinced, "Catholics are settled who do not give local Protestants to celebrate their culture." And on the walls of a new, beautiful building hateful inscription appear: "Catholics - out! ", "Clean up our area from Catholics ", and stones are flying through the windows of unsuspecting people (who certainly have no idea of the completely fiction-like, but very real background of this story!).

Just imagine how far could Igor go in life, had he known the English language properly! But this knowledge can be acquired... And as a fall-back (in case if the authorities will still find where they can deport them to) Igor and Tonya are attempting to solve their problems with having a child: they hurried with it before the legislation will be abolished, which says that children borned here automatically should receive the Ireland citizenship (if in the Republic of Ireland such a birth already doesn't give the parents an automatic right to settle there, but here, they still can use European legislation that allows parents of such child to live with him in another EEU country). And all these efforts were paid by the British taxpayer, because Igor and Tonya used local health care to achieve this aim artificially...

...

Certainly, it was no crime. Especially not after continuous plundering of both Ukraine and Russia by the Western corporations, in unison with our domestic "oligarchs." But nobody knows how much Tonya and Igor didn't tell about their past and from what (whom) they were actually hiding.

Once in a Belfast shop I met a young girl, compatriot of Tonya (from the same town) who was married to a Lithuanian. Tonya and Igor usually were so happy to contact with our compatriots here that they didn't miss a single opportunity to meet new people and to invite them to be their guests. But how strange: when I happily told to Tonya about her compatriot, instead of enthusiasm her face was covered with a grimace of fear. And they certainly didn't want to meet with Olga. "You do not know everything..." - Tonya mumbled in response. "*Oh, how much wonderful discoveries prepares for us the spirit of enlightenment!*"⁴⁴¹

- But that's nothing compared to that big things that are coming to us, young lady! - I heard the cheerful voice of Colonel. He brought me back to Earth. -*Mevrouw*⁴⁴² Francisca, Major O'Leary places so many hopes on you! Those kids are just torturing us!. And they soon will start climbing to planes. It's a pity that we can't treat them like in war time. And a couple of weeks ago that damn runner came here to promote himself. You should have seen this, Saskia, what was going on! I wouldn't release any coins in his honor.⁴⁴³ In fact, I wouldn't have even named my dog after him!. So, what do our FOL guys have to do with any of this? Were they perhaps overtaking him in Beijing? Now we will not have any rest until his appeal. I hope they will give him this bloody medal - let him choke on it, that brat! Ladies, we need to do something! Think of something for these local ***.. - He wanted to say a bad word, but looked at Tyrunesh and stopped at the last moment. -... started to feel how good our American friends are for them. I realize that one truck will not be enough. But, can you come up with something like that? In the end, you are the experts, aren't you?

- We will do our best, Colonel, - said Tyrunesh. - I'll circulate a statement of your press release, and you can visit us on Thursday, when we once again will rehearse all the details of the ceremony on Friday. I'm sure that by that time I and Saskia will have some decent ideas...

- *Afgesproken!*⁴⁴⁴

The colonel came up to me almost marching, and again shook hands with me.

-We've got so few people like you! - He told me earnestly. - You'll just be worth your weight in gold. I'll see you soon!

And he went out of the door. The weight of gold? Me? Why is that?

- Did you see? He wanted to say: "so few whites", - calmly explained Tyrunesh - and "these local niggers'.... You see now, Saskia, why do we need you? If it was not for this, I would have handled it myself. But they never will believe me 100%. They will believe you- if you can play your role. I know, I have no doubt that they are plotting something...

- Well, but what do we do with Americans? - I asked - What can I think of to make them popular? Honestly, I think this problem is unsolvable...

⁴⁴¹ Famous verse (1829) of Alexandr Pushkin, the most famous Russian poet; this verse was used for the popular Soviet TV documentary series about science, "The Obvious and The Incredible"

⁴⁴² Madam (Dutch)

⁴⁴³ A coin was released in Curaçao in honor of Churandy Martina's performance at the Beijing's Olympics (2008)

⁴⁴⁴ That's a deal! (Dutch)

- I have an idea, - said Tyrunesh - And we'll tell to Colonel Weterholt and to Major O'Leary that this idea was yours...

She went to the window and paused, as if she was waiting for the Colonel's car to leave..

- Let them paint our high schools at their own expense and collect the garbage on the beaches, - she said, -At least those bastards will be good for something.....

Chapter 26. The Bolivarian Circle.

«Tula warda,

No wak ainda

Ya ku nos tin algun kos di drecha

Kere ku nos ta trahando duru»⁴⁴⁵

(lyrics of "Tula, wait!" by Antillean group "Doble R")

The first working week flew by. I familiarized myself with the FOL⁴⁴⁶ files and files of some other clients (the American “warriors” allowed them to be promoted by a local PR company because it was cheaper than their own PR team and because the local experts “know Antillean mentality better”). I thought about how we could possibly “make them popular” and wondered: “*Oh, how they fool our brothers! Oh, how they do!*”⁴⁴⁷ They fool people not in the sense that they can really make anyone popular: it is just that all these attempts to make them popular were so poorly disguised that it raised questions about the whole PR and advertising institution. They both are, as men said in a joke about the Armenian radio, “useless animals⁴⁴⁸”! They are even much more useless than all the propagandists and agitators were in the era of “stagnation⁴⁴⁹”!

Any way you look at it, for an average person - using the capitalist’s terminology, “a consumer” – there are no benefits for us from these quill-drivers. The benefit is only for those who employed them - and thus, we can safely say that for society in general they are like bedbugs. But at least bedbugs bring some benefits: to those who want to sell you a new sofa...

I am not attempting to speak for the ordinary people of “developed” countries: those, like hypnotized rabbits, even without any PR or commercials are used to believing anything they are told by TV. Their belief in the “freedom” of their press is sucked into them from birth, with their mother’s milk (actually, much more often with formula, nowadays!). And just like zombies, they buy everything that was advertised on television. In our case, it is slightly different. Let me explain.

We just laugh at the advertising and the PR companies. “*Unique taste* ”, you say? *It tastes just exactly like the tooth powder!*” - My mother’s colleague once said about a famous brand of chewing gum. Since the Soviet era we have inherited an inner ability to read between the lines. And to every kind of PR I have my dependable Soviet immunity. At first glance it may seem that it is not so, because in Soviet times, radio, television and newspapers used to enjoy absolute respect and trust among our people. I remember how Little Tamara flatly refused to believe that it was going to rain, though overhead there were storm clouds: just because *on the radio they said that there will be no rain!* This though overhead us there were storm clouds: just because *on the radio men said that there will be no rain!*

was so because in Soviet times, unverified information was not allowed to be broadcasted: for example, con-artists could not advertise there. This was because the State had the responsibility for the accuracy of published information, because the newspapers, television and radio all belonged to it.

⁴⁴⁵ Tula, wait, do not look yet, we still have a lot to fix, but trust us: we are doing our best! (Papiamento)

⁴⁴⁶ Forward Operating Location - read more about the US Army FOL on Curaçao at:

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/military-base-in-cura-ao-the-third-frontier-of-the-united-states/>

⁴⁴⁷ Quote from one of well-known monologues of Arkady Raikin (1911-1987)- most famous Soviet stand-up comedian

⁴⁴⁸ Jokes about Armenian radio were quite popular in the USSR

⁴⁴⁹ Gorbachev’s name for the 1970s-1980s in the USSR

That's why so many people "burned their fingers" in the beginning of perestroika. They had been used to believing what the radio or the press offered to them and they had sound grounds for such beliefs. For most of the readers from our part of the world a printed word has been something magical. But since that time, too much has happened... and as a mechanism for survival in a world where people will say or do or publish anything for money, we have had to use our Soviet ability to read between the lines: ability to see the actual reasons for the authors to write what they did. That's where our experience with censorship comes surprisingly handy! Westerners who believe that they do not have censorship (while in fact, they do!), are vulnerable to PR and advertising like a helpless, soft turtle without a shell. Essentially marketing, advertising and PR (regardless of the differences between these equally useless industries) were designed for idiots. No matter how highly qualified the employees of these industries, they have one original foundation: they assume people are fools who can and should be deceived. They are convinced that people by themselves, without any advertising or PR, are not able to understand what exists and what is happening around them. And that is what is the most offensive about these freeloaders. PR is, even more than other industries, focused on cheating: *"When a person reads an article about your product written by a third party or sees a report about your event on television, he sees something for what you did not pay directly as in advertising, and that's why he tends to evaluate it differently than the paid advertising. When there is some kind of "approval" by a third party (in this case, by an independent source of media) we can create greater confidence in the products or services for our customers "* - brags a modern textbook for these opportunistic thugs.

How much did I mentally spit, while reading those PR files! I had the feeling that I was cleaning out the Aegian stables. But it seems that I was not the only one: Tyrunesh had the same feeling as she spent almost the entire week, cursing, conducted over a press release of that General Lebed of Dutch bottling, in an effort to bring it into more or less digestible state.

- Because when people will laugh at them, they'll blame everything on us!

So Tyrunesh and I became companions in misfortune. I wanted to cheer her up a bit, and I began to tell her stories about our advertising. Of course she will understand at once that I'm not from South Africa, but didn't Dónal tell me that the person who would know our password, is "one of ours for 200%" ?

- Now, since you mentioned laughing,... - I said. - Here, listen to this advertising. "Razors from Gillette: the first blade shaves cleanly, the second one- even cleaner... the twenty-fourth polishes your jaw!." Chinese pencil against cockroaches! It is enough to anoint it in several places, and cockroaches will disappear instantly. And your flat will be quickly filled with the Chinese"

"For our beer we selected the best grain. We always select what's the best. Customs of the Russian Federation." "Before my hair was dry and lifeless. And now, thanks to my new shampoo, it is always hydrated and it moves! "Girls! Do not worry if there are some silly stains! You really need to worry only when there are no stains at all⁴⁵⁰ "- " Delma", our guys are going on a fishing trip, what should we prepare for them? - *Daddy, Daddy! Our mother is talking with margarine again!* "

Tyrunesh listened at first with interest, then she began to laugh softly, then she broke down and exploded with laughter.

⁴⁵⁰ Mocking of a commercial for sanitary pads

- The Director General of "Pepsi-Cola" calls Putin: "We want to place our logo as advertising on your national flag. For this, we will pay you 50 million dollars, " Putin:" Wait a minute." To Yastrzhembsky⁴⁵¹: "When will our contract with" Aquafresh⁴⁵² " expire?"

She laughed even louder.

- The new "Tide" will make your laundry spotlessly white, no matter what color it was before washing... New "Always" with wings: now with twice reduced load on the wing and improved maneuverability.... Send us four covers from your toilet seat and you'll get a free roll of toilet paper...."You can exchange five packs of the ordinary powder to a gram of the extra-ordinary⁴⁵³?" ... "Your cat would buy "Whiskas." The famous cat trainer Kuklachev helped us to check this. But it didn't work out. the cat ate it for free, but she refused to buy it"" I did make up for a passenger of "Titanic." Mascara remains on the eyelashes forever...." And finally - "We know that skin around the eye is the most sensitive. Laboratory "Garnier" solved this problem... - We transplanted your eyes to a place where the skin is not so sensitive! "

Tyrunesh doubled over at her desk and began to produce incomprehensible sounds.

The Press release of Colonel Weterholt, corrected all over the place by her red pen, rolled on the floor, but she did not even have the strength to pick it up.

- A... and... Do you have something about PR too? - she barely was able to utter it.

- " The Union of Pediatricians recommends " Pampers." "Pampers" - the only diapers recommended by the Union of pediatricians. Union of pediatricians - the only alliance that was created specifically for recommending diapers "Pampers"... Or no, this one is better: a PR man comes to the director and says, "Please tell me what's going on?" - "Well, I will try to explain it to you now..." - "No, I do not need your explanations, I am a PR man myself, please just tell me, what is really happening?"

There was a knock at the door, but we both still could not stop laughing. The door opened. Oisín stood on the threshold. How did he slip through the secretary Marilena?

- You forgot one more joke, - he said with a serious face, - *"I am a terrorist and am constantly working with people. That's why my "Tic Tacs" are always with me!"* Saskia, the working day is finished.

He turned to Tyrunesh.

- Will you let me take her home a bit earlier today? I think I found a place for my furniture store. I wanted to show her.

Tyrunesh waved with her hand, still wiping the tears off her eyes:

- Go home, Saskia! Otherwise, I will never finish that damn press release...

But there are also many sad stories from our country... Even about advertising.

"Ah, it's you, Chappy! Shame on you, why couldn't you jump over that fence? - It's all because of my boss... He feeds me from his table: with sausage, meatballs, ham... - Do you want to try real dog food? Run to our pensioners and ask them for some of what they eat."

⁴⁵¹ Sergey Yastrzhembsky (b.1953)- Russian [politician](#) and [diplomat](#), former spokesman for president Putin

⁴⁵² Aquafresh toothpaste has the same colors as the current flag of the Russian Federation

⁴⁵³ "Ordinary powder" here means "washing powder", "extra-ordinary powder"- cocaine. Mocking of a washing powder commercial.

The place which Oisin found for his shop turned out to be just around the corner from our house - in the same building where I used to work back years ago as uncle Patrick's secretary. And, of course, it belonged to him, too! Only I was working upstairs - there was a separate entrance from the outside, through a spiral staircase,- but Oisin's workshop was on the ground floor.

- You will really get me shot,... - I sighed. But he did not listen to what I said as he was immersed in his plans.

- It's my workshop that is going to be on the ground floor,- he corrected - A furniture store will be upstairs.

- Have you thought about how you're going to drag your furniture up there? - I asked cautiously, - Wouldn't it be better to find a place somewhere closer to the city, for example, in Otrabanda?

- It's too far away, - Oisin said - I do not want to drag myself every day halfway across the island. And then, Otrabanda, as I understand, is a place for tourists, and what tourists will buy furniture while on vacation? No, it is for the locals... I will put a couple of ads in the newspaper...

- "*I believe that our workers still do not imagine deeply what is a revolution in the production of furniture*"⁴⁵⁴, - I said sarcastically. I was hurt that he is taking such risks without thinking about me, and only because he was too lazy to drive a little further away from home. After all, the more often he sees uncle Patrick, the greater the chance too that uncle Patrick will see me sooner or later. But Oisin did not understand. And I had no desire to argue with him.

- Tyrunesh and her husband invited us for a picnic in the Christoffel Park⁴⁵⁵ at the weekend, - I said to him instead.

Christoffel Park was named after the highest mountain on Curaçao. The mountain was probably too much of a word, it is only 375 meters high, but nevertheless... The park includes 3 former plantation sites. It is famous for its orchids, cacti and bats.

Having heard about the mountain, Oisin suddenly became very enthusiastic.

- In Dublin, I was a member of a mountain walkers club, - he proudly told me - and I even have the appropriate shoes with me here. I'll definitely get to the top! And I'll picnic with you later, when I'll get down...

Oisin was fantasizing in earnest. Seeing that he would not be talked off it, I promised him that I will find out if Tyrunesh's husband Arlonee would join him. For me being well familiar with the local climate, it was too much...

It turned out that Arlone would.

- That's good - said Tyrunesh happily the next day, - only they should go up there very early - at 7 o'clock at the latest. The walk takes as much as 3 hours, and they have to get to the top before the most intense heat. Let our men get their exercise, and you and I will visit the old Savonet plantation. And I'll tell you a little more about what is happening here.

Alas, Oisin shamefully slept in at morning dawn. And even more unfortunately, he was still determined to conquer *Christoffel-berg* on the same day, no matter how I tried to discourage him.

⁴⁵⁴ Choe In Su. "Kim Jong Il, The People's Leader", vol.2, p.368 (quoted by the Russian language edition)

⁴⁵⁵ The Christoffel berg, also known as Mt Christoffel or Mt St Christoffel, named after the explorer [Christopher Columbus](#), is the highest point on [Curaçao](#). The Christoffelberg is 372 metres (1,220 ft) high and lies in the reserved wildlife park, Curaçao Christoffelpark, which can be explored by car, bike, horse, or on foot.

The morning was sunny - like almost every morning here. Oisín refused to believe that it ever rains on Curaçao. Indeed, the semi-arid landscape, covered only by thorn bushes and tall cacti, did suggest a desert.

Before we even got to Christoffel Park, the sun rose high and it became very hot.

- Maybe you shouldn't walk up there? - I pointed at the Christoffel-berg. - Some other time, eh? Look, how hot it already is.

- We'll take drinking water with us. And I also have a hat, - Oisín patted his baseball cap - And at the top there will certainly be a cool breeze... Wouldn't you like to come with us?

- No, thank you.

Maybe he was right about the breeze: no wonder planters always have built their houses on high ground, to get fresh air from all sides - but to walk under this sun, with his fair skin?

- At least use some sun cream, - I urged Oisín. - You didn't even get a bit of tan here before.

- Cream?... You'll be offering me a lipstick next! - He muttered irritably, - What am I, some ---?

He didn't finish, but I knew what he meant. "Some *poof*⁴⁵⁶." Again, this European craving for form instead of content. It was ridiculous. As if the sun cream wasn't for his own good! This was the same reason why boys would not give flowers to the teacher on the 1st day of the school year. But Korean boys for some reason do it without any problem. And they do not even hesitate to cry if they feel overwhelmed. And yet, they are much more men than most Irish!

Tyrunesh and Arlone were waiting for us in the shade, under the roof near the house on the plantation-turned-museum called Savonet. This plantation was established in the early 1660s, and used to be home to more than 1,500 people. It was for breeding livestock, producing milk and wool, but during severe droughts the cattle perished. It made sense to grow here only those plants that were drought-resistant, such as peanuts. They also produced sisal here, for export. But, frankly, I was not interested in economic aspect of the history of plantations. I am much more concerned about their humane - or more precisely, their inhumane! - aspect...

Arlone was tall as a basketball player, a handsome guy, slightly darker than Tyrunesh. I quickly learned from our conversation that politics did not interest him. In general, he lived easily, thanks to his parents, and his only interests were as the hero of Zhvanetsky "*What are you interested in? - I'm interested in, well, in eating something.*" Plus - the interests of an ordinary consumer - "fast toys for fast boys." I watched him, listened to him and thought how brilliant it was that I have brought my Che just in time into a non-consumptive society! When a person is under 30, and his mind is still full of such children's nonsense, it's not even funny!

I looked at Tyrunesh trying to figure out what attracted her to him, except for his looks (she was hardly one of those who can be lured into a marriage by the status of the groom's parents!). But I could not find the answer to this question, except that I saw a woman who was repeating my mistakes. Someday - perhaps soon - she will understand it all herself.

However, to be fair to Arlone, he was a sociable, cheerful guy, and you could feel that he was easy-going. That in itself was something!

⁴⁵⁶ Homosexual. In the North of Ireland any man who wears bright colored clothes, uses facial cream, carries flowers can be seen as a homosexual, even if he has nothing to do with it at all.

And he was also quite foolish, I realized, when he supported Oisin in his quest to conquer the local peaks.

- Nothing wrong with it, girls. I'll go with him, I have been there many times, it is impossible to get lost. And it's not so hot today.

Perhaps for a native of Curaçao, it was not hot, but a native of Belfast, where people faint at plus 23 degrees Celcius...

- Please, take at least your mobile phone with you! - I said to Oisin, -Just in case. Call me immediately if anything happens...

- You are treating me like a baby! - Oisin's pride was hurt.

"What else can I do when you're acting like a baby..." - I thought, but did not say it aloud.

- Leave them, Saskia, let them go! - Tyrunesh said suddenly, and I understood by her tone that she wanted to talk to me about something.

Arlone and Oisin took their supplies of water and food, put on their backpacks, pulled on their caps and walked off, and Tyrunesh and I strolled along the path around the plantation.

She was silent for a long time: probably she did not know where to start. I did not pose any questions to her, I was just waiting for her to get her thoughts together.

We walked down the path framed by thorny bushes where was once a plantation. Everything around us was already ringing from the heat. Small, fast *lagadishi*⁴⁵⁷ were Running across our path. Sometimes, in the thickets flashed the heads of curious iguanas. Some of the cacti were still blooming, and some small birds were flying over the flowers.

- This road stretches for 10 kilometers, - said Tyrunesh - we'll get back just in time when our guys will descend.

- I told you that I cannot forget my father and my sister. - She said - Cannot forget the fact that I can not live in my own home country. But not just this. When I was little, my father worked in Cuba, I went to a Cuban preschool. I'll never forget what the atmosphere was like over there: fraternal, friendly. I have never felt myself so in my life, not before and not after that.

All these years, I continued to monitor developments in different countries of the world. My own country was split in two, lost its access to the sea. American puppets who do not care about our people, came to power there. But in the West, they call them "democrats"... The longer I lived in the Netherlands, the greater became my desire that my own children, if I ever will have them, will not live such a life as people there. I was a good student, I could achieve a lot out there, could become a sort of Ethiopian Hirsi Ali⁴⁵⁸, if I had made a deal with my conscience. But I preferred to leave. I really wanted to find like-minded people, but in the Netherlands it appeared to be impossible, even though I tried. Unfortunately, the left wing types whom I met there really had their heads in the clouds. Maybe I was just unlucky, but they had no idea of real socialism - with all the difficulties, with all its imperfections, but still infinitely better than what we have today. Instead, they dreamed of a manna from heaven.. I'm not dreaming about manna... A couple of years ago I was on business in Caracas and I was so moved, to the depths of my heart, by what I saw there. By how the lives of people are

⁴⁵⁷ Lagadishi - lizard (Papiamentu)

⁴⁵⁸ Ayaan Hirsi Ali (b.1969) is a Somali-Dutch anti-Islam liberal activist, writer and politician who is being widely used by imperialist establishment for its own purposes

changing. By the way they are fighting for their rights. You know, it is one thing when you sympathize with some abstract forces - and quite another when you see these people with your own eyes.... After you had the chance to laugh and to cry together with them, and even share a piece of bread. Now they are like family to me. I'll fight for them, if necessary! - Her eyes sparkled.

I nodded. I very well understood her feelings.

- When American soldiers arrived in Curaçao, which has become my second home, at first I was furious. But I have had the sense not to show it to anyone. Arlone would not understand these things anyway. Luckily, then Orlando (you will meet him later) gave me a book about Felix Dzerzhinsky. What he said - about having a warm heart, clean hands and a cool head. Instead of destroying everything around me with impotent rage, I came here, sat here and thought. It was clear that the Americans chose Curaçao for their own purposes. That the fight against drug trafficking is only of secondary importance to them and in many ways just an excuse to cling on to the Antilles. Economically they have long been squeezing the Dutch away over here. Now, apparently, they have decided that economy alone isn't enough. From the very beginning it was clear to me that they have Venezuela and Colombia in their sights. What can I do to stop them? Just me? Even if it wouldn't be much... And when I got that contract with FOL (thanks to Arlone's family!), I nearly jumped with joy: even though a few months earlier, I would have strangled anyone who would even hint to me that I'd take up such work. For now, things remain limited to the intensifying of tension here: these constant visits of warships, and worse, all of these "accidental" violations of Venezuelan airspace and other "delights"! But this is just the beginning. The more I communicate with them, the more I feel that they are preparing something big - I really hope that this will not be direct aggression, but you can never be sure about it with the Yanks. There's a lot going on. For example, did you know that the FOL concept is something completely new in the military, because it takes into account the lessons of the space war in real time, which were acquired during the Gulf War. FOL is based on the compact reconnaissance platforms: small airfields for spy aircraft and their system of real-time communication with the Air Force Space Command (AFSPC) located on an Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, which operates a "virtual" military base. The usual idea of a Space War Conduct Center is that it is a place where battles in space, using weapons deployed in space, are being simulated. But since the mid-90's. this center is switched to a regional counterinsurgency fight. This Center held several secret trials in the mid-90's., Collecting real-time intelligence data from multiple locations on the ground and from sources in space, analyzing it, and immediately ferrying combat aircraft, naval auxiliary groups and army vehicles support. Additional classified information networks were created after September 11. During the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo, Space Command has conducted a series of experiments using data from space surveillance obtained through FOL and unmanned aircraft, stationed on the islands off the coast of Dalmatia, in order to provide operational intelligence for the bombing in Kosovo. But only during the implementation of the " Colombia Plan" did it become clear that the bases are "fully planning to use intelligence received in real-time for war." Remember what happened recently with comrade Reyes in Ecuador⁴⁵⁹?... Although several radars have already been placed in the department of Putumayo, as well as in Peru and Bolivia, the U.S. have created 4 special FLO's to conduct counterinsurgency operations in Colombia. And one of these 4 is based here.... It has everything you

⁴⁵⁹ Refers to the targeted assassination of the FARC-EP commander Raul Reyes in an air strike by Colombian army (2008)

need for this - a small airfield, portable signal intelligence equipment, satellite dishes, contact with some contract companies to obtain additional information.⁴⁶⁰

Some might say that high-precision war real-time, made possible by FLO, is a perfect way to "get Bin Ladens" with minimal civilian casualties. This is clearly a more refined tool than a plain bombing campaign. But Bin Laden is still alive and well⁴⁶¹, while comrade Reyes is gone! FLO is being tested on the other side of the planet: in Colombia, and it proves that the Pentagon wants to use this model in different theaters of counterinsurgency operations. The fact that Bush said that this war is not only against al-Qaeda, and that it is "infinite" shows the direct threat that the FLO's will be used again and again, in various regional conflicts. Alas, only a few Antilleans have even any idea about these things. And one of our goals (of my comrades from the local Bolivarian Circle, most of whom are Antilleans) is to educate people about it. But most importantly, we need information about the U.S. plans in the region.

I was silent, trying to digest all what I heard. Much of this was really new to me. The situation was much more serious than it seemed from outside - and much more urgent. This wasn't going to be a piece of cake.

.

- I worked with the Yanks already for a year. We managed to find out a few things and to pass on some information. For example, in May of this year when an American plane flying from Curaçao violated Venezuelan airspace⁴⁶²...

Meanwhile, we had come across the ruins of a neighbouring plantation called Zorgvlied⁴⁶³.

- Here, look - and Tyrunesh pointed to me a an overgrown with thorny bushes place for punishment of slaves and the ruins of the house of a local *bomba* - slave's overseer, - My people, fortunately, have escaped this vile fate in their history⁴⁶⁴. But today, the imperialists are trying to make us the overseers of other nations⁴⁶⁵... As well as from the Antilleans.

- Here, on these ruins, I vowed to myself that my children and grandchildren will never become the overseers for the "golden billion", - she said quietly.

On the way back it was my turn to tell her about himself. I did not tell her only about my children and Korea. I came to the Antilles of my own free will. I am not paid by anybody, and no one sent me here. Joan of Arc was right a thousand times, saying, "*If not me, then who?*." Still, one question never ceased to bother me:

- But why did you choose us? What can we do that you cannot do yourselves?

- They will trust you because you are Europeans, - Tyrunesh just said. - You can even accidentally find out from them something about what they'll never talk to me.

Being busy with our conversation, we did not even notice that we were already back at Savonet.

⁴⁶⁰ Most of the information about FOL on Curaçao is taken from <http://www.tni.org/briefing/een-verkeerde-stap-een-foutieve-richting> Tom Blickman "A wrong step in the wrong direction: Forward Operating Locations on Aruba and Curaçao" (in Dutch)

⁴⁶¹ The book was written in 2008

⁴⁶² Refers to real events in 2008

⁴⁶³ Zorgvlied - one of the old plantations on Curacao

⁴⁶⁴ Ethiopia was never colonized by Europeans in its history, except for a brief Italian occupation in the XX century

⁴⁶⁵ Nowadays Ethiopian authorities are staunch allies of the USA and participate in US-led military actions in other countries, such as Somalia.

- Tyrunesh! Saskia!.. - We heard Arlone's voice from afar, - Your husband is unwell! Call the ambulance!

The ambulance wasn't needed, as Oisín quickly recovered, but he still could not walk properly. When he rose to his feet, he staggered. Oisín had sun stroke.

- Give me a wet towel! - I exclaimed, - Or at least, something wet...

... He was lying in bed without moving, on his stomach, and quietly, almost silently moaned into the pillow like a wounded man. His back was such a brilliant colour that it seemed to be brighter than the light - and that it could light the room instead of lightbulbs. "*The Red Lantern at the very entrance, it is difficult to make a mistake, señor*"⁴⁶⁶ - I remembered. Poor fellow! I could well remember myself what it feels like.

- Do we have some kefir⁴⁶⁷? - I asked to Oisín.

- What?

- Well, yogurt, only unsweetened. And without any fruit additives. Otherwise we'll have bees here as well.

- We should have,... - He moaned, almost incomprehensibly.

- Lie still, do not move.

And I ran to the fridge...

When I started rubbing his shoulders with yogurt, Oisín nearly jumped out of bed: both because of pain, and probably also because he again remembered that sad spring day in the Irish Killiney Bay.

- Do not move! - I warned him – I'm doing it for you. This is our old remedy for sunburn. However, we usually use kefir for this purpose, yogurt is similar in taste, but I do not know if it helps as well as kefir...

The amazing helplessness of "civilized" people in health matters always astonishes me. No, no one encourages them to take too many pills without a prescription, but they actually do not know simple, basic things such as, that a piece of aloe vera, bound to an abscess, can pull pus from it. That if you want to stop the bleeding quickly you can bind a clean plantain leaf to the cut, that sore throat can be cured with hot milk, mixed with honey and butter, or, finally, that if you have nausea, you do not have to buy «Rennie» pills, but it is enough to swallow a teaspoon of baking soda (and for a hangover one should drink the brine). And most importantly, these are not some voodoo tales and superstitions - by the way, many of Westerners are not ashamed to believe in god like in good old middle Ages! – but proven by centuries, effective folk remedies. Prince Charles was nearly "eaten alive" for his "prejudices" when he began to promote homeopathy. If he was not a prince, perhaps, he would have been burned at the stake.

There are not many doctors in the West who know folk medicine, which so perfectly complements the pharmaceutical industry. Western doctors want to protect the interests of the international pharmacy

⁴⁶⁶ Lines from the opera "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" by Gioachino Rossini (1816). In the USSR arias from operas were widely known by general population, even children.

⁴⁶⁷ Russian sour milk drink similar to yoghurt

mafia. The more expensive pills and ointments are, the better for the latter. Perhaps those doctors also get a bonus for this, who knows?

- I wonder with what your own great-grandparents were treated with in the past, especially when there was no NHS? And most importantly, why have they not passed their knowledge to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren?... - I said while I was rubbing Oisín with yogurt. - The general medical education of the population in our country, in fact, is on a much higher level than your doctors' - if we discard silly belief in such people as Kashpirovsky⁴⁶⁸, which is our national traditional response to hard times of crisis. Our patients consult with their doctors about the usage of certain treatments almost on equal terms, and it is a normal thing for us. While your doctors are shocked when they see such *unscrupulous attacks on their unquestioned authority*. And you only recently have finally figured out what fire cupping is and that cod liver is good for health... You, "experts"!

I grumbled, but he kept quiet.

I no longer felt that reverent awe of Oisín, which was bugging me for so long since that April fiasco five years ago. I guess, for that to cease it was enough to hear a couple of times how the subject of your old love is snoring, I said to myself as a joke. But snoring was not the cause. Simply, in the words of the poet, "*I outlived my desires, I stopped loving my dreams*"⁴⁶⁹... Finally. Thanks to Korea...

The old feelings raised in my heart just once, at the first moment when I saw him after 5 years of separation. But after a couple of days together in Portugal, they laid down to rest on the bottom on my soul like sediment in a test tube. "*The train is long gone*," – as Volodya Zelinsky used to say sarcastically... And when I closed my eyes, in my mind I now saw not Oisín, but my dear distant Korean friend. Without him it would have probably been a lot harder to survive this unexpected mission partnership...

Still a vague, annoying confusion stayed in the depths of my soul. From time to time, it poisoned that normal, comradely atmosphere between us: as, for example, now. And in those moments I struggled anxiously to dispel this unease.

- Do not jerk, or it will be more painful! - I said loudly to Oisín, who started to twitch in my hands like a caught fish, while I covered his back with a the white yogurt. Oisín stopped trying to break away and bit the corner of the pillow with his teeth.

-You know, it really helps! - He said happily after twenty minutes.

- Just lie down and try to rest. Try to sleep or something, if you can. I'll turn the airco on full. When your back becomes dry, I'll smear your stomach.

- Oh, no! - Oisín got really scared.

- Well, ok, smear it yourself then. And I'll go to "Esperamos"⁴⁷⁰: to buy more yogurt. We are almost out of it.

Oisín suffered from his sunburns for two weeks. He lost sheets of peeling skin every day as it healed.

- In the 1930s we had a novel called - "*Man is changing his skin*." Was it about you? - I was teasing him. During the day he was hiding from the merciless Caribbean sun and went outside only when it was getting dark.

⁴⁶⁸ Anatoly Kashpirovsky (b.1939) is a Ukrainian psychotherapist and hypnotist turned charlatan psychic healer who enjoyed great popularity in the last years of Soviet Union

⁴⁶⁹ From a verse by the most famous Russian poet, Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)

⁴⁷⁰ Supermarket in Curacao

- You behave like some evil spirit. Or a vampire - I laughed, but he was not laughing.

Oisín restored furniture during the night and slept during the day – in the only bedroom in our house with air conditioning, on a bed with a water mattress. I graciously conceded it to him because it was pitiful to see a person suffering. I decided to tell him what Tyrunesh said when he felt better.

Now Oisín became my comrade, as he should have been from the start... And a comrade should be well looked after.

...Time passed, and a month later I went for the first time together with Tyrunesh to the American FOL. For presentation of our project (in fact, it was the project of Tyrunesh which she has decided to give to me) – the project's goal was how to make U.S. "warriors" popular among the local population.

- Are you nervous? - Tyrunesh asked me when we got into her car.

- No, - I said and mentally I was very surprised, because that was true. - I am only worrying about what will happen if we really make them popular here?

Tyrunesh smiled:

- Do not worry. This is necessary for our business. They will begin to trust us. And their popularity, even if we manage to achieve it for them, is not going to last long, as soon as they try to do anything hostile to Venezuela, then...

She did not finish, but from her tone it was very clear, that in this case they would be in deep trouble.

I told her the truth: I was really not worried. What I experienced before this meeting with the U.S. military should be called by a different word. It was very similar to the feeling that I have experienced when I had to change children's diapers: you know that it is necessary, and there is no escape from it, you just want to plug your nose and close your eyes, in order not to vomit. And do it as quickly as possible.

That is the reason why I have never had a desire to visit the United States- I am afraid to vomit during the trip. Plus, I'd lose too much mental energy trying to keep silent, being afraid to say what I really think.

As we passed through the checkpoint, I imagined my grandmother. She appeared in my mind as usual-kind, but demanding, calm, imperturbable, - the same as she was, perhaps, when the Nazis were coming near our city, when instead of evacuating from it, she went to dig antitank ditches... And I thought that I heard her voice: "The devil is not so black as it's painted... God helps only those who help themselves! »

After that, my heart overflowed with jubilation: probably because we, my Soviet people, in our history have defeated much more powerful opponents! And I came to the territory of FOL, smiling broadly. Even Tyrunesh was surprised.

I was not surprised- not even by the similarity of the process of entering the base with the process of visiting Northern Irish prisons (at least, they do not use dogs yet, but I think that'll come in time.) And I looked straight into the eyes of the screws⁴⁷¹... oh sorry, *of the defenders of freedom and democracy!* I now knew they were cowards, like those sailors on board of the "Pueblo", where there were 80 armed

⁴⁷¹ Northern Irish slang for prison guards

*longnoses*⁴⁷², but yet, they were detained in Korean waters by only seven men from my favourite country. When I was just a little less than a year old...

Tyrunesh introduced me to a Major with the Irish surname O'Leary. "Probably too, a supporter of Irish independence!" – I thought, but I tried not to think about this. In this situation, such thoughts were counterproductive, otherwise I'd start all over again, remembering what has happened in Ireland, and then I would become angry...

There was nothing Irish in him, except for the name. He was relatively young, very polite and very impatient: because he wanted to learn quickly about the plan which we brought with us.

- The presentation for you will be given by my new team member, Saskia - said Tyrunesh to him. - This plan action was proposed by her, and she will present it.

And I opened my laptop.

- Major O'Leary, we believe that at this very sensitive moment the most important thing is to show the local people, how close to heart you are taking their everyday problems. That you are interested in their daily issues. Let your subordinates engage themselves in voluntary work in local neighbourhoods in their spare time. Mrs. Francisca and I have conducted several polls and have found out which issues are currently occupying most of the local people's minds. Here's a poll, - and I pointed to the projector screen - Based on these data, we identified several possible directions and actions that can, in our opinion, have a positive impact on the Antillean public opinion. For example, painting of school buildings by your guys - in their spare time and if you will allocate funds for this purpose.

It does not cost too much, do not worry, But a positive attitude will pay off for these costs a hundredfold. Or what about another idea, your divers could clean in their free time local bays and beaches from garbage? For this you will also receive gratitude from tourists. And when they come to their home countries, they will tell that these American guys on Curaçao are just great... For example - "Operation" Clean up the reefs for Christmas! "- I think it sounds good?

We will find local sponsors... It is not a problem. We will write in the media that it was the initiative of some of the U.S. officers. We will describe colorfully, how they have suffered, seeing the littered water. Beforehand we will notify the local television: let them make a live coverage of this event. And at the end of the press release, we shall not forget to mention once again the reason your troops are placed here. We will remind to those who may have forgotten, how important and noble is the fight against drug trafficking! – I finished enthusiastically.

- But let's begin with the schools, - added Tyrunesh - We've already talked about painting the walls as one of the possible actions. You can invite the kids to your base - on a tour. Show them what useful work you're doing here. Allow them to sit in the aircraft (even adults will enjoy it, and the children will be in seventh heaven!)

This was correctly observed. I remembered with what delight Sonny responded to an open day at an air base near my native city, when he was able to sit in a "real Russian military helicopter." He then exploited his photo in this helicopter almost to pieces, showing it to all his friends indiscriminately...

- After that, we believe, the incidents with the local children will come to an end.

- Oh, and to inform the media on time, to prepare press releases, to find sponsors and all that - leave it to us! - I added.

⁴⁷² Korean mocking nickname for American and European imperialists and armed forces (Koreans see people of European descent as having long noses)

When we finished explaining this plan to Major O'Leary, he beamed: as Vasily Shukshin⁴⁷³ says in his stories, *"like a bare ass in the moonlight."*

- Ladies, it's brilliant! We ourselves were thinking of something similar, but we have no precise data on what is a priority for the local heads. Let us now go into the details.

At this point, there was knock on the door, and the Dutch Colonel Weterholt entered the room. I noticed with some surprise that he felt and acted at home in the American base.

- Here you are, Gerrit! - Major O'Leary welcomed him - Did you hear what a wonderful plan our ladies have? By the way, this is Mrs. Saskia Duplessis, if you haven't met yet.

- We already have met, - said the colonel, holding out his hand, - After seeing such a woman once, I'll never forget her.

"Now, that's bad", I thought - "That you will not forget. It's better to be seen and forgotten. That's why all our KGB agents usually have such unprepossessing appearance. So that they won't be remembered." But I pretended not to hear his clumsy compliment.

- How are you, Colonel? You look very energetic today.

- How can I not look vigorous, when you finally have honored us with a visit?

Actually, we did not honor him, we honored the Americans. But if he insists, I will not argue...

- Come, I'll show you the base - with your permission, Joseph! Are you here for the first time? Get acquainted with the guys.

At these words, for some reason I remembered the Dutchman Willem, who once wanted so badly to introduce me to Ian Paisley-Junior⁴⁷⁴.

The base was really small in size and seemed awfully familiar, that's because I've seen it in several videos of it posted on YouTube.

When I was introduced to "the guys" - in the canteen, because it was lunch time - I shivered inside. Kieran told me once that when you shiver so, it means that someone at this time is walking over your future grave - an Irish superstition. At the cemetery, where Kieran is now buried, republican dissidents often arranged their meetings to hide their explosives and the like. When Kieran was still alive, I often laughed when he shivered, "What, dissidents again are jumping over the graves?" And now he's dead, and now I do not want to joke about things like that. I often wonder where will be my future grave? In what country? Suddenly I felt a strong desire to die and to be buried only in the Soviet land. (without it, my life, was devoid of meaning.) To die at a time when everything is good and solid. When you can die with a clear conscience and with a light heart, because you do not fear what will come after you are gone, for your loved ones, for all your people and your country.

I shook my head, trying to forget about funerals. If it comes to that, this is my desire, I will still have a long life! - I said to myself. I just have no right to die, not yet, and will not have it until there will be a new Soviet Union on my land! This idea, however fantasy-like it may seem now - greatly cheered me.

"The guys" were of all sorts. Some were typical American soldiers, arrogant, narrow-minded, as if in cartoons, but some were ordinary boys, with schoolboy ambitions and without frills- caught in the

⁴⁷³ Vasily Shukshin (1929 – 1974) was a [Soviet/ Russian](#) actor, writer, screenwriter and movie director from the [Altay](#) region who specialized in rural themes.

⁴⁷⁴ See part 2 of the book

soup⁴⁷⁵, and I felt sorry for them. Especially when one of them - Aaron, I think - handed me a plate with a hamburger. He had such open face, and he looked at me for some reason trustingly, almost like a child looks at his mother, that I just wanted to ask him how he managed to get himself into this mess. But, of course, I did not do that.

And what would he have told me? Probably some plaintive story about how he couldn't find work or how he needed money for admission to the university. Now it became fashionable to feel sorry for them, based on "universal values" and even to justify them in some "New Vietnamese" films - where they claim that in the Vietnam War "nobody won" (yeah, maybe nobody won in WWII as well?). And that "Americans are humans too."

Of course, they are humans. But that's not the point. Nazi soldiers, too, were humans, and among them were probably also guys who looked so pathetic, that you just wanted to pat them on the head like children, saying: do not worry, guys, it will be all right at the end!. Moreover, because they - unlike today's Americans - were drafted, and did not join the army willingly.

But that's not the point, and in the words of Leo Tolstoy, for evil not to exist in the world, each of us should first not participate in what we consider to be evil. Some things cannot be justified by anything - and certainly not by the desire to go to university. Such a person has made his choice, and not based on some "universal values", but thinking only about himself. And, accordingly, he has lost the right to not be judged by others.

That's what I was thinking when Tyrunesh and I returned to our office.

- Saskia, are you asleep, or what? - She called me suddenly.

- Oh, sorry, I was just thinking...

- Tomorrow night we will have a meeting. We - that's the Bolivarian Circle. Do not take Alan with you for now, come alone. You can bring him next time. Put on some nice clothes. The Circle is meeting under the guise of Latino dance school.

The next day, at the appointed hour, Oisin as usual went to repair his furniture, and I knocked on the door of a small house in *Domingitu*⁴⁷⁶. Tyrunesh said she would be waiting for me inside.

The door opened, and I instinctively recoiled: on the threshold stood the older, but quite familiar Carmela, the Colombian former housekeeper of Sonny's grandmother, who years ago had managed to bewitch his handsome, but annoying uncle Thomas...

- *Señora!* - She exclaimed in surprise.

My first reaction was confusion. To run somewhere was silly, it was also stupid to deny that it was me (as in the movie "Trembita": "*Maybe it's not him, Bogdan, who died, but I, Vassily, the kingdom of heaven to me?*"⁴⁷⁷) - as she recognized me so easily, not even saying that I look like someone of her friends. But to admit that it was myself would at the very least put our mission into question, and at the most... I did not even want to think what it could mean at the most!

And so we stood there, Carmela and I, looking at each other and smiling (she did not do me any harm, it wasn't her fault that she recognized me) and both did not know what to do next. And I have no idea how this would have ended, if wasn't for Tyrunesh.

⁴⁷⁵ Russian expression meaning "who got themselves into mess, into trouble."

⁴⁷⁶ Domingitu - well-off neighbourhood in Curacao

⁴⁷⁷ The trembita is a Ukrainian, Polish, and Slovakian [alpine horn](#) made of wood. Popular Soviet musical comedy film of this name was produced in 1968 (based on an operetta by Yuri Milyutin)

As she had promised, she was waiting for me inside. Hearing the exclamation of Carmela and a long silence that came after it, she went out to meet me. And from the first look she realized what was going on...

Half an hour later Carmela and I were sitting in a small, cozy room, which she rented for her school of Latin American dances, and talking. It was an amazing feeling - to talk to her, because, if you remember, last time, 16 years ago, we were able to exchange only single words and gestures! Over time Carmela, who had married the annoying Uncle Thomas, learned not only Papiamento, but also sufficient Dutch. I learned to understand Spanish reasonably well too. Now we talked using all these three languages simultaneously - mixing Spanish, Dutch and Papiamento words, depending on which word from which language came faster to mind

I learned about what even Uncle Thomas does not know about Carmela up to this day. It turned out that all these years - even while being the housekeeper of grandmother Mai - Carmela was the representative of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia on Curaçao.

In fact, she came here already as a mature woman. I remembered the first time when I noticed some gray hair in her long hair: when she was dancing slowly and sensually with Uncle Thomas in "Fort Nassau" with its expensive cocktails. But nobody asked Carmela any questions about her youth. Nobody paid any attention to her (except for Uncle Thomas, but his attention was of entirely different character). Carmela had spent all her youth in the jungle, in the ranks of the guerrillas.

- Then, 16 years ago, there wasn't such an urgent need for me to stay here, as it is now - she said to me in a calm, casual tone as if we were talking about the adventures of heroes of some *telenovela*⁴⁷⁸, and not about our real lives.

- But Comrade Reyes foresaw what value these islands will acquire in the future,. And he was right, God rest his soul! - With these words Carmela made a cross sign. - This is when he decided that we should send someone up here... The choice fell on me. But at that time I had a very small workload here, while now it is really a great deal. No way would I be able to handle this alone. Thankfully, there is Tyrunesh and our Antillean comrades. And beside me there is now also another one of our people here; I'll introduce you to him later... Well, what about you, what brings you here? I heard that you and Sonny have divorced, but I do not know the details...

And I began to tell her briefly about what had happened in my life over the years.

The hall was getting filled with people. Among them there were our comrades of the Bolivarian Circle, only I do not know who they were. Because Carmela actually did really keep the Latin American dance school and we was coming to actually have a real lesson, a Salsa lesson, which I always did so badly in.

I could hardly wait for it to end. I danced in turn with different partners, gazing into the faces of each of them, and just silently looked at the present women, trying to figure out which of them were members of the circle, and which were not. I was so fascinated by this that I did not notice that I stepped on the foot of my next partner - an Antillean, who introduced himself to me as a sergeant Marchena. He was a local police or customs officer, I wasn't quite sure. He appeared to be about 30 years old. "Well, this one, for sure, has no relation to the circle" - I thought, when he invited me to the next round of salsa, so I wasn't even looking at him properly.

- Watch out, lady - he said resentfully.

⁴⁷⁸ Latin American term for a soap opera

- Sorry, - I said mechanically, continuing to examine other dancers.

- Are you looking for someone? - asked Sgt. Marchena,. - Or are you so out of tune?

In fact, he said some other Antillean expression⁴⁷⁹, but that was its meaning. I thought for a moment, to take offense or not, and decided that I should not look for trouble. I pretended not to understand what he has said to me.

But finally the music stopped and the student-dancers gradually began to go home. Those who remained, were pretending that they did so because they had some problems with the moves and wanted to ask for further advice. I wonder what will Carmela do if someone, without suspecting anything, really just decides to stay for the sake of her advice?

As if reading my thoughts, Carmela spoke with one of the dancing ladies:

- Marcia, you did it so well today! You just floated in the air! Maybe you're in love, *mi chica*? And how are your kids doing? Junior has to go to school tomorrow? To get up early? Oh, and it is so late... Well, I really wanted to talk to you, but I still have to deal here with those ones over here - comparing to you they dance like goats! Well, so long, Marcia! Relax, you have more than deserved it today,... - And this way, she ushered out one of the guests, who was about to stay.

Great was my surprise when I saw that she did not even try to show the door to sergeant Marchena! And it became even greater when I was introduced to him:

- This is Siegfried. He was one of our first members of the Circle. And he is truly irreplaceable. Siegfried is often trusted to do external patrols of important objects, and he finds out a lot of things first. Thanks to him we find out, for example, when and how many U.S. military arrive on the island on warships.

Sergeant Marchena nodded with a very important look. Then the other members of the circle were introduced to me. In total, there were 15 people. Among them were six women, including Carmel and Tyrunesh, and only two foreigners - one Venezuelan, who lived on the island for over 20 years and one *Dominicana*, who, as I understand, had something to do with Campo Alegre⁴⁸⁰ (that was the place frequented by those American "warriors"! All others - as many as 11 people - were true born and bred *yu di Korsou*⁴⁸¹. So, no one could not accuse us of "exporting revolution"- even if they wanted to!

By the way, how did this come about? Where did this mysterious disease of absurdity come from -that fear of what the enemies of most of mankind "would say about us"? Or what some typical consumers would say? And often this disease strikes the smartest and most honest people, the real Communists."Do not say this, otherwise they would say that..." , "Do not write this, or they might think that..."... For goodness's sake, let them say and think what they want!

We should not be afraid of this: we should be afraid if they suddenly start praising us!. The way Irish Republicans today praise British military commander Chris Brown⁴⁸² - for their peaceful letting of balloons into the air as a form of "protest", for their apologetic "We protest against the British Army parade because they killed some local people here in the past." As if the fact that they continue to do exactly the same, but in some other parts of the world, is OK!

⁴⁷⁹ Un persona sin ritmo (Papiamento)

⁴⁸⁰ Campo Alegre- resort with sex clubs and prostitution on Curacao

⁴⁸¹ Yu di Korsou - literally "child of Curacao", a person who was born on the island or abroad as a child of Curacao natives

⁴⁸² Refers to a British army parade in Belfast on the 2nd of November 2008 and "dignified protest" against it by local "mainstream Republicans"

Remember our *holy fool* Gorby, who up to this day doesn't care about anything or anyone except for worrying how to keep his *pretty penny*? It should be like a litmus test: if imperialists start praising you, then you have become a reformist and a renegade. So, let them curse at us all they want! With all blades. The more, the better!

At the beginning of the meeting, each of us talked about the news: the educational work conducted among the kids-Churandy fans, what men on the streets say about Americans, but also what kind of flights, how many times a day, and at what times they fly. Monitoring of this was had to be done in turns by some members of the group, who lived near the airport. And any change in the frequency or times of the flights had to be noted and analyzed. Tyrunesh introduced me to all those who were present, told them about the work we started doing, and that soon Americans will voluntarily gather trash around Curaçao on their weekends, and repair schools. Her speech was interrupted by cheerful laughter, with comments similar to an old Soviet anecdote - "*That's exactly what those long-haired deserve!*"⁴⁸³

And then members of the group began to discuss the works of Jose Marti. I listened to them and realized that I still have much to do to catch up with them, for in the Soviet Union, we, with characteristic for that time arrogance, did not study enough the works of progressive leaders of other countries! And it was so good: that in the Bolivarian Circle in the far Curaçao they study not only Jose Marti, Che Guevara, Fidel and Simon Bolivar, but also Ho Chi Minh, Mao, Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Kim Il Sung. And I was again asked to give a talk about the Soviet Union, just as Fionntan had asked me back in Ireland.

Among the members of the Circle there were a teacher and a journalist, a policeman and a fisherman, a handyman from a construction site and a taxi driver, a bank employee and an ice cream seller, a waitress and an IT engineer... They were from different backgrounds, their skin was of different colors, but they were united. As a swarm of industrious bees, like ants erecting their colony home, bit by bit. And again, I felt right at home.

When I came back to our place, Oisin was still awake. He was planing on the front lawn some table legs. Above his head palm branches were softly rustling in the wind.

- Well, how was your dancing? - He met me with this ironic remark.
- Great. Next time, you'll come with me.
- I? But I've never danced, not even in my teens!
- Well, now you will. Because that's what solidarity with the brotherly people requires!

Between Christmas and New Year another regular cruise ship came to the port of Willemstad. On board was the usual public: this time doubly idle because cruises at this time of year were more expensive than usual, and so the passengers sought to have, using the terminology of "new Russians", "a full blast" on this holiday to justify their costs.

But there was on board also one completely sober and not idle person, the tourist entertainer with a beautiful Irish name Saoirse. Originally she was from Derry. She was my contact person.

⁴⁸³ Mocking Soviet joke reflecting opportunism of the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev : 2 Revolution veterans are listening to a speech of Nikita Khrushchev. One is asking the other: "What is he saying there?" "He says, the current young generation will live under communism." "Ah, that's just what those long-haired fellows deserve!"

We met at the cafe «De Heeren», in the place called «Suikertuintje» (translated from Dutch, "Small Sugar Garden"). It is quite far from the port, and back years ago I visited this place only once: because it was "a place for the white", tourists and wealthy locals. When I lived in Curaçao, I was not interested in such places. But somehow Sonny once brought me here - probably, in order to "show off" with me.

I recognized her by her freckles, by a brick-red face and red curls. And besides, she said to me our code word:

- Tell me, are there any sharks in Curaçao?

- Along the Northern coast there are some, but soon we'll get rid of them.

I do not know who came up with these code words, but this one did not just sound nearly funny, it also had a double meaning. If a Korean would have heard us (Koreans are unparalleled world experts in searching of hidden meanings!), he would immediately suspect that this was about something else. American base on Curaçao is located near its Northern coast...

Saoirse sat down at my table and we both ordered for ourselves a cold pasta salad.

- Have a look, what an interesting article is in the latest issue of "Cosmopolitan" - about shoe fashions this season - and I handed her the magazine.

This ill-fated magazine reminds me of a collective farm village store, where everything is placed on one counter: from herring to notebooks and candy. So it is there too: a range from horoscopes to contagious venereal diseases and from shoes to love (or rather, to what is meant by this word in the vocabulary of those "free" single-celled individuals.). But inside of the magazine I inserted the encrypted summary of U.S. aircraft flights from Curaçao in the last quarter. The rest I had to tell her in words.

For about twenty minutes or so we were talking about "Cosmopolitan" and certain different spots that can be found on one's body, and Saoirse showed a remarkable knowledge in this field. I guess the poor thing really has read all this rubbish. I was picking with my fork in my plate with a poorly disguised disgust, waiting for her to offer us to go for a walk. Saoirse finally exhausted her topic and really offered to go - for a breath of fresh air.

- Well, hello, comrade *Soviética!* - She whispered to me as we left the restaurant. I had no idea that Hilda and Dónal remembered our conversation and seriously decided to give me such a conspiratory name.

- Hello, Saoirse! Are there any letters for me? - I asked with a sinking heart. She shook her head

- They did not have time to pass them on to us. But don't you worry, you will soon see your folks. In early March, you are entitled to a vacation. Go to Portugal, to our old friends. There you will be given instructions on what and how will come. Do you remember their address?

I remembered the address. But I was still upset... Until March, there were still more than two months. I gave Saoirse the letters that I had written for my mother and for Ri Rang.

Sometimes I had the feeling that a little bit more, and I would dissolve completely in Saskia and her life and would cease to be myself. I guess it's good for the intelligence to operate this way. But I did not want to become Saskia. I wanted to be myself especially since I had only recently finally fully realized who I am. It was good that Saoirse had said this word aloud again - *Soviética*. Even just to hear it gave me strength.

Oisin and I hardly celebrated any Christmas or New Year, although the house was decorated with a Christmas tree in case anybody dropped by. Around the holidays I ran my feet off on those American public relations affairs: their diving for garbage from the local beaches was meant to be one of these days. By the way, thanks to our efforts it was such a success that this landmark event was reported even by the American TV channels. I say "even" not because of any reverence for Americans as Sonny had, but because these channels have much more viewers than the small TeleCuracao.

I managed to get a bit of a break only closer to the season when the carnival comes to Curaçao.

On my birthday - yes, mine, not Saskia Duplessis! - I suddenly received a postcard in the mail. But when I opened the envelope, it turned out that it was not a birthday card, just the one of a series "Thank you that you exist." Yet, such a great coincidence scared me. Puzzled, from whoever it might be, I opened the card and read:

"All my life has passed, and I still did not get to the Friend Street.

The end of the carnival, but where is the face of that Friend I desire?

There is paradise of smells, because all the roses bloom, announcing my Friend,

But the heart is tired to wait for this Friend in the blooming spring place.

Yes, Friend's face is like as eternal morning for a bat:

It's always the case: a blinded by light bat did not see her friend⁴⁸⁴."

- Wow! Whose are these beautiful verses? - I said aloud, turning to the mirror.

- They are by Imam Khomeini - Oisin said behind me. And he walked out of the room before I had time to recover.

- What?

I ran after him to the porch, to demand an explanation. And I saw him trying to sneak out to the garage.

- Wait a minute, you, *Tiocfaidh Armani*⁴⁸⁵! What does this all mean? What does Ayatollah Khomeini have to do with this? And why did you send me this?

He answered reluctantly, looking away.

- It's just a very beautiful poem. I came across it by accident. When my older brother was preparing a book of collection of revolutionary quotations... I read there that there is a street in Tehran named after Bobby Sands... I know that you have a birthday today. Well, I just wanted to tell you something nice... because I was such an ass at that time, and...

I thought that I was delirious. I even shook my head to wake up.

- How do you know it's my birthday? - I asked suspiciously.

- I asked Dermot.

⁴⁸⁴ These really are the verses of Ayatollah Khomeini (translated from Russian as I received them once in an email from Iranian radio)

⁴⁸⁵ *Tiocfaidh Armani* - mocking term for constitutional Irish Republicans. *Tiocfaidh Ar La* - Irish Republican slogan "Our Day Will Come" (Irish), Armani - famous fashion designer. Leaders of Sinn Fein were mocked as "Armani Boys"

- Dermot? And he remembers? And he did ask you, why do you need this? - I was amazed. I used to believe that men do not remember any anniversaries. Many do not even know exactly how old their mother is - although they congratulate her on her birthday every year.

- He did, but I made something up for him... don't even remember now what. Did he lie to me?

- No, he didn't... - I was still recovering from what I've heard. - And that "blinded bat" - that's supposed to be you?

I regretted immediately that I said this. After all, I wanted still to find out what it all means. But my words made Oisín slam his inner "doors": as a shelled sea creature closes up, sensing danger.

- Well, I'm sorry if I did something silly. - He muttered, and ran away.

- Come have some tea and cake... I actually didn't celebrate this day for a long time, but since you already know about it... - I said to him when he returned - after about six hours.

- OK! - He looked delighted. Oisín had one small weakness: sweet things.

And we did not speak about Khomeini's poem anymore.

After a while, I noticed that every night, returning from his workshop, Oisín was coming to my door and looking at me for a long time through this door, thinking that I was asleep. His face was at the same time thoughtful and almost dreamy. What could I say to that? Only that he was a strange person. Or did the spring have such effect on him? But here it was really just summer, all year round!

It had been six months since our arrival in Curaçao, and finally the day came when I could go on vacation and meet my children and mother. I was not told where, and I secretly hoped that it would be in Korea, and dreamed of how I would see Ri Rang again, as the longer we were apart, the more I missed him. But when I arrived in Lisbon, and from there - to another European city, I was told that our meeting will be held... in the Maldives: Russian citizens do not need visas for going there, and someone had thought it would be easier for mum and enjoyable for all of us. Seeing my sour face, those who told me this news, were very surprised:

- And we thought we'd make you happy!

But I did not need the Maldives. Just give me my beautiful Pyongyang!

It was unbearably cold in the plane. There was nowhere to put my feet. I tried to tuck them under the seat in front of me, then pulled them out, but nothing worked. Just as nothing worked to get myself warm, not even a woolen blanket. And so it was impossible to sleep.

I tried to do something so as not to think over which part of the world we were flying. I tried to read a book popular among Russians at the moment - "Night Watch"⁴⁸⁶. The book was easy to read and addictive in its flowing language, but about as addictive as chewing gum, because all the adventures in it were empty, as were all its heroes, who, like true modern "civilized" people, did not have any ideals. Neither good nor bad, just none at all. They must have been distant relatives of the famous Shchedrin's "wise gudgeon"⁴⁸⁷: the main thing for them is not to interfere and not to stick out, or things will get worse. And definitely for the whole of humanity. A primitive credo of "heroes of the XXI century": *if you do anything good, there will only be more evil in the world.....*

⁴⁸⁶ Popular Russian post-Soviet fantasy book (translated into English)

⁴⁸⁷ Hero of a satiric fairy tale who all his life was avoiding problems and hiding from dealing with them

Like our modern politicians, these heroes publicly stated that the most important thing for them is to care about people, but if you looked into what they were doing in practice, it becomes evident that they cared only about their own lives and the lives of their own wives, husbands, lovers, children, and grandchildren. And because of this all they were engaged in, were exclusively scuffling with each other, still believing that they live for the benefit of mankind. The true inspiration comes upon them only when it comes to describing the tastes of different beers (founder and Coryphaeus of such literature was Mikhail Zhvanetsky⁴⁸⁸, remember?..). *Took from the refrigerator tomatoes, onions, lettuce, eggs, sausage, sour cream. Took off from the nail a thick board. Washed everything clean and began to prepare my own breakfast. Cut tomatoes into six pieces and piled them in a crystal bowl. Sliced fleshy red peppers, chopped onions,, shredded lettuce, shredded cabbage, shredded carrots, sliced cucumbers finely, put everything in a bowl on top of tomatoes. Pured some salt on it.. Mixed all with vegetable oil. then sprinkled with vinegar. Added a bit of mayonnaise and began to stir with a wooden spoon. And more. From the bottom and up. Watered with its own juice and again, from the bottom and up....*" That, in fact, is the whole sense of their lives.

I closed the book. Next to me sat a charming oriental young mother with a boy of about three. The boy was playing and did not want to fall asleep. She pleaded with him for a long time in a language I didn't know, calling him somehow "Papa." At one point he trustingly leaned on my shoulder, looked me straight in the eye with his dark, beady shining little eyes, tugged at my sleeve and said something to me in this unknown language. I smiled at him, feeling his warm little hand - he just started living and had no fear of strangers, - then I looked at the screen, which showed where our plane was flying... and my heart sank coldly.

We were flying along the Iraqi border.

At other times, this flight would go right over Iraq, but now it seemed unsafe, and the route was moved slightly to the side.

Somewhere far below us those commandos with their steroid muscles and Pepsodent smiles, were killing little boys like this one on a daily basis, without even blinking...

So you say, do not interfere, Mr. Lukyanenko⁴⁸⁹? That otherwise there would be only more evil? You even insist that in our time a treaty on balance between the forces of good and evil is in place? And in my opinion, Avulon and his team⁴⁹⁰ have captured Moscow at least 15 years ago. And none of your "light ones"⁴⁹¹ even attempted to maintain the parity. They were too busy with beer, marriages, divorces, being in love with witches, fighting against appearance of any such good force, that will be strong enough to defeat the darkness. Parity between good and evil was declared to be a "relic of stagnation", perhaps in conjunction with that summit in Reykjavik⁴⁹².... Better not even to mention those "civilized countries." There all the "light ones" have been evidently deduced as lice - in Soviet schools.

"Treaty between light and darkness", in fact, is Gorbachev's "new thinking" in action. When vampires are allowed to roam the streets - if they are registered- I wonder which "light one" has issued a license to kill for those ghouls Blair and Bush?

⁴⁸⁸ Mikhail Zhvanetsky (b. 1934) - famous Soviet and Russian satiric writer and stand-up comedian

⁴⁸⁹ Sergei Lukyanenko (b.1968) is a [science fiction](#) and [fantasy](#) author, one of the most popular contemporary Russian sci-fi writers, author of "Night Watch"

⁴⁹⁰ Evil magician from "Night Watch"

⁴⁹¹ All magicians in "Night Watch" are divided into "light ones" (good) and "dark ones" (evil).

⁴⁹² The 1986 Reykjavik Summit between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev was one of the first major disasters of the Soviet international politics dressed up as a "victory for peace", with one-sided Soviet concessions to the US.

Next to me, sniffing into my sleeve with his little chiseled nose, the future "potential terrorist" was sleeping peacefully. And I felt that he was much closer to me than all kinds of "caviar socialists", eaters of hamburgers and visitors of mixed unisex toilets. Next to me sat a small, living human being, a normal person. I did not want to "save" Europe from the likes of him. Much more I wanted to save the rest of the world from this plastic "Europe" of Rita Verdonk, Filip De Winter and Jean-Marie Le Pen⁴⁹³, with its odorless flowers and two-legged creatures whose whole meaning of life was "to have more and more and more" (have you heard their animals-like cries of joy when they win on some TV show a speed boat or a player that can reload 5 discs?)...

By the morning we landed in Doha, capital of Qatar. At half past seven in the morning the temperature outside was already 37 degrees Celsius. The new airport building was being built up right in front of the passengers: huge, glass, enticingly cool. Builders worked under the hot morning sun tightly wrapped in scarves - only their eyes could be seen (at noon all will be closed here - until the sun will go down). I wonder have all those European critics of "the barbaric Muslim habit of covering the face" ever been here, under this heat?

I have never been in any Arab country before this, and it was sharply different from what I had seen anywhere before. Completely different colors, odors. Different people. You could feel it. This difference was of a different order than difference between the pines of Sweden and palms of Spain. But I was not scared of it: because I did not come here to steal anything from local people, assuring them that it is being done for their own good, and I did not come here to teach them "how to live" or what kind of values are "universal." I came here to absorb this difference. Surprised and happy to see that the world has not yet turned into a standard supermarket shelf

I have never considered a holiday on the Maldives as "prestige" or "elite." I had read about them in a Soviet children's book written long before appearance of the mass tourism here, and there were many astonishing stories about history, traditions, problems and hopes of these islands. So when the glaringly handsome young Arab registering me for a flight to Male, said looking at my lack of registered luggage: "The Maldives? You would certainly need nothing there, except for a swimming suit. What else should you do there but swim?", I in my turn, was surprised. How can you have "nothing to do" in such an interesting country?

When my plane was landing, I was watching the capital city Male, which from the plane looked like a toy, - a compact town on little island, full of grayish-yellow buildings and with a glaringly-white prayer-tower in the middle. And I was recalling that book.... There is something common between the Maldives and the Soviet Union. That is that the tourists, who come here, live their own lives and do not see much of the life of the locals. Only somehow this doesn't bother "all civilized world" who were claiming that the Soviet Union was "unfree." Also "western democracies" are not worked up by such "displays of totalitarianism" as the ban for any other religions except for the state one (even tourists are prohibited to bring into this country religious symbols of other faiths – please, compare this situation with our "democratic" Russia where members of religious sects of all kinds from abroad ramble all over the country). And the president of this country hasn't been changed since 1978 and he was regularly re-elected. And he was an unopposed candidate.⁴⁹⁴

But all these restrictions "on freedom of movement," "religious freedom" and other "freedoms" do not bother our "democratic civilizers" and no one is going to close foreign bank accounts of the now already former Maldivian President and forbid him to the entrance to the European Union.

⁴⁹³ Dutch, Belgian and French right wing populist politicians

⁴⁹⁴ Book was written in 2008.

Maybe it's because there are no military objects that tourists would photograph, and perhaps because President Abdul Gayoom Momum does not "disturb" Western monopolies (for example, foreign firms have opened garment factories in the old British military barracks on the island of Gan. There are only factory hands from Sri Lanka and only a few local residents). They have long working days and they work through the holidays.) Why did these companies decide to open their factories not in Sri Lanka or in Bangladesh? Because these countries already produce more textiles than are allowed to be imported to the United States!).

By the way, the Maldivian president really did a lot for his country. Of course, it was within the framework of capitalism. His government, which developed tourism, put strict rules on the hotel chains that wished to take a lease on a particular island. The rules put forward by the government, have been institutionalized in the law on tourism, the Strategy of Quality Tourism, according to which:

- resorts are to be created only on uninhabited islands;
- hotel corporations have to apply for participation in the contest for the right to obtain a contract and their projects must meet strict standards: buildings cannot cover more than 20% of the island or to be higher than the surrounding vegetation, the maximum number of rooms is limited to the size of the island, the responsibility of the builder includes the creation of the entire infrastructure, from carrying out power grids and water supply to sewage and waste disposal;
- when the lease expires, the Government may require repair of buildings in the resort as a condition of extending the lease, or it will put up the involved island on the market for new offerings from other leasing companies;

There were also rules on ecologic norms and certain working conditions and wages of workers.

And protection of local culture (the population of this country is estimated 270,000 people - less than in my native city in central Russia!) from "cultural pollution" by hordes of foreign tourists is really a good thing! It is the question of survival for this culture.

But when the presidents from the non-western countries (even the capitalist ones) try to do positive things for their country and start to really interfere with the tyranny of Western business, they are immediately accused by hysterical screaming about "dictatorship," violations of "human rights" and demands for "democratic elections." Clever Gayoom managed not to cross this line for many years. Local Novodvorskis and Solzhenitsyns, who have settled in the UK, could not understand why opposition leaders are arrested, independent media banned, but democratic "big brother" - the West to whom they appeal for help- doesn't really listen to them?

Well, but now the Maldives have elected as president a former political prisoner⁴⁹⁵. But will the Maldivians feel any better from this ? Incidentally, this activist of human rights has already announced the need for privatization.... I wonder what he would do with the law on tourism? I have now - after our own national experience - suspicions about those who are supported by "Amnesty International":

⁴⁹⁵ Mohamed Nasheed (b.1967) was a former political prisoner elected as president in 2008 and forced to resign in 2012. Became known for his publicity stunts, such as his presiding over the world's first underwater cabinet meeting in 2009, with the meeting participants underwater in [scuba diving](#) gear. In a 2011 interview with [The Guardian](#), British Prime Minister [David Cameron](#) described Nasheed as 'my new best friend' and said that he, [Bill Clinton](#), [Barack Obama](#), [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) and [John Key](#) would be the five world leaders Cameron would invite on his [stag weekend](#). That alone already in itself speaks volumes about this so-called "Mandela of the Maldives."

those are "*masters not to create - to destroy*", using the words of Nekrasov⁴⁹⁶. Bulldozers, capable only of levelling everything, not able to create anything....

I tried to turn around in my chair, to make myself comfortable, but my legs were still sore.

Have you noticed that Western tourists travel to Third World countries mainly in order to gawk at the animals? The zebras in Kenya, the monkeys in Uganda, the elephants in Sri Lanka, the fish in the Maldives. But people, the local people with such interesting and quite different cultures from their own, do not interest them. Local people for them are usually just their servants, part of the landscape.

Maldivians were humble people of small stature, very polite, but without fake Western smiles. It was felt here, just like in Russia, that laughing for no reason in the Maldives is a sign of you know what⁴⁹⁷ ...

Among those waiting for seaplanes to the different ends of the Maldives archipelago my fellow countrymen dominated. Their fair skin identified them (at that time in Moscow there was still no fashion for fake tan studios), along with fire in their eyes. They were on the wooden flooring, constantly clicking with cameras. Almost like Japanese, but even the Japanese do not imprint themselves in such quantities. And their poses in front of the camera are not as spectacular, as ours. When a Russian tourist poses for the camera, his whole body and face seem to say, "Look at me! Do you know how much I have paid for this trip?" And the photo is clearly not made just for the family album, but to "show to people ..".

There was only one Russian couple in my seaplane. We were given a pair of earplugs - for protection from the noise of the engine. Honestly, I could hardly imagine how that fragile little "birdie" would fly over the ocean (the flight would take about an hour), but it turned out to be not that frightening. There was such a breathtaking view from the cabin window, we just had no time to get scared. We felt like watching everything: a giant pelican flying under us above the clear aquamarine water, the capital, Male, left on starboard. From above the city looked like a can full of anchovies, because it was filled with concrete-like boxes of buildings. We could see an unbroken chain of tiny islands, each of which was surrounded by a ring of aquamarine lagoon inside of the cay. Beyond it the dark-blue depth suddenly emerged.

The island, which was our final destination, looked exactly as in the tourist leaflet. It was little, green, with a chain of villas jutting out right into the lagoon and with a long wooden mooring, nearly a mile and a half long. The plane splash-landed near the pontoon which was floating in the lagoon and moored to it. A small blue carved wooden traditional boat, the dhoni, pulled off the shore and headed for us. Swarthy skinny boatmen gave their hands to help us to get on the boat.

The Moscow *Milady* held out her pink fingers to them in disgust and all the five minutes of our way she was wrapping her shoulders up in a pink sarong, though it was hot as hell. A Sri Lankan manager had already been waiting for us on the pontoon (almost all of the managers are not native), he had such a servile look on his face that it was hard to imagine what else he could do to be more hospitable. He greeted us and asked us to follow him. My companion's high heels clip-clopped on the plank deck. Two local boys, slight in build, hardily pulled her three suitcases, placed on a sort of a wheel barrow.

The manager offered us a cocktail on the open terrace of the administrative building and asked us to fill up a form, while he was describing the local traditions to us.

⁴⁹⁶ Nikolai Nekrasov's poem "The Railroad" (1864), which was critical of the quality of life among workers on the Russian railroad, made the Tsarist Russian government so unhappy that it shut down the literary magazine *The Contemporary* in 1866.

⁴⁹⁷ Laughing without a reason is a sign of stupidity (Russian saying)

- Vitya, they ask about the occupation here. What am I supposed to write?
- Write “advertising manager”, - replied her powerful fellow-traveler in huge sunglasses, which covered half of his face, and who was wearing pretty multicolored shorts.
- And what address should I write?
- Write your address in Moscow!
- Oh, Vitya, look at this sand floor! I wish we had something like this in our flat!
- Yes, Lusya. Natasha will go crazy.

It was hard to understand from his tone of voice, whether Natasha was a strange role-model to Lusya. like the lady millionaire Vanderbilt for Ellochka the Ogress from Ilf and Petrov's “Twelve Chairs”⁴⁹⁸, or she was just a housemaid, whose duty would be the cleaning of that floor.

And the couple, who apparently had few addresses to choose from, and who weren't quite sure how they earned their living, went away, without thanking for the cocktails.

Mum and my kids were going to come only the next day. It was beautiful and cool in the villa. The air conditioner worked to its maximum. The fish swam under the glass floor, and it seemed that the hipped roof went right into the sky.

- And where's your luggage. Madam?- I heard behind my back and turned around. A young swarthy man with two front peg teeth gave me a timid smile He was dressed in a multicolored shirt, long shorts and Hawaiian slippers. There were many wipers around his belt. He was a houseman, or better to say, a personal servant, who was attached to each villa for their time of rest.

I had read in the tourist guide that only men were working at the resorts, particularly as housemen and waiters, because this country is a Muslim one. The local women were protected from communication with foreign tourists who could be very unpredictable (the tourists were allowed to drink alcohol at the resorts whilst the alcohol consumption is strictly prohibited for the local people).

- My name is Hussny. - the houseman introduced himself,- It's easy to pronounce it -

H-U-S-S-N-Y.

I thought he must have had to communicate with British tourists a great deal, since they seemed to be unable to pronounce any foreign name, even the one that was as easy as mine. And I introduced myself.

- I have no other luggage here. - I pointed at my knapsack. - This is all.

He was surprised but he didn't show it.

- If you want anything, just tell me and I would bring it.

- Could I have a little more sugar for coffee?

- Of course! - he put a lot of white sugar sachets on the table. -Anything else, Madam?

- No, thank you.

- If you need something. I am at your service.

⁴⁹⁸ One of the characters of this book who survived with a vocabulary of 30 words and was blindly following fashion trying to “overdo” the lady called Vanderbilt whose photo she saw in fashion magazines.

It seemed to me Hussny was surprised again, but I didn't understand why. And only a bit later I understood that many tourists were using their housemen literally as chore boys. For example: if you didn't feel like going to the bar in the pouring tropical rain, just send your personal Hussny or Ismail to bring you beer at any time of day or night. 'What's the big deal? We do pay them tips!'

I wasn't used to anybody serving me. I didn't like it. A houseman or a housemaid are just as human beings as I am. And if I give him tips, it would be in a human way. Not like throwing a piece of meat to the dog for showing new tricks.

I had read different reviews on that resort on the Internet before the trip itself, and I remembered three issues. Firstly, that the manager of the resort had died as a result of the tsunami; secondly, that the holiday-makers were satisfied with their Alis, Hussnies and Akhmeds, their personal servants, and the last one was that everybody without exception thought a lot of a certain Fernando, as the *heart and soul of the party*, without whom the vacation was not complete. I was simply eaten up by curiosity. Who was that mysterious Fernando? What was he? Was he an amusements organizer or a diving teacher?

It all turned out to be, however, more prosaic. Sri Lankan Fernando was a barman on that island. He worked at a bar, where all the drinks including strong ones were free.

The bar stood on the water at the pier: it was refreshed from all sides by warm wind. When I came there, it was already noisy under its straw roof. I drank a green cocktail called *Elephant Kiss*, watching how an elderly English tipsy tourist lady was squeezing 'her' waiter. She exclaimed that tomorrow she would leave and she knew that he would miss her. 'Will you be sad when we leave?' - she cried out.

It wasn't Jamaica, though, for her over here, where the waiters were already tempered for such pressure and even had a specially worked out code of conduct ("*Enjoying your dinner. Ma'am? Would you like me to show you some Jamaican night spots?*"). And the waiter gently, but successfully fought her off.

In the other corner a drunk Englishman tried to figure out the nationalities of the passing-by guests out loud; he did it, as if nobody could understand English and he could say just anything he wanted. Burping after drink, he muttered something to the effect that '*this is our island*' (Maldives became independent two years before my birth), and that '*some wops have no business hanging around here*', and then he finally went Southwards, bending in half over the railing over the Indian Ocean.

I had quite enough of my cocktail and I went to the other end of the pier for the rest of the evening, where the fish which were attracted by the light of a blue lamp were swimming in circles under that light. The sounds of splashing water did not stop all night long, the sea was well heard in the 'water villa.'too. In the morning heavy rain began with such a clatter on the roof and with wind howling, that it seemed the "villa" would be picked up and carried away directly into the ocean. I tried to make myself fall asleep, but the thoughts about tsunamis kept passing through my mind. I promised myself not to ask anything about it so as not to rub salt into the wounds of people here just for my vain curiosity, but imagination was not so easy to turn off and I tried to imagine the side where the sea billowed, how it looked and what happened to the island after it. I knew from Internet blogs that nobody from the island died except for the manager (but the manager appeared at that time to be not here but at his home at Sri Lanka) and that most of the tourists were just scratched by the reefs, while the roofs of the buildings were demolished, boats had been thrown to the top of the palm trees... It all ended up well, when a passing Pakistani warship took them from the island in a couple of days.. The

hero of the film "*Do Not Worry, I'm With You!*"⁴⁹⁹ would say about this: "What an interesting life some people have!" But it was not so "interesting" for local people who had been without work for six months afterwards.

The ebb began at 6 a.m. and the water went from the lagoon at such a speed that it had been only a foot by half past six. Protruding into the lagoon, "water villas" on the wooden platform overlooked the west, and from the east where there was a beach with crystal white sand and fragments of coral, the island was covered only by a few old-fashioned (and cheaper) "beach villas", and a diesel electric generator was hidden between the palm trees in the center of the island. There were also all sorts of utility rooms and box-like two-story building in which attendants lived. It seemed they did not even have air conditioners. Washed clothes were hung out to dry around the building, mainly men's clothes. But to my surprise. I noticed local women: at this early hour they swept the sandy- paths of the island and removed the fallen leaves. They were modestly dressed in bright buttoned (and very beautiful!) traditional ankle-length dresses, some were in the headscarves, they swept surprisingly gracefully and apparently hesitated to greet us, but apparently, they had been taught that Western tourists expected that from them. So the book guide was outdated: even though cleaning tourists' rooms on Maldives still remained men' work, local women had to work at the resorts to support the family too. Globalization progress.

I noticed Hussny who ran quickly with his trolley carrying cleaning solution, swab and clean bed-clothes, and I greeted him.

- Do you start your working day so early?

- We are on the move every morning from 4 AM, - he said animatedly.- I will be working until 10 PM.

- When do you have a day off?

- We have four days off in month, but we don't have any at the height of the season. This job is important for me. I earn nothing on my own island. There we can live only by fishing.

- How far away is your island?

- It takes 20 minutes by speedboat or 2 hours by our local one. 17 people have died during the tsunami on our island. Our island is usual, not a resort, tourists do not travel to us. Most of our houses were destroyed. Now people are living in two camps. Much time has passed but nothing is set. My wife and daughter are living there. When I have the weekend I am going to them immediately.

He told it without being boastful or pathetic, simply and naturally. I remembered Cubans working in the tourism sector. Have they seen even just in nightmares an 18-hour working day with a seven-day working week and 4 days off a month? Plus, even this was unwarranted.

.. I found out only later (and not from him). Before the tsunami, Hussny worked at the same resort, as we now say, "at the reception." He graduated from college, did a course for tourism workers. But after the hotel was closed for more than six months, he asked to start working as a cleaner: at the reception they do not get tips, and he had to feed the family and save money for a new house.

Well, this is imperialism: when educated people go work as cleaners and street vendors. Today in Dublin, for example, the fashion is to have cleaners from Mongolia, who have just graduated from a

⁴⁹⁹ Soviet Azerbaijani musical comedy from 1981. In this particular scene a farmer follows with an envious gaze a couple who are being chased by a gang of bandits - first they go in one direction, then they come back, and the farmer says enviously: "They were chased on the way there, they are chased on their way back... Some people have such interesting lives!"

university back at home... These women took on the job, leading to dismissal of the local "uneducated" women doing it for years. And in my opinion, it was not only because they can pay Mongolians less. It was also because the Western new-rich *prefer to be served* by educated people, more educated than themselves. It 'flatters' them. As it is for our new Russian mafia, where somebody, coming from a ballet school or conservatory, serves as a babysitter for their children.

Now, having walked around the island, I imagined well, where from the wave swept over that fateful morning. From the serene and peaceful beach, it poured over "in the face" little old "beach Villas", then it crossed the restaurant and high palms and hit "back" the unsuspecting "water villas..". Far into lagoon, near the barrier, which was separating it from the deep ocean, some palms teared down by tsunami were still lying....

About noon, I saw the water plane which rattled over the island like a huge dragonfly. My mum and the kids had arrived.

There was no end to their delight as they had never flown on such an aircraft, and because of the sea, and because of the fish. Well, also because of the meeting with me. Fidelchik was shy of me in the beginning, but Che from the very first moment just hung onto my neck and refused to let me go even for a second. They stayed in another villa, but naturally, all the time - day and night - we spent together, trying not to waste such precious time, not even a minute in these two weeks. Lisa had grown, she became nearly taller than me. She was much calmer, she was smiling shyly and sometimes was even saying some short expressions in Russian, quite often well with a meaning. Because in Korea she was also getting a medical treatment - an herbal, Korean traditional one.

Of course, I did not expect that Ri Rang would come with them but apparently somewhere deep in my soul I was still hoping for it. Perhaps he had already forgotten me? That's life, after all; anything can happen.. I decided not to ask mum about anything. But she understood my state of mind and did not torment me any more:

- Here, hold this! - And she handed me an envelope in which was a sheet of paper, with small and neat handwriting of Ri Rang.

"Zhenya, my dear! My beloved, Zhenya! I love you so very much. I work a lot and think a lot about you. I even started writing poetry in Russian (of course, very simple verses). For example,

"There's something feels so nice to do for me:

To close my eyes and think about thee."

Or:

"Let it be cold outside,

But if you're by my side,

It's warmer in the room,

And in the snow flow'rs bloom."

I always knew that there are 24 hours in 1 day, and that one hour is 60 minutes, but I did not know that even one day without you is an eternity.

A man without a dream,

Is like a wingless bird:

Eat, foul - yes, it can,

But fly - no, it cannot..

I was told that our question should be solved soon.

I believe that you serve with honor to our mutual case.

I have no doubt that when the task is taken by the most sensitive and the most enthusiastic woman in the world, she will certainly achieve all the goals she is aiming at.

Write to me, Zhenya. I'll read and reread your letter, inhaling its smells and plunging with my head into its atmosphere. When I get news from you, I feel that I'll never be without you in this world. You are my inspiration.

That rainy day, when we first met, was really a happy day for me and I hope for you too.

With warmest hug and deepest kiss to you, my comrade.

Yours, Ri Rang

In reality, I was probably supposed to eat this note. But I could not bring myself to do it. And not because of the paper taste. Against all the rules I even had a photo of Ri Rang: I hid it among the old postcards with movie actors. And I hid this note too, and secretly reread it every night before falling asleep. It became a ritual for me.

It rained for almost all two weeks of our stay on the island. I wasn't annoyed: it was only upsetting that because of this we couldn't go on a tour to one of the normal, inhabited islands. And I was not interested in trips to see dolphins and sharks, the choice of which here was much wider.

Every morning in any weather, beautiful and modest local women who behaved with such dignity, swept the paths. Every morning cleaners and waiters got up at 4 o'clock. Hussni cleaned the entire villa twice a day, getting to it even at this most heavy rain.

And the guests complained of the weather, filling the plates with all-inclusive meals three times a day, drinking up the whole evenings and being entertained by organized crab racing on the beach. (In Jamaican resorts, there is also another "wonderful" "intellectual" contest, "*who will drink most beer*": that's the perfect place for a holiday for that writer Lukyanenko!). They more and more irritated me, these people without the slightest mystery in their lives, for which the form is always more important than content. People who really believe advertising saying that "in every woman there is a goddess who would appear, if she shaved her legs with a razor of our company." People who are wasting time on this divinely beautiful island by looking at the TV "comedy" "There's Something About Mary", with Homeric laughter⁵⁰⁰ watching as the main character was masturbating over some pictures, and then rubbed his forelock with this liquid instead of hair gel.

Every day, I became more deeply convinced about what I had long known: capitalist culture is primitive. It is only effective in one thing- how to use others. As the parasite-ivy on the tree, effectively sucking juices out of it it looks green and lush, but we're not saying based just on this that ivy is "more highly developed" than the tree which was strangled by it?

Now I prefer animals too: a brave raven croaking on the edge of the table in the restaurant, and no gluttonous greedy Western tourists would share even a crust of bread with it, but it does not stop them from clicking with their cameras. Large silvery fish, sailing in flocks to my feet every time, when I came down the ladder into the water from my «villa," absolutely weren't afraid of me, when I fed them bread. Crossing the lagoon, swimming, snorting, was a young turtle. The raven took care of her

⁵⁰⁰ Boisterous laughter, prolonged [belly laughing](#); long or uncontrollable laughing.

family: she begged the people for bread to take it on a nearby uninhabited island, and to feed her babies. Fish were staying in a flock, where two of them were "scouts": they did not eat all the food they have found, but swam to bring the rest of fish to this food...All of them had much more of a human being than the heroes of American comedies, fixated on their *needs from below the belt*. And it was much more pleasant for me to spend time with my nearest and dearest, feeding fish and having small conversations about local life with Hussni, who was already used to the fact that I wouldn't send him for a beer, than to be among those "goddesses" with their shaved legs.

... Once Hussni couldn't resist it and gave an interview to some Western journalists (which is generally not encouraged in the Maldives): "Tourists told me that at home they have collected money in buckets to help the Maldives after the tsunami. So where is this money?" Poor man, he probably does not know that in buckets they collect only coppers in the West...

Just six days before that tsunami the UN declared that it intends to raise the status of the Maldives from the low-income economies to the middle-income...

But the tsunami delayed this decision. According to the calculations of the same UN, in order to recover from all physical damage to these islands, 470 million dollars were needed. On the war in Iraq, America spends five thousand dollar per second⁵⁰¹. That mean, that it takes little more than 5 days of what they spend there - on murder and destruction - for the necessary aforementioned sum for restoring the normal life on Maldives...

If other tsunami-affected countries have suffered damage from it, that was equal to 3-5% of their GDP. In the Maldives, this percentage was as much as 70% of GDP! However, the Maldives for a long time have not received the promised assistance. The reason? Not many people here were killed, as in Thailand or Indonesia, and "benefactors" forget about the victims who were survivors.

One day, saying goodbye to Hussny, some unemployed tourist-Irishman gave him almost \$ 100 in tips although the guidebook advised to give only 10. Western unemployed seem to be more generous with tips than advertising managers; although in fact, what's the difference between the first and the second? Apparently, the only difference is in the amount of tips given by them (the unemployed are more sympathetic). After all, advertising managers do not do anything useful for society either. And both of them live and travel around world at the expense of people like Hussny. On the last evening before my departure my mother and I once again talked about the Soviet Union, when the kids were asleep.

- As I understand, our people have practically turned their backs to socialism, because they were so absolutely sure that the "boring" Soviet life was not going anywhere, but think that they still can gain a lot of things from capitalism they in their daily lives, - my mother said to me with sorrow - Everyone remembers "the queues for sausage", but they don't remember the free apartments, as if they got housing "out of itself", as if it was "given by God"... Socialism had not yet worked out its mechanism of self-protection, there was no time for it, there were many other, as it seemed back then, more important things. And the mechanism of self-defense of socialism is the struggle with greed in every single man. Collective greed, the ninth wave of greed, that shot up in the world to heaven, has swept away and destroyed the best thing on Earth: the possibility to have a normal life on this planet for everyone.

And I thought again that we should never allow- never, under any circumstances, under any cover of "human rights", not from any fear of what they might say about you in the "civilized world"! - the

⁵⁰¹ \$5,000 in 2008 - <http://usliberals.about.com/od/homelandsecurity/a/IraqNumbers.htm>

minority to push upon the majority that which is actually contrary to the majority's interests. For me, an "owner of factories, newspapers, ships"⁵⁰² is not a respectable person, not "the elite" and not somebody worthy of envy. For me he is simply a rudiment of the disgusting past. This is simply disgusting - when one person under some stupid pretence owns what should belong to and serve the people.

In the day of my leaving, as usual, the sky cleared up. I stood at the pier waiting for a seaplane, trying to remember this entire fantastic little island. Who knows, if I would have ever visited it? And rumors stubbornly say to us in 20 years time there might be nothing left of the Maldives at all- that they will sink under water because of rising sea levels caused by global warming, a process, which Maldivians cannot challenge, and which they can't affect in any way. I really didn't want to say goodbye to my family yet again. Instead, I asked my mother to take children to the beach. They were going to depart the day after me.

«Goodness me, when will it finally come - it should come one day! -, a day when I will not have to go away anywhere? When I will be *at home* at last - with all of them, and when Ri Rang will be next to me?»

In the plane on the way back they showed the old Jamaican comedy movie, "Smile Orange." It was, you know, such a specific comedy : "*a very funny comedy*,"⁵⁰³ in the style of comedy from the pen of Karabas-Barabas. Its heroes and heroines - Jamaican tourist industry workers - slept with a one-legged American veteran of the Vietnam war in the hope that he'd marry them and take them away to America; helped their relatives who can't swim to get a job at the hotel as lifeguards in the swimming pool; spent a fortune on the crab races; mocked at inexperienced young waiters who had just arrived from the countryside, where they were "shopping for sugar cane", teaching them how to seduce fat, whale-like looking, big-nosed older American tourists, "*Enjoying your dinner, Ma'am? Would you like to me to show some Jamaican night spots?*." It was a comedy of which I wanted not to laugh but to cry.

I was flying back to Curaçao and dreamed of how I will meet Ri Rang the next time. I imagined myself in some absolutely unrealistic scenes in the style of meeting of Stierlitz⁵⁰⁴ with his wife: that we'll see each other somewhere near a night camp fire in an African village, or that he will be on a stage in the ranks of a KPA chorus performing in some "developed" country, where it became a bit fashionable to see some "North Korea's exotic," that I'll be among the spectators, and we'll look at each other non-stop during the concert.... It would have been quite enough for my happiness, really. I knew, of course, that all these were just unrealistic fantasies (after all, who am I, to organize something of such a scale just for me?), but nevertheless, they muffled a little the longing for him in my heart: it was so strong, as an angry hungry bear just awakened from his den after winter, fell on my shoulders.

I couldn't resist it and got out a small picture of Ri Rang - to look at him. He looked at me with that pensive and a little mysterious smile of his that now made my heart ache. Then I took out photos of my children: my future revolutionaries, and Lisa, our Peoples' Friendship.

⁵⁰² Description of millionaire Mister Twister in the satiric poem of the same name by Samuil Marshak (1930s)

⁵⁰³ 1976 Jamaican comedy film, with somewhat acidic view of the tourism business. "A very funny comedy" was a description of a very un-funny play written by a villain Karabas Barabas in "Adventures of Buratino", Alexei Tolstoy's popular children book.

⁵⁰⁴ Max Otto von Stierlitz is the lead character in a popular [Russian](#) book series written in the 1960s by novelist [Yulian Semyonov](#) and of the [television adaptation Seventeen Moments of Spring](#). Stierlitz has become a stereotypical spy in Soviet and post-Soviet culture, similar to [James Bond](#) in Western culture.

Yes, I'm not supposed to have them with me. But I needed them like a flask of living water⁵⁰⁵ is needed by a *bogatyr*⁵⁰⁶, returning to the heat of battle.

⁵⁰⁵ In Russian fairy tales *living water* heals wounds and brings dead people back to life

⁵⁰⁶ The bogatyr is a stock character in medieval Slavic legends ([byliny](#)), akin to a Western European [knight-errant](#). It is a strong man, defender of his Motherland.

Chapter 27. Zeena.

«Too ra loo ra loo ra loo, they're looking for monkeys up in the zoo

If I had a face like you, I would join the British army.»

(«Join The British Army», Irish folk song)

...I was sitting under a palm tree reading a small green book. It was called "For the victory of the socialist cause" which had been written by comrade Kim Jong Il. Ri Rang passed it on to me through my mother as a gift. My mother discouraged me to take it with me to Curaçao, because of my mission: "What if someone sees you with this book? You best read it here and then leave it with me»/.But I could not leave it behind: after having opened this little book and having read a few pages....

Previously, to my shame, I have never read his works properly. I read in somebody else's retelling, read books written about him, but I did not read what has been written by himself. Comrade Kim Jong Il's writing was crisp, clear, accessible - and the most important, it was not the same as in the speeches of our late Leonid Brezhnev, which were like "transfusion of wind in a net", but precise and very specific. Most surprisingly, his works were prophetic. At a time when we still reveled in the Soviet Union under the sounds of "Aluminum cucumbers⁵⁰⁷" and "freedom not to rush to the barricades", Comrade Kim Jong Il already saw quite clearly where this "freedom" will lead us in the end, and has openly said about it, without any embellishment.

*..".The flag of socialism is being pulled down gradually in the Soviet Union. Owing to the machinations of the modern revisionists who availing themselves of the the US imperialists anti-socialist strategy, the day is apparently not far off when the Soviet Union will break up and end its existence."*⁵⁰⁸

It was written at a time when Gorby was probably still in full working on a "new Union Treaty⁵⁰⁹." Long before the State Committee on the State of Emergency⁵¹⁰ and even before the Referendum⁵¹¹ on the issue of preservation of our country (and who actually put its existence into question in the first place, as not the government itself? I personally have not met anybody who questioned the existence of USSR around me at that time!). This Referendum was attended by 79.5% of voters, and 76.43% of them preferred to keep the USSR!

Comrade Kim Jong Il wrote those words as far back as in January 1990. After finding this out, I felt the greatest respect for the him and could not break myself away from this book. And the more I read it, the greater was my surprise and the deeper became my respect for him, I felt.

" Modern social democracy is based on a bourgeois viewpoint and attitude towards social phenomena. It advocates unlimited freedom in social life and unbridled competition through the market, which means the laws of the biological world such as spontaneity. It is in essence a reactionary viewpoint and attitude aimed at making the law of the jungle, the law of bourgeois society function without restraint.

⁵⁰⁷ 1980s popular Soviet hit by Victor Tsoi and "Kino" band

⁵⁰⁸ Kim Jong Il «For the Victory of the Socialist cause», Pyongyang, 1999, p.1

⁵⁰⁹ Refers to Gorbachev's plans to "renew" the Soviet Union in 1991

⁵¹⁰ State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKCHP in Russian) was a group of eight high-level officials within the Soviet government, the [Communist party](#) and the [KGB](#) who attempted a [coup](#) against [Mikhail Gorbachev](#) in order to safeguard socialism on 18-20st of August 1991

⁵¹¹ A referendum on the future of the [Soviet Union](#) was held on 17 March 1991. Turnout was 80% across the USSR. The referendum was approved by at least 70% of voters in all nine republics that took part.

Modern social democracy reveals its reactionary nature in concentrated way in its viewpoint and attitude to man.

It regards man as an instrument necessary for material production. Material production is needed for man, man does not exist for the sake of material production. A developed machine, if it does not serve man, is nothing but a worthless scrap of iron. Nevertheless some people do not hesitate to trample upon the basic rights of man for material production, It is explained by the fact they advocate the use of unemployment as a means of pressure to increase labour intensity. The right to labour is the basic right of man. The "socialism" that deprives the working masses even of their labour right cannot become a humanitarian and democratic socialism. To violate without mercy the working masses' right to labour is a phenomenon inherent in an exploiting society. Capitalists regard man as a commodity and an accessory of the machine. For them the working masses become meaningful when they bring about a profit. Modern social democracy and the bourgeois viewpoint both eliminate man's value by means of money and material ⁵¹²

Now all these things seem clear to me. Now I have understood them through my own personal life experience. But back then... Why this article wasn't published back then in my country? Aye, but it's very clear why. And it's clear that back then, even if it was published, it would have been announced just as "article of Korean ally of Nina Andreyeva⁵¹³"... We were so blind, so deaf :like a grouse during the mating, whom, as you know, the hunters like to shoot at that particular time because it's so easy...

I read this book in one breath. I have never read any theoretical work with such ecstasy, and I'll tell you why. That is because this time the speech was not about something understandable for me, but yet abstract. It was about something that I have experienced on my own skin and flesh, with my own heart and soul.

Most of all I wanted to know how do Koreans manage to overcome something on what we have stumbled, falling flat on our faces. And of course, He gave the answer to this question - and it was a very comprehensive answer, I must say...

- What are you reading with such pleasure? – interrupted my thoughts Oisín. He had decided to go to the beach only because the sun was about to disappear over the horizon. He was still deathly afraid of sunburn. Now he's a new skin - and thanks to his hiding from the sun, this new skin was such as pale as before...

We were sitting on the sand at the beach Kleine Knip. It was my most favourite beach, because the tourists didn't go here. This was the favourite place of vacation for locals; no one here hanged their ugly breasts in the wind hoping that they might attract at least someone. Antilleans - *hendenan nechi. Laga tur porkeria na Hulanda, por favor.*⁵¹⁴

Kleine Knip was very cosy. I felt almost as if I was at home near the oven with Grandma..It was warm and I wanted to curl into a ball and to purr...

⁵¹² Kim Jong Il «For the Victory of the Socialist cause», Pyongyang, 1999, pages 28,30

⁵¹³ Nina Andreyeva (b.1938) is a Russian chemist, teacher, author, political activist, and social critic. A supporter of classical Soviet principles, she wrote an essay that defended many aspects of the traditional Soviet system ("I cannot forsake my principles"), and criticized General Secretary [Mikhail Gorbachev](#) and his closest supporters for not being real communists. She was portrayed as an outdated reactionary in Gorbachev's time, but since then most people have realized that she was right.

⁵¹⁴ Leave all your swinery in Holland, please (Papiamento)

It's difficult to imagine that nowadays some overseas thugs practice here from time to time, with guns in their hands taking these peaceful beautiful beaches by a storm⁵¹⁵... They drop onto these beaches from the sea with armored cars, flamethrowers and with their camouflage painted faces. Sometimes I felt among them as Valya Dovger⁵¹⁶ in the occupied Ukraine.

- If you want, you can read it, - I said to Oisín, being almost confident that for him it would be "too hard to read" He took the book and started reading: slowly, running with his fingers over the lines. I saw how his lips moved. Capitalism makes people poor people almost disabled. They can't even read properly.

Difficult or not, but Oisín did not give up and continued reading. I closed my eyes and began to think: about the USSR and those who have ruined it. I thought I heard my mother's soft voice:

"In the central part of European Russia, merchants have never been respected. People who were involved in sales, were usually the ones who didn't want and often just couldn't do real, productive work, because of their mental or physical underdevelopment. Of course, working people scorned them. One of the heroines of the Gorky's play "*Children of the Sun*" says: "I've never seen *real people* in my life, I lived just among the *merchants*." Since trade is the type of activity that does not require high skills or specific deep knowledge, in the USSR this labor was paid like unskilled labor, the labor of unskilled laborers. The salary of the Director of the department store was approximately equal to the salary of the head of a sub-department in the factory.

I think I will not discover America if I say that the sphere of trade is connected with all sorts of abuses, as men said in the Soviet times, or simply speaking, with theft: those people stole and continue stealing from the buyers, from the state, from each other... You might hear that in the West sales people do not cheat or steal (by the way, in your Northern Ireland people tried to shortchange me many times: they do not know that we are able to multiply in our heads!), but the huge margin on top the price from the manufacturer – sometimes it's twice as much or more! - it is an ordinary, real theft!... I don't mean the transport costs and the storage costs, but I am talking about the enormous profits that these people put in their own pockets, while creating nothing...

"And it is really insolence!" - I thought. - "To take for the results of the others' labor more than those people who have created this products!."

And my mother's voice, it seemed to me, continued:

- Before the war the inhabitants of one of the streets of our Districts asked their neighbour, store manager, "Ivan Ivanovich! How come that you have been trading for so long and you have never been in prison?" - "Because I have never taken for myself *more than one bag!*" - was his answer.

In Soviet times stealing this way, especially in the prewar and postwar years, but even until the 1980s, was difficult because of different kinds of control: party control, the People's Control⁵¹⁷, Department

⁵¹⁵ Refers to NATO military exercises in Curacao Joint Caribbean Lion in 2006

⁵¹⁶ Valentina Dovger - Soviet partisan, undercover resistance fighter (1924-1990), comrade-in-arms of the legendary Soviet partisan Nikolai Kuznetsov (see previous notes)

⁵¹⁷ The People's Control was a semi-civic, semi-governmental organisation in the [Soviet Union](#) with the purpose of putting under scrutiny the activities of government, local administrations and enterprises. The 1979 [USSR](#) Law on People's Control established committees of people's control in each [Soviet republic](#) under the supervision of the central Committee of People's Control. These committees had the authority to audit government and economic administration records. Officials found guilty of illegalities could be publicly reprimanded, fined for damages, or referred to the procurator for prosecution. More than 10 million citizens participated in their work, and 95% of them were volunteers.

Against Misappropriation of Socialist Property 518, Komsomol Spotlight⁵¹⁹, etc. Sales people were afraid of OBKhSS⁵²⁰ very much. Yes, there was some corruption, in the organs of control (more so in the 1970s-1980s), but every family, as they say, has its black sheep...

The hero of the Soviet movie "Clear Sky", a brave pilot who was wounded in battles and after becoming disabled was directed to work in sales, when he heard of this, was almost ready to kill everyone around him. "*Is that what I shed my blood for? To weight herring here?*"

But today, this is called "a prestigious job with an opportunity for career growth."

Apart from pre-school children who enjoy playing "the shop", the Soviet youth wasn't interested in the work in sales. By 8th grade at school for some pupils it became unbearable to study- to those who were not able, because of their mental capacity, to get higher mark than "3"⁵²¹. These students had the same kind of friends: good students were bored with them, and even the bad students who received "3" only because of their own laziness were not interested in them, either. After completing with some difficulty eight-years of secondary school, these students entered culinary and sales vocational schools, and after just a year or so they became the workers of sales or catering... Do you remember Khazanov⁵²²'s interludes famous hero – student of a culinary college?

And this sort of "wizard dropouts⁵²³" decided to create artificial shortage of goods in our country - on the one hand, the sale of goods "from the back door" with the margin pocketed by these salesmen gave them illicit profits - for example , products from state shops were sold through back door to the markets, where there were illegally re-sold for high prices (mostly it was fruits and vegetables), on the other hand, it allowed them to raise the prestige of traders in the eyes of their more intelligent, more able former classmates, neighbours, etc.: professors, researchers, teachers, actors, directors, and others went to them "for a favour": a bottle of champagne, a sheepskin coat, a pair of imported shoes and the like, and all of this with overpayment. Plus, it became possible for the sales people with the help of this to get for their own children a place in the university or a good job (as a rule, sales people themselves categorically did not want their children to follow their footsteps, their golden dream was to see their offspring as doctors - and therefore it became in 1980s already almost impossible for a normal school graduate whose parents weren't in sales, to actually get to study in a medical school).

Contempt and disgust to the hucksters has been, is and will be felt among our people! Especially in cities such as ours: a city of skilled craftsmen, who were long before others (for 200 years) freed from serfdom and have worked for the state: as a "state-owned workers." Since then serving to our is the biggest honour for us. And that is why for citizens of our city to accept this "working for yourself"- so joyful for those children of serfs - is very difficult, especially since this "self-employment" is mainly in sales and trade, an occupation inwardly unacceptable for a developed person. Different attitude to hucksters is there in countryside, where they cause the envy of the local population, which borders with respect, desire to imitate, to send their children to work "in the city, in a shop..."

⁵¹⁸ Department Against Misappropriation of Socialist Property, The OBKhSS (1937-1992) was the [Soviet](#) anti-corruption squad, responsible for the regulation of [economic](#) laws, fight against theft of socialist property in the organizations and institutions of state commerce, consumer, industrial and individual co-operatives, savings banks and procurement agencies, as well as for fighting against speculation.

⁵¹⁹ "Komsomol Spotlight" - name of the movement, organized by the Young Communist League in 1962, mass form of participation of the Soviet youth in public control.

⁵²⁰ See reference above

⁵²¹ "C"

⁵²² Gennady Khazanov (b.1945) is an acclaimed Soviet and [Russian stand-up comedian](#). Ignorant *culinary college student* was his first character that made him famous.

⁵²³ "Wizard Dropout" - popular comic song of Alla Pugacheva (b. 1949) in the mid-1970s.

Abuses in the trade are very dangerous to the socialist state. This was realized by the leaders of the USSR on the eve of World War II, when the law violators were severely punished for undermining the state's economy, and not surprisingly, they are one of the main groups in the list of "victims of repression" in those years: many shop directors, storage place bosses, and other such likes. The USSR had gone through two coup through creating an artificial shortage in the shops that has caused dissatisfaction of the people: dismissal of Khrushchev in 1964, and much more catastrophic Gorbachev time's discontent that has led to the change of constitutional order and to the end of the existence of the great state - the USSR...

In modern Russia, the worst thing is the appetites of our shop owners. If they and their loved ones in the near future will not be forced to undergo a stomach reducing surgery, they, as the Clay Guy⁵²⁴ from a fairy tale, they will devour everything around with their price increases every 2-3 months - by one and a half to two times at once! Of course, a trip to the European football championship in the summer wasn't cheap, I can imagine: guys had fun, have enjoyed themselves full-scale. The result is a price increase all over the place, that is, we all, apparently, have to compensate them for their expenses on these trips, and so much that they then would be able to have another relaxing trip, somewhere to Turkey-Greece. They were so tired after that championship, poor things...

Intelligent people today say openly: today sales people are a threat to mankind and civilization in the world!... “

I remembered her words and thought that a true Soviet man is genetically alien to the desire of "making money." He is not a "slacker", not "slave of the system" as is claimed by those who see as a proof of intelligence their special diligence to rob others in order to enrich themselves at their expense: it is just that, unlike them, he really knows how and loves to work, and it makes him really happy to do good things for others. This is his meaning of life, not "making money." And that is why they are completely unable to understand the Soviet man, because his way of thinking is on a much higher level than their animal-like perception of life. Their perception of the Soviet people is like when a dung beetle is trying to understand why do birds need to fly, if there is enough manure on the ground.

For me, a society that allows at least one of its members to be homeless, to look for food through digging in the garbage, or to make a living by selling his own body and humiliating himself, even if this traumatized person says that he "likes" doing this, a society where old lonely people are slowly dying and then lie for months undiscovered in their own apartments, where nobody cares about you, if you become ill on the street,- for me, such a society elementary has not the slightest right to be called "civilized." No matter how much there raked in bonuses the executives and no matter what cool helicopters they have. What's more, it only further emphasizes the enormity of primitiveness of such social order. After all, we are humans precisely because, unlike animals, we are able to care for each other, not only about our own "cubs", and not only until they grow, based on some instinct. For me, the true level of civilization of a society is measured by this. By people who care about each other. By the State that cares about the people - what else do we need it for, if not for this? And based on this criterion, DPRK and Cuba today are the most civilized countries in the world!

By the way, do they know, those left "sissies" who have never visited the DPRK, those screamers wearing T-shirts with Che who evaluate the achievement of Cuban revolution only by the fact if the locals are allowed or not allowed "to the hotels for foreigners", that when Che Guevara visited Pyongyang around in 1960, he has told the press that the DPRK is "the model to which revolutionary Cuba should aspire"? Have they ever even thought about why their idol was of such opinion?..

⁵²⁴ See previous notes

But these “sissies” do not really know anything about life in Korea - except what is being pumped into their brains by the corporate media. In the same way as people in the West do not know anything about what it was actually like, living in the USSR. Why even go as far as the West, for examples! Comprehensive brain washing a la the "free world" has got hold of our own children, in our own country. Here's for you a compilation of what today's Russian children “know” and think about the Soviet Union - those children who were born after its collapse. Read it, my dear Soviet compatriots and admit, do you recognize in these descriptions our country at all? Tell me frankly. I personally do not. I recognize in them only a picture drawn by American Hollywood Cold War thrillers. And the yellow press production by various "Centers of Soviet studies."

..". Once there was a country of the USSR. It was formed when Lenin came to the country. The people said to the Tsar that he should stop ruling, and then Lenin came to power." (Yulia Sokolova)

..". People just worked, worked, worked.... And they didn't even think about themselves. The people didn't care at all what they eat, where they sleep, how they spent their rest time. When there was Soviet Union, people did not pay attention to the clothes. They did not dress. Men were dressed in galoshes, a jacket, a light hat and gloves when working. Women wore a jacket, gloves, a scarf on the head (the head was not visible) and also galoshes. This was the most convenient way to dress for work." (Vadim Khudyakov)

"The Soviet Union had a red flag, so red was really in fashion. The red colour represented blood that should be shed when you work a lot. Children were wearing red ties, women were dressed for holidays always in a red dress, cars were made also of red color, and the houses had red wallpaper." (Name crossed out)

"All men were dressed identically. There was uniform. At that time children wore uniforms: girls wore dark brown skirts, blouses and red ties, and boys - dark trousers, white shirts and red ties, too." (Name crossed out)

"The most happy were those who lived in the villages. They had their own farm, and they were always able to kill and eat their own pigs. In cities, people were always hungry..."(The name is not specified.)

"Food in the USSR was not very good. For sausages there was 20-kilometer line. A sausage from the factory was sometimes even green. People did not have TV sets." (Daria Rakova)

«Lenin, who lies in the Mausoleum now, ruled the USSR. In those times people worked at plants and factories. They made bombs, tanks, cars, but not food. That's why there was not lots of food. To buy something people used coupons, instead of money because people had no money». (Julia Ostroushko)

«People in the USSR always worked and they refused to have a rest. They came from work and went to bed, because they were tired from too much work. People didn't see dreams when they slept». (Julia Ostroushko)

«In their free time people went to the Mausoleum. People met there, they drank tea, exchanged news, had a fun. In the Mausoleum lies dead Lenin. The Soviet people really liked to look at him». (Sveta Kamynina)

«It was said to the Soviet children since early years that they should study and work, and that it is not necessary to play at all. And children didn't play, but only studied and worked. Also all children put on identical clothes... Though, I think, that was good...The kids in the USSR were very oppressed». (Julia Ostroushko)

«I sympathize with Soviet children. They had no computers and toys. Adults always told to them that they must work very much. And when it was necessary to have a rest, adults told to them go to walk. Children always walked down the streets. It was the unique entertainment for children». (Alexandra Mishakhina)

«People did everything outside: read outside, walked... At home, when they didn't work, they had nothing to do. And that's why they always walked. There were parks for people, people were happy». (The name is crossed out)

«Birthdays were celebrated modestly, New year wasn't specially celebrated either... The most important holiday was the Labor Day... And now there is no anywhere such holiday - the Labor Day». (Julia Sokolova)

« Most of all people in the world lived in the USSR (three quarters of a world's population)... And all these people always worked. The USSR was the richest country though people starved here. Naturally, other countries envied the USSR...» (V. Skosyreva)

«The USSR won the war because in this country there were more hardworking people. Germans were idlers - and that's why they've lost». (The name isn't specified)

«War began on the 1st of September in 1941, Napoleon was leading the fascists, and Russian won because fascists went on wrong road, they went on the old Smolensk road and they lost their way, and also there was a new Smolensk road on which all went...»

«Simple people lived in cold apartments because all heat was taken away by officials. People got scanty payment, but they were honest... I do not know even why... nobody in the world understood the Soviet people. And nobody understands them now». (Margarita Edemskaya)

«My grandfather had many medals... he had the whole box of awards! At that time children were dressed very badly and could hardly get any money to live. And even in such situation people wanted to help each other. And then everything had changed, and the USSR stopped to exist. People don't want to work and help each other now. And those who still live, they feel sad. My grandmother now lives in Krasnodar, as my grandfather. They always remember about the USSR and they are always lonely. The grandfather takes performance on May First and when he came to Moscow in the summer, he went with me to the Mausoleum. I am proud of it». (Igor Melnichenko)⁵²⁵

Of course it's pleasant that Igor is proud of the grandfather. Perhaps the grandfather will tell him the truth, if parents of these children can't do it. After all, I have also learned about what was life like under the Tsar, from my grand parents, instead of from dribbling saliva church services for the resting of peace of «sacred Nikolay» or from soap series about Kolchak⁵²⁶. And for this reason I don't have any illusions about that life.

Most of all I “liked” the thesis that in the USSR people even « didn't see dreams» - was it, perhaps, because it was forbidden by the CPSU? Girl, darling, do you know, that people don't see dreams when

⁵²⁵ Real quotes from contemporary Russian newspapers

⁵²⁶ The last Russian Tsar, Nicholas II, who during his lifetime had a nickname “Bloody Nicholas”, was recently declared saint by the Russian church; Admiral Alexander Kolchak (1874-1920) was a [Russian naval](#) commander, [polar explorer](#) and later - the Supreme ruler of the [counter-revolutionary anti-communist White forces](#) during the [Russian Civil War](#). He was working closely with the British interventionist forces during that war; in the occupied by his troops territories he acknowledged all of Tsarist Russia's foreign debts, returned factories and plants to their owners, granted concessions to foreign investors, dispersed trade unions, persecuted Marxists, and disbanded the soviets. His troops committed murders, tortures and executions. Today in the capitalist Russia he is being portrayed as a hero.

they sleep easily and strong, when they are really content and happy? How much I would give for them not to torment me now, those dreams!

However, some children came to right conclusions with their own minds. Or their parents had more time to educate them properly.

«... There, in the USSR, people were very civilized. They had good jobs (interesting). They weren't using insulting words. They helped each other, they didn't take things away, they weren't greedy. We differ from them. They differed from all people on a planet...» (Darya Susanina)

«People say that the USSR collapsed and doesn't exist any more. But I do not completely trust it. Perhaps this country still exists? People there work, celebrate the 1st of May every year...» (Sveta Kamynina)

Truth comes from the mouth of babies!

... It started to get dark, but Oisín still tried to figure out the lines of the book in the darkness. I was surprised by his persistence.

- If it is really interesting for you, you can borrow it, - I said to him, - Only don't break your eyes, you can read it at home.

- You talk to me all the time talk in such motherly tone! - Oisín took offense, but he still took the book.

- Well, I'm sorry... It's because I really care about you. I didn't know that it is unpleasant for you, - I said. - And I don't mean anything that I shouldn't have meant. I already simply got used to you now. Do you understand?

He kept silent, but I read on his face that it was not what he wanted like to hear. Then what did he want do hear, damn it?

- Let's go to swim a bit more if you want. The sun is finally gone,, - I offered.

Oisín jumped up from sand, turned away and only after that squeezed out of himself:

- I don't want to. It's better to go home.

Did the book work on him so depressingly? I don't think it possibly could have.

- There are very good ideas in that book on how we should build socialist life. And about why it is inevitable, - I prompted to him. - You probably just didn't reach that page yet...

He looked at me as if I fell down from the Moon. And he heaved a deep sigh. Now I really couldn't understand absolutely anything. After all, it was him who has asked me for the book... It's probably because he is reading it and compares it with the Irish reality.

- Thanks, - said Oisín at last resolutely, - I will definitely read it all.

And we both went to our off-roader.

...Once upon a time there was a girl called Rasa. In the Soviet, back then "occupied", Lithuania⁵²⁷. A horrible accident happened to her in the summer of 1983: her father worked as a tractor driver in the

⁵²⁷ Mocking of Lithuanian claims that Lithuanians were "repressed" under the Soviet rule; this story of Rasa Prascavičiute from 1983 shows very well what life in Soviet Lithuania was really like.

field and accidentally cut off her both feet with a lawn mower. Rasa was 3 years old. Here's how they describe it today even now fairly anti-Soviet newspaper: *"It was almost night time outside. In the village there was no phone. The only thing left was to die. From blood loss and shock." "Mommy" ... People, help! ... 12 hours later daughter of tractor driver from the collective farm "Vadaktay" laid on the cold operating table in the Soviet capital. For the Tu-134 specially dispatched to Lithuania on Friday night after the alarm was raised, they cleared the air corridor all the way to Moscow. Air traffic controllers knew: there is just 1 little passenger in the empty cabin. That was first link of this, "relay of goodness," as Lithuanian newspapers have written, and after them all the rest. Her feet, surrounded by frozen fish, were flying on a passenger seat. Moscow dawn beside the windows, at the airport ambulance is already waiting... And in the emergency room at the Children's Hospital a young surgeon by the name of Datiashvili: he was called up from home, from his sleep: he's waiting for that emergency flight from Lithuania."* The Soviet doctors managed to save Rasa's legs (naturally, all of this was totally free of charge, including the flight!), and today she can walk by herself. Only now she walks in the European Union: like many thousands of Lithuanians after "independence" Rasa was forced to emigrate in search for work...

I was still a schoolgirl when it happened, but I do remember how genuinely worried was the whole country for the little Rasa. Rasa's legs were sewn back together in Moscow, the doctor doing surgery, was a Georgian. But nobody was even thinking about her or his ethnic origin. Or that she had "alcoholic parents", simple farmers. Incidentally, this would be the first thing that would have been pointed out now: men would say that the parents were to blame, and that "those drunkards should have been castrated." And then - that is, if the girl would have been very lucky! - maybe some brisk PR-promoted journalist would have had "mercy" on her, and would be willing to write about this case in a newspaper, begging "new Russian" fat cats who have robbed our country and our people, for tens of thousands of euros needed for girl's prosthetics in some Germany...

There also once lived another girl, called Lisa. She was almost as old as our Rasa: she was 4 years old when it happened. Only it was at quite a different time and in a different world. She lived in the most "free" possible country - the Netherlands. When the disaster struck, and she got sick, the first thing local doctor asked was, "Who will pay for my home visit?" ... She was lying in front of him half-dead, and he was figuring out when he will get his hundred guilders. The price of a whole broken human life...

And he does not even feel any remorse: why should he? Because for those "free persons" theoretical right to call their Queen "stupid cow", of course, is much more important than any practical right to free health care. (Although in this case no one even asked to treat Lisa for free: he was just told that he would see the insurance papers a bit later). After all, true democracy and human rights consist of this right to blabber in grind language, don't they?

Modern Russian children do not know about the case of Rasa. Like comedian Rowan Atkinson's character, Johnny English, "they know nothing.⁵²⁸" But they are confident that they already know everything necessary about life: because they know all about Spider-Man, Uncle Scrooge and Mickey Mouse...

Tyrunesh got the taste for it: now U.S. "warriors" were not only collected rubbish on the island and repairing schools, but were also donating power generators and other equipment to hospitals and even held vision test sessions: for "about hundred Antillean s who do not have access to this type of service

⁵²⁸ "He knows no fear. He knows no danger. He knows nothing." - tagline of the British comedy film "Johnny English" (2003)

": a pathetic parody of the Cuban operation Miracle that has provided free eye surgeries for nearly half a million poor people from 26 Caribbean and Latin American countries.

- OK, they will check those hundred Antillean s's vision, and then what? - I wondered. - Who is going to offer them the actual treatment?

- You do not understand, Saskia: this is called "PR!" What this got to do with any treatment?

I felt sorry for poor Antillean s who do not know that it is just a PR and really hope that they will BE helped by the Yankees.

- And here is when members of our Bolivarian Circle will come into action, - calmed me down Tyrunesh - Do you think we'll just leave it like that? After this, our people will meet these Antillean s, will listen to their complaints that US Army has left their to their fate while promising help. And we'll inform them about the Cuban operation "Miracle", that in Cuba they'll be able to treat them for free. And then we'll see what they'll really think of those US military Aesculapiuses! In the meantime, let the Americans think that our action is good for them...

By then Curaçao was already regularly visited by U.S. warships - in the frame of so-called mission "*Continuing Promise*" (what louts, as if someone asked them to promise anything to anyone!). And she instantly harnessed those rascals, whose numbers sometimes passed a thousand, into such actions, after which they often lacked the strength to even crawl to Campo Alegre⁵²⁹...

By the way, on Curaçao I once more had the opportunity to see for myself what evil are those modern missionaries of imperialism: the NGOs. They took active part in the organization of such visits and were almost licking Americans' heels, since most of these "independent" organizations existed on American grants...

I listened to Tyrunesh, inwardly admired her sharp wit and insight, but also more and more felt myself a really worthless scout compared to her. She's well able to do all this without my help, let alone me coming up with something...

- Do not worry, Saskia, your time will come! - She said to me when I shared with her these thoughts, - Do you think we would have invited you, if we thought that we do not need you?

- Listen, - I said to her one day, when I became more up to date with work we were engaged in - How come, the Dutch have long been carrying out such actions, their Marines were repairing schools here and God knows what else, but this O'Leary responded to our offer as if we have really just discovered America... Maybe there is some catch?

- Absolutely no catch! - Tyrunesh smiled, - They just do not want to ask the Dutch for help, they do not want to show that they want the Dutch expertise: they do not want to admit that *«it's a big taste for such a small country!»*⁵³⁰. So, to hire locals- like us, who are not only madly glad that we got hold of this contract, but also can help Americans to choose appropriate and best places and to advise the best time for carrying out of such actions, we know what would be most popular among the people, and so on. When you'll get to know the local Dutch military closer, you will see for yourself and will be amazed: even though they are getting lectures on the Antillean culture nowadays when they are sent in reality, it is and it remains a closed little world of its own, and they come in contact with Antilleans almost exclusively when those work as indentured servants. But you really will see this all soon yourself: the Dutch officers' wives are going to organize a charity sale and they invite us to discuss its

⁵²⁹ See previous notes; "red light district" on Curacao

⁵³⁰ Slogan of the 1990s Dutch commercial of the lemonade Herschi

PR. Since I now already have a pretty good idea about you, I can recommend you one thing: take with you a paper bag. In case of an attack of nausea...

-And what about Colonel Weterholt? If they don't need Dutch experience, then why is he all the time with them?

- Well, try to understand the Dutch too... Someone should observe these Americans at least a bit. They always seem to forget that it is the Dutch territory! - and Tyrunesh laughed contagiously.

I and Tyrunesh became really good friends. Before I met her, Ethiopians seemed to me to be rather emotionally cold people who hold peoples of other nationalities at a certain distance. Nikita Arnoldovich, I remember, even compared Ethiopians with the Japanese, considering them both formalists, with whom it is also impossible to understand what they really think. But this friendship with Tyrunesh has radically changed my opinion about them, although after Said, Tadesse and other co-students from the past, I was pretty sure that I had already known these people well. Tyrunesh was passionate, fiery, uncompromising woman; and at the same time vulnerable, sensitive, taking a lot of things to heart. But she didn't show this her side to everyone. Because, as it befits Ethiopian, she was very proud.

Eventually, I told her about Said. To my big surprise, she knew him: not him personally, of course, but only his name. According to her, my first and so unfortunate love has "made it" in life and become a high places civil servant in the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture. Well, *wise gudgeon*⁵³¹ and a pedant like him has always been able to sit out in during the troubled time, without expressing his views and opinions... This was also eased by the fact that he never really had an opinion or thoughts of his own. Except for 'Mum, what's for dinner today?..'. The main thing for him was

"not to have to decide anything by yourself..."

- And Tadesse? - I exclaimed,- What about Tadesse Gyрма Veldeis? A small guy, with a scar? He was such an activist, we always said to each other: well, this one will go far! If Said is a big boss now, then Tadesse must be at least a minister. Surely, he "moved on" with the times, and... He has promised to send me a postcard every year for the Revolution Day, the 7th of November. But he never once sent it to me in all these years and... Maybe, for him it's not a special day now.

Tyrunesh's face suddenly darkened, as if the sun went behind clouds.

- Well, your Tadesse is no more, - she said quietly, - He didn't and couldn't "to move on." He was executed by the new authorities after Colonel Mengistu was overthrown... That is why he didn't send you any card.

Oh... And we at one the time didn't trust him, considering him a careerist who was purposely talking only in slogans... We have misjudged him so badly! Probably that's why we also fell for Yeltsin's bait.

If I had a hat on my head, I would have immediately took it off. But there was no hat, and that's why I just said:

- I didn't know... Oh, what a pity!

- And not only him... - Said thoughtfully Tyrunesh - They still scream in the West about the "Red Terror" in Ethiopia, but when it comes to democratic terror... Let's not talk about sad things!

And she tossed her long silky black hair that made her look like a woman from India: as if she was trying to banish the evil shadows.

⁵³¹ See previous notes in chapter 26

- Let's we better do everything we can for this not to happen in Venezuela...

Oisin's successes were even more modest than mine: he sold his furniture successfully enough, fascinated Dutch military wives, some of whom became his regular customers, with his snow-white smile and reticence (that was because he was afraid that his strong Northern Irish accent would betray him). And he gave me advice only about the conspiracy (??) on the eves of my meetings with Saoirse.. His modest role satisfied him:even though he's told me that he is a man without ambitions

...

Saoirse - that's who worked as a true professional! Every time we met at a new place and on each regular meeting we talked about the new place for the next time.

Every time she thought up something new and looked differently. Once every two months she brought me fresh letters from my mother, a bit more rarely - notes from Ri Rang. She passed on orally what information was required from us, she took away or remembered, depended on their nature, my reports and then passed them on to those they were intended to, -on Margarita or the other Antilles.

Saoirse was our permanent contact, but I haven't met yet the man who was supposed to be used for emergency communications. I knew only that his name was Comrade Orlando comrade and that he was Colombian. And also that he studied in the Soviet Union: as you can see, my good friend Habiba was mistaken, that in order to become a revolutionary, you would definitely need to study in the West... It was he who gave once to read a book about the Dzerzhinsky to our Tyrunesh, what directed her on the right path. Now he wasn't on Curaçao, but according to Tyrunesh, he was due to return soon, and then she would certainly introduce us to each other.

Today I finally managed to persuade Oisin to go with me to the dances- I mean, to the meeting of the Bolivarian Circle. He resisted all the way:

- I won't dance!

- You don't have to. No one is forcing you. Just sit on a chair and look how I'll be dancing. But you should finally meet the comrades!

And it was settled then.

I was lucky: the evening started with merengue. In the first round I was invited by Sergeant Marchena: by now I already knew that he was not a customs officer or a police officer, but employed by the Coast Guard of the Netherlands Antilles. Sergeant Marchena smiled wryly, evidently expecting that I'll step on his foot again. But no such luck. Merengue is my favourite dance

«*El baile del perrito*⁵³²» - screamed the speakers. For the best effect, Carmela has turned on something like disco lights. The sergeant began to respect me by the middle of our first round. He was an excellent dancer himself, but among Antilleans it's hard to surprise anybody by that. I looked over his shoulder to see what Oisin was doing. He was looking at me with obvious surprise. It seems, he never expected that I was capable of such things. Oh, Oisin... How little you still know me.

Then two charming young Antillean ladies jumped to him excitedly and began to invite him for the next dance: there were no formalities with regards to this at Carmela's school. Oisin protested and fought them off in every possible way; luckily for him, our round soon came to an end.

⁵³² Popular merengue song by Wilfrido Vargas (b. 1949), popular singer from the Dominican Republic

- And now let's dance cumbia⁵³³, for a change, - Carmela suggested. And she showed us how to perform this traditional dance from her native country.

I didn't dance cumbia for many years. But once Peruvian Pedro taught me how to do it, and what was shown by Carmela, confirmed my memories of those lessons.

For some reason cumbia reminds me of how Bobby⁵³⁴ dances. Probably because most of the dance partners revolve round and round and just as intently as he does, come into contact with each other only with their hands. I wonder whether Bobby has Colombian relatives?

- I will pass this one! - Sergeant Marchena said me - It's not my style. Too far distance from the partner,- and he winked to me mischievously.

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed that one Antillean *senorita* again went to Oisin: apparently, he aroused their interest as a new man, looking so unlike the majority of Carmela's pupils. Fear was written all over his face.

I felt sorry for him, but there was only one way to protect him from it.

- Maybe you would like to try it with me? - I joked, absolutely certain that he would not agree, but at least *senorita* would leave him alone after my offer.

But to my horror, Oisin agreed!

And now too it was my turn to be afraid: Sgt Marchena as an experienced dancer, more or less guided me through a dance and turned me to the right side. And what will I do now, when it's me who'll take up the role of experienced dancer?..

Music started playing: lyrical, full of melancholy "*Cumbia Campesina*⁵³⁵". It makes me feel... if it is possible to describe, as if my the heart is wrapping itself in a tube and then is unfolding: like a sheet of drawing paper. How many times have I heard this melody, when Fionntan was languishing in prison in Latin America, imagining himself listening to this tune somewhere near a campfire in the jungle, along with the partisans! And here am I: though not quite in Latin America, but among the same kind of people...

Memories of my comrade Fionntan inspired me to such an extent that I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and whirled around the room with such force that I nearly knocked down a the chair, from which Oisin just got up. I did not even look how he was dancing and whether he was dancing at all: so that I won't lose that feeling. I just pulled his hand when it was also his turn to whirl.

Music stopped just when I got fully tuned into it. Sergeant Marchena said seriously:

- I'm now sorry that I did not take this dance...

All *senoritas* looked at Oisin with admiration and attacked him with new energy... He was in despair, looked at me, not knowing what to do. And I felt sorry for him.

-Are you all right? - I said aloud, so that they have heard.- A bit dizzy? Go get some fresh air...

Oisinu did not make me to repeat it twice. Like a bullet, he flew out the door. And I was approached by Carmela.

⁵³³ Cumbia is a [Colombian music genre](#) and dance popular throughout Latin America.

⁵³⁴ Refers to Bobby Farrell of Boney M, see previous notes

⁵³⁵ Colombian popular tune, literally "Farmers Cumbia"

- Listen, - she said softly, - I want to tell you now, before the meeting. In the next two weeks, be careful. Your Sonny with his family comes to visit relatives. And *senor* Arturo, they say, is moving to Curaçao for good...

... To be honest, I was already tired to be shocked when life throws at me such surprises. I'm tired of fear. Tired to shy away and to live in a state of fear: some 10-odd years back, when I innerly prayed for many months in a row, saying to myself, "Lord, anything, but this!" - about yet new and new horror, and each time exactly what I feared most of all, was happening... This would have pulled soul out of anyone.

... When back then, more than 10 years ago, a Dutch doctor, intently studying my reaction, like if I was a laboratory frog, had told me that Lisa's got brain damage, and that she will remain disabled, I no longer screamed "No-no!" and did not shake in hysterics. Instead, my heart turned into stone, as if in a child's play "*The sea is worried once, the sea is agitated -twice, the sea is excited -three, naval figure, freeze!*"⁵³⁶ I could not cry. My hands and my feet felt as if they were wooden, stiff, and all I was doing from that moment on, was as on autopilot. On this autopilot, I phoned home and without any emotion in my voice told my mother about Lisa's diagnosis. Mum gasped and said she wanted to come to us immediately. As if it were that easy

Thank God, all this took over my practical, never losing her head Petra: I'm telling you, that only now discovered that I did have some wonderful friends in Holland, even though they were few. Petra made an urgent invitation for my mother to come to Holland, called the Dutch embassy in Moscow, and then met my mother at the airport, let her stay in her house and brought her for registration to the local office of *Vreemdelingendienst* ⁵³⁷ where she brought to tears a female police officer, telling her about what has happened to Lisa (yes, the Dutch also cry!). And I was immensely grateful to Petra for all of this..

My mother did not believe what has happened to Lisa: that is, until she saw it with her own eyes. To be more specific, "did not believe" is not the right word. She simply could not imagine it. Until she saw the face of Lisa who had become thin as a concentration camp inmate: face devoid of any expression, with a vacant look, devoid of that living spark showing her bright mind which has so disfigured her once beautiful face. Absence of any Lisa's response to our appeals brought my mother to tears, along with Lisa's animal grunt and her descended and moved forward jaw.

Lisa could not walk or even crawl. She was sitting in a wheelchair and rocked back and forth like a pendulum. Almost all of my day now - in the intervals between feeding and doctors inspections (though Lisa did not eat herself: she was fed saline solution through a nose tube, which she tried to pull out all the time)- consisted of wheeling her in this stroller along the endless corridors of the hospital. I wheeled her and sang her all our favourite Soviet songs. I did not hear my own voice myself.

The hospital was modern, beautiful, almost like small town in itself. There were cafes and shops - they just cannot do without them in a capitalist society, perhaps they have them even in a cemetery. And of course, in a prison, that's for sure. Sometimes, for variety, I used to take the elevator to bring Lisa to different floors, but her face did not change the expression. She did not respond to anything. The last words that I heard from her, was in Dutch: «*Het is koud*»⁵³⁸: when the wind blew through an open

⁵³⁶ Russian children's game

⁵³⁷ Emigration police (Dutch)

⁵³⁸ It's cold (Dutch)

window in one of the corridors we went through. I was very happy when I heard it: at least, she can feel! And she understands! Since then, I was always covering her legs with a blanket while we were walking, but she kept throwing the blanket down, because there was so much twitching in one of her legs. And she could not say anything any-more, she just completely moved to some inarticulate sounds...

In the neurology department (prior to this I had a very vague idea what neurology was), I saw so much human suffering, that after a while my heart just stopped to take in any the pain, as it happens when you are in shock. I remember well a girl who was about 12 years, who was crawling on all fours on the floor and screamed non-stop, and her exhausted parents. And I remember another girl - younger than Lisa, she probably just recently learnt how to walk. She was cheerful, and she cheerfully ran around the floor, greeting everybody; and I was terribly jealous of her parents: she can walk, she can speak, they should be so happy! I would have been so,so happy in their shoes! All what was perfectly normal and ordinary just yesterday, now seemed an almost unreal miracle - just like our free medical care, free education and absence of unemployment, since the Soviet Union was gone.

But the little girl's mother was constantly in tears. Every time when she looked at her daughter - so cheerful, so bright, so full of life, -she was hiding her face and weeped (sobbed?) silently. And the doctors were whispering something to her: probably that she shouldn't cry and shouldn't make the child upset. I have never found out what condition that little girl had suffered from.

Almost every day somebody from the refuge's personnel came to visit us: they had to do it, according their rules. In the Soviet Union sanitary epidemic control station⁵³⁹ would already long have closed down this institution: in search of the source of salmonella. But here it seemed that nobody really cared or considered it necessary to look for the source. Only back then I did not think about it: I had other things to think about. I mechanically answered their questions, telling them what we were told by a doctor (doctors who visited us, were different every day). One of the employees of the refuge: the animator who was working with the refuge's kids (I myself called him a PE teacher) one day broke down and cried,

- Zhenya, you're so calm when you tell us about all of this! If this would have happened to my daughter, I do not know what I would have done! Probably I would have cried day and night as a catechumen.

I looked at him in surprise, as if tears would help with anything? And I said:

- Would it make anybody feeling better if I'll cry? I try not to focus on my feelings, just to do what has to be done to make Lisa a little bit better.

But I knew that if I ever give way to tears and to my feelings, then it won't be long before I'd start drinking, jumping out of the window and God knows what I would do. And what would happen to Lisa? That's your explanation...

But at the refuge after this rumors began to creep about me, that I was almost an *Iron Feliks*⁵⁴⁰...

⁵³⁹ The characteristic feature of disease control in the USSR was a focus on prevention. The network development of epidemic control stations began immediately after the Civil War. A vast network of sanitary/ epidemic control stations throughout the country controlled very strictly health regulations and conditions in all the Soviet institutions. They had the powers to close down for disinfection any place with a source of public health hazard.

⁵⁴⁰ Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky (1877 – 1926) was a Soviet statesman and a prominent member of Polish and Russian revolutionary movements, founder of the Soviet state security organs. He is better known under his nickname as the Iron Felix. "Iron Felix" in this context means "somebody who is very strong, who never cries."

Very rarely, but sometimes thoughts of the future still came to my mind. I was aware that my more or less easy (at least compared to today) life was over forever. That Lisa will never go to university, will never become a singer, will not have a family, and I will not have grandchildren,... That I will not have another family, too: I have not experienced from self-pity thinking about it, I only found it necessary to look at things realistically. I very willingly would give it up: if only she just got better!

Worst of all for me was the fact that Lisa could not speak. I was hoping that maybe this is not only temporary, and not so much due to brain damage as because of a stressful reaction to all that she had to endure that year. If Lisa would be even sitting in a wheelchair for the rest of her life, but could understand everything and could talk! I thought that physical disability is easier than the mental one. It is better not to be able to walk, than not being able to express yourself!

I remembered that when I was pregnant with Lisa, I often thought, "Well, now at least I will have someone to talk to!" - And this is exactly what we both were deprived of now... Anger was bubbling in me: if Sonny and I were bad parents in the sense that we were too busy with our own showdowns, as my mother thought, are we really the worst parents in the world, so that in order to punish us an innocent child had to suffer like this? When such truly shaped monsters and criminals are hanging around our planet with impunity, and no one punishes even themselves, never mind their children!

It was terrible to even imagine that Lisa must have been feeling if she could understand something, but could not in any way express what she wanted. I tried hard not to think about it, because I could not help her with anything here.

Once the refuge workers brought to our hospital our unhappy French woman. During our stay at the refuge we became friends, so she asked them to see us. How she burst into tears when she saw Lisa! She took Lisa's hands and tried to talk to her, but Lisa only reflectively rocked, pulling her foot and looked at her with empty eyes. It ended up with me having to comfort the French woman. What has further strengthened my reputation as *the Iron Felix*. I do not know myself why I could not cry anymore, even when I saw tears of others. Everything in me just has burnt out like after a shortcut. Only dull, aching pain in the heart remained, with a feeling of heavy stone hanging on my soul, which grabbed me as soon as I woke up in the mornings and has not let go of me the whole day, so I was tired - feeling terrible, incredible fatigue. I felt like I was at least a hundred years old.

Maybe I could not even cry because I always remembered the words of my lawyer: her instructions before I had visited the child protection office (?), just a little over two months before (now it seemed that it was in a different era): "If you'll cry, you are deemed unstable, and it is harmful to the child. And because of this you can be separated."

That's the kind of freedom they have: it's no problem to call the Queen "stupid cow", but don't you dare to cry!..

And I knew that all hospital nurses - both day and night shifts, - had official diary, not only to record the temperature and blood pressure of the patients... The nurses were nice, I have nothing bad to say about them, such were just the rules: almost the same as in the corporate bank, from which I was fired in Dublin some years later. Both had the atmosphere of surveillance and informants. Once, at the very beginning, after Lisa was diagnosed, I answered the question of a nurse about how I felt that I felt as if I was going to jump out of a window. True, I have added that I was not going to do it: because I have Lisa. But then, much later, I saw in the hands of my solicitor a copy of the hospital's diary, where in a Dutch neat handwriting same nurse had written: "The mother of Lisa Z. wants to jump out the window." I told you that the Dutch are perceiving everything literally!

Surprisingly, this time, my solicitor found it possible to use this proof of my “instability” in our favor, she showed (with my permission) a copy of this document to the judges during the court process, so that they could see how deeply I cared about the child and that I did not leave her all this time even for a second (there was much more stuff written in that diary!), day and night. It's true: I did not leave her at all, except when I had to go to the toilet, - for a month. I slept with her in the same room (we were moved into an isolated room, when it emerged that Lisa had an infection), and my mother didn't leave her too (doctors, sympathetic in a non-Dutch way, have allowed her to stay with us too.)

Our day started when Lisa woke up, while it was still dark: she jumped up like Roly-Poly in bed and began to rock with a dull grunt. Nurses brought breakfast, filled up Lisa with nutrient solution and medication, measured her temperature. Then an *allochtoon*⁵⁴¹ cleaner - a Turk, it seems - washed the floor in the room with soap. Then medical rounds began.

One of the doctors was very cordial - doctors, as I said, each time were different, but I always waited for this one. He reminded me of Shurek somehow. He did not give us false hopes, nor sow illusions, but he was able to speak in such a way as to leave in our soul still a place for faith and hope for the best, so that life wouldn't seem so hopeless.

- It is unclear how many brain cells are really dead in Lisa's brain and how many are only - let's put it this way, - are recovering from an illness, - he explained - I can promise you that to a certain extent, she will still definitely recover, but to what extent, none of us can predict at this stage for you. The recovery process can take a year or even a year and a half. What will not recover after that, is unlikely to recover at all, although anything can happen. But it is very important that somebody will work with the girl. She needs a good revalidation.

After that conversation with him, I calmed down. Again, "calmed down" is not quite the right word. I just kicked up my inconsolable grief as deep into my mind as possible, and slammed the lid.

I concentrated on revalidation. We've already started to do some of it at the hospital: every day I brought Lisa to another floor in her wheelchair, where she met the physiotherapist. But she still didn't react to almost anything, she couldn't even keep the balance, and sometimes she tried to bite the therapist. Every day Lisa was taken to bathing - in a huge bath - and every day she, who used to love water so much in the past, cried when she was dipped into it: she began to be afraid of water because she couldn't keep her head up and keep the balance. She also apparently had a terrible fear that the water would come over her head, although nurse and I held her.

Endless, gray, dreary autumn days were passing one after another. We slept no more than 4-5 hours a night at that time. I almost stopped thinking about divorce (though I became even deeper convinced that it was a necessary step), almost stopped paying attention to what my solicitor was doing (since I trusted her). She also visited us few times and empathized with us sincerely. I almost stopped to be afraid even of Sonny: It him just dare to try to take Lisa away from me now, in her condition! But he still didn't know about her condition: one reason for it was my hope that Lisa would feel much better, and I didn't want to upset him; on the other hand, it couldn't turn good for her if he'd known about it. As if our problems weren't enough to deal with, he'd also come to the hospital with his showdowns and hysterics! Knowing him, I had no doubts that I couldn't expect anything else from him.

Around that time, for the first time of my living in Holland I dared at the open «rebellion against the authorities»: more precisely, against just one particular nurse on duty, but if we take into account that

⁵⁴¹ Dutch word for a foreigner; in official papers- anybody who has even just one grandparent born abroad, in reality - anybody who is not ethnic Dutch.

for nearly 8 years I was all meek and mild, it was a really important step for me. It was the transition to the new qualitative level of my life.

Between ourselves my mum and I called this nurse 'The Owl': because she had round wide eyes behind thick glasses and usually 'flew in' at night time. She had very unpleasant habit: she didn't simply come into our ward at night to check if everything was alright, but shined a flashlight right at Lisa's face. Poor girl slept only for 4-5 hours a night: she was woken up by electric activity in her cortex, which made her so hyperactive. But The Owl didn't let her sleep peacefully even for these 4-5 hours: you could always reach an agreement with other nurses, but not with her... She waked Lisa and began to feed her through the nose tube by force: because it was 'necessary under the schedule'. Just like in a concentration camp.

Lisa started crying and tried to break away: she had stomachaches because of the tube feeding. Watching tortures of my long-suffering daughter, I at last exploded like a ballistic missile:

- Stop it right now! Don't you see that girl wants to sleep, and it hurts her?

- *Mevrouw*, according to the schedule I must give her so many ml at 2 AM... - she started.

- I've told you: stop torturing the child! Otherwise, I'll pull this tube out of her nose and will put it into you! And I'll pour something into it, too! I'm not kidding.

And I looked at her in such a way that The Owl didn't dare to argue with me any more and silently retreated backwards.

- I've never seen you like this before! – mum whispered to me, when Lisa fell asleep.

- Well, somebody had to stand up for her...

After that accident I waited for some sanctions from the doctors and I was ready to tell the doctors off, including some comparisons of The Owl's regime with *Buchenwald* (which was a very painful thing for the Dutch⁵⁴²). But nothing happened: since then The Owl just left Lisa in peace at night. So I was just convinced yet again that in Holland might is right. You just have to be brave and open your mouth. They are cowards, the Dutch.

When these three horrible weeks passed, we finally had a real little break-through. Lisa stopped to jerking her leg. Also she began eating by herself. You should've seen the face of that pseudo-Aesculapius, who assured me with an unshakable confidence that Lisa was doomed to be a 'vegetable'! When I proudly wheeled her wheelchair passing this doctor's room with its glass wall and he saw her: not jerking her leg and even turning her head to the sound of my voice! He was shocked and I was proud, proud as if Lisa had taken a record height at the world's championship in athletics. When Lisa started eating without help: greedily, with almost brutish rumbling, I laughed of joy. It seemed to me that from now on, after she finally began showing normal human behavior, the most dreadful things were over. If she started to eat, she'll get better. Even one nurse's remark that display of the simplest reflexes didn't prove anything, didn't break down my spirit. Come on now, how can you live being such pessimists! How can these Dutch live with this heavy load of negative outlook on life? I'd really hang myself if I had such outlook.

Lisa was licking her hospital bed constantly. It was an easy way to catch an infection, and mum decided to rub the bed with garlic, as a disinfection measure. However, it didn't stop Lisa: she rumbled

⁵⁴² Concentration camp during the WWII; the Dutch do not like to be reminded of the WWII because of the role of significant part of the Dutch population in the collaboration with the Nazis.

with pleasure, licking the garlic of bed's railings. On the other hand, after that doctors were afraid of visiting our ward: like vampires from legends⁵⁴³.

When the month was over, we were told that Lisa was going to be discharged from the hospital, although she still needed daily procedures and couldn't walk, and even though now, comparing with the very beginning of her illness, she became thin as a shadow. I remembered that we had to return to the refuge with its reveilles and daily meetings - to a tiny flat on the 2nd floor, to which we needed to climb the steep staircase; there was only a rusty bunk bed, and we needed to stand in a queue every day in order to have a bath. And I felt uneasy.

- But she's still in such a bad state... – I tried to explain.

- *Mevrouw*... - and they gently hinted at the costs of Lisa's hospital stay, though payment should have been made by our insurance company, and by then we'd already found out the insurance policy number.

'*Lord, I've forgotten where I am*⁵⁴⁴!' – I thought for the umpteenth time over these years.

- I invented a scheme which wouldn't allow the bill from your insurance company to be found by your husband, - said that nice doctor in parting. I thanked him sincerely for that. Everything is good for something. After all, he didn't have to do that!

Lisa was put on a waiting list for a place in the rehabilitation center: in another town, where I would have to bring her, almost paralyzed, daily - by public transport. At my own expense: taking into account that cost of bus trips in Holland was not like the Soviet five kopecks⁵⁴⁵... Of course, I couldn't work those days, and my stipend ran out too. But nobody cared about that...

- Don't worry so much! – Like in the haze, I heard Carmela's voice and came back to reality. – I think it will be OK. I just found it necessary to notify you.

- I do not worry, - I answered honestly. – Thank you, Carmela.

Dance class ended soon, and after some time the meeting of our Bolivarian Circle started. I introduced Oisín to my Antillean comrades: as Alan Ramsey, of course. However, Carmela guessed quickly where he was from: I think, in general she knew about our mission more than we have told her. And she winked at me, whispering into my ear:

- A real Irishman? Like those three men that were in Colombia with us⁵⁴⁶?

I realized whom she had in mind, and hesitated, not wanting to raise this issue, but Carmela realized that all by herself and did not ask me anything anymore. She just looked at Oisín with unconcealed respect.

Strictly speaking, in any case, there was no time for us to discuss aspects of the Irish peace process and the interrupted peace process in Colombia: the atmosphere at the meeting this time was tense.

- Analysis of the data over the past few months shows that in comparison with September of last year the frequency of American aircraft's flights here almost doubled. However, to my knowledge - reported to us Sgt Marchena - the number of suspected boats, ships and aircraft that we at the Coasts Guard have (details of which were handed to us by the Americans) has increased over the same period

⁵⁴³ Vampires are afraid of the smell of garlic, according to the legends

⁵⁴⁴ From the Soviet comedy film "Ivan Vasilievich Changes Profession" (1973)

⁵⁴⁵ In the USSR bus trips were extremely cheap, including inter-cities bus journeys

⁵⁴⁶ Refers to the 3 Irish Republicans who were arrested in Colombia in 2001, see Colombia Three in previous notes

by only a half percent, and the quantity of seized cocaine is kept at the same level as last year. Then why such increased flying activity? This question just comes up itself. I have my assumptions, but I would like first to listen to other comrades. Who has any ideas on this? - And he looked around at all of us.

- May I? - Raised his hand, middle-aged Antillean called Rafaelito, local trade union activist, one of those who lived near the airport, - It is noteworthy that the flights have risen dramatically after Venezuela was visited by the Russian strategic bombers⁵⁴⁷. And they became even more frequent in the beginning of the Russian-Venezuelan naval exercises. Moreover, about 85% of all reported by us flights went into south-easterly direction: in the direction of Venezuela, although the bulk of the seized cocaine was found on boats departing from Colombia, as Siegfried can confirm to you, - as a proof, he pointed in the direction of Sergeant Marchena, - It doesn't require a rocket scientist to understand that the Russians touched a hornet's nest... Remember the words of Chavez? "This is a warning. Russia is with us... We are strategic allies. This is a signal to the Empire. Venezuela is no longer poor, and not alone "⁵⁴⁸

- But that's not all. And that's not even the main thing, - suddenly said softly Maria Helena, a *Dominicana* from Campo Alegre - We recently had a visit from a Haitian, who moonlights for the Yankees. Jean-Baptiste. He is a sort of an errand boy for them, he spends most of his time around the base. O'Leary took him up as a sort of a gardener: Americans feel relaxed here. There are very few Muslims in Curaçao, the majority of the population loves American television, absorbed all this American stuff almost from infancy, and if it wasn't for the the case with Churandy... At least that American gave him that medal in the end⁵⁴⁹, but the resentment is still left in the soul of the people. Sorry, I am digressing... I just wanted to describe the context. Usually nobody pays attention to our Haitian: as to a part of landscape, especially since he doesn't speak much English. His English lexicon is about the same as that of the Terminator. But even with his limited English, he realized that in Curaçao something out of the ordinary will be happening soon. According to him, O'Leary was talking to the "fat Dutchman" (that surely must be your Colonel Weterholt), while Jean Baptiste was trimming the hedges in the garden, and a window was open, and..."The fat Dutchman" said to O 'Leary that "the aircraft will be brought soon" - note that he said "brought" and not "will come" or "will fly." (I asked Jean-Baptiste 3 times, but he swears he remembers these words exactly.) And that after that, "pirate Hugo will get into a trap." Even our Haitian realized that they were talking about Chavez, but what kind of trap, and what a plane that someone will bring to the island, got to do with it? That was all what Jean-Baptiste could understand. And, unfortunately, so do I. But he has a natural instinct for danger, comrades! Good that I've known him a long time... You see, for a long time already he is trying to persuade me to quit Campo Alegre and to move to Suriname with him.... And he told me what he had heard in order to convince me that in Curaçao it will soon be dangerous."Let's go away together, *ma cherie*»⁵⁵⁰, - he said - "Let's go now, while nothing happened yet, because there might be a war in preparation, you know...." It is tempting to go away, of course, but we ust can't leave this matter like this.

- Or maybe only he invented it all, in order to convince you? - said Rafaelito uncertainly.

- It may be, of course, but it does not look like it. According to him, they also mentioned Poland and Georgia. Jean-Baptiste is not good at geography, so I do not think he could come up with this.

⁵⁴⁷ In September 2008

⁵⁴⁸ Quote from actual words of President Chavez

⁵⁴⁹ Refers to Shawn Crawford's gesture to return the silver Olympic medal to Churandy Martina

⁵⁵⁰ My darling (French)

- And what about you?

- I promised him to think about it. And advised to talk to no one else about what he has heard. They may be preparing to do something dangerous, and if they find out that he was blabbering about it around the island... Jean-Baptiste promised me to keep quiet. And I asked him to keep his ears open, but how big is the chance that he would once again be so lucky that he will hear something is, of course, a big question... Now he regularly assures me that he will definitely take me away from here, he just has to save some money first by working for Americans.... And I break my head, what does this all mean.

- It seems to be really serious, - said Sergeant Marchena grimly, - I too will keep my ears open, though it is unlikely that in our office anybody would discuss such plans. It would be nice if one of us would be able to penetrate the territory of the base, but it's not easy to get there and to visit it regularly and openly. Haitians help those who help themselves... If only there could be some kind of our person at that base... But I honestly can not imagine which one of us and how would be able to do this.

- And I can, - suddenly said Tyrunesh - Saskia, we will propose to O'Leary to organize on the base some tours for prospective subcontractors. At least once every two weeks. You've heard they're going to expand soon... Not to mention the tours for kids- scouts and others. Until now, these tours were isolated, and were held by their own military. But if they become permanent, it means that someone must always be distracted from his direct work at the base in order to deal with this. We will offer to take over these tours for them. We will offer them to make those tours regular: not just for contractors but also for better relations with the local community. And you will be the one who will be guiding these tours.

- Did the Americans decide that, or did you already decide it for them? - I asked.

- Our task is to convince them that this is their own decision. And when we will convince them (I have little doubt that this is possible; in any case, we must try), then the rest is a matter of technique. You look presentable. You speak several languages. You know how to smile. Colonel Weterholt likes you (he keeps talking about you all the time), and even though he is a Dutchman, he is very close to the Yanks. The main thing is keep your ears wide open. I think, comrades, that we are ready for serious work, - she turned to the others - it's no time to us to play in the revolutionary trifles. We can no longer sit idly by as if nothing is happening, discuss revolutionary theories set out in books and wait while right in front of our eyes the very, alive Revolution is being stifled. The Revolution that today inspires people around the world. Remember what you were feeling when there was a coup in Venezuela....

I dutifully remembered. Indeed, the feelings were most atrocious. A hundred thousand times worse than when Churandy had his well-deserved medal taken away."Ah, Chavez, Chavez!" - I sadly thought back then, watching the news bulletins. - "That's another revolution devoured by the insatiable Uncle Sam... When will he finally choke on them? '.

I did not doubt for a second that Uncle Sam was involved in this,. His ears stuck out a mile off this coup. I did not even have to see any CIA documents for it: they were needed only for those who had any doubts.

"Fu-fu, it smells like American spirit⁵⁵¹" - I thought at the sight of fox -faced Pedro Carmona. And when, a couple of days later (by the way, it was Dermot's birthday) the coup failed and Chávez

⁵⁵¹ Saying from a Russian fairy tale; here indicates links between Pedro Carmona, one of the anti-Chavez coup leaders, with the US.

returned to Caracas, I, along with Dermot, jumped for joy in a hotel room back in Dublin, so that to the guests in a downstairs room nearly ran complaining about us to the reception.

- You see, how lucky we are, - Dermot told me back then, - On your birthday they killed Savimbi, and on mine - Chavez returned to power!...

...Tyrunesh continued:

- In order for us to convince the Americans of the need for our plan, it is important for us to find the right approach to them. Saskia, remember, I told you that the next weekend Dutch officers' wives will be holding their charity sale? American wives will be there, too: all of the "whites" here stick together (whites not in terms of the skin color, but in socio-economic terms). This will be a great opportunity to meet them all and to make a good impression on them...

- For now, - said Rafaelito - I suggest that you and Alan should get a servant.

- Who, me? A servant?! - I almost jumped up with indignation. And I thought as Ivan Vasilyevich Bunsha when he was offered to be a Tsar⁵⁵², "*Never in my life!*"

- Who else? - confirmed Sergeant Marchena, - If you want to be accepted in such circles, it is a must. Otherwise, not only will you not be taken seriously, it even can cause suspicion. Plus, this way it will be easier to keep in touch with you, if, say, three times a week our Lyubenshka will come to you, - he pointed at the middle-aged plump woman on the right of me - to do some house cleaning and so on.

- That's just what we need, - suddenly gave voice silent before this all evening Oisín - Good housekeeping - that could do no harm...

- Well, you know what? - I could not stand it - If somebody would not be scattering throughout the house his dirty socks and would immediately wash at least the frying pan after breakfast in the morning...

My words were drowned in laughter.

- *E'n ta gusta kushina awe...* - Sang Rafaelito and they all in chorus finished - *Lage bai!*⁵⁵³

- That's agreed, then, - summed up Lyubenshka.- From Monday on I will come to you on the odd days of the week except for Sunday. At 10 o'clock in the morning.

- At 10 o'clock I will be at work - I said - And our fan of order in the house at this time of the day is soundly asleep.

- Well, he will have to make adjustments in his daily routine, - inexorably Tyrunesh said.

Oisín was clearly displeased. During our stay in Curaçao, he completely got used to work at nights and sleep off in the mornings, and opened his shop in the afternoon, after *siesta*. He's got now not only a small black with grey beard, but also a little beer belly, making him to look more like a loan shark than a carpenter-guerrilla. Sometimes it seemed to me that he just did not want to be in the same house with me, when I came from work, and that's why he went in the evenings to his studio. Although we both had our own room, and it seemed that we could talk normally to each other on the weekends, even traveled together around the island. But each of us was cooking only for himself. Oisín went all over

⁵⁵² From the Soviet comedy film "Ivan Vasilyevich Changes Occupation" (1973)

⁵⁵³ Words from a song "Lage Bai" (Let Her Go) by the Antillean band *K-Liber* ("She doesn't like to cook today, let her go" - Papiamentu)

the island until he found where he could buy black pudding⁵⁵⁴ for his Irish breakfast. B-r-r-r... Those Irish delicatessen!

- Wasn't it you who wanted order in the house?- I teased him.

- One more thing, Saskia - said Tyrunesh - In 10 days Comrade Orlando will come to Curaçao. You will definitely need to meet him, to get to know him and have a chat.

Charity Fair that was organized by the Dutch military wives, was held on the day of the Queen. This Dutch national holiday actually isn't really the current Queen's birthday, as you might think, but the birthday of her mother, the late Princess Juliana. Because Queen Beatrix's birthday is at the end of January - a month for "mass folk festivals," because of the weather. Wrong, of course, in Holland - in Curaçao there would not be a difference.

It seems that most Dutch people love this day for the fact that on Queen's Day, they are allowed to sell anything on the streets, without being charged or it: the only day of the year when they do not require any permission for selling and no taxes are taken from it. This is, apparently the true happiness! The streets of Dutch cities and villages are instantly transformed into continuous, "flea market", surging with crowds of people. And the Dutch people, young and old, pour into the streets, trying to get rid off their accumulated at home junk, to purchase which not so long ago was the meaning of their existence, but they quickly got bored with it after purchase. They are ready to seel it even for a pittance - as long as not to give it away for free.

The Junkmen nation brings up its children also from childhood in these glorious national traditions: even pre-schoolers are trying to shove you their old toys on that day. And trade and bargain as adults. At that age I did not even know what money is; and not because we "had nothing to buy." I was not interested in having money. All what I needed, I already had. And I got attached to my toys as to living beings, and I would never have get the idea to sell them. Even when my grandfather offered me one day to throw from the bridge into the river a couple of old toys that were already quite broken-down - "Look, Zhenya, how they'll fly from this height!" - I could not bring myself to do it. "But they'll be hurt!" Dutch children are not aware of such sentiments. They grow *Duremar*⁵⁵⁵-like: "*I do not care, as long as I have gold ringing in my pockets!*"...

Curaçao people also traditionally selling their unwanted things in this day - "he who dwells next to the cripple learns to halt". But unlike the Dutch in Holland, for whom the beauty of it is precisely in the fact that on this day they do not have to pay for any permits, Antilleans in the "Kingdom of Equal Opportunities" even on Queen's Day have to buy a place on the street for selling, a permission to sell. Surprise surprise, a contract for the sale of these sale permits is not in the hands of Antilleans, but in the very Dutch hands! And this is while residents of the country of tulips and brothels do not stop yelling that "these islands are hanging around our neck." If you dig a little deeper, you'll find out who really hangs on whose neck!...

The whole week before this historic event Tyrunesh and I were working hard on PR campaign for the Dutch ladies, which reminded me of the classic sayings of our cat Matroskin⁵⁵⁶: "*in order to buy something unnecessary you'll first have to sell something unnecessary.*" Because for the money

⁵⁵⁴ Blood sausage made by [cooking blood](#) or dried blood with a filler until it is thick enough to congeal when cooled, popular in Ireland and the UK.

⁵⁵⁵ Leeches seller, kickside of the main villain in the fairy tale "Adventures of Buratino" by Alexei Tolstoy,

⁵⁵⁶ See previous notes

received from sale of unnecessary things, brought with them from their “*klein kikkerland*”⁵⁵⁷ they intended to buy... attributes from a Dutch sex shop for an organization dealing with disabled people on Curaçao: with the likes of my Lisa and Sonny’s uncle Edgar.

When I first heard about it, an old Russian proverb involuntarily came to my mind, “*what a f**’ does a goat need an accordion for?*.” I mean that people with disabilities have much more urgent needs in life. Ideas of those Dutch ladies reminded me of a foreign science fiction story which I read as a child: I do not remember its author or even its title, but the story goes that some aliens abduct an Earthling and make it a sort of guinea pig out of him: to study humans’ mind. He gladly perform all tests - out of hunger! Yet instead of a meal at the end of the test he gets some pictures of “Playboy”: the alien also, apparently, decided that he is in desperate need of this... And the poor man weeps bitter tears over these images, with his empty stomach.... Apparently, the Dutch have not read this story.

Tyrunesh wisely advised them not to advertise on Curaçao what they were going to buy with the proceeds from the sale, but to replace it with a neutral “*necessary equipment*.”

- *Dames*, here your actions will be interpreted in a different way than in the Netherlands - she explained to them.

And, by the way, quite rightly so! Honestly, I even got angry at them. Being a mother of disabled child myself, I more that others know about the needs in such schools and institutions, and what are the really urgently needed items there, of which there is often not enough. When Beckham’s⁵⁵⁸ through some generous charity donated to Lisa a special tricycle, being touched by her story, I, without a moment of hesitation, gave it to Lisa's school in Ireland: she shouldn’t be using it alone, let other children like her to use it too! And here they are, those Dutch ladies, fixated on acquisition of *a lot of baloney*, and that's to put it mildly...

But when that day finally came, and I met them face to face, on Mambo beach which hosted the sale, I was no longer surprised.

This beach, as Antilleans say, is more or less under direct Dutch occupation, and at the sight of it I remembered a question the old Soviet international passport⁵⁵⁹ application form: “Have you been in the temporarily occupied territories?”...

Here Dutch stars give their shows: the ones that nobody knows, except for the Dutch. Here men drink Dutch beer; well, Dutch beer might well be better known in the world than their singers, but to drink it in such quantities..... Here you can easily behave like Amsterdam without fearing oblique views of the “natives.” Mambo is really like Scheveningen⁵⁶⁰. Only much warmer.

I looked around and remembered what they write about Holland in their own books, how these people see themselves. The junk manhood, for example, they refer to as “trading spirit.” And their own hypocrisy is “tolerance.” About 15 years ago, they were so proud of it that they even had a song; I mentioned it once: “Tolerance” by Hans de Booy. This song really put me off - probably because I have already had enough of this “tolerance” in practice. It's a set of classic Dutch clichés of their vision of the world: there are accusations of Germans in racism (“A Yugoslav is no longer a person, and maybe that's the secret German dream?”) - as if they are better themselves! And the belief that

⁵⁵⁷ Small Frogland (affectionate term of Dutch people for the Netherlands)

⁵⁵⁸ Beckhams, David and Victoria - British celebrity couple, football player and singer turned fashion designer

⁵⁵⁹ In the USSR there were 2 passports - an internal one (similar to an ID card) and an international one (for traveling abroad). The questionnaire for application for the international passport was quite extended

⁵⁶⁰ .Scheveningen is a suburb of The Hague and well-known seaside resort in the Netherlands

animals are better and nobler than people (it depends which people!), and the idea that a native of Thailand must always be a masseuse, and a native of Suriname can only be a drummer. (Then who should a Dutchman, according to such clichés? A pimp or a drug dealer?). Tolerance? Ha! Now, when any of migrants or their children or grandchildren dare to become the mayor of Rotterdam, as Aboutaleb⁵⁶¹ - that's when you see the real Dutch "tolerance" in all its glory⁵⁶²! And "Jesus, Allah, Buddha and John Lennon; they all want to tell us the same thing?" If it is really just all the same, then why should we listen to all four of them? What a mess in the head of a classical "tolerantist" who considers himself to be progressive! Surely, it is only based on Dutch tolerance they got such utopian ideas in Holland as creation of a database of only Antillean troubled teens: database based on ethnicity, plans which the Dutch, much to their dismay, had to abandon at the last moment. Apparently, when such databases are created of the Jewish population, that's fascism, but when it is for the Antilleans or Moroccans, it's "desire to restore order in our own country?"

The Dutch don't let the Antilles become independent not out of "care for the Antilleans" (though the first thing those Dutch theoretical supporters of independence elsewhere in the world would scream at you if questioned about the Antilles, will be "Who is going to pay for them all their bills? Without us, they'll immediately go bankrupt ! "), but because of " what will we do without our cozy second-houses and villas, without Mambo beach." And please stop your hypocrite tales about tolerance!

Yes, the crowd that gathered on this beach was quite predictable. These people, with exception for some adventurers with missionary genes, like Sandra Roelofs⁵⁶³ and quite a large group of those who like eating in ethnic restaurants, "stewed in their own juice" all their lives, even when living among people from very different cultures. Even that sale which organized, was among themselves. Of course, hardly anyone else would even need those *poffertjes*⁵⁶⁴ pans, the likes of *kaasschaf*⁵⁶⁵ and worn-out jeans, designed for miles-long leg s...

In charge of the bazaar were three Dutch ladies: one was older than me - Hanneke, aka Mrs. Weterholt and two were younger: Anita and Linda. Hovering around the last ones was their blond offspring. Their behaviour on the beach was not much different from how they would behave in a department store somewhere in "*Vroom & Dreesman*⁵⁶⁶" where the same kind of adorable looking kids rolled on the floor and tear off clothes from hangers, and no one even commented on that. And here they also remain true to themselves : scattered ice-cream wrappers, cans of Coke and bags from crisps all over the foreseeable radius, and, again, no one even raised an eyebrow at that. Mentality of such people (I mean kids' parents) is: I pay taxes, so a job is created with my money for someone especially to clean after me. A sort of landowner/ aristocrat mentality. Concepts such as respect for the work of others, they did not get in their childhood. Just as they did not get, for example, respect for bread⁵⁶⁷.

In our family, even in my generation, bread on a subconscious level was something almost sacred. And this despite the fact that none of us even know what hunger is. Bread is never thrown in the rubbish bin. If it became hard, give it to the birds outside. But to throw bread away or even just to drop in on the floor, was something unthinkable for us. A deeply abhorrent act. It was precisely because we

⁵⁶¹ Ahmed Aboutaleb is the first ethnic Moroccan who became the Mayor of Rotterdam (he was born in the Netherlands and is a Dutch citizen, of course).

⁵⁶² There were many hostile reactions to this in Holland, because of Aboutaleb's Moroccan origin

⁵⁶³ Dutch wife of Georgian president Saakashvili (b. 1968)

⁵⁶⁴ Small traditional Dutch pancakes covered with sugar powder, made in a special frying pan

⁵⁶⁵ Dutch device, cheese slicer

⁵⁶⁶ Popular expensive department store in the Netherlands

⁵⁶⁷ In the USSR respect for bread was paramount. A Soviet man would never throw a piece of bread away or not even drop in on the floor; this was seen as disrespectful to human labor.

respected other people's work. Koreans will understand it easily. But the "universal values" erase memory of whole generations about such things, apparently....

The woman that looked younger than others - Anita - smiled at me and handed me the latest issue of «Libelle»⁵⁶⁸ magazine. I tried to show her rapturous enthusiasm.

- Oh! Maybe you also have «Prive»⁵⁶⁹ ? I heard that Katja Schuurman⁵⁷⁰ is pregnant. Is this true? That Thijs Römer⁵⁷¹ is such a sweetheart...

Anita beamed.

- Oh, I am also crazy about him! Was so jealous when Katja married him... No, Katja is not pregnant, but Chantal Janzen⁵⁷² recently gave birth.... Have you heard of it?

Recently? It has been three months ago! Well, I was well aware of the latest gossips of the Dutch show business. My daily reading of Dutch newspapers on Internet, which has become a habit for me many years ago, helped with this.

- What place, do you think, the Netherlands will get at the Eurovision this year? - I threw some oil into the fire, knowing that this is a painful subject for most Western Europeans, and that Anita will talk for a long time.

Strange people, by God! Why worry so much about it?

I watch Eurovision song contest every year, but not for the sake of songs.

I'll be surprised if anyone is still in earnest watches it because of the music: what songs you can expect from a few dozen Barbie and Ken's look-likes, any of whom could have, in fact, represent any country? The same lacquered hair, artificially blown in a "sexy" way with fake wind, the same memorized in rote movements, the same style of clothing, the same tightened in chocolate pantyhose knees sticking out from under the mini-dresses, the same easy to forget as chewing gum music, flawed English-language, reminding me of the heroes of "Kindza-dza" film: "and this Patsak always think in languages continuation of which he does not know." Same fireworks from the stage during the songs, the same air kisses and the same pseudo-pitiful antics of "Vote for me" after the performances... The same screams of fans. Attempts by individual artists to be "different" look just as forced and made out of thin air as that deliberate fake "ethnicity" of the music.

Nevertheless, I look this contest with pleasure.

And I'm interested in exactly that part of it over which nervous Western commentators are crying for many years in the row. The voting process.

From this voting you can learn a lot. For example, how different national diaspora of migrant workers are spread around Europe. If Ireland gives 12 points to Latvia, it is definitely not because the Irish suddenly fell in love with Latvian tunes en masse.... The same applies to Spain and Romanian music. Why such kind of solidarity is not observed by the British expats who are much more numerous in the same Spain than Romanians,- that's something for Terry Wogan⁵⁷³ to investigate...

⁵⁶⁸ Libelle - Dutch women's magazine

⁵⁶⁹ Prive - Dutch magazine with gossips about celebrities

⁵⁷⁰ Katja Schuurman (b. 1975)- a [Dutch](#) actress, singer, television personality and occasional [VJ](#).

⁵⁷¹ Thijs Romer (b.1978) - a Dutch actor, husband of Katja Schuurman

⁵⁷² Chantal Janzen (b. 1979) - a [Dutch actress](#) and [musical star](#)

⁵⁷³ Terry Wogan (b. 1936)- an [Irish](#) radio and television broadcaster who holds dual [Irish](#) and [British](#) citizenship. Wogan has worked for the [BBC](#) in the [United Kingdom](#) for most of his career.

Criticism by the Western countries of those "bad Eastern Europeans" who "were liberated from communism," and even allowed to join the European Union (although as second-class citizens, but many in the West believe that we are in fact really second-class!), but they are so ungrateful, that for some reason, continue to vote for their neighbours, and not for whom it was expected from them, is preposterous. It is of a kindergarten level: *"Give my toys back and do not pee into my pot, go get yourself another girlfriend, you are no longer my friend."*

You have to learn how to lose with dignity, gentlemen!

Let's say it's really just a purely musical contest. Then why Eastern Europeans should vote for the music that they do not like, just in order to please the contest's Western sponsors? It is logical that they like music of their neighbours because it is closer to their own!

The most funny are their impotent threats of "no longer participating in the Eurovision Song Contest", coming mainly from those Western countries, which are either already for many years do not even get into the finale, either stably occupy a place at the bottom of the list, or only get into the finals due to the fact that their country is one of the main sponsors of the contest (such as Britain). Imagine that the figure skaters who have lost at the Olympics (points in figure skating also largely subjective!) will decide out of protest no longer participate in the Olympics and instead hold your own!

The same Terry Wogan, who openly declared that Ukraine and other countries voted for Russia because otherwise Russia would behave like heroine of Nonna Mordyukova in "Diamond Arm⁵⁷⁴" (*"And if you will not take it, we'll turn off the gas"*), does not notice that it is exactly his own country that blackmails others with its power as the sponsor of the contest.

They'll hold their own contest: well, who is going to miss him? And who said that the remaining countries do not have enough money to continue without their sponsorship?

Terry Wogan is quite right that "it is no longer a musical contest." In any case, if he has forgotten, it certainly isn't since the time his Britain has invaded Iraq. Surprise, surprise! - that was the first time Britain got "0 points» at that contest! Note, not only because of Eastern European countries, it got 0 points from the Western ones, too. I'm sorry, but how else could people express their outrage, if the leader of that country, along with Bush had blatantly disregarded all the multi-million anti-war demonstrations that swept across the world on the eve of the Anglo-American barbaric aggression?

If success in this contest is really defined only by voting of friends for each other, in place of Wogan I would rather start thinking why my country is so unpopular that even when it sends to the Eurovision a singer with great vocal abilities⁵⁷⁵, like last year, still, nobody votes for him. Why did Britain have no friends in Europe, except its semi-colony Ireland and ignorant in politics San Marino. I am sure that if Andy Abraham, like the native of Aruba, who had won for Estonia, decides to move to another, more delicate in its foreign policy, European country, and will then perform at Eurovision once again, even with the same song, his results will be a lot better.

Funny to see how the very same West that "fought for demolition of the Berlin Wall," is now building up these walls itself. It tries again to divide Europe into the Western and the Eastern ones, despite the fact that many of the Eastern European countries are already even taken into NATO. So, when it comes to NATO, Lithuania, Latvia and Croatia are European countries, but when it comes to Eurovision, they are not? "Ukraine is not a European country",- shouted Dutch audience. And Israel is

⁵⁷⁴ Soviet comedy film from the late 1960s

⁵⁷⁵ Refers to the British singer Andy Abraham

a European country? Look at you, you want both "to climb up the linden tree and not to get scratches on your bum!" It does not work like that.

"Russia were going to be the political winners from the beginning⁵⁷⁶," - lamented Terry last year. That's right, and what did you want? Not every day is Sunday. Even for the British. But that's exactly what's bothering them. And I'm not paranoid: Wogan himself had previously stated that the West "won the Cold war ", but lost the Eurovision." The West wants to be a winner everywhere and can not stand it when someone takes away from it even such modest and little meaningful laurels...

It's simply that capitalist Russia finally understood the capitalist technology of the contest's process. And this is what scares the West. That Russia is learning how to use its own methods. Even the theoretical emergence of an economic competitor, especially the one with the oil and gas at its disposal." 1 million euros was spent on Dima Bilan to prepare for the " Eurovision ", despite the fact that world star Evgeny Plushenko and Edwin Marton were performing for free. 500,000 euros were spent by Ani Lorak for her performance in a mirror room. Another 200 000 were the costs of her dress." Here you have it, that's all your "music"....

It certainly feels good that the "civilized world" was defeated with its weapons. Seres it right! But if you look more closely, then what's there particularly to admire? How many Russian and Ukrainian children and pensioners could have been fed with this money?...Clearly, for the "new Russia" and "Orange Ukraine" showing off abroad is more important. Tell me, what are your priorities, and I will tell you who you are...

"But this is not about the luck. What luck, if tens of millions of dollars were pumped into Zenith? One of the best coaches in the world and built of stars cast of players were hired. In this case, the money invested is not lost, but is spent wisely."⁵⁷⁷

Wisely? Is that what you now call "wisely"?...

"We just have to think: what is the next goal? Perhaps to win another "Oscar"? Football championship or the Champions League? Or to join NATO? "

Of course, you can join... But who is going to clean you afterwards?

Indeed, "we will find targets on this Earth⁵⁷⁸!" As Vladimir Zhirinovsky was shouting in Baghdad. Heads just become dizzy: what else on Earth can we do?

How about starting working on that there would be no more homeless people, no abandoned kids in Russia, so that all children would go to school? How about closing all the brothels? Too hard of a task?

Enthusiasm for the victories of Bilan or of players or "Zenith" in Russia today reminds me of hastily gilding of a bath, from which a baby has long been thrown out, together with the bathwater.

But still, I felt rather content after last years' Eurovision, unlike the old alarmist Wogan.

Hey, Western Gentlemen! "Either remove your cross or put on th underpants!⁵⁷⁹": you were so happy that you broke us apart, but now you seem to be unhappy that Ukrainians vote for Russia, Russians- for Armenia, and Bosnians - for the Serbs? That's exactly why I like to watch the voting!. It is a joy to

⁵⁷⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/7418940.stm>

⁵⁷⁷ Quote from Russian newspaper "Komsomolskaya Pravda" after Dima Bilan, the Russian singer, has won the Eurovision song contest

⁵⁷⁸ Quote from the speech of Zhirinovsky when war in Iraq was about to start

⁵⁷⁹ See previous notes; "you cannot sit between 2 chairs"

see how voting, not directly related to politics, exposes those unseen roots that still connect us to each other, despite the rabid nationalist propaganda in many of our newly “independent” countries. It really is heart-warming.

...Hanneke Weterholt was a pleasant lady: athletic, short-haired, tanned to blackness and with original Dutch "rabbit" teeth. Greeting me, she vigorously shook my hand.

- *Aangenaam*⁵⁸⁰. Many thanks for your work: we were already contacted by four journalists from newspapers and local television. Now the whole island probably knows about our sale. Things go like warm bread rolls over the counter⁵⁸¹. On the advice of your colleague, we did not advertise the details of our action. But believe me, people with disabilities will be very grateful to us! We will buy for them first-class products. You know, I sometimes use products of this company myself: Gerrit is so busy at work that...

The picture that has popped up involuntarily in my mind, made me feel slightly sick. I could hardly contain nausea. Why, oh why they are so inclined to share such things with other people?

But the ice was broken. From the discussion of show business and the latest models of the season (fashion in the Netherlands is more like a German one than French or British), we gradually got to politics. Generally it is a minefield subject in any country: if you do not know the views of your conversation partners. But I quickly figured out that at least one of my Dutch conversation partners - Anita, - was a fanatical fan of Geert Wilders⁵⁸².

Not being sure if the two other ladies shared her views, I took advantage of the heat, took her into the shadow and let her talk about "Fitna⁵⁸³." (Garbage it is, in fact, that "Fitna," complete and utter garbage!) Myself, I spoke little, I just nodded a couple of times made short verbal comments in the spirit of improvisation of Dutch listeners to the song Salah Edin «*Het land van...*»⁵⁸⁴. By the way, he describes the modern Netherlands just as they are - and this is what hurts most people like Anita!

Linda was not interested in politics: she was more into recent models of diapers for swimming in the sea for her kids. Well, in this area I can also share some expertise...

But Hanneke was a supporter of the Dutch Labour Party: it is a family tradition on her mother's side, as she explained to me. Thus, she needed a different approach: talking about tolerance and multiculturalism. To do that I had to wait for the afternoon: after lunch both Anita and Linda could not stand complaints of the children about the mercilessly scorching sun and decided to go home.

- Will you be able to manage it alone, *mevrouw* Weterholt?

- Don't worry, I'll help her! - I assured them.

⁵⁸⁰ Nice to meet you (Dutch)

⁵⁸¹ Als warme broodjes over de toonbank (Dutch) - selling really well, fast

⁵⁸² Geert Wilders (b. 1963)- Dutch extreme right populist anti-Moslim politician, big fan of Israel. Wilders is the leader of the Dutch Freedom Party which is firmly against immigration, while his own wife is Hungarian and his mother is Indonesian. He dyes his hair to make himself look like a true Arian blonde. There are rumors that his nickname in his teenage years was “the Negro of Venlo” (Venlo is town in the South of the Netherlands) and that he has suffered racial abuse from his Dutch classmates at that time.

⁵⁸³ *Fitna* - a 2008 short film by [Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders](#). Approximately 17 minutes in length, the film attempts to demonstrate that the Qur'an motivates its followers to hate all who violate Islamic teachings. In fact, it is an extremely anti-Moslim film.

⁵⁸⁴ Abid Tounssi, also known as Salah Edin (b.1980 in the Netherlands), is a Dutch [rapper](#) of Moroccan origin. After his release of “Het Land Van...” song and video (“The country of...”) in 2007, a song critical of the life in the Netherlands, he was subjected to various attacks in the Dutch media. Many Dutch listeners advised him “to go back to his own country” while in fact he was born and raised in the Netherlands. Truth hurts, I guess...

I and mevrouw Weterholt were eating our lunch-snack right at the counter - her favourite Dutch food,- Indonesian sate and Bami- and I proceeded to the "barrage." I touched her to tears by singing a couple of verses from that ill-fated song of Hans de Booy, since I still remembered it up this day.

- Oh, I did not even think that in our tough time someone still remembers this wonderful song! - exclaimed Mrs. Weterholt. - It even back then did not get up high in the charts... It has apparently been already brewing in our country, its present crisis.

- Mevrouw Weterholt, it is not forgotten! - I picked up strongly. - I was just for 2 weeks in the Netherlands and heard this song on the radio. The same same day I ran into "Free Record Shop" in Kalverstraat⁵⁸⁵ - to buy this single....

- So nice to meet a like-minded spirit in this forgotten corner of the world! - And she once more businesslike shook hands with me, despite her emotion-personal tone. - You know, here even my Gerrit doesn't understand me. He always votes for the CDA⁵⁸⁶... And on the local population, he kept looking down so that I sometimes even just feel embarrassed. But they are also people and their culture, too, can enrich us: for example, if we could back at home, in Kerkrade Antillean restaurant, when Gerrit will retire, of course... Although we have not yet decided on this. I would like to move here permanently, when we can get the status of *penshonado*⁵⁸⁷... Do you watch culinary programs of Desiree Da Costa Gomez⁵⁸⁸? This is simply yummy!

- How did you meet the Colonel, if you even vote for such different partes? - I asked.

- Oh, I'm from a military family. My father in his youth has fought in Korea. Got wounded.

"That was too little for him!" - I thought. Korea! Sweet, sweet Korea! I thought of the photos of Ri Rang's father and grandfather who both fought in that war to defend their homeland from barbarian "United Nations"...

- Gerrit was often visiting us, when I was finishing school, and he was a very young officer.... Well, from one it went to another... Now we have children who are almost adults. Nienke is a student and Joost is finishing school. Nienke soon will come to visit us here in Curaçao - through an internship...

Oh, I have heard about Dutch interns in Curaçao from my Antillean friends!. About how they recently flooded the island, laboring here for fun for pennies (fortunately for them, they can afford it - after all, they also have other means of subsistence) and taking away from the local youth the already scarce jobs... For Dutch interns it is essentially a paid vacation, and local people have nothing to live on as a result!

Busy with conversation we did not notice how the time flew. Evening came down on Mambo. Everything was sold clean by 4 PM, but we continued to talk and to drink the indispensable Dutch drink coffee (in this heat!). Finally coffee became unbearable, and I ordered for myself and for mevrouw Weterholt a couple of cocktails. We have been trying to figure out the difference between Caipiroska and Caipirinha⁵⁸⁹, but in vain.

- *Wat ben jij een schat van een meid*⁵⁹⁰, Saskia! And how you can listen! - Hanneke became a bit tipsy after the fifth cocktail. - You know, Gerrit often has no time for me... No time for such womanly

⁵⁸⁵ Kalverstraat is a well-known pedestrian shopping street in Amsterdam

⁵⁸⁶ The Christian Democratic Appeal is a [Christian-democratic political party](#) in the [Netherlands](#) founded in 1977

⁵⁸⁷ Papiamento term for Dutch people who retire early and come to settle permanently in the Antilles after that

⁵⁸⁸ Famous Antillean TV cook

⁵⁸⁹ 2 different Caribbean cocktail drinks

⁵⁹⁰ You are such a treasure of a girl, Saskia! (Dutch)

talk as you and I are having here now. And other Dutch women here; they are too young to understand many things. And they think that their youth will last forever... For those living here it is one big adventure. The older ones are too busy with their children. And my adventure time has passed and my children grew up... Now I'm here making a monthly news-sheet of our society - wives of Dutch troops. We could let you join us; sorry that your husband isn't a military!

- Hmm... - I said, remembering the brave ranks of KPA⁵⁹¹.

- We have a lot of information in the news-sheet- recipes, for example. Again, local business are advertising with us, so they also benefit. We try to organize something interesting every month. During the Sinterklaas I dress up as Black Pete⁵⁹². I wanted to ask Gerrit be Sinterklaas - because he has the appropriate height and looks - but he turned us down, and so abruptly... I still feel hurt, to be honest. I had to invite Mr. Schoop for the Sinterklaas's part; like this, it even got funny. He's the Surinamese - so, we actually have a Black for the white Sinterklaas, just painted his face; and Black Pete is actually a white woman, but also painted. Almost like in that song of ours: «*De neger wil de blanke als slaaf, en wij vinden het zo wel goed*»⁵⁹³. A symbol of our good old Dutch multikulturalism. You know, in the 70's and 80 years, people have been much kinder...

- In my country too - I frankly told her, forgetting for a moment that I am Saskia.

- You see, and everybody says, apartheid, apartheid... Yes, it was a rotten system, no one disputes. I myself participated in the actions of our boycott of "Shell." But I'm sure that in South Africa, among Afrikaners, there were also a lot of good people, right?

- Remember, for example, poet Ingrid Jonker, - I said, not wanting to directly answer this question.

- Yes, of course... Have you seen our Dutch series about South Africa? "Stellenbosch⁵⁹⁴"?

This unfortunate soap... I have attempted once to watch it on DVD: long after I was gone from the Netherlands, I continued to buy new Dutch films. I was still wondering what and how the life was there, in that this country, which also became an integral part of my life, though a rather sad one. And some of these films were very much to my liking. But this one... I watched only the first part and had to turn it off. It seemed so racist and so traditional-colonialist to me. With glorification of "hard-working" (yeah, for some reason it always works so well on other people's stolen land!) Colonists, condemning "these strange left" of their own community and with the image of "natives" existing solely in order to forgive their white masters everything and to be the object of their sexual desire. The fact that the main character's dad kills the little brother of this character's such local "object of desire", it turns out, it's okay, and she graciously forgives him, allowing him to abuse her. Apparently, that's what some Dutch perverts would like "the new South Africa" to be: apartheid was abolished exclusively in order for these European middle ages randy goats no longer have to break the "law of morality", while doing their dirty adventures!

- Yes, yes, very nice - I said absently, - it's very close to reality.

⁵⁹¹ KPA- Korean People's Army

⁵⁹² In the [folklore](#) and [legends](#) of the [Netherlands](#) and [Belgium](#), Zwarte Piet (meaning Black Pete) is a [companion of Saint Nicholas](#) ([Dutch: Sinterklaas](#)) whose yearly feast in the Netherlands is usually celebrated on the evening of 5 December (*Sinterklaas-avond*, that is, St. Nicholas Eve) and 6 December in Belgium, when they distribute [sweets](#) and [presents](#) to all good children.

⁵⁹³ "The Black Man wants the White Man as a slave, and we approve of it" (lines from Hans De Booy's song "Tolerance" from the 1990s) (Dutch)

⁵⁹⁴ Dutch TV soap opera about life of Afrikaners community in South Africa

I just hoped she would not start question me about the real Stellenbosch. Did Hilda say anything to me about it?..

- Saskia, jij bent echt een schat⁵⁹⁵! - Hanneke finished one more drink. Apparently, Gerrit did not pamper her with drinks - I'll have to introduce you to our American companions. They are a bit like us, the Dutch. Only more traditional. Some of them even know how to sew clothes - can you imagine? I have never held a needle and thread in my hands! If I break something, I just throw it away and buy a new thing. They, of course, also don't fix rags: for them it is a kind of hobby, all this sewing. Mr. O'Leary's wife, Olivia, for example. She knows how to sew bed covers from small pieces. Patchwork. As an artist. Today we have sold, among other things, 3 covers that she has made - for 50 guilders⁵⁹⁶ each.

Hmm, maybe this is their national sport, along with carpet bombing of the most vulnerable countries? I remembered *Lame Crutch's* wife: she called herself "*The Irish Puma*" and also was seamstress and ardent fan of Hillary Clinton. Our "Puma" was so terribly upset when Obama got the nomination, instead of her idol...

- It will be an honour for me to meet Mrs. O 'Leary,- I said.

- And now let's fold the tables, Saskia... They say that today Marco Borsato himself will be singing at the beach! But that's something I can not believe... I will not believe it until I 'll see with my own eyes!

She was right that she did not believe it... An hour later instead of Marco Borsato some local *bubbling*⁵⁹⁷ thundered from loudspeakers with a vengeance, and I got the taste for it and danced together with Anita's husband. He, too, was a fan of Wilders, but this did not prevent him from copy - though in a rather comical way - Antillean hip movements. Oisin, which by that time, too, appeared in my and Hanneke's company (as usual, only after sunset) and managed to charm her and other Dutch women by his terseness (reticence?) and the contrast of his white-toothed smile with a black beard, quite naturally frowned, watching this scene.

- Don't know about you, but I'm quite content today, - I told him back in the car - One day I was passing a test called "Knowledge of land and its people" and I got a bad mark because what I said was true and not what was expected of me. And today I had a real, not theoretical exam on such knowledge, and I think I passed it with distinction (honor?). And you too, well done! You have very naturally portrayed jealousy. Now all Dutch women envy me.

Oisin frown even more severe and kept silent. And he kept silent all the way home.

I will not describe all the vicissitudes of my acquaintance with Mrs. O'Leary and other Americans. For two reasons: first, as goes Belgian song, «*maar als ik alles zou vertellen, dan moest dit een maxi versie zijn*».⁵⁹⁸ And secondly, if I start to write it all down on paper, my story is going to confirm the most common, almost caricatured view of Americans so much, that I'll run the risk that no one will believe me.

⁵⁹⁵ Saskia, you really are a treasure! (Dutch)

⁵⁹⁶ Antilles' currency was Antillean Guilder

⁵⁹⁷ Caribbean music style

⁵⁹⁸ "But if I would tell you everything, it would have to be a maxi-version" (from the song of Margriet Hermans "All Beautiful Men Are So Ugly" (Belgian song from the 1990s)

Sometimes even I myself felt that those American wives must be pretending: how can one live with so little knowledge and such flat perceptions of the world? However, when the world got to know Mr. George W Bush, did it not seem to us impossible that a man with such an intellectual level was elected a president? In America, unfortunately, it seems that even worse things can happen... And my new acquaintances did not even imagine that it is possible to live in a different way than they did and to strive for something other than themselves.

In general, both of these groups of wives had one important thing in common: they reminded me not comrades-in-arms of the defenders of their homeland, but rather ostriches, trying to live their life with their heads in the sand.

None of these women did even realize what their husbands were actually doing here in a foreign land. As well as what the likes of them are they doing in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries. After all, to believe in some kind of special nobility of their mission is much more pleasant than to admit even to themselves, that it is the most ordinary colonialism. Instead of thinking these ladies did cross stitching, playing beach volleyball, swimming in the sea and practiced charity. To me they somehow reminded a Russian group of human rights activists visiting Belfast: those ones who sang at a party paid by the British in unison with the local RUC policemen. For them too, it was much more pleasant to think of themselves that they were doing something useful.

... However, I must say that these contacts were really helpful. Because thanks to Olivia and Hanneke heavy millstones of the bureaucratic military machine budged, and Tyrunesh's plan was becoming reality. For which we were very grateful to both of them!

A month later, I was already bringing visitors to the FOL: of course, only on strictly certain days and hours. And I already got to know the place pretty well, - of course, within the limits of what I was shown. All sorts of types passed through my hands as potential bidders for the Pentagon contract - *DynCorp International* and *Kellogg, Brown & Root*, *Lockheed Martin* and *Raytheon*... Numbers of my cumulative (useful?) for our cause contacts grew rapidly.

- And you didn't believe me that we can do it! - Tyrunesh liked to repeat to me whenever I brought her another summary. The next time Oisín was to go to the meeting with Saoirse instead of me: it was time for him to finally do some real work too.

Life went on as usual. Two weeks have long passed, I haven't bumped into Sonny during this time, and I sighed with relief at last and almost calmed down. But Carmela warned me that it was too early to relax: Sonny just postponed his trip for financial reasons.

- But señor Arturo actually moved back to Curaçao for good, - she told me - and now he lives with her sister. Well, he almost doesn't leave the house, except for the church on the weekends. But still, please, stay away from Suffisant⁵⁹⁹.

I promised to keep away from it. Although internally I was very sorry that I could not meet with him and talk. I was very happy for señor Arturo that he finally was able to return home and did not stay to live out his days in exile.

In real life, as was correctly noted in a song from the movie "12 chairs"

"No need to waste your nerves in vain:

Life is like a zebra, like a zebra,

⁵⁹⁹ District on Curacao

*A black stripe and then there will be a white one,
That's all the secret..."*

But how can one not to waste nerves, when it is the turn for a black stripe?...

All the worst things always happen to me in May. In May they transferred serve on Curaçao Zeena Kostyuchenko.

Of her existence, I learned by accident. On the last day of May: the same day that mine and Sonny's wedding took place years ago, I walked past the American hangar with my regular visitors, when a stray dog ran along the fence of the base. It listened to the sounds of metallic clanging coming from the hangar and began loud barking.

- Get the f*** out of here, you bitch! - came out of the hangar sweet girlish voice. It was said in good Russian: if you can, of course, call these words "good language" - I mean, without an accent.

I froze. And hastened to take away the visitors away from the hangar.

We had to quickly figure out who this speaking in Russian stranger was and what she was doing there. But so as not to arouse suspicion, including the fact that I understand Russian.... I could hardly wait for the end of the tour.

Fortunately, that day Colonel Weterholt was at the base. Ever since I became friends with his wife, both of them were constantly inviting me to visit their house.

- Ah, Saskia! - He was delighted to see me. - Well, when you will finally pay us a visit? Hanneke is so eager to let you taste her trademark stampot. Next weekend, you just take your Alan and... But if you do not want to take him with you, you don't have to. I'll be even glad if you'll be without him....

Half an hour later I found out the following from the Colonel.

The stranger really was Russian. She has long been serving in the U.S. Army and reached the rank of Sergeant. She was an aircraft mechanic by profession, and had just moved to Curaçao - after a short vacation, deserved for her service in Iraq. Together with her 2 more soldiers moved here. Apparently, she was of great interest not just to me, but for all the Dutch and Antilleans, who heard of its existence. After all, not every day you could come across attractive Eastern European women at the U.S. military base. Until recently, Americans were familiar with them only from Colonel Ninotchka in a show called GLOW600 and Anna Kournikova (mail order brides do not, most of the Westerners I knew thought of this category as of «losers»). And the first thing asked by the Dutch who have learned of the arrival to the base of this woman, too, was "Does she look a bit like Anna Kournikova?." Just like Geoffrey once asked back in Northern Ireland.

But she was not like Kournikova.

It was a dark-haired girl, with slightly high Slavonic cheek-bones, with a snub nose that made her look like the Ukrainian singer Ruslana⁶⁰¹, with a beautiful sensual face and chiseled figure, feminine even in American military uniform. How did she manage to fall that low? This was even worse than being a prostitute!

⁶⁰⁰ Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling - US TV show with female wrestling from the late 1980s

⁶⁰¹ Ruslana Lyzhichko (b. 1974)- Ukrainian Eurovision winner, see previous notes

I first saw her at the picnic at Weterholts' where I came with Oisin: we had to, because of the latest developments. When you face unknown danger, it is better to look it in the face, rather than expect it to strike you in the back.

- Zeena, - she introduced herself to me in good English, but with a strong accent. - Z, double «e», n, a. Yeah right... Are you sure about it, Zinaida Batkovna? That double «e» and not any other way?⁶⁰²

By the end of the evening I had some idea of how she came to such a life. I myself did not talk with Zeena about it: so as not to attract too much attention. It seemed that every time I had to refer to her, my native accent on which I have been working on so much, grew stronger. Maybe because that was the sort of accent she had: strong, juicy, typical Eastern European. And a little bit Southern, with a soft "g."

Probably my fears were groundless, but I still decided not to risk it. For the whole night, I did not say to her more than three sentences. And her story she told not to me, but to Olivia O'Leary and other Americans. I just listened and picked up bits and pieces.

... Once in a small village near Rostov there was a girl called Zinaida Kostyuchenko. A Cossack girl, like my grandmother, only not the Kuban, but the Don one⁶⁰³, as the heroines of Sholokhov. Everything about her was perfect. She was great at school, she was considered a first-class beauty and was one of the best Pioneer, and then Komsomol activist. And she always perfectly passed all the GTO⁶⁰⁴ norms. During the harvest season she was also the first helper in the fields. Her parents were nice, loving, and hard-working: mother - an English language teacher at the school, and father- chief agronomist at a local collective farm.

She would have been destined to live and rejoice in the vast expanses of Rostov region, but when Zeena was 15 years old, her country - the Soviet Union - ceased to exist. The collective farm where her parents were working - until recently it was a farm-millionaire - after a while became poor, youth left to work in the city, and her mother's school was closed. Zinaida, who dreamed about studying at the University of Rostov, instead became a sales girl in a Rostov kiosk. City by then was flooded with refugees from the Caucasus, where different wars were ongoing; small and big, and the owner of Zinaida's kiosk was an Armenian. She was 17 years old when... I will not say what happened, you have probably understood. She was very afraid of losing her job and staying in the unfamiliar city all by herself, with no means of livelihood. After that Zinaida firmly hated all the "blacks" - from Armenians to Indians and Chinese. Although Chinese and Indians had nothing to do with what had happened to her.

But she had nowhere to go: back at home her parents still had another 2 kids to feed, those kids were born back in the good times, when no one had even suspected that such day might come when you would have no means to feed your kids... Zinaida tried to go into modelling business, since her looks allowed her that, and all the girls' magazines were vying with talking about what kind of sugary life models have, but this life turned out to be not very different than the one of the kiosk's employee...

⁶⁰² In Russian, her name is spelled with one "I" instead of "ee."

⁶⁰³ There are different variations of Cossacks, usually based on the name of the river in the region where they live: Don Cossacks, Kuban Cossacks, Terek Cossacks etc.

⁶⁰⁴ Ready For Labor And Defence, abbreviated as GTO was the All-Union physical culture training programme, introduced in 1931 on the initiative by [Komsomol](#). It was a complement to the [Unified Sports Classification System of the USSR](#). While the latter provided [Soviet](#) physical education system requirements only for athletes, GTO was a programme for all Soviet people of almost all ages. By the year 1976, 220 million people were awarded GTO badges while in 1986 the tests were passed by 33.9 million people.

She was already almost in despair, but then one of her girlfriends left the farm to get married in Germany. By correspondence. She rapidly became the envy of the whole farm: listening to the stories told by the girl's mother, looking at the photos of Germany that she has sent photos ("this is our house", "this is our car") and at the gifts sent by her to her family. They envied her remarkably en masse: despite the fact that the German husband was 30 years her senior and extremely tatty. Zinaida, who had already turned 19 years old - by rural concepts, almost a spinster - also burned with a desire to arrange her own destiny. Photographed in a bikini with the background of the old carpet at her parents' house, in a vulgar pose (she was told that this was "sexy" and that after that there will be an endless queue of Western suitors), sent photos to a Moscow marriage agency and waited for her prince.

Princes did come across, but they were all strange: no one wanted to save the Russian beauty and brain-box from poverty, everyone just asked for yet more of similar photos. But at last the prince was found - in the person of already not so young American called Jerry, who wrote to her that she was his love at first sight and asked her to become his wife. Jerry was almost 50, and he lived in a small town in the middle of nowhere, but it did not scare Zinaida.

Her imagination painted rosy pictures of a peaceful village life - similar to the way in which their Rostov farm was before perestroika, only with more gadgets. Golden wheat fields, children playing in the steppe... And good people who are not seeking how to use you and then to throw you on the side of the road, when you will be no longer required...

Zinaida convinced herself that she was in love with Jerry. Even his picture did not frighten her. If only she could leave, leave as soon as possible and for good, so that her future children would not have to go through what she went through in order to be able to help her parents.

That's what she was thinking on the way to America, already in America itself, while going down the aisle with Jerry and even during her wedding night with him.

But life in America turned out to be not as she had imagined. It was not like a good and peaceful Rostov Soviet collective farm. Zinaida did not go in details, but I understood that Jerry was in debts, and beat her as gray goat. With great difficulty Zinaida managed to escape from him and with even greater efforts - to divorce him, while keeping the right to stay in America. Going back home would mean not just economic problems - it would be a loss of face. A thing much more terrible in the countryside.

Time went on...but the prince on a white horse still didn't come forward to Zeena. She had to work as a dishwasher, a waitress, a nanny, and even as a call girl. But Richard Gere are scarce nowadays⁶⁰⁵. What Richard Gere, at this stage she would have agreed even for an OJ Simpson! She just would not let him from the beginning to treat her as he had treated his Nicole. And then she would just divorce him, get a lot of money and move somewhere to Canada. Marriage to Jerry has hardened Zinaida, and now she would not tolerate such treatment from any man. Rather, she would treat them like that herself.

But she had turned 26, and Prince still did not come. Does she have to remain a Cinderella for the rest of his life - virtuous, but deep in the ashes, - when somewhere in the world there are glass slippers? Then she enrolled in the U.S. Army - where else, if not there could you meet so many singles and young men at once? And to get a good pay for rotating in their circles was a bonus. It was good - at least compared with the wages of a dishwasher.

⁶⁰⁵ Hint at the Hollywood film "Pretty Woman" (1989)

In the army, Zeena acquired the skills of a mechanic, soon went on a promotion and for the first time in her life felt professional pride. About the ethics of her actions she never even thought. Ethics died for her, along with the Soviet Union. Gogol's words "*homeland is what our soul is seeking*⁶⁰⁶" never tortured her with their cold blasphemy. "Do I have to live like worms from that joke: all life in the manure, because " there is such a thing called Motherland? "- she used to say.

After a while, already in Iraq, she met Fred. A sociable, happy gamer who loved his burgers and steaks, he was easily lost when he saw her languid brown eyes and tasted her Cossack beetroot borscht. They were so happy together - even in Iraq. So much fun - even during a sandstorm, even during night raids to the houses of those Arab morons. Next to Fred Zeena finally felt herself 100% American, and was afraid of nothing, not even of the roadside mines. And then... then he was killed. A helicopter in which he was traveling, was shot down. In front of her eyes. Since then, life has never been the same for her.

Zinaida must have really wanted for people to respect her and to admire her and yet, to feel sorry for her at the same time. Her story sometimes even gave hints of Tolstoy's "Peter the Great." "*If only nausea could again swept over my eyes - I would not feel so sorry for myself... Animals, people are just animals... Once upon a time there was a girl... she lived like as a flower field... Dasha, Little Dasha - called me mother dear... Why did you give me life?.. So that people would bury me alive... I am innocent... Do you see me, do you?*"⁶⁰⁷

I tried to feel sorry for her, but I couldn't. I was sorry for Natasha - victim of sex slavery, but for Zinaida - no.

Instead, I imagine those whose homes she and her Fred searched with so much "fun." They were frightened, those people; their children were crying. And in my heart grew a sense of disgust in relation to this my, so to speak (so-called), compatriot. Zinaida's actions were tantamount to enrolling in butchers after your family had died in a slaughterhouse. And even to be proud of it. And Zinaida was clearly proud of: of her uniform, and of her bought with someone else's blood passport. That sort of people became *polizei*⁶⁰⁸ during the war. They, too, were in the service of the Germans because they "did not want to live in shit." Instead, they wanted to drag into shit other people...

No matter how badly life treated you, you shouldn't turn into a sub-human, using this bad treatment as an excuse. Yes, you can make a mistake, you can mess things up in a stupid way, but you can not allow yourself to turn into a beast.

- With her, you will have to keep your eyes open, - Oisin said when we got back to our place.

- I already know that, - I sighed.

In my heart, I was worrying. Not only and not so much out of concern for my safety, but because of all the thoughts and feelings that were awakened in me after meeting with this Khutoryanka⁶⁰⁹. Very serious thoughts: about the meaning of human life.

The appearance of Zeena at the base spurred me like a whip. All week I kept literally dropping everything out of my hands. That, at least, was my feeling. It was good that I only had one tour on the base that week. I felt like I was wasting my life. After all, we still have not find out so far, that those

⁶⁰⁶ Nikolai Gogol "Taras Bulba", see previous notes

⁶⁰⁷ Quote from the novel "Peter the First"(1929-1934) by Alexei Tolstoy (1883- 1945), nicknamed the *Comrade Count*, was a Russian and [Soviet](#) writer who wrote in many genres but specialized in science fiction and historical novels.

⁶⁰⁸ Collaborators with the Nazis during the WWII in the USSR; German word "polizei" means "policeman"

⁶⁰⁹ A woman from a *khutor* - a single-[homestead](#) rural settlement of [Eastern Europe](#)

mysterious words about the aircraft and the trap for Chavez meant. And I haven't met Comrade Orlando yet, although our meeting was due to be held in mid-May.

- He is still in Europe, - explained to me Tyrunesh. - Do not worry, he will come soon.

In the evenings I felt that I started to lose my nerves. Especially when I thought of the boys and Lisa. I really wished there was an understanding, close person next to me for a while, with whom I could talk about all of this. Yes, Oisín was my comrade, but he kept certain distance from me in our conversations, and I was not sure if he would understand me, if I had shared with him the thoughts that I had after meeting Zeena. "Ri Rang, he'd be the one who would have definitely understood!" - I thought for the umpteenth time in recent months. And I re-read many times his sweet note. I jammed almost up to holes these simple and gentle lines, which I long ago learned by heart. But I still liked to see these rounded, carefully written by him letters: when I looked at them, it was as if he appeared in front of me at the same time, the same trim and fit. At bedtime I stared till pain in my eyes at his only photograph which I had with me, and then I was trying to recreate in my memory every detail of his face. I counted the days until next meeting with Saoirse Oisín: from her I could get such rare news from my family. I imagined how I would get a new few lines written by Ri Rang's hand. They were so necessary to me now, like an oxygen mask to somebody caught in a vacuum. At the thought of it, my soul was thrilling.

Finally the day came. This time it fell on a Sunday, and I did not have to go anywhere, but that was even worse, because it was impossible to fill my thoughts up with anything else, from the very early morning.

In the morning Oisín was quietly humming in the bathroom an old Irish song, trimming his his beard:

«Come tell us how you slew

Those brave Arabs two by two

Like the Zulus they had spears and bows and arrows,

How you bravely slew each one

With your sixteen pounder gun

And you frightened them poor natives to their marrow.

Oh, come out you black and tans,

Come out and fight me like a man

Show your wives how you won medals down in Flanders

Tell them how the IRA made you run like hell away,

From the green and lovely lanes in Killashandra. »610

He had a good voice. But seeing that I was listening to it, Oisín got shy and went silent.

- Go on, go on, - I said - I did not mean to interrupt. *"It would be wrong. This approach is equivalent to limiting the supply line of battle ammunition "611*

⁶¹⁰ "Come Out Ye Black and Tans", Irish rebel song from the 1920s

⁶¹¹ From the book of Choe In Su "Kim Jong Il, the People's Leader"

But he did not want to sing anymore.

Oisín left, I wished him *good-bye or break a leg*⁶¹² (he was already familiar with this, our Russian saying), and I stayed home. Time passed terribly slowly. I vacuumed all the rooms twice, watered the flowers, polished all the dishes to perfection, hoed the beds in the garden, but there was still no sign of Oisín.... I was getting anxious. Finally, when I did not know how to cope with this and therefore started to paint the kitchen door in purple, somebody slammed the front door. Oisín returned.

- And? - I ran to him, casting a swinging brush covered in paint, so that the floor was scattered with fat purple blobs.

- Everything is fine. Comrade Orlando will meet you at Fort Nassau next Saturday at 9:00 pm. Our Irish comrades send greetings to us and comrades from Venezuela thank us for useful information. Oh, I almost forgot, here...

I almost snatched the little white envelope from Oisín's hand and could not resist to rip it open straight away. A small photocopy of my mother's handwritten letter fell into my hand. There was no letter from Ri Rang in the envelope.

[View detailed dictionary](#)

⁶¹² Russian wish of good luck, in accordance with one of numerous Russian superstitions

Chapter 28. The Grapes of Wrath

"During the war a rather unpleasant thing happened to me sometimes. Apparently, this character trait was inherited from my Terek Cossacks ancestors on Mother side... In anger, I become almost insane... My heart was pounding with fury in my throat."

(*T. Lisitcian "War Was Breaking Us"*)

"God is of course in thruth and not in might,
But only strong and righteous will make right."

(*Inna Kabysh*)

Mum wrote, as usual, a lot. About the kids: with them everything was fine, but they were missing me. Mother described for me different funny stories from their kindergarten life. But she wrote not only about them. Apparently, my letter raised in her a new surge of memories.

"...With the advent of perestroika into our lives came advertising: annoying, often poorly made, vulgar and unprofessional, in a semi-literate language. In Soviet times, there was also advertising: I remember very well how our Shurek as child, going to a nearby shop, which was popularly known by the name of its pre-revolutionary owner - "Dayev's" - loudly proclaimed: *Taste the Soviet champagne!* (In the store there were colourful leaflets with this advertisement), and across the road from our train station visitors to our city were met with some irony by a huge poster: *Try out the Aeroflot airlines!* One of the most famous Soviet advertisement became part of the famous comedy Ivan Vasilievich Changes Profession - *Citizens! Keep your money in the Sberbank savings bank*⁶¹³. More often than not advertising was on the local radio in the mornings: for the Gosstrakh State Insurance Services - in the form of various amusing mini-plays. You yourself liked listening to it as a child. It was funny, but not disgusting. Advertise the things that people may not have thought of buying or doing.

Advertising in the Soviet period was not intrusive, not patronizing, not shamelessly filling people's homes through television. Not to mention shamelessly looking into people's underwear, as they do now (advertising sanitary pads, etc.) Much more important in the lives of people during the Soviet time was not advertising, but product information on products and services. Professional magazines were published: such as "*New Customer Goods*", "*Commercial Herald*", "*Demand*", and others. These magazines informed people about the goods, produced in the country or imported: their quality, performance, materials or products from which they were made, the enterprises in which they were produced.

These reviews were not hiding anything, they wrote about the shortcomings of products as well as their good qualities, thus the idea was to inform the consumer and to give him the freedom of choice. Our Soviet advertising respected intelligence of the consumers: because really, our Soviet consumer was literate and educated, not only formally. Capitalist advertising considers consumers to be stupid. For the Soviet people such advertising is perceived as an insult to their intelligence.

True, in the beginning of the advent of capitalism with its "ninth wave" of advertising, our people who were accustomed to the Soviet habit of believing radio, television and newspapers, rushed to buy the advertised products, or, even worse, brought their savings, to AO "MMM", Khopyor Invest⁶¹⁴ and other similar Ponzi schemes. But they quickly realized that all of such Filthy companies as the MMM JSC. And then they began to laugh, in accordance with our national tradition: at the advertising, at each other and at themselves. That was when jokes started circulating about advertising. But our people quickly realized that the good, quality goods do not need any advertising, and that the more annoying and pushy an ad is, usually, the worse is the advertised product. Our children have long understood that Alyonka⁶¹⁵ is much tastier than Snickers and Mars and don't even look at the latter anymore, also preferring our local crisps. People in Russia generally do not pay attention to the advertised product: for example, when, after 10 pm on all channels advertised beer flows like water (on each channel a different brand). Then the next day when people meet each other they laugh and greet each other with the words from those commercials: *We should chill out more often*,⁶¹⁶ and at the same time they do not even remember which beer was advertised last night. Those who drink it already have a brand of beer that they love, and advertising does not affect that. Regardless of the amount of advertising people, know that local dairy products are better and more natural than the so widely hyped *Domik v derevne*⁶¹⁷. And that our local chickens are several orders of magnitude tastier and safer to eat than the infamous Bush legs⁶¹⁸ (apparently, it must have been even Bush-father, if we judge by how hard that meat iss!). No matter how much they advertise smoked sausage Yummy-yummy, the population that gets pensions worth just ten old Soviet roubles, and student scholarship money equivalent to only three old Soviet roubles, this sausage will be rotting in warehouses, regardless of how tasty it is supposed to be. It has already happened with our black caviar, which now you will not find on sale in Russian shops anywhere (duty-free at the airports doesn't count): not because people are snapping it or because they do not like, but because no one can afford to buy it at that price. Therefore, they just stopped selling it all together.

Many of our people find commercial ads terribly annoying. Some people even stick a white strip of paper at the bottom of their TV screen, so as not to see the scrolling line. I personally often switch TV to another channel during commercials. But they seem to have outsmarted me here and began to run ads almost simultaneously on all channels. Worst of all is the night when you cannot get out to the balcony or into the kitchen during the good films, and commercials interrupt them every 10 minutes. I then have to turn off the sound and to close my eyes, and at night it's very easy to fall asleep this way... And also for some reason for a long time in commercial breaks during the broadcast of Formula 1 car racing: 40 minutes for a total of one and a half hours of racing, I timed it! - they advertise some

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Infamous Russian Ponzi schemes that have collapsed in the 1990s. At that time Ponzi schemes were completely new and unknown phenomenon to former Soviet citizens whose savings in the USSR were always protected by the state, hence the blind trust of too many people into these "investing schemes."

615

Alyonka is a girl's name. It is the most famous brand of Soviet chocolate that is still being produced today.

616

Commercial slogan of one of Russian beer brands

617

Literally: Little House in the Countryside, contemporary Russian brand of milk products

618

Mocking nickname of chicken's drumsticks imported to Russia from the US which are usually of very bad quality

male stimulant, apparently believing that all Formula fans must be extremely impotent! And in advertising of toothpaste they often film people with obviously false teeth.

When I came home from your Ireland, we had the local radio every day for an hour in the afternoon and evening, touting some dietary supplement based on kelp. I studied advertising business back in the Soviet period for my work, and then again during the perestroika, and I had to work with almost all advertising agencies in our city. So I know the prices for such services. So, based on this knowledge of the cost of advertising, this drug cannot be anything other than a mud from a nearby puddle. In addition, they began to stage phone calls from allegedly "grateful patients": add to that price also expenditure on the actors. After adoption of the Law on advertisement time of such programmes has decreased, but now they are just called by another name: "Talking about health" and the like, and today the Russian radio consists of such "talks" for about 70% of broadcasting time, their the tone is didactic and achingly -persuading.. And it is unclear to whom they are addressed (except for perhaps some mentally defective listeners): the elderly are not so stupid and not so rich, and the young ones are not so sick. Because of such things most people in Russia now even refuse to listen to the radio at all, I have it now also only in order to find out the weather forecast. And when they are going to shut off the hot water in the city.

And the TV screens continue to urge us all to buy a massager- well, an extremely seductive offer, with a free measuring tape as a gift! Are they mocking us or something? And for some reason they carry their washing powder everywhere with them: on the street, and on a date, and even in a theatre. But our people are still much more inventive than in the West - we find our own use for all those things: sanitary pads with wings are put in place of shoes insoles (both warm and soft, and it absorbs moisture!). When there is no shovel, we use a tray for tea set for clearing the snow; in St. Petersburg, our men arranged a sailing competition... on inflatable sex dolls (of course, the whole river was covered with laughter!)... And do you know with what we fence off the trenches dug during road works? With lights made from plastic bottles: we cut them to the desired size and stretch inside of them wire with electric bulbs. Old people use the same bottles instead of water dispensers in country cottages or for planting tomato seedlings. When we send alcohol bottles through the post, we wrap them up in children's nappies- to prevent breakages...

The difference between the Soviet and the capitalist advertising is that the Soviet advertising, besides state insurance services and Aeroflot also dealt with really completely new products, of which the public was still unaware. But that were always products of really high quality; while the capitalist advertising is focused solely on selling at any cost: obtrusion of goods to the public, as much as possible, and getting the people into debt. And you know yourself, the worse is the product, the faster it breaks, and... there we go again, in a circle! In the capitalist world, there is a whole lot of very highly paid people who are not involved in the production process. i e, do not produce any real benefits to society, but their upkeep is included in the price of goods and services: various stock and commodity exchanges (traders), professional sport ("sponsorship"), model-prostitution business, security guards, managers and other *office plankton*, as Mikhail Zadornov⁶¹⁹ rightly calls them. The socialist economy managed perfectly well without any of this (well, if not completely, then those costs did not bear any

comparison with what is taking place under capitalism, and those funds spent on this, would have been well enough for free education, free health care, subsidized housing, etc.)...."

"In the capitalist world, they don't even have such a criterion: to benefit the society" - I thought mechanically.

I read my mother's letter, and its contents did reach my mind, but as if in a fog. Fog shrouded my eyes. Why, oh why Ri Rang did not send me a letter?

Maybe he was so busy that he did not find the time for it? But at least a couple of lines he could write: he knows how important it is for me...Or perhaps did I write something wrong to him myself the last time? After all, I'm still so new to the customs and traditions of this mysterious country: what if I somehow inadvertently offended him, without even knowing it? Or maybe he was denied permission to our marriage, and he therefore did not write anything at all: because he did not want to upset me? Or maybe something else happened: not with him and not between us, but something else? Perhaps the international situation has changed? For example, the deterioration in the inter-Korean relations after Lee Myung-bak⁶²⁰'s taking office in South Korea wasn't a secret for anybody. But in general, news from the DPRK reached here very rarely, and when they did, it was often not news at all, but unsubstantiated gossip, fiction passing the desirable for reality by the Japanese, South Korean intelligence services and North Korean renegades that was bloated Western media up to the skies: in a rough and caricature-like form. Based on this, it was very difficult to find out what was really going on over there, and what wasn't, but I knew one thing: 99.9% of these "news" were sucked out of thumb by the enemies of this country, and these "news" should be looked at accordingly.

Unfortunately, I could not go directly on the DPRK Internet sites: my mission on Curaçao did not allow me that. But then again, judging by mum's letter, everything was going well in Pyongyang. I was lost in conjecture about the reason for Ri Rang's silence. Mum wrote about him only that "Ri Rang sends greetings to you." As if we were talking about my some purely superficial friend... What could have happened there without me? But I did not want to complain about it to my mother.

I learnt to appreciate why there is some mistrust for foreigners in Korea since I understood as good as never before during our last days in Beijing. Thanks to Hilda. Thanks to her I realized, unfortunately, they cannot treat us for now in any other way. Because of such people as these foreigners.

It would seem that men allowed you into a decent country - hence, they have shown you trust; it would seem, you came there, too, with your good intentions, but once I looked deeper into this... That's when you see that under capitalism there is no concept of "benefit to society", but only "to conduct mutually beneficial cooperation.", and even that as a last resort. They, Koreans, of course, are well aware of this. And they know who they are dealing with in the face of such people as Hilda. But just in case they do not fully trust all of us. And rightly so: in fact, I almost began to believe her myself, almost began to consider her "one of our own.": after all, it was she who was preparing me for the trip - along with Dónal.

I did not tell her for a long time that I did not like what she was doing in Korea - because I knew that it was a temporary necessary evil, sort of like a predator allowed for a short time into a nature reserve, under the careful supervision of its workers. But at parting, I and Hilda had quite an argument in Beijing. She got herself into this: I did not want to bring this about.

- I noticed that you're trying to stay away from your fellow countrymen, Zhenya, - said Hilda once at a dinner, sipping from a glass of red wine and taking a bite from a force-fed Peking duck, while Dónal went to order himself a beer, - This, of course, is even commendable now, when you cannot share with anyone who you are. But generally speaking, one should love his *Vaterland*⁶²¹. Otherwise you'll never be happy.

She said it in such pompous, such lecturing tone that I finally broke down and exploded:

- And who told you that I do not love my *Vaterland*? I do, and even so much that you never dreamed of it! And that's exactly why I hate so much what some of my fellow countrymen did to it, do you understand?

But she did not understand and got herself even deeper into a bottle, even though I did not want to raise this issue.

- But, Zhenya, we must look for something good in everything... Yes, our children are not like us, but that's okay... And yet, in any time there is something positive...

- Even in the heyday of the apartheid? - I could not refrain from hitting her below the belt - Yes, I am not the same as my parents and grandparents, but still, the main values that we have in life, are common. There surely is something positive in any time, of course. For example, nowadays young people are snapping Marx' *Das Kapital* from the bookshelves. And this is completely voluntary. Have you heard how much its sales are growing? Is it not wonderful?

For business people (of both sexes) a reference to Marx is like to show an icon to a devil. Hilda turned green.

- This is all very well,- she said with a touch of sarcasm - If only socialist economy would have worked in practice... Except for some short on the historical scale outbreaks of enthusiasm of the masses...

I interrupted her:

- And what can your capitalist economy offer to the masses instead of their enthusiasm? Brothels? Coffee shops in the Dutch style⁶²²? A new model of mobile phone every three months? And for what? For the sake of the people? That is why, perhaps, in a capitalist society there are record numbers of drug addicts and of all kinds of perverts: because people are really happy, and their life has meaning? That is why children are starting to drink alcohol and smoke at 10-11 years? Is there such a good life now in South Africa? I do not think so. And do not tell me life stories of a couple of some crooks, who made fortune, as evidence to the contrary. I am talking about how the majority of the people live. In the Soviet Union, I never had the feeling that I was missing something, without which it is impossible to live. And today, my Bulgarian friends in their country that became EU member, are looking for food in somebody else's rubbish bins: it's probably they have such a great freedom of choice! So I advise you to change the subject. If you do not want to spoil your appetite.

- And yet...perhaps, you have a recipe for how to make that Marx's theory to work... Because you all just say that "another world is possible", but when it comes to the practice... I am going to Nampho

621

Motherland, native country (German)

622

In the Netherland *coffee shops* legally sell soft drugs

soon: to accept humanitarian aid from the UN... And you look at all the measures that Western governments are taking in order to rescue their economies...

-... Which will be paid for by the majority of poor people in the society! Your vaunted governments just launched their money printing presses to the full capacity. The entire West has been living in debt for years, if not centuries: what are you going to do when the time of payback will come? To blow up the whole planet, as suicide bombers? You have long been holding the whole world as a hostage. And please, do not give me as an example the difficulties in the Korean economy: it is a true miracle, what this small country with its limited resources manages to do every day, and this is despite all what you have been trying to do to it for such a long time! Yes, people need to be brought up properly under socialism, and corruption must be controlled in order to operate a socialist economy: in the interests of the majority (by the way, I have never seen such corruption and at the very top, as in Britain!). But what was the first thing that Gorby did when he came to power? Forgot? He had abolished the death penalty for economic crimes of the special large scale⁶²³! You, lousy civiliziers, would be the first ones to scream that it is a "dictatorship" if corruption will be brought under control.... Oh, and by the way, if the socialist economy is so bad, then what are you doing in the DPRK? *Opening the way*, as those still desperately hoping South Korean managers in Kaesong?

Even though we were in Beijing, not in Korea, and the Koreans could not hear us, Hilda turned pale.

- I was invited by the Koreans themselves. They need investments...

- You know very well why they are in a position where they are in need of it. Because of our, allies, betrayal. And you are invited as a temporary necessary evil. Put it into your pipe and smoke it; and please leave your missionary manners in Russia of the 1990s. Stop playing a benefactor. In our mind, you are just seeking to occupy a niche in a possible market before the others would jump in: that's what you hope for, and that's all what is really motivating you. Do you really think that they do not see it from miles away?

In excitement I switched into English, though before I spoke to her in Dutch.

- It is insulting to allege that the right to blah-blah somehow is more important for a human being than the right to raise his children in dignity, to educate them and to have medical care for them without fear of not being able to pay the bill. Only rich snobs who don't know anything about real life – that's because they suck the blood from 3/4 of the world's population!- can suggest otherwise. And please, spare me your sarcasm about «another world is possible»: that other world is right under your nose, but you snob it!

- Zhenya, Zhenya, quiet, not so loud... We are not enemies. Why do you think I am instructing you here?

- You know better why you do. Maybe it was just because your husband asked you to. Or some other old Irish friends whom you could not refuse. And maybe it's just your such long-term investment. In case if Marx was right. In any case, you continue to believe in the middle way, and it's like trying to sit between two chairs. Sooner or later, you will have a sore butt. This is the same phantom, as perpetual

motion, this "middle way" of yours. Only a certain assistant of a combine harvester driver⁶²⁴ and you can still maintain such illusions. Enough today to look at your "new South Africa", to see the results of all these consensuses and compromises. All of the "third ways" lead to only one Rome: the Rome of global capitalism. If anyone still does not understand it, let them read the memoirs of Michael Manley⁶²⁵. It is such an instructive book! He also wondered why did the Yankees try to put a spoke in the his wheel all the time when he was such a progressive man. He was constantly assuring the Americans that he was not a communist: each time before he did anything good for his people, as if he was asking Americans to forgive him for that in advance. And with what did his "careful approach" end in Jamaica? A CIA's great friend⁶²⁶ came to power there, that's with what!

Hilda was silent for a few seconds, and I even thought that she was about to start grabbing air with her lips, like a fish pulled out of water on a bait. But then she took a deep breath, her eyes narrowed unfriendly, and Hilda blurted

-You are an incorrigible idealist, Zhenya. I think that it is you who does not want to see reality. Let me give you one small example from your own life. Now you're thinking that you are waiting for permission to marry this your *fierce fighter against imperialism* - she slightly grimaced - A classic proof that you do not know these people. Do you really think he would make you a proposal, if this wasn't already agreed upon in advance at a higher level? And again, how many mixed couples did you see in Pyongyang?

- Joe Dresnok and his second wife⁶²⁷, - I blurted out, but my heart went cold.

- Joe Dresnok has nothing to do with it, - replied Hilda. I saw that she was getting a taste for it and even began to smile - it is a different thing. He is married to a woman whom no Korean would take as a wife. A half-breed. It is even surprising that they allowed such a child as her to be born. Did you ever think about why they are no mixed couples? Why did they make an exception for you? After all, no Korean would allow his whatever personal feelings to get in the way of his sense of duty to his country..

I already knew what she was hinting at. And thought how I should respond. But Hilda took my silence as a symptom of emotional knockout and with obvious pleasure continued:

- So, they just need you for some reason. Why, we do not know yet, but I think that over the time it will become clear to you in the first place. Purity of blood is so important for Koreans, that Comrade Song, we can say, is making a very serious sacrifice by deciding to take you as his wife. And most likely, it wasn't his own decision, he was probably asked to...

Getting personal, Hilda? Due to an inability to find arguments for more serious issues?

624

Gorbechev's first job as a teenager; mocking reference to his level of leadership

625

Michael Norman Manley (1924 – 1997) was a [democratic socialist Prime Minister of Jamaica](#) (1972–1980, 1989–1992), supporter of the so-called "Third way."

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Edward Philip George Seaga (b. 1930) - Jamaican politician and statesman; he was the [Prime Minister of Jamaica](#), from 1980 to 1989. On his links with the CIA see <http://patantonya.wordpress.com/tag/edward-seaga/>

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James Joseph Dresnok (born 1941) is an American defector to the DPRK, one of six American soldiers to defect after the [Korean War](#). He still lives in Pyongyang today.

Of course, she was expecting me to jump up, to become indignant, maybe even to shed a tear, as a real vulnerable idealist would do when somebody is attempting to touch his dream with dirty hands... You will never get it from me, my dear. Retaliation will be made with the same your Western cynicism. ? Who will come to us with a sword, will die from a sword⁶²⁸...

- Whatever the reasons, the fact remains, - I said to her with a quiet smile, - I would consider it a great honour if I can really be useful for them, for whatever that may be. I wonder why are you worrying so about it? Maybe upset that your services are not required beyond economic cooperation? No, it's not like you. Maybe you thought it would hurt my feelings? How naive of you... This is really an obvious case of incurable idealism. Isn't it just great: to combine revolutionary business with pleasure?

Hearing this, Hilda jumped up like scalded. *Gaaf!*⁶²⁹

- You know what.... You and he are really worthy of each other!

After that, she had nothing more to say, and hurried to finish her dinner, citing a headache as an excuse. And she never left her hotel room since. But Dónal did not find out about this our conversation: he spent too much time away from the table, getting his glass of beer...

... twenty years. For almost twenty years I am living in this pile of manure, masked at the top with a thin layer of chocolate, called *the free world*. If only could I escape for a while, take a breath of fresh air instead of inhaling this burning my nose *sodium sulfide of consumer stupidity!*. Cuba and the DPRK were to me like such a breath of fresh air to a diver, before his new dive into the deep. If only I could be sure that I don't have to stay for the rest of my life in this *bowel movement wrapped in a beautiful wrapper!* I want so much at least to spend the rest of it in the world, like the one where I was born and grew up, where I was formed as a person and where I was really happy, I just rarely thought about it... But I agree even to living in the capitalist hell (in order, of course, to destroy it!), if only Ri Rang was there!

I did not attach much importance to Hilda's words back then. Even if it were true, it only meant that they consider me to be worthy of trust. As for Ri Rang... *Ah Ri Rang*... Well, you know what, I'm not 15 years teenager to build illusions on the sand: I'm a grown up woman, and I know when I am being loved. And if feelings coincided with the needs of society, it is even much better...

But what if Hilda was right? What if he really did not have feelings for me, and it was only a direction from above, and now the need for it was no longer there, for whatever reasons, and...? I tried to drive away these thoughts, but something seems to have snapped in me when I did not receive a letter from Ri Rang. At work, I seem to be functioning normally, but I could not eat or sleep. After a couple of weeks I was left a shadow of myself. But I said to Tyrunesh and to worrying by my looks Colonel Weterholt that I am getting so skinny just because I'm on such a new diet.

- You, Saskia, do not need any diet! - Colonel was outraged. - You're just exactly the way a woman should be. So stop these women's stupidities.

I promised him to stop it. But I just couldn't.

In the evening, I climbed on the roof of our house on Jan Norduynweg, overgrown with vines, the watering of which is so expensive in Curaçao. I felt almost like back in my childhood, just needed

628

Words of the legendary Russian Prince Alexander Nevsky (1220-1263) after the Battle of the Ice (1242)

629

Cool, great! (Afrikaans)

around some lilac and pigeons. I sat there motionless, staring at the black velvet of the Antillean sky. In Pyongyang, it is a daytime now... Where are you, Ri Rang? Do you remember how you told me that you will always be with me, if I just close my eyes? Well, where are you? Where are you now when I need you so?

I closed my eyes and tried to recall his features. Now he seemed to me almost a dream: a wonderful dream that I dreamed of when I was abruptly awakened by someone. I can see us sitting on a bench in a park on the banks of the river, surrounded by willows, and he tells me about his first wife, the late Jong Suk. Ri Rang's face is dreamy, as if lit from within.

- Jong Suk understood me so well. Without words. What the Russian for my other half?... But do not think that if Jong Suk was my other half, then who you are... You're different, Zhenya. You are nobody's half. You are yourself a whole person. But this does not mean I love you less: it's just a little different love. And it also does not mean that you do not need anybody in your life, you do need a comrade-in-arms. You were always looking for him and could not find him. Because of looking at wrong people. Is this true, did I guess right?

- It is true - I say in surprise.

Ri Rang leans towards me, hugging my shoulders, and I hear his voice, for some reason with a strong Northern Irish accent.

- Zhenya, what is the matter with you dosing off on the roof! Something is going on within you, already for a long time. I can no longer watch you suffer. What is the matter with you, huh?

I opened my eyes. Bright tropical stars shone into my face. And next to me on the roof sat Oisin. I shyly got up and sat down. The last thing I wanted was to tell him about my personal life.

- Stop your inquiries, please! Someone may hear us... I'm okay, - I muttered, - There is nothing wrong with me. Just tired from work, and have fallen asleep. Thank you for waking me.

- Just tired? On the roof? You're sitting here all week in the evenings, I've seen it. And you do not eat anything. And you have such a face as if there was a coup in Venezuela again. Is anything wrong with the kids?

- No, the kids are all right.

- A... Well then, of course... - Oisin paused. I, too, was silent. What could I say?

- And it's great idea you came up with: to sleep on the roof... - He said suddenly. - Pity I didn't think of it before. It's warm here at night, but it's not hot. And there's no mosquitoes. Just what I like... Take a sleeping bag and lie here and watch the stars...

- Well, of course, the downside is that at night some fearless guys with a machete can join you up here, - I picked up - but it's such mere trifle, not even worth to mention. And that you will be awoken at dawn by the F-16:- just in time to get to your office for work. You can call the airbase and in the evening to order a *wake-up flight*.

We looked at each other and laughed.

- It is so good up here, - Oisin took a deep breath and spread his hands - you know, you'll laugh, but this is somewhat similar to Donegal in my childhood. It was the only place where parents could afford to bring us on holidays, the entire horde. It was our Spain or our Cote d'Azur. In the very first night there, I always could not sleep. Because of silence. What is it, I wondered, how come there are no explosions, no shots, no cries? How do they live here at all without it? Well, and then, after a couple of

days, then you were getting used to it. After impinging on the dunes in the afternoon with my brothers, breathing enough fresh air I could fall asleep just as well without explosions. But later, I did not want to go home... This is somewhat similar to Donegal. Perhaps, because of this. Just a pity that there are no familiar plants. Neither clover nor daisies. How was it?...She'll love me, she won't... Did you ever want to tell fortunes? But there are no daisies here anyway, - he added hastily, when I was only just beginning to realize that he had said.

- You don't need daisies - I blurted out, - you can use buttons.

- How's that? Never even heard about this.

- Look - and I started fingering the buttons on my blouse: - *He'll love me, he will not, he'll spit at me, he'll kiss me or he won't, he'll press me to his heart or he won't, he'll send me to hel or he won'tl, he'll love me, he won't...* Well, thank God, at least, he won't send me to hell!

Again I thought of Ri Rang. Oh, when will it be that he will press me to his heart?

- And I - Oisín ran his hand over his T-shirt, - unfortunately, there are no buttons here. Perhaps, therefore, even though no one sends me to hell, but no one also tries to...

He did not finish. I pretended not to hear.

- Do put on a shirt with buttons tomorrow and seek your fortune as much as you like.

- But then I could cheat: I could in advance to pick up something with as many buttons as I want.

- Yes, of course. But then it wouldn't be a proper fortune telling. This will be the same as stock trading in airline shares the day before September the 11 - knowing that it will take place. To say the least, quite unethical.

- And if I really want to guess? Seriously? - Asked Oisín.

- If seriously, that's really the right place for it: on Curaçao there are plenty of specialists in such matters. Just ask our so-called maid, when she would come to us to do the cleaning. I am sure that she will tell you whom you need to contact.

- Thanks, I will. By the way, did you have lunch today?

- No. I just don't want to eat for some reason. Probably because of the heat.

- Then how about a late dinner? You can't do without food at all. Let's go... or not, you just sit here, I'll bring for you...

- What? Not *spaghetti Bolognese* again?

- You are offending me. Can I not cook anything else? Liver and bacon, braised with onions and a side dish of colcannon. In Lenadoon⁶³⁰ style. Yummy, - Oisín winked. - I once was spoiling with this dish our guys in Long Kesh. In England we were not allowed to cook ourselves, but when we were transferred to Ireland... Sit down; I'll get you a plate.

He banged his heels on the roof towards the staircase.

I smiled. Still, it was nice to see that there was somebody who cared. I'll have to eat a little bit, so as not to offend him.

About ten minutes later Oisín returned. With a tray in his arms and a backpack, from which, when he opened it, threw steam. In the backpack there were two small pots, with liver and colcannon, 2 plates, forks, knives, and a bottle of red wine with a plastic cup. I guess for me, because he did not drink alcohol. Only once, that day in Portugal.

- You should have brought candles with matches for greater atmosphere! - I laughed. - Thank you for such care, but I will not drink, will you? Tomorrow I have to be in good form: Comrade Orlando is coming, remember?

- All right, do not drink then, - agreed Oisín - Am I going with you to that meeting, or are you going alone?

- I think it would be best to go to both of us - you, too, need to get to know him. By the way, Tyrúnesh said that we will have to agree with him when we are going to have some time off next time. You still do not want to take a vacation - do not feel like going home?

Oisín looked tense.

- No, I don't, - he said through his teeth. - I'm not tired, I do not want to rest. You better eat, or it will get cold.

I do not like boiled cabbage. Mashed potatoes are OK, but like this, mixed with this green mass... I closed my eyes, poured generously with thick onion sauce over it, took my fork and took a small piece.

- Hey, how yummy! - I feigned surprise on my face. After all, he was really doing his best.

Oisín beamed.

- I told you that you will lick off your fingers!

He hesitated:

- Listen... maybe you could teach me how to make this your... what is it called?... that red soup...?

- Borsch⁶³¹? - It was my turn to wonder - With pleasure! I would have already taught you, it's just because you, Northern Irish, are afraid to even try any food that you do not know since childhood...

- Well, now I'm not afraid anymore. Matured finally, you can say. I guess I should say thank you... If I had not been here, and would not have known that in life there are so many different things.

- Well, you see, I told you that a long time ago...

Then I remembered that it was better not to remember what had been a long time ago, and what else I told him then. Although Oisín clearly ceased to panic at the thought of the past.

- Look, let's cook in the future not each our own food, but in turns: one day - you, the day - I? - He asked.

- Is this a proposal to conduct a joint household? - I joked.

- And why not? You know how much we can save on gas and water?

- Okay, let's save, Matroskin⁶³².... It is a cat we had in a cartoon, he too, loved to save so much. Only if someone would come to us for a dinner and see that we are preparing the Irish and Russian dishes,

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Russian and Ukrainian traditional beetroot soup, red in color

there goes our cover... Did you think about that? While I can also cook some Ethiopian food. Or... - I wanted to say "Korean", but did not. Such pure things better not to touch in a trivial conversation.

- And we will not let anybody to come to us for dinner - said Oisín with a strange, it seemed to me, voice. - We will be posting a sign on the doors Please do not disturb. As in a hotel.

- Okay, let's try it - I laughed. Somehow I was not feeling comfortable, even though Oisín did not say anything unusual. But some inner sense told me that it is better to change the subject in another direction. And I began to frantically praise his cooking: liver, which indeed was a success, I did not even notice how I ate my portion.

- Could I have some more? *Go raibh maith agat*⁶³³! - I said, wiping the plate clean with a piece of bread.

- You still have not forgotten Irish?

- Such things cannot be forgotten, Comrade Commander! So strange... - I said to Oisín - Here we are sitting here... You, an Irish nationalist, and I, internationalist to the core, since childhood. I just did not have to be a nationalist, because when I lived in the USSR, my nation was not oppressed. Yet you and I have a common front, a common struggle... You've never really thought about it?

- Irish nationalists are also internationalists. Though not all of us, of course. We have always supported the Basques, the Palestinians, the ANC in South Africa, Cuba... - Oisín said.

- Yes, I know. I just recently read some definition of internationalism and nationalism in a modern online encyclopedia, and I was struck by its one-sidedness. According to the person who wrote this article, nationalists and internationalists are diametrically opposed to each other, and, logically, they must hate each other. But there are different kinds of nationalism. And internationalism and cosmopolitanism are also quite different things. How can it all be lumped together? I have a feeling that these people who wrote that article, just do not read very basic things: sorry, I mean, basic for us at home. Lenin, for example. About nationalism of the oppressed nations and the chauvinism of big nations. Yes, they think that Lenin is no longer an authority for them, and that's exactly why in their minds there is such an incredible mess. Mess of emotions and of their grievances many of which today are justified, but the problem is, they do not splash it out on the real perpetrators of their grievances, only on those who are weaker. It is, of course, easier that way. It is easier to simply slap the face of a Tajik migrant worker; especially since in the papers they write that they are all rapists and drug traffickers. Or to stab a Yakut chess player, and even more easy is to sing "They Killed a Nigger"⁶³⁴! It is so much easier than to expel, to kick out of the country some sleek Western managers, confiscating their loot in our country and to plant into jail our "new Russian" masters, who are such faithful slaves of the latter.

Oisín thought to digest what has been said: because he knew not so much of our Russian reality. I also thought, aloud, recalling all my country has been through.

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Cat Matroskin from the Soviet cartoon "Three from Prostokvashino" (1970s) was known for being very

thrifty
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Thank you (Irish)

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Song of a Russian band "Forbidden Drummers" (2006)

...I always so stridently opposed nationalism of my own people: I mean, that kind of nationalism, which Lenin has referred as "chauvinism" - precisely because everyone has to start with overcoming all the reactionary from what is close to him, from what he is more familiar with, and it is in order for your own people to become better. This does not mean that I did not see other peoples' nationalism or that I ignored it. Nationalism of small nations, I tried to understand, though I was not always able to do so. For example, when the Alma-Ata riots⁶³⁵ started were due to the appointment of Gennady Kolbin⁶³⁶ as the first Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, I was genuinely puzzled: was this really just because of his ethnic origin? I would not care what ethnic origin is the man who would be the head of the Soviet Union: Kazakh, Georgian like Stalin or a Chukcha, - if only he was clever and a real Soviet man. And that's how I think to this day.

But back closer to home. As I said, at that time my own people were not oppressed by anybody, and the chauvinism of some of them that I've encountered, had no excuses. I thought it was just ugly, when a big nation behaves in such unworthy manner: it was unworthy of the Russians' historic achievements. Remember how my Russian compatriots acted, when they saw me and Said together on the streets...

Nationalism of the oppressed nations - such as the Irish - yes, it can seem provincial, limited, but it carries on a strong positive charge. Inspired by such a force people are capable of miracles, of true exploits. But in that nationalism, with which I and Said were confronted in Moscow of the mid-1980s, there was nothing progressive at all, it was in one word disgusting. Yet, I never came across this sort of nationalism - a vulgar and aggressive one - in the ranks of those same Irish Republicans. In the ranks of their oppressors - yes, I surely did. How could our Soviet people stoop so low as to become like the swaggering and poorly educated British Unionists? How was an African student, rare even in Moscow in those days, be of any hassle to an average Soviet citizen, if even his tuition fees were paid usually by his own country? Product of what was this racism? Was it animal-like, on a subconscious level: "Do not walk over my footpath" and "do not touch girls from my village?" Or was it a product of the old imperialist translated books with racist overtones, such as "Robinson Crusoe," which our Soviet reader swallowed without hesitation as adventure, without considering their historical context? In any case, I had decided already back then, like Karlson On The Roof: "if I will see any injustice, then I will immediately throw myself like a hawk on it!" Do not let your people behave unworthy of its high rank: *a new historical community of people*⁶³⁷. And knowing my warrior-like, despite my quiet appearance, temperament, my fellow students never expressed racist thoughts to me, no matter what they might have thought inside. *The Good must have fists*⁶³⁸ - wonderful words.

Chauvinistic sentiments grew with the development of perestroika. Only recently, it seemed, the whole country voluntarily (I'm not exaggerating, we were not forced to do so at our institute!) was raising money to help victims of the earthquake in Armenia - and now suddenly in the metro people

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The Jeltoqsan or "December" of 1986 were riots that took place in [Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan](#) in response to [General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's](#) dismissal of [Dinmukhamed Konayev](#), the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and an [ethnic Kazakh](#), and the subsequent appointment of [Gennady Kolbin](#), an outsider from the [Russian Republic](#)

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Gennady Kolbin (1927-1998) was the First Secretary of the [Central Committee](#) of the [Communist Party](#) of [Kazakh SSR](#) from 1986 to 1989.

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Official definition of the Soviet people in the Soviet social science

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Well-known in Russia line from a verse by the Soviet poet Stanislav Kunyaev (b. 1932)

indignantly spoke of "those Armenians." I tried to find out what did the Armenians do to them - and in response I heard, to my surprise, from a middle-aged woman: "Girl, you were probably greatly offended by Russians that you are speak like this about them." I was genuinely surprised: "How could they hurt me, with what? I am myself also Russian. They did not hurt me, they hurt themselves by such behaviour."

It has been almost 20 years ago. And today when my people have can be safely attributed to the category of the oppressed - by the imperialists on the world scale, perhaps, our Russian nationalism finally became more progressive?

Yes, today I feel a great bigger deal of understanding towards our Russian nationalism. I am pleased to see how our people no longer look to the West as an "example"- with a tongue in delight slung over their shoulder, - and finally begin to ask questions. Questions that are logical, just and long overdue. But still, did our nationalism for the most part become more progressive? Alas, it is still hard to see. But striking is that even the ones who are calling for joint action with "rational and fair national liberation movements" in the former Soviet republics and in Russia in the first place, find it difficult to name even one of these movements by its name.

Personally, I still have not managed to find a single Russian activist of "national liberation", who in fact would not have turned out to be an ordinary, most shabby racist. And he is usually aiming to free Russia not from the yoke of Western managers, of Ford, Nestle, P & G and Citybank (we can deal with our domestic Gazprom later too), but from the black a *** Caucasians and Asians who come to us for the same reason as why Poles and Lithuanians go to Ireland: because life in their" independent" countries is even worse than in ours. Did we come across many Tajiks in Central Russia during the Soviet time, think a minute?... Such Russian nationalists, who often write the word "Russian" with a capital letter⁶³⁹, forgetting that these are the rules of the English language. And not of our native Russian, are permanently disturbed by blacks or Islamists. But they somehow do not notice how very white and most Christian oppressors (some even with a pound-weight cross around their neck!) suck all the blood out of our country.

Yes, of course, modern Russia, as in any capitalist multinational country has its own ethnic Mafia (have learned it from America!). And, yes, the government does not take our people into consideration when it comes to being able to bring from another country cheap working force: just like the Dutch or the British governments do not consult their own peoples when it comes to that. And yes, it would be good to find them in our country: these "rational and fair national liberation forces," but where are they? If they really stood for national liberation, they would have fought against the Western corporations, not against Uzbek street cleaners, Yakut chess players and African students. Brave only against the lambs, that's who they are!

Yes, in our left forces there is no unity, and yes, it is necessary to find ways to achieve it. But how to find those ways, when those who verbally are to a search for them, at the same time contradict themselves in practice? For example, some of them arrogantly ridicule 2? the remaining true socialist countries: Cuba and the DPRK. These countries, they say, "are not the model of development that is enviable." "They're not even closely comparable with the projection of the future society, which was in the USSR."

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In Russian language adjectives with the names of nationalities are written with a small letter, unlike in English.

And they have the audacity to say this! Usually it is said by those who have not been in either of these countries themselves. That is to say, *a theorist, I send a greeting*⁶⁴⁰. Just like the apparatchiks of the Brezhnev period, shrugging off any socialism even slightly different from the Soviet one as having no right to exist. Despite the fact that all of them know, of course, the classic formulation of the *national in form, socialist in content*. Here, among other things, is how we have killed the Soviet Union: by such arrogance and by our own short-sightedness!

You know, even in comparison with the USSR both these countries have much to envy. In a good way. For example, how these small countries with limited, compared to our Soviet untold wealth, resources, were able to survive, managed to maintain its socialist system and all of its major social gains, how they were able to stay true to their ideals. Despite the betrayal by their former socialist allies in Eastern Europe (many of whom are now even striving to kick these two as painfully as possible, from behind their American boss, like Poland and the Czech Republic do). Despite the U.S. blockade and sanctions, despite the black imperialist propaganda about them, which managed to obscure the heads even of many Communists in Russia and in other countries.

Already for this alone both these countries deserve the eternal gratitude of all the mankind! We need to learn from them: how they were able to survive, why unlike us, they were not defeated in the ideological battle, in spite of all the difficulties that they had endured. At the time when we have sold our country *for mirrors and beads*, no better than the savages in those old imperialist books at whom Russians still laugh. At the time when we pathetically threw out not just the water, but also the whose real baby out of the bath tub⁶⁴¹ and handed over the bath tub itself for scrap metal - rather than elementary changing dirty water in it for a clean one. And it's ourselves who deserved to be mocked, but neither the Cubans nor the Koreans stoop to that. They feel our pain.

There is no such thing in nature as a "100% perfect socialism." To sit and wait for it is just as silly as to wait for the good stable weather near the sea⁶⁴². Leave it to the Trotskyites, those eternal "waiters for the dawn of communism" as Rabinovich from a joke⁶⁴³. And no one argues that what works in Cuba or in the DPRK, surely would have worked in our country. We will have to find our own way to socialism. But much of the experience of our persistent Cuban and Korean brothers is still very important to us.

Their socialism has survived exactly because it was not a blind copy of ours, as it was in some countries in Eastern Europe. Because they have found this very own way. We can learn from them how to educate our younger generation and how to change our own set of values, which are now already so damaged and so dreadfully fixated on the material things, and in which there is almost no room left for people and human relationships. Our socialism has suffered such a blow precisely because we were not able to bring up the New Man, though we much talked about this. We have a lot of talk today about the "degeneration of the elite" in the period of stagnation, but was it only the "elite"

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Ironic line from Tristan's song in the Soviet film "[The Dog in the Manger](#)" (1977) based on the play of Lope de

Vega
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Throw out the baby with the bath water is an [idiomatic](#) expression used to suggest an avoidable error in which something good is eliminated when trying to get rid of something bad,¹ in other words, rejecting the essential along with the inessential.
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Russian proverb
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Rabinovich - fictional popular Jewish hero of Soviet jokes

that had degenerated? Let's be honest with ourselves: was it not the majority of ourselves that had suddenly decided that the gains of socialism are something "God-given", that they will not disappear anywhere if we decide to "earn a bit on the side"?

Before so lightly judging others (to whose level we still have to grow a lot!) one should at least first pay them a visit. And even if you do not like something out of what you'll see, what right do we have to tell to millions of people who are keeping on the socialist path by their hard dedicated work, that their system is supposedly "inferior" to the one that we ourselves were unable to save?...

... - Though we are nationalists, we are also fighting against all forms of racism in our own country,- Oisín brought me back to reality from my reflections.

- That's exactly the difference... And we have... I could never call myself a Russian nationalist, though I love my country, but maybe that's exactly because I love her so. A patriot - yes, but not a Russian nationalist. By the way, what our nationalists do not understand, is that you really just stop even noticing the skin colour or nationality of others when you communicate with representatives of various nationalities for long enough. After that, what counts for you, is only what kind of people they are, not what they look like. Their spiritual, moral, intellectual qualities, not the colour of their skin or the language they speak. And for our nationalists, alas, this was and remains paramount. The first thing they see before them is a "nigger" or a "Tajik", and their ideas about the person is then formed on the basis of this...

As for internationalism which our nationalists are mixing up with cosmopolitanism They are two such different things, that this idea could arise only in their filled by buckwheat and kvas patriotism⁶⁴⁴ brain.

For the first time in my life I read somewhere the word "cosmopolitanism" (long before we were told in school history lessons, just who were "rootless cosmopolitans"), I think when I was about 10-11, when I studied in my free time "*Dictionary of Foreign Words*"⁶⁴⁵ of my uncle. So I knew it first in its literal meaning: "Cosmopolitanism: the ideology that considers all people as the Earth's inhabitants, regardless of nationality or any tribal affiliation. Cosmopolitan is a citizen of the world." Then it struck me as a romantic notion. At the age of 11 one can still believe, for example, that an International court it is really an international court, not a vulgar instrument in the hands of the "golden billion" for selected "justice" whose real aim is completion of their dirty dealings in different parts of the world...

You see, I still did not know that Valeria Novodvorskaya⁶⁴⁶ is a Cosmopolitan. I still did not understand back then that this theoretical romanticism in reality turns into *fatherland is what our soul is seeking*⁶⁴⁷ such as did Zeena Kostyuchenko, and into almost cartoonish *in this country* by the

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Kvas patriotism - term introduced in the XIX century by Pushkin's close friend Prince Petr Vyazemsky. Ironic definition of stubborn adherence to "native" Russian national life, jingoism, where form is more important than contents. It is contrasted with true patriotism. Buckwheat porridge is very popular Russian food.

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Popular dictionary of foreign words used in the Russian language; was widely used as a reference book in the USSR

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Valeriya Ilyinichna Novodvorskaya (b.17, 1950) is a [Soviet dissident](#) well-known in Russia for her full of hatred remarks not only about Soviet Union, but about anything Russian as well. Most Russians agree that she makes an impression of a mentally ill person. In Soviet days she was temporarily detained in a mental institution, and today most people agree that it definitely had medical, not political grounds.

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notorious Valeria Ilyinichna. And my soul seeking just one place: the Soviet Union... Regardless of how many countries I have visited by now.

But it's really good when life pushes you face to face with such a reality! So that the rhetoric of the *Dictionary of Foreign Words* would not put your head into the clouds, take a good look at Valeria Novodvorskaya. One such look should be enough. "Permanent Revolution" also theoretically sounds so tempting...

Cosmopolitanism and internationalism are as far from each other as heaven and earth. As Valerya Ilinichna and Dolores Ibarruri.⁶⁴⁸

Internationalism means not to be indifferent to the suffering of others, a desire to come to the aid of a friend and a desire to learn from him what will be useful for your own struggle. It is your mutual struggle against a common enemy. It is the recognition of the world in all its diversity and respect for this diversity. It is the realization that you are not alone in this world. It is a feeling of your comrade's shoulder next to yours - and a willingness to lend him your shoulder.

Cosmopolitanism is globalization, the same sleek hair and memorized "sexy" wiggles of teenagers all over the planet. It is the relentless search by fixated ladies of their own "G spot" and the tireless measuring against each other by the no less concerned about the size of their genitals gentlemen. It is Harry Potter in different languages and hysterical advertisements' touting, it is people who have no qualms about becoming upkeeps of the Empire, who do not care how millions of their countrymen live, not to mention millions of peoples in other countries.

In other words, internationalism is a weapon in the hands of the communists, it is the rope that links the rods (branches?) together in our broom, using which we will soon sweep the capitalist debris for good off the face of our planet. Cosmopolitanism is similar in form, but totally different in content weapon in the hands of capital. Do you see the difference? Cosmopolitanism even has one thing in common with our homegrown nationalists, the sworn enemies of internationalism. It is that heart-rending-uterine *And for me? And what about me?* of Yevgeny Leonov's hero Uef from the movie "Kindza-dza."⁶⁴⁹ "I'll let you watch this film someday. When we'll get out of here.

- And will we get out of here together? - With hope in his voice asked Oisin.

- Well, of course, what do you think?... Comrades shouldn't escape and climb out alone leaving others behind! Time to sleep now, it is too late. Though tomorrow is Saturday, but still, much more needs to be to discussed before the meeting with Comrade Orlando. Will you help me down from the roof?...

The following morning I slept almost until noon. This had not happened to me since ancient times, when Lisa was still healthy: so, for more than ten years. But I woke up with a heavy head, like from a hangover and for five minutes frantically pondered where I was and even who I am. There you go!

Somebody knocked on the door: unobtrusively, even gently, but loud enough. Apparently, this knock was what woke me up.

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Quote from Nikolai Gogol's "Taras Bulba"(1835) (words of Taras' son Andriy who became a traitor)

Isidora Dolores Ibárruri Gómez (1895 – 1989), known as "*La Pasionaria*", was a [Spanish Republican](#) leader of the [Spanish Civil War](#) and [communist](#) politician of [Basque](#) origin, most famous for her words "No pasaran" (They Shall Not Pass).⁶⁴⁹

See previous references, for example, chapter 21

- Zhenya, are you sleeping? - There was Oisín's voice from behind the door. - It's almost twelve. Time to get up.

Just seven hours were left until the meeting with Comrade Orlando.

We were due to meet, as I mentioned, in a bar "Fort Nassau": that very place where once Carmela was so sensually dancing with her future husband, Sonny's uncle, and where Sonny taught me the tricks of merengue⁶⁵⁰. I tried to recreate the look of the bar in my memory, but all I remembered was its mysterious semi darkness and its high prices for drinks. And also a little kitten, who was hiding from us among the cacti on the way there, up the hill: Fort Nassau almost hangs over Willemstad harbor like the Crimean "Swallow's Nest"⁶⁵¹, and the area around has a view of the entire city, the harbour, the refinery and even of the Dutch naval base Parera⁶⁵²: Colonel Weterholt refuge.

Comrade Orlando was known in Curaçao under quite a different name. As a well respected Latin American businessman, who has long left his native Colombia and was shunning the contacts with his fellow countrymen in the Antilles, but was willingly rotating among the Americans and the Dutch. "My American dream came true in the Antilles" - he liked to repeat. He was married to a Dutch woman for many years, was a Dutch citizen, had two houses on Curaçao: a villa in the upmarket Jan Thiel area and a sort of country retreat in Westpunt; a house on Bonaire⁶⁵³, a villa in Belgium (where taxes are lower than in the Netherlands), a yacht and God knows what else. He was engaged in the import and export between Latin America, the Antilles and Europe. Somehow Comrade Orlando managed to hide from all his long-standing education at Moscow's PFU⁶⁵⁴. And no one would ever suspect this lively, sociable and cheerful "playboy" whose ability to enjoy life made Colonel Weterholt so jealous, that he was the representative of FARC-EP⁶⁵⁵. Not even on the island scale as Carmela, but of the regional scale: Comrade Orlando frequented many different countries in the region, up to Montserrat and Saba, and no one ever questioned it. In addition, he was one of the main sponsors of the unpretentious club sessions of those Dutch military wives and of various activities organized for fun for the Dutch and American commandos.

I and Oisín already knew how he looks: we have seen him on local television. And he had to find us by the colour of our costumes: green dress for me, green shirt for Oisín. In addition, we had to ask him, *Is it true that a storm is coming?* : another "great" idea of Tyrunesh. And it did not matter what

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Popular music and dance style from Dominican Republic

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The Swallow's Nest - a [decorative](#) castle near [Yalta](#) on the [Crimean](#) peninsula. It was built between 1911 and 1912 in [Gaspra](#), on top of 40-metre (130 ft) high Aurora Cliff.

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http://www.defensie.nl/marine/operationeel/caribisch_gebied/marinebasis_parera/

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Bonaire - a [Caribbean](#) island that is now a [special municipality](#) of the [Netherlands](#). Together with [Aruba](#) and [Curaçao](#) it forms a group referred to as the [ABC islands](#). Bonaire was part of the [Netherlands Antilles](#) until the country's [dissolution](#) in 2010.

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Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University in Moscow was founded in 1960. Its stated objective was to help nations of the [Third World](#), mainly in Asia, Africa and South America by providing higher education and professional training.

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The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army are a Colombian [Marxist–Leninist revolutionary guerrilla](#) organization involved in the armed struggle in Colombia since 1964

he would answer to that: because we already knew what he looked like. It was important for us to be identified by him.

Time before the meeting dragged on, as usual, slowly. As the final hours before the New Year: have you ever noticed how they are drawn, and how quickly then time flies after, in the early hours of the New Year? I tried to read a ladies romance novel in Dutch, given to me by *mevrouw* Weterholt - one of those in which... *he looked into her bottomless blue eyes, wide with passion...* - but reading wasn't getting into my head. Phone rang a few times, but I did not want to pick up the phone: let them call, you never know who is this. If they have something important to me, they can leave a message on the answering machine. But no message was left.

Oisin, inspired by his culinary success yesterday, tried to feed me by his personally cooked Irish breakfast, but in vain. At the thought of burnt pork sausages and scrambled eggs with sour roasted tomatoes I did not feel well.

- Thank you - I said to him, - Some other time. Anyway, today is my turn to cook, remember?

Cooking dinner a little distracted me from the sad thoughts. I conjured soup and dreamed about how next weekend for the year ahead, I would make *kimchi*. Of course, that is if I would find on Curaçao all the necessary ingredients for that. Aloud, I complained to Oisin that on Curaçao there is no such sour cream as we have in Russia, not to mention proper rye bread. While I was cooking, he kept peering over my shoulder in the cooking pot, asking about the ingredients, and even wrote something in a small notebook.

- Are you perhaps going to open a restaurant, when you come back to Ireland? - I laughed. - Such keen interest in cooking!

... We left the city when the island began to fall into purple twilight. Fort Nassau has changed a lot after all those years that I haven't seen it, it has become even more luxurious, and the cocktails in it have become even more expensive. Only its atmosphere did not change: a cool shade that adjusts all those languishing all day outside in the heat couples into invariably romantic mood.

- What will you drink? - Asked Oisin, heading to the bar. - Although I already know: as usual, *Ponche Crema*?

There was no sign of Comrade Orlando yet. In a similar to a cave grotto hall the airco was working full blast, to such extent that I soon started to believe it was not lights hanging from the ceiling there, but very real icicles. I was sipping my drink as slowly as possible: in the expectation that Comrade Orlando was about to appear.

From time to time in the "grotto" tumbled some new visitors, their faces were barely visible: because there prevailed the shadows, and their voices were barely heard, because music was playing almost non-stop. I struggled intently to see all the new faces, trying not to miss the one we were waiting for. That's when into the doorway came an elegant *caballero*⁶⁵⁶, accompanied by a tiny Thumbelina-like Eastern woman walking behind him with noiseless little steps, I strained my sight... and got shivers.

It was Sonny Zomerberg with his new Chinese wife. The one that so perfectly cooked and so much does not like me without even having met me once. He was smiling, but his Indian eyes were eternally sad: he looked almost the same as during our very first meeting, a lifetime ago...

And even though I was now a blonde, and though he did not expect to see me here, I had not the slightest doubt that if I were to stay long enough in this "cave", he would recognize me. After all, seven years of marriage is no joke.

I tried to figure out what to do, but my thoughts did not obey me, and my legs have become as if made of cotton. I scolded myself with the worst possible words that I had relaxed so much and no longer even thought of the possibility of such a meeting. But swearing does not help.

Sonny turned to his companion, leaned over her and began to explain something. Fortunately, at this time the DJ turned on another song, accompanied by flashing lights, and the "grotto" lit up like a rainbow. Thundering from the speakers was «*Mas flow*» performed by "*Project Click*." In Papiamento.

Mas flow...

M'a yega den bo hari, mami dali, - suffered the singer.

There was no time to think for much longer. I grabbed Oisín by the hand. He looked at me puzzled and, I would even say, inquiring-joyful, if I had time to think about it.

- Come to dance - I whispered, - Cover me and dance straight for the exit. Go outside - I'll explain it to you there.

I buried my face in his shoulder, pretending that I became so soft from surging in me feelings, and deploying him to the right and to the left, moving slowly to the door. *Daphne, you're leading again*⁶⁵⁷ - flashed through my head. But what else could I do?

Sonny also danced: with his *trophy wife*. Without looking at her. He led her around the room as if she were an inanimate thing. His face was detached, as if he absorbed the words of the song: *Dushi... mi sa ku t'a bo mi ta ke*⁶⁵⁸...

Every time he raised his eyes, I buried my face in Oisín's shoulder even deeper. Never before have I been so scared. Suddenly even such fears surfaced in me, of which I have been sure that they had long been firmly etched (ditched?). Before my mind flashed the smashing of plates against the wall, and in my ears sounded Sonny's distant voice: *I did not need to beat you in order to make your life miserable!*.

There were many couples in the grotto, and none of them, of course, was in a hurry to exit. We had to push the crowd apart, but gently and politely, so as not to be too obvious. This was not easy, and I could hardly contain a growing desire to plant an elbow in the side of anyone who'd be particularly languid. By the end of *Mas flow* the doors were just a couple of metres away from us. I closed my eyes, waiting for the DJ to turn on the light the "grotto", at the end of the song....

But then a small miracle happened. "Grotto" plunged into almost total darkness, and on the tables lit electric candles.

And now let's remember the past! - Proclaimed the DJ. As I was so grateful to him for these candles! - Our retro song today is *It's not easy* performed by the tragically killed recently in South Africa Lucky Dube⁶⁵⁹. This song is dedicated to all our guests who have experienced separation from a loved one,

657

Phrase from the comedy film "Some Like It Hot" (USA, 1959) which was very popular in the USSR

658

Darling, I know that you are the one that I want (Papiamento)

659

but found the strength to be reborn into a new life. Despite the fact that this it's not easy, as warned us many years ago Lucky...

And I realized that it was a fate. Of all the songs of the world it had to be this one! I carefully looked over Oisín's shoulder. Sonny was very close to us, to the right hand, but he did not see me. I thought for a second that in his eyes glittered tears. Probably it was just my imagination. However, cruel people are the most sentimental ones...

Sonny stared again, not at his tiny Chinese Surinamese (and, thank God, not at me!), but somewhere into space. His lips were moving to the words of the song.

The choice I made didn 't work out the way

I thought it would

This choice I made it hurts me so mama

This choice I made didn 't work out the

Way I thought it would

This choice of mine oh....

He thought of our divorce!

I stepped on Oisín's foot.

- Faster, he can not hear or see anything for now, like a (singing wood grouse)! - I whispered. It seemed as Oisín too was fascinated by this song; well, he found the right time for that, that's for sure!

I took a deep breath only when we finally got out of the building. Quick, quick, upward, away from this terrible door! A minute later we were standing on the observation deck near the control tower, from which port officials ruled the call at their ships.

- What happened? - Finally asked Oisín.

I nodded in the direction of the bar.

- My ex-husband - I said softly. - Over there.

Oisín, to his credit, understood all at once and no longer asked anything, except:

- And where is our comrade?

Then I remembered why we were here, in the first place.

- Goodness, he can also come any minute now! Go back there. If you see him, come to him, have a chat. Do not forget to ask about the storm. Then bring him over here. I'll wait for you here, on the observation deck. If you come here, and I am gone, then I must be hiding in the cacti, because Sonny is somewhere near. Whistle for me then, just quietly. Do you know how to whistle? Do you understand? Repeat.

- What am I, a little boy, to repeat? - Oisín was offended - Do not teach a duck how to swim. Wait, I'll be right back. And you...listen, you take good care of yourself here, okay?

He ran down the hill. I stayed on the observation deck. Far below were shining the lights of the city and I could see the ships in the port: tiny like toys. I really wanted to go somewhere, to run and hide, but it was impossible. My teeth were chattering.

I do not know how much time had passed. It seemed to me that it was a lot. Oisín reappeared silently and suddenly; like a true guerrilla. Sometimes I still forget who I'm dealing with...

- Everything is hunky-dory⁶⁶⁰, - he said quietly, - He will be waiting for you in half an hour: on the waterfront at the bottom, where the floating market is. The boat is called "Consuelo."

- Just me alone? - I was surprised.

- Yes, we had already talked. Well, we better go; it will take some time to get to the waterfront...

Until the very last moment - until the Fort Nassau was out of sight in the rear window of the car - I was afraid that from somewhere in the darkness, suddenly Sonny's familiar face would appear in front of me. But he did not appear: he stayed there, in the shadows, surrounded by the cocktails, which he now can afford, and with a heart sweetly wounded by Lucky Dube....

Oisín parked the car and stayed waiting for me in one of the small lanes in Punda⁶⁶¹. He really wanted to take me to the quay, but I did not let him to.

- It is full of some suspicious types! - He tried to convince me: almost like Sonny back years ago, - And you are a European woman. No need to look for trouble so.

But I was very much angry with myself for my own cowardice, and after meeting with Sonny I was certainly afraid of no *choller*.⁶⁶²

- I will be quick, - I said. - Do not worry. There are just a couple of steps to the waterfront, and the time is only half nine. Wait for me for about forty minutes, and then come to the market.

Indeed, in the street nobody even tried to approach me. I guess at that point I just exuded some fluids of fearlessness.

"Consuelo," I found at once. It was a homely boat: apparently, of a fruit merchant, and the name of it was half closed with a board. The market, of course, was closed for the night, and at the waterfront there was no one except for a couple of tourists who were walking in pairs and threesomes, to keep it on the safe side.

I hesitantly entered the wood flooring planks creaked under my feet.

- *Hola*⁶⁶³! - I said in Spanish, stepping carefully on the deck - is there anyone here?

At that moment somebody's long, brown hands stuck out of the hold of a boat and with the speed of an oceanic shark they dragged me inside. I had not even had time to get scared.

- Good evening, our Soviet comrade! - Said an unfamiliar male voice in good Russian. - How your pan Zyuzya⁶⁶⁴ used to say, *my very good evening to everyone!*

Yes, only a man who has lived in the Soviet Union, may have known this!

660

Satisfactory; fine

661 Central part of Willemstad

662 Homeless person (Papiamentu)

663 Hello (Spanish)

664 Well-known character of the Soviet comedy program The 13 Chairs Tavern, played by Zinoviý Vysokovskiy

- Do you like the The 13 Chairs Tavern⁶⁶⁵? - I involuntarily blurted out.

- Oh yeah!! Especially *Pani Monica*⁶⁶⁶ - confirmed, gleaming in the darkness of the hold with his white-toothed smile, Comrade Orlando, for it was he. Only this time he was dressed not like a "successful businessman," as we saw him on TV, but as an ordinary Latin fruit seller of whom here at the floating market in Punda were a dime a dozen.

The hold sharply smelled of stale fruit, "Consuelo" softly rocked under our feet. One single lamp was lighting; so dull, that at the sight of it in my head Pushkin's lines "Oh, the day is near, a lamp burns out..." popped up automatically.

- You sit down, sit down, do not stand, *Soviética*, - said comrade friend Orlando with his singing voice. He was older than me by roughly 10 years. In our country, it was a generation of the builders of BAM⁶⁶⁷. At the time, I envied them terribly, because I was still too young back then and could not wait - no, not when I could wear lipstick and earrings, but when I finally would grow up big enough to do important work, really needed by people...

I have a stable, strong idiosyncrasy to the word "businessman." For me it is a kind of two-legged jackal, which runs all day around the savanna, sniffing, where he can grab a bite. And then, after having glutted himself, at night he is howling at the moon: for all to hear how "successful" he is. I never had any human interest in business people. For example, when I was a free woman, nothing could have put me off so much when getting acquainted with the opposite sex, as if they started telling me the story of "their own business." I just lose all interest in the other party with the word "business", you know? After this, there is no need to go any further. And I'm not pretending. Worse than the "universal" concept of "businessman" is only one thing: the "new Russian businessman." It is not just a jackal, it is a cross between a jackal and an ape with a thick purse. I remembered Zeena's dinner with the Dutch and the Americans, where she got sentimental after drinking, talking earnestly about the fact that "we are all looking for a prince in our lives." Not at all, Zeena, not at all. And to find your own Che Guevara is much more difficult than finding any princes....

Exactly the same attitude I had to "business women" (for some reason at this expression I at once imagine Irina Hakamada⁶⁶⁸). Once, when I was just starting to live in the Netherlands and so much longed for reading in my native language that has become unavailable for me (Internet did not exist back then) that I was ready to read even the "*La Pensee Russe*⁶⁶⁹", there my eye caught an announcement of a new book: the memoirs of our ordinary runaway traitor in which she described as "she was left in America with two small children in her arms, but was able to open her own firm." But I had no admiration for her whatsoever: I was very sorry for her children, and to some extent for herself too (although nobody forced her to stay in America, it was in Soviet times, so, there was still a place to go to). But I experienced an acute attack of disgust for the society in which she found herself: what kind of a life is that, when a woman - a mother of two kids is afraid how she and her children will manage to survive?! What kind of a society it is if everyone has to fight for everything with his

⁶⁶⁵ The 13 Chairs Tavern was a comedy series (1966-1980), very popular in the USSR, based on short sketches. The action was taking place in a small Polish restaurant, and all characters were supposed to be Polish.

⁶⁶⁶ Pani Monica - one of its characters played by Olga Aroseva

⁶⁶⁷ The Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) is a [railway](#) line in [Russia](#). Traversing [Eastern Siberia](#) and the [Russian Far East](#), the 4,324 km long BAM runs north of and parallel to the [Trans-Siberian railway](#). Due to the severe terrain, weather, length and cost Soviet premier [Leonid Brezhnev](#) described BAM as "the construction project of the century." It was built in 1974-1984, mainly by Soviet young people and students..

⁶⁶⁸ Irina Hakamada (b.1955) - Russian liberal right wing politician

⁶⁶⁹ Anti-Soviet Russian emigrants newspaper based in France

teeth and horns, as if in a wild forest? In my opinion, such a life is simply not worthy of a human being at the end of the twentieth century. But by the beginning of the twenty-first century, many of my compatriots have already got used to such a medieval situation...

How seldom we all thought at the time about all what was given to us under socialism - because we could not even imagine a different life! How could any of us even in a nightmare imagine, for example, that one day we will become "migrant workers"? For us it was something of the time of the Nazi occupation, when our young people were forced to work in Germany. How could imagine this a little girl from the grace of the Soviet Crimea, where one could only dream of living? How could she imagine, this girl of the same age as younger sisters of my girlfriend Marusya that when she will grows up, she will lose both legs from frostbite, in a prosperous Britain?

*Full of aspirations for great goals, of good intentions and determination*⁶⁷⁰ to finish on time all the Christmas shopping, Westerners with the capital W in the Northern Irish town of Coleraine for over a week simply passed by this young unfamiliar, decently dressed girl who was sleeping rough in those cold days on its streets. Not one of them stopped and wondered looking at her frightened, tearful face, what has happened to her, and if he or she could do anything to help. And of course, why would they, when their mind was aimed at such really great goals: buying a Christmas turkey and the latest models of mobile phones for their pampered offspring?

"Frostbite" can be translated literally from English into Russian as "the bite of frost." The case of young woman Oksana Sukhanova, a Ukrainian who came to work in Northern Ireland under the contract at a factory, and finished up stranded on the streets, with frostbitten feet, which had to be amputated, on the surface seems to have shocked even many of those who are used to rough stuff during the years of armed conflict here.

"How could this have happened in our civilized country, at the beginning of the twenty-first century?" - They beat their chest. Local ultra-left Trotskyists immediately began screaming about the need "to bring to justice the factory owners" and "to make all migrant workers union members" and the local right-wing unionist politicians expressed condolences to Oksana about her tragedy and demanded that the government figured out how did it happen that she was allowed to stay in the country after she was fired (if she would have been immediately deported, you see, her legs would be intact, they said, with an almost gleeful expression, as if saying, "Her example is a lesson for others!").

But in general, this case has not changed anything in the situation of migrant workers there and is very unlikely to change anything. Local politicians in the town of Limavady - district centre of the district where Oksana has slept the whole week on the streets, and no one noticed! - had their general meeting which expressed "solidarity with migrant workers," and that was the end of it. I cannot help to quote on this subject from the local press: "*In horror of what has happened to the Ukrainian woman, local administration unanimously decided to hold a celebratory reception at the occasion of the Chinese New Year... The head of the office for recreation and tourism recommended to allocate a grant of 480 pounds for this celebration....*"

How did it happen, that Oksana was on the streets, no one really knows. Nothing is known of what happened to her between December 22 and January 1, when she barely alive, reached the house where she once lived with her Ukrainian and Polish colleagues. This house, she was forced to leave after her employer who had provided it, put her out on to the street. Oksana stayed for some time at a friend among the Poles in the other house, but on Christmas the Poles decided to go home, and Oksana was

⁶⁷⁰ "In this respect, I believe in the Western man, in his mind dedicated to great goals, his good intentions and his determination" (Soviet dissident academician Andrei Sakharov)

on the street... She could barely speak English. According to her, what happened to her in these days, she cannot remember. It is known though that Oksana came to Northern Ireland for a one year contract to work in a poultry factory, that is situated in a very "Christian" part of Northern Ireland. This factory produces chicken meat and other poultry (including turkey for Christmas). According to those working together with Oksana, she often worked seven days a week with no days off, trying to accumulate as many hours (low wages, deductions are high, and the majority of those who came from Eastern Europe had to borrow money from someone at home to finance their trip abroad and this money must be paid back: without it it's better not to show yourself at home at all.) They also say that Oksana has left her young child with her parents - doctors. They had no phone at home, so what happened to Oksana they found out much later from a letter...

On September the 17th Oksana was fired. According to employers, "for failure to comply with health and safety regulations" - they chose not to go into details. I saw - and translated - many work contracts of such factories with Ukrainian and Polish workers, and I always noticed how easy it was for those employers to get rid of any employee. If the Poles no longer required a work permit, due to the membership of their country in the European Union, the Ukrainians in this situation are cornered: the annual work permit that they have, makes them "tied" to a particular employer, who also gives them housing (and charges them an arm and a leg for it!). Losing their jobs, they in fact lose all human rights. Which in practice means that the employer can force them to do anything, to work any amount of overtime, to work under any working conditions...

The last time representatives of the factory saw her was in November, when she came for the remainder of her wages. After Oksana's frostbitten legs were amputated, employers were terribly afraid of possible lawsuits - and so, they were quick to assure the media that when they saw her for the last time, Oksana was in good health, and was offered a ticket to go home, but she refused... Ukrainians who work here - in contrast to the

Westerners with the capital W - do not need an explanation of why. If Oksana would come home - only six months after the beginning of the contract, with no money, she

almost certain would not be selected to work in the "civilized world" again. And if she had to get into debts even in order to come here this time, then...

Of course, the recruiting agency that selects Ukrainians for working here, who are paid as a shepherd for "livestock", are trying not to show this side of recruitment for working abroad. They stress that "it is still better than in the Ukraine." Take a look, for example, how they advertise to Ukrainians this work abroad, in the "civilized world" - the kind of work that not only the locals would refuse to do, but even those migrants who already have settled here and refugees. Do young Ukrainians, Poles, Latvians, Lithuanians ever ask themselves a question what is the reason for it?

«The Live-in Caregiver Program is a special program designed by the Canadian government to attract foreign people willing to work as caregivers, in the event when it is impossible to find such workers among local citizens or permanent residents of Canada... Doctors, nurses, child minders, teachers, caregivers, nursery teachers, and teachers can participate in this programme. The Live-in caregiver is a person who provides care for children, the elderly and people with disabilities in the private sector We are talking about people who hire individuals (hereinafter - the employers) to care for children or disabled or the elderly (speaking in Russian, they need nurses and cleaners.... Remember, Mayakovski: *"He was an engine fitter, named Ivanov Ivan, but called himself Parisien-style:*

*ingénieur Jean?*⁶⁷¹) The employers are “private persons” - that means, the employees will not have even the rights that they could have if working in a public hospital...

Or: "Are you an honourable person who wants to bring joy to people? Then come to us!.. Volunteers: Ordinary these programmes are available only to residents of developed countries (*oh yeah? really? So all in "advanced" countries people are simply fighting for such jobs?*). Now Ukrainians also can participate in them!. (*What a joy! Here it is, the promised "orange" president coming closer to Europe!*) This is an opportunity to make money and to see far-off countries."

To earn money? Hmm...

"Volunteer is a person who is doing his work for fun and free of charge. Not really free. A volunteer does not receive a salary. But he received his expenses. Volunteer work as a rule, is for 4 hours a day. Work is selected in accordance with the wishes of the volunteer. There are lots of different volunteer programs. Usually they are either competitive or one has partially to pay for taking part in them. These programs are typically designed for the citizens of advanced EEA countries. (?!)... We are happy to offer volunteer work in London Christian Centre of entertainment for the Disabled⁶⁷². Work for the Ukrainians, who would like to improve their English skills or to visit England, but cannot afford the luxury travel tours or training courses at universities or colleges. You work as an organizer of the entertainment programs for the English disabled, under supervision of local instructors: bring them out for picnics, set the table, feed them, clean up, talk to the guests. The centre is based on self-service and you will be able to do many other pleasant activities (*for example, changing diapers, cleaning the toilets...*). All your skills or abilities are useful. What is extremely important in this programme: you can talk all day long with the English and become their friends. They really do not have enough friends (*and in Ukraine or in any other country do disabled people have plenty of friends?*). You can take courses in English from a teacher (*at your own expense, obviously, because the leaflet says nothing else about it.*) Duration of the programme is from one week to one year. Since such programmes are intended primarily for the wealthy British (*did you see many wealthy people doing this work?*), accommodation and food are appropriate to their requirements (?!). You should know that most biographies of the "powers that be" started with volunteering." (*For example, Abramovich, Berezovsky, Soros, Bush?*)

"Basic information about the programme:

You work 6 days a week;

one day off;

pocket money is \$ 50 a week;

Accommodation and 4 meals are free."

50 U.S. dollars that's about 30 British pounds. An average Northern Irish earns in a week (5-day week, not 6!) £ 200-250. In other words, in this case, the Ukrainians have free - for feeding! - slavery. If someone just wants to help people who are in dire need of support, why not do it in your own country, why not take care of our own disabled instead of English ones? Because you so desperately want 30 pounds and feeding? Hungry people can't be judged, but what's this got to do with charity work?

"Even without training in the United States you can have a good life."... Yes, sure, ask any Mexican street cleaner or any unemployed resident of Harlem! It is from this "good life", obviously, young

⁶⁷¹ From Vladimir Mayakovski' s "Mariusia poisoned herself" (1927)

⁶⁷² That's how it was written in the Russian language original!

Americans are enlisting in the army, because they have no other way to pay for a qualification or a degree than with their blood. Why don't they just want to live without it, especially if life without it is supposed to be good? Offer of an Ukrainian firm for nurses who are going to work in the U.S.: "Preparation, adaptation course, assistance in obtaining documents, employment prior to departure." - Training which will take....a year and a half. And this is going to cost you probably more than you can earn afterwards over there....

In Northern Ireland, too, there are many foreign nurses now: because their local ones emigrate to where they get paid more. In particular, there are many nurses from the Philippines. Filipino periodically get their houses set on fire, sometimes are arrested for "supporting terrorism" (and then released without charges)... They work very well, the patients are very satisfied with their work. So much satisfied that it makes their Western colleagues extremely unhappy. Recently, a few of them, of course, full of the most good intentions and decisiveness, which were so valued in a Western man by the late Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov⁶⁷³, asked their Filipino counterpart "not to work so hard." She did not pay attention to it: after all, someone had to wash the floor while they were drinking their "cuppa"⁶⁷⁴. Aspiring to their great goals, they tied her up to a chair. And left her in this position until the morning (it was during the night shift). When the morning staff came in, they told them it was a joke: oh, these *uncivilized savages*! They don't even understand *civilized* jokes...

Oksana was lucky that she's still alive: in the Republic of Ireland a Dublin court has recently convicted guilty of the death four years ago (!) of a 43-year-old Polish woman Teresa Kwiatkowska her employers, directors of two recycling companies. She was hit on the head by an excavator bucket at her workplace: a suitable vehicle for the cleaning job on the day of Teresa's death was broken and unavailable. Teresa and her husband worked at cleaning the Western debris just for three weeks... Excavator operator stopped only when he heard the screams...

But the employers of Oksana were not threatened with such a trial. From the point of view of the law, they did not do anything illegal (that's what such contracts are compiled for!). As for "public scorn," similar to what Sakharov expresses towards "the Soviet regime", they care little for such things. You can spit at them all you like, as long as they get their money!. This is not the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee. That's the whole "greatness" of a Western man: such small things as the fate of a single member of staff are of no concern to him! After all, he is busy with nor more or less than with bringing of "freedom and democracy" to the rest of humanity! And you talk to him about somebody's amputated feet...Big deal! They'll fit in prostheses for her: that's what the charities are for. And the queue of all those wishing to work at that factory Ukrainians and Poles wasn't reduced the slightest. So, why should the bosses worry?

In today's neoliberal world, as Dutch premier Balkenende⁶⁷⁵ teaches us, "A man should be responsible for himself." In the vision of Balkenende, in this world today, "there are no unemployed, only people between the two jobs." Who are responsible themselves for how to survive "in between these 2 jobs"...

And don't all human miseries exist in this "free" world only for turning them into a single measure of all local values: a resounding coin? Thus, under the pretence of Oksana's amputated legs various charities for the homeless immediately began a campaign of self-promotion, and various working with

⁶⁷³ "In this respect, I believe in the Western man, in his mind dedicated to great goals, his good intentions and his determination" (Academician Sakharov)

⁶⁷⁴ Northern Irish for "cup of tea"

⁶⁷⁵ Jan Pieter Balkenende (b.1956) - a [Dutch](#) politician of the [Christian Democratic Appeal](#) (CDA). He served as [Prime Minister of the Netherlands](#) from 2002 until 2010.

migrants NGOs began to request additional funds for translators (where were they when she was freezing in the streets?)...

Oh yeah, it is truly amazing - the foresight of the late Andrei Sakharov, feeling to whom should all of us handle our deepest hopes in this world for the salvation from the "tyranny" of the peoples of the former USSR!

The mentality of people among whom for more than a week Oksana was freezing in the streets, is very well illustrated by an article that is engraved so deep in my memory during my time in "Ulster." It is written by a typical representative of the local unionist community who had his own column in the horn of unionists, a newspaper called «Newsletter», which they call "the pride of Northern Ireland," and it is about his holidays in Latin America's Suriname, which he presents to his accustomed to look at the world through the colonial Victorian glasses readers as "the former Dutch colony."

Here are excerpts from the experience of facing the real world by this "true gentleman", "loyal church-goer" and a "true Christian":

*"I sat down at a little waterside cafe, ordered a beer and was just about to raise it to my lips when a hand clapped me on the shoulder."Hey, brother, remember me?" said its owner. I looked up. He certainly didn't look like my brother, who, the last time I saw him, was white and in Tyrone."*⁶⁷⁶

Then for almost a whole page the respectable unionist did not stop to complain how the visitor who appeared to be a taxi driver that had brought him to hotel the previous day, in response to own proposal to have a drink of beer with him and a snack, instead of politely declining, as a well-fed "white" gentleman of Tyrone would have done, -o horrors! - *"poured himself the last of my beer"* and *"grabbed a piece of chicken with both hands and tucked in"*! And how is he, imperialist parasite, not ashamed of himself!

Faced with two more begging poor Surinamese in the street, our *seeking great goals in life and decisive, perfectly plump hero*⁶⁷⁷, in disgust handed out "five guilders" (two dollars!) to one of them who is sleeping in the streets (in comparison with Oksana, he is fortunate that in Surinam it's warm!) and making a living by washing clothes in the river (phooey! - frowns our noble "white" gentleman). After which he ran in a gallop to his hotel, hallucinating on the way of "blacks" just like Marshak's Mister Twister⁶⁷⁸ and *"arrived back at the hotel half expecting to find a penniless mother and five blind children all lined up the steps with their begging bowls out, so that I would have to declare sternly: "Right, hands up who's most deserving - except for those who've had their hands chopped off by their father so as to look more deserving, of course."*⁶⁷⁹

More deserving, that is, like Oksana?

Much to the dismay of Mr.Unionist, at the hotel no one was waiting for him, and he

⁶⁷⁶ Geoff Hill: Chicken run way of life in Paramaribo, The Newsletter, Belfast, January 20, 2005

<http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-127428656/geoff-hill-chicken-run.html>

⁶⁷⁷ Perfectly plump hero - comic self-description of Karlson on the Roof, main character of Astrid Lindgren's popular Swedish children books

⁶⁷⁸ Satirical poem about rich racist by Soviet poet Samuil Marshak, written in the 1930s

⁶⁷⁹ GEOFF HILL: Chicken run way of life in Paramaribo, The Newsletter, January 20, 2005

<http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-127428656/geoff-hill-chicken-run.html>

*"gave himself five guilders as a reward for being so generous, and went to bed."*⁶⁸⁰

I think that this "work of art" is a perfect example of the mentality of those from whom academician Sakharov so strongly expected to "save the world." Colonialist, racist mentality of those who are unwilling to realize up to this day that their favourite "glorious" Victorian times are long gone. These "aiming for great goals" often do not even realize that they are racist and will sincerely assure you that they're not. Because *for them to be racist is the norm*. Just as it is the norm for them, for example, to tell the mother of a disabled child, *"I'm sorry that your child is coloured!"*

And these same people are shouting, "How could this have happened in our country, and even in Christmas time, while we all are good Christians?"...

I, for example, am not at all surprised that it has happened there. Such things happen exactly in such places where any stranger is considered to be "sub-human", where his presence is simply not noticed, where the local "good Christians" can not even imagine that a Black man can be their brother in humanity, because they honestly believe that their own people are "God's chosen one."

It was precisely those Sakharov's Westerners "aspiring to great goals" whose "peacekeepers" have destroyed in front of the whole mankind the historically invaluable Babylon - without blinking an eye, and not feeling any slightest remorse (*what remorse? Well, the guys had a bit of fun, so what? Are they not entitled to?*). And how would our Soviet intellectual like such Western vision of Tolstoy's "War and Peace"? *"An intellectual decides to kill Napoleon, in order to take revenge for the suffering caused by him to his great unanswered love"* (this is not a joke, this is an announcement of the American film "War and Peace" in a British TV guide!?)

And Sakharov wanted to trust the future of our nation, of our country into the hands of these *regular churchgoing Pithecanthropus?*

Recently, Gordon Brown, passing through Africa, said that *"gone are the days when Britain had to apologize for its colonial past... It's time to talk about permanent British values - such as freedom and tolerance."* It seems that Oksana Sukhanova has had a good taste of both, and more. As well as *the freedom* to die sleeping rough in the streets and *the tolerance* of civilized public to what was happening in front of them...

... 20 years ago in Germany a book was published of the so popular among our "reformers" German journalist Günter Wallraff⁶⁸¹, about what life is like in quite a civilized West, in Germany, for a Turkish illegal worker. What has changed since then? Only the fact that nowadays in this way are treated not only illegal immigrants, but also legal contract migrant workers, and the geography of the exploited has expanded... Today they are treating us the very same way even back in our own countries. And they expect us to be even grateful for that!. Just like that Unionist was expecting from the Surinamese.

But mankind (humanity?), that's us! Is it not the time for us to wake those smug Sakharov "heroes" up and to show them the real world? So that we would not have to thank their "generous" doctors anymore for saving our lives by free- of -charge amputation of our feet?...

- What are you thinking about? - Pulled me out of these thoughts Comrade Orlando. I sighed:

⁶⁸⁰ Idem

⁶⁸¹ Günter Wallraff (b.1942) is a [German](#) writer and [undercover journalist](#). Wallraff came to prominence thanks to his striking journalistic [research](#) methods and several major books on poor working conditions of the German working class, including migrants.

- About the Soviet Union...

- I often think of it, - he told me in confidence. - In my youth, before I came to study in your UFP, I had enough time to live with my parents in the States. I had the chance to taste, so to say, of that "sweet life." So I had something to compare socialism with. The first time I came to you was in the summer of 1979 and I met people there from all over the world. I was a member of the youth group of the Socialist Party of Puerto Rico - my father was a Colombian, and my mother was Puerto Rican. Our guides were a Russian woman and a Kyrgyz man. With that Kyrgyz man I immediately became friends. He told me that "the only rivalry between ethnic groups in the USSR is a competition which of them is more than Soviet." He marvelously knew all American writers' books, that Kirghiz: he asked our opinion on these books that no one in our entire group has even read! Most of all he loved the stories by O. Henry⁶⁸²...

- This is familiar to me, - I said. - Back at home every child knows "The Headless Horseman" and its author Thomas Mayne Reid⁶⁸³, but at his homeland, in Northern Ireland, no one knows about him. And this book in English is just impossible to find?. But they continue to boast of that sunken on its maiden voyage "Titanic", while others would have been ashamed in their place..

- And that Kirghiz was the son of Chinghiz Aitmatov⁶⁸⁴! - continued Comrade Orlando.

- Really? Is that perhaps the one who became the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the independent Kyrgyzstan?

- I do not know, I have lost contact with him a long time ago...Once we were sailing on a boat on the Dnieper river,-How nice it was around, it is indescribable! An old Soviet worker started talking to my friends in German. He learned German during the war. I remember he was asking my friend where he was from. My friend said: "Chicago." "Oh yes, Theodore Dreiser⁶⁸⁵ and his trilogy of Chicago! Of course! "- said that old Soviet metallurgical worker, who did not even have any university degree. I swear that at that time almost no one in Chicago itself - and certainly no one among us! -knew much about Dreiser and those of his books!..

He continued his memoirs, and I listened to it and began to realize that in front of me was a rare type of businessman, similar to Friedrich Engels⁶⁸⁶, the one who does business not for the enrichment, but only for the benefit of the revolutionary cause. Very quickly, my tension was gone by itself. This was not the same sort of person as Hilda. This was an entirely different kind.

- Since then many years have passed,- said Comrade Orlando. - I am not going to tell you all my biography, I will not tell you how I ended up in the ranks of the Colombian guerrillas (well, maybe someday, when we have time, if you're interested). I will only say that for the last 15 years I lived in different Antillean islands. Lived for some time in Dominica - then there was a left-wing prime minister, Rosie Douglas⁶⁸⁷, by the way, a great friend of your Irish friends. But he remained prime minister for only 8 months, and then he died all of a sudden... So unexpected and so suspicious was his

⁶⁸² William Sydney Porter (1862 – 1910), known by his [pen name](#) O. Henry, was an American writer. O. Henry's short stories are known for their wit, wordplay, warm characterization and clever [twist endings](#).

⁶⁸³ Thomas Mayne Reid (1818 – 1883) - a [Scots-Irish American novelist](#) born in Northern Ireland

⁶⁸⁴ Chyngyz Aitmatov (1928 – 2008) was a [Soviet](#) and Kyrgyz author, the best known figure in [Kyrgyzstan's](#) literature.

⁶⁸⁵ Theodore Dreiser (1871 – 1945) was an American novelist and journalist of the [naturalist](#) school widely known in the USSR

⁶⁸⁶ Friedrich Engels (1820 – 1895) was a [German social scientist, author, political theorist, philosopher](#), and father of [Marxist theory](#), alongside [Karl Marx](#). He was also a factory owner, but used his money for socialist political work.

⁶⁸⁷ Roosevelt Bernard Douglas (1941–2000) - a [Dominican](#) politician. In 2000 he was [prime minister](#) of the Caribbean island for eight months, from 3 February 2000 until his death later that year

death that his family even demanded that the autopsy on his body would be carried out by Cuban doctors... It was such a cheerful person - and daring up to despair! ??

- I remember him, - I said - I saw him once at the party congress of Sinn Fein. He was the one who told them “ If you need anything, go to Nazarbayev⁶⁸⁸. But be careful: for the right amount of money he would sell even his own mother”...

-... Now, more to the point.. So, Curaçao.... American bases in the Netherlands Antilles, as you know, are the closest to the North of Columbia. After the death of our comandante, Manuel Marulanda Vélez⁶⁸⁹, after the murder of comandante Raul Reyes⁶⁹⁰ and recent events well-known to you, as well as the large-scale offensive of the government troops - in reality, they are under the U.S. command - in the south of our country, our command has decided to gradually move the core units to the central and northern parts of the country, to regroup and recharge. It is important to gain time under the current circumstances. And this is where the role of U.S. bases in the Antilles sharply increases, as they are now a major source of intelligence for Uribe⁶⁹¹ and the Yankees. We need to know what is happening here, and quick. But the principled position of our armed forces, among other things, is that we do not conduct any military operations outside our country. And in this situation, my work here is difficult. If the Yankees even suspect who I am... Such a hype will start that what was happening around those three Irishmen who had been in our jungle⁶⁹², will seem to you just a childish cartoon. In short, really I have no right never mind to order, even to ask the local comrades for help. We are fortunate that our West Indian comrades were so responsive and understanding towards our situation. But I cannot show myself in any way in either side in this action. That's why I'm in Curaçao only from time to time. But my position allows me to come often to the other islands and out there I have the right contacts, to convey information. So there is a positive side in that too. By the way, our West Indian comrades were surprised to find out who I really am. They regarded me as an arrogant rich snob,.... - And Comrade Orlando laughed contagiously.

-But an island is an island, and since all the locals are in sight, that's why we needed people like you. Now you have a more or less complete picture of what is happening here. In fact, we are a mini-Communist Internationale in action. And how could it be otherwise? Against a common enemy we can protect ourselves only together.

- Gorby and Yeltsin have dismantled a broom - and we have to collect it branch by branch then put it back together. In Russia now also many things have changed - I said - There is a strong and growing anti-American sentiment. About our relations with Venezuela, you probably know better than I. It is strange that so few West Indian newspapers wrote about our involvement in a joint naval exercise. I expected from them some hysterical screaming, especially from the Dutch. And have you not tried in the light of the latest events to establish closer ties with Moscow?

⁶⁸⁸ Nursultan Nazarbayev (b.1940) is the [President of Kazakhstan](#), having served since the nation's independence from the [Soviet Union](#) in 1991.

⁶⁸⁹ Pedro Antonio Marín Marín (1930 - 2008), known by his "[nom de guerre](#)" Manuel Marulanda Vélez, was the main leader of the [FARC-EP](#)

⁶⁹⁰ Luis Edgar Devia Silva (1948 – 2008), better known by his [nom de guerre](#) Raúl Reyes, was a [Secretariat](#) member, spokesperson, and advisor to the [Southern Bloc](#) of the [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-EP \(FARC\)](#). He was killed in a [targeted killing](#) military operation by the [Colombian army](#)

⁶⁹¹ Álvaro Uribe Vélez (b. 1952) is a Colombian politician who served as the 39th [President of Colombia](#) from 2002 to 2010 known for his pro-American course.

⁶⁹² The Colombia Three are three Irish Republicans who are currently living in the [Republic of Ireland](#), having fled from [Colombia](#), where they were convicted of training [FARC](#) rebels in the early 2000s. Their case was widely used in Ireland for political purposes and pressure on Irish republicans.

- Ah, *Sovetica*, - Comrade Orlando sighed, putting his hand on my shoulder - I must disappoint you... Modern Russia has "no permanent friends, only permanent interests", as old colonialist Churchill used to say in his time. These permanent interests, alas, are where the banks are located, where they keep their money. Chavez, that's different for them, he is the President, he has oil... With us, they too will be friends: once we will come to power. But until then... "fight against terrorism is a common cause," as they say. And to be friends with Uribe and Bush or Obama is much more profitable for them.

- Hmm... - I said, remembering the closing of our base in Lourdes⁶⁹³ which was announced just at the time when Lisa was treated in Havana and other similar manifestations of those "permanent interests." There was nothing really to add to this.

We heard a noise, and although I did not see anyone on "Consuelo", but Comrade Orlando, it was clear that there was also someone else on board, and, more specifically, that this "someone else" was now desperately trying to stop on the deck someone who was eager to get to us in the hold. Comrade Orlando jumped up and said something in Spanish into a mini-transmitter. And then he laughed with relief.

- *Soviética*, this is your *Irlandes*. He came to save you from us! We spoke for so long, and it's getting late already... So, let's say we got to know each other. The next time it will be your turn to tell me about yourself, okay? And now it's time for you to go, otherwise he will inadvertently blow up our poor old "Consuelo"... And we might still need it, - and he shook my hand - *Venceremos!*

... I do not remember how we got to the house that night: so much we laughed the whole way, remembering Oisín's desperate attempt to "free" me from the hands of those "insidious Latinos": I was away for so long that he seriously decided that the Colombian guerrillas misunderstood something and had kidnapped me for ransom. Back then the newspapers were full of stories about "poor Ingrid Betancourt" (with whom it turned out to be nothing wrong at all, she wasn't even sick). Comrade Orlando, when this all came out, laughed the loudest.

- You should read the bourgeois press less! And a TV set I'd advise you to throw in the trash all together, *companero!* - he slapped Oisín on the shoulder.

And on the way back in the car, we continued to laugh all the way about it. But I think it came because of my nerves: I had to go through too many things in one day...

Then I tossed and turned for a long time in bed, unable to sleep. I suddenly realized how much has changed in the last year in my attitude to life. These changes began in Korea, and now the process was finally over, and I felt (in a figurative sense, of course) like a butterfly hatched from a cocoon: she did not recognize herself, surprised by her own ability to fly...

After the Soviet Union - and before Korea - for many years my life has faded, lost its meaning, has turned into a purely physiological existence. Quite often I found myself thinking how good it would have been to close my eyes, to fall asleep and to never wake up. Material well-being was (and still is) for me something minor, but human relationships... One of my capitalist acquaintances said once, already in times of crisis, that people are "willing to accept anything, just in order to keep the level of material well-being to which they are accustomed." These words that no one will refuse a purely personal material comfort, even if for the sake of it he will have to "walk over the corpses", deeply surprised and even hurt me. It was like declaring that all humans can be bought and sold, if the price is right. Or that all women dream of marrying an "oligarch."

⁶⁹³ Soviet and later Russia's last military base in Cuba, at Lourdes, was closed down in 2002 by president Putin, while the USA continues to open new military bases around the globe.

It depends what to give up and for the sake of what! I've often thought about it, would I want to go back to my life in the Soviet Union, after having been pampered by the Western lack of "queues" (that's about the only thing it can pamper people with, since there is nothing else there but shops, especially nothing in cultural terms!), if I had such chance. And my answer is univocal: yes, yes and yes! The only thing that would put me off the USSR and I remember up to this day with pain in my stomach, was the rudeness of our local officials, even in the Soviet era. But at present in Russia it really reached cosmic proportions! The difference was that in Soviet times, you could always find a justice against rude cadres or officials, but in today's Russia... Forget about it. The movie "A Forgotten Tune for the Flute"⁶⁹⁴, which was predicting how made redundant officials would be making a living by singing in train cars, now, in the post-Soviet era looks like an incredible, of universal scale nonsense! In the West, the bureaucrats are at least polite, but even with their politeness, they can shake three souls out of you...

In any case, I had no illusions that I could just so simply and easily get back one day to the familiar and dear to me USSR, and this was what was making my life so empty, so meaningless. The remains of Soviet life in the counter-revolutionary Russia of Ksenia Sobchak and Konstantin Khabensky⁶⁹⁵ were like ice floes in the river, into which somebody already began to pour hot pigswill: you had to jump all the time from one ice floe to another, in order not to drown, while they were becoming smaller and smaller... The Ice of modern Ostap Benders started to break⁶⁹⁶, and gentlemen of the jury have returned⁶⁹⁷. Together with the master minds, shouts "The West will help us!", fathers of Russian democracy, and forever, apparently, linked to this democracy «*je ne mange pas six jours*»⁶⁹⁸...

That from now until the end of life all I have to do, is just "survive" as a bedbug, instead of doing good and things for the people and feeling that you are needed by them. That no matter what you would achieve in the capitalist life, it will all be just for you and your family, but not for society as a whole - the realization of this bended me to the ground like a heavy stone, hanging around my neck. I have never been able to accept this knowledge that any living creature is designed in such a society to exist only for their personal profit. Capitalist society, in any of its versions, from the Antillean and to the Russian and Western European ones, reminds me of the chicken coop from a joke: in which, as we know, "one aims to sit higher, to pick at those next to him and to sh** on those below him." And you know what? I do not share any of these three secret desires of a capitalist consumer!

That's how I lived all these years: as if under local anaesthesia. Saw everything around me, but could not feel anything. Except for that dumb, aching pain that I tried to drive as deep into my soul as possible. This anaesthesia began fading away only when I saw Korea. And now, a year and a half after I first set foot on Korean soil, my attitude towards life was completely different. There was no place in it for depression, lack of faith in the triumph of justice, or in my own force. And what is happening here on Curaçao was for me, in direct connection with what is happening in other parts of the world: not for nothing they are fond today of trumpeting about "interdependent world"! And if someone had told me: "Do you really hope to inspire the struggle for justice of our fellow countrymen with your help to someone else on the other end of the planet?", I would be honestly surprised. What else I had to do in my position? To say "no thanks, I'd rather wait until we will have a mature revolutionary

⁶⁹⁴ A Forgotten Tune for the Flute - Soviet film from 1988 by Eldar Ryazanov

⁶⁹⁵ Russian celebrities (TV presenter and actor), here used as symbols of capitalist Russia

⁶⁹⁶ "The ice has broken, ladies and gentlemen of the jury!" - one of the catch phrases of Ostap Bender, con-artist, the main character of "12 Chairs" novel (1927) by Ilf and Petrov

⁶⁹⁷ Reference to this novel here refers to the restoration of capitalism in Russia

⁶⁹⁸ I did not eat for 6 days (French) - phrase from satirical novel "12 chairs" (1927) used by one of its main characters when he is begging on the street, pretending to be an aristocrat, "father of the Russian democracy."

situation back at home"? Or, as some of our Communists say, "Venezuela does not move us?" Or, perhaps, to take part in some "March of Dissent", in the "Russian March"⁶⁹⁹, or in some other infamy? Well, excuse me, "nice" alternatives...

Who can look further than their own noses, will be inspired by victory of progressive forces anywhere in the world: in order to continue the struggle in their own country.

At parting Comrade Orlando told us:

- Yes, the Soviet Union no longer exists, but there we are - its spiritual children and grandchildren. And we will carry with us through life not just the memory of it: we will carry a spark of its revolutionary flame. Of the sparks we will light a new torch - heralding true dawn for humanity. It is important to hold this torch burning even in the black, starless night. Do not sit back, do not stew in the juices of the past experiences while the torch is dying down, but to search. To search for the like-minded people, and to strive to unite your forces with theirs...

Remembering his words, I felt deep warmth in my soul. And I finally fell asleep...

In the morning I was awakened by voices: Oisín's and some female's. Yawning, I put on a dressing gown and looked out the window. In the garden talking to Oisín stood comrade Liubenshka - our so-called "maid." But it was not her working day, and it was long before 10 AM: it was just beginning to dawn. Did something happen? Maybe Sonny has recognized me yesterday?

I ran out into the garden, as I was, in a dressing gown and barefeet.

- *Bon dia*, Saskia - greeted me Liubenshka. - Why did you not answer the phone yesterday, when I called you? Carmela asked me to warn you that someone you know is now on Curaçao. She told me that you would immediately understand who it is

- I already understood, thanks! - I said hastily, - Why are you here so early? Did something happen?

- Nothing yet, - said Liubenshka quiet, as if she was talking about something perfectly ordinary, - but soon, something is likely to happen. Do you remember that Haitian that goes to visit Maria Elena? Now, he told her that he heard how some Americans were saying that many Antilleans "will not make it" to the New Year...

- Antilleans? But what Antilleans got to do with this? Chavez is not going to attack the Antilles.

- I do not know, why they said about the Antilles, but something big is in preparation. He also remembered the words: "Hugo will be driven to his grave precisely by his Russian mates.." We do not know what that means. This means, we need to find out. Before it's too late....

So, what was it brewing out there, behind those high walls of the base? Do we have enough time to find it out? Will we have time to warn our comrades, even if we do find out? Can we prevent this yet unknown to any of us threat to their country that is brewing on this island?

A few days passed. My sense of inner unrest grew, I almost felt like during the perestroika years: only this time, my awareness of the responsibility that has been entrusted to our shoulders grew simultaneously with this feeling, not much too late after it. Before we have learned about this latest development from the words of the Haitian, I usually brushed aside the thought of responsibility when they were arising: what is so special about this responsibility if we do just do everyday, small things,

⁶⁹⁹ Political marches in Russia around the time when the book was written

collecting daily routine information, bit by bit, like ants in an anthill? What's so heroic or extraordinary about that? Anybody could do that, it just so happened that it were us.

Granny in my childhood taught me to be humble, not to exaggerate the significance of my own actions or person: she taught me that I just have to do honestly what I was assigned to, to work hard, and only then, if I'm really doing this work well, people will notice it and appreciate it. For a long time this traditional Soviet upbringing was like a mighty barrier for me during job interviews in the West (where I also tended to underestimate my abilities, because praising yourself, by our norms and values, was the lowest of the low), but now I was as happy as never before that I was brought up that way. Grandma's covenants did not allow me to float with my head in the clouds, even when the situation was more than favourable for this purpose. I remembered in such cases the heroine of Natalia Kustinskaya⁷⁰⁰ from "Ivan Vassylievich Changes His Occupation" with her overly excitable "*Wawa, you are going to faint now...*" - and the last thing I wanted, is to be like her.

Now I firmly understood that the time has finally come to show in practice, if we were worthy of the trust confined to us. Mine and Oisin's mutual task years ago in Ireland now seemed to be just clumsy child's play: a theatrical performance in the style of "Mystery-Bouffe"⁷⁰¹. The reality of combatting our common enemy was much more humdrum and at the same time much more severe. There was no place in it for teenage fantasies a la "The Elusive Avengers"⁷⁰².

We could not wait for the gifts from fate - for example, that we will get into our hands a flash drive with detained outlining of the imperialist ideas; we could not, in the words of Michurin⁷⁰³, *to wait for favors from nature*. We had to find a weak link in the enemy's chain: the link that would allow us to find out what they're up to. In words, this is clear, but in practice... Besides the two eternal Russian questions: "what do" and "who is to blame?", there is also a third one, no less pressing: where to start?

And so when on a rainy summer day Colonel Weterholt suggested for me to go for ten days on a journey with a Dutch patrol ship, "to see with your own eyes the cooperation of partners in NATO" - Dutch Marines and a U.S. helicopter team- and then in the colours to tell the media about their "heroic mission combating the drug trafficking, "I did not hesitate.

- Oh, really, colonel? I can be present all the way while your guys conduct arrests of drug dealers? I will consider this a big honour!...

Oisin somehow was not too keen on this idea.

- I don't feel like letting you going alone in there, - he said with a frown - why would the colonel suddenly offer it to you? Is this not some kind of a trap? Maybe he suspects something?

- And do you think if I wouldn't go, this would look even more suspicious? And anyway, would it not be better for me to stay away from here until Sonny returns to Holland?

And Oisin had to accept this.

⁷⁰⁰ Soviet film actress (b.1938), in this film she has a short part of an actress that is boasting over the phone to various friends about becoming protégé of a film director. While she is boasting, he is going away with another actress.

⁷⁰¹ "Mystery-Bouffe" is a [socialist dramatic play](#) written by [Vladimir Mayakovsky](#) in 1918/1921.

⁷⁰² A 1966 Soviet adventure film loosely based on the novel "Red Little Devils" by P. Blyakhin. The film was hugely popular in the USSR and other socialist countries, including DPRK

⁷⁰³ Ivan Michurin (1855 – 1935), was a Russian practitioner of [selection](#), Honorable Member of the [Soviet Academy of Sciences](#), and [academician](#) of the [Lenin All-Union Academy of Agriculture](#). His famous words were: "We cannot wait for favors from Nature. To take them from it – that is our task."

Away from the coast the Caribbean Sea is not azure, as near the beaches of Curaçao, but dark blue. The tropical sun seems even more ruthless there, and even a refreshing sea breeze does not save from it. I wisely sought the shade on the deck all day. Although Colonel Weterholt could have well served me as a shadow, especially since his height allowed his shadow to cover me completely. The colonel did not leave me for a moment during the journey. He was worried if I would get sea-sick (such things one had to ask in advance!), or how would I like the traditional Dutch *blauwe hap*⁷⁰⁴...

- *Blauwe hap?* - I did not understand. - I've never heard this expression. And I thought I perfectly know the Dutch language...

The colonel laughed smugly. He was pleased to surprise me at least with something.

- That's how the Dutch marines styled the Indonesian "rice table"⁷⁰⁵.

"Rice table" was actually a colonial invention. It's a whole set of different Indonesian dishes: chicken, meat, vegetables and so on, each of which is including a side dish of rice which is placed in the middle of the table in a single large bowl. The only traditional Dutch thing about it was only that, just like in the Netherlands, for some reason it was always on the menu on Wednesdays. But I did not argue with the colonel.

Such was his attention to my person that it somewhat depressed me, even seemed suspicious. Maybe Oisin was right? That care of Colonel Weterholt brought to my mind for some reason associations with the criterion of how "to act as the true mother," according to Karlson on the Roof⁷⁰⁶, "You'll try to persuade me to drink the bitter medicine and promise me 5 öre⁷⁰⁷ for that. You will wrap my neck with a warm scarf. I will say that it itches, and only for 5 öre will I agree to lie down with my neck wrapped." I did not need 5 öre, but in the company of the colonel I too felt as if I was wrapped into a itchy invisible woolen scarf. "Why did he ask me to go on this journey and now he doesn't leave me alone for a second?" - I tried to analyze in the evenings in my cabin, when I was finally left alone.

During the day I had no time to analyze anything: I had to keep my travel notes about the Marines alleged heroism and read them aloud on the go to the colonel, so to write these notes was not such a small task. Not least because it was already the 6th day of our patrol, and not one single narco-boat has been found yet by the "heroes." All I had left to write about, was that they are "such nice guys", and how quickly they "have accepted" me, the guest, in their team. In reality, the "acceptance by the team" consisted of dining at the captain's table and some smiles of duty towards me on the deck by? NATO soldiers. ?? To those smiles they responded willingly, even on duty: women on board were few. Just myself and the already known to you Zeena - well, she was the one who really became part of their team! That's right, she was also here: as a mechanic in the crew of a U.S. helicopter, which took part in the patrol. It was a worn-out Lynx with some mechanical problems during landing. Because after each landing Zeena was for a long poking around in its lower part. She was a talented mechanic, because when on the third day of our trip on the Dutch boat a pump refused to work in the sea water distilling apparatus, without which we would not be able to stay at sea for a long time, because there was no sufficient water supply on board, Zeena, together with a Dutch sailor, was able to repair this

⁷⁰⁴ Literally "blue bite" (Dutch)

⁷⁰⁵ The Indonesian *rijsttafel* is a [Dutch](#) word that literally translates to "rice table", it is an elaborate meal adapted by the Dutch following the presentation of food from the Padang region of West Sumatra. It consists of many [side dishes](#) served in small portions, accompanied by rice prepared in several different ways. Popular side dishes include [egg rolls](#), [sambals](#), [satay](#), fish, fruit, vegetables, [pickles](#), and nuts. Although the dishes served are undoubtedly [Indonesian](#), the *rijsttafel*'s origins were colonial

⁷⁰⁶ See previous notes

⁷⁰⁷ Swedish money (1 krona = 100 öre)

pump, too. Needless to say that after the Dutch Marines started to respect Zeena, though before they looked at her with typical Dutch male gaze: as at an ordinary *stoeipoes*.⁷⁰⁸

When I looked at her - tanned, cheerful, lively, - I almost forgot who she was and what she was doing here. Zeena was so good looking, in a young way, and at the same time she emitted such strong signals of female loneliness, that she attracted men like a magnet and she was evidently very proud of it. Zeena was behaving as if she was not on board of a NATO patrol ships, but in some rural disco, where all the tractor drivers was mad about her. When she ran gracefully across the deck in her NATO catsuit, and when dozens of pairs of eyes stared at her, the facial expression of our countryside girl was such that in my head immediately started spinning a song by "Balagan Limited":

"Girls-slobs,

Bought some powder

Powdered their forehead

And sit there like lapdogs! "

"*Hoots on you!*"

That very "*hoots on you*" was almost engraved on her face, with a simultaneous glancing sideways, who was it exactly there who was interested in her. Zeena knew what she was worth, and the first, the best available ship's cook was not a match for her.

By this time I had stopped being afraid of her, even though I cannot say that I wanted to be in her company. I just politely avoided citizen Kostyuchenko, like avoiding a lying on path the cow "cake", so as not to step into it. Although when we perforce came face to face, it was not that hard for me to say hello to her. However, once I caught not a very friendly Zinaida's glance: when she saw that I was having dinner at the captain's table. I was surprised a little bit of her dislike, Did she not realize that the captain could not invite her to his table, not because somehow he likes me and doesn't like her, but just because I'm here as a civilian guest, and she is a military below his rank? But Zinaida apparently had watched too many old TV soaps like America's «Love Boat» and at times forgot that this wasn't a cruise ship. Probably, she secretly wished she could do a *defile* in front of her squad in an evening gown of some Versace. But it was certainly not my fault that she could not do that.

But no one has noticed her baleful look: the Marines were not up to women's whims. Yes I myself soon forgot about it. In the end, I'm not a gold coin to please everyone.

Much more I was worried that, as I was beginning to understand, Colonel Weterholt, apparently had an eye on me. And he invited me out on this trip, judging by his behaviour, not for public relations, but for some other, much more ordinary and carnal purposes. At first, I had only a vague suspicion. But after two nights in a row when colonel knocked at the door of my cabin after it became dark - without any of the business purposes for the occasion - those suspicions turned into certainty. I was scared. I pretended not to notice and not to understand, and in the evening I locked myself in my cabin, lying on the bed as quiet as a mouse, pretending to be fast asleep. By some bad luck, I've got a creaky bed, and I was afraid even to turn over once more on it. And I counted the days until our return to shore...

Periodically, we woke up at night by what in the Dutch military jargon was called «*praaaien*»: this is when it was loudly announced on the ship that a "capturing group» (*boardingteam* it was called; can these Dutch ever make up their mind if they want to speak their own language or English?) must

⁷⁰⁸ Pin-up girl, literally "sex kitten" (Dutch)

prepare for "the boarding": searching of some frail boats that came to the attention of the Dutch military and were perceived to be "up to no good." Even more suspicious than fragile boats, were, of course, speed boats, but the luxury yacht Dutch military did not search them as thoroughly. Once in front of my eyes those *valiant fighters* against drugs pretended that they "did not notice" how an owner of one such luxury yacht was himself clearly under the influence of drugs. Hence, they must have been on board too? But after looking into the owner's passport the Dutch quickly hushed up the whole thing, and I realized that his cabin on the yacht wasn't even searched. And leaving such luxury boats, the "capture group" as a rule, apologized to their hosts, while any apologizing to Hispanics in their leaky boats they apparently considered to be unnecessary. Not that the Marines were rude to ugliness: in comparison with their U.S. counterparts in Iraq or to the Israelis in Palestine, they were far from rude. But the class differences in their approach to those who were being searched, were unmistakable.

During these searches, the whole crew were raised on our feet by the alarm, and I watched the searches from the ship deck. Interesting, did any of those Marines ever even try to imagine how people must feel on board of those tiny boats, when they were facing enabled with projectors in full steam rushing to them NATO war machine? ???A rhetorical question to which I will never know the answer....

Zinaida, by the way, was displeased with the Dutch soft approach.

- Why do they have all these ceremonies with these black b ***? - She said once during a routine search of one of those leaky boats, turning to me, as it just so happened that at that moment I was standing next to her. - They should just whack them on the neck properly.... In our America, no decent person would even live in the same quarter with the likes of them, and these Dutch are playing patsies with them here....

Well, of course she said it not word for word in English, but that was the meaning of her speech. In general, I have noticed that among our emigrants in Europe and America often thrives the most rabid forms of racism: of the kind which even in these countries has long been considered unsuitable for expressing it aloud. It was almost parody-like, Mr.-Twister-like: "In a place where they rent rooms to blacks, we cannot stay for a moment."⁷⁰⁹ And this is widespread not only among ex-Russian IT specialists and scientists, but even among labourers: I remember how a Russian-language newspaper in Portugal, had a long article about how our painters or fruit pickers are better than Angolans or Mozambicans, with a secret hope that Portuguese employers will appreciate a Russian or Ukrainian illegal worker much higher than African illegals. It just made me sick to read it. What class solidarity!

When Zeena told me this, I shuddered. For a moment it seemed to me that it was not her in front of me, but Nikolai, that perestroika time Soviet official who secretly envied blacks residents of Holland because of what kind of cars they've got.

- Have you by chance worked as a guard in Abu Ghraib⁷¹⁰ during your time in Iraq? - I asked politely.

Zinaida felt that I disagreed with her, and gave me one more angry look.

- Maybe it would have been better for you to work as a contractor for a private security company? - I could not resist it, - The wages would be higher, and you'd have more freedom there when you come across somebody you don't like because of his skin colour...

⁷⁰⁹ From Samuil Marshak's "Mister Twister" (see previous notes)

⁷¹⁰ Prison in the occupied Iraq, infamous by torture and humiliation of prisoners at the hands of US military

She said nothing, but backed away from me a half-step. And what else could I answer her - did I really have to agree with it?...

On one of these nights, after another proved fruitless Marines conducted search Colonel Weterholt caught me when I was returning to my cabin. I have not had time to shut the door in his face, he barged in and was clearly not intending to go. The colonel was chatting all sorts of nonsense: about how their barracks in Den Helder⁷¹¹ which was recently renovated, were equipped now, and about the fact that his dog will whelp soon (so, if I wanted a puppy...), while I was thinking feverishly, how to put him out more tactfully. Finally it hit me.

- Excuse me for interrupting you, colonel, - I said, - I forgot: Zeena - you know, that Russian girl under the American flag - asked me to translate into English a couple of advertisements from a Dutch newspaper. So, with your permission, we can finish this conversation next time...

I just blurted it out without much thinking: because on board I knew only two people, Zeena and the captain. But I could of course not say that it was the captain who asked me to come to him at this time of day!

The colonel retreated. But it was a tactical retreat. He walked with me to the helicopter's improvised hangar at the upper deck, next to which was Zinaida's cabin, and he said that he will take a walk on the deck and wait for me. After that, my last doubts in relation what he was up to, disappeared.

All that I wanted to do, was to quietly slip back to my cabin and quickly lock myself in. But how? What could I do now? Naturally, I wasn't going to ask Zeena for help... Moreover, it seems, she was already asleep. But in the hangar next to the helicopter was still busy doing some work her American mate. I had no choice left.

- Good evening - I said to him. The soldier turned his face to me. He had a Latino appearance. I was so tired of the events of the day that was desperately trying to figure out whether if it was good or, conversely, bad.

- Hi, - he said, slightly surprised.

- Sorry to bother you, - I continued, - And, please, let what I will say, stay between us... I feel very embarrassed, but...

... I was lucky. Luis - that was the name of Sergeant Alvarez - happened to be a normal, understanding guy. I did not even have to tell him the name of my unwelcome suitor.

-*Señora* , - said Sergeant Alvarez with a strong Spanish accent - you go to your cabin through the left side of the ship, and I'm going to intercept him: go up to him and ask for a cigarette. Is this man smoking?

- I think so...

- Even if he doesn't, I'll think of something. Oh, those officers... Many times did I have to help girls out this way, in Iraq. Sometimes I even had to follow them, if you excuse me, to the bathroom. So I do have some experience. Do not worry. Go to your cabin.

At that point I was almost ready to pray for my saviour, regardless of his nationality. After all, in a bourgeois society no one is obliged to help, and he could have told me that it's not his business, or that he should immediately complete some propeller repair or something like that.

⁷¹¹ The main base of the Dutch Marines in the Netherlands is in Den Helder, a town in North Holland province

Unfortunately, over the sea a huge orange moon shone brightly. I mentally cursed it, trying to hide in the shadows, and not feeling my feet, rushed to my cabin - a long way to go. I did not look back. I calmed down only when the door was closed behind me. Although after a while I heard cautious steps, and somebody knocked into the door, I did not respond. Soon I fell into a heavy, deep sleep without dreams... Thank God, that until our return to the port of Willemstad only two days were left!

- I was looking for you yesterday, Saskia, - Colonel Weterholt told me over breakfast. "I know," - I thought, but of course, I did not say that out loud. I pretended not to know what he was talking about. Tonight I will have to be more careful, I said to myself.

I even opened my mouth to answer insolently to the colonel that I too was looking for him yesterday, but did not, because a siren hummed, and the Marines jumped up.

On the horizon there was a suspected speed motorboat.

At this time the "fish" was caught in the net: already by the way the motorboat was trying to get away from the Dutch ship, it was clear that something was fishy. The Americans have started to launch their Lynx.

"In his cage the bird gives out a tiny trill,

And above the hill there flies a mill.

And that mill lands down in woodland nearest,

And from it come out two helicopterists" " - helpfully pushed to me my memory when it flew with a roar over my head. A little song from a good comedy film "There walked a dog over a piano"⁷¹² - from the time when we all understood very clear that the "basis", the main thing in life is to feed the people with bread, and not to pump out our oil to abroad and especially not to sell Herbalife⁷¹³. Why do such songs come to my mind in a world where there is no place for them? In a world where the fishermen are paid to destroy their fishing vessels, and farmers are given subsidies to ensure that they do not produce anything, and then "cheap" fish brought in from Thailand, green peas - from Kenya, apples and grapes - from the Cape of Good Hope... Where people are forced to produce and grow food not for themselves, but for export, for them just to survive. Is there anything still remaining in this world that is not mutilated, is not turned upside down?..

But memories of our Soviet "*helicopterists*", with inspiration playing the tube at 4 am in a collective farm field⁷¹⁴ inadvertently cheered me up, and I burst out laughing into my fist - at the worst possible for the moment. At this point, we were ought to admire the heroism of brave Marines - but no, I did not feel like it. Such a universal scale contrast was there between our Soviet helicopter pilots and those NATO thugs. I looked at them, and in my eyes were Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia... And no heroic capture of a single motor boat with drugs (especially if you remember why people in Latin America are forced to grow coca) could overshadow in my memory the dead Iraqi babies and mothers weeping over them, could suppress the evil barking dogs of Abu Ghraib...

No one, however, noticed my laughter; around me they were too busy "hunting." Those who got used to the emotions caused by computer games, followed the Marines approximately the same way as they would follow the movements of the figures on a computer screen - with crazed from the virtual

⁷¹² Soviet comedy film (1978)

⁷¹³ Selling Herbalife in the post Soviet Russia - doing useless work that brings no income

⁷¹⁴ A helicopter pilot, hero of this film, is a keen amateur musician who practices early in the morning in the fields waking up the whole village.

gambling eyes. I thought that some of them even involuntarily squeezed their fingertips: in search of a joystick.

Half an hour later it was all over. Dutch marines threw bags of cocaine on board. The crew of that speedboat - five Latinos I don't know of which country with downcast faces and hands tied up with plastic handcuffs - were escorted to the hold. On all sides I heard cries, reminding me somehow of the second-rate cowboy movies. "*Women were shouting*" Hurrah! "*And caps were thrown into the air*"⁷¹⁵.... " Zeena did not have a cap at hand, so she did her best to shout «Yahoo!» as cheerful as possible: «in our American way»⁷¹⁶."

The fight against drug trafficking - that's fine. It is just interesting based on what international law NATO members have appropriated the right to sail in neutral waters, stopping anyone who they do not like? Does anyone ever even thought about over the whole absurdity of it? Or maybe it's some kind of divine right given to them from above, as claimed their ancestors - crusaders and missionaries? Those, too, were always able to find some noble cause to justify any of their own actions. You'd listen to them and get tears in your eyes, so touching they sound...

In the evening we landed back in Willemstad. We finally moored while I was giving to Colonel Weterholt my reports on the trip, and he expressed his views on which media would be the best for us to contact. I suggested that as a catch a story of Marines heroism should first of all "accidentally" appear somewhere on the Internet for a start: as a blog of someone from the crew. (According to the colonel, this role was best suited to the Dutch military corps chaplain; moreover, because he was actually on board and considered himself to be an amateur writer.) Then later on I and Tyrunesh will point out this blog to the professional journalists; - and that's when for us will come in handy all the material in greater detail than written by that priest: written by me.

- Please read it all very careful, colonel - I said to him, - Maybe I revealed inadvertently some of your military secrets in there, without even knowing it. Maybe I shouldn't tell, on what days of the week what dishes you have on the menu...

The colonel laughed almost as a Western Santa Claus:

- Ho-ho-ho! Don't you worry, Saskia, about this. We are so strict with secrets that not a fly will get into our base unnoticed. No wonder even the Dutch Minister President⁷¹⁷ had elected our base as the safest place on the island for signing the new State agreement⁷¹⁸ with these lay-abouts - after they booed the governor and went to the streets with embroidered "Stars of David."⁷¹⁹ The cheek of them - to compare themselves with the Jews during the war! When these bugs only suck our blood for so many centuries...

- Indeed, I have never come across such cheek before! - I replied, meaning, of course, the colonel himself: a descendant of the slave traders and colonizers. By the way, one of the suppressors of Tula

⁷¹⁵ From Alexander Griboedov's "Woe From Wit" play (1825)

⁷¹⁶ Mocking of Zeena' allegiances

⁷¹⁷ Prime Minister of the Netherlands' official title

⁷¹⁸ In 2006, Curaçao and Sint Maarten were granted limited autonomy from the Netherlands, but this agreement was rejected by the then island council of Curaçao. The Curaçao government was not sufficiently convinced that the agreement would provide enough autonomy for Curaçao. Eventually the agreement was signed, under such wide protests that the ceremony had to take place in the Dutch military base.

⁷¹⁹ Such protests really took place in Curaçao. The meaning was that the Curacaoan people were mistreated by the Dutch similar to the Jews during the WWII.

uprising was also called Weterholt⁷²⁰: by any chance, was it a family?... But my heart sank at these his words. Not so much because I got confirmation of the Dutch racism - this is no surprise, only the Dutch themselves can still deny that they are racists. But he just reminded me of how difficult it will be for us to find out what they were up to.

Meanwhile, we were approached by the captain. He was all glowing with happiness.

- You can congratulate us; the boys are now weighing the prey. Well, are you impressed with our little action?

- It was like in an movie - I only said. - It was just in time.

This I say in all sincerity, because thanks to that Colonel Weterholt now was busy with other things, and I could sigh in relief.

- Well, colonel, I have to go, - I said - Alan is waiting for me at the entrance to the base, I already phoned him. See you on Monday.

I quickly rushed to the door. After the incident with Sergeant Alvarez the colonel kept a low profile, but still, you never know what was in his mind... That's why I mentioned "Alan." And he seems to have understood me correctly.

Passing the chief-cabin, I heard some funny inarticulate cries, in which something seemed unnatural and, as it seemed to me, even a groan. Maybe someone needed my help? I carefully looked through the door.

At the table sat seven people - five Dutch marines, one American (not Sergeant Alvarez) and Zeena. They were all - no, not drunk, it was something else, something unfamiliar to me. Zeena saw me first and joyfully exclaimed:

- And, our "attached reporter"! Hi! And we're celebrating July the 4th...

Indeed, it was the eve of the U.S. Independence Day. Well, hold on, tomorrow Uncle Patrick will again post solemnly over his house this stars-and-striped cloth, which I would not even put to my threshold instead of the mat for wiping shoes: too much of an honour. Best of all - truly deserved - did with it in his time an American citizen, Dean Reed⁷²¹. But today already no "Tide"⁷²² in the world could help to wash it out...

- Congratulations! - I said dryly. And at that moment I noticed white powder on narrow strips of paper on the table. Cocaine! "The trophy"!

Zeena caught my glance.

- We have the right to a little fun - she said, - In the course of any military action servicemen are entitled to certain trophies.

⁷²⁰ During the slaves uprising in Curaçao in 1795 the governor and the slave owners had raised a force of 60 well-armed horsemen under the command of Captain Baron van Westerholt who attacked the rebels

⁷²¹ Refers to the episode with washing of the US flag in front of the US embassy in Chile by American singer, actor and political activist Dean Reed (1938- 1985). In 1970, a week prior to the election of Chilean president Salvador Allende, he was arrested for [washing a U.S. flag](#) in front of Santiago's U.S. consulate. He explained that he was symbolically cleansing the flag, which is "dirty with the blood of the Vietnamese people and of all people under dictatorship that the U.S. government politically, economically, and militarily defends against the wills of the people." Nobel Prize-winning poet [Pablo Neruda](#) helped to secure his release from jail.

⁷²² "Tide" - popular in post Soviet Russia brand of washing powder

I just looked at her. What else needed to be said? Here they are, NATO brave "fighters against drug trafficking"! Never mind that "they are not all like that." In any event, this case was not unique. In 2004, four of the same Dutch commandos were arrested with cocaine in Aruba. They did not even go to jail in that case: they faced only repatriation and a dismissal. It was such a pity that this scene cannot be included into my essay. That would for sure be of interest to the local press...

One of Zeena's "homies" rose from his seat: a two-metre tall Dutchman with the size of shoes of at least number 46. Zeena gazed admiringly at him. The eyes of her new attraction were vaguely empty.

- Do not talk to anyone about it, *mevrouw*, - he said quietly, - Our bosses do know. This is just our small business *bonus*. We're not going to sell this thing. But like this, for relaxation... it is even good for us. Would you like to try some?

I must have had such a face that I did not even need to say anything.

- Well, as you wish... But outside of these walls no one needs to know. Even if some of ours do sell a bit on the side, you understand that he won't get anything for it, except for a dismissal. And many of our guys have families back at home, they have to provide. Do you know how hard life in Holland has become now? Since the introduction of the Euro⁷²³...

Once again, I looked at all this merry company, wondering what to say. It was clear that from reading them a lecture on morality with a raised reproachfully finger they will not get back to the right path.

- Why would I need to talk to anyone about it? - I said finally. - Of course, I will not. You feel free, guys, go ahead. You will soon send yourselves to a better world.

Zeena rushed to me, but the burly Dutchman held her.

- *Rustig, rustig, schatje*⁷²⁴! - He told her soothingly, holding her hand. - The last thing we would want, is for you to start a fight. Then they'll call the local police and...do you want to get into the "*Bon Futuro*"⁷²⁵? I personally do not. *Mevrouw* already told you that this will stay just between us. And I believe her. And you guys? - He turned to the others. But his neighbours at the table were in such a condition that it was difficult for them to understand even where they were. One of them was rowing with his hands on the table - as if making breaststroke swimming in the pool.

- Gerben! - Zeena, who had not yet reached such a condition, tried to protest. But Gerben twisted her hands, grabbed her in his arms and carried her back to the table.

- *Prettige avond verder, mevrouw!*⁷²⁶ - He nodded to me at parting, - Shut the door tightly, there is a draft.

- *Doe!*⁷²⁷! - I said and slammed the door. I have not even had time to figure out what a word game it turned out to be.⁷²⁸ But it would still be understandable only by a Russian.

For a few seconds I tried to collect my thoughts and spirit. Perhaps, indeed, it was better to keep quiet about it; especially if the ship bosses were really aware of these orgies. After all, the seized cocaine was in their possession.

⁷²³ Dutch people widely complain that everything has become much more expensive since the introduction of Euro

⁷²⁴ Quiet, quiet, darling! (Dutch)

⁷²⁵ "Bon Futuro" - prison on Curaçao

⁷²⁶ Have a nice evening, Madam! (Dutch)

⁷²⁷ Bye! (Dutch, Amsterdam dialect)

⁷²⁸ "Doei" pronounced as "dooi" sounds like the Russian word which means imperative of the verb "blow"

Behind me there was a delicate cough. I turned around so fast that I nearly fell down the stairs. It was my yesterday's saviour, Sergeant Alvarez.

- Let me help you, *Señora*, - he said, taking my heavy bag. And he carried it down the stairs before I could get over it.

- It has long been here so, - he said, lowering his voice, when we were on the dock - Do not be surprised. There is much of what cannot be seen by the man of the street. You can even shoot someone dead unpunished. This woman, - here he lowered his voice even further, - became a drug addict already in Iraq. I know, we were there together. A very nasty, mean woman. Although she is so beautiful. She is particularly mean when she gets to disliking somebody. Try to stay away from her- for your own good. I say this not because I want to blanch someone. If I was sure that somebody would take action, and not sweep it all under the carpet, I would be the first one to report everything. But I'm not sure. Not sure at all... And that is why I keep silent. You'd say, cowardice? Maybe so. But I've seen enough, what they do with the brave ones...

- Thanks again - I said, - for your help. And also thanks for the advice. Sure, I'll remember it. All the best to you.

I turned away and walked with a fast pace away from the ship, without looking back...

... In our family they were all civilians. Except for the grandfather Kolya, who died long before I was born. True, my mother at her work was constantly faced with military representatives - members of the armed forces, who were permanently working at her factory: to accept their products. The plant did not have to look for a market and especially did not have to equip enemy armies with their products, just in order not to close, as now. A time when everything was turned upside down, was still far away. One of the military representatives, with whom my mother worked, once worked with Kalashnikov himself, and my mother was very proud of that. Although that military representative was quite a hard man, in her words, but he was a great specialist in his field. And very clever.

My uncle Shurek was a senior lieutenant, but of the reserve, and very, very rarely, probably two times during my life back at home, he left for military training. Grandpa Ilya passed the war as a private. My closest my personal contact with the army life - not counting the show of songs and marching⁷²⁹ at school and the fact that in my class, I was a nurse - was when my mother and I went to Moscow to visit in the army my hapless second cousin Grisha. Then, as I said, his military service seemed almost a tragedy for me, but if you think about it, a service like this is a natural and even an honourable thing for a normal man. This isn't about conquering some foreign countries because of oil. In normal countries an army exists in order to defend its own country, and not for constantly existing in the intervention-occupation mode (I think, the British already do not even realize that in fact, the army is supposed to protect its own territory, and all the Irish idiots who join the British the army, do so in order to "see the world." as if somebody stops them from seeing it as a tourist - there's your "freedom of movement"! "Democrats", of course, now will foam at the mouth shouting at me "But what about Afghanistan? And Hungary? And Czechoslovakia? "And you can spend a lot of pages, explaining to them the difference, but they will all continue to chant the same:" *change your socks, dear Karlson! Change your socks!*"⁷³⁰-, without even listening to you... Therefore, instead, let's just offer them to continue this list, if they have anything else to add. And then to compare it with the "track record" of

⁷²⁹ Annual competition between classes in a Soviet secondary school (in military marching and singing), usually held in February, for the Soviet Army Day (23rd of February)

⁷³⁰ From "Karlson on the Roof" by Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren. Refers to somebody who continue to repeat their mantra without listening to any arguments.

the U.S.: the number of invaded countries, their geographical remoteness from the United States and in particular the number of civilian casualties... And everything then just falls into place.

*We are a peaceful people, but our armoured train is on the siding*⁷³¹. But why, oh why, could you tell me, please do the Dutch need to learn how to fight in the Surinamese jungle, allegedly in order to protect their semi-marshland flat piece of land in Europe? Does any country that has jungles, threatens to capture The Hague?

Recently I had a chance to see the old Soviet documentary film about Afghanistan during Babrak Karmal's⁷³² time (it was filmed at a time when Tajikistan had its own film studio) - and you know how flourishing, how modern Kabul looked at the time, compared with Kabul "liberated" by Americans? The soldiers, our Soviet soldiers of that time can't even be compared with those who are now called with that stupid little word "Federalists"⁷³³ from which emanates something reminding of the American civil war! Almost simultaneously with this film I saw a report about modern Chechnya: guys, I do not want to offend anyone, maybe these were contractors (in the Soviet army we had those who were enlisted and voluntarily decided to stay in the service over their time, but no contractors, no "soldiers of fortune"), but those "Feds" who were shown in that film, had a bleary, meaningless look in their eyes: the same like Zeena with her *bonus* on board on that ship. That's what struck me: this difference between smart, lively, inquisitive eyes of the Soviet soldiers and those empty, lacklustre eyes of the "unfinished Rambo's" in bandanas, heirs of Colonel Budanov⁷³⁴. I understand who is behind the likes of Basayev⁷³⁵, who urges them and equips them; I'm not talking about that now, I am talking about how our current Russian army is very different from the Soviet Army. As if these were the people of two completely different countries that have no connection to each other, with no common history: the Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan and the current "*Rambo a la Russe*." And can you imagine a Soviet army officer selling ammunition and weapons during the war, and to the enemy?! Now do you understand what sort of people are chirping the loudest with hatred about "Stalin's dictatorship"? He was such a nasty man, you see, he interrupted their such a profitable business...

Our army was not the same as the NATO armies. It was not an army of invaders-cutthroats by its nature. Our army was closer to the Korean People's Army: an army of workers and defenders. And in Grisha's construction battallion soldiers worked on the construction of the national economy, not on building countryhouses for the officers.

At a time when Grigory was in his construction battallion, army bullying was almost non-existent. In any case, not in such brutal forms like today. It was more of childish pranks like disorderly conduct of kids after dark at a summer camp (which Grisha being an expert in martial arts, did not experience on himself at all). When we came to visit him the first time, and he came out to us in his uniform, he looked so home-like, so like one of our own - and not only because I was missing him so much, but also because in this uniform he looked so much like our Soviet soldiers who defended our homeland wearing it when we both were not even born yet. A current uniform of the Russian "federalists" is just *not ours*, is alien, almost the same as NATO's, it's not the uniform, but "ugh, just a title"⁷³⁶! And, as our proverb says, "*proper clothes open all doors*..." So, how should we meet those who shot the

⁷³¹ "Song of Kahovka", by Dunaevsky and Svetlov (1935), cited as an expression of self-confidence and as a warning to opponents, to be more careful in their actions.

⁷³² Babrak Karmal (1929 – 1996) - an Afghan Marxist [politician](#) and statesman during the [Cold War](#).

⁷³³ Nickname for Russian troops in post-Soviet Russia

⁷³⁴ Yuri Budanov (1963 – 2011) was the [Russian military officer](#) convicted by a [Russian court](#) of [kidnapping](#) and [murder](#) of a young girl in [Chechnya](#).

⁷³⁵ Shamil Basayev (1965 – 2006) was a [Chechen](#) militant [Islamist](#) supported and armed by the West

⁷³⁶ "Our romance was not a romance, but ugh, just a title!" - from a popular Russian song

defenders of the White House in October 1993⁷³⁷? Those who have served all their life under the red banner, and now serve under the flag of the General Vlasov⁷³⁸? I do not know... If I was an athlete, I would even do a victory lap, wrapping my shoulders in the Soviet flag, brought with me for the occasion: because of that tricolour Vlasov and tsar Nicholas' banner is not my flag!

I do not judge our army more than I judge myself. Our army became just as much fleeting in a desperate search of itself, as is our society. One day it makes a march to Pristina⁷³⁹, raising people's expectations (both of Serbs and of our own people, back at home), next day it is involved in joint exercises with *the butchers of Yugoslavia*, who turns out to be its "strategic partners." Similar to how with the start of the bombing of Belgrade, one Russian politician turned back his plane when he was flying to America⁷⁴⁰, and after a while another Russian politician went to Belgrade to persuade Milosevic to surrender...

It is high time to tell our whole country, not just the Army: *take off your cross, or put on some underwear*⁷⁴¹! And there is less and less time left for us as a nation to make this fateful decision...

Oisín was waiting for me outside the gates of the base: like a real husband. He even kissed me on the cheek. I barely resisted the impulse to pull myself away from him.

- Well, how are you? - he said, - Still alive?

- As you can see. Oh - I said - So much has happened; I do not know where to start. Only it seems, we are not one step closer to unlocking what we need to solve. Unfortunately...

- Don't worry, - said Oisín - You just tell us what you have. Not to me now, but to Saoirse and Orlando. Tomorrow. In Aruba.

- In Aruba? - I cried.

- Well, yes, what's wrong with that? As I understand it, it's just a very short flight, no longer than a half an hour?. Saoirse's liner this time does stop in Willemstad. And while you were away, I got a message from Orlando that we have to meet in Oranjestad⁷⁴². To think that I, an Irish Republican will have to go to a town, named in honor of William of Orange! Life is strange...

- Why is it so urgent? Did something happen? - I interrupted him. I was not up to the Irish Republican sentiments at that moment.

- I understand that the situation is so serious that it was decided once again to discuss all that we know at this moment, to try to make an... how did he put it? "Information and intelligence breakthrough." You see, maybe something that you know, in itself seems having nothing to do with our goal to you, but in conjunction with what is known to other comrades, a more clear picture can be formed....

⁷³⁷ The [political stand-off](#) in October 1993 between the [Russian president](#) and the [Russian parliament](#) that was resolved by using military force. The president did not have the power to dissolve the parliament according to the then-current constitution. Parliament building was shelled, with unknown number of civilians killed. The "democratic" West approved this action.

⁷³⁸ Andrey Vlasov (1901 – 1946) was a [Russian Red Army](#) general who collaborated with [Nazi Germany](#) during [World War II](#). Symbol of a traitor in the USSR and Russia. Was fighting alongside with the Nazis under the flag that today became Russia's state flag.

⁷³⁹ Pristina march - in 1999 Russian troops arrival in Pristina ahead of NATO forces after the end of the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia took Nato completely by surprise. The Russians were greeted like a liberating army by thousands of cheering people there. But that march was initiated against the wishes of the Russian pro-Western politicians and had no effect on life in "liberated" Kosovo afterwards

⁷⁴⁰ Yevgeny Primakov and Victor Chernomyrdin respectively

⁷⁴¹ An expression meaning "you cannot sit between the 2 chairs"

⁷⁴² Capital of Aruba

Officially, we're flying to Aruba for a romantic weekend. So, that's why I practiced... and you're already ready to pull my eyes out for that! - Said Oisin in a justifying himself tone and laughed awkwardly, - By the way, your ex-husband flies back to the Netherlands on Sunday, so it's even better if we don't show ourselves here for another couple of days.

- Practice on cats⁷⁴³, - I blurted out. Although, of course, he did not understand me again.

... To visit Aruba was my life-long dream. My old, still childhood dream - so childish that it was now even uncomfortable to recall. The circumstances were wrong for enjoying in adolescent way the fact that I will finally see Bobby⁷⁴⁴'s homeland. But my heart is still warmed up - as if I was meeting someone I knew, someone who shared a common past with me, and therefore would understand me without words.

From Curaçao to Aruba it is really only a half hour flight: not even enough time to unfasten the seatbelts on the plane. It is so near and yet, many things there are completely different than in Curaçao. Yes, people on both islands do speak the same language, but in Aruba it even has its own spelling rules. Aruba also has its own, different style of music, which is not very much to the liking of the residents of Curaçao. And the people in Aruba are mostly fair-skinned: a mixture of Spaniards with the Indians. Aruban Black people - like Bobby - are usually descendants of migrants who came here from the English-speaking Caribbean islands in search of work. Not for nothing Bobby had an Irish surname (in Ireland, as I found out, the surname Farrell hails from the small town of Longford, almost in the centre of the island).

And Aruba is flat: almost like the Netherlands, compared with a hilly Curaçao; and the climate there is drier. Beaches are much longer, and they are covered with golden sand, not greyish, like our Russian river sand, on Curaçao. Aruban Tourism reminds me of a glossy postcard, and also the "backyard" of the United States. There are many more American tourists there than on Curaçao, and Aruba's economy is much more dependent on them. And because of that all is fitted to suit their tastes. Arubans more often insert into their speech English words, and many of their songs even are completely bilingual. And they try to speak in English with an American accent: so much that it is simply a pain to my ears. Here are more hotels and shops that are styled in American phrase «*shopping mall*», and the bars and discos are working almost around the clock.

But Arubans are the same kind of people as their counterparts in Curaçao: friendly, hospitable, cheerful. "Officially" Curaçao has a bad reputation: supposedly because of crime, of which there is more than in a quiet Aruba. But I felt in Curaçao in this respect about the same as I did in Rotterdam's Nieuwe Westen⁷⁴⁵, where they "do not touch the locals." I remember only once in all of our 5 years of life in that part of Rotterdam a drug addict hit señor Arturo on the face in the metro: up to blood. Just like that, without any reason to. Dutch people all ran away in fear, nobody came to help an elderly man. The police detained the addict, but almost immediately let him go. "We have no available cells, and we are not allowed to put 2 detainees into the same cell," - cheerfully said Dutch policeman to señor Arturo, from whose nose blood was still gushing, and whose eye was swollen shut immediately. Back at home he got even more from his own son:

- You are yourself to blame! - resented Sonny - You just have such a face... of a potential victim. That attracts all these types.

⁷⁴³ Phrase from the popular Soviet comedy film "Operation "Y" and other Shurik's Adventures" (1965)

⁷⁴⁴ Bobby Farrell (1949-2010)- native of Aruba, singer and dancer of Boney M band, was Zhenya's big idol in her childhood, see part 1 of the book

⁷⁴⁵ Old district in Rotterdam populated mainly by migrants

It was not the Antillean way at all: to consider the victim himself to be guilty of being assaulted, but Sonny became too imbued with the spirit of Dutch Protestantism over the years. For Protestants also poor are always "themselves to blame," for the fact that they are poor, and the rich for them are certainly rich because they "earned their wealth through honest hard work"...

But in Curaçao, unlike in Aruba - as admitted by those who have lived on both islands - there is a more traditional, original, not baseball-hamburger-like culture, and in addition, it is easier to get to know local people deeper there, not only on surface-level like waiters and maids for a tourist. So in Aruba I experienced mixed feelings of what I saw. Here it was somehow all too *pomadé*. But Oisín fell in love with Aruba at the first sight.

- I will be... what a beauty! - he exclaimed constantly, until we went to our meeting place. - I have seen stuff like that only in the movies. That would be great to have a real, proper holiday out here, to the fullest!

I felt sorry for him. After all, he still did not have a normal vacation - ever since we came to the Antilles. I'll have to say something about it to Orlando, so the next time they'd sent Oisín to those Maldives. I've had enough of it after being there once. I have a slightly different concept of "a vacation to the fullest" that Oisín. Give me a museum and a theatre. And most importantly - people who understand me!

Comrade Orlando was waiting for us on board of his private yacht with a beautiful name "Esperanza"⁷⁴⁶. We recognized it from a distance- it had scarlet sails on its masts: Comrade Orlando was a great admirer of that novel by Alexander Grin⁷⁴⁷...

- Sometimes I imagine myself to be captain Gray, - he admitted to me - and when I feel like that, I pull up on the "Esperanza" those red sails... Although my Ingrid is too practical and too grounded to be Assol. But it has its advantages. Not everyone can be romantic. Sit down, guys, drink something cool.... Today it is hotter than usual. I myself am rarely in Aruba: too much noise here and too much "glamour." Bonaire is much calmer. And Ingrid thinks so too. In Aruba, we also have a few friends who are watching the local American base. But all the major military merrymaking are happening elsewhere... The base here is small - it's only an excuse. If there were too many of American F-16's in the air here, that would spoil the holidays here for their own countrymen. There is much more going on in bars and clubs here, rather than directly at the military. One of our friends in Aruba, by the way, is a bartender, and he hears a lot of interesting stuff at his job... Some day I'll introduce you to Aruban comrades. But not now.

- Thank you, Comrade Orlando - I said - You have so urgently summoned us here... Did something happen?

- So far nothing - Comrade Orlando lowered his voice - but our Venezuelan comrades intercepted interesting information which may be relevant to what is being prepared for the Antilles.

His face grew serious, like a cloud passed over the sky.

- They are preparing a military provocation, *companeros*. A serious, real military provocation. Of the same extent as the explosion on the USS "Maine" in Havana harbour in 1898 during the Cuban War of

⁷⁴⁶ Hope (Spanish)

⁷⁴⁷ Alexander Grin (1880 – 1932) - a Russian writer, notable for his romantic novels and short stories, mostly set in an unnamed fantasy land with a European or Latin American flavor, with "Scarlet Sails" being his most popular work. Assol was a heroine of that novel

Independence⁷⁴⁸. We have established - including using information received from your group - that they are scheduled to implement it before the end of this year. We are now in July. We have almost six months left. It only seems that six months is a lot. Now we will have to count every day. There is an urgent need to find out what exactly is planned and for when. Our comrades have also learned the following: the provocation will involve the use of aircraft, but not of the U.S. planes or of the Dutch ones. Which ones then; that is the question? And the essence of provocation would be to cause the loss of civilian lives and military personnel in Curaçao, and then to blame it on Venezuela. It is, in fact, a sufficient excuse to start a war. An intervention against the Bolivarian Republic. Of course, that's not advertised. On the contrary, Washington is now talking as much as possible about Afghanistan, it insists that it will be there where the main U.S. military forces will be relocated from Iraq. What will take place in the Caribbean, will allegedly happen "out of the blue" for the United States, but as a partner of the Netherlands in the NATO, "they will see it as their sacred duty to respond to the unprovoked aggression waged against the Kingdom of the Netherlands" - and so on, and so forth, blah blah blah, in the spirit of all their other such wars. Immediately Colombia will jump to the aid of the U.S. Colombia, and Venezuela will be "taken in ticks." Then... I do not need to explain to you what will happen next.

Although outside it was, as rightly noted by Comrade Orlando, an even hotter than usual Caribbean day, I felt a creeping chills going down my spine. This is not a movie, not a book of some of Tom Clancy; all this is really happening. And not just happening, but to prevent this from happening depends not on someone else, not on Superman, not on Ilya Muromets⁷⁴⁹ or a Dutch boy who closed a hole in a burst dam with his finger⁷⁵⁰, but on us. On me, on Oisin and on our comrades. To be honest, at that point I felt scared. I felt almost like Ivan Bunsha⁷⁵¹ when he gets to sign a royal decree: "I have no right to sign such historical documents».

I tried to pull myself together. After all, I'm not alone here. "We are many, you cannot hang us all," - as once Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya said⁷⁵². And the realization that I was not alone, that there are also Oisin and Tyrunesh and Comrade Orlando, and Sgt Marchena and Liubenshka and Rafaelito and all the others, really helped. The cold shivers disappeared. Let those to be afraid in whose society "heroes" are more like a single psychopaths, those who grew up in the world of Rambo, Rocky and of Terminator who joined them!

- One thing I cannot understand, - I said - How can they convince anyone that Chavez attacked Curaçao? This is so stupid! Why would he do that?

- It's us who, of course, know that this is a complete nonsense, - replied Comrade Orlando - But a philistine capitalist is scared by the image of "dictator Chavez." In the Netherlands, many racist

⁷⁴⁸ USS *Maine* was the [United States Navy's](#) second commissioned [battleship](#) best known for her catastrophic loss in [Havana Harbor](#) on the evening of 15 February 1898. Sent to protect U.S. interests during the Cuban revolt against Spain, she exploded suddenly without warning and sank quickly, killing nearly three quarters of her crew. It was a deliberate provocation sinking in order to drive the U.S. into a war with Spain.

⁷⁴⁹ Ilya Muromets is a [Kievan Rus' epic hero](#). He is celebrated in numerous [byliny](#) (folk [epic poems](#)). He is regarded as the greatest of all the legendary [bogatyrs](#) (i.e., [medieval knights-errant](#) of [Kievan Rus](#))

⁷⁵⁰ Dutch legend has it that there was once a small boy who upon passing a dyke on his way to school noticed a slight leak as the sea trickled in through a small hole. Knowing that he would be in trouble if he were to be late for school, the boy poked his finger into the hole and so stemmed the flow of water. Some time later a passerby saw him and went to get help. This came in the form of other men who were able to effect repairs on the dyke and seal up the leak.

⁷⁵¹ Hero of the Soviet comedy film "Ivan Vasilievich Changes Profession" (1973) who accidentally travels back in time and has to take place of the Tsar Ivan the Terrible in order to save himself.

⁷⁵² See previous notes

screamers already shout that they are ready to concede Antilles to Venezuela «voor 2 kwartjes»⁷⁵³ (although Venezuela has never expressed the desire to annex the Antilles). But as soon as something like this will happen, the same screamers will yell with all their might that "the Latin American dictator" encroaches on the territorial integrity of the Netherlands', that for many centuries Antilles belonged to the Netherlands, that Netherlands have long economic and strategic interests in the region, and so on. For this, they may even temporarily stop calling Antilleans "Antillanen" and begin to call them "Caribische Nederlanders" (something that they usually like to forget). And they'll come up with an excuse. They will say, for example, that Chavez "wants to unite the whole of Latin America by military power" (no wonder he bought so much of Russian arms, eh?) Or that Venezuela is afraid of losing the contract with Curaçao's refinery, or that Chavez wants to "teach these Americans a lesson," or finally, that he simply "lost his mind" as long earnestly says Venezuelan opposition... They will come up with something, don't you worry! If those ordinary Westerners seriously believed that Saddam Hussein "could hit Britain with his rockets in 45 minutes" - such folks can be told anything!

I remembered the British tabloids and the public that reads them at lunchtime. Yes, this public will swallow any total rubbish - under a garnish of branchy boobs of "girls from Page 3"⁷⁵⁴.

- What do we do if we manage to find something out? Do we go through the normal channels, or do we directly contact you? - I asked.

- Yes, in this case, the first thing is to contact me. Now I will explain you how.. What do you think yourselves, *companeros*, who is preparing this? How many people know about these plans? The most important thing is when is the operation scheduled, and what exactly it consists of? Any suspicious movements on the base, any change in the mood of your contacts there, any delivery of any unusual containers, arrival at the base of any new military, especially of the higher ranks... You will have to make note of even the smallest details. The lives of a huge number of people depend on it, largely. On it depends the fate of the Venezuelan revolution, and thus the future of Latin America. And to a wider extent - the world revolutionary movement. After all, it is Venezuela that people from all over the world look at with hope today... Do not you worry, *companeros*, - said Comrade Orlando, and his eyes softened, - Yes, from the outside it may look like a steep mountain, which is impossible to climb on to. But I remember how one of our teachers was telling me in the Soviet Union, when I worked in the student construction brigade⁷⁵⁵: "Your eyes may fear the task, but your hands in the meantime are doing it!"⁷⁵⁶...

- It was a favourite saying of my grandmother! - I exclaimed.

- Well, then even more so... Then whom I am trying to teach? Of course, a single pair of hands is not enough. You will need to work with your brains here too. But you both have good heads on your shoulders, as we all have already seen.

I and Oisín both looked down in shyness, not saying a word.

- Everything flows, everything changes - continued Comrade Orlando - and not always just for the worse, although in the last 20 years, many of us might think so. When the Soviet Union vanished from the map, I for a long time could not find a place for myself. I consider myself to be a Soviet

⁷⁵³ Dutch expression (literally "for 50 cents") meaning "very cheap", "for next to nothing"

⁷⁵⁴ Page 3 in the British newspaper "Sun" published photo of a topless woman on a daily basis

⁷⁵⁵ Student construction brigades (in Russian: SSO) are temporary [construction](#) teams composed of students in [universities](#) and other institutions of higher education to work, usually during [vacations](#). This form originated under the control of [Komsomol](#) of the [Soviet Union](#).

⁷⁵⁶ You never know what you can do till you try (Russian proverb)

Colombian. I had the feeling as if I had lost someone I cared for, a relative. It was a tragedy of such a global scale, and I still wonder how it is possible that you have so many people for whom took more than a decade to finally figure this out...

- Do not ask me - I said, - For me the most is just as much a mystery as it is for you. I personally needed only one year. Am even ashamed to remember... Maybe, this is exactly the reason: that people are ashamed to remember how stupid they were, and because they block in their mind the realization of what has happened. It is easier to live this way.

- But the pendulum has gone the other way now, - continued Comrade Orlando - Including in Curaçao. Curaçao today is not the same as 10, - no, even 5 years ago! You saw what happened in Willemstad during the signing of a new agreement with the Netherlands? The Dutch prime minister had to sign this agreement on the Dutch military base in Willemstad: very symbolic for the "new relations within the Kingdom"! Agreements where both signing parties are equal, are not being signed on military bases! Did you see local people protesting against Dutch neo-colonialism, selecting the most painful symbol for the Dutch: the "Star of David" which was sewn on their clothes⁷⁵⁷. I read that among the volunteers who went to serve in the SS in Western Europe, the Dutch were almost the biggest group... How many children in today's Holland know that their grandfathers and great grandfathers were offered a premium during the war for each Jew delivered to the Nazis - and manage in their own mind to link it to how many Jews have died in those years in the Netherlands? Yes, you know... But during the Second World War there was also an Aruban who died in the Netherlands in a fascist jail: Boy Ecury⁷⁵⁸, an underground resistance fighter. There are also some Dutch who do not really like to remember it. Boy Ecury could have said to himself: this is not my country, this is not my war, not my business, why should I get involved? But he was not that kind of a man. He could not ignore it: just like we cannot ignore what is happening here today. The Antilles are waking up, and that is what the colonizers are so hysterically afraid of. Although of course they will continue to chant "let those islands get off our neck" and "if a woman gets off a cart - it will become easier for a mare"⁷⁵⁹...

- You know,... - I interrupted, because an understanding came to me suddenly, why all of this was so familiar - You know what this colonialist attitude to the Antilles makes me think of? Of the tyrannical behaviour of a husband to his wife, whom he tries to "bend like ram's horn", so that she would not leave him. The most powerful weapon of such a husband is his constant suggestions to his wife, that without him she would not survive, that she is incapable of doing or deciding anything by herself, that she is so lucky that she's got him, that he is providing for her, that she is stupid, that nobody would need her, but him, that one day (that day is never specified), he would kick her out, and that's when she will cry without him... We've been through all of this. We tasted all this on our own skin. And it's OK, we survived, and we are not a bit sorry that nobody provides for us anymore. On the contrary, it became easier to breathe. And the Antilles will also breathe easier once they will be free. The main thing is to make people believe in themselves.

I noticed that Oisín listened with great interest. Oh yeah, I have never told him details of my marriage to Sonny... And why on earth would I do that? Never mind, let him listen. Maybe he will finally understand why I became what I am. Irreconcilable.

- A very precise analogy! - Praised me Comrade Orlando - Wow! This never occurred to me. But that's just the way it is, *companeros!*

⁷⁵⁷ Reminder of the Dutch betrayal of the Jewish people during the WWII

⁷⁵⁸ Boy Ecury (1922 - 1944) (real name Segundo Jorge Adelberto Ecury) was an Aruban born member of the [Dutch Resistance in World War II](#) who was executed by the Nazis

⁷⁵⁹ Russian proverb meaning "good riddance"

At this point, we heard light knocking of heels on the deck of "Esperanza": Saoirse arrived.

- *Dia duit!* - She greeted Oisin in Irish, - Hello! Sorry I'm so late. Our liner entered the port with a delay of three hours. The tourists were very upset: now they are here only for half a day, and they wanted to buy so many things... They are afraid now that they will not succeed. It took some time to calm them all down, then to get here... I am not here? for long, I have got million of things to do back on board. Here are the letters, guys, hold it, - she gave me and Oisin an envelope each.

Yes, Oisin also finally got a letter from home! I saw that he was very surprised by this. But he put his envelope into his pocket without reading it. I hastened to follow his example: it was somehow awkward to start to read personal letters now, when we are talking about such serious things. "*Today it's not personal things that matter, but a summary of the working day.*"⁷⁶⁰

I handed the letter that I wrote for mum to Saoirse. I also wrote a letter for Ri Rang, although I did not receive any letter from him the last time. I did not ask him in my letter why he did not write to me, I just wrote it as if nothing had happened, trying not to show, how lonely and anxious I felt because of his silence,. As the *bearded dendrofile*⁷⁶¹ says in such case, now the ball will be in his court.

Saoirse took my letter and hid it... in her red mop of hair, putting a summer hat on top of it and deftly hooking it with a clasp for it not to be blown away by the wind.

- And I have nothing with me, - said Oisin confused - I did not know that I would get a letter...

- Don't worry, you'll pass me your answer the next time! - Saoirse patted him on the shoulder. - Is there anything else you both would like to convey in words?

- I do not know who is there in charge of our holidays, - I said - but I would like to ask... Please, no more Maldives for me. It is better to send him to the Maldives he really needs a good rest,- and I pointed to Oisin. - And I... Please send me the next time to Pyongyang! It is my dearest wish. I hope so much that I will deserve it.

- I have no doubt, - smiled Comrade Orlando - Only now, as you know, all the holidays are postponed indefinitely. In such a situation none of us can afford it.

- I understand, of course. But I am speaking about the future... Please do not forget to tell them? - I almost cried out.

- Do not worry, *Soviética*, I will, - Saoirse calmed me.

Oisin again looked at me with some fresh eyes.

- What is it? - I asked him.

- Nothing, - he said, - Pyongyang.... Wow, look at you! A brave woman!

- Why is that? - I looked at him sternly.

- Are not you scared? Not at all? After all, there is hunger, the cult of personality, and they also kidnap foreigners...

I was angry. He had just got out of his ghetto for the very first time in his life, and there he is, he sure knows everything about the world around him!

⁷⁶⁰ Line from the Soviet song "My Address is the Soviet Union" (1970s)

⁷⁶¹ Dendrofile - a man who loves trees; hint at Sinn Fein's leader who often mentions his love for trees in his interviews.

- Yeah, and bears roam the streets out there, - I picked up - Just like in Soviet Russia. Where Stalin allegedly said to one of your Irish, "What kind of a revolution it is, if you still have not hung any single priest? No, comrades, this is not serious! " Goodness gracious, you are such a smart guy! Why do you repeat like a parrot what the bourgeois press says? After all, they wrote about yourself such things that I should just tremble with fear, standing next to you! And I'm not even afraid to live with you under the same roof, you, *wonder in feathers!*⁷⁶²

Oisín blushed.

- No offence, comrade Alan - intervened Comrade Orlando - but *Soviética* is right. I was there, in Pyongyang: at the World Festival of Youth and Students in the late 80's. And I would heartily recommend you to visit it, if there is such a possibility. After that, a lot in life you will begin to perceive differently. Korea greatly cleans people's brains - as a water filter. I do not say that you will definitely be delighted by everything you will see: there is no accounting for tastes, but I am sure that you will admire these wonderful, strong, freedom-loving and proud people. And make sure you will visit Cuba too. You will discover a completely different system of values in life. But do not be upset that *Soviética* was so sharp with you; very few people in the world do really know what a wonderful country it is. Your comrade was very lucky to visit it.

I closed my eyes, trying to drive away a surge of my memories that flooded my head at his words. God forbid, I would cry out of nostalgia...

In the evening, when Saoirse long returned to her ship, and the discussion of all business issues was finally completed, the three of us sat comfortably on the deck of "Esperanza." Exhausting heat began to subside. I and Oisín have booked a hotel in Oranjestad, but did not want to leave here, and Comrade Orlando, feeling our mood, said that we can spend the night at his yacht; there was enough room for everyone. It would be just better to leave it in the early morning, when people will still be asleep, to avoid being seen. And the hotel staff will certainly think that we danced the night away somewhere in the disco - here for tourists it is a common thing.

- Well, I just started getting used to the idea of having a lie-in in the morning! - Oisín was upset.

- We'll get to the hotel after that, and you can sleep there all you want,- I said - Even until our departure. Comrade Orlando, would you tell us about the Soviet Union? For example, what are your most wonderful memories of it?

- The most wonderful memories? - Comrade Orlando thought for a moment - The best was probably the construction of BAM⁷⁶³. As a student, I begged to be allowed for one summer to join the student construction team of my Soviet comrades... Do not ask how much effort it cost me! But I was allowed, and it was really great. Such a sense of friendship, a sense of co-shoulder exists, perhaps, only among the guerrillas. And the jokes and the laughter, which helped us in the hard work, and the realization that you do not just work the allotted time for "the bucks", as you say now, but to build something useful for people, *to create* (I love this beautiful, now almost forgotten word!)- That you're breaking new ground for the future - what could be better? All of two months, I was like in heaven, not paying attention to mosquitoes. I remember for a lifetime taste of crispy, fragrant smoky potatoes baked in the camp fire.... And I saw Dean Reed live⁷⁶⁴!

- Really? - I exclaimed.

⁷⁶² Russian expression meaning something like "unfortunate beauty"

⁷⁶³ See previous notes

⁷⁶⁴ See previous notes

- Who is that? - Asked Oisin. And I and Comrade Orlando began excitedly to tell him who it was, and even sang in a duet a couple of songs from the repertoire of Dean, the Chilean "Venceremos" and "We say" Yes! "

- And what were the most unpleasant memories for you? - Asked Oisin. - Queues in the stores?

*Who talks about what, but those who suffer from lice, can only talk of a bath*⁷⁶⁵...

Comrade Orlando laughed heartily.

- And the most unpleasant ones were not from the Soviet Union. From the time when I was in Moscow in 1994: from advertising, which I saw there on television. They said, even with such pride in their voice, with such fervour: "*I do not work. My money works for me...*" I could not continue to listen.... And most wild for me was the fact that the Soviet people - my dear Soviet people! - did not resent such abominations. As if they were ashamed that they would be declared to be "out-of-date", if they say out loud that it is disgusting: to be proud of not working. That it is disgusting: when one person owns at some unknown reason fruits of the labour of hundreds of thousands of people. That money cannot "work" for anyone and does not create anything. I think, now, during the crisis, it is more obvious than ever. This is one of the most painful memories of my life. Even worse than when our unit was surrounded by government troops in the jungle. More desperate.

- Excuse me for a second, I'll go out for a second, - Oisin said suddenly. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed that he was pulling out from his pocket a letter that he has received.

- Do you know about what I'm most worrying now? - I said to Comrade Orlando, when Oisin disappeared into the darkness.

- About what?

- I always think about whether I have like-minded people back at home. That maybe I did not do enough in my life in order to find them. About just how cowardly I acted, leaving behind all that was dear to me, to its own devices, hoping that all this will be saved by someone else... I'll never forgive myself!

- Do not torment yourself - said Comrade Orlando - Yes, you are to blame. Like many other people. But you should think, what to do in now and in the future, and not just worry about the past. Even though we must remember the past too. Your life goes on, and your country is alive. Though it is suffering under all the dung, which she is covered with today. But I am sure that you will still get back home. Like-minded ones at home, of course, there are: I've seen them, I spoke to them. I have met there such people even in the midst of the reaction. It was just amazing: to meet people who unconditionally supported our struggle, no matter how many bad things they were told about us by the media. And I can tell you with full responsibility: while in Russia and the other republics, there are such people, you should not worry, even if you personally have not met them yet. Often they live in remote areas and therefore are not visible at first glance. Because it is usually the noisy ones that especially catch the eye first: they are more visible, like foam on the beer.

I smiled.

- Thank you.

- For what?

⁷⁶⁵ You're like a broken record (Russian proverb)

- For the hope. You know, a small nation's nationalism is probably a completely different thing than the national feelings of a bigger nation. Look how passionately Koreans want reunification of the country. True, they have sufficiently learnt from the German example, to desire the reunification not at any price, but on their own terms... But their national feelings are very strong indeed. It's just when I see all those glamorous Dunka's and Romka's⁷⁶⁶ in Europe, I do not want to associate myself with them. I do not feel that they belong to the same nation as me, even though they seem to be speaking the same language. And do not mind if there was a high impenetrable wall built between us. Only why should we give away half the country to them? We are already haing our own demarcation line: it runs along the Moscow Ring Road. Let them better clear off to their spiritual daddies across the ocean; but without the loot, and, using a popular expression of Zhirinovskiy⁷⁶⁷, with just a toothbrush. Since capitalism is such a great system, as they assure us, and they are so clever, it shouldn't take them much work to amass a fortune there again, should it, using exclusively their own work, of course?

Comrade Orlando laughed.

- Whenever I come across such with *clay guys*⁷⁶⁸ and ladies, these *Robin-Bobin Barabek*⁷⁶⁹ of domestic spill, I can't help asking myself: is it really our people?

- Soviética, there is such a wonderful book about the Soviets during the war - "Seagull" by Nikolai Biryukov. The prototype of the main character was her heroine of World War II Lisa Chaikina. Maybe you have read it?

- I did, only long ago.

- There's a fascist who says to the heroine before her execution: "It is foolish to die for the people who betrayed you in a moment of danger." Do you remember what she tells him? "It is a bitch, not the people. The people are out there" - and she points to the forest where the partisans are... So, that's what you have now. All these glamorous cows and "tough guys" on TV - that's bitches, not the people. And the people are out there, out of view of cameras... But they are alive. And waiting for their time.

At this point, Oisin returned to the deck. His lanky figure was hunched more than usual, and it seemed to me that his face was troubled. Maybe something had happened at home? In any case, I felt that our intimate conversation with Comrade Orlando will be interrupted - if not by Oisin's words, then by his silence. The inner harmony of the atmosphere was interrupted.

- We have to get up early tomorrow, Comrade Orlando - I said hastily, - It's great to talk to you, but it's time, as we say, for *nighty-night!* If you remember that expression in Russian...

When we went down to the cabin, of which on "Esperanza" there were three, Oisin suddenly said:

- Sorry, Zhenya... You wouldn't mind if we... If we stayed for the night in the same cabin? Do not think anything. I would not have asked you, but I'm feeling pretty lousy. Maybe we could talk a little bit - no matter about what?

To be honest, I was very confused.

- Did something happen? - I asked - Something in the letter?

⁷⁶⁶ "Let Dunka go to Europe!" (from the play "Lyubov Yarovaya" (1926) by K. Trenev)- allegory of enthusiasm for the external side of life in the West (ironic, despising.). Romka - the likes of Roman Abramovich. Dunka - short form of Yevdolia, common Russian female name.

⁷⁶⁷ Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (b.1946)- a [Russian](#) politician who is often viewed as "a [showman](#) of Russian politics, blending populist and nationalist rhetoric and a brash, confrontational style

⁷⁶⁸ Guttler from a Russian fairy tale;

⁷⁶⁹ Guttler from Kornei Chukovsky's children's verse "Barabek" (1927)

- No, - Oisín shook his head - it was something that *wasn't* in that letter... This letter was simply from my brother Paddy... And I thought that... It does not matter what I thought, I just would not like to be alone now..

I hesitated. I understood how he felt, I recently was in the same condition when in the evening I climbed on the roof, but still somehow...

- Well, OK, - I said, - But I am very tired, am almost falling asleep, so I can't promise you a long conversation. No offence. If you see that I am falling asleep in the middle of a conversation, I'll better listen to you in the morning, okay?

In fact, I myself was even afraid to open the envelope with the letter I received and decided not to do so until our return to Curaçao, no matter how my hands were itching. What if there is no letter from Ri Rang again? And two people in a state of depression in the same cabin - that would be too much.

- OK, - said Oisín somehow dimly - I am tired too.

We did not even turn on the light in the cabin: just fell on the bed like two sheaves in the August field. As we were and what we were in.

Oisín was silent.

- Well, come on then! - I could not stand it.

- Come on what?

-Talking, of course.

- What if I don't want to speak, just to cry with a flood of tears, but it does not work, and I am not allowed to do it by my status - because I am a man? - Oisín said, so softly that I could hardly hear him.

- Is it that bad? - I sympathized.

- Yes, it is bad...

- Well, then... I do not know... - And I gently stroked his head as that of a small child, internally horrified by my own actions.

- Thank you, - said Oisín and silently buried his nose in my hair. Against my will I could feel with all the emotional force how sad he was. But in five minutes he already slept like a log.

- You know, I think that the real Ireland has died with farmer Frank - I only managed to say. I do not know why I said exactly that. My thoughts were confused, and my tongue was moving with difficulty. The last thing I heard before I was overcome by sleep, was Oisín's answer:

- Not true. I'm still around....

But in the morning Oisín did not tell me anything else. We just picked up our modest luggage and left the board of "Esperanza" when it was only beginning to dawn, and the sky still glowed with the last stars (my son Fidelchik⁷⁷⁰ who was a true "bird", usually was waking up at dawn, asking me to "turn off" such stars!), there was low tide at sea, and in all the other yachts after partying all night, everybody fast asleep...

Later that evening we went back to Curaçao.

⁷⁷⁰ Little Fidel (Russian)

July passed, and August - the hottest month in Curaçao, came to an end. Started September, and we still have not moved a single step towards finding out what was being prepared behind the high gates of the U.S. base. My whole being by that time had already been seized by trying to find a solution to the problem before us, and I had no strength left to any other thoughts. Even the fact that there was no letter from Ri Rang again in the envelope brought by Saoirse, this time did not get me out of balance.

Yes, when I discovered that there was no so hotly anticipated by me piece of paper in that envelope, I felt a sharp stab in my heart. Yes, in my heart now I had a permanent deep sadness at the mere recollection of those cheerful black eyes and that low husky voice, and even more so - at the thought of my shared with him dreams and plans for the future. But I could not allow myself to become limp at this moment. "*Let us first fulfil our military order, Lizaveta...*"⁷⁷¹ - and then you can allow yourself to cry in a pillow...

"In the end, maybe I just dreamed it," - I tried to persuade myself in those rare moments when I could not drive away such thoughts any efforts. After all, such people probably exist only in fairy tales. Such countries as his exist only in dreams. So I tried to persuade myself, biting my lips. Ri Rang could have a thousand of reasons to reconsider. And circumstances could have changed within a year and a half beyond recognition, and in the end, as men say, "out of sight out of mind"... It's a mere trifle, as Karlson on the Roof used to say. But I could not believe in the latter. After all, Ri Rang for me was also long "out of sight", but to let him "out of mind" I could never, not even when I myself wanted it, so as not to suffer too much, when I will finally find out the reason for his silence... From the words of my mother, in a letter, by the way, it was hard to figure out anything. She wrote that they see Ri Rang now not so often - because he is busy at work, but his daughters come to them still almost daily: they took a kind of patronage over my boys, teaching them the tricks of the Korean language, and taking Lisa out in their free time for a walk in the park... I told you that in Korea one would never be forgotten or abandoned! This is not "Road to Calvary" with a sick child around the European hospitals...

... In the end, maybe he was really just too busy at work! And was it not my own mother who used to say that "*normal men do not write letters?*" With that in mind, I usually fell asleep.

Oisín by then also got his grief under control, and the cause of it has remained unknown to me. At least superficially he had it under control, and what was going on in his soul, I cannot presume to guess. Everyone knows that another person's soul is a mystery⁷⁷².

Now I wasn't missing any single event related to NATO's military on the island. I attended all *vormingsbijeekkomsten* - that was the Dutch name for the classes to prepare military newcomers to Curaçao to cultural differences between local traditions and what was familiar to them in their own little world (I wish somebody would have taught me some of these things when I was going to marry Sonny!), to the nature on the island and to working in a tropical climate. I was peering into these new faces, hoping to identify the man who came here specifically to implement the planned provocation. I went to the Marines joint exercises with the Americans. At the shooting range in Wakawa where we had to sit for hours in the heat of almost 40 degrees, with our tongues hanging out. I went to the airport with the group - to say goodbye to those going back to the Netherlands who have already served their term in Curaçao (to see off the Americans would be more difficult: they flew home directly from the base, on their own military transport). The Dutch termed this seeing off «*Hato-biertje*».⁷⁷³

⁷⁷¹ Words of Senior Sergeant Vaskov from "The Dawns Here Are Quiet." Soviet WWII film (1972)

⁷⁷² Another man's mind is a closed book (Russian proverb)

⁷⁷³ Hato -name of Curaçao airport, biertje - little beer (Dutch)

One night in late September, I went to another «*Hato-biertje*» (it was on a night flight) and was surprised to see a group of those seeing off the Dutch soldiers our Zeena. Because this event was usually purely Dutch. However, I immediately found out why she was there: Gerben was going back home. Zeena looked disconsolate.

We sat at the bar in the airport Hato, where it was cool because of the air conditioning, and that's why cold beer did not make the same strong impression as it would outside. There were still 2 hours left before Gerben's departure: the Dutch love to everything with plenty of time left. They were talking about everything and nothing ("*koetjes en kalfjes*"⁷⁷⁴): a standby talk about what the weather is like in Amsterdam, and how Gerben's fiancée is waiting for him in his native Oldenzaal (now it was clear why Zeena was so upset!). Colonel Weterholt, seeing that I did not touch the beer, ordered for me some known only to him cocktail. I absentmindedly took a sip from the glass, so as not to offend him, and my whole inside went on fire. "*It tastes like a rat poison. But you should know the best what did you slip in there.. Please bring in a fire extinguisher!*"⁷⁷⁵

- Oh! Give me some snack, anything, quick! - I was breathless.

⁷⁷⁴ Literally "talking about little cows and kalfs" (Dutch)- about nothing, nonsense.

⁷⁷⁵ From Astrid Lindgren's children book "Karlson Flies Again"

The colonel himself was scared and automatically shoved me the first thing that happened to be under his hand: a large ripe tangerine. Tangerines are rarity on Curaçao: not in the sense that you can't find them in stores, but in the sense that they do not really grow there, it's a subtropical fruit. Tangerine was a salvation for me, my throat burning immediately ceased. The skin of it was so easy to peel off and was so thick and juicy that I suddenly longed to take a bite of its white flesh inside: like back at home in my childhood. So I did. It smelled of New Year celebrations, and I felt cheered up.

- Why are you so glad? - hissed Zeena. This time, she was not dressed in her American uniform, but in a beautiful slinky mini-dress: apparently, she took leave for the occasion. - Because Gerben is going away? There is nothing to be happy about...

- Goodness, I did not even think about your Gerben! - I said quite sincerely - God bless you, my dear. Do I have nothing else to think about? Why don't you just let me up. You know, there's such a cool Aruban carnival song...

And I sang to her the first verse of the song from the repertoire of Aruban band "Qua Si", it was in English, so there was no even need to translate it for Zeena.

Man I am so tired,
So tired from this,
Get off me back,
Please let me live,
I have enough,
Enough of your fire,
You keep moving down,
I keep getting higher.

At that time I did not know how prophetic those words would be.

I thought that at this my conversation with her would be ended. But I was wrong - it was just the beginning...

Gerben flew away. At parting, he did not even kiss Zeena and even pretended to be barely knowing her; apparently, his bonus had long evaporated. While I was freshing myself up in the toilet: I still felt slightly dizzy, and that's after just a sip of something, but I still had to drive back to the house - all those who came for the seeing off, have dispersed.

I guessed it was better to take a taxi. Safer. But on leaving the airport I bumped into Zeena's jeep.

- I really need to talk to you, - she said, suddenly seriously.

- Is it about Gerben? - I tried to joke, - Do not worry, I told you that I will not tell anyone about your bonuses. I have better things to do.

- I thought so much you have more important things on your mind,- said Zeena mysteriously, - No, it's not about Gerben. But I have to tell you something very important. Shall we take a drive with to Westpunt? We'll have a chat, and then I'll take you back to Bandaribu.

Curaçao is divided unofficially into two parts: Bandaribu - the West coast and Bandabau - the Eastern part, where Willemstad was also situated. I noted to myself that Zeena said "Bandabau", not "home." I still did not understand what this was all about, but some sixth sense said to me that things smelled of kerosene as the Russian say meaning trouble is in the air. Only if I had refused to go with her, it would

be even worse. I decided to find out what was the matter and at the same time to pull the time. Maybe it was just one of those ordinary silly women's things of hers.

- Okay, let's go, if it will not be long - I said deliberately careless, - I have to get up early tomorrow.

While Zeena went out to pay for parking, I managed to send a short text message to Oisin: "I'm going to Westpunt. If I'm not back in an hour, come and look for me, "and then I removed the battery from the cell phone, as I was once taught by Dermot. Just in case.

On the way, Zeena was silent. I was silent too: after all, it was her who wanted to say something to me, not the other way around. But I soon noticed that something was wrong with her. Zeena was driving in a strange, jerky way. We were lucky that it was so late that the road was almost deserted. But the road to Westpunt is quite dark, and after ten minutes I was just praying that we will not end up somewhere in a ditch on the roadside. And in the eyes of Zeena, which were reflecting the lights of her jeep's dashboard, appeared some familiar to me already unhealthy glow. She must have taken a dose of her "bonus" again!

I was going into the impenetrable darkness in the company of an armed drug addict with an American passport, which was going to tell me some stuff. Well... This was where it was really getting "Curiouser and curiouser"!

The journey seemed like an eternity. I was trying to figure out what she wanted to say to me and I also tried hard not to show her that I was thinking about it.

Finally we got to our destination. To the place which is called Playa Forti. Playa means a beach. During the day there is a working snack bar and a restaurant, but now, of course, everything was closed. And there was no one around. At Playa Fort there is a famous local rock, from which holiday makers jump into the sea, from a 12-metre height. For the Dutch Marines such a jump is part of their local induction programme. Apparently, it must have been Gerben who had shown her this place. That Gerben again, damn him!

We climbed up that very rock. It was a dark tropical night, but over the sea the Moon rose like a huge plate. Therefore we could still see each other's faces. I was surprised that Zeena did not bring with her even a torch. She must have been very much in a hurry.

She sat down on a rock. So did I. By the way, I'm afraid of heights, so I tried not to think about what was below us somewhere under the sea cliff. I looked at Zeena. Maybe it was finally time to end this farce? Her face expressed exactly the same thought.

- I wonder who do you work for? - She said to me in Russian, - For the FSS?

It sounds ridiculous, but I felt relieved when she said this. And my first thought was, "It's better if she thinks that it's for the FSS!" And I was very glad that it was dark: the light of the Moon was not enough for her to make out all the shades of expressions on my face. Or the fact that I realized this.

- You are a strange woman, - I said to Zeena in English - You took me out at night into some horrible boondocks, you said you wanted to tell me something important, and then dragged me to some rock and are talking to me in some foreign language. I thought maybe you needed some help. Apparently, that's exactly what you need. If you do not want to go to a psychiatrist, would you try a priest? They say confession helps...

At these my words Zeena exploded.

- We'll see who of us must confess! - She said, this time in English. So, she was not sure that I understand Russian... - Wait till I'll bring you to our base, there they'll sort you out quickly!

They are not the Dutch whom you can easily fool. And they broke even tougher cookies. For the last time I am asking you: Who do you work for? For the Russian intelligence?

- The Russian intelligence? If I did, I would first of all have bought me a new jeep, mine keeps getting into repairs shop almost weekly... Sweetheart, I think, you started hallucinating. By the way, we are not in Iraq or at Guantanamo Bay.

- But some people may soon get there! - Screamed Zeena.

- Wow, you must be doped to your eyeballs... It is harmful to abuse your bonus so much, - I continued in the same mocking tone, which was making her so furious. Now she will tell me everything that I otherwise would not pull out of her. For example, why she suspects me. It was only in a tasteless joke that they could recognize a Soviet agent by him zipping up his trousers while he was already coming outside of the toilet...

- Doped? I have long noticed that you are not the one whom you pretend to be! Your strange phrases on board of that ship: about Abu Ghraib... It is a pure support for terrorists!

- In this case, those terrorists have so many sympathizers, - I said - For example, "Amnesty International." I see that laurels of Lynndie England do not let you sleep at night. You should have taken with you an angry dog and a video camera up here. Maybe that would calm you down...

- And what about you saying "Doei" to Gerben. "Doei" - when he asked you to close the door because of a draft? It means "to blow" in Russian.

Now that would be really funny to listen to, if I were not in the position in which I found myself. It reminded me of that story with an owl and the Guinean Mamadou. «Ca va, mon cheri!»...

- "Blow" means "goodbye" in Dutch, dear multilingual talent, - I said - Did you not learn a word of Dutch in all your time with Gerben? Not to learn a word in the language of a loved one? Ugh, how unromantic!

- Do not touch Gerben! You do not understand...

- Yeah, of course, how could I...

- What about the tangerine peel, that you gnawed at the bar tonight? - Zenaida has given me her trump card

- What?

- A tangerine peel. Only Russians devour them so. Still hungry from Soviet times.

Hmm, yes, that really was my serious mistake as an agent. Good for you, Zeena. By the way, I have never experienced any hunger when I was absorbing Sukhumi mandarins and their peels under my Soviet New Year tree by almost a ton at the time. I just really like the taste of that white piece of their peels. They say it has a lot of vitamin "C" in it...

- And this are all the charges against me? Not much, - I said. - If I were in your place, I'd first sober up, before I started to pretend to be a Sherlock Holmes. If that is all, I think that for both of us it's time to go home.

But I was well aware that she will not let me to go home. That was not what she brought me here for with such a triumph. Zinaida was too excited, and it was not only because of her female personal dislike of me; it was just that she got an opportunity to curry favour. Not one polizei collaborant by calling would miss such an opportunity.

The situation was almost the same as in the "Kidnapping Caucasian Style¹⁷³": "Either I'm taking her to the registry office, or she takes me to the prosecutor." Only now it was not funny.

-There can be no question about it. Are you still joking? That's OK, you will stop soon, - and Zinaida made a gesture as if erasing a smile from my lips.

-When a normal, not stoned person hears stupidity, to laugh is a natural reaction,- I retorted and began to grope with my hand behind my back a suitable heavy stone. But as bad luck, there were no separate loose stone out there.

Of course, I did not intend to kill Zinaida. Why would I dirty my hands with her! I just needed to stun her properly, and then... we'll see what to do then. Just to get out of here as soon as possible. And of course, I'll take her with me. Then my comrades will decide what to do.

- Just imagine how your colleagues will laugh when they will hear your legend of tangerine peels - I was provoking Zinaida, - You'll be among them like a walking joke. They already didn't take you seriously. So you're right: let's go and quickly. I also really want to see this.

- It's me, they are not taking seriously? Me? Ha! You just wait, you freaks, till a Black Falcon will arrive - and then all your niggers here will fly into the air! With my help!

Black Falcon? This is getting warmer... Speak, Zeena, speak!

But she angrily stopped. Apparently, I went too far.

I realized that this was the moment that could no longer be avoided. It was sink or swim now: either I or she. In a classic novel of socialist realism in a similar situation, most likely, at this point a thoughtful dialogue would follow, revealing the irreconcilable gap between the two worlds and the two worldviews. But we were not in a classic novel, but on top of a 12-metre cliff over the Caribbean sea. And I was not going to stoop to defiling the great and mighty Russian language, talking in it with a creature who has long voluntarily abandoned her own language. Too much honour for this werewolf in American uniform!

"Well, that's when the trembling's gone in hands..." - flashed through my head. Trembling really disappeared. I have to tell her something else. Something to infuriate her already in earnest. Something that would make her lose her head. Then it will be easier to deal with her.

- Well, let's go then, storyteller of the Love for Three Oranges¹⁷⁵?

Zinaida had not expected me to agree so soon to go with her to the base. Probably she thought that I was going to cry and to persuade her to let me go. She was mentally looking forward to it: as those interrogators in Iraq. And because of surprise for a moment she lost her grip. She was thinking for too long, why I behaved like this.

I closed my eyes for a moment, and in front of my eyes was a scene from the museum in Sinchon. That one that I had visited on the anniversary of September the 11th. I thought I heard the cries of separated children and their mothers, who were burned alive in the American bunkers, and I felt how I was filling up with rage. This rage went up to my throat, and then pushed me into the air like a rocket. Who said that raging is "bad"? With some people you simply cannot feel anything else.

With a short, triumphant cry I brought Zeena down. We rolled over the rocks. She was younger, stronger, and better trained than me. But I was inspired by this rage of mine. It was hatred not towards her personally: to all what she stood for. To traitors and deserters. To the destroyers of their own country and servants of another. To prostitutes who voluntarily lie under "civilized gentlemen" in the hope that they would provide for them. To pimps and profiteers. To all blood-sucking two-legged

creatures, which, according to Hilda, I should love and cherish, just because of the fact that we happened to be speaking the same language.

And I had one more irresistible weapon left against Zeena. More deadly than an atomic bomb. This weapon, as you probably already knew, was taunting.

-You're hysteric, dear child, and depressed in mood,

Have a genuine fresh egg, it will do you good¹⁷⁷! - I croaked into Zeena's ear in Russian, pulling her fingers one by one off my throat. Now I had nothing to lose. Hearing the words of a song from our mutual childhood's favourite cartoon, Zinaida roared like a wounded bull. Fury blinded her for a second, and I took advantage of this, liberated from her my own throat and grabbing her with a burst of new energy. We rolled over the rocks again. We did not waste time on such women's things as pulling each other's hair.

- In general, the agony of those who act in defiance of history, goes along with an inevitable hysteria¹⁷⁸, - I continued. Zinaida growled again and violently banged my head on the rocks. Sparks flashed before my eyes.

- Well, son, did your Poles help you¹⁷⁹?...

But her strength and fitness outweighed mine, and I felt that Zeena was on the winning side. "I warn you, I will not just give myself up like this,¹⁸⁰" - I thought, with a desperate passion. I just knew that I would die, but I will not let her take me to any bases. I will drag her along with me down to the fishes from this cliff. I again grabbed her with force.

...So that's how a person feels in the last moments of his life. I was not afraid. Just terribly sorry that I'll never see my boys and Lisa again. But if I would allow myself to think about it now, I would really end up somewhere in Guantanamo. And I cannot stand hard rock music¹⁸¹. I would certainly not survive torture by it. That meant, I had to endure now. Come what may. I gathered my courage.

- I have a last wish - with a smile said I. - Would you please brush your teeth more often, Rambina! Especially since your hands you already can never wash off...

Suddenly there was a thud, something snapped, and Zinaida went limp and slipped quietly onto the sand.

- Oh shi-i-it... – she drawled in surprise managed to say. Even now she spoke not in Russian... Blood splattered into my face.

Above me stood a tanned man in the American military uniform. In his hand was a weighty paddle. Zinaida lay motionless on the sand. It was so dark before my eyes, that I could not see the man's face.

-Sergeant Alvarez at your service, señora! - The army man introduced himself. - Do you remember me? And, seeing my puzzled face, he added: -My brother was killed in Iraq.

And down the beach Oisín was already running, sticking up to his ankles in the sand.

"How did you get here, Sayid?¹⁸²" - I thought. I still involuntarily recall quotes from Soviet movies. That means, I'm still alive...

Chapter 29. The "Brion" Operation

"This is the essence of true democracy - to bring in the aircraft carriers, to launch a a guided missile strike, and then to make the gathered reporters to applaud."

(About the bombing of Iraq, September 1996)

(General Alexander Lebed¹⁸⁴)

Ik had hoop, maar ik houd het voor gezien,
Want de wereld wordt bestuurd door gevaarlijke regimes,
Nu verzamel ik mijn team, we vormen een front
En bestrijden die corrupte president als James Bond
(Ali B, «Bij Boosjes»)185

I was still sitting on the sand, unable to move. At that moment I felt like I was a thousand years old. Or at least three hundred years-plus, like Elina Makropulos¹⁸⁶. Everything around me seemed like a shot with a "soft lens" of a camera: viscous, streamlined, fuzzy...

... I only remember how Oisin pulled me up from the sand, while Sergeant Alvarez was trying to find Zeena's pulse. His calm seemed surprising. Although on the outside I probably looked just as calm myself. Well, did I really have to scream, in fact?

Until that day my biggest criminal offense in life was eating a couple of chocolates from a box in the supermarket. I was about nine years old, when the first self-service supermarket was open in our part of town, which was immediately popularly named "The Glass Store" - because of its huge plate glass windows like walls, crystal clear, not covered up with any advertising (and a broken window back in those glorious days would have been really almost unheard of!). My family let me go there with my friends on my own since we did not have to cross the road anywhere. Marussia bought in that supermarket bread, oil and other such everyday things, and I just went with her for the company.

One day, we noticed that in the back corner of the store on one of the shelves box of chocolates was slightly ajar. I think they were "Maska¹⁸⁷" chocolates. "Shall we have one each?" - offered the most perky of us, Lyusia. I and Marussia would not even get such thought in our heads. But a bad example is contagious: Lyusia stuffed her mouth like a chipmunk, and I and Marussia looked at each other and also took a chocolate each out of the box. We ate them, without leaving the shelves, and went to the exit. The box was still more than half full, and no one had noticed

our crime. But the first thing I did at home, was to tell everything honestly to my mum, who even grabbed her chest when she heard about our "heroic deeds." And she dropped on me in most severe words that I should never ever do anything like that again. I felt ashamed - so deeply ashamed, that even to this day I remember that case. While in Northern Ireland not only many kids, but even their parents - the alleged believers! - would do something like this without even blinking an eye...

Of course, I had absolutely no experience of being next to the corpses of the murdered people. When a long time ago the only murder in my whole Soviet lifetime had happened in our street, I was too young and did not come out to the street, while the adults were running in pursuit of the murderer: as they were, without any arms! - and called the police and the ambulance. Mass murders in our country started only after my departure, in the 1990s: just like epidemic of syphilis, simultaneously with the victory of "democracy." And with a colorful demonstration of corpses on our national TV, with some almost sensual relish of graphic details of their injuries: here those "new Russians" for some reason do not follow the example of their favourite "civilized" countries where the corpses would be very rarely, if ever shown on the news, even when they talk about the murders, and if they are shown, they are usually covered with a white sheet... And the viewers are warned in advance about "graphic contents", unlike in Yeltsin's Russia!.

It is only now that Alexander Nevzorov says that his program "600 Seconds¹⁸⁸" was a mistake of his youth¹⁸⁹. But, in the words of Arkady Raikin¹⁹⁰, a journalist is "like a pilot: he made a mistake, and I was dead." How many young people have died spiritually in our country, thanks to those daily 600

seconds of continuous horror? How many of them have come to regard this video necrophilia as something normal?

Just about the same time, maybe a little earlier in the fashion instead of traditional Soviet anecdotes came funny "horror verses", the likes of:

" Once in the basement kids were playing Gestapo

Who was tortured to death? The plumber Potapov."

Or

"A little boy once found a machine-gun.

Now the village is empty: there's no one."

Apparently, such verses were designed specifically to ensure that we would quickly and less painfully get accustomed to the "bright capitalist future"...

" An old man once found a grenade.

He brought it to the local office of State.

Pulling the ring out, he threw it there :

The man was so old: he didn't care."

And we laughed like little idiots..." The man was so old – he didn't care..." - they were suggesting to us. He allegedly didn't care that they have trampled with gusto on his ideals and the work of all his life, he didn't care if he would receive his pension in time or not, he didn't care that he now had to live from hand to mouth, or to live or to die at all.... And many believed it.

We have ceased to take into account and to respect the elderly; those ones who in any "uncivilized" society are traditionally revered and respected for their experience and wisdom. If they express their "undemocratic" views on modern existence, in return they hear clowning : "Ah, these old farts! Who cares about their opinion? "As if those clowns themselves are going to be forever young and" cool." "There are 2 things everybody will have to do in his life," - said the unforgettable hero of my childhood Bobby Farrell191. - "Everyone will sooner or later have to go to the WC. and everybody will eventually have to die..." I do not know, if Zeena remembered an old Soviet song in which as if in response to this, there were such words:

"Sooner or later we will have to die,

But it is better, after all, it happens later.192..."

The only time I saw a dead body near to me during the Soviet era, was that of a man who has died a natural death - it was, oddly enough, in the bathhouse. More precisely, not in the bathhouse, but at its door: a man was returning home from a sauna and his heart just gave in... So he was there, in the doorway, and terrified visitors of the bathhouse - both from the women's section, and from men's - were afraid to walk past him to go home and waited for the doctors and the militia to arrive. The fact that he was dead already, was beyond doubt. I do not know why people were so afraid - even though there was no blood, no injuries on the body. (Nevzorov wouldn't even bother to show him on his programme!) Perhaps it was simply because back then we were not used to death. It is now that my "freed" compatriots would walk not just by a corpse, but even step over it, if somebody will offer them an appropriate material compensation for that... They even pass by alive people in need, and they do not care. This I still have cannot get into my head.

And the man just lay face down in the doorway, in a coat and a cap. My mother was the most courageous of all the freshly washed ones.

- Let's go home, huh? - She said to me - It's getting late.. Who knows when they are going to come for him... And you still have your homework to do for tomorrow.

It was really a serious argument. There was actually quite a lot of homework. And even though I was scared, and I tried not even look at him, at some point, I still did - I could not resist it, a bit like Khoma Brut in "Viy"193.... I remember how surprised I was of the thought of where does life go, and what it actually is: is it just only the shining in the eyes and the color of the face, that this man did not have anymore?...

It is only lately they started to teach us enjoying the sight of corpses. And live, on camera operations on bloody flesh (in the "civilized" West, too.) It gradually became the norm: just like the unemployment, the prostitution, and street gatherings of mafia boys sorting each other out. Coupled with a caveman like naturalism on our national television. And hypocritical ah and oh of modern domestic journalists who, in contrast to the Soviet journalists, do not change anything in life by their writings, except for a temporarily raise in the sale figures of their newspaper.

But no matter how all those domestic Nevzorovs have tried in the past to make us to get used to it, I did not have any slightest desire to inspect Zeena's face closely or to try to determine what and where was exactly damaged there. I tried to sort out my feelings about what had just happened, and I could not. I had no feelings at all, there was an emptiness in my soul. such as

had never happened to me before. There was no any sinister mentally painful joy, like those U.S. chastisers have in Iraq or the Israelis in Palestine, when they shoot civilians (in order to experience such "high" feelings, perhaps, I should have been born and raised in a different society, with other attitudes and priorities), neither even just a relief, nor sense of pity for the woman who had made her choices in life, siding with imperialism, whatever her motivation and justification."It is strange," - I thought - "I should feel at least something. Probably, this is the state of shock."

After a few minutes I felt something- no, not a pity, but a sense of frustration on how absurdly, how senselessly she had lived her short life, that former compatriot of mine, and how very different her life might have been, if not for..."Oh, like this one could justify anything!" - I said to myself. But I did not justify her: I was just really sad for her. As if for a booby from the same pioneer branch with me.

... I remember how surprised I was when I realized that Oisín all by himself miraculously got to Westpunt, although at night and without a car until it was virtually impossible to get there. Perhaps that is why in my head at the sight of him floated that phrase about Saïd from the "White Sun of the Desert"194...." That was the first thing I said to him:

- How on Earth did you get here? You do not drive a car. Did you take a taxi or something?

Oisín looked at me like I was a Martian. Probably, because at that moment it did not make absolutely any difference.

- I borrowed a scooter from Rafaelito for the occasion, - he muttered, - What happened here? You look awful. And who is this woman? And who, excuse me, are you? - With these words Oisín turned to Sergeant Alvarez. Sergeant Alvarez and answered for me, because I was still not able to express my thoughts coherently.

- This woman is a U.S. servicewoman, Zenaida Kostyuchenko. And I am the brother of the man she has killed in Iraq. When I got here, she was trying to do the same with your wife. But now she will no longer cause any grief.

Zeena? Killed someone in Iraq? This young woman with a gentle like a peach face? Well, why am I surprised? Things that people do, when they just want to see the world and earn enough for a college fee...

But can it be that Zeena is really dead? Somehow that just went beyond my understanding. And beyond Oisín's understanding, in my opinion, too, for in Hollywood films a villain never dies just like this, from a single blow... My throat that has been so mercilessly squeezed by Zeena's fingers, still hurt. I rubbed it with my hand.

- Yeah, - said Oisín - Okay, you can tell me back at home, what happened. You need to get over it first. But what do we do with...? - He nodded towards Zeena. I was still trying not to look at her. My throat and my head ached dully.

- This, I'll sort it out, - said Sergeant Alvarez.

- But there will be an investigation, and I would not like to see my wife...

- Do not worry. There will be no trace of the fact that your wife was here. It was just an accident. Frankly, after all, it was really so... Though that bitch rightly deserved it, but I had never in my life yet raised my hand at a woman. Actually, I was only going to have a proper talk to her. But saw her doing this... and now... - He paused.

- I wanted to tell her that I know: about my brother. I wanted to look into her eyes when I say this. Previously, I did not have the chance. It is the first time for all this time, that she has taken a leave - Sergeant Alvarez awkwardly waived with his hand. We did not interrupt him.

- Officially, my brother was killed by "friendly fire" - as a result of an unfortunate accident. Nobody would even get down to from whose arms exactly were those bullets - there are more urgent things to do there, in Iraq. But I managed to find a man who saw it all... She shot Jorge in the head, after he had told her he was going to file a report on how she and her boyfriend and two more guys were looting and pillaging. That they were drug addicts. How they mocked the locals - they were helicopter pilots. They would deliver the Marines where it was necessary, and while they were waiting, out of boredom, they'd start this "fun"... I will not tell you before the night of sleep what they were doing. When they were "high," it was best to stay out of their sight. Of the whole four of them. But my brother was too young. An idealist. For both of us, Iraq was a big shock, but for him even more than for me. Yeah, in a "democracy", where if you wear a uniform, you actually have the right to shoot with impunity anyone, even another person in the same uniform if you wish...

- Excuse me, but do you not wear the same uniform yourself? - I could not resist it. Probably, my tongue is my enemy.

Sergeant Alvarez hung his head.

- I will explain everything, and to believe me or not - it's your business. Now it seems that it was a thousand lifetimes ago, when I and Jorge signed up in the U.S. Army to get those damned passports... We are Guatemalans, from a large peasant family. Our dad died, and our mother had seven of us to look after, including one disabled brother. There was no money for his treatment. No work. Our sister fell so low that she started to give birth to babies to order: to Americans for adoption.... I and Jorge were very much against it. Wait with doing silly things, we said to her, we are healthy young guys. We'll earn some money and come back. We went to America to work. It's long to tell the whole story. It ended up with this, - he tugged at his shoulder straps - being the only way for us to stay there. But Miranda did not wait for us... She already gave birth to two children, and both were given away to the rich Yankees. Now the whole village does not speak with her because of that... I guess this woman

signed up just like us,... because of the passport. It's all very absurd, if you think about it. We do the dirty work for somebody else. But we did not understand it all straight away, even though we eventually figured out quite quickly, what we got ourselves into. I was sick to death of these searches and raids, but she probably got the taste for it. She began to enjoy it. To feel the power at least over someone in your life. And I still have nightmares. Those screams and eyes, eyes, and screams...

- And the man who saw her shooting your brother: did he not report it? - Asked Oisin. - And if not, why did he tell about it to you?

- No, he did not report it. He said he was afraid for his life. And he said this to me just before going home. He said that beside me only our regimental padre knows. We're Catholics. We regularly confess. He, too, was Hispanic. He said that his conscience was really hurting. That he would not be able to sleep at nights if he did not tell me.

- Does that mean that now he can sleep peacefully? - Again, I could not withhold it, - and your priest can sleep in peace too? Maybe she, - I nodded at Zeena - also confessed to somebody?

- I do not know, but it's unlikely. An orthodox priest came to us not so often..

- Phew! - that was the only thing I could say, trying to digest all what I heard.

- If all of this is so disgusting for you, then why are you still serving? - More sympathetically asked Oisin.

- And what can I do? To desert? How do I run away from here? I am already glad that at least we got transferred to here. I was close to getting nuts. But I can't run away from memory, can not escape anywhere, no matter how much I would want to. And now this as well...

- Were you not afraid that she could do you too...? If you would start talking to her about your brother?

- For me, after the death of Jorge everything in life has lost meaning. Especially this bought with blood passport. But I was still waiting for her to be on leave. So that she would be unarmed and could not shoot me in the back...

- Guys - intervened Oisin - all of this is good and even great. No, of course, not what is happening in Iraq... But we have to get out of here, and as soon as possible. It's two o'clock in the morning. Dawn begins at about seven. And what if some lovers couple would suddenly decide to take a walk on the beach here in this moonlit night?

- They won't, - said Sergeant Alvarez. - Now's not the weekend. Today is Tuesday. Tourists are far away from this spot at night. And locals, they have to get up in the morning, they are not up to walking. She probably knew that, otherwise she would not bring you here. I wanted to ask you, why did she dislike you so much, but your husband is right: now is not the time. Go. Go quick, and I'll stay here. Do not worry about me. Everything will be in order. I will not tell about you, and you do not give me away. Meet me when everything calms down. OK?

I was about to ask why would we still need to meet after that, but like this we could really talk until the end of time.

I barely remember how we got home. I only remember that I was sitting on a scooter behind Oisin tightly holding him around his waist with both hands: this time it did not scare either him or me. And warm wind whistled in my ears. While my eyes were closing inexorably, though, I'd think,, after all of this it was impossible to fall asleep...

When we entered the house, I only managed to say to Oisin:

- This stupid cow thought I was working for Russian intelligence... She wanted to take me to the base... - And I passed out...

... I do not remember how long I slept after that. The sleep was endless, drawling and very heavy: full of anxiety that came from some subconscious dreams.

One moment I saw a little puffy brown eyed toddler in the hot southern Russian steppes in August, and an inner smooth voice was whispering to me: "If there will be no this boy, nothing bad will happen to your country... There will be no civil wars, no terror, no homeless children, there will be no mass prostitution and no gangsterism, no homeless people... No one would ever get the idea that people can be solved like things - at the end of XX century. People will not have to look for food in the trash bins, they will not be evicted from their apartments for non-payment, rich fathers will not take away children from their mothers - because it was only their "investment" ; there will be no mass abortions, there will be no war in Yugoslavia... America will not dare to attack Iraq. Millions of people around the world will not suffer the way the do now... Come on, Zhenya, come on!..."

And I knew that this voice was right, but I felt so sick that I was waking up in cold sweat. But only for a moment, and then I was falling back to sleep, into the next dream, in which from the back of the sofa the familiar face that I have not seen for a long time, suddenly came out like a genie from a bottle: face of a bearded man with rabbit-like upper teeth, who looked so much like a rabbi from the Pale of Settlement¹⁹⁵. He looked at me as if instead of eyes he had an X-ray

machine and he was cheerfully smiling. But at the time I did not know yet the meaning of such looks... I was trying to fight off this new vision and angrily exclaimed:

- And what are you doing here? I think you are at the wrong address! Come on, turn around, and forward, march, off you go to your Ireland, or, rather, to America, for new investments, mister!

The bearded man opened his mouth, trying to say something to me, but dissolved in the air. In his place appeared another, very familiar face, of a man whose name I could not remember in my dream. He had long, blond hair and a sad smile. He looked at me with approval, but said nothing. Finally, I realized who it was.

- Everybody says about you that you would have supported what they are going now there, in Ireland. All of them hide behind your name, they use it as a fig leaf for themselves. Would you really have supported the surrender, calling it a victory? - I asked him. The young man smiled.

- Mo cara¹⁹⁶, - he said - Who told you that: maybe that friend of mine who has become a British spy? Never in my life would I ask the Yankees for indulgences and blessings for our socialist republic....

And we sang in unison, in 2 voices, without any preliminary arrangements:

«Come all ye young rebels, and list while I sing,

For the love of one's country is a terrible thing.

It banishes fear with the speed of a flame,

And it makes us all part of the patriot game. »¹⁹⁷

But the dawn was still not coming. Instead, it became stifling.

Why there is such a pain... in all my joints, in all the bones, everywhere? Why I feel so dizzy? And it's cold, very cold... Someone puts a warm hand on my forehead.

- It is dengue fever¹⁹⁸, - I hear an unfamiliar voice.

I hear these words, and with some sixth sense I know that they are talking about me. That I am the one who has that fever. But I cannot open my eyes to see who is speaking, and my consciousness is already taking me somewhere far, far away.

... I stand in the queue in front of an old Moscow house. It is October, it's cold, it's spitting rain, and the queue is endless, longer than to the Mausoleum, and it is moving with a speed of a millimeter per hour. Is it a queue for sausage or for imported shoes? No, it is a queue to the Dutch Embassy, where I came for a visa after my Amsterdam hosts have sent me an invitation to come visit them the second time. The first time the documents for us were processed by the Ministry of education, and I've never had to wait in such a queue. I had no idea of its length. I almost felt sick when I saw it.

Drizzling rain gets harder and soon turns into a downpour. Those who were standing at the back of the queue, have now occupied the entrances of the nearest apartment blocks. Apparently, this was happening every day, because local residents terribly cursed at us. I noticed that people in this queue somehow had different faces: they looked as if possessed. Nothing else in this world existed for them, except for this queue. In their eyes an unhealthy shine was burning, and they spoke exclusively about visas, invitation letters and how life is over "there." The queue was divided into those who already have been "there" and those who haven't yet. I was even wondering how did our citizens manage to make friends with the Dutch in such quantities?

Those standing beside me asked me if I had an invitation, and when they found out that I already have been "there", they began to inquire for details. I talked about my - still positive back then - impressions of the previous trip. The people listened with interest. All over their faces awe was written: "Wow! Now, that's what I call civilization! Cannot be compared with our backwardness...!"

Those who came out of the doors of the Embassy with a visa, swelled with pride, like May frogs in the swamp. On their faces one could read quite another thing, arrogance of "being allowed into civilization." Although they did not even get to Sheremetyevo airport yet. Where am I, who are these strange people?

Only after standing for a couple of hours in these long-suffering apartment block entrances, among this crowd with their obsessive sense of their own exclusiveness and yet so pathetic, a crowd that was not interested in anything of what was happening around it, I finally realize that all these people were going not to the Netherlands. It was those dreaming to go to Israel: at the moment still only for a family visit, but with the dreams of a permanent residence there. It's just that Soviet Union had no diplomatic relations with Israel, and that is why the Netherlands have taken on the role of the Israeli embassy, under their own burden of guilt towards the Jews during the war, which I had already mentioned. The funny side of the situation was in the fact that everything I have told these people about my visit to the Netherlands, they took to be a story about Israel!

Only about 40 minutes remained until the end of the working day at the embassy, when I with a cry, "I'm not going to Israel, sorry, I'm actually going to Holland!" cut through the crowd, hoping to get to the militiaman, the equivalent of policeman in USSR, who was guarding the embassy. The crowd reluctantly parted: some were looking at me with hostility (and not so much because I wanted to jump the queue, as because I happened to be not "one of their own"), and others even with envy.

Netherlands was somewhere beyond the orbit of the imagination of this queue. If even Israel "was considered to be an excellent, highly-cultured place¹⁹⁹", then the Netherlands for them was a land of milk and honey. The militiaman looked at my papers and let me in. These were not any wishing to travel to the Netherlands at the Dutch embassy. But I still felt sick in my soul. It was all so disgusting. Do I really look the same from outside, like those in this queue, who have lost their heads and their

sense of human dignity?.. It was really food for thoughts. But I pushed those thoughts aside. It cannot be. I am not like that. And they are really waiting for me in Holland...

Such a deep shame... Indeed, how shameful it is to remember all of this today!... I could tell like Nevzorov, that it was my youth mistakes, but that will not ease my shame. That's no excuse. "Stupidity is not worth doing even out of boredom."200 In the stress of everyday life under capitalism today I rarely remember exactly how I felt back then, and what was my head stuffed with: some sort of porridge made out of the program "Glance201" mixed with "KVN202" with forever young Maslyakov and terribly barev, as we then thought, film "To Kill the Dragon", in which we were laughing most at the way they were making fun of the late Leonid Brezhnev. That was really the case of " What are you laughing at? You are laughing at yourselves!203..".

Dragons have since not disappeared, they have only grown bigger, with new and more numerous heads204. Not only we failed to kill them in ourselves, we have let them loose onto the streets. We are respectfully calling them "elite" and running so subservient to them: "What would you like, Sir?" Just like clerks in pre-revolutionary private small shops did in the so beloved by Govorukhin205 Russia, which, as it seems, he has lost206...

Well, and then from my unconscious began to pop up again all what had been so carefully herded there - like if a doctor, whose face I never saw, put me on something spiritually-vomiting, to clear the abscess in my soul. Before me arose Kieran, severely chastising me for what I dared to tell our Che about Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. We were watching a picture book about dinosaurs (I wonder why, in a capitalist society there is such hard-obsession about dinosaurs? We have not played in them when we were children: I could see them only in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia207, and as a child I was terribly afraid of them in the pictures..).

...So, we were looking at one of such children books, and Che asked me, where were the people back in those times, and I told him that people did not exist yet back then. He was very surprised and asked me, because of his age, where were they then. And I told him briefly about the ape, who took up a stick208 and the gradual change in its mental and physical structure... In the USSR, I remember, we learnt about this not even in biology lessons, but in the history books about the ancient world. For the 5th grade. When I read that book, I myself at the time only just finished the third grade, but I picked up this book in the summer holidays from my second cousin Grisha, who by that time had long finished his 5th grade; and I read it in two days, from start to finish, completely voluntarily, so fascinating seemed that tutorial for me. So, I knew the concept of evolution and of the Marxist theory of socio-economic formations already by the age of 10. And given that today's children grow up faster than we ere... I wasn't explaining to him some basis of genetics, in the end!

But Kieran raged:

- If only they find out in his school about... Ah, then you can expect a visit from social workers! Then we will be under investigation. Just to think of this - to tell to a child that we come from a monkey! What to say to him then, you ask? Could you really not tell that a child comes from mummy's tummy? And it is the dad who puts it in there? Or, for example, that God created humans?

Here we go then... We already have arrived. And can get out. I found it already hard enough to tolerate local views on the issue, even though I never contradicted aloud Liz or Kieran's mother when they struck up sentimental conversations about it. But it seems that silence was not enough. That I was even supposed to lie to my child actively. To tell him things in which I myself do not believe. And this is called "free society"? How about the fact that the process of tolerating in a free society should be mutual?

- But that's not what we are talking about. We are not talking about reproduction. Maybe I should also tell him your favourite Catholic tale about bees and flowers²⁰⁹? Kieran, you know that I am not a believer. I already at least do not make comments on what he is being taught there in his nursery...

- Would you then say that the people lived at the same time with the dinosaurs and were friends with them?

- Well, you really went too far with this one! This is not truth. Maybe people are also friends with sharks and with poisonous snakes?

- And what is the truth? Your monkeys? If I was told when I was a child that I come from a monkey, I would have certainly grew up to become a murderer and a bandit!

- What's this got to do with murder and banditry? Forgive me, Kieran, but I do not see the connection. Why do you hate monkeys so much? What's wrong with them? They are not worse than the dinosaurs, which, according to you, you can be friends with!

- Yes, a murderer or a gangster I would have become! - He thumped his chest with his fist, not answering my question about monkeys. - Because then what do I have to lose?

- What do you mean? I know the theory of evolution since my childhood, but somehow I have never had a desire to rob a bank or to kill someone...Could you just please explain quietly, without emotions?

But he could not. And thus, he went on, continued to infinity... Talking to him was useless, even though in fact, I really would like to understand why, according to this world view, an adult person, should so necessarily have something to be afraid of, just in order to elementary behave decently. For example, I have never been afraid of no God with a stick in his hands waiting for me in the afterlife: it is just that I would simply stop respecting myself in this life, if I did certain things that are contrary to my norms and values, to my notion of human decency. And that to me was much worse than any Gehenna's fire. To cease to respect myself as a human being is the worst thing in the world. That's how I was brought up, without going to any churches, by my Soviet grandmother.

I want to pull my hair in despair in such moments when I realized in what kind of medieval wilderness I was stuck with my boys. Despite all their latest plasma TVs and latest models of laptops, this place was the most typical, common and vulgar Dark Ages. With social workers, probably, instead of the inquisitors.

But there was no place to escape to... Nowhere to go. It was probably pretty close to how the hostages feel.

If during the first time, with Sonny, I could not pinpoint the moment when our relationship has past the point of no return, this time I was looking back at our recent past and was horrified to realize that my relationship with Kieran also already went over that point. And I knew even exactly at what point it happened: after that "friendly" Liz's anonymous call to the social services. It was after it that Kieran started drinking, or rather renewed his drinking habits, constantly trying to quit. His first impulse - "we will leave this country together" - has passed: he could never get away from his Irish breakfast and the TV soap "East Enders." Gradually I and not Liz became guilty in the fact that he was feeling so lousy, was not Liz and I: blood is thicker than water. I was guilty of unnerving him, just because I was trying to talk to him, I was guilty of the fact that children were not asleep by the time he returned from work (at 5:30 pm!) And of another whole heap of things. When Kieran was aching for a drink and struggled with this desire, he became irritated so much, that I seriously feared for the children who were too young to understand his state, so I was tempted to bring him his beer: after this he would drink and

become "fun and playful as a young sea lion²¹⁰." The beer was the only thing that made him kind, generous and happy: like sneezing was for Karabas Barabas²¹¹. Only it was, of course, bad for his health.

When I began to fear his arrivals from work and waited with special horror when he would wake up in the mornings at the weekend, I realized that our relationship was doomed. Déjà vu²¹². Like Sonny, Kieran did not have to beat me to make me feel miserable. It was enough to yell: so loud that from the sound of his voice the lights on our frightened artificial Christmas tree began flashing by themselves. Or to throw something at the door. Or to trample children's toys with his big boots: to hysteria of Che. Fidel in such cases clenched his little fists and threw himself at his father, shouting «Daddy! Bad boy!

Is this a destiny, a cross that for some reason we women have to bear, and do all men behave this way?

He could trample with his beetle-crushers which he took off only at night (what slippers are, was unknown to Kieran: at home he stubbornly refused to change shoes, though he so often used in and out of place and the only familiar to him foreign word - "bacteria", which he seems to have picked up from some yogurt advertisement) at a harmless bottle of classic dental drops of Russian production, still of the Soviet formulation, which cannot be compared in its effectiveness with any lousy bourgeois paracetamol. Oh horrors, I dared to treat a sick child with something foreign, which was not prescribed by a local doctor!

- Just you wait, I'll tell Liz! - He cried, spluttering (by that time he and Liz have made peace, and he was intimidating me by her the way small children would be intimidated by a Baba-Yaga²¹³). And I, almost in hysterics, was willing to lie at his feet and to beg him not to do it: not because I did something wrong, but out of pure fear of what else might Liz come up with.

And then Kieran drank up his beer after locking himself in the bathroom, where he was hiding from us, so that we won't interfere with his life. And to all my questions about what I should do with a baby who cries of pain, if I am not allowed to use my Russian medicines (it was the weekend, no doctor was working in town), he just replied that it was none of his business, that's what a child has a mother for (!), and that we have to wait until Monday. Even a simple mustard plaster²¹⁴ I and Che had to apply in an atmosphere of deep underground secrecy, with Fidel standing at the door on a lookout... Oh, the joys of family life!

At some point I realized that it doesn't matter in what language men scream at you: in your own or in a foreign one (if you remember, I once avoided my fellow countrymen of the opposite sex for this reason: Call me a "soft", but I can not and will not tolerate, when somebody raise their voice at me. And in a foreign language it seemed to me to be less painful). Now I understood that it was not less, it was disgusting in exactly the same way. Kieran began more and more to remind me of El perro del Hortelano²¹⁵: himself, he could not care for children for a long time, but he also didn't let me to find at least some help, even though I literally was collapsing from broken sleep for days in a row. For him it was more important what the neighbours would think of us, than how I felt. He was that kind of a man.

He also reminded me of Pushkin's lines: "That's where Koshchey the Deathless²¹⁶ pines over his gold..." Not because he was greedy: he was, like cat Matroskin²¹⁷, thrifty - and not even because he reminded of Koschey by his physique, but because he wasn't really interested in anything, except in money.

I tried to ignore his flashes of psychosis: in the end, as I already said to myself, I did not love him. But more and more often I caught myself thinking when he was at work, in one of those horrible "scary

verses" words: "A little boy was walking on a construction site, When a big truck crept up from behind..." - with the rest of the text²¹⁸. These were unlikely thoughts for a healthy family life...

Back in the past I was ready to run away from my mum in search of peace of mind: that's how she drove me almost to tears with her emotional outbursts. At that time I was looking for some sort of emotional protection at Kieran: as if in a quiet backwater. But now it turned out that in these still waters there were devils breeding²¹⁹, and I wanted even more strongly to run away from them. Without looking back and even aimlessly. I was making up in my head at night before going to sleep hundreds of exciting options of how I and the boys will run with this godforsaken farm where time stood still forever at 1690220.

And yet I knew that, just like in case with Sonny, I just needed to do the most difficult for me: to wait. To wait until we will be provided with such an opportunity.

...It really was all resolved by itself, I did not even need that truck on a construction site. A long time after that I was feeling guilty though, because I have allowed into my head such thoughts and wishes. As if that brought bad luck to him.

It's easy to convince yourself exactly of what you are told by such "husbands": It's all because of me, that's why he feels so bad, and that's why he behaves like that, etc. But Kieran was just a very contemporary man, in his own way. He had the ability to empathize completely atrophied. And not just to the characters of the film. As the heroine of "Shirley Valentine²²¹" said, "if you have a headache, then he's got a brain tumor..."

Since then in my everyday life, I drove all of this into my subconscious. I remembered only the good things, especially since he really treated me better than Sonny. And so by the requirements of an average modern Russian woman, Kieran was a treasure trove for family life: he could fix everything and to stick anything up.... However, Sonny could that too.

But I don't need such treasures. Let the state to nationalize them.

... Damn it, can I do not dream about something nice? At least during my illness... And I'm trying to call up mentally in my mind the sight of so familiar and so dear to me already streets of Pyongyang. And that unique, amazing and unforgettable day in Mangyongdae.....

Although usually dengue fever lasts about a week, well, a maximum of ten days, I didn't really properly come back to my senses until the end of October. Almost a month later! Oisin said that I had a combination of this fever with a nervous breakdown. And that he did not leave my bedside the whole time.

- Thank you, - I said.

The fact that I woke up at home, not in a prison hospital, was a good sign, but still the first thing I asked Oisin, was:

- What is happening? Did we manage to find out anything about the plans of that provocation?

and:

- What about Zeena? Did they find her? What will happen now?

...Oh yeah, during the time that I spent unconscious, a lot has happened. Zeena's body was naturally found. In the sea, near Playa Forti. Police came to the conclusion that it was an accident: a young

(naturalized) American military woman took a leave for the first time during her service on the island, was very upset by the departure for Amsterdam of a Dutch soldier, with whom she had a warm personal relationship, and under the influence of intoxication (in enclosed materials they referred more bluntly: under the influence of drugs) she fell into the sea from that rock which 2 of them have visited so often. Of course, she was a very good swimmer, but because of her intoxicated state she did not calculate it properly and hit a rock with her head while falling... Her jeep left near Playa Forti, was the same night hijacked by local joy-riders, not suspecting, of course, about the tragedy, as it was late at night and very dark. They rode in a jeep till it ran out of petrol, then set it on fire and thrown it off a cliff into the sea at Boca Tabla222. The local newspapers were full of explosive melodramatic stories of an unrequited love, similar to the ones in the Latin American TV series; Gerben and his fiancée certainly must have felt very uncomfortable, if they would have read any of those articles in the Antillean press. At least, if I were in their shoes, I would have felt almost guilty about what had happened. But of course we never found out what was Gerben's reaction to all of this. And, to be honest, we had more important things on our mind than that. We were already thrilled about the fact that the police believed in this version, and I mentally again thanked Sergeant Alvarez, who so deftly managed to cover his tracks.

- Was it really so easy? - I wondered - I thought that they would turn everything on Curaçao upside down.

- Zhenya, but the thing is that many on that database, including her own bosses, were even happy to get rid of her! - Exclaimed Oisín when I told him this. - So, no one really wanted to investigate too thoroughly investigate what has happened to her.

- Why not? - I was surprised - I, on the contrary, thought that she was a perfect "new American."

- That doesn't matter. It just turned out, that she began to blackmail her bosses (of those who serve here in Curaçao, two of them were with her back in Iraq): with the help of some photos taken there. And perhaps even with some worse stuff, who knows... In any case, after she had disappeared, from base also instantly disappeared all her belongings: supposedly taken to the

police for investigation. But the police did not get it, we found out from sergeant Marchena... So, draw the conclusions for yourself.

- What if there was something on her suspicions about me in her papers?

- If it was so, then they would have the perfect excuse to question you in connection with her disappearance. No, I'm sure she acted hastily and that's why she decided to act on her own... With all the ensuing consequences. We were lucky. Double lucky that she wasn't very popular among their senior ranks. I am inclined to think that some of them even breathed a sigh of relief when she was found at the bottom of the sea...

- Yes, if a woman gets off a cart, it becomes easier for the mare223, as we say in Russia,- said - I sighed. - Poor Zeena! She tried so hard to curry favour...

- She overdid it a bit, I think, - hemmed Oisín - But you were really terribly lucky that this guy on the beach had followed her. I would have never made it on time... I had no idea that you were in such danger. Why, not only you, I think, all of us were so lucky that we came across this guy...

It turned out that during my illness Sergeant Alvarez as became friends with Oisín who believed in the sincerity of his distaste for the American occupation of Iraq so much, that Sgt. Alvarez more or less became unofficially a member of our little group. No, Oisín did not tell, of course, to Sergeant Alvarez, who we were, and did not introduce him to the other members of the Bolivarian circle, but

apparently, that's where it was all heading to. Discussing with each other Washington's policy in Latin America, they both came to the conclusion that their views on these policies were virtually the same. Ironically, this U.S. Army Sergeant Alvarez expressed warm sympathy towards policies of President Chavez. Of course, not just to anyone and everywhere. But he seriously regretted that there wasn't such a president in his native Guatemala. Little by little, Oisín hinted that there were rumours on the island that in Curaçao something was in preparation against Venezuela, and asked Sgt. Alvarez to take notice at the base, if there would be any warning signs of that....

- Good that I was sick all this time! - I blurted out.

- Why on Earth is that ? - Oisín was perplexed.

- Because - you can consider me paranoid, but I would never have been able to trust him. Even despite the fact that he has saved me, or maybe exactly because of this. It was too sudden, too much like in the movies. For you, the Irish, it is typical so easily and rashly to trust Americans if they even utter just a single word, that they support your struggle. And he could just as well be a CIA agent. Remember who has actually destroyed from within one of your dissident organizations? That's right, the same, "sympathetic American." Which turned out to be an FBI agent.

- This McKevitt224 had deserved that... He... - outraged Oisín.

- It's not about McKevitt. Just you fire me, but I'm not going to participate in this. Even with all my personal gratitude to this sergeant, I still can not trust him 100%. And I don't advise it to you either. Does Tyrunesh know about this?

- She does. And she also told me to be careful. But I am being careful. To him, I just sympathize with Chavez, as he does. I'm such a Western European idealist, you know the type? Of the "greens", that's why I love to restore the old furniture. And do we have a better lead than this one? Do we have any other contacts on this basis: on a personal level - that we can allow ourselves to be so picky? And the time, as you know, is running out... I don't have to tell you this. That thing can happen at any time.

I knew it. By and large Oisín was right: beggars can't be choosers. We can not so easily dismiss possible useful contacts. And yet... I would not have been able to do this. I would have been too much gnawed by the worm of doubt. It's good that Oisín as an Irishman looks at American with a bit different eyes than I do. But it is good that I'm here too. I'll keep an eye on the development of their events and in any case I will try not to let him to do anything stupid as the likes of McKevitt did.

-

-Are you sure you didn't tell him that you are linked to the I...?

- Who do you take me for? - Oisín was offended.

But this was not all yet.

Sergeant Alvarez (Louis, as Oisín called him already quite informally) introduced him to one of his colleagues, a helicopter pilot called Sam Johnson, who, in contrast, had not served in Iraq and was terrified at the very thought that he might have to go there. At this time he happened to fall in love with one of the local girls on Curaçao, and more than anything he wanted to start a peaceful life together with her. Sergeant Alvarez, or Louis, managed within a short time to sort him out in such a way - by the stories of the horrors of Iraq and the hints that something might happen soon on Curaçao and through no faults of Chavez - that this Sam Johnson was fully in Luis' pocket. And he promised to notify Luis immediately if anything happens that would seem out of the ordinary.

I grabbed my head.

- You're both crazy. You and this Louis. Unless, of course, he is not somebody's agent. Do not you know the saying "if three persons know something, every pig will know it?" Soon the whole island will talk of this. And then, when they will start finding out who is spreading such rumours...

- Luis did not tell him anything about me. And yet, in my opinion, he's the guy that we need...

- How have you managed to make friends with this Louis so quickly?

Oisín again looked down.

- I took him on a fishing trip...

I rolled up my eyes. Oh, those men! A fisherman can tell another fisherman from afar. 225...

- Yeah, maybe it wasn't enough for you than at one time gave there was some reliable guy who betrayed what you were doing in those English woods?

This time, Oisín looked angry.

- Do not bring this up. Back then I was just a stupid kid. And if you know everything better than anyone else, then, a flag in your hands... There you go! On your marks, and...

I took myself under control. Instead of taking a flag. I just came back to my senses after an illness, and we are already almost having a fight. That's not right. We need to work together, not to put each other spokes in the wheels. What if Oisín is right? God grant that he is right. After all, in our situation we have no right to make mistakes.

- Well, I believe that you know what you're doing. Sorry that I got so excited, - I said soothingly. - But please, do be careful. I would hate to see anything bad happening to you.

And then a miracle happened. Oisín literally blossomed before my eyes like a Dutch spring tulip... Probably, this association came to my mind because his face became just of such tulip's crimson colour.

... Another two weeks passed. One evening Oisín came home with a beaming face, as if he had won the lottery. No, at this moment he did not remind me a bloomed tulip, but he looked very happy. Like a cat in winter near the stove. He was clearly waiting for me to start asking him what was happening, but I deliberately decided not to do it: following human logic, like this he would faster tell me himself what was going on.

- Well? - Finally broke Oisín, after walking for about 5 minutes at the kitchen table with his mysterious gleeful smile.

- Well what?

- Why do you not ask me what happened?

- Did anything happen?

- It did, it did! - And Oisín suddenly lifted me up from the chair and danced around the room an Irish jig.

- Wait, wait! You are about to break my bones! - I started to fight back., - Well, what did happen?

- I told you that our Louis is the right kind of a fellow! A man came to the base who has a nickname the Black Falcon. A top class pilot, called David Ratcliffe. Participant of bombardments of Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, and even Somalia. Mind you, not a helicopter pilot, but a fighter pilot, while F-16 mission on the island is not going to expand. Something is afoot, no doubt.

- And you are so happy about this? - I tried to make a joke awkwardly. - That something is afoot?

- But once we know exactly what they are up to, then we do have a better chance to prevent it! - Said Oisin.

... We installed double surveillance for David Ratcliffe: the outer one, that is outside the base, and the internal, within the base itself, with the help of Louis. The situation was eased by the fact that David shared the tent with his friend Sam Johnson. According to Sam, David behaved arrogantly. And with all his behavior he was giving to understand that he was here only for a short time, as well as that he was not some ordinary pilot. Sam found his arrogance terribly annoying. And when David in the evenings after dinner, began to show off about his military "exploits" that included bombing of villages in different countries as a punitive action, of which he talked with pride, Sam had enough of it. It was he who told Louis that David was nicknamed Black Falcon. He was called "Black" because he specialized in night missions. He told about it himself.

Indeed everything that was described was probably true. But then how could Zeena who wasn't very popular with her superiors know of the existence of this special arrangement, and that this man was going to come to Curaçao? Was this not against the common sense?

We felt that we were finally close to the discovery of those secret plans. But at the same time new puzzles began to emerge too.

After a while the observation - both external and internal - reported that most of the time Black Falcon spent in the company of Colonel Weterholt. Although, logically, he seemed to have no reasons to: why would he hang out permanently in the company of a colonel from another, even though allied army, instead of his own? We pondered over it from all sides, but could not find a clear and understandable link between them two. And November was drawing to its end...

David regularly flew an F-16 as he trained, but he still spent more time on the Dutch *Parera*⁷⁷⁶ base than on his own.. And one sunny and windy morning Tyrunesh said to me in the office:

- You know, Saskia, I think that we have another way to quickly find out from them the information we need. I just do not know how would you feel about this...

- About what?

- The point is that he likes you, Colonel Weterholt, I mean. Remember, you told me about it yourself?

- What do you suppose me to say about it? - I replied. I already knew what she was driving at and, frankly, I shivered even at the thought of it. Tyrunesh felt my condition:

- Saskia, I am not calling you to do anything outside the limits of decency. But could you at least show some temporary interest in him? If this may be our only chance...

- Are you sure it can bring any result other than resuming his morbid interest in me? I was just so happy that he has left me alone, and you're asking me to throw more wood into this campfire...

- Saskia, time is short... It's now or never. This David spends with the Colonel on the Dutch base at least 3-4 hours daily, including Saturdays and Sundays, or goes with him for a drive around the island, as if studying something. Do you think they would do this for fun? If we do nothing, then later, when innocent people will die, we'll bite our elbows that we were so sissy. If it was me he was interested in, I would not doubt for a second...

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The name of the Dutch naval base on the island

- And I have no doubts, - I said, blushing up to my ears. - If it is necessary, then so it is...

At her mention of the people who walk every day about their business on the island around us, not knowing that it has already been decided to sacrifice them, to make them a "collateral damage" of "fighting for freedom and democracy," by prescription from Washington I felt so ashamed of my own selfishness, that my eyes filled with tears.

"Remember the example of Judith⁷⁷⁷," - I said to myself, - "And you don't even have to decapitate the Colonel, just to flirt a little with him." Although deep down I was not sure that this will be sufficient in order to get closer to our goal.

-I will try - I said to Tyrunesh - only, mind you, do not be angry with me, if this will not work out. I completely forgot how to flirt with people just for the sake of practicing my skills. And, frankly, I am glad that I did forget this.

At these words, tears came back in my eyes. Because I remembered Comrade Song Ri Rang....

Tyrunesh and I agreed that I will make the first attempt in our office. She will go out, so as not to get in the way, and if Colonel will take the bait and will begin to overstep the limits of decency, I will drop a heavy paperweight off the table, and Tyrunesh will immediately return. I begged her about this, because I was completely mentally unprepared to even hint at the colonel that he allegedly was to my liking. For me to do it was much more difficult than to reach the top of Christoffelberg.

Tyrunesh sympathized with me.

- We will not tell anything to Alan for now about this. Let us first see whether this *old Dutch* eagle would give us at least some useful information at first try.

- This military man? At first try? The professional, who was certainly warned about spies? - I cried. - I do not think so. For this I will have to eat more than a pood of salt with him⁷⁷⁸. To put it mildly...

- And yet, try, Saskia, please? - begged Tyrunesh. - Unfortunately, this is the best that we can do now. We can't really kidnap him for questioning, can we? Then it would really all go down the drain.

I reluctantly promised her to give it a try.

The Dutch colonel, Gerrit Weterholt, courted me for a long time. Clumsily and awkwardly, as only Dutch men can. Sometimes they are trying to become attractive by attempting to copy the style of Antillean courting of women, not realizing that by doing so they really transform themselves into something perfectly ridiculous. But the colonel was not one of those: he was a Hollander to the bone, *recht voor zijn raap*⁷⁷⁹. He deeply despised Antilleans. And this made him even more unpleasant for me.

With disgust I was expecting Tuesday, when he had to appear in our office. But fate brought us together before this - on Monday, in the World Trade Center (in Curaçao they have their own mini-version of it), at a press conference announcing the release of a new liquor of the famous brand "Blue

⁷⁷⁷ Judith, a daring and beautiful widow from the Bible story, goes with her loyal maid to the camp of the enemy general, [Holofernes](#), with whom she slowly ingratiates herself, promising him information on her own people. Gaining his trust, she is allowed access to his tent one night as he lies in a drunken stupor. She decapitates him, then takes his head back to her fearful countrymen. The enemies, having lost their leader, disperse, and her country is saved

⁷⁷⁸ Russian expression "to get to know somebody really well" - "in order to get to know a man properly, you'll have to eat more than one pood of salt together" (1 pood = 16 kg)

⁷⁷⁹ Straightforward (Dutch)

Curaçao." I do not know, why the Colonel was there - maybe he was a fan of this drink. I had noticed that the colonel was not shy of a drink or two.

The colonel was pleasantly surprised when he realized that my smile was addressed to him. At first he was not so sure of it and even several times turned, looking behind himself, as if searching for someone there for whom my smile was actually meant. But having found no one there, he blushed like a boy, and after ten minutes he was already smiling back at me. I was mentally surprised at the ease with which it happened. He seems to have not even asked himself a question, why was it that I always did my best to avoid him, but now I was suddenly smiling to him

Finally at the end of the press conference, Colonel could hold it no longer and came up to me in the lobby. He shook my hand and said, in English (he spoke to me in a mixture of English and Dutch, although he could perfectly address me just in Dutch, but for many Dutch people it is almost innate: to talk with foreigners in English, as if to emphasize "*you have not deserved to speak our language yet*"):

- Nice to see you, Saskia. I have not seen you for a long time, and in this time, you became only prettier.

- Thank you, Colonel, - I said shyly.

He leaned over to my ear and suddenly whispered:

- I like you.

And then, perhaps, he suddenly thought that I would get it wrong, in the platonic sense, and added:

- I love you.

I wonder if he really did not understand the difference between these two things? Maybe because it was a foreign language to him? Or was this difference for him a purely physical one?

"Yeah, that's what is known as "love" nowadays..." - I thought sadly, and feigned a smile. But my tongue stubbornly refused to say, "I like you too." Surely, he was not completely idiot to believe in this?

Colonel took me by the arm and dragged me off somewhere. There were a lot of people around us, so I did not really resist. It turned out, our road led into the bar. Colonel almost threw me down to sit at the table and disappeared somewhere. 5 minutes later he came back with 2 green in color cocktail with ice cubes: for me and for yourself. And as soon as I took the first sip, he started stroking my knee under the table. Yes, just like that, insolently, as some "new Russian." Is it really enough just to smile to a man for him to imagine that he can do anything with you? Unfortunately, I could not give him a good slap in the face in this particular situation, even though my hands were really itching.

- Saskia, *schaatje*, ⁷⁸⁰ pinch me, please, so that I can be sure this is not a dream! - said the colonel.

Oh, that's with pleasure I with great pleasure pinched him quite painfully. Colonel even jumped on his chair in surprise.

... I almost did not hear what he was saying. Instead, I thought about how to conduct myself with him so that his intentions would not go too far. And how could I in this situation to start a conversation about what really interested me without causing any suspicions. In any case, it was clear that today I could not talk about it yet.

⁷⁸⁰ Literally "little treasure", popular Dutch endearment term

- Unfortunately, I have to go.. Well, Saskia, will I see you again? - Interrupted my thoughts Colonel Weterholt.

I woke up from my thoughts.

- Of course, you'll see me. Come tomorrow to our office, at about ten o'clock.

- I'll come just for ten minutes, no more. Just to kiss you...

Why, surely, just for this!...

And before he knew it, I removed his hand from my knee and rushed to the exit with all my might...

I caught my breath only when I was two blocks away. When I realized that my car was left behind at the WTO. But I did not turn back, and began to look for a taxi.

This proved to be more difficult than I thought. And I do not mean to find a taxi in Curaçao...

In my youth, at a time when I was learning Amharic, I read one Ethiopian novel, of which I do not remember neither the title, nor the author. The only thing I remember from the story, was how its main character, a beautiful Ethiopian woman, was making men crazy about her. She was allowing them too much at the first date, and then she just vanished from their horizon, was avoiding them and pretending that nothing had actually happened between them at all - without any explanation. And men in love were falling for her in stacks. I used this method myself only once: on Sonny. After that, he almost immediately proposed to me...

I would not want a proposal from Colonel Weterholt, even if he was not married. I needed him only to tell me about their military plans while trying to impress me. But would this well-tested Ethiopian method work on a sober Dutchman?

He really did come on Tuesday to our office at the appointed hour. Half an hour before his arrival I drank a small glass of brandy: for bravery. And he really kissed me. As soon as Tyrunesh left. Colonel Weterholt kissed like a real professional. "*He might be not the greatest military in the world, but he is a fantastic kisser!*"⁷⁸¹ If I was a "new Russian", I might even have liked it. But I'm not a "new Russian." And I barely suppressed a wave of nausea... After that, I simply had to drop that notorious paperweight. Tyrunesh was true to her word and came straight away. The colonel was forced to retire...

After that I really started to avoid him, like that Ethiopian woman from the novel. I did not answer his calls, I was hiding in the toilet when he came to our office. And even once went home by taxi after work, having got out of the building through the back window - because the Colonel was waiting for me at the entrance.

- What are you doing? - Tyrunesh hissed, seeing him again under the windows of our office - One day he will just shoot you. Or he will be fed up with this, and will go for his needs elsewhere...

- I have learnt all this from your Ethiopian book! - I laughed.

And the Ethiopian book was right: in a little while Colonel began to resemble a mortally wounded animal...

Once he caught me in the morning near the house: that's how desperate he has become!

⁷⁸¹ From a Soviet joke about Leonid Brezhnev waving after Yasser Arafat's plane left Moscow airport. "Why are you waving to him for so long, Comrade Brezhnev? He isn't the greatest politician in the world." "Maybe he isn't. But he can kiss so well!"

- Good morning! Let me drive you to work today. It's on the way for me anyway.

And then... then he burst into tears right away into the shoulder. A crying Dutchman is a sight not less rare than a weeping Bolshevik, but frankly, not a very pleasant one. I was confused and did not know what to do with this.

- Colonel! Come, come quickly to your car, it is embarrassing, somebody will see you!

The colonel cried awkwardly and mumbled through his tears:

- It's so hard... I'm so lonely... My wife does not understand me... I cheated on her just once in all our 20-plus years of marriage, but that girl chose another over me... just because he was younger... But you... You, Saskia... If I could only hope...

I began to comfort him, just as clumsily as he cried. Patting his balding head.

Half an hour later, when Colonel wiped the remnants of his tears, and we were already approaching Willemstad, I knew who was the girl, he was talking about. It was Zeena. And then I understood how she knew about the Black Falcon. What, then, that meant, I also had a chance to find out some secrets...

After a couple of days we met a tearful Maria Elena: that Haitian who loved her so dearly, was knocked down on the road along with his friend by some dashing car at night. It was a hit and run. His friend died on the spot, and her Haitian died later in a hospital in her arms. Before his death, he kept whispering: "The Dutch! Yellow, blue, red... Paint! The plane!..".

And I felt that I could no longer put off a meeting with Colonel Weterholt after this.

... We met at an Italian restaurant, "La Pergola", in the old city. With characteristic Dutch bluntness the colonel launched his "artillery preparation" after the first bottle of wine (before that he, being a true Dutchman, could not get relaxed enough.) He switched to the Dutch language - a sign of trust- and on "*jou*⁷⁸²"

- Your husband is very jealous, Sas. I can see it with a naked eye. He is jealous even of niggers. He just eats you with his eyes whenever you're around, - he said to me.

- Really? I did not noticed it, Colonel.

Could this really be true?

- Call me Gerrit. Strange type, this husband of yours. There is something not right about him. He's too closed, too stressed. Surely no good in bed?

I almost blurted out that I had no idea, but I bit my tongue just in time and said nothing. Colonel interpreted my silence in his own way

- I thought so. Just like my wife, she is also useless. Only she's not jealous. But what a shame, huh? I'm talking about you. Such a beautiful lassie like you deserves better. I could treat you to something nice sometime, if I am to your liking, of course. I am not going to impose myself.

The only thing that was "to my liking" at that moment, would be to punch him for his words right in the face. Who does he think he is?!

⁷⁸² Informal form of "You" in Dutch (like "tu" in French)

- I understand that I take you a little by surprise with my proposal, but I am saying this sincerely, honest. For years I dreamed of such a sweetheart like you. She'd be good looking and smart. And a little bit exotic. So that she would melt in my mouth. Can I kiss you?

And without even waiting for my answer he juicily kissed me. It was so disgusting that I knocked over a glass of wine on the floor, and as he lifted it, I quickly wiped off my mouth with a napkin.

The colonel was coming to the end of the second bottle.

- Oh what a honey you are, Saskia! I want some more... Look, we are going to do big things together soon. Soon we'll need a good, cool PR person. Because there will be dead, and some of the local blacks - you know, the ones who sympathize with Castro? - might say that this is due to the presence of our American friends here...

- Dead, Gerrit? - Freezing cold pierced my whole being. - What dead are you talking about?

- Actually, I'm not supposed to tell you this, but today is such a cool evening... And you have such beautiful tits.... May I?

He pinched me and lowered his voice to a whisper.

- Listen, Saskia. One of these days a small bomb will fall on Suffisant⁷⁸³ - you know, the place where the barracks are⁷⁸⁴? It will be dropped from a Russian-made MiG. The same MIG will fire a missile at the barracks. Venezuelans will get the blame for it. And then we'll have a good excuse for intervention to that rotten country. Chavez will regret that for so long he taunted our American friends with such pleasure. But in fact, this MIG is at our base: I can even show it to you if you want. If you show me those beautiful tits of yours... and let me to taste them... my sweetie! - He licked his lips. - In two days, a U.S. aircraft carrier will enter Willemstad. Then we will place our Russian airplane at it, and the day after that the Americans will launch it from the open sea. Early in the morning. Cheap and cheerful. In such way that no one will see it.

Suffisant... I almost threw up. It was a poor neighbourhood, there lived my ex-father-in-law, señor Arturo. Right next to the barracks! Houses there are almost on top of each other, and even if just one bomb falls there...

- Wow, Gerrit, what a plan! Honestly, I am just lost for words... This actually does require a good PR. And why are you sure that no one will know that this is not a Venezuelan MIG?

- Because neither we nor the Americans are not supposed to have MIGs at our disposal.. This one we got from the Bulgarian army, from their vaults from the "cold war." They gave it to the Americans, out of joy that they were accepted to join the NATO. Just yesterday, a couple of Haitians painted it for us in the beautiful colors of the Venezuelan flag... But they will not tell about it to anybody. Not even one of our guys here knows this: only the commandant, I and the Americans. A cool plan, isn't it? And I am one of those who can consider himself a proud sponsor of this idea. At your service! - He proudly saluted.

I flinched. I imagined bald head of Pim Fortuyn⁷⁸⁵.

⁷⁸³ District on Curaçao

⁷⁸⁴ Marine barracks for poor, disadvantaged Antillean young men where they voluntarily serve since there is not enough work on the island

⁷⁸⁵ Wilhelmus Simon Petrus Fortuijn, known as Pim Fortuyn (1948 – 2002), was a Dutch right wing populist politician who formed his own party, [Pim Fortuyn List](#) (Lijst Pim Fortuyn or LPF) in 2002. Fortuyn provoked controversy with his stated views

Haitians...

- Yes, indeed, this is great plan... such a spin, like in Hollywood movies. I did not know, Gerrit, that you're such a naughty boy! - I playfully ran with my finger down his chest - but still, why Suffisant? The island also has other barracks...

- Because those barracks are currently hosting only some negroes⁷⁸⁶. And they are useless as personnel. *You know what we think of them?*

Yes, I do know *that one*, Gerrit. And I know it much better than you imagine...

- What about the civilians?

- The more victims there will be, the more they will blame Venezuelans! If a couple of tourists will be bumped off, it will be quite good too. But think: it is all in order to ensure our interests in the region. If there will be victims, it'll be not in vain. We are talking about big things, lassie. The really big ones. About freedom and democracy. Do you understand?

- I'll have to think carefully how to approach this in the PR. You are such a tough guy, Gerrit! I did not expect this from you, I can tell you. There is even something exciting about this. My husband would never get such things in his head, he's such a sissy! - Probably, this stunning, barbaric news really affected me so much, because I suddenly *suffered the bat*: the words came themselves out of my mouth, - Maybe, it's really time for me to teach him a good lesson... But where? We cannot go to a hotel, it's a tiny island, someone will tell your wife or my husband, or even both of them at once. Maybe we could have a little play in your office? When there is no one there...

Gerrit was already so looking forward to the *rendez-vous* that he immediately agreed.

- When, my pumpkin?

- How about the day after tomorrow, at night, Gerrit?

- Excellent! - Colonel leeringly rubbed his hands - Just then most of the Marines go to a Christmas disco in the city... The fewer people around, the better. And with the guards, there will be no problems.

... I left the restaurant, staggering, not from wine, but from the severity of the knowledge that has fallen on my shoulders. My head was spinning. We had two days to prevent a massacre, designed to start a war...

... Oisín's face, when I told him about all this, struck me: it became white from being full with such a rage. And not just because of the plans of Colonel and his mates in respect of Curaçao and Venezuela.

- I'm against it, - he finally said after a long silence - This means that you'll have to let this bastard...? Anything, but that!

I was pleasantly surprised. But we did not have much choice...

... "*Curaçao prohibits the use of its territory for attack on Venezuela*⁷⁸⁷" ... This headline I saw in the newspapers in 2005. But just a year later the largest NATO military exercises in the region were held

about [multiculturalism](#), [immigration](#) and [Islam in the Netherlands](#). "At your service!" (in English) was one of his favourite expressions.

⁷⁸⁶ See reference at the previous page

⁷⁸⁷ <http://www.rense.com/general63/curaco.htm> (March 2005)

on the island... Those ones,, with the onslaught of NATO thugs on the beautiful local beaches... As in the case of a referendum in Ireland, where the authorities make people to vote over again and again, as many times as necessary, until they will vote “the way they should”, unfortunately, it's not up to the locals to decide.

As it goes in a "genuine democracy", "*Vote, no matter whom you'll pick, you will only get a dick*⁷⁸⁸"... Curaçao government can decide whatever it likes, but in reality, it is the likes of Colonel Weterholt who actually decide how to use its territory...

... It was very late when the members of our Bolivarian circle gathered at Carmela's. We had to decide what to do.

- Maybe, to warn the Venezuelan government? - Someone said hesitantly. Tyrunesh soared.

- Of course. But Venezuelans do not have time to prevent it. Especially when we have no documentary evidence. Only the words of Colonel Weterholt.

- Maybe we go to the media?

- Again, with no evidence? No one will publish this: they'll be afraid. Of a court case for defamation. But the mission of Saskia and Alan after this could be definitely considered closed down...

- Then what do we do?

And then Oisin got up from his seats

- I think I know. True, it is risky. Plus, our mission after this, too, is likely to end. I had long been involved in these things, but I haven't done it in ages. But in any case, we will be here not for nothing. I'll tell you what I think, and let's work out together, if it is realistic or not. In my opinion, we will have to enter the base and to destroy this very MIG. That's the only thing we can do, considering that we have only two days. And surely we will have to film it first and then to send that video to the media. But I do not know how much this base is protected, and...

- Probably, very tightly, - I said - I think it will be. Since it was the safest place on Curaçao for signing the treaty with the Netherlands...

- Actually it is, - broke the silence Sergeant Marchena - But the bay around it is patrolled by our coastguard. And I know very well there all the ins and outs there. So I think this is realistic. Although it won't be easy. If you are, of course, know how to dive...

- Colonel told me that the day after tomorrow at night, most of the Marines will go to town for the Christmas disco - I added.

- This is even better... But after that you two really can not stay on Curaçao.

They began to discuss the technical details of the operation that I'm not going to expound here.

- But we will be declared terrorists, - Liubenshka exclaimed.

- Of course, we will be, - quietly confirmed Oisin - So what? Do we really care what we will be called by those who are planning to bomb civilian neighbourhoods, with a view to start a regional war out of this? The main thing is that we ourselves do know the truth. We are not going to kill anyone intentionally. Just to blow up that MIG. Well, of course, there will be a fire, there will be damage. But all this is baby talk compared to what they are about to do.

⁷⁸⁸ One of the popular mocking verses about elections in Russia in the 1990s and later

... It was decided that after bringing Colonel Weterholt to the right condition, I will persuade him to show me the unfortunate MIG. Especially since the colonel himself had proposed this. When he opens the hangar, our boys - Oisin, Rafaelito and Sgt Marchena - who will enter the base from the bay, will tie up the Colonel and... The rest is a matter of technique.

- Do we all have balaclavas? - Asked Oisin. - And the gloves?

And I was surprised by how casually he sounded.

- I have not made any explosive devises for a long time, - muttered Oisin - It is not my specialty. I'll have to bring up in my memory so many things...

- I'll get you a Dutch uniform - said Carmela - One of my distant relatives working in the laundry. Tomorrow I'll take a sample and it'll make you similar ones.

- And how are we going to escape? -I asked. To escape is always the most difficult part. The same, like getting down from a tree is much more difficult than to climb up it.

- You will leave by the sea as we will come,, - said sergeant Marchena - I will take Saskia away as soon as we will tie up the colonel. On my official motorboat. To Klein Curaçao⁷⁸⁹. There she will wait for you. And you guys... you will swim, - And he began to explain to them where they will need to swim to. - And from there to Klein Curaçao... We will have to think about this one.

- It seems I myself can organize this,- Oisin said. - But first I have to talk to someone. So just in case, please prepare a backup plan.

- We will. And tomorrow morning we will contact Comrade Orlando, and he will organize your further passage. From Klein Curaçao we will ferry you to him on Bonaire, and from there he will have to take you out of here. Pack the most necessary things that you want to take with you. Tomorrow morning Liubenshka will come to you as if to clean your place and she will take them out for you. One of us will depart tomorrow with your bags to Bonaire by plane and will give them to Comrade Orlando. And it's likely we will have to burn your house after this. So that there will be as little evidence as possible. Of course, all can not be destroyed for 100%, but that's what we'll have to aspire.

- You do not know if the house of uncle Patrick is insured? - I asked to Oisin. - I would not want him to suffer because of us...

- Lord, what are you thinking about at this time! - Interrupted me Tyrunesh - Surely it is

- And you? - I suddenly realized what Tyrunesh was risking by staying in this disturbed hornet's nest, after she had introduced me to this society - What if you will be in trouble because of us? Or maybe they would figure out that you...?

- Do not worry about me, - Tyrunesh soothingly patted my hand - because I found you through an employment agency, I had no idea what you were up to. I'll survive. Especially because my husband's family is around and they have great connections everywhere. Of course, I will have to lie low for some time, but that's not a big deal. If all we are hoping for, will go as planned, they will not dare anything of this kind again for a long time after this.

I did not know what to answer to this: I was so smitten by her bravery. I have such great comrades, and I'm afraid some bullshit?!

⁷⁸⁹ Klein Curaçao ([English: Little Curaçao](#)) is an 1.7 km² [uninhabited island](#) south-east of [Curaçao](#) in the [Caribbean Sea](#), and is part of the country [Curaçao](#).

- And I'll get you clonidine⁷⁹⁰. For the colonel, - said Maria Elena. - I think that you, Saskia, will find it to be very useful...

- So, everyone understood what his or her task is? - Asked Tyrunesh. And turning to me and Oisin, she said - Tomorrow night, I'll come to you, guys. And then we will discuss it all again in the smallest details.

- I have a suggestion, - said Rafaelito - Let's call our operation, Operation Brion - in memory of the patriot of Curaçao, who had devoted his life to the liberation of Venezuela! Who is for this proposal?

And we all raised our hands simultaneously

- Well, folks, - said Oisin - It's time to say goodbye. With some of you we'll meet again, but with some we will not. Anyway, today was our last time here with all of you together. And I want to tell you - and I think that Saskia would support me on this - that you are most wonderful comrades. And we are proud of the fact that we had a chance to fight and to live side by side with you. I, like every man, had my moments of weakness, when I had doubted, if I did live my life in vain. Today I know that it wasn't in vain. But I will be finally convinced of this only when we will do everything that depended on us to stop this impending war.

- Let's sing a goodbye song for comrades, Alan - I suggested - Our combat one, the Irish one?

And we struck up in a chorus:

Come all ye young rebels, and list while I sing,

For the love of one's country is a terrible thing.

It banishes fear with the speed of a flame,

And it makes us all part of the patriot game⁷⁹¹....

-No, this one is too sad, - said Oisin and started:

«Well I have been a Provo now for fifteen years or more

Of ArmaLites and mortar bombs I thought I knew the score

Now we have a weapon that we've never used before

The Brits are looking worried and they're going to worry more

Tiocfaidh ár lá, sing up the 'RA

SAM missiles in the sky... »⁷⁹²

And our West Indian comrades listened to us, and some of them had suspiciously shining eyes...

... At night I could not sleep. My condition was like before the most unpleasant exam. With a capricious, suffering from cancer teacher, where your mark does depend not as much from yourself, as from how strong will be her cramps during the exam day.

⁷⁹⁰ Clonidine is a sympatholytic medication used to treat medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, some pain conditions, [ADHD](#) and anxiety/panic disorder. Is often known as a "rape drug."

⁷⁹¹ "Patriot Game", Irish rebel ballad

⁷⁹² SAM- Surface-Air Missile, SAM Song - popular Irish republican song, based on the tune of "Riders in the Sky"

I tossed and turned from side to side, but sleep did not come at all. What we had to do seemed so phantasmagoric even in my thoughts, that I was almost physically sick when I realized that this was not a movie, not a book, but a real life - my life!

But I immediately imagined what would happen if we did not do it. And then I felt even worse.

At three in the morning somebody knocked softly at my door. Oisin!

- You're not asleep, Zhenya?

- What sleep, you must be joking,... - I muttered. Then I suddenly realized that he was still outside the room, - Come in, please!

- Shall we go for a drive around the island? - He suggested suddenly. - When else would we have such chance after what we will have to do...

About ten minutes later we left the house, and, without saying a word to each other, went to our favourite beach - Kleine Knip. It was a new moon, but in the sky was full of shining bright stars, and Oisin guessed to bring along a flashlight.

- For you, of course, it will be very difficult... - He finally said. I shrugged

- It's okay. Your girls in Belfast, too at in the past were arranging honey trap⁷⁹³.

- But they were not my girls. I would not let *my girl* to do this.

-??? - I threw a questioning look at Oisin,. - Since when did I become *your girl*?

- Do not mind the words, Zhenya! - He blushed. - I'm responsible for you, and you know it.

- Responsible to whom?

- Even to your children.

- *Girls* have no children.

- In Belfast it happens!

- You call that *girls*?

So we sat there on the beach bickering, but we bickered lazy, not seriously. We both just did not want to be silent, because silence was scary.

I thought for some reason about the grave of that South African Communist, I saw in my time in Moscow at the Novodevichy Cemetery⁷⁹⁴. The Soviet Union still existed back then - though it was under Gorbachev's perestroika, and no one cared for his grave, and it was overgrown with tall grass. I thought of how I, full of indignation, talked about this to my academic teacher at the Africa Institute: perhaps would its staff will take over looking after that grave? I would myself personally go there regularly and weed this grass and bring there some fresh flowers, if I was allowed to (to get to the territory of the Novodevichy Cemetery, you needed a permit: could the institute help me to get such a pass, if they themselves were not really up to caring for that grave?) She said "ah" and "oh", and that it was such a shame and promised me to do something about it, but then the institute began to allocate plots of land for country houses to its staff, and they were really, in a *perestroika* way, not up for that task. And who cared about some foreign communist who died abroad, when there were such battles

⁷⁹³ Trapping somebody using seduction methods

⁷⁹⁴ Novodevichy Cemetery is the most famous cemetery in [Moscow](#)

taking place at the Congress of People's deputies⁷⁹⁵?... I remembered about it, and I became more and more ashamed that I did not visit that grave after this. And if anything happens to us here, there will be nobody to visit our graves too, and we have to be mentally prepared for this....

But I did not tell about this to Oisin: he's already having it harder than any of us.

It was a warm, velvety night. Waves gently lapped at the beach. I looked and looked and looked at Curaçao and could not get enough. Because no matter how it all may end, one thing I knew for sure: after tomorrow I will never see Curaçao again.

- Shall we go home? - Finally asked Oisin - It's almost 5 in the morning.

- Oisin... - I said hesitantly. - Just please don't go away anywhere, huh? I'll tell you a secret. I'm actually afraid. Just please do not tell to anyone!

I will never forget that a little sad smile of his.

- You also, please, do not tell to anybody, Zhenya, will you? I myself am afraid...

... "And the cursed ones began to overcome, and Christian lines have thinned - there are few Christians now, but mainly the trash. When he saw the death of Russian sons, Prince Vladimir Andreevich could not help it and said to Dmitry Volynetsy: "So what is the benefit of our standing here? what success will we have? whom shall we help? Already our princes and nobles, all Russian children are brutally killed by the pagans, like grass slopes! "And said Dmitry: "The trouble, prince, is great, but our time has not yet come: to begin prematurely bring harm to ourselves, for the ears of wheat are suppressed and weeds grow and rampage over the good born ones. So, let's hold on for a little, until the suitable time, when our hour will come to let us give our opponents what they deserve(...)" And Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, raising his hands to heaven, wept bitterly and said, "God, our Father, the Creator of heaven and earth, please help the Christian people! Do not allow, oh God, our enemies to rejoice over us, punish little, and have a great mercy, for thy mercy is infinite!" And the Russian sons in his regiment wept bitterly, seeing their friends killed by the unclean, continually wanted to rush off into the battle, as if those who are invited to the wedding for a sweet wine drink. But Volynets banned them from it, saying, "Wait a little, rowdy Russian sons, your time will come, when you will be comforted, because you will have someone to have fun with"

And then came the eighth hour of the day, when the wind from the south pulled from behind us, and Volynets cried with a loud voice: "Prince Vladimir, our time has come and time has come easy" - and added, "My brothers, friends, be braver: the power of St. Spirit helps us!"

Comrades and friends jumped out of the green oak woods, like tested falcons burst from golden shoes, rushed to the vast well fed herds, on the great strength of Tatars, and banners were all turned hard by voevoda Dmitry Volynets: and they were, like David's young men who have hearts like lions, like savage wolves attacking flocks of sheep and became nasty and whipped the Tatars mercilessly.

Pagan Cumans then saw their death, shouted in their own language, saying, "Alas, we, were again outwitted by Russians, juniors fought with us, and the best all survived!" And turned the pagans, and they showed their back, and ran away..."

⁷⁹⁵ The Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union was the highest body of state authority of the Soviet Union from 1989 to 1991

So goes the story " *The Tale of Mamai Slaughter*" about the actions of *ambush regiment* in the Battle of Kulikovo⁷⁹⁶.

... Once upon a time I went to the Kulikovo field, along with my mother and Victor Petrovich. We had a long, long journey to get there - on his "Moskvich." And the closer we approached this historic place, the more endless were getting around us the semi-steppe spaces. It seemed, in whatever direction we went, our country would never be finished. And that's how was my feeling about my motherland - the Soviet Union.

Rare villages and small towns breathed peace and tranquility. Life in such places was measured, in it there was sufficient space, time and mood for reflecting on life's meaning, for simply enjoying the sunrise or the first leaves on the trees, or the first snow in winter. Because people were not forced to wake up with a painful thought, "What I am going to feed my children with today?" "How can I buy them school uniforms?", "And how are they going to find a job, when they will finish school?"...

I even envied the residents of Yepifan⁷⁹⁷ - a typically small Russian provincial town with a toy-like church (I do not care was placed in there during the Soviet times!), with a number of old wooden houses, similar to the home of my childhood, and the only, it seems, factory for the whole town. Of course, for somebody who had the ambition to see Africa, living in a small town might seem boring, but it would probably be such a brilliant place to return to from the distant expeditions! Then, in the Soviet time, I immediately felt a unshakable inner peace, reliability, and the natural way of life in such a place. Relationship of people with one another, the way they cared about each other. These were the things that are inherently much more important than any opportunities to travel to Africa, the Bahamas or the Cote d'Azur. In such a place the past does not seem to be irrevocable, it was a natural part of the present. It is this natural and charming humanity and simplicity of life that fascinated me so back then, that I came across again many years later in Korea...

...Our January smelled of mandarins and baked potatoes from the oven, February - of prickly snow that the wind was throwing us into the face, March - of thawed ground and the drippings from the rooftops, April - of the ground that was drying up and of the first buds bursting, May-of May blossom of fruit trees, of lilac and cherry, June -of the fresh grass, July - of the sweltering hot earth and the sun - warmed river water, August - of the ripe apples and cold morning dew and fog, September - of the freshly painted floors and walls of schools, of the new textbooks and satchels, and of colored leaves falling from the trees, October - of bonfires, where those leaves were burned, November - of stove smoke and rain, December - the most magical month of the year -of the New Year tree⁷⁹⁸...

Most of all I loved to travel with my mother and with Petrovich by car around our non-chernozemye⁷⁹⁹ outback in late spring. When the evenings were still cold, when everything around was raging with blossom, when the leaves on trees and the grass were still juicy and tender. And in the fields potatoes were just beginning to sprout. In those long, bright days it seemed that the whole life was yet to come -

⁷⁹⁶ The Battle of Kulikovo was fought between Russians and the [Golden Horde](#) in 1380 at the [Kulikovo Field](#) near the [Don River](#) (now [Tula Oblast](#)) and resulted in victory for the Russian forces. This victory was an early signal of the end of the "Mongol yoke" (vassalage), which officially ended with the [great standing on the Ugra River](#) a century later. Its spiritual importance for the unification of the Russian lands was even more important. As historian Karamzin said, the Russians went to the Kulikovo field as citizens of various principalities and returned as a united Russian nation. The battle was the first step in the liberation of the Russian lands from the Golden Horde dependency.

⁷⁹⁷ Yepifan is an [urban locality](#) in [Kimovsky District](#) of [Tula Oblast](#), [Russia](#), located on the left bank of the [Don River](#) 78 kilometers southeast of [Tula](#), in the proximity of the [Kulikovo Field](#)

⁷⁹⁸ In Russia, it is still called "New Year fir tree" and not "Christmas tree"

⁷⁹⁹ non-black soil area

as the coming summer. I looked out of the window of "Moskvich" at all this quiet, boundless expanse and distance, and in my soul sounded:

"You, my Russia,

Are the golden land,

You, Russia, dear, cherished,

For your latitude,

For your beauty

I love you, my bright Motherland! ⁸⁰⁰

But it was *the Soviet Russia* - not Russia of oligarchs and of of Alla Pugacheva and Maxim Galkin⁸⁰¹. Rather, Pugacheva was there too, but she was not as vulgar. *Censorship* was curbing this vulgarity of hers.

My first disappointment in her was the film "*The Woman Who Sings*"⁸⁰²: in the reviews they wrote that it was the film "about the singer's work," but all that was shown to us, were some women's "disputes" in her private life. I remember how I was deeply offended by this movie. For whom does she take us, her fans, to slip to us such *nonsense in vegetable oil*? I was terribly sorry that such a powerful musical talent was not supported, as it turned out, by just as powerful intellect. But all should be fine in the same person⁸⁰³! After that I stopped listening to Pugacheva's songs, and in my young categorical maximalism I for a long time even defiantly walked out of the house every time she started to sing on TV. So I spent a lot of time in the fresh air, thanks to Alla!..

...Kulikovo field was almost untouched by time. That was, at least, the impression that it produced. True, I've been searching for that oak grove, where once my favourite ambush regiment was hiding in 1380, but I did not find it.

In such places, pride in our history wakes up in me. And, frankly, I could not understand the reaction of my Mongolian co-student Munhzul who was offended by me when I, without thinking, gave her a postcard with a view of this most heroic of our fields: in this case, were we the invaders who were finally beaten by their the opponents to the ground? On what it the opposite? But Munhzul was still offended and used this my postcard as a coaster for a kettle...

... I often imagined that oak grove, which was hiding the ambush regiment, to be similar to the woods near our urban cinema "Iskra"⁸⁰⁴. And I imagined how I myself was standing there, in the ambush, how I saw my fellow countrymen being overpowered by the enemy, biting my lips, so as not to interfere into the battle ahead of time... I so vividly imagined it to myself, that I often went with my whole head into such dreams. Even in the classroom. I would love to be in the shoes of those warriors. And now I think I finally found myself in such an *ambush regiment*...

Almost all of the next day, I slept, gaining the strength after a sleepless night, and before all what was ahead of us.. Once I packed up in the morning my most necessary things into a suitcase and gave it

⁸⁰⁰ My Russia, Golden Land - patriotic Soviet song, music of S. Tulikov, words of S. Ostrovoy

⁸⁰¹ Maxim Galkin (b.1976) - Russian comedian, Alla Pugacheva's latest husband (see below)

⁸⁰² *The Woman Who Sings* (1978) -autobiographical musical film of Alla Pugacheva, the most famous Soviet pop singer (b. 1949)

⁸⁰³ From Anton Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya" play - "In a man everything must be beautiful -- face, clothes, soul, and thoughts" - that is seen as a Communist ideal

⁸⁰⁴ Sparkle (Russian)

Liubenshka. When she took with her photographs of my children and of Ri Rang, it felt as if I got a piece of my heart cut off. After all, no matter what will happen, now I can not even look in a difficult time again at these dear to me faces... I felt completely devastated. And my sleep was troubled, jerky. I woke up and then forced myself back to sleep.

But Oisin almost had no sleep at all: in the morning he had gone somewhere, and he was not there all day. He returned only in the evening: happy, but not very talkative. He said only that everything was settled with the transport...

- It will be better to set the house on fire early, - he told me - Before we blow up that MIG. Then all the fire trucks will leave here for its extinguishing, and there will be nobody left for the base.

Our house was at some distance from all others, so there was no danger that the fire would spread to neighbouring houses.

And then, when it was dark, came Tyrunesh. We stayed together the whole evening drinking strong Ethiopian coffee with a pinch of salt instead of sugar. Oisin, however, has not finished his cup: it was too exotic for his Irish stomach...

That night I did not sleep. And the day before the operation, there was no time for a sleep. I could not eat either: no piece of food would get through my throat.

First, I mentally scrolled in my head all the things that we had to do, step by step, exactly the same as before an exam you read and re-read, in a state of exaltation and panic, for last time the tutorial in the hallway. At such times, it is important to wait for the state when the panic will retreat, and instead of it you will be gripped by the state of indifference; no, not indifference, but that feeling when you just want to quickly enter the room, to get your exam questions quickly and to pass the exam as soon as you can, so that this stone can fall from your shoulders. I hoped that the required condition would come to me in the right time of the evening. As long as I would not go over it and would not start to panic again...

Some other time I'd probably could not stand it and would have drank a little bit of brandy for bravery. But not today. Today this would be fatal. Alcohol relaxes, and here one should have a clear head at every step - both of the enemy, and of my own.

When evening came, and I headed out a little after sitting for a short while, as is required by our tradition⁸⁰⁵, Oisin stopped me already at the door.

- Zhenya, wait - he said, hardly finding the words, it seemed. - Listen... I... I will as be there as soon as I can! Do not worry, I'm... I'll kill him if he touches you even just with finger!

"Still, it's nice to see that people whom you like, care for you," - I thought. Aloud, I said:

- I'm not afraid. To be afraid of the wolves means not to go to the "free" world⁸⁰⁶...

I still could not get any food down my throat when I met the colonel, and he offered me at first to have a dinner together somewhere in the restaurant.

⁸⁰⁵ "Sitting for the road": before departure, Russians traditionally sit down for a few seconds, for good luck of their mission or trip.

⁸⁰⁶ Variation of the Russian proverb "If you're afraid of wolves, don't go to the woods." meaning "If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen."

- I do not want to lose precious time - I lied, with a strained smile. - Your Marines are probably already at the disco? Maybe it's better to take something with us, a takeaway dinner? Wine, I already have. Ours, South African, my favourite one. *Chenin Blanc*⁸⁰⁷

"It's great that I have not met any South Africans here" - flashed through my mind: "It would, perhaps, be much worse than meeting Zeena!"

The colonel was willing to do anything. He devoured me with his eyes, and it seemed that everything I said to him, flew into one of his ears and flew out the other one⁸⁰⁸. I guess at this point I could tell him any nonsense like "Have you heard about *the murder a bald man on the roof of hairdressers?*" - and he would not even realize the sense of what has been said. But even the thought about it did not make me laugh. Although usually I find something that would make me smile even in the darkest moments, and it's a great help to me.

Finally the colonel understood what I was saying, and he turned the car to the nearest pizzeria: to order two pizzas for a romantic dinner. Well, everyone has his own idea of a romance...

- I do not want to come out, I'll sit in the car, - I said, trying to overcome panic that rose against my will in my heart like the ninth wave.

Colonel Weterholt shrugged

- As you wish, Saskia. I'll be back quickly - and he slammed the door.

It was a very warm evening, and he left his uniform jacket in the car. It was several minutes before I realized what a great opportunity it was for me to dig into his pockets. I peered out the window. The Colonel was where I could see - through window inside the pizzeria, and he stood with his back to me. The street was empty.

I gently put my hand into his jacket pocket. Empty. Into the other one. It was also empty. Into a small inner pocket then. There lay a small notebook. I gently pulled it out. The street lights were too dim to get acquainted with its content, but I could see written in small, accurate handwriting words: the name of the American aircraft carrier, which was due to take out the MIG from the Dutch base, and the time that was scheduled for the bombardment. The colonel was careless like a teenage student: apparently, he was so excited about the idea of his own ingenuity and sophistication in conceiving it, that he openly scribbled in his notebook the words "Suffisant» and «*Kaboem*⁸⁰⁹!» It was the Dutch interjection denoting the sound of the explosion...

I hastily closed the book, seeing that Colonel was paying for the pizza. This is the evidence, and what a one! And who knows what else is written in this little book, if we would read it till the end? But if I do not put it back into his pocket, he would notice its absence...

The colonel took the package with the takeaway dinner and went to the door. I quickly shoved the notebook back into his pocket, from which it was pulled.

My heart was beating so fast that I thought it could be heard from across the street. Colonel took my uptight look differently.

- Are you afraid, Saskia? - He asked with a knowing look, almost paternally.

- Yes, I actually am, - I nodded - I have never been unfaithful to my husband yet.

⁸⁰⁷ Chenin Blanc - South African white wine made of grapes of the same name

⁸⁰⁸ in at one ear and out at the other (Russian expression meaning not paying attention, not taking something seriously)

⁸⁰⁹ Kaboem (Dutch) - kaboom, [onomatopoeia](#) representing the sound of an [explosion](#)

By the way, it was true.

The Colonel nodded

- I understand. It will be OK. You will get over it. We'll have a dinner with candlelight, drink a little, and you will have some fun. And as for me, I promise you that you will not regret about this...

- I hope so, - I said.

- You're afraid that somebody will see us together in my workplace at this time?

- Of course, I'm afraid! - I exclaimed passionately and sincerely, - Any normal person would immediately say: what it is they are doing here at this hour?

- Here you have nothing to worry about, because I've already thought of everything - and the colonel triumphantly handed me a bundle.

- What is it?

In that bundle there was... a dark-haired wig.

- if you wear, you will look almost like my daughter. Even though she is much younger than you, but you're the same height and build. And I brought along her *indentiteitskaart*⁸¹⁰. I will tell to the watchman that you came to us in Curaçao for Christmas (Nienke really has arrived) and that you really want to see where your father is working... Wouter is on duty today, and he is a good guy. I will ask him to make an exception for me, I will say that during the day my daughter has no time for it, and that e will come out quickly... And I'll ask him not to enter these details into any computer system...

- And do you think, Gerrit, that he will listen to you, and that he will not report immediately all of this to your boss?

- He will not. We serve together for some years. Also, I can make some big trouble if I'll also report where it's appropriate about how much he is spoiled by *the bonus* which we confiscate from those Latinos at sea... And he knows it. He is not stupid. So everything will be fine, do not worry. No one will know that you were here with me. I am a gentleman.

- Thanks, Gerrit! I am sincerely touched!

Gerrit had no idea how much it helped my task - of course, if this Wouter really listened to him... And how he had cheered me up! The panic was gone, replaced by the state of cheerful excitement coming over me.

Meanwhile we approached the base. I hurriedly pulled on a wig.

- Sit here,- said the colonel. - I'll be right back.

He thrust Nienke's ID into my hand.

Colonel was away for about ten minutes, but by now I for some reason had absolutely no fear. And, as it turned out, for a good reason.

-It's OK! - Cheerfully said Colonel when he came back.

Indeed, Wouter did not even look at me when I handed him over Nienke's document. Although I already looked down to the floor and pulled the wig on my head as low as possible.

⁸¹⁰ ID (Dutch)

I was surprised by the ease with which I found myself at the base under a false ID. Of course, the Christmas holidays already started, of course, it was not a Northern Irish prison in which they send dogs at you to sniff you, of course, Curaçao was a dependent Dutch territory, no matter how autonomous it may be considered, and the Dutch felt here as masters and safe, but I did not expect such as negligence. This was probably summed up by their national character trait, - too much of a self-confidence that sometimes goes beyond all the limits.

In any case, Colonel Weterholt already was opening the door to his office...

In Hollywood movies, or in tabloid reports of some Russian newspaper reports in such cases, a bad guy either falls asleep at the right time like a baby, or he gets a punch in the stomach from a fearless journalist, or gets distracted by her friend who has taken the fire on herself. But in real life it would be silly to expect such favours from nature. This is something that you need to take care of yourself. I could only hope that the bottle of wine which I had taken with me, contained the correct dose of clonidine.

To describe all the details, too, hardly makes sense: firstly, because I am not a journalist from some tabloid described above, and secondly, because for the history it is not important. For the history only the results do count.

Half an hour later it was really fun. Not for me, but for the colonel. I looked at the way he behaved, listened what he was saying, and recognized all the symptoms that I also once had, when visiting Shura in Maastricht⁸¹¹. When I could see everything around me and seemingly understand everything that was going on around, but I had a feeling that I could not move my hand or foot, in order to stop this: just like a rabbit before a snake. And unlike a rabbit, I wasn't even scared.

I glanced at the clock. The moment was approaching. Now the important thing was that the colonel would not pass out until the right moment.

- Saskia, I am going to... - and colonel launched verbal violent fantasies, which, as said Donna Rosa, "*a decent woman would not stand even for five minutes*"⁸¹².

- Ach Gerrit, toe nou! Doe niet zo ordinair, joh! Ik wil ook een beetje romantiek, he? Dat is nou juist wat ik mis in mijn leven met Alan⁸¹³...

He hit his chest, with the expression on his face, as if he suddenly began to feel himself a noble Zorro.

- OK. I get it. Just say what you want. And my manly task is to perform! - And he pressed his lips to my neck.

- I want something... a bit spicy, - I said, lightly tickling him, - How about a change of environment? Remember, you promised to show me that Russian aircraft? What if we could do it right there... as it were, under its wings?.. Is it far? Or, perhaps, you would get into trouble because of this? Can somebody see us there?

Colonel was swaying on his feet.

- No one will see us, - he assured me. - It is around the corner. I have the keys.

*"The hangar is closed, all went to the disco"*⁸¹⁴ - flashed through my head.

⁸¹¹ Refers to an incident in part 2, chapter 10 of "Soviética)

⁸¹²

⁸¹³

Outside it was already cool and pleasant. It was very dark: the half-moon was fine, just like a cut off by a real Dutchman slice of cheese. And the lighting was poor. Somewhere far away in the darkness I heard gentle lapping of the sea. From there, in the darkness, my comrades had to appear. What if they do not show up? Or they will when it will be too late?.. I hastened to drive away such thoughts.

Hangar, which was concealing the weapon of provocation, was indeed just around the corner from the office of colonel. From the outside it was small, almost invisible, far more modest than other buildings here and it even seemed to be deserted. At the door, Colonel Weterholt again carefully looked around: apparently, he was no less than me afraid that someone could notice us, although for very different reasons than I was.

The door opened quietly, and a soft light automatically lighted up inside the hangar. Here it is, the freshly painted MIG!..

- *Doe alsjeblieft geen lichten aan, Gerrit. Ik wil op de vleugel klimmen en daar een klein stripteasje voor je uitvoeren... Nee, klim jij maar eerst... en ik zal je iets laten zien*⁸¹⁵...

Stupid *kaaskop*⁸¹⁶ became so over-excited that he really got up on the wing, on the go unzipping his trousers.

- *Zo.. en nu kijk eens, Saskia, wat ik jou te bieden heb...*

- *Zo... en nu kijk jij eens, Gerrit, wat voor verrassing ik voor jou in petto heb!*⁸¹⁷

Because two men in balaclavas stepped out from behind my back and slammed the door. The third one was standing behind the colonel and was filming everything with a video camera.

- *Asjemenou*⁸¹⁸... - that was all what Colonel Weterholt said. It can't even really be translated properly. It was an expression of extreme surprise.

- *Vuile vispeuk*⁸¹⁹! - I blurted out. Have you not noticed? For some reason to swear in any foreign language is emotionally much easier than in your own, as if you do not feel the "weight" of words...

- Now leave it to us, Saskia. Get out of here as soon as possible, - said one of the men in balaclava, tying up the colonel. - Wait for us in the agreed place. You did your bit, thank you. Now it's our turn to sort this out. What will happen next, is not a women's task.

Another men in balaclava led me out of the door and into darkness, to the sound of lapping waves.

- *Zhenya*,... - He said, and paused. It was Oisin. - Wait for me until 3 am. If I'm not there, let the sergeant take you to Bonaire. In case I will not see you again... If I ever hurt you, I'm sorry. I had a reason for it, not related to you...

- Do not talk about it, Oisin. Please....

⁸¹⁴ Reference to a very common war-time writing on the doors of Soviet party committees: "District committee is closed, all went to the front"

⁸¹⁵ Please, do not turn on the lights, Gerrit. I will climb up on the wing and perform there a small striptease for you... No, you climb first... and I will show you something (Dutch)

⁸¹⁶ Cheese head (Dutch) - mocking name for Dutch people

⁸¹⁷ So.. and now look, Saskia, what I have to offer you...

- So... and now you look, Gerrit, at the surprise that I have in store for you (Dutch)

⁸¹⁸ Expression of extreme surprise in Dutch

⁸¹⁹ Dirty bastard (Dutch)

- Zhenya, I...

- Just you please get out of here safely, Oisin!.. I do not want to escape alone, without you... - I did not finish and raised my arms: I suddenly wanted to put them on his shoulders, but I did not dare. I remembered too well his reaction the last time and was afraid that this time he might misunderstand me. Oisin suddenly hugged me in a jerk and just as quickly moved away as if burned by fire

- You mean it?

- Of course!

- I hope you're not kidding, Zhenya!

What is he talking about?

- Of course, I'm just kidding! - I was angry. - That's all I do from dawn to dusk. Zhenya has become a traveling circus for all of you long time ago! Leader can confirm it to you.

Oisin wanted to say something, but then out of the darkness came sergeant Marchena.

- Guys, it's time!

- Do not forget to search the Colonel and to take a notebook from his inner pocket! - that was all I could say.

I jumped into the motorboat and again looked at Oisin. But he already disappeared into the hangar.

Only when I and Sergeant Marchena were already out in open sea - officially he was patrolling the shore that night - I started to shiver. At this time I did not care if we would get safely to Klein Curaçao and even less so, what will happen then. All I wanted now with all my heart, was good luck for Oisin and Rafaelito on which depended the lives of so many people. And so that both of them after this will be not only unharmed, but also safe and free.

It was a couple of hours by boat until Klein Curaçao. After a lapse of more than an hour, the sky in the distance suddenly lit up with a bright flash.

- *Manse!*⁸²⁰ - I cried when I heard the distant rumble of thunder. *We are the Ambush Regiment of the XXI century!*

*"The blast of the crater of revolution is upcoming. This is the inexorable law of history."*⁸²¹

⁸²⁰ Hooray! (Korean)

⁸²¹ Quote from one of the DPRK's books

Chapter 30: The Flower of Revolution Never Fades

“This elimination of the terrible fear of poverty and insecurity, which bears down upon the masses everywhere, is a great achievement. It is said that this relief has almost put an end to mental diseases in the Soviet Union.” (Jawaharlal Nehru⁸²²)

“Say, the road will be hard.

We know, but we won’t kneel

Till the good beats the evil’s card,

Till tales on earth turned real

(“New Year’s Eve Adventures of Masha and Vitya⁸²³”)

Grasping my knees with my hands, I was sitting on an empty beach of Klein Curaçao⁸²⁴, watching small waves tenderly licking the sand around my feet. It was pitch dark: Klein Curaçao, naturally, does not have any electricity, only stars, myriads of stars of the Milky Way, were piercing the warmth of the Caribbean darkness...

Klein Curaçao is an uninhabited island, situated southeast of big Curaçao. It has only the old lighthouse and a few huts, where local fishermen stay overnight if night unexpectedly caught them underway while they were fishing. And a small canopy for tourists who come here during the daytime by boats, either for a couple of hours or for the whole day: to dive, sunbathe or lie in the shadow of palm trees... Except for a few palms, nothing grows on this little island either. The whole island, which is clearly visible like the palm of your hand, can be walked around in 15-20 minutes. On the windward side of Klein Curaçao there is a real ships’ cemetery, including even one carcass of a small tanker, *Maria Bianca*, which is lying there slowly rusting, with one side dipped into the sea. Not far from the coast there are 4 or 5 smaller rusting ships, with their bodies half way in the shallow water. On the other side of the island, there are debris of wood, delivered here by tides, hundreds of rubber shoes - “vietnamkas⁸²⁵”, as we call them, - and thousands of the plastic bottles. The atmosphere is thus quite romantic...

From here, from the beach of Klein Curaçao, the glow in the sky was no longer visible, but I deliberately went to the beach to escape as far as possible from sergeant Marchena’s motorboat, so that I wouldn’t have to listen through his loud portable radio what kind of panic has gripped Curaçao. It was already hard enough for me to control my nerves without it. My feelings at that moment could be compared with after-pains: only not physical, but emotional. And I have learnt since living in the *Kingdom of Bigotia of Ulster* how to preserve my nervous system. Otherwise you just wouldn’t be able to survive there...

I and sergeant Marchena were waiting for Oisin. Rafaelito from the very start categorically refused to leave Curaçao, dismissing all the warnings and worries of some of our comrades, who asked him at

⁸²² Jawaharlal Nehru (1889 – 1964), often referred to as [Panditji](#), was an Indian politician and statesman, a leader in the [Indian Independence Movement](#), and the [first Prime Minister](#) of independent India. This quote is taken from <http://www.voiceofdharma.com/books/gagon/ch04.htm>

⁸²³ Popular Soviet children’s musical film from the early 1970s

⁸²⁴ Klein Curaçao ([English](#): Little Curaçao) is an 1.7 km2 [uninhabited island](#) south-east of [Curaçao](#) in the [Caribbean Sea](#), and is part of the country of [Curaçao](#)

⁸²⁵ “Little Vietnamese” - Russian name for rubber flip flops / beach shoes

least to think about the dangers that he would face if our enemies figure out his participation in our *Operation Brion*.

- I am not going anywhere - he put an end to the discussion - and *basta!* Don't you worry: no matter what happens, I won't betray anyone.

"What a strong man!" I thought, "What a great comrades I have!.."

...All my life I wanted so much to be a part of a group of people genuinely bound together by the same ideals and finally my dream came true! And I do not feel either a "homeless cosmopolitan", or an "international vagabond." On the contrary, I finally feel to the full that all worthy people should help each other in the sacred fight for the good cause, no matter what nationality they are and no matter what language their mother tongue is! And that we are not alone in this world too. Our time will yet come. *Tiocfaidh Ar La*⁸²⁶.

Tears were rising in my throat when I thought that I might never see them again, - all those comrades who became so dear, so close to me during this time. And I was trying to convince myself not to think about it too much, - just to believe that everything will end happily and that we will meet at some point in the future.

But of course, for a good ending, the return of Oisín was absolutely crucial. And he still didn't come and wasn't coming...Against my own will I remembered how we were introduced to each other ages ago, on a cold March day in Letterkenny⁸²⁷, how suddenly my heart began to pound wildly when I saw him for the first time, and everything we've been through during the following 2 years, when we were on our mission in Ireland together.. And of course, I remember how stupidly I confessed to him my feelings back then, which apparently only frightened him... It seemed that millions of thoughts were running through my mind at the same time. I could even already imagine Oisín in that infamous orange suit somewhere in Guantanamo Bay. By God, no! How I am to live, if anything would happen to him?...

No, no, I just have to think about something else...

...A new life is starting for me, a new beginning. I don't know yet what to expect from it, I don't know yet what it is going to be like, but it will most certainly be a new life, completely unlike my previous one. I feel as if a long polar night is coming to an end and before my very eyes the sun is slowly and majestically rising on the horizon...

I already experienced something similar once before... When I was leaving the Netherlands for good: with my mum and a very sick little Lisa, who still barely understood anything, but was already joyful and laughing. After her discharge from the hospital, when we returned to the refuge, it took us another month before we finally could go home. That month was harsh, so harsh that even now, many years later it is painful to think of that time..Before we came back from the hospital, the refuge's staff was for a long time preparing the other children for what Lisa would be like after her stay in the hospital. Many of them who have played with her before still remembered her healthy... They were told that Lisa "just became like baby again" for a while. But they were assured that she would start "to grow up" again soon. (Oh, I would love to believe in that myself!)

⁸²⁶ Our Day Will Come! (Irish) - slogan of Irish Republicans

⁸²⁷ Letterkenny - main town of Donegal county in Ireland

The first thing that really struck me when we came back was the spotless cleanness, especially in the kitchen: somebody, probably, still got a good hiding for that salmonella's outbreak. Even though, I have no proof of how and where Lisa got that bacteria.

It was also very difficult for me to think of what Sonny must have been feeling all this time: I desperately tried to convince myself how I should think about it: I tried to assure myself that it was not me who started to create this mess. This didn't bring any relief, of course, but I personally really never have wanted that kind of divorce from him...

In the refuge building there was no elevator. And since Lisa still could not walk, I had to carry her every day all the way up and down the narrow spiral stairs, to and from our tiny room in the attic. Every day I had to bring her by ordinary bus to the revalidation centre in Katwijk⁸²⁸. Yes, to that very Katwijk where only 2 months ago Lisa, full of life, intelligent and beautiful, was playing in the sea water, so happy that her daddy finally kindly allowed her mummy to be with her again... And now, she was sitting by the bus window, uttering some animal-like sounds and attempting to lick the window frame with her tongue...

But even so, life already didn't feel hopeless to me, as it felt a month ago in the hospital. I was trying to compare Lisa not with the way she was before her illness (that would be the quickest way to lose my mind), but with her condition back in the hospital, in the climatic days of her illness. And I saw how she was slowly, against all odds, recovering, and I was also growing in confidence that no court would separate us now! Therefore, even when the director of the refuge, unlike the hospital's staff, did not allow my mum to stay with me and Lisa overnight in our room, despite our desperate situation (the director of a refuge for abused wives apparently seriously believed that if she were to allow this, "everybody would want to stay here!"), it caused nothing but a smile on my part. Perhaps Dutch people genuinely believe that the whole world has a burning desire to stay in their refuges for beaten wives. That is what they are Dutch, they have their own special view of the world, and of their place in it. God help them... As long as they just leave us in peace, that's all I wanted from them. But that was exactly what they were refusing to do: to leave us in peace! "It is against our rules", they said... And when mum went to Petra's place for the night (it took at least an hour for her to get there), some social worker came into my room instead of her, forcefully interrogating me "how I felt and what I was thinking about." I felt nothing, I was just numb, and all my thoughts were circling around one simple desire: to get enough sleep before 5 AM the next morning when it would be still dark, but Lisa would sharply jump up again like a Roly-Poly doll and start rocking in bed again and mooing. Yet another day would start to roll on... In the evenings, before she would fall asleep, I had to hold her down on the pillow for no less than a half hour, until convulsions would stop torturing her body and she could fall asleep, as a healthy human being should.... What kind of "soul-to-soul" conversations can be there then, especially with a stranger, who is only talking to you so that she could fill in her report with all the required check marks!...

That was exactly when my mum, leaving us for the night, bumped into my social worker, Conchita, at the door and asked her provocatively but calmly: "*So, you are from Bolivia? Is that where they killed Che Guevara?*". .. We laugh each time up to today when we remember how that woman ran out of my room like a bullet and since then never initiated her "soul-to-soul" conversation with me again!

⁸²⁸ Sea resort small town in the Netherlands

By that time, anyway, I had already recuperated, pushing all my feelings somewhere deep into *the Mariana Trench*⁸²⁹ of my soul and doing everything exclusively by the rules: whatever was required and expected from me. I signed up on a waiting list for social housing, already being absolutely sure that nothing in the world would make me stay in this country, where my future would consist of living with a sick child on unemployment benefits, without any support from relatives or friends, with a jealous ex-husband around the corner, from whom no police force would ever try to protect me... No, to stay in this country would be the shortest road to suicide! And what would happen to my Lisa then? To whose care would she be assigned?

I had no doubt that I would fly out of that country at the first opportunity, like a bird from an open cage. But till then, I had to hide my real wishes and intentions. Not to scream about it on every corner, not to ring the bells on every church tower. Here, in this country, you couldn't just yell: "What the heck are you doing?!" as my granddad did, grabbing a thief by his hand...

No matter how strange it may sound, from my personal experience I can firmly state that it is not in the USSR where one could not openly say what he or she really thinks, it is here, in this "free world" that you really can't express yourself in public and be yourself!

The long suffering French woman, who by that time was already alone, was forced to negotiate with her abusive Moroccan husband when she went for a walk into town (she tried to convince him that she wanted to reunite with him, for it was her last resort, the last hope for her to see her children), and not one Dutch official institution tried to help her. She cried when she looked at Lisa and whispered to me when no one could hear: - You have to get out of this place... It is a bad, bad place.

I consoled her in my thoughts that it is exactly what we will do, but I could never say it aloud even to her.

"No saviour from on high delivers

No faith have we in prince or peer

Our own right hand the chains must shiver

Chains of hatred, greed and fear",

I sang to Lisa in the evenings

*The Internationale*⁸³⁰ was now her cradle song.

And when finally one cold November morning the three of us were leaving for Schiphol⁸³¹ airport, I was ready to sing it aloud!

On the same flight to Moscow there were also that *civilized* Russian professor, who once tried to convince his own wife "not to interfere" in my "personal life" and a Dutch former student - Slavist, whom I had met during my first trip to the Netherlands who by now had become a chunky "important businessman", in a very non-Western style dressed up in all leather. Indeed, it's a small world...

It was the most fabulous, unforgettable flight in my life. Perhaps, that was how Fionntan felt when he finally left his Latin American prison...

⁸²⁹ The Mariana Trench is the [deepest](#) part of the [world's oceans](#). It is located in the western [Pacific Ocean](#), to the east of the [Mariana Islands](#). It reaches a maximum-known depth of 10.911 km.

⁸³⁰ "The Internationale" is a widely sung [left-wing anthem](#). It has been one of the most recognizable and popular songs of the [socialist](#) movement since the late 19th century. It was written by Paul De Geyter and Eugene Pottier in 1871-1888

⁸³¹ Schiphol - main airport of the Netherlands, near Amsterdam

And, when already at home Lisa, hearing the song from the Soviet time film “The Circus” “*Wide Is My Motherland*”⁸³² (god only knows how it got on TV in Yeltsin’s Russia!), suddenly got on her feet and ran to the TV screen, my happiness became so huge that it seemed my heart was about to blow up....! Even though I knew that two months later I had to go again, this time to Ireland, I already firmly believed that the new life had finally began. Nobody could push me and Lisa off this new road. And I felt exactly the same way now, on Klein Curaçao, too...

“No, no, it simply can not be that something has happened to Oisin! If he was in danger, I would feel it, I would know. He will definitely come”, I kept saying to myself. And the most important thing is that now the whole world will know what has been planned for the Antilles. While Antilleans themselves had nothing to do with those sinister plans...

But half an hour later I again felt plunged into turmoil. Even though it was a warm, tropical night, I couldn’t stop shaking. In order to shake my fears away, I started to dance a *tsyganochka*⁸³³ right here at the jetty, under the surprised glimpses of sergeant Marchena. He tried several times to tell me the news that he heard on the radio, but I refused to listen, explaining to him that this would simply be too much for me to handle.

It seems already an eternity ago when suddenly I heard the sound of an engine. And about 10 minutes later, to my horror, I realized that it was a helicopter. An American helicopter! I jumped on my feet and ran to sergeant Marchena: -

- Zigfried! Do you have any weapons?!

He looked at me in surprise, though it seemed to me it was very clear why I was asking about it.

- I do, of course. But what do you need them for?

- Don’t you see for yourself?

- Ah! - sergeant Marchena laughed and waived with his hand, - I forgot to tell you. It’s Oisin. He has arranged with Luis Alvarez that he and his mate would bring Oisin here after the operation.

- Americans?! On their helicopter? And they knew nothing about our operation?... Are you sure that they don’t come here just to arrest us and to bring us back to Curaçao?

- Yes, I am, - said sergeant Marchena, -. They both have already asked for political asylum in Venezuela. Johnson even picked up his Curaçaoan girlfriend along with him. Though their American commanders still do not have a clue about it. For them this flight was a usual scheduled coast inspection flight. And, of course, about the operation those two knew virtually nothing, just in big lines, after it already took place. But if you have any doubts, I’ll give you my pistol with pleasure. Just in case...

Our conversation was cut short by the deafening sound of the helicopter. It landed, creating a small sand storm around us, and Oisin jumped down on the sand... Alive, unharmed and barely breathing from exhaustion...

Alive! And free!

⁸³² “Wide Is My Motherland”, also known as “Song of the Motherland” is the most famous patriotic song of the [Soviet Union](#). The music was composed by [Isaac Dunaevsky](#) and the words were written by [Vasily Lebedev-Kumach](#). The song was first featured in the classic [Soviet film “Circus”](#) in 1936.

⁸³³ Little Gypsy Dance - popular Russian folk dance of Gypsy origin

Oisín ran to me. As if hypnotized, I too made a few steps towards him: I already had no energy left to run. Not uttering a word, we embraced each other. Oisín turned to sergeant Marchena:

- Guys, would you leave us alone for a second? I have to talk to Saskia alone.

- *Ta bon*, - laughed sergeant Marchena - *Saskia, si e terrorista ei lo bai molestabu, grita duru.*^{834?}

Oisín was palming my face and I was laughing through tears of joy in my eyes. Before this I could not understand how people could laugh and cry at the same time. I remember how puzzled I was looking at Irina Rodnina⁸³⁵, crying while standing at the Olympic pedestal of honour in Lake Placid⁸³⁶.... And, despite our pledge from 5 years ago, I and Oisín both reached out our lips to each other... Wait, wait, what on Earth is he doing? You don't kiss friends like that, Oisín!...

- *Mo thaisce* - said Oisín softly - *Is gra liom thu.*⁸³⁷

My goodness...I was afraid to breathe. It was completely dark, only myriads of stars were sparkling over our heads. And the sea was gently rolling its waters.... I was so afraid to open my eyes.

So, I actually lived to this day... When I was least expecting it. Is it really always “better late than never”? Because there are three things we can never bring back: time, words and opportunity... Luckily, the curious sergeant Marchena intervened:

-Guys! You will have plenty of time for that later - he yelled from his motorboat. - But now you have to go. To fly away, to be more precise. Don't forget that Luis and Sam still have to reach Venezuela. And I have to get back to my office, reporting to my boss with honest eyes that “nothing happened during my watch.” And our *compañeros*⁸³⁸ on Bonaire are also waiting for you. So, say good bye to each other...

Oisín became confused and at once again turned into Kai from “*The Snow Queen*”⁸³⁹ so familiar to me with the ice cold splinters of the troll-mirror in his eye and in his heart.

- They will search for you in the direction of Margarita⁸⁴⁰ or Coro⁸⁴¹ - sergeant Marchena continued. - Because at this stage they probably think that you are Venezuelans or even Cubans. And, in the meantime, you will be on your way to Bonaire. And in such a transport that they would never even dream of this!... Hey, what's wrong with you, guys? You look so pale, as if you both are about to

⁸³⁴ Good. Saskia, if this terrorist will harass you, scream loud! (Papiamento)

⁸³⁵ Irina Rodnina (b.1949) is one of the most successful [figure skaters](#) ever and the only [pair skater](#) to win 10 successive [World Championships](#) (1969–78) and three successive Olympic gold medals (1972, 1976, 1980). She initially competed with [Alexei Ulanov](#) and later teamed up with [Alexander Zaitsev](#).

⁸³⁶ Winter Olympic Games in Lake Placid took place in 1980. Irina Rodnina became Olympic champion for the 3rd time, at the age of 30, after 1 year maternity leave. She had tears in her eyes when she was presented her medal.

⁸³⁷ My treasure, I love you (Irish)

⁸³⁸ Comrades (Spanish)

⁸³⁹ *The Snow Queen* is a [fairy tale](#) by [Hans Christian Andersen](#) (1805–1875). The tale was first published in 1845, and centers on the struggle between good and evil as experienced by a little boy and girl, Kai and Gerda. In the story, splinters of the magic evil troll-mirror get into Kai's heart and eyes which changed his personality (he gets “frozen heart”).

⁸⁴⁰ *Isla de Margarita* is the largest island of the [state](#) of [Nueva Esparta](#) in [Venezuela](#), situated in the [Caribbean Sea](#), off the northeastern coast of the country.

⁸⁴¹ Coro is the capital of [Falcón State](#) and the oldest city in the west of Venezuela, the nearest Venezuelan city to Curaçao

faint... That's not right. It's not the right time to fall apart. *Mevrouw* Saskia Duplessis, you are as white as chalk! Here, have a bit of rum! *Nami un sunchi. i te despues!*⁸⁴²

Zigfried Marchena kissed me on the cheek and handed me a small flask. I accepted it automatically, just as I automatically took a gulp from it and began to cough: it burned my throat. He just laughed, looking at me, then shook hands with Oisín, winked to me and disappeared into the darkness... Oisín and I were left alone by the helicopter. I felt uncomfortable to climb into it: to be inside a closed space with him after what happened on the beach. But Oisín acted as if nothing happened.

-You probably already weren't expecting me to come? - he smiled

- Don't even remind me! Well, how did it go? What's happening now?

- All went as it should! Haven't you seen it from here?- he waved in the direction of big Curaçao.

-No, you can't see it from this place.

Wait till we'll take off, then you can observe it for yourself! And...

- Don't tell me, please, Oisín. It's clear enough what else you had to do...

- And what else is clear to you?... - His eyes penetrated me so deeply that I felt my face burning. Or maybe that rum started working, which I drank on an empty stomach? Because I did not eat anything and had not slept for over 24 hours.

Perhaps I also felt so uncomfortable because I now was in the company of those whom I stubbornly refused to trust for such a long time. Even though I am not sure if Luis or Sam felt this, because they both greeted me heartily. Sam looked as if he was offered a major part in some Hollywood blockbuster movie, and I am not sure if he fully understood that he will never be able to come home again... His girlfriend Noraya, a charming brown girl, smiled at me shyly.

...If this part of my story does not seem very realistic to some of you, I have to confess that I wouldn't have believed it myself, if those American pilots hadn't really flown us to Bonaire and didn't really head for Venezuela afterwards where they really did ask for political asylum. They took with them the laptop of colonel Wetherholt, along with his notebook that Oisín gave them as a present to President Chavez.

In order to describe their motivation and how they came to this decision, more realistically, I should have known them a lot better. And, unlike Oisín, I didn't spend much time in their company. Hence my narration in this part of the story might seem a bit far-fetched. That is also why my communication with them felt a bit strained.

- Good evening - I said, not being sure what and how I could talk with them about.- It is a very nice evening today, isn't it?

Luis burst out in laughter.

- It surely is! - It was all he could say - It surely is!

Very soon down below we saw the lights of Bonaire. And in 10 minutes, the beam light of our helicopter (I still hesitated to call this property of the Pentagon "ours") found the scarlet sails of Comrade Orlando's "*Esperanza*" in a small bay...

⁸⁴² Give me a kiss, and I'll see you later (Papiamento)

Luis was not very talkative during the flight. But Sam was talking non-stop, reminding me of that little donkey from the cartoon Shrek. He asked us again and again about life in Venezuela. And, since neither Oisin nor I had a chance to visit it, Sam would go on fantasizing, trying to figure out how they would be received there...

I learned that my comrades already passed on a message to the media of several countries as to why that hangar was blown up on the Dutch base and what was really kept there (including the relevant photos). It was sent from a computer located on the American base, since Luis and Sam were leaving it for good. That press release explained that the hangar was destroyed because of the military aircraft that was kept there to be used as a military provocation, and that this act was committed not by Venezuelans nor by Cubans, nor by any professional agents, but by ordinary honest people, who believed that it was their duty to disrupt these criminal plans.

I was so tired, both physically and emotionally, that I could only listen to the story; I couldn't participate in the discussions, nor even try to imagine whether the media would believe this story, would it be published, and if yes, what kind of consequences it might or would have. The only phrase that was flickering through my mind at that moment was the Latin expression: "*Fed quod potui, faciant meliora potentes.*"⁸⁴³ I did not want to think about Oisin words that he said to me on the beach either: what one would not say in the midst of the struggle!

Luis and Sam decided not to land on Bonaire in order not to attract attention, but to let us both down on the sea, not far from the "Esperanza", which we would have to reach by swimming. This was when I praised Dónal in my mind with his program of intensive training!

The sea was calm and tender, and all the inhabitants of Bonaire were either already sleeping or breathlessly glued to their TV screens, listening to the reports about the mysterious explosion on Curaçao. In any case, there was nobody on the beach. But yet, I did not feel very comfortable, for I have a fear of heights to begin with, and the darkness in combination with the height made it even more unpleasant. Plus, I was dressed in a velvet overall with the 1970s wide trousers, which would be probably good for a romantic evening with a Dutch *warrior*, but wasn't very suitable for a swim in the sea water, for I knew it would become much too heavy when soaked. But we had no choice. The helicopter was already hanging over the bay.

- Guys - I said and made a little pause after using such a homely word to those whom I only yesterday considered my enemies - Could you go a bit lower down? Don't laugh at me, but I am afraid of heights...

Neither Luis nor Sam laughed at me. Oisin also didn't. Instead he shook their hands and said:

-Grand, thanks for everything, mates! Good luck to you in your new place. Let all there be good for you. When you are there, please, tell them that we did everything in our power. There will be no war. At least not for now and not for some time to come, that's for sure. Among others, thanks to you too!

And he moved to the door first... In a minute we heard the sound of water splashing, which even the helicopter engine could not mute. I had a hat on, to which a small electric torch was attached. I looked down and my head spun....

-Well, bye then..., - I said uncertainly to the helicopter's pilots.

⁸⁴³ I have done what I could; let those who can do better (Cicero, "Letters") (Latin)

- Have a safe journey wherever you go! - said Sam - Safe journey!

And Luis added:

- *Todos buenos y hasta la vista!* All the best! And see you later!

And Noraya smiled:

- *Te aworo i mi ta spera ku tur kos lo bira bon!*... See you. I hope it will all turn out well for you!

I closed my eyes, found the rope ladder's step with my foot and grasped this ladder with my hands tightly like a crab.

- Please say hello to President Chavez for us! - I still managed to shout, and in a few seconds I was already in the water. The next minute some strong hands already pulled me aboard the yacht. In front of me there was all wet but happy, smiling Oisín and Comrade Orlando looking like a birthday boy. When Orlando looked at me, I thought for a moment that he had tears in his eyes. And then Comrade Orlando just passionately hugged both of us.

- You did it! What heroes you are! You did everything the way you should. I have to confess that I had my doubts that all would go as planned. There was not much time for the preparations either... But then I remembered whom I am dealing with! Could our "*Fearless Northern Gale*⁸⁴⁴" and our Soviética, a true Soviet communist, fail their mission? Never! No bloody way!

- So, it's done - said Oisín, looking a little uncomfortable with such a tirade in our honour - and we managed to escape... What next?

- -Next you are going home, or to be more precise, in whatever direction you choose. And we will continue to unmask those imperialist militaries here. You said that you took a laptop from that Dutch guy? That's great...

- Yes, and not only that: we also got his notebook. I flicked through it - there are a lot of interesting things: addresses, dates, names...

I did not feel well, my head was spinning. My velvet suit was soaked through with salt water and was sticking unpleasantly to my skin. I tried to get up but could not: everything was literally circling before my eyes. Oisín quickly grabbed me by my elbow.

- Oh, please, forgive me, Soviética - said Comrade Orlando - I didn't even think about how tired you both must be. We are sailing off right away. There is nothing to wait here for. Later it will only become more difficult. One more thing... You have to change your appearance as quickly as possible. I even brought some hair dye with me for this occasion...

- I hope, there will be my natural colour in your collection... I hadn't look like a normal human for more than 2 years already, - I said. - Please, look in your cabin's bathroom; there should be different colours. Since we started about this, let me bring you there.

Once more I tried to get up and failed this time too; my legs were like made of cotton. Oisín again came to my rescue, grasping my elbow. I felt uneasy again remembering his words on the beach, but I still tried not to pay them too much attention. Didn't I already once before misinterpret some signs

⁸⁴⁴ Expression from Wolfe Tones (famous Irish band)'s "Irish Republican Jail Song":
"For England knows, and England hates
Our fearless Northern gales;
And that's another reason why we'll free
Our lads from Crumlin jail!"

from him? Well, there will be no more “interpretations” of any signs on my part. I will not allow anyone to make a laughing stock out of me again.

- You should really get some proper good sleep now - said Comrade Orlando repeated walking behind me. I felt that myself, literally with every step. Probably, it was visible on the outside too, because Oisin, it seemed to me, also looked at me compassionately.

- Good night, comrades - said Comrade Orlando, opening the door to the cabin for us. - You probably do not realize it yourselves yet, but it seems to me that you have found the turning point, which will finally help us move our planet from this dead end, from where it was drifting to for the past 20 years, into the right direction. Now all we have to do is to give it a little push all together... This is what I think, friends... Nothing will disturb you from a good night sleep. The weather at sea is good. In the morning you can sleep as long as you wish: you have nowhere to rush to anymore. It will be up to us, up to your crew, to speed up now!

He left us alone in the cabin. The cabin was truly luxurious: with covered with wood walls, a mirror and a huge bed. I felt even more uncomfortable now: “not in my own plate⁸⁴⁵”, as we say in such situations.

Notwithstanding the exhaustion, I could not sleep. Of course, Comrade Orlando was right: we had to sleep, and as long as possible, but my nerves were stretched like electric wires: a little bit more, and it seemed that they would be like bells tolling loudly in the wind. It seemed like Oisin was in a similar state, for he was silent.

-Let me colour your hair, Zhenya, - he broke the silence, still not looking in my direction.

- We'll have to get you sorted now, and I think you are so tired that you won't be able to do it on your own.

Blood rushed into my cheeks. I wanted to reject it, categorically, but could not utter a word. The last thing that I remember was him picking me up in his arms and the sound of running water.

«And it's down along the Falls Road,

That's where I want to be,

Lying in the dark

With the Provo company....

("My Little Armalite", Northern Irish republican song)

I woke up early; it was still almost dark. Half asleep, I looked in the direction where my alarm clock usually was: is it time to get up for work? The alarm clock wasn't there... Wait a minute... Why are the walls and bed swinging?! And whose hand is this?..

I jumped out of the bed as if scalded by boiling water.

- Quite, quiet, Zhenya, it's just me... Did you have a bad dream?

Oisin was lying in the bed, half-covered with the bed sheet. He calmly looked at me, as if smiling to himself. His shoulders were freckled and pale in a very Irish way, despite his long stay in the tropics.

⁸⁴⁵ Russian expression meaning “feeling uncomfortable”

His short black hair with streaks of gray was dishevelled; his face was sleepy, but peaceful, so peaceful that I had never seen such an expression on his face before.

Does it mean that this wasn't a dream?

I blushed up to my ears and wrapped myself even more tightly in the dressing gown I had on. I was sitting now on the very end of the bed, trying to pretend that I did not remember anything that happened yesterday. To be honest, I really did not remember anything else, apart from those words said on the beach. But the very fact that he was here now and that he was looking at me in such way... Of course, the man just lost his nerve, after all that happened to us in last week. Most likely he regrets it now... I certainly regret that I did not say anything to him yesterday.

Oisín was still looking at me in a very strange way: I probably looked quite stupid, I thought. What on Earth have we done? And I tried to help him, so that he wouldn't feel so guilty, *to dot all the i's and cross all the t's*.

- Look, Oisín, don't worry, things can happen... I understand, you were under such stress... Don't torment yourself, please... I remember very well that you are an "almost married" man... Maybe by now even a "fully married" one... And I respect your feelings. Let's just agree that nothing happened. I too have a fiancé waiting for me in Korea, and believe you me, I feel very awkward because of yesterday...

Where? - Oisín suddenly flared up - What Korea? What fiancé? After what we've been through together? Was it with him you shared the roof over your head and all woes and joys for the last two years? Was it with him you blew up a NATO base together?

-No - I said wholeheartedly and completely dumbfounded, - *With him I did not blow anything up yet...*

-Oh please, stop mocking me! - Oisín was outraged, - Don't you understand it yet, Zhenya, that we are made for each other! Do you understand that? M-a-d-e!

Ah... That is what you are talking about, honey... I figured that one out a long time ago... At least 7 years ago. But I was living a new life now, and I was also not quite the same person as back in those years. As Volodya Zelinsky used to say, *"the train has left the station..."* Yet, apparently I still felt hurt by those past events.

- What about your girlfriend? - I knew that I should not say this, but I couldn't resist, - *Your almost wife?*

- I don't have a wife, do you understand it? I don't, - he still sounded very angry. - And you "never had" one?, - I blurted out maliciously and immediately regretted it.

Oisín's face looked as if I had slapped him on the cheek.

- I did, - he said slowly, - I had a wife. She left me, together with our kid. Do you have any other questions?

- I do. So, was I "a player in reserve" for you all this time? - I knew that he would become even more insulted by his, but again, I could not restrain myself... After all, I had strained nerves too. - Your second choice? A runner up?

- Who told you that you were my second choice? - now Oisín really lost his temper, - You were *the choice that I just didn't dare to make* at that time. Do you get the difference?

I was looking at him, realizing that all that I have tried to mute and eradicate for years was speedily coming to me back out of nowhere. I made a last attempt to change the subject and turn it all into a joke:

-Well, - I said, just in order not to keep silent and god forbid, not to start crying, - Brits in Belfast haven't ever seen such fireworks as we had here yesterday, that's for sure! *There is still gunpowder in some guns*⁸⁴⁶ ...

Oisín suddenly beamed with a child-like, pure smile, he slightly raised himself, carefully wrapping himself up in that bed sheet, and pulled me towards him. At first gently, then stronger and stronger... He was really so handsome at that moment that I wanted to shut my eyes and could not: his face drew me like a magnet...

- I'll show to you the fireworks, - he uttered, - And the gun powder too...

He locked my hands above my head and I heard his hot whisper in my ear: "I will never give you away to anyone, never, do you hear? Not to a Korean, not to a Russian, not even to a Papua! Not even to Chavez himself!

To be honest, I got quite frightened: it was so unlike the controlled, strict and non-sentimental Oisín I knew! What on Earth happened to him? What has Chavez to do with all of this?

-*Mo thaisce*⁸⁴⁷... come here....., - he kept saying, pulling me closer and closer to him, - There is no need for any Koreans... Don't you like the surname Rafferty? - It's a nice surname, but I... Oisín! - I've been waiting for you, Zhenya, all night long... Waiting until you woke up...

- Waiting? So, that means that we didn't....

- Who do you think I am, Zhenya?. You were sleeping!

And I suddenly started to shiver, as if in high fever, even chattering my teeth, and could not stop it. Oisín's face changed:

- Why are you shivering? What's wrong?...

What's wrong? He is still asking what's wrong?!

- By the way, I always shivered when you were around. Only you stubbornly preferred not to notice it, - that was all I could say, hiding my face in the pillow. - Then why, what for, why all of this now?

- Well, *I'm a late learner*, - said Oisín shyly. And then he suddenly realized how ambiguous this really sounded, and his face became bright red.

And just for this one second everything else ceased to exist around me...

But my emotions came into play almost immediately. "*Die, but do not give a kiss without love!*"⁸⁴⁸ flashed through my head. I ran out of the cabin without giving Oisín time to do or say anything more, and hid myself in a corner of the deck, crying long and bitterly, burying my face in the pile of some old sacks.. It was still dark, nobody saw me, and I could give my emotions free reign.

⁸⁴⁶ Expression from Nikolai Gogol's "Taras Bulba"(1835) - a [romanticized](#) historical [novella](#)

⁸⁴⁷ See previous notes in this chapter

⁸⁴⁸ Nikolay Chernyshevsky. "What is to be done?" (1863) - a novel written by him when he was imprisoned in the [Peter and Paul Fortress](#). It was written in response to [Fathers and Sons](#) by [Ivan Turgenev](#). The novel has been called "a handbook of radicalism." [Lenin](#), [Plekhanov](#), [Peter Kropotkin](#), [Alexandra Kollontay](#) and [Rosa Luxemburg](#) were all highly impressed with the book.

All the pain inflicted by Oisin in the past seemed to wash over me with a new force. What would I need his feelings for now, when my life finally got a shade of normality? Tatiana Larina was right a thousand times when she rejected Onegin⁸⁴⁹? And I... How could I have allowed that man to kiss me? What about Ri Rang? How did I dare, even just in my thoughts, even just for a second to do this to him? The more so because Ri Rang wasn't even at all like Tatiana's Gremin⁸⁵⁰. For me, it wasn't at all the case of "*all drawing lots were equal*."⁸⁵¹ I drew such a lot that was almost like a fairy tale. Maybe that's the whole point: it was so fairy-tale like that I found it hard to believe in it....

But that is no excuse. It does not matter why Ri Rang did not write to me for so long: it would have been an elementary ignobility to reassure myself that since I had not received any letters from him, then I would have the right to behave this way. Only a woman brought up under capitalism could think this way.

The brief moment of bewitchment was over. And I could try to justify it by anything: a memory of old feelings, strained nerves and a thousand other reasons, but to be honest with myself until the end... No, I do not love Oisin. I do admire him, the force of his spirit, his fighting qualities, he is my comrade in the full socialist sense of the word, but... But it's not love.

I do not want, cannot see him after this! I wanted to hide in one of the sacks on the deck and stay there for the rest of our journey.

The ocean roared so loud that I could have cried out loud and still no one would hear me. I remembered his warm and shy farewell kisses on my lips for the next 9 months, which misled me into making such a shameful mistake. His cold and scared "*What...I am an almost married man!*" was still ringing in my ears: insulting, as if I myself started it all, without him having given me any reason to, and the pain just gushed over me.

Yes, we could have been together long ago. My children could have been his children. There wouldn't be any of those things I'd been through after this. There wouldn't have been any silly deeds - both *almost done* and *really done*.

But then, there wouldn't be Korea in my life either. And... At the very thought of Ri Rang's splashing, sparkling joyfulness, of his calm confidence in the victory of our mutual cause, of his tremulous deep respect for serious feelings, which reminded me of the Soviet films of the 1950s, I almost gritted my teeth. No, there will never be any man in my life even remotely close to what Ri Rang is like! And I don't need anybody *like* him. *Just him*. Only what moral right do I have to talk about it now?

Some people believe that whatever happens in life, it is always for the best. But I could not agree that Oisin's belated declaration of his feelings for me was "for the best." No bloody way. I felt like wailing aloud, the way Russian women traditionally do at funerals. If I could only change boats and sail somewhere in an opposite direction, I would do it without a doubt. But I had no choice. I wouldn't

⁸⁴⁹ *Eugene Onegin* (1825-1832) is a [novel in verse](#) written by [Alexander Pushkin](#). It is a classic of [Russian literature](#). Young Tatiana Larina confessed her love to Onegin who rejected her. Years later, she is married to an aged prince. Upon seeing Tatyana again, Onegin becomes obsessed with winning her affection, despite the fact that she is married. However, his attempts are rebuffed. He writes her several letters, but receives no reply. Eventually Onegin manages to see Tatyana and presents to her the opportunity to renew their past love. Tatyana admits that she still loves him, but declares her determination to remain faithful to her husband.

⁸⁵⁰ Gremin - Tatiana's aged husband in the opera version of "Eugene Onegin" (music by P. Tchaikovsky)

⁸⁵¹ That's how Tatiana describes her marriage during her last conversation with Onegin.

jump overboard over this, would I? Maybe I should ask Comrade Orlando to give me another cabin? There were three cabins on the yacht, as far as I knew.

- Zhenya, dear, what's wrong? What happened?... - Oisín's voice came from behind me, - Did I hurt you? Did I do anything wrong?

I had no desire to "clarify our relationship": my life experience has taught me that no such "clarifications", when one accuses another, even if he or she is right, ever lead to any positive resolution. Even more so, what's the point of *brandishing fists after the fight*⁸⁵², if it was your own fault? Or maybe I just became too old to make scenes: it takes up so much of your spiritual energy; it is such a waste to spend it on this. So I just pressed my face deeper into some not very fresh sackcloth and continued to cry, without making a sound...

Oisín stood over me: tall, helpless, clumsy and bewildered in his confusion.

- I always say or do something the wrong way, - said Oisín softly. - Maybe you haven't realized it. Forgive me, please. It's a mental illness. That's how I live now: as if I'm out of my own body and mind. For a long time already. It's as if all that happens to me, happens to someone else. As in the movies. Or in a dream. I see it all, understand it all, but my tongue doesn't move. Or it just babbles something by itself, detached from me. And my hands do not obey me. Or they do, but I still have the feeling that they are not mine. As if all this around me is not real. As if it is made of some gutta-percha⁸⁵³. When this just started, it was scary. Now I'm a little used to it. But it's still very unpleasant... How can I explain this to you? It's as if the life around me is some sort of a performance in which all those people take part, - all the time, non-stop. And I'm staying out of the play; I was not invited to participate in it. And if I try to take part in it, the rules of the game seem to me so imposed, so artificial... Everything around me seems artificial: hunger and thirst, even gravity. If that makes any sense. Even my own walking. The way I read a newspaper, the way I watch TV. I only understand with my mind *what* I should feel or *how* I should behave, but it's still somehow remains *outside of* me... You want to say to somebody who is dear to you that you care about this person, but instead you just mumble devil knows what and shy away from it... Look, I have no doubt that your Korean is a great guy. That he deserves you more than I do. I guess I shouldn't have... You would have never even approached me if you knew what problems I have. I just could not believe back then that I could really be needed by you... Can you understand that? I was afraid to even think that you and me... - he did not finish, looked at me and blushed again.... - Sorry, sorry, I'm a thousand times a fool! Even now, I can not explain to you how much you mean to me. If I start to explain, it will be again like in the movies, you see? Do you get my drift?

He got confused, sat down next to me on the deck, and covered his face with his hands.

- And I, Oisín? Do you think I do not have a heap of problems? I have a daughter with a disability, a controlling mother and I am useless in housekeeping. And I've always thought too: why would he need somebody like me? That's why I never thought that you might want any sort of a serious relationship with me... ("Lord, *why am I saying all of this to him?*" flashed through my head.) Even when I shamelessly told you in your face that one day you'll be sorry about it, but it will be too late... You probably thought back then that I was an impossible hussy, but I said it out of desperation...

⁸⁵² Brandishing fists after the fight never proves anyone's might (proverb)

⁸⁵³ Inelastic natural [latex](#) produced from the [sap](#) of trees of the same name

- I'm neurotic. I even have an official mental disability. Do you understand? It's official. This is worse than a quarrelsome mother.

I did not answer. Because again, I did not want to show my tears.

- Do not leave me, please, Zhenya, if you can.

I buried my face in his chest so that he could not see my tears and whispered:

- Where can I get away from you now?

Oisín heard this, and his face lit up like the Irish sky after rain.

- It's breakfast time. Shall we go and have a bite to eat?

I felt like someone caring for a friend in need, not like a woman in love. But does Oisín understand it? And how do I make him understand it in such a way that it wouldn't hurt him? Of course, if that was at all possible.

... The days were passing by. I did not know already what time of day it was and what day it was. I lost count. The yacht was always awash: lately we were in a storm zone. But it was not scary. I did not pay attention to the storm. What in the world could be scary after what we have already experienced?

Comrade Orlando told his crew not to disturb us, telling them that we were on our honeymoon. But it was not a "honeymoon" in any way. Pity for Oisín filled my whole being. Although I was well aware of how offended he would have been if he would have realized that it was just pity, and so even more I did not have the heart to call a spade a spade.

When I thought about Ri Rang, I felt ashamed to the core. I do not deserve someone like Ri Rang. More than that, I probably do not even deserve to be called a Soviet person... These thoughts plagued me when Oisín was asleep. When he was awake, I was afraid of only one thing: that he might jump overboard somewhere. And all my conduct with him was determined by this.

I was aware of the Oisín's mental problems after 12 years of high-security prison in England and in the North of Ireland, but never before had they display themselves for me in such a rainbow variety. From excited joy he fell into doubts and fears, from short anger - into a deep depression, and impulsivity was quickly replaced by claustrophobia in the closed cabin. He was not used to sleeping in the same room with another person, and he often wanted to run out somewhere. Sometimes he tried to remember something but could not. He was very valetudinary and most of the time he had a very low opinion of himself. But he never did me any harm, never said a bad word. He was aggressive when he was feeling bad, but he just ran away. Or hid himself into a chair somewhere in a corner. It was painful for me to see him suffering. But - strange thing! - all of this has not alienated me from him one bit. I truly appreciated his heroism - that he was able in his condition to do what he did in Curaçao. Apparently, this condition of his was exacerbated by the sheer stress in which we were landed for so long.

Oisín was always in doubt, always worrying about something.

- You really do not want to run away from me? - he asked with a sudden strange anxiety in his voice, when it seemed that there was no reason at all to ask this. - I still wonder... how long would you put up with me...

- What is there to put up with? When you want to be alone, you just tell me, I'll go for a while. It's not a problem. The problems arise when people try to change each other.

- *This is not a problem...* And I was told that I would never be able to make any woman happy....

- Who told you such nonsense? Some envious fellow?

- Almost. Brits said that when they interrogated me. - Oisín spoke with difficulty, slowly, looking down, as if squeezing every word out. - For a long time. 3 months. They'd strip me naked, put me in the middle of their office for half a day and walk around me, cracking jokes... Later on again: when they were kicking me with their boots after they recaptured us after our escape... When they strip-searched me with their mirrors in gaol after each visit... And I dated only one girl in my life before I got in there. Our ma died when I was 11, and our dad was very strict... And when I was 25, the Brits nicked me. In that forest, with explosives.... My girlfriend, sure, did not wait for me. And then they... - I saw Oisín wince. My poor, poor comrade... What did they do to you?

- Tovarish⁸⁵⁴, - I said to him in Russian, - F*** the Brits. If I only knew that you existed... I would have waited for you all these years!

I wanted to support him and to make him believe in himself. Only after I have said this I realized that he could interpret my words in quite a different way... And due to my fault the situation slipped further into a deadlock.

- I don't know myself how I dared to tell you that, back on the beach... I think it was the adrenaline, after that explosion. Or, perhaps, because I knew we'd have to part soon.... This was my last chance.

- Why didn't you say anything before then? I mean, about all of this.

- How could I? To the woman that I care so much for - to say *that*? I did not tell it to anyone, not even to Linda.

- Linda was a friend of your sister?

- Yes. How do you know? It was Una who introduced us...

- I guessed.

- At first, all was well... I treasured what we had, you know? Because I never had this in my life before. And then, after our wedding, I already had a breakdown. With hallucinations. She said that I was crazy... and that she doesn't need a nutcase. You'll laugh, but the one thing I was glad back then, was that you didn't have enough time to get to know me better...

If I only knew all of this in my distant "Ulster's" past... Now I understood the past: his painful shyness, and the way he had awkwardly embraced me with stiff hands, and his almost sheer horror when I had dared to put my hands on his shoulders. But what can we do about all of this now? After all, in any case, I could not just leave a comrade behind in a lurch... I had to say something encouraging to him, but what?

⁸⁵⁴ Comrade (Russian)

- I am so glad that I got to know you properly at least now!

I was really just making it worse, wasn't I?

Oisín started to speak. He spoke for a long time. I tried not to interrupt him.

- Now you know why I was "almost" a married man? - he said apologetically. - I am emotionally unstable... No woman, of course, will be able to live with this for long. And Linda, too, in the end, could not. Although to be honest, Linda did not see me when I was even half as bad as I am now.... I held on. I tried. I did my best. With her, it was easier. She is simple. But with you there... I do not know what is happening with me. My head spins. At first, I could not help it when I kissed you - in that Dublin park. It was already bad enough, because the people who are on a mission together, shouldn't... And then, I was always afraid that you would see that there was something wrong with me... and when I realized that you too, liked me... - Here he blushed deeply -... At first I said to myself: this can not be, why would someone like that amazing woman need someone like me? Then I tried to convince myself that it wasn't me that caused her interest, but the adventures we were in. That she would fall in love with any of my friends who'd have happened to be in my place. And then I could no longer cope with it and asked for advice....

...A man who was my married lover at the time. Because I, too, like you, decided that such a person as I, with my problems, with my sick daughter, was only suitable for such a relationship... Yes, you could hardly pick a better adviser!...

- So, you and Dermot?... - Oisín nearly fell off the chair. - I... Oh, I'm a dumb donkey...

- I had a not too bad relationship with him, although it couldn't be called love. He was smart, an interesting conversationalist. A good friend. I still respect him. I wasn't looking for anything else. I had more important things to think about. The last thing I wanted was to fall in love! And then you came along, and I... It was like in a bad book: at first sight. Like a bolt from the blue sky.... I just looked at you at that table in Donegal and realized that I was irrevocably lost... So I hated myself for it... And then, when you offered to be friends, I initially agreed to it: because it would have been too painful not to see you. I thought that I could... But when we met the next time and parted, this time without a kiss, even though both of us were pulled to each other like magnets (I wasn't blind!)... I realized that I could never be only friends with you. It was better not to see you at all. And there is nothing amazing about me. I thought, I would have a couple of kids and would forget about all these stupidities... So now, 7 years, 2 children and one military base blown up later...

I paused, looking for words, which could help me to explain to him as tactfully as possible that it was impossible to step twice into the same water, but Oisín just put his finger on his lips and ran out before I finished what I was trying to say.

It was New Year's Eve. The warm sea was splashing around the yacht; Oisín and I were sitting on the deck, under the huge Milky Way of stars. Behind us numerous Christmas garlands and lights were hanging, put up by the crew for the festive days. The sea was calm at this time. We were looking at the sky, searching for the Big Dipper.

- Maybe we're in another hemisphere now? - He said. - Do you actually know where we are?

I shook my head.

- No. And I do not want to know! It's more interesting like that.

Oisín lay down on the deck.

- You know what I'd like most of all now?

- A plate of vegetable soup with barley and fresh soda bread? An Ulster Fry? - I joked.

- No, I'm not about that. Although that would be a good idea! - Oisín licked his lips. - But I'm talking about life in general.

He looked wistfully at the Milky Way.

- I am 46 years old, Zhenya, and look at my life! What did I see in it? I wish I had a family, a normal work, home, kids. That you and I would still be only 25. I wish I could have finished school at least. I wish my mother was alive. I wish I could erase those 12 years from my memory, I wish I would have lived them *usefully*! Probably, it's because I'm a man without ambition, but I would have given anything for such an ordinary life.

My heart sank. Because I actually lived a life like that: in the USSR - and so shamefully I did not appreciate it! Back then it struck me as boring, devoid of heroism. Despite all the school essays on the subject "There's always a place for a feat in our daily life." To me, like to Baron Munchhausen⁸⁵⁵, it seemed that there was nothing more boring than to be like everyone else - just to live, just to have a family, just to enjoy a job that you like. I loved the quote from Griboedov's Chatsky: "*I am strange, But who is not? The one, who looks like every nut?*"⁸⁵⁶ I terribly wanted to throw a challenge: but to whom, why? Have I ever thought about it? Did I pick up the right audience for my "tossing of gloves"? People who just lived and worked honestly? I remembered a sympathetic glance and words of two women on the street in Moscow in distant 1986, when I had a quarrel, who said: "Poor thing! She is running after him, crying! Girl, you should just spit at him and rub it off!"

Didn't they, these same people, feel sorry for me, when as a result of my own *experiments*, I was *hoisted by my own petard*? And was it them I considered as "commoners"? As racists? Not realizing that the only ones who "challenged" them were shameless *salesmen from art*⁸⁵⁷ and dissidents ("*masters not to create - to destroy*"⁸⁵⁸), all dissent was based on their elementary arrogance, on the fact that they saw themselves as exceptional, as those for whom the rules of normal social behaviour do not exist, as unrecognized geniuses - that is, based on ordinary conceit! And what is this "unrecognized genius" worth in reality, they have already managed to prove to all of us, as soon as the "damned censorship" was abolished...

⁸⁵⁵ Hieronymus Carl Friedrich von Münchhausen (1720 – 1797) was a German nobleman and a famous recounter of [tall tales](#). *The Very Same Munchausen* is a [1979 Soviet television movie](#) based on a script by [Grigoriy Gorin](#). In the movie, baron Munchausen is portrayed as multi-dimensional, colorful, non-conformist man living in a gray, plain, dull and conformist society that ultimately tries to destroy him.

⁸⁵⁶ Chatsky - main character of Alexandr Griboedov's play "Woe from Wit" (1823),- a Russian classic play in verse, satirizing the society of post-Napoleonic [Moscow](#), or, as a high official in the play styled it, "a pasquinade on Moscow."

⁸⁵⁷ Bitter term for Soviet intelligentsia, writers, directors, artists etc who have betrayed Revolution's ideals while during the Soviet time they pretended to be loyal Soviet citizens.

⁸⁵⁸ Expression from Nikolai Nekrasov's poem "Railroad" (1864)

Was I any better than they were? I squirmed when I talked about motherhood, about love for our country, about the struggle for peace."Why struggle for something that we already have?" That's why: in order not to lose it all!

I felt so bitter that it took me so many years to admit this fully even to myself! How many of us, if we are honest with ourselves, have allowed the disaster that had happened to our country, just because we were too occupied at that time with our own supposed "uniqueness", but in reality, it was only our claim that we were "better" than the others, and that they should *be all over us*, the way our parents who spoiled us rotten were? Rummage a bit in your own memory: pull out of it into the light your wonder, half-erased by now, of why people suddenly stopped talking about you, "*What a charming little fellow,*" or "*What a nice girl!*", pulling your chubby cheeks... *Because you have gotten too big for this.* Because *now you won't get candies and compliments anymore.* Because *people no longer give up that red seat at the window in a tram for you, which you used to think was your birthright.* Instead it's your turn came to give way to others. Instead now you yourself had to work and continue to build our mutual home, which our fathers and grandfathers began to build. And this is what you weren't willing to do, being brought up spoiled and lazy!

Wasn't it there, the hidden root of all our "dissatisfactions" with our Socialist Soviet society? With the socialist system that has given us immeasurably, unbelievably, incomparably more than any other system has given to any people over the centuries of human history...

But to put all of this in a nutshell for Oisín was impossible. In order to understand what I am talking about, it would have been necessary to have lived our lives, to re-evaluate it, as a Soviet man. After all, the vast majority of those who come from the place where he grew up are unable even to believe that there were no homeless people in the Soviet Union."Of course, they were," - they tell me completely confident and categorically - "*You just weren't told about it!*"(!) They say this because they themselves are organically unable to *even imagine* life without the homeless, the beggars and the drug addicts. Without unemployment and prostitution. Without price increases and authorities taking your fingerprints at a whim. Please let's show some compassion for these so-called "free" people! They truly deserve it, with their miserable lives.

- It's not a matter of ambition - I said to Oisín, - It's just that people are forced to live like you have lived, and do what you're doing, exactly in order to do away with such a life. And if you still doubt about those 12 years of your life, then please don't ever doubt about the last two! Don't you dare to doubt! Do you hear me?...

A small portable radio that we had with us started to play the Spassky Tower chime, one of the most loved sounds of my childhood: the New Year had come to Moscow. We still had to live in the old year for 6 hours but for my children, mum and Ri Rang the New Year already came 6 hours ago...

There was no champagne on the yacht. But I did not really need it now. I secretly got out of my pocket the photographs worn almost to holes of the people closest to me, and promised them in a whisper that this year we would definitely finally be together. And we would never be separated again! Well, at least not for a very long time...

The last photo in the envelope was one of Ri Rang.. I have long hesitated to look at him, and when I finally did, I realized that no matter what part of the world I may be in, no matter how many years pass, no matter which military bases might go up into the air, no matter what revolutions may take place in the world, and no matter whoever would confess his feelings to me, for myself and my feelings this will not change anything...

... For more than a month. I deliberately did not watch the news on television or listen to the radio, even though we could do that on the yacht. When you already know that you will be called a terrorist and so on, you don't really want to listen to it every day, especially not from the lips of those who *have not found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq or the grave 10,000 Albanians in Kosovo*, but are still insolently occupying those lands, those who want to *"patrol the sea, to prevent weapons being brought into Gaza"*, but provide much more modern and terrible weapons to Israel in large quantities, those who *shout about "human rights violations" in Cuba*, but keep mum about how poor Eastern Europeans, deprived of free healthcare, the right to work and receive instead the right to be thrown out of their homes for not paying rent, are trying to survive, "overjoyed" by capitalist "freedoms" and "rights" in the style of *"It doesn't matter whom you choose, you're the one who stands to lose."*

You know what? *Pipe down*, ladies and gentlemen!

I vaguely heard that America wanted to take advantage of our operation, "Brion" as a pretext for an attack on Venezuela, but it was unable to do so: the documents that we had obtained about their plans which we thwarted, that were brought to Caracas by Luis and Sam, were released very quickly before the whole world. An international scandal followed. On Curaçao the news that a bombing of residential areas had been planned, in the words of that miserable colonel, "for the sake of freedom and democracy", caused an explosion of popular indignation. The prime minister was forced to resign. The number of supporters of the island's independence from the Netherlands began to grow by leaps and bounds. More and more Curaçao residents understood the main thing: the time comes when you realize that no matter how much you may be afraid of independence because of financial difficulties, it is the only way to live with human dignity. In a marriage based on the subordination of one spouse to another and on humiliation and bullying, a divorce is liberation, even if the spouse was "providing" for you and was assuring you that you will not survive without him.

The political situation in the region changed overnight. Even Arubans started to demand the withdrawal of the U.S. military from their territory. In Colombia the power was also about to change big time. Operation "Brion" helped to open the eyes of many Colombians as to what the U.S. "Plan Colombia" was actually all about, and what the consequences were of the course of the right-wing Colombian government if it brought it to its logical conclusion.

But things have changed not only in Latin America. Around the world, the countries which housed American and other NATO military bases were swept by a powerful wave of protest by the local population, demanding their closure and the expulsion of the American warriors back to their home. The slogan *"Yankee go home!"* found a new life. It became just as popular as throwing a shoe as a protest, after that heroic act of an Iraqi journalist in Baghdad⁸⁵⁹. And one of the most powerful anti-American speeches swept across South Korea.... The movement for the reunification of Korea gained a second wind.

I admit, when I heard about all this from Comrade Orlando, it took my breath away. I and Oisín looked at each other and, without saying a word, shook hands. It was hard to believe that we, two quite ordinary people, and our just as ordinary, quite earthly comrades were able by our actions on Curaçao

859 On December 14, 2008, Muntadhar al-Zaidi, an [Iraqi broadcast journalist](#), shouted "This is a farewell kiss from the Iraqi people, you dog" and [threw his shoes](#) at then-[U.S. president George W. Bush](#) during a [Baghdad press conference](#). Al-Zaidi's shoeing inspired many similar incidents of political protest around the world.¹ Following the incident, Al-Zaidi was "embraced around the [Arab world](#)"

to cause such a political earthquake in response. I was proud of it, and yet still could not fully imagine that all of this was really happening. Even when I closed my eyes. But I reminded myself that for almost 20 years I also could not believe what happened to the Soviet Union... And to believe in good news after so many years filled with despair and despondency was, believe you me, much more pleasant!

After that my attitude toward the Irish comrades also took on a new dimension. I wondered what they thought about what was happening now. Does Fionnntan know or at least, does he guess that I and Oisín are following in the footsteps of him and his companions?...

- And you didn't believe that we still have true revolutionaries! - Oisín mocked me.

- Don't remind me... I thought, if I had stay a little longer in that *Bigotia* of yours, I would even have started to believe that Dean Reed really had committed suicide in despair!

- Who is Dean Reed?

I just grabbed my head; because I had already told him about it, how could he forget! And I began to tell Oisín his story all over again....

That's how we spent our days...

According to Comrade Orlando, everything was more or less OK on Curaçao. None of our comrades was arrested, but they had to wind up their work for some time to come. And then again, it was too early to predict how this all would end. Tyrunesh was questioned at length about me and about the circumstances under which she had hired me, but she came out of it without a scar - among other things, possibly, because of her husband's family connections. There were no victims of the explosion and fire at the base: that Christmas disco certainly helped, as the majority of the personnel were away for the evening. Even Colonel Weterholt got away lightly. He, along with a couple of other soldiers, only got a bit of smoke inhalation. Although of course, he was in real trouble: he was fired with disgrace from the armed forces, was more or less made a scapegoat in the whole story, and a court martial was awaiting him. But there is no death penalty in the Netherlands...

The Colonel, oddly enough, still stubbornly refused to reveal who I was, and assured his superiors that he was lured into a honey trap by one of the local *Dominicanas*... Why, I do not know: maybe he was ashamed that he was so naive, or maybe he really had some sort of feelings for me.

The official version at the time was that Luis, Sam and Oisín (though his real identity remained unknown) were involved in the explosion on the base and "Saskia" was only an unsuspecting victim of his deception, since he used his marriage to her for his selfish "terrorist" purposes. But I was well aware that sooner or later my role in all of this too would be established. I was not particularly worried about it and tried not to think about the possible consequences for myself. What was the point to think about it now, especially since we did not have much choice?

...And the "Esperanza" already had long ploughed the Atlantic Ocean. A couple of times we were stopped by patrols: ironically, by the British. Britain, apparently, still felt it had the right to surf the seas, thousands of miles from its own shores, acting as if it had the God-given right to control the whole world. A leopard never changes its spots...

Comrade Orlando's documents, of course, were in order. And he naturally did not have drugs on board. We were registered as Canadian members of his crew; I was supposed to be a cook. I casually rattled pots in the galley as the inspectors walked around the yacht.

I was the only one who noticed how Oisín got all tense at the sound of the English accent - and I quickly knocked a pot of soup onto the floor, so I could ask him to clean the floor with a mop in order to somehow distract him. With relief, I saw that it helped: once he was busy with this task, he stopped paying attention to our uninvited guests.

- Any signs of Prince William on board⁸⁶⁰? Or maybe the poor fellow has a bit of a motion sickness? - I sneered, but not too loud, while they were examining the "*Esperanza*": the weather was stormy, and those "John Bulls⁸⁶¹", so to see, could not wait to get back to their own warm cabins.

Well, that was just handy for us...

From Comrade Orlando I understood that Oisín intended to return to Ireland. I was not surprised; I would have been rather surprised if he was going anywhere else. But Oisín was surprised when he learned - from the same Comrade Orlando! - where I intended to go.

- Are you serious? - he exclaimed.

- Of course, I am. What do you think?

- Are you still going to marry your Korean?

To be honest, it was painful for me to even think about all of this. Never mind to discuss such things with Oisín...

- Oisín, listen, let's not talk about this... Enough already of what has happened...

- And I thought... Is Ireland not good enough for you?

- Oisín, first of all, my kids are in Korea and I...

- Well, you can take them out of there, - and come to me in Dublin!

He could not even imagine what kind of longing for Korea I had from mentally comparing Dublin with Pyongyang...

I did not speak with Oisín about Korea anymore. But I couldn't simply forget Ri Rang and put him out of my mind, even if I wanted to. Even if he would not talk to me now... Mentally, I was preparing myself for just such a finale.

In fairy tales it all ends with "and they lived happily ever after." But life is not a fairy tale. And only Ri Rang finally helped me to believe that *we were born to make the fairy tale come true*⁸⁶²...

- *Soviética*, - Comrade Orlando said to me one morning in the saloon, and I suddenly noticed how serious his haggard face had become. - Circumstances have changed. Today, you may have to take your Irish comrade with you.

⁸⁶⁰ "Prince William, the second-in-line to the English throne, has joined an elite force of the British military on a secret training mission to fight pirates in the Caribbean. According to a report published in British tabloid 'The Sun', the 26-year-old Royal will experience how the Special Boat Service (SBS) unit deals with drug runners and pirates during his deployment"- November 21, 2008, Times of India.

⁸⁶¹ John Bull is a [national personification](#) of [Britain](#) in general and [England](#) in particular, especially in political cartoons and similar graphic works. He is usually depicted as a stout, middle-aged, country dwelling, jolly, matter-of-fact man. In Soviet cartoons was one of the main villain figures, along with Uncle Sam (USA).

⁸⁶² From "Aviation March" (or March of Aviators), a Soviet military song (1923) by A. Khait and P. Herman, official song of the Soviet military aviation.

- What happened? - I knew immediately that whatever it was, it was serious.

- They found out who he is... He cannot return to Ireland now. Soon we'll approach the islands of Tristan da Cunha, have you heard about them?

- I did, but not much. All I remember was that it is the permanent settlement most remote from any other human settlements in the world. Am I correct?

- Look what you know!.. It is called Edinburgh-of-the-Seven Seas. Officially it is a British territory, and though it is far from Britain, we have to watch out when we get there. We'll get supplies of water and food there. We are making a trip around the world, remember? We won't stay there long. At most for a day. The following morning, I'll take you to one of the uninhabited islands nearby and will leave you there. Don't be afraid, you won't have to wait long. If all goes as it should, within 12 hours you will be picked up by a Korean cargo ship, which is nearby.

- And if it does not go as it should?

- Then you will have to spend the night on that island and in the morning we will pass by again and will take you with us if you are still there. And then we will think what to do next. What do you think about that, Soviética?

- Actually, my name is Zhenya, - I finally decided to introduce myself to him. - You know, maybe I'm wrong, but I don't think this is the right time to talk to him about it. If we do, he might... I do not know what he might do, but if he finds out that instead of Ireland he would have to go to Korea.. Yes, cheating is bad. But what if it affects his life? You see, he was already in prison, and for so long that... In short, I will not let anything to happen to him again...

I could not speak further. Comrade Orlando gently hugged my shoulder.

- Please, do not be so... I myself was on the stage in *La Picota*⁸⁶³ and I know firsthand what prison life is like. It's good that you care so much about your comrade. Perhaps you're right. It's not just about him and what he wants, but also about the safety of other people. Take him to Korea for now, and then we'll see. Sinn Fein people have great connections in America. They might arrange for him to be left in peace, and then he could come back. And perhaps he will like it so much in Korea, that...

I did not want to talk to Comrade Orlando, what a complex tangle of human relationships our lives have become, so I just nodded.

- Yes, we'll see. The most important is for him not to fall into their hands!

...Surely, some other time I would have climbed around this Edinburgh-of-the-Seven-Seas, up to its most secluded corners: it's so interesting to visit a place almost untouched by tourists! But now I had other things to think about. And I stayed the whole day on board of the "Esperanza." Yes, probably, I will never in my life have another chance to visit these islands. But was that the main thing now? It was 2000 km from here to the island of St. Helena, and 2800 km to the Cape of Good Hope. And how far was it left for us till we reach *our hope*?...

...The next day the "Esperanza" dropped us off on a small uninhabited island, which was called quite appropriately - Inaccessible Island⁸⁶⁴. We had to get ashore by a small boat: at the Blenden Hall Bay, where the only hut on this island stood, rickety from constant drafts. For more than 100 years people

⁸⁶³ One of the most notorious prisons in Colombia

⁸⁶⁴ Inaccessible Island is an [extinct volcano](#) with Caim Peak reaching 449 m.. The island is 14 km² (5.4 sq mi) in area, rising out of the South Atlantic Ocean 45 km (28 mi) south-west of [Tristan da Cunha](#). Inaccessible Island is a protected wildlife reserve which has been designated as a United Nations-controlled [World Heritage Site](#) by [UNESCO](#).

had stayed in it only about 30 times: scientists, mainly ornithologists and botanists. The weather here was cool, to put it mildly. There was a strong wind. The island was covered with high grass, a myriad of birds lived on it. And a whole bunch of very cute penguins.

According to the rules in force on the islands of Tristan da Cunha, we were supposed to take a local guide and bring him back home before dark, but of course, in our case we could not act in accordance with the rules. And because of that the "Esperanza" did not take a direct course for Inaccessible Island, but left Edinburgh in the opposite direction. We spent almost half a day in this bypass manoeuvre. Comrade Orlando, who enchanted islanders with his wit, talkativeness and generosity, also managed to find out from them that there were no other tourists to the archipelago those days and that none were expected. The waters around the Inaccessible are declared a nature reserve out to 22 km, and this means that the Korean ship could approach it close enough. The local fishing companies are allowed to fish up to 3,000 metres from shore, but we weren't worried about them as the weather was too rough.

- What a place you came up with for this exchange! - grumbled Oisin, who knew already that we were about to move to another ship, but did not know yet how drastically our original plans were forcibly changed. - You couldn't find anything more difficult? How they are going to see us, how are we going to get to that ship? 22 km is not a joke! And what if a local patrol finds us here first? What stories should we invent for them?

Comrade Orlando had time to tell us that a local fishing patrol from Tristan da Cunha occasionally monitors the waters around the Inaccessible and that it has the power to arrest anybody who landed on this island without permission.

- They won't! - said Comrade Orlando confidently. - This patrol consists of only a couple of scientists, and I and those scientists had such a nice *celebration* of our acquaintance yesterday.... They will not want to patrol anything for another couple of days after that!

He always thought of everything... How would we manage without him?

- Plus, you are not going to harm any local flora and fauna. You won't even trample the grass. You will just sit quietly for the rest of the day in that hut. Tomorrow at dawn once again I will pass near the island. If by that time you haven't been picked up by those whom we expect, then you will go back to the "Esperanza", and we will sail to the Indian Ocean. Are there any questions?

- Do they know where to look for us? - I asked. - Or will we need to look out for them on the horizon from time to time and to wave to them as if we were shipwrecked?

- *They know everything they need to know*, - Comrade Orlando said with respect in his voice - So just you sit in that hut and don't stick out!

- Just look at those rocks, Orlando! Not only a ship, but the devil himself would break his neck over there! - exclaimed Oisin.

He was right. "The island is surrounded by cliffs on all sides, and to moor to it is very difficult. Even in good weather, landing is risky" - I thought about the lines that I read a day before. But Oisin does not know what they are capable of, the Koreans. The Koreans sailors, for example, were the first in the world to stand up to Somali pirates and fight back - and they beat them!

- I don't know what to say to you as goodbye, - said Comrade Orlando, when the time came for him to leave. - I want to say something important, something weighty, I want to express the extent to which we are grateful, but I am just getting tongue-tied... Let's not say goodbye, right? And it is not because

that's the English way of parting⁸⁶⁵, but simply because we will definitely meet in the future. Let's sit down before heading for the road, the way you Russians do.⁸⁶⁶

We sat down where we were, inadvertently scaring a flock of penguins.

Oisín curiously observed our Russian tradition, but did not comment.

After that, we walked with Comrade Orlando to the boat. Soon he disappeared out to the sea...

On that day Oisín was taciturn, and I knew the mood that was bothering him and did not try to start a chat. He huddled in the corner of the hut, curled up and tried to sleep sitting up. In the hut we had a small flashlight with batteries, our packaged cold dinner for two and two sleeping bags: just in case.

Evening came faster than we thought. In the hut we heard the noise of birds returning to their nests for the night. Sometimes outside we heard light quick steps: that was running penguins. Before this, I only saw them in the zoo...

Quickly it began to get cold, and soon my teeth were already chattering, despite two fleece jumpers donated by Comrade Orlando: it was not easy to get used to the cold night air after hot Curaçao.

As darkness deepened, the birds fell silent, and I lit the torch. Oisín remained silent and at times closed his eyes wearily. We had the sleeping bags but did not use them: we were both under such strain. Night seemed endless. At some point I gave up, opened the door, and gasped! The whole island was shrouded in thick fog! Well, now for sure not a soul would be able to get here... I was depressed and stared silently for a long time into that thick custard-like haze. Somewhere out there, thousands of miles away there was a struggle going on. The struggle for the future of humanity. But here it seemed as if the whole world was inhabited only by penguins and birds. Plus perhaps a couple of seals...

But I was wrong. At two AM we heard a slight rumble of the engine, and a small motorboat appeared in the bay like a ghost. What if it was a patrol from Tristan da Cunha? What if they had already managed to sober up?

I quietly closed the door and turned off our torch. Oisín was sleeping - sitting as he was - and did not even hear that I was back. The sound of the engine faded, and another twenty minutes later there was a soft knock at the door of our hut. A Spartak chant knock⁸⁶⁷! "*This is how our Spartak wins, this is how our Spartak wins!*"⁸⁶⁸ How do they know it here?

I did not respond.

- *Annyon hashimnika! Hapke kapsida! Bballi!*⁸⁶⁹

It was so familiar, though I still could not understand them, such sounds of the Korean language that were dear to me!

- *Bangap sumnida!* - popped up somehow magically in my memory - *Mannaso kamsahamnida!*⁸⁷⁰

Two Koreans in sailor's uniform entered the door: short, skinny, but bursting with strength, confidence and vigour. And when I saw them, I could not help it but cried aloud in Russian:

- *Our guys!*

⁸⁶⁵ In Russia it is common to think that English people part with each other without saying goodbye.

⁸⁶⁶ Russian tradition to sit down for a few seconds before departure (see previous notes)

⁸⁶⁷ Typical knocking or clapping of supporters of Spartak - well-known Soviet and Russian football (and ice hockey) team

⁸⁶⁸ Chanting of Spartak supporters

⁸⁶⁹ Hello! Please come with me. Hurry up! (Korean)

⁸⁷⁰ Glad to see you! Thank you for coming! (Korean)

Because that's what they were for me - *our guys*, no matter what language they spoke. I felt as if my batteries were recharged in a second. I felt like climbing the rocks, the way only they, the Koreans, are able to. I felt like singing and dancing. I felt like working in a field. I wanted to live as much as never before. Even the Inaccessible now did not seem so impregnable anymore. Next to Korean comrades I was not afraid of any mists, any treacherous ocean currents or any shoals or submerged rocks. With them, I was ready to go to the end of the world.

Oisin, who had just awakened, saw my shining face and those Asian sailors who were unfamiliar to him. He frowned and did not say a word. All the 22 kilometres in a motorboat to the Korean cargo ship he kept silent, shivering and wrapping himself in his black leather jacket, a farewell gift from Comrade Orlando.

He did not even ask me why we were picked up from the Inaccessible by Koreans. The very fact that it was them was enough for him. He did not know the sounds of the Korean language, and did not know anything about Korea, but with some sixth sense he immediately understood that it could not have been anyone else.

.. -You will leave me, Zhenya, I know. Your Korean...

- Oisin, come on, for God's sake!

- Maybe you're afraid of how your kids will feel about me?

- No I am rather afraid of how you will feel about them. You're not used to children, aren't you?

- Why not, I have lots of nephews!

I know what kind of nephews you have, I thought. And your next question, too, I know.

- Do you love him?

Well, there now!... But I did not want to talk about Ri Rang with him.

- What am I supposed to say to that, do you think?

- If yes, then what do you need me for? And if not, then why are we going there?

- And where on Earth would you like us to go to? I explained to you that you still cannot go to Ireland. Be patient, it's not forever. Your comrades will sort this out. Do you really want to land in Guantanamo Bay so much? And then, my children are in Korea, if you remember.

- And that's it?

- That's not enough for you? Well, it's a beautiful country, and I really love it. I really wanted to live there for a long time - long before I found out about your feelings for me, and long before we had to blow up this goddamn base!

.

For a week already we were living on board the Korean cargo ship, and my communication with Oisin became increasingly difficult.

I felt at home among these people, although I did not understand their language. We could communicate even without words. But in addition, Alina, the ship's doctor, was on the ship: a Korean, born in Soviet Tajikistan. A complete opposite of Zeena. And my acquaintance with her was for me a completely new page in my relations with compatriots abroad. I met a kindred spirit in her.

The fact that she was quite a young woman - a different generation than I, who only remembered the USSR as a child but very clearly shared my views on it - inspired me. No, with such young people *we will still have celebrations in our street*⁸⁷¹ in my lifetime! And it doesn't matter how many young people the bourgeois manipulators have managed to fool, like the friends of Dunno on the Fools Island. After all, we *win with ability, not with numbers*⁸⁷²!

We spent most of the time together. She told me a lot of things that were new to me about Korea: after all, she knew it better than I did. And I told her about everything that that I had experienced in the world of capital. Only one thing I did not tell Alina: about my relationship with Ri Rang. And about the role that Oisin had played in my life for some time.

But Oisin almost never left the cabin. Stunned by unfamiliar language, smells, tastes, rules and the atmosphere in general, he just turned his back to the wall when I knocked on his door and went to see him. When we met in the saloon for lunch or dinner, he ate almost nothing, listlessly picking at a plate of rice. He was losing weight by leaps and bounds. And he became more or less alive only at the sight of Korean sailors. But it was not a joyful excitement: he looked at them with such an inquisitive look, as if he suspected each of them of being my *chosen one*.

I could understand his feelings, but he had to understand too: for now it was the only chance for him to keep his freedom.

For myself I'm almost resigned to the inevitability that Ri Rang was lost to me forever: didn't his namesake from the famous traditional song run away through the mountain pass out of jealousy, without even finding out what really happened⁸⁷³? And that I would spend the rest of my life caring for Oisin - as I would for a brother, for a comrade. I don't have to love him to look after him, the way I love Ri Rang. It was enough that I valued my friendship with him.

One day Oisin's silence became unbearable. But, apparently, it had also become just as unbearable for him. That was when we started talking - see our conversation above... And I broke down and told him everything I thought.

- Oisin, dear, you need medical treatment, and there is nothing to be ashamed of about that. Let those who have tortured you be ashamed. Bastards! We'll find you good treatment, OK, you'll see! Please, do come with me. Please. I can not live in peace if you will go somewhere now, in your current state, and anything could happen to you. Do you understand this or not, you Irish blockhead?!

Alina came to my aid. She gave to Oisin something calming out of the medicine chest. Here they are, the benefits of socialism: you think all the capitalist ships have their own ship doctor? No bloody way. And how many of us, landlubbers, ever wondered what it is like to become sick while at sea?

Oisin long protested, but in the end we were able to make him to take a bit of this medicine.

- This is not some Western pile of chemical junk, - Alina admonished him - It's all based on purely natural ingredients.

Although I think that people in Western countries are afraid of everything natural and pure even more! But Oisin, to his credit, was brave enough and after regular use of Alina's medicines he gradually

⁸⁷¹ Russian equivalent of "Our Day Will Come"

⁸⁷² Famous expression of Alexandr Suvorov (1729-1800), well-known Russian Generalissimo

⁸⁷³ Arirang" is a [Korean folk song](#) that is sometimes considered the unofficial national anthem of Korea. Arirang is derived from the vocative 아 'a!' and boy's name 리랑 'Ri Rang' who is a hero of the Arirang story.

became much more balanced. Now he participated in my discussions with her, said hello to the crew, even started eating rice and - with his eyes closed! - kimchi.

We talked about Korea, about socialism, and I tried to share with him the optimism that was filling me up now, despite my almost mournful thoughts of Ri Rang.

- Oh my! You spent your whole life in struggle for the same things. That there would be no second-class citizens, that the nation would be reunited, that there would be no hungry, no homeless, no people who cannot afford medical treatment. For education being accessible to all, not just those who are able to hire private tutors for their children. For everyone to have a job. Wouldn't you like to see how it all works in reality? Try to live such a life for yourself?

- I'd like to, - Oisín hesitantly said - But...

And then he repeated all the wildest and most absurd fiction about the DPRK from the bourgeois press. I felt like Ivanushka from a fairy tale fighting with a three-headed serpent Gorynych⁸⁷⁴: as soon as I chopped off one head and began to overpower him, he immediately grew a new one. Arguments had no effect on Oisín: the bourgeois propaganda, absorbed by him in childhood with air itself, almost with mother's milk, crept into his mind at the subconscious level. And it was all the more surprising that in front of me was a real fighter for the independence of his own country and a real internationalist-soldier, of the same breed as those who fought in the 1930s in the International Brigades in Spain. A man who should know, it would seem, the real face of the bourgeois media and was aware of the progressive friends of the DPRK, such as Cuba. But, apparently, it was not easy to be completely free of the tabloid rags' dope for someone who had a pretty bad education. And he had such bad education only because in his country during all his life he was a second class citizen...

As in a fairy tale, I had to locate and cut off the *fiery finger*⁸⁷⁵ of the serpent of bourgeois manipulation, and then it would no longer represent a problem to cut off his head. And it could be done in only one way: Oisín had to see socialism with his own eyes. No wonder that folk wisdom says that it is better to see once than to hear a hundred times.⁸⁷⁶

But Korea was still far away. I have not verified our road on a map, but other socialist countries were clearly not along our road, plus we weren't going on shore. We had other things on our mind than the beauty of foreign lands... I only know that our cargo ship rarely approached the docks, preferring to stay at anchorage for long periods.

Then I took Oisín with me - to a party hosted by the Korean sailors on the ship for the birthday of one of them. It cannot be that he would not feel the beauty of human relationships and of all these people without exception belonging to a culture - a real culture, not a "culture of chewing gum"! Although...Kieran was never able to understand such things...

Oisín was visibly nervous when we found ourselves in this cheerful, noisy company. But as the evening went on, I saw how his expressive face was changing. How nervousness was giving way to interest, then to surprise, and soon - to admiration.

⁸⁷⁴ In [Slavic mythology](#), the word "zmeý" (masculine of "snake") is used to describe a [dragon](#). In [Russia](#) and [Ukraine](#), a particular dragon-like creature, Zmeý Gorynych has [three heads](#), is green, walks on two back paws, has small front paws, and spits fire. Ivanushka (Little Ivan) - most common main hero of Russian fairy tales.

⁸⁷⁵ Fiery finger - in some Russian fairy tales in order to kill the dragon hero has to chop off his "fiery finger" first, otherwise dragon's chopped off heads will grow again.

⁸⁷⁶ Russian proverb

- I did not expect them to be able to have fun, - he said to me with surprise. - I thought they were like robots, just following orders, you know?

I just laughed at him. *More is coming, oh-oh-oh!*⁸⁷⁷

The sailors sang, danced and recited poems in their native language (of course, by heart, without looking at a book!), organized sport team relay competitions... They did all that with ease, of course; it was clear that nobody was forced, they were enjoying it. Almost every one of them knew how to play a musical instrument. The Captain and the First Mate took part in all of this on a par with the ordinary sailors, and no compelling social distance was felt between them: only respect for the elders of the junior ranks, and a kind, fatherly attitude of the senior ranks to the younger sailors.

Oisín not understand their language, and neither did I, but he could feel that what he saw, what was unfolding in front of him, was completely new to him, unfamiliar to him, amazing human relations, and it was also a completely different attitude to life than the one where he was born and grew up. Being what he was, Oisín could, of course, appreciate the comradeship, but here it was of a completely new quality. It was *concentrated* in comparison with the *diluted* capitalist "*friendship is friendship, but keep our tobacco apart*"⁸⁷⁸. Here, *nothing was apart*. And for these people it was as natural as breathing.

When we returned to our cabins, I was so happy that Oisín seemed to have understood it all and appreciated it, and Oisín himself was deeply moved. But then at the door of his cabin he suddenly threw at me:

- Now I see why you love him... Why I am not a Korean!

And he suddenly pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket.

- Zhenya, I'm a bastard. Now you will hate me. Saoirse gave me this a hundred years ago, and I decided not to give it to you...

Oisín shoved a piece of paper in my hands. It was a letter from Ri Rang.

...I cannot say that I hated him after that. Yes, I was very hurt. But I just felt pity for Oisín after this. In the light of the fact that I now knew about his plight.

Before opening the envelope (naturally Oisín did not read the letter: it was in Russian, but he guessed by the handwriting that it was written by a man), I had a good cry - where no one saw me. When I opened it, I found that the ink had spread on a soaked piece of paper: I could only suspect that Oisín kept the letter in his pocket for all these months, including our diving into the Caribbean waters from a helicopter. The only thing that I was able to read, were the first two lines:

"Zhenya, little drop of my own blood! Snow and storms will soon give way to a new spring and to a summer that will bring everything back to life..."

If that were only true!

At the bottom I was able to make out: *"Warm greetings to you from Pyongyang. So warm that I'm even afraid to burn you.."*

After that, of course, I cried all night.

⁸⁷⁷ From Soviet singer Alla Pugacheva's (b.1949) popular pop song "First Grader's Song" (1977)

⁸⁷⁸ Russian proverb about limitations of friendship

The closer we came to Korea, the more nervous Oisin became. He completely stopped sleeping. Alina and I tried to calm him in chorus, and I didn't mention a word of what was in my mind since he told me about his *snatching* of that letter. But Oisin persistently wandered for hours at night on the deck until Alina gave him sleeping tablets.

And then, one fine day, when I already thought that everything was going to be fine, there was almost a tragedy. Oisin broke into the infirmary at night (locks were not used on most doors here as there was no need for them: this wasn't Europe) and almost emptied the ship's medicine chest... Early in the morning he was found lying on the deck by a Korean sailor, who raised the alarm.

Oisin was very lucky. Lucky that Koreans regularly patrol their entire ship. If he had lain so for at least an hour more, he wouldn't be with us today. Alina brought him literally back from the dead.

After that, I didn't leave him for the rest of our voyage, day or night. Days and nights merged into one solid, continuous duty. Alina sometimes literally forcibly made me go back to my cabin to get some sleep. To be honest, to look after Lisa was easier than to look after Oisin. But I was not going to give up. He does not know Russian women yet! We brought much harder cases back to their feet.

The Korean sailors sympathized with me. I do not know what they knew about us, but one or the other comrades regularly brought me something nice, and the First Mate, Park In Mo, who spoke Russian, even got hold of "*How the Steel Was Tempered*⁸⁷⁹" for me somewhere. In Russian!

Two weeks later, Alina told me that it was only three days' journey left to Korea

It was the beginning of April.

On a fresh spring evening, our ship entered the port of Wonsan. Cheerful sailors trooped down into small boats, rushing to the shore: we stood at anchorage again, because of the ebb. Each of them said goodbye to me personally. But I myself was in no hurry to leave: Alina told me to wait until an ambulance would arrive on shore for Oisin. He was still very weak, though he was attempting to get up. Shortly before arriving at Wonsan Alina gave him a sleeping pill, and now Oisin was sleeping like a baby.

I was summoned by the First Mate: the one who spoke Russian, Comrade Park. He said that he had news for me, but he did not mention if they were good or bad.

I went into the saloon, not knowing what to expect.

- Ah, Comrade Kalashnikova! - He greeted me in good Russian - Welcome back, and with the victory! You are now *in a special account with us*. Your fiancé is waiting, poor guy, his eyes are all red from looking for you...

Who on Earth teaches them all these expressions in Russian?

- He's here, he's in port. He came *specifically* to say goodbye to you.

- To say goodbye?

⁸⁷⁹ *How the Steel Was Tempered* (1936) is a Soviet classic [socialist realist novel](#) written by [Nikolai Ostrovsky](#) (1904–1936) during [Stalin's](#) era.

Does that mean Ri Rang already knows everything? Well, surely, their intelligence is working like a clock!

I was so tired I could not even feel anything. Well, maybe it's for the better. This way I would not have to explain anything to him....

- Yes, for a few months. He is going on a mission. It's a miracle that you managed to catch him. His command allowed him to come here. Will you invite us to the wedding?

- What; is the date already set? - it was so unexpected that I got frightened. After all, Ri Rang does not know yet about my shameful behaviour! - So, was our request granted?

- Yes, yes, it was, no doubt! And to set a date - that's your mutual task with him.

I felt that I was about to faint.

- Oh, what a *fine chap* he is, Comrade Song! *A true falcon!*

I was ashamed: so ashamed that I almost felt like jumping overboard.

Before I could even digest everything I heard and to think what I should say to Ri Rang, he burst in - literally flew into the saloon, as if on wings.

Ri Rang had not changed a bit over the past two years; maybe he just became a little thinner. His anthracite eyes sparkled. His engraved profile looked very much like a Korean soldier from a poster - the one hitting a long-nosed American with rockets in his hands with the barrel of his rifle. Maybe this poster was painted from him? The military uniform terribly suited him.

My heart began to pounce at the sight of him. Pounce happily, just as before. But with what eyes could I look at him now?..

- Zhenya-*tongmu*⁸⁸⁰, it's so great that you're finally here! And what a pity that I have to leave... But I'll be back: as soon as the mission is over, and then...

- Ri Rang... You know that my comrade is seriously ill, and I decided to bring him with me to Korea...

- I know. Good woman! You were right. That's why I love you. To leave a comrade in need is the worst thing there could be! Especially such a comrade. Nurse him, treat him as long as necessary. We have good doctors. They can put even dead people on their feet, if they are needed for the Revolution. And it does need people like your comrade. And our President Kim Il Sung always said, "the flower of Revolution must never fade."

What did I have to say to this? It was an *iron revolutionary logic*...

I was embarrassed, ashamed to the core. As befits a Korean, Ri Rang was very sensitive to the moods of others, and he felt my state of mind as if by an invisible antenna. This is called *nunchi*⁸⁸¹ in Korean. One cannot hide anything from them, but I didn't intend to hide anything.

- Ri Rang, I...

- Don't say anything, Zhenya. If you say anything now, it will be *not the right thing*, you know? You must also have a very good rest. To *turn off your communication lines* for a while. You are just getting

⁸⁸⁰ Comrade (Korean)

⁸⁸¹ Nunchi refers to a concept in [Korean](#) culture that describes the subtle art and ability to listen and gauge others' moods. Nunchi is literally translated as "eye-measure"; the sublime art "to listen and to perceive the mood of the other." In Korea, it is the person's kibun being read, which is his or her pride, mood, or state of mind. It is of central importance to the dynamics of [interpersonal relationships](#) in [Korean culture](#).

slightly crazy at the moment. I see. Because you are exhausted. You and your comrade have helped to prevent a terrible imperialist crime against a brotherly nation. And this is what is important. I am proud of you. And between you and me everything will be *as it should*, you'll see. Don't worry.

"And *how should it be?*" - I thought.

- You think so? - I asked mechanically, feeling how really incredibly tired I was.

- I am certain, - he said, just like Shurik from our film⁸⁸². (Has he seen "*Ivan Vasilyevich...?*"). - Women like you, Zhenya, *don't grow on trees*.

I almost snorted out loud and immediately felt better.

- You think so? Thank you!

- You see, *maybe there are just a few of us, but it's quite clear that we are the ones wearing striped vests*⁸⁸³. And that is why in the end victory will be ours!

"Even if some irresponsible people will have to be kicked all the way to the bright future," - I thought with a smile. "*If you can't do it, we'll teach you, if you don't want to do it, we'll make you, but we'll not let you shame our squad!*"⁸⁸⁴

- At home all is well; everything is alright with your kids. You will not recognize them, so well-behaved they are now. They have learnt to play a Korean drum. My girls have become great friends with them. And our mothers are also friends: - my mum remembers a little Russian, after all, she once studied in the USSR. Your mum also already knows a few words in Korean. *She will go far in life!*

Now he is going to say that my twins are already calling him dad, and it will be *a blow below the belt...*

-When I'll return, I'll take you'll to the Kumgang mountains for the weekend. We'll go camping, take the kids with you. We'll arrange a picnic. You would drop dead, how beautiful it is there! You are not even allowed to die until you'll see the nine dragons. I will bath you in a lake, my darling. We'll look together at the stars. We'll sing. I will teach you Korean songs - with these words Ri Rang slightly blushed: probably he remembered our singing session and night rain in Kaesong. For some reason the verse of Sharaf Rashidov⁸⁸⁵ came to my mind. "*Do not be shy of my passionate eyes..*".

He did not say it.. He did not want to hit me below the belt. I was in complete disarray. What do I want from life? I involuntarily pictured myself frolicking with the children in the mountains, their laughter, a tent, a campfire, blooming heather, Ri Rang bathing me in a lake... Love is not just a relationship of two people, it is also a family and there's no getting around it.

⁸⁸² Quote from *Ivan Vasilievich Changes Profession* is a [Soviet comedy film](#) produced by [Mosfilm](#) in 1973. This film is based on a play by [Mikhail Bulgakov](#) and was one of the most attended movies in the Soviet Union in 1973 with more than 60 million tickets sold.

⁸⁸³ This expression first appeared during World War II in the speech of Soviet Navy sailors who were famous for their courage and heroism, when they were involved along with the infantry in combat on land. The expression means: we are few, but we are serious opponents for the enemy and it's hard to defeat us.

⁸⁸⁴ One of the motto's of Soviet Yong Pioneers. This principle was often used in the USSR.

⁸⁸⁵ Sharof Rashidovich Rashidov (1917 - 1983) was a Communist Party leader in the [Uzbek](#) Soviet Socialist Republic and a [CPSU Central Committee Politbureau](#) candidate member between 1961 and 1983. He was also writing poetry as a hobby, and one of his verses became a song.

- I remember... - I said. And I softly sang "*Soldiers Answer*", like that night in Kaesong... - But what if that dragon would become angry with us?

- You're still the same! My darling little jester...

He put his arms around my shoulders: gently and softly, as he did the first time. The way they embrace in our Soviet films from the 1950s. I was still not used to such treatment, and for that reason alone already it felt as if I was about to fly up to the sky.

Here you are, precious world of real feelings and real people!

Ri Rang radiated such calm, such confidence, such understanding - without words, that my heart felt quiet and warm, as on a frosty winter day near a freshly-heated stove. For the first time in the last two weeks, I felt relaxed. He took both my hands in his, intertwined our fingers and touched my forehead with his.

- Here, look for yourself... Are you happy?

- Very, - I answered honestly.

- So am I. Do you feel *the harmony*?

- I do.

- Well, then everything will be in order...

- But how....

He put my hands around his neck.

- *That's how.*

And I suddenly felt the stress evaporate from me like air from a punctured balloon, as if Ri Rang was absorbing it into himself. How my *kibun*⁸⁸⁶ is recovering. And I felt that really, no matter what would I say now, it would not have been *the right thing*.

- Ri Rang, you're a wizard! - I exclaimed.

Ri Rang gently pulled me towards him. Then he took my face in his hands and looked me deep in the eyes.

- No, *I'm still in training*⁸⁸⁷. I am not *that* Ri Rang who would run over the mountain pass without looking back. You understand me, Zhenya?

Did I understand him right?...

⁸⁸⁶ In the Korean culture people striving to reach harmony. The disturbance of harmony is equal to the disrespect of the partner. "Kibun" is the expression of the feelings, and moods, the state of mind, while "nunchi" is the instrument for understanding the *kibun* of the other person.

⁸⁸⁷ I'm not a wizard yet, I'm still in training (Young Page in "Cinderella" by Evgeny Schwartz, famous Soviet film from 1947)

From outside the portholes came thunder: while we were talking, clouds gathered in the sky, and a thunderstorm broke. Ri Rang laughed: with a happy, full-fledged laugh at the sound of which my heart almost jumped out of my chest with joy.

- Look, Zhenya, - he said - it's happening again. Look what you've brought with you. This is the first spring thunderstorm. Rain just keeps following us right at our footsteps. So, *we definitely will have to be happy*.

- Ah, Ri Rang! - I cried. I was unable to say any more. The only thing I wanted now was for the clock to stop forever.

But somebody was already knocking at the door.

- I have to go, Zhenya, - whispered Ri Rang, lifting his lips from mine. - But I'll be back sooner than you think... "*Do not cry, little girl!*"⁸⁸⁸ By the way, your mother and the boys and Lisa are already waiting for you in the harbour.

Already on the run to the door Ri Rang turned to me:

- You remember, Zhenya, you said that you know Amharic? And I'm good at Chinese... What do you think? Is this not a useful combination? "*Our best song hasn't been performed yet...*"⁸⁸⁹

- And *the best girl is still somewhere ahead*⁸⁹⁰? - I blurted out.

- No, why should she be? Where the best girl is, I already know! - And he winked at me dashing. - There is no need to look for her anymore.

The door slammed. And in that moment I was pierced by an insight: why was I so foolishly afraid that I and Ri Rang might not find common language because of our different cultures, not realizing how close he is to me, to my ideals and to my way of life, despite any cultural differences? Yes, we are not *of one blood, he and I*⁸⁹¹, but we are of the same ideology. The same ideals. And that is so much more important.

The thing is that Ri Rang is just *ours!* He is a Socialist Man. And he knows it too, which is why he is not *running away through the mountain pass*. Because he understands that I had made a mistake. He is wise enough to forgive me. At this thought I felt such a lump coming up in my throat that I...

A Oisín... Well.... Oisín is just a brave and long-suffering *alien* abducted from his home planet by a brave starship captain Yevgenia Kalashnikova and brought by her to her home planet *Soviética*. Will he be able to breathe with our Earth's oxygen? Will he like it in Korea? Who knows... Native Belfast men long awfully for their city, even when they live in Dublin.

Meanwhile Oisín slept. In his sleep he had a baby-like, open, serene face. Probably that's what he was like prior to his arrest. When he was still himself. I gently stroked his hair. He smiled in his sleep like the Cheshire Cat (God forbid, if he finds out I compared him with an English cat!) And he turned over on the other side.

No one else will ever hurt you, my dear comrade! No matter what happens next, I will not let anyone hurt you anymore, ever. I will do everything to make you happy. Just as I am now happy myself.

⁸⁸⁸ "Do No Cry, Little Girl!" - popular Soviet song from 1971 addressed to a girl whose boyfriend is joining the Soviet army for 2 years of service.

⁸⁸⁹ Words from "Everything Is Still Ahead" - popular Soviet song performed by Mark Bernes in the 1950s

⁸⁹⁰ From the same song

⁸⁹¹ Rudyard Kipling, "The Jungle Book"

In the distance I could see the green shore.
The shore where they were waiting for me.
The shore where flowers of Revolution never fade.

Life is just beginning!

Our struggle is just beginning...

Necessary Epilogue

Well, here we are then... The book has come to an end... But it's still very hard for me to believe in it, and I am surprised myself at how hard it is for me to part with its heroes. I've grown so used to them during these months, so related to them that they have become an integral part of my life.

To tell you the truth, I never thought that I would have to write an epilogue to this trilogy: it seemed to me that all in my book speaks for itself. But after some feedback from readers, I realized that some clarification would still be necessary.

Many readers automatically identify me with the main character and believe that absolutely everything described in the book, has happened to me personally. I'll have to disappoint them. My heroes are just as much real people as the characters of Tolstoy's "War and Peace" or Sherlock Holmes of Conan Doyle.

In such places nowadays authors usually put a disclaimer. Something in the sense of, "*It's not me, and over there what you see is not my mare*"⁸⁹². Well, we can also pay respect to this fashion: I can say, of course, that all the characters and events are a pure invention. Except for the Soviet reality! And, unfortunately, the capitalist reality too...

"Any resemblance to reality, and any similarity to real people are a pure coincidence", and there you go then! And if it still appears to someone that he or she recognizes himself or herself in this novel, then I can answer to them with a folk's saying: "*If something appears to you, make the sign of the Cross!*»

Someday perhaps I'll write a separate story about the difficult circumstances in which this book was created. I can only say with certainty that many of today's "trendy" writers in such circumstances would just give up on it. Originally, I had planned to complete this task within six months, but it took me almost a year. However, against my will there were some long breaks in my work during this period, and sometimes it even seemed to me that I would not find the strength - both physical and emotional - to complete it. And at such moments, I reminded to myself that I am, like my main character, a Soviet woman, and then reached out for a pen again... Now, when the work is done, I feel that I could probably sleep for a week. But there is no time to sleep: I still have to make adjustments and to check the material that is now ready!

If we set aside the practical side of the writing process and move on to its creative side, one of the most difficult things in the course of my work on this book was how to write chastely about the dirty things, which, alas, are inevitable part of the capitalist way of life, and we are facing them now daily, there is no escape from their flood under capitalism. But a dignified person still has to stand up to them. I hope that I managed to describe this side of life with enough tact, because to a true Soviet person, any such dirt which is attacking us from all directions under the guise of "freedom of expression", is still deeply shocking and disgusting. At the same time, not to write about these things at all, to pretend that they do not exist would in our current circumstances mean to give up the struggle against all sorts of nastiness.

In the course of writing the book I received from my readers a variety of tips for which I am very grateful to all of them. Yes, we still remain "the land of the Soviets"⁸⁹³, and I do not mean by these

⁸⁹² Russian saying meaning denial of something. In Soviet books, disclaimers were not required, and for a Russian reader they remain a very strange idea.

⁸⁹³ "Soviet" means not only "council", but also "advice" in Russian

words any kind was a jokingly meaning⁸⁹⁴. I can even to reveal that it was some readers' advice that has influenced how my story ends.

The advice were very different in nature: they were both on what I should or should not write, according to readers, and how, in their opinion, the main characters should or should have behaved. I must admit, I was pleased that some of my readers took to heart the fate of the heroine so much that they even offered advice on how to arrange her personal life the best, in order to "avoid causing onslaughts of the philistines" (although, in my opinion, it is clear that people like my heroine, would not be worried the slightest of what the philistines might say about them). There was even a case where a reader sincerely believed all the events of the final part of the trilogy and was literally reproaching me for "exposing the underground work and underground internationalist fighters to the clutches of the imperialist intelligence services." I considered it to be a greatest possible compliment to myself as a writer, the fact that this reader believed so unconditionally in my story!

Some criticism, too, of course, came: for example, about the fact that too many foreign words and expressions are used in the story, and too frequently, even though I tried to use them in their original form, with translation or explanation in the footnotes, rather than the form of "new Russian" neologisms in horribly distorted Cyrillic. The fact is that when a person lives for a long time in the atmosphere of a different language and culture, it is very difficult to keep in touch with his or her mother tongue in pristine, pure form: after a period of time you involuntarily begin to think and even to dream in different languages, and not because of some "showing off" or because you want to. This is just the reality of everyday life far away from your native land. My character lives in exile, and it seemed like to me to reflect this as part of her life, although after reading the comments I became more careful in using this technique.

There were also suggestions that "a description help to someone somewhere in Venezuela would not inspire anyone in Russia for anything" (I hope that this is not the case, because what matters, is not Venezuela as such, but the fidelity to your ideals, no matter where your fate might bring you or might throw at you !) and some accusations of "international homelessness" of the characters (it is probably the new, capitalist Russian reality that has taught some of our communists to look at the homeless people with such social-Darwinist contempt! In such case, Che Guevara, and other internationalists could be also called "international vagabonds"), and even a dubious compliment to me comparing my story with... "The Gulag Archipelago", only with the prefix "anti-." Again, I hope that my book is in no way similar to this opus, albeit with opposite sign. But in general, as we say, "*you can even call me a pot, just heat me not!*"⁸⁹⁵

Many of those who remember life in the Soviet Union, happily responded to memories of it, but would like to see in this book only that: our mutual unforgettable memories of our country.

Yes, it's important to tell the truth about life in the Soviet Union to our young people who know already virtually nothing about this life and judge it based on such rubbish films as the notorious "Bastards"⁸⁹⁶ and on the lampoons of various scribblers- recipient of grants and international (read - imperialist) literary and political Prizes. It is important to talk about Soviet reality also to our foreign friends, many of whom, even with all their sympathy for the Soviet Union and socialism, yet do not really know anything about our everyday life at that time and thus subconsciously believe in some

⁸⁹⁴ Old Soviet joke: in a shop, customer asks for some meat, the saleswoman: "I do not have meat, but I can give you an advice." Customer: "I don't need advices, I want meat." Saleswoman: "Then go to Argentina, that's country of meat, and our country is a country of advices (Soviets)!"

⁸⁹⁵ Old Russian expression meaning "Words will pass, only blows fall heavy"

⁸⁹⁶ Extremely anti-Soviet film about WWII, made in Russia in 2006 based on a fiction story

spread by imperialist horror stories.. I think it is also very important to give an unvarnished story of life in the countries which many of my compatriots out of habit still consider to be “very civilized”, in one way or another, or look upwards at them. And I want to emphasize that despite the abundance of characters of various nationalities in this book, it is intended primarily for our domestic reader - in the broad, Soviet sense of the word “domestic.”

But still, this book is more than just memories of the USSR, or criticism of the "corrupting influence of the West"⁸⁹⁷ And I'll try to explain why. Because there are already quite a few nostalgic memoirs published about the Soviet Union, but still very few books that would call on people to fight the surrounding us evil. This book aims to provide the reader with hope and to inspire him for the resistance, not just for memories. Because, as my Korean comrades say, *'a pen can pierce the enemy's heart, when a bullet failed to pierce it.'*

So, what is my book about?

It is about loyalty to your ideals, about how not to give up when everything seems so hopeless, how to remain true to yourself under any circumstances, how to find your place in life where, apparently, there is no any place not only for exploits, but even for any unselfish, not aimed at "making money by all means" actions. It is about the fact that there comes time in life when you cannot "remain neutral", that "neutrality" doesn't really exist in the world, that behind this beautiful word hide indifference and selfishness.

I would like to say a few words to my friends who will read this book, especially the Dutch and the Irish friends. I hope that you will be wise enough not to take any critical passages about things I have witnessed in your respective countries, as something personal. I deeply respect you and appreciate your friendship.

There were also some people who inspired me to write this book with their negative actions, which, apparently, only strengthened my desire to complete my work: it is not the time or place to name them now, but I am grateful to them too. They helped me to really feel and understand my own strength as a Soviet person.

To my friends in the socialist and developing countries: you are my inspiration! More, you are the hope of the mankind. As long as we will remain united with you, we are invincible! As soon as we would start thinking of ourselves as "white", we can be written off as a nation.

My Soviet friends, please do remember that you are always and everywhere with me, even if I do not receive any messages from you already for a long time. Even if some of you are no longer with us. Please never forget how lucky we are that we had the opportunity to live in the Soviet Union, where life that for most of humanity remains just a happy utopia, was quite a tangible reality for us. The future is ours!

I would like to conclude my little epilogue with the lines of the Soviet poet Robert Rozhdestvensky, from "The Song of Elusive Avengers" of the filme "Crown of the Russian Empire." These lines are about the Soviet people and their place in the history of mankind:

Our day is not gone,

It will recur as a song,

Years after narrators will come.

⁸⁹⁷ Common expression in the USSR for bourgeois influences

**Being as the truth plain,
Our lives haven't passed in vain.
In chants and sagas we'll re-rise as the dawn.**

Let us be worthy of our fathers and grandfathers. Let's live our lives not in vain!

Irina Malenko

January 2009

Appendix.

READERS LETTERS.

"This is the best book about our generation (after "Generation P (:))"

"Irina Malenko's novel "Soviética" that is being published on the website Left.ru is a wonderful example of how the great tradition of Russian realism literature can be carried on today. This is an honest, poignant book. It has all the things for which we have longed so strongly during many years of the unchallenged dominance of various postmodern stuff in our literature. There is ruthless self-criticism, sincere pain and shame for those citizens, with whose criminal connivance dashing rogues have robbed us of our Motherland, the ability to empathize with other's grief as her own, Internationalism with a capital letter "I", organic continuation of the "universal responsiveness" of a Russian person. Real humour: sometimes kind, often sarcastic, but never arrogant, never aloof, never the kind of "jokes" that humble man, cut him down, as it is so common today from those authors who have finally "made it" into literature.. And most importantly, this book is a call to fight and a call of hope! We can put up with the cruel and unjust reality, can try to adapt to the "new reality", can get away from it in the "parallel life", standing like a preying mantis and waiting for its chance to break into the ranks of the few who have "succeeded" and "take everything from life." Or we can refuse to exist in accordance with their nasty rules, stop singing to their tune, choose to be on the side of the weak and the oppressed, and enter into a long, relentless struggle against the main evil of our time: capitalism and imperialism. And to find a purpose in life, and hope for a better future for ourselves and our children. Postmodernism says "goodbye" to us today. Long live the socialist realism! "

Ilya Ioffe

<http://www.left.ru/2008/13/ioffe182.phtml>

"It's a classy "Anti-Gulag Archipelago "- against capitalism...

The main character...is not the narrator, but her look at capitalism: through the eyes of a Soviet person. This hopelessness, this life without a future for millions of people who find themselves under the umbrella of capitalism. This is a life worthy of plants: to be born, to find some minimum habitat area, to stay in it for several decades, crouching to the ground during the financial storms, then getting straightened again and... to realize that the life, the real life has already passed you by. Capitalists carefully conceal from people the fact that they live the life of plants, and the people accept it as a fact, as a given that a parasite grows and stretches himself next to them, they do not realize that they can take this parasite out: the capitalism that smothers all their life; for them, it is the norm.

They just do not guess and do not want to guess that capitalism sucks everything out of them, all their life forces and that if they had removed it, it will be easier for them to live. But for that, one must be able to think, and most importantly, to act..."

Larissa Babienko

"I just finished reading your chapter nine, and of course, I cried. You wrote a good book. You wrote it out of the name of all of us. We need so much to open people's eyes to the fact of what we have lost."

Julia, a reader

"Just finished reading the trilogy "Sovetica." of Irina Malenko.

To say that this book has made a very deep impression on me, is an understatement.

The book is very powerful and shocking, despite the happy ending for the main characters. It is shocking because its story is real, not invented, because its characters and circumstances are taken straight out of life.

It is shocking as a look of a person who came into a world of creatures that look no different than humans, but they quite frankly do not understand why someone should need to read books, and most of all they value in life trinkets and wrappers.

And when the main character found this out, it turned out that there was no place to return to. Because her own world was also captured and consumed by the same two-legged consumers.

But surely, there must be still a real, human life somewhere?

"Zhenya... I will not ask you where you're going or why. I Just want to know what made you take this decision - said Ri Rang to me already near the door of our hotel.

I thought for a second: how best to express it in words.

- Because I can no longer sit and watch without any action how our planet is being taken over by the scab.

- The scab?

- Well, this is a contagious disease in plants. In our garden back at home we had some pear trees. First, just one tree's leaves became covered with black spots, but none of us paid any attention to it. A year later, all the pears on it were already covered with these black spots, and they became inedible. One of the neighbours told us, "That's not a big deal, you still have another pear tree, behind the house." Indeed, the disease has not yet spread to that one. "No," - said my grandfather - "If we do nothing now, then the next year the healthy tree is going to become ill too."... Do you understand, Ri Rang?

He nodded:

- I understand."

And of course, the writing talent of the author is of great importance.

Personally, I read it avidly. Read this book, it is very much worth it!

Maria Donchenko (<http://ustik.livejournal.com/99029.html>)

I finished reading it. Well, almost: I am now at the half of part 3.. What can I say... It's powerful! For a long time I have not read as if drinking alcohol, - and that's from the computer screen as well! But here, I just couldn't pull myself off it, until I fell asleep at my laptop, when the sky was already turning light. Very "tasty" - almost tangible descriptions of places and events. I share many of your thoughts.

Konstantin Ananich

“Sovetica..”.

It has been a long time since I read like this: especially from a computer screen! - until dawn, and when I woke up, I just wanted to continue. But strange enough, that's exactly what happened. I am reading the story of Irina Malenko - "Sovetica."

It may look controversial, it may be not “polished”, but in my opinion, it is certainly talented. It is much more than “emigrant prose.” More than nostalgic memories about the Soviet Union. More than a story of a difficult life in a difficult time. It is also an attempt to understand what is happening. I cannot re-tell the story to you, you'll have to read it. But I have to warn you: a couple of pages would not do, you will not understand it from just a couple of pages.

<http://kgx.livejournal.com/52387/html>

"Hello, Irina.

I am now reading your novel "Sovetica" and I wanted to share with you my impressions.

At first it scared me by its cloying nostalgia... I already wrote to you that I am skeptical about nostalgic feelings and manifestations. But reading on, I became increasingly fascinated by this story. I came to the conclusion that your story is very similar in spirit to my website and reflects exactly what I wanted to express creating this site: sovetika.ru. I wanted to make it clear that there was a different space, apart from that what is given to us now in textbooks, in some TV programs, ie, different historical space than the one, which is now being imposed on us. A bitter feeling that the country that we had, is gone, is no longer there. You wrote a really cool book! I will continue to read it..

Sincerely, **Dmitry Lastov**, administrator and author of the websites

"Sovetika.ru» <http://www.sovetika.ru> - site of the Soviet time.

"SovKino.info» <http://www.sovkino.info> - site of the Soviet cinema."

<http://lj.rossia.org/users/vaduc/1779.html>

Irina Malenko "Sovetika" - I recommend it

Thanks to my beloved friends I just came across on the website Proza.ru, the full version of the trilogy "Sovetica.", by Irina Malenko. Before that I read this book, chapter by chapter, when it was posted once a month on the website left.ru.

So, download this imperishable piece in full from that site!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yasMT0vZXqU>

"That is why I think that the mission of our generation, born in the Soviet Union, is to transfer knowledge about our country to our children and grandchildren: we are the keepers of collective memory. Following the example of Irina Malenko, who has written an excellent novel "Sovetica" (which can be found through Google)."

<http://yamert.livejournal.com/80961.html>

"Today I decided that I haven't been on the website left.ru for some time. I visited it and came across an amazing and sad story about a woman who has left to live, study and work abroad after the collapse of the Soviet Union. First to Holland and then to Ireland.

Incidentally, this is only part of the trilogy "Sovetica." In this episode there is basically the story of the life of the heroine (Yevgenia Kalashnikova) in Northern Ireland, her participation in Sinn Fein and her acquaintance with «the boys» - the IRA.

There is also enough of the bitter truth about the reality of the West for women from the former Soviet Union. But the advantage of this novel is that its main character is not an innocent victim, but a desperate fighter for better life: not just for herself and her daughter, but also for the others.

I liked the story of Yevgenia -how in Northern Ireland the IRA militants dealt with the drug dealers while the police remained inactive.

(...)

The author is Irina Malenko. Never heard of her before. A Google search revealed that Irina has written many stories- on Cuba, on North Korea, on the Netherlands and Ireland. Apparently, she is a real, decent person. I will try to read more stuff from her in my free time, I liked it very much."

"Dear Yevgenia!

Sorry to call you by the name of your heroine, I found no middle name, no matter how often I re-read your book. I'm not such a fan of correspondence, but this time I realized that I simply have to write you a letter. The fact is that for many years I was reading all your articles, but after the publication of the chapters of the "Sovetika" I realized that I am constantly mentally talking to you. On quite different topics. All of what you write, is surprisingly close to me. I can not even explain it: we have had rather different kind of lives, and our characters are probably, different too. And yet, I simply can not read "Sovetica" without tears. Please, forgive me, for God's sake: I understand that when an unknown man writes something like this to you, I know, it sounds quite strange. But I decided to myself that if I would really dare to write to you, I would not follow any epistolary forms, but would just write it down as it is.

My name is Michael. I'm a little bit older than you. At the time, I also went to the West (1993). Lived first in Palestine (in my defence I can only say that I did it for my biology thesis and lived there a purely university life), dreaming to leave that place. Then I moved to Canada. I left science and became a school teacher. I lived among the Indians in a reservation, among the Inuit's in the Arctic Quebec... But I knew that it was all temporary. Then something happened that I have long planned, I came back (in 2006). Not to Moscow, where I lived before, but to Belarus. Now I live in a small town near Minsk. I live alone with my daughter. Anya is 10 years old, I adopted her from Russia while still living in Canada, from a Siberian orphanage (how many children are now abandoned in our country, you probably know yourself). So, everything related to your childhood, I read together with Anya.

She especially remembers how you played war after watching ..". The Dawns Here Are Quiet." It is also one of her favourite movies, but she always cries and goes out of the room in the fragment when Lisa Brichkina drowns. But no, I suppose, the reason why I feel so close to your tone and the words of your memories is much more because what for you was natural already in your childhood, for me was the acquisition of my already mature years. At least, I started to think about it many things and to understand something about our socialist life quite late, already living in the West.

And I was very interested in your articles about North Korea. I love this country without even having visited it, already for a long time, even though I know very little about it and probably do not fully understand it.

With respect and kindest feelings,

Michael, Belarus"

"Good evening, Irina!

I was just about to write to you that yesterday I completed reading all your "Sovetica" - I was up until 2 AM, reading. Today is my first day at a new job, and I almost fell asleep at my desk :-)) I was so fascinated by reading last night that could not pull myself off it!

Thank you very much for your work, for your the miles of stretched nerves that you spent on writing it! Any plans for a book release?"

Kirill Danilin, Dublin (originally from Latvia)

"Converted it into audio format, saved it on my flash stick, am listening, almost at the end of the first part, it is such a powerful thing: it feels warm and sad at my heart at the same time.. Thanks for the link."

[# t743587](http://kgx.livejournal.com/52387.html?thread=743587)

"Thank you very much! I felt as if I was drinking fresh water after a poisoning, when reading your novel. But sometimes it was so painful, I felt so ashamed or so angry that I almost could not continue to read. I would like for your book to be translated into English. Actually, I want to make it widely known!

I confess, I have long lived like a zombie under the capitalist "spell." The only problem was that I felt severely depressed: I did not want to live by the new rules, "to seek" what is customary to "achieve" today, and to dream about what we are supposed to dream.

I am very grateful to you. In addition, I believe that you are a real fighter, an incredibly confident person, independent and fearless.

Olga Vassilyeva

"Hello, Irina!

I was going to write to you again for some time, but was putting it off, because I wanted to say to you so much. I will write to you now only what I can write... And now, just because of my time constraints, I will only say to you as to the author of "Soviética", that it is not just a novel, that this is not just a book, it's a wonderful story that captures, that weaves into one a lot of genres: a bit of a detective, and something nostalgic and melodramatic... and most importantly, it raises a number of questions about your generation, and about mine too.

Please do not think it's just words, but your book is exceptional. I became part of it, it is now my favourite reading, I agree with many of the conclusions about the Soviet past and do not agree with some, but agree with most of them... and I often regretted that I had not initially picked up a pencil, that would allow me to make notes while reading...

This is a great work done by you, and most importantly, I think that everything is done is very, very professional. I printed out the book from a number of sites, and it is a big pile of papers, but, in my view, you don't even need to edit anything. You should publish this book, but for now, I'd love to put it on my website, if you would allow me.

Excuse me that I did not write earlier, I just have a lot of work plus my websites in my spare time, but every night before I go to bed, I take great pleasure in reading your novel... It is so big that I used almost all the paper in our office, printing it out, and now I read only the middle of the 2nd part.

I wish you all the best. I loved what you write so much, that I started seeking out your work on internet. Good luck to you!

Sincerely, **Dmitry Lastov**, administrator and author of the websites

"Sovetika.ru» <http://www.sovetika.ru> - site of the Soviet time.

"SovKino.info» <http://www.sovkino.info> - site of the Soviet cinema

"Reading this book, ... I cried together with Irina. Let me know, please, where and how I can buy the book "Soviética" by Irina Malenko, this remarkable young woman who lived in the USSR, and then tasted the "happiness" in the much-vaunted Europe. Well done, Irina! But in bookstores or book clubs in our city they had not heard about the book "Sovetika" or its author And how this book is needed for our younger generation! This book should become part of the school curriculum: in literature or history (based on this real story), although better in literature: she is a beautiful writer. '

(Sevastopol resident Viktoriya Mikhailova, age 85)

"I recently read a book on the internet, by Irina Malenko. It is called "Soviética." This book is unusual - not some Fandorin. It is written in a clear language, and the story is not fabricated. This book belongs to a genre that is difficult to describe - the genre of personal confession. And the confession, which every one of us can relate to: so much it is in tune with our people. After reading just the first part, you already anticipate that you wouldn't be able to let this story go before you will finish reading it in full. It has everything you expect from a new author who writes in a realistic style: the development of characters, the plot and especially the political stand of the author. All the events of part 1 actually did take place. The author has visited all the countries described, has experienced a lot

and has been a lot through. Mistakes that she has made, disappointments, and then her naturally ripening political position reflect the experience of human masses.

The book contains many interesting factual, ethnographic material, many witty observations. The political and cultural background of Soviet society in the end of the 1980s is particularly interesting. That era is gone, it's already time to remember it, to reconstruct it. The book of Irina Malenko can be referred to without fear of distorting history. The author has an amazing memory, and most importantly, she has talent that allowed her to express human memories that all of us have, in a very exciting form.

The book is lengthy (three volumes), which is also unusual in our time, yet, it does not feel stretched. It is such a large book, but believe me, you will read it in one breath. The author keeps the reader in suspense, and through reflecting on personal, sometimes on not intrusive social issues, the main story thread will lead you. And the further it goes, the more exciting the story becomes.

In a new, unexpected from a woman, way the author stands by her political position. In some places you just do not expect her to make decisions that are hard to make even for a strong and confident male. There are moments in the book, which, if this book will appear in English, today may well cause the author some political persecution in the capitalist world.

I believe that Irina Malenko's book "Soviética" is of great interest to the public. It accounts for a lot of good feedback - people identify with the heroine, feel together with her. Many people have asked me where to buy a printed copy."

Julia Hawkins (England)

"Dear Ira, hello!

Yesterday, on Sunday, I could not tear myself away from your book - until I finished reading part 2 of "Soviética." I read all day, having put off everything else! The children instead of me did the spring cleaning, planned, as always, on the weekend. Of course, I left a lot of bookmarks in it, on great ideas that I sure will quote in my materials. (For example, a passage from your book on visiting Paris, where the young French boy recognizes the portrait of Lenin on the flea market and that wonderful - "The Revolution Continues"). Yesterday I noticed that you were born under the sign of Pisces, and then attempted to identify your birthday from the text. Mine and children "investigation" showed that it is on 22nd of February. And yesterday, it was the 21st... Happy birthday! Please accept my sincere congratulations! Ira, I want to say to you so much.... Yesterday, I read your great words on Decembrists and narodniks who did not complain that there was no revolutionary situation, and did everything to bring it closer, from inside. It is no exaggeration when I say that your book, "Soviética," is now just a part of my life, I just dive into it and I can not tear myself away. You described also my childhood - I was born in May 1964 in the heart of Ukraine. And I travel with you to different countries, and I can see all of them through your eyes, the way I would see with my own. The most important thing is that you are Soviética! Your statement "people can really love only if they hate all those who hinder them to live like human beings," is mine too. I think, Ira, that I am writing to you so freely because I got to know you so well through your book. I love your grandmother, your mother, your Little Tamara. Thank you that you exist, that you were born on this winter day (I hope I'm not wrong in my calculations). In Kiev, it was a very sunny day, but in an icy frame. A hug for you.,

Lyuba Golubeva (Kiev)

"Dear Irina! I started reading your book. Now I can only say a few words about the introduction. First, I already read excerpts from this entry in the "Thoughts." Now I read it in full. To be honest, I'm just amazed, and it is even weird. And, apparently, it was not for nothing that I finally was able to look at the first page of your book on the eve of May Day. How exactly you describe all of our, of mine, of my mom's past, our Soviet May! I remember how many memories it brought back to my mother when she read your story back in the paper! This is amazing. We lived in different places, but we had so much in common, and most importantly - the same thoughts and feelings! They are all mine, to the last word. Thank you. Irina, a lot! Thank you for sending me your book. Now, every day, I will continue reading. I understand that this is autobiographical? Only the names have been changed?

And it's interesting, my grandfather was also seriously wounded in the siege of Leningrad in December 1941.

I can indefinitely comment on every line of your book. Because, as I said, this is also mine, this also lives in me.

You wrote that you could send me your book. I think this is expensive, but if you can, I would like to ask you to do it for my mom. She can not sit at the computer, and also the whole sea of our friends would love to read your book (I would give it to them in turns).

Thank you, once again. I'll write my impressions after all the parts. It is already 3 am, and I have to break off, unfortunately.

Happy May Day!"

Nadia Raks (former political prisoner, Ukraine)

"Dear Irina! We thank you for the opportunity to place on our website your book "Soviética." It is unique. And sorry if the illustrations presented are not to your taste - it is picture of a Soviet artist and photos of glamorous site. If you do not like it, we are ready to replace them.

Site "For the USSR"

<http://za-cccp.narod.ru/Sovietika.html>

"Hello dear Irina Malenko!

I read your book "Soviética" and I would like to express our appreciation for your hard work. I was born in 1978 in Tbilisi (USSR), and still am a Soviet person, contrary to what happened to my country and this whole nightmare. I spent several years in Germany and all that you describe in the book, is true. Reading the book, I felt joy and some memories where my heart sank, and at the same time, tears rolled down from my eyes. You have put all my thoughts in your book. I would gladly like to communicate with you, if you do not mind. I am a historian (Oriental), the author of several scientific papers on history, ethnography, and theology. I searched on the internet where I can buy your books, but there is only the electronic version.

Thank you very much! I bow to you!

Regards, **Dmitry.**

P.S.. I lived in Germany for several years, but was never able to get used to Europe. Now I decided to return. I know what awaits me, there are many difficulties and trials, but in Europe I am really suffocating."

"Dear Ira,

I do not know if you remember me. I remember you very well... That's, probably, how most of the letters from former classmates and fellow students to each other long begin after not seeing each other for many years. But we almost didn't know each other during our student years . We were just visiting the same lectures in the same classrooms of our Alma Mater, historical and dusty! And yet, I remember you... However, all this time I heard about you - from Tanya, and even some milestones of your biography were known to me (also from her). I dared to write to you after I started to read your book - greedily, without being able to pull myself away from it!. To say that I am stunned, is an understatement. I experience so many different feelings now. However, I'm in the beginning of the way - I started to read just two days ago, through a the link on the Internet (again thanks to Tanya!). And now I can not help it, but to write to you... I know that it is too early: I should finish reading first, but I can not resist... I'm very excited and I am very grateful to you for this book, for your position, for your stunning Russian language, for the memories, many of which are our common, as common are (as it turned out) our views on many things, with this difference, that for me it is just looking and silent meditation, and for you - it is your commitment, heartfelt, gained through suffering, and so acute...

I was struck by how many similarities were there in our childhood and adolescence. And even more striking is why we did not become friends earlier. I remember only our single joint walk near Pushkin Square. I remember your eyes... Strange...

I understand that my letter is messy and probably stupid. And yet I am writing to say thank you, thank you very much, and to express my admiration - for your book, for you, for your life, which is - that's for sure - not a miserable existence most of us have with our "oohs" and "ah" : that was not possible, for this there was no time, who's to blame, what to do? It's always been a mystery to me, that special breed of people who can see and think, not to see "from a distance", because supposedly, that is the only way to see the "big picture", but to see things here and now.

Who would have told me that I would spend three days in a row, from the moment I read the first twenty pages, walking around and writing you a letter in my head. Yevgenia Kalashnikova - Ira Malenko completely took over my mind and imagination. I'm still in very unsettled mind, and my soul is so full of excitement and confusion that I find it hard to speak, and I want to cry. I'm shocked. I am shocked by how much you saw, remembered and understood and felt through. And with what blood, sweat and tears you've got through your life. Last night I finished reading the first part of your book.

Once again - thank you! And accept my deepest admiration and respect! I'm so glad that you and your book exist!...

Regards, - **Lyuba Stolyarova, Moscow**

I received the novel "Sovetica" from its author - Irina Malenko. I devoured it from late at night, waking up at night – to the morning. Now, when the furious barking of all svanidze- swinedze swearing at the Soviet Union sounds from the TV screen, this novel seemed to be a "ray of light in the darkness," a breath of oxygen. The epigraph of the novel: "In memory of my Motherland - the USSR" reveals its main ideological meaning. Irina - the young woman who was still a young student during the decline of the USSR, a member of no party, not engaged in any Komsomol posts, has now become a prominent figure in the international communist movement, the editor of the Internet publication "Left Russia."

I saw only the first part of the novel - the rest will come later. But the experience of reading has overwhelmed me in such a way that I want to share this as soon as possible!

The plot can be summarized schematically, in a few words. Irina studied excellently in one of the Moscow high schools. Together with several students, by way of exchange, she was sent for a couple of months to Holland. Then in the twilight of Gorbachev's "perestroika", she returned to Moscow. Irina graduated from high school, enrolled simultaneously in two post-graduate courses. And then, suddenly, went off for the last 14 years to the West - first in Holland, then - in Ireland, then moved to the northern part of the island, belonging to England. During this time she got married, had children. It seemed that her life succeeded happily – the West now is an attractive dream for many people. But it turned out, the soul didn't leave Motherland, it suffered from its pains. And now the novel has been written, to write a story - a description of her life and the fruit of reflection of the fate of the Motherland.

Images of many dozens of people with whom Irina was brought together by the fate go through all the pages. But with multitude of human lives, the world - the West and the Soviet Union, life in its ruins – the whole epoch arises. And the book becomes the evidence of accusations against the gravediggers of the USSR!

The West - a desired dream of the average man about rivers flowing with milk and honey! Irina saw it with her own eyes. It's no joke: 30 varieties of cheese, dozens of kinds of sausages, and what cars, comfort! But gradually the pink mist that first shrouded her eyes began to dissipate! At first, having seen the "real capitalism" in Holland, Irina then comes to the realization that this is just a showcase, and "real" capitalism is in Brazil and other countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia, with millions of hungry people, homeless people living in slums at the expense of which "civilized" countries parasitize. And in Holland itself she was staggered by costliness of public transport, the cost of food, forcing ordinary people to live very frugally, the constant price escalation with which wages cannot keep up, despite the constant strikes. And more - the spiritual poverty of many people with whom she had to communicate. - "The first thing that shocked me in the West - it was eternal, endless clack about money. How can you live like this, when everything is measured only in money? Isn't it disgusting for them? "When it came time to give birth, it appeared that you have to pay for the hospital. Due to complications, she was placed free of charge, but only for 24 hours, after which the woman recently confined was evicted! And a maternity leave in the Netherlands is only 1.5 months, while in the USSR - 1.5 years with pay. You have to sign up for a kindergarten before the birth of the child, and she didn't want to talk about the price of it and did not want to talk! But all receded into the background when they started bombing Serbia. - "My first feeling when NATO vultures bombed the remains of Yugoslavia was a terrible anger. Semiofficial falsehood about bombs to protect "human rights" quickly stuck in my craw. The sugary, smiling mask decorated with "universal values" finally fell from the ugly face of " the world community." By the way, let's recall how the West resented when the aggressor Saakashvili, who covered Tskhinvali by missiles, was finally repulsed!

The memory of the Soviet Union stands out through the whole story, especially when she recalls trips to her homeland in the days of "catastroyka" and the subsequent mess of Yeltsin.

"If the Soviet Union continued to exist, - Irina says - ...Each of us would work at our own places, would raise our children, would go to each other's homes...And at that time even in a nightmare we could not imagine that we would share borders, that civil wars would start in different parts of our great country, that we would experience unemployment, rampant price growth, banditry, that in our beautiful Moscow they would sell people." In another part of the novel she said: "Good, happy time! When there was no war in Chechnya, when simple human happiness, immeasurable by no money, was

possible. I always remember a different life. Not luxury-animal-dull but full of things that today's young people neither in the West nor in our country have and cannot have: spiritual and intellectual development, respect for others, purposes in life - not for oneself, but to benefit others and feel yourself to be a person thanks to that”...

Well, in the USSR we could not compare by material wealth and comfort with the richest countries of the West. Recollect, what legacy we received from tsarist Russia, what destruction we were caused by wars, how the arms race imposed by imperialism was draining our economy. Our harsh climate of the coldest country in the world, requiring enormous costs for protection from the cold is not comparable with the West. But the spiritual wealth of older generations of Soviet people that achieved wonders was much higher. - "In Soviet times we were not strangers to each other." Irina recalls how she felt bad in a crowded bus. People immediately tried to help: - "The girl feels sick, make way!" And Irina says: "This is what we have lost irrecoverably - such an amazing relationship and care about each other doesn't exist anymore. And it can't be replaced by any trips to the Bahamas ...»

All sorts of svanidzes claim that Soviet people were "slaves." Irina Malenko answered them: "In the Soviet time, working for the state, we worked neither for a “director”, nor for the “Politburo” but were self-employed. No "privileges of nomenclature" - pathetic and ridiculous in comparison with the privileges of the capitalists could ever cancel the fact that all that we had created, the state returned a hundredfold - not only in the form of subsidized products, but also by many social benefits.” And Irina, who knows, how invoices for payment are continuously coming one after the other in the West, recalls that in the Soviet Union her family received only two accounts - for rent and electricity - "It was such a miserable quantity!"

And Irina also recalls the peace and quiet that reigned in the Soviet Union."To wake up with a sense of happiness and expectation of a miracle - that's what I was deprived of ever since the Soviet Union was ruined.” She recalls Soviet songs, filled with love for the country - such a contrast with the stupid "pop":

- "Our concern is simple,

Our concern is that

Of needing long life for our Motherland

And haven't other concerns...”

- "To ruin such a country – they were able to do it!" - Irina says angrily.

The transformation to jungle - so you can briefly describe what the enemy of the people Gorbachev, a band of «democrats" around him, then Yeltsin, Kravchuk, etc, did to the country, completed the defeat of the USSR. On the pages of the novel, pictures that serve as a basis for the indictment for murderers of our beautiful country appear.

Already for the first time after returning from Holland, Irina was amazed how people had changed under the influence of Gorbachev's reforms. Taxi drivers at the airport cost twice the usual price to drive to the city. - "We did not recognize Moscow. Instead of our little grumpy, but kind and helpful people we met a colony of bipedal anthropoids; only one thing was seen in their empty eyes: greed for money. Miners - "a guard of labor" - have also changed -:"Miners have imagined that if mines would be privatized, and they themselves would become shareholders, they would sell coal for dollars, and the rest would remain as in Soviet times."

With Gorbachev's la-la-la the country was approaching catastrophe. During the next visit, after Yeltsin's putsch and pogrom reforms, she saw the most terrible thing: "Factories began to stop, wages and salaries were not given, and the people were trying to survive selling bales of rags imported from Turkey and China." People were fooled by the distribution of vouchers. "Having starved for several months because of non-payment of wages, they were happy to give away a piece of paper which had become useless for the price of a bottle of vodka. People have moved to pasture – everything that they could grow in their gardens and cottages."

Yeltsin's "market" reforms initiated real genocide. "Perestroika and after perestroika conflicts - I. Malenko writes- have colored people's minds. It was scary to see how normal, cheerful people who yesterday were familiar to you gradually lose their minds before your eyes: become sectarians, become drunkards, commit suicide."

Post-Soviet countries were flooded by mass banditry. Irina gives a long list of famous tragedies and she concludes: "When I went to visit my grandfather's grave at the cemetery, I cried out loudly having seen how many graves of young, healthy men and women are around it. Almost all were younger than me. All of them - during the last few years."

And anger was growing in Irina's heart: "So how is it possible to get used to rankness? How is it possible to put up with it? Tajik kids, begging in the street instead of going to school are standing before my eyes. Old men, selling their war medals not to die of hunger. And strong stupid big guys with one-kilo chains around their necks. And former Komsomol laborers - now "respected businessmen", standing behind their backs selling everything that is not watched, willing to sell their own mother for the right price."

She contemptuously describes the campaign for the President Yeltsin election - "Vote by your Heart" - and she proves that his victory was based on fraud and falsification. Desperation sounds in her words when she describes the philistine mass, which adapts to the surrounding filth, living only a day at a time, having undergone massive stupefying. "Sometimes, looking at today's Russia, - says Irina - I inevitably begin to wonder where are the knowledgeable, educated, intelligent, literate, educated, intelligent, well-read people in our country? Can it really be true that it is possible to grow stupid in 10-15 years?"

Still, the memory of the Soviet Motherland does not allow being idle. This remembrance raises such people with bright souls like I. Malenko, to fight. "Oh, my God, my God, if there is a paradise on earth after death, and if I deserve it, let it be so, as the USSR, - Irina exclaims. – Do they say that Yeltsin avenged his grandfather? Then it's time for us to begin our revenge! "

Killers of the USSR, self-centered "smarty pants" – are not intellectuals! - They disdainfully called real Soviet people "scoops (sovky)" (people with Soviet upbringing). No, sirs, ladies and gentlemen, you - the two-legged jackals, hyenas, crocodiles and other predators, who love only yourselves – deserve the contempt! The bright image of the Soviet patriot, collectivist, humanist, who loves people and is ready to fight for their happiness, comes from the pages of Irina Malenko's novel. Irina was able to express what is in the heart of millions of people who have remained faithful to the memory of the USSR. This memory is akin to a sense of class, of which Vladimir Mayakovsky wrote: "Common are even tears from eyes!" And howsoever they try to eject, to befoul this memory, replacing it with "national ideas" about "independence", the image of the Soviet Union will rise to fight new generations of fighters up to the final victory!

The novel "Soviética" is covered not only with noble ideas and feelings. Each page shows the author's literary talent. We are astonished by her memory, observation, masterful sketches of many people

whom she has met in life. This book on its literary quality deserves to occupy an honored place among the classic autobiographical works.

We wish the author to complete her broad epic work. But how is it possible to publish it to make it accessible to readers? "Democrats" are boasting of "freedom of speech", but only those who can find a lot of money to pay for their publication can use this "freedom"! Where is the way out? Perhaps future readers will "dob in", collecting money for the publication? Tell me what to do so that "Soviética" will find its way to readers.

Felix Gorelik "*Evidence of the era,*"

<http://rk.org.ua/rk/434/15.html>

It is a true celebration - real literature,. From the first line, I dipped into it and I swam in this world of childhood and the life that is so familiar and yet, we began to forget how it feels...I even remembered the sticky smell of those spring branches, which we tied to the balloon when we were walking on the 1st of May!... I could not pull myself of your book for three hours, and was sorry to have to stop, but it was time for work... and evening time, now I am here again in wondrous anticipation: to get into bed and to dive - with pleasure - into this book! To read!... Ira, you are a great talent!!

"I slept for three hours... and I smiled - remembering the smell of our zinc bath tub in my sleep ... That was my very first life impression too... and I wondered at the coincidences - well, you were also raised by your grandmother... and I grieved - when I came to read about the arrival of Lisa and your mum in Ireland... so much that my neck became sore... but I had help - again, from the book! - I got up and poured myself a glass of brandy, drank it in order to catch my breath...

Ira, how did you survive it all with your soul?...

"I can not go through this experience on my own - I have to send this book to my friends... who are also beginning to read your book, and like myself, they dive into the first lines. Today already 2 of them asked if they can write to you directly about their feelings?... Ira, my friends and I are ready to meet you at the airport of Vladivostok!"

"Ira, good afternoon! All my Sunday plans evaporated once I took up your book... I usually read quickly. Recently I have been reading mainly the literature about business-, training, pragmatically pulling out information-. It has been a long time since I have felt this long forgotten desire to sneak a peek at the end of the book: how will it end?

I can't read it quickly. You are being so frank, so open, I have this constant pain in my heart, and for some reason want to hug and to comfort you. Yet I am ashamed of my own political apathy, cowardice - and along with it I feel a shy admiration for you.

Your book made such a deep impression on me that even during my classes I am finding excuses to share it with my students. I told them to read your book without fail, and many have downloaded it from me.

Olga Maltseva, Vladivostok

Hello, you're such an amazing woman, Irina Igorevna!

Sorry for my persistence. But I have wanted to meet you for a long time. And now I finally have such an opportunity, after I read an article in the Ukrainian newspaper "Communist" (to which I subscribe), "Self-Portrait in Red. Irina" by reporter Felix Gorelik from Bochum, Germany. You gave him two volumes of your book – "Sovietica"! This article was published on 5 March 2010.

Irina Igorevna, I read part 1 of your book with great interest, more than once, because the book is very fascinating. I even took the book with me to Moscow and read some fragments of it to other people, especially during the elections on the 4th of March 2012, and a quote from Napoleon: "If my soldiers were able to think, my army would be scattered." So it happened to us that our Soviet people stopped using their heads and followed inept criminals, the so-called reformers. And as a result of this mass betrayal we now have wild capitalism, where a man is a wolf to a man.

Irina Igorevna! How fortunate it is that there are people like you in the world. You are a heroic woman! After all, living in a capitalist world, it is not safe to write and to tell the truth to the working people... only heroic, honest people can do that.

Irina Igorevna! I would like to describe my impressions of the book to you. It was the most pleasant experience and I fully agree with you! I'm not a communist, but I am more than a communist – I'm with Lenin and I hate the bourgeoisie and the root of all evil – private property – more than he did. As a result of the so-called "perestroika" our society has degraded.... At one time, I actually traveled almost half of the USSR, visited the great construction sites, having worked in international collectives, and I saw the enthusiasm with which the Soviet people worked! Now, there is almost total unemployment in all the former Soviet republics.

A little about myself. I was brought up in children's homes in the Orenburg region during the war and after the Great Victory over Nazi Germany and its satellites. And I know at first-hand how we were looked after by real Communists; they took care of us as their own children. In such a terrible time for us, the Soviet State cared for the orphans, and now the new "owners" trivialize everything Soviet, including us, the children of war, war veterans and labour veterans. Now we have, both in Ukraine and in Russia, more homeless children than after the war, even though their parents are alive.

Your novel, where under the name of the main character Zhenya Kalashnikova, you have described a lot of your own life, is striking with the sharp, clear, embossed, vivid portraits of many people whom you met in your destiny. In its breadth of description and depth of penetration into the human and social destiny and the actual understanding of what life is all about, this novel can be considered a real encyclopedia of a large part of the world at the end of the twentieth century. Through the description of the fate of an individual grows the appearance of three worlds: the USSR – from the dawn to the fall, post-Perestroika Russia and the West. In the darkness of the modern "art" and "erotic literature" your book is really like a "ray of light in the darkness." I believe that in the future when there will be a trial of the murderers and grave diggers of the USSR your novel, Irina, can then be presented as one of the most important evidence for the prosecution!

Irina Igorevna, what a blessing it is that I got to know you! I look forward to a parcel with 2 other parts of your book! Thanks for such a generous gift! I just do not know how I can thank you enough for your generosity. By the way, how is your little girl? A huge communist greetings to your family and to your mum, who has raised such a wonderful daughter! I wish you happiness, health and success in your creative work.

P.S. Respected Irina Igorevna! To conclude this letter, I want to note that my beloved granddaughter Anya helped me to send you this email. I did write a few times, to that Kiev newspaper, asking if they could help me in buying your book, but I did not get the answer and then my granddaughter helped me to find you with e-mail; she does it quickly and efficiently. This year, she graduated with honours from the University and enrolled in post-graduate school. Anya sends you best regards and best wishes.

I would like to finish the letter to you with your own words at the end of the part... "That's *exactly right, you have nothing to offer in order to oppose Soviet time, except for sanitary pads! And was it really worth it, to destroy the country and humiliate its people in such a way for that?!"*

"The Soviet Union was a precious pearl, which we cast into dirt for the swines. Thinking, we would have plenty of those pearls: in other shells. But they all turned out to be empty..." "Yeltsin is said to have avenged his grandfather. Isn't it just time for us to avenge ours?"

I want to ask you to give me your phone number, so that I could congratulate you at holidays and at least to verbally thank you! Of course, if you do not mind.

With heartfelt greetings,

Leonid Lvovich Shepelev,
Kirovograd region, Ukraine

Hello Irina.

I read your book in one go.

While I was reading your book, all the while I got the impression that you write about yourself. Because you can only write like this if you have survived through all of this yourself. Then at the end of the book, I realized that was wrong. But I think it was wrong only partially. What you write about, was the experience of every Soviet man who survived. Or of any person who can call himself a Soviet man.

I was born in 1975. My parents were ordinary Soviet family. We lived in the Arctic city of Murmansk. But my conscious childhood passed in Murmashi, Murmansk region. It was a wonderful time. Our house was inhabited by people of different nationalities. However, I never heard that there were some conflicts about it. Not one word, not one hint. My parents were Ukrainians. But I have always been proud that I live in the country called USSR. I was proud of this country, so many different nationalities living together. My heart bounced at the sound of the Soviet national anthem. I'm really proud of this country and continue to be proud of it until today.

In 1985, my parents moved to live in Moldova, town called Orgeev. It was here, in Moldova, I heard this nationalities divide for the first time. And some rancour existed even then. I keep trying to figure out when did this hatred start? Why? Why did we start to hate each other?

All that happened with Zhenya Kalashnikova, is what happened to our people after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

While reading your book, there was a sense as if I was living through that collapse of our country again. The same sense of loss, grief and despair.

We're used to the reality. Resigned to the fact that we can not change anything. It seems that it's not too bad, bearable - to live like that. But the more I read and thought, the more horrified I became by this our present reality. Now it seems to me that we are on the precipice (on the edge) and look down

into it. After reading your book. I was hurt that so easily, without resistance, we gave away our country for a plunder. All these years, I was rebuilding my sense of what is happening around me, just like Zhenya Kalashnikova. And I think that millions of Soviet citizens would say the same thing. We were used to the stability, the confidence in the future as something normal and natural as the air. We could not imagine that it could ever be any different. Especially we could not imagine that things could turn into their opposite. We have lost the habit of thinking about the struggle of resistance. We're just so much used to trusting our government, that this is what was our undoing. In our view, we could fight the enemy, the occupier. We could not imagine that the enemy can be within. And the greatest enemy is human greed, meanness and treachery. Remember, as Gleb Zheglov ("The venue can not be changed" film) says: "If ever there were a devil, he is not goat-footed. This is a dragon with three heads. And their names are meanness, greed, betrayal. If one of them bites a man, then the 2 others will finish him off." Every time I think of those words. How many of today's people are gradually being eaten by these three heads. And we are told that this is normal. That such eating is the natural state of man. That morality, ethics are nonsense. We are told that this is the main moral -that personal interests more are more important than honour, conscience, shame.

In your book, I regained a sense of reality of what is happening around. Because it began to seem that all that is happening around is unreal. I once read that a normal person that ends up in a madhouse, in time begins to act like a madman. It's true. All these years I have had the same situation. And most important were words, words. They were always false, false, false and entangled you like in a spider web. They dulled your mind. Turned you upside down saying that this situation is the only correct one.

Under the influence of such a turn of events we just froze, stood still. Curled up in a cocoon. Hiding deep within ourselves pity, compassion and tears. They scoffed us, calling us "sovok" We were ashamed to tell the truth. We were ashamed to protest. We were ashamed of ourselves because we were "too Soviet." Were ashamed of those of us, who still have consciences. Ashamed that we do not know how to, and did not want to take bribes. That we did not know how to spin, and that we were able to work. That we can not adapt to those to who "know how to live." That we struggle with ourselves, which was, perhaps, the most difficult and bloody battle. We were silent. Just put up in silence. We did not know how to fight mentally and physically. But over time we have learned. The main thing is that we have stopped to accept the reality around us. We no longer consider it natural. We began to understand. That there isn't any "development of the country", which they wanted us to believe in. There just isn't. It has been almost twenty years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. That it was a collapse, not a decay. Twenty years of devastation. Twenty years of deception. Twenty years of not even a theft, but a real plundering.

Your book is a breath of fresh air. A sip of clean water. You are the first person in this madhouse, who told the truth. Like the little boy who was not afraid to cry out that the king is naked.

I do not know what to do. But I do know for sure that something must be done. We can not just sit idly by. We have lost too much time. We need to save our children. To rebuild our country. We have a lot to think. There are many of us.

Just like Zhenya Kalashnikova, I believe that I will see the revival of the Soviet Union.

Thanks for the book. Thank you for the truth.

Rita Shevchenko, Ukraine