

Nikita Kalabin

The  
Formidable  
"Fugitive"



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# The Formidable «Fugitive»

## The Last Altruist

On a high hill, surrounded by a small river, stood a magnificent castle. It was especially beautiful at sunset. Its slate roof glittered in the sun, and the light walls in the evening rays complemented the landscape with unique beauty. The hill was surrounded by a wooded area in which songbirds were singing. The castle was surrounded by a wonderful lawn with short grass. On the stone bridge in front of the castle gate stood a carriage drawn by four horses. Today there were many of them, and the guards let them all through without asking questions; every carriage, every horse had a symbol.

There were long tables in the middle of the huge hall. People were sitting at the tables, expensive clothes indicated that these people occupied a high position in society.

However, on the tables there were only mugs, jugs of wine and bread cakes.

A tall, simply dressed man came out from the back of the hall. He rubbed his hands and said:

— Dear friends! I am very glad to meet each of you. Thank you for accepting my invitation! Believe me, I have come a long way to bring you together. I know each of you personally. Many of you see people you don't know here. I hasten to convince you that these are all worthy people! And before coming here, they swore an oath that everything they heard here would remain only with them, and would not go beyond the walls of this castle.

He spoke loudly, abruptly and clearly. The sound of his voice echoed throughout the entire hall.

— Friends, among us are scientists, philosophers, influential people from different countries of the world. You were not chosen by chance. And we have not gathered here for a merry feast. A great thing awaits us. You are all already familiar with the purpose of our meeting today. And I declare once again: we have gathered in order to establish society. Society to help humanity. To all the peoples of the world. Our help to people will be free and unspoken. Therefore, our society will be secret. I repeat, friends. Our activities will not be public, only we will know about them. High secrecy is needed for a number of reasons. The knowledge that we will possess and apply should not fall into the hands of ignorant or evil people.

Each of us will have something useful for the activities of our society. I have made a number of discoveries that, if applied correctly, will be very useful for society. I also have books from the ancient library that will become reliable tools in achieving our goals. Our main goal is to make Man more perfect, to help that part of humanity that needs help.

Those present, and there were thirty-six people, sat in silence. Not a murmur of surprise, not a rumble of objection.

— My friends, – he continued. — Near each of you on the table there is a book with the laws by which we will carry out our activities. You are partly familiar with them; I have previously discussed them with each of you. I now ask you to read and sign them. These laws will be in our power, over time we can supplement and change them.

—My brother, — one of the listeners turned to him, — in paragraph 3 it is written: “everyone’s contribution to the common is commensurate with his capabilities and is determined by himself”. What amount are we talking about?

— Gentlemen of the Florentines want to make money here

too, — another “sitting” with a lush black beard grumbled jokingly.

— Thank you, brother, for contacting me in accordance with our rules, which means you accepted them, — answered the leader of the meeting. — In accordance with the first rule of our law, we are free people and united on the basis of brotherhood. Therefore, the contribution of each of us to our common cause will be as each of us determines it. The contribution may contain gold coins, labor participation and any other items and actions useful for our business. For example, my personal contribution will contain one twentieth of my income, the results of my research, books in my library that will be useful for our affairs, and other activities necessary for our Brotherhood.

— What books are you ready to make available to the brotherhood? — the bearded man asked, carefully watching the “leader”.

— Those books that will help in our work aimed at the benefit of people. I have very valuable ancient books. For example, a book about the influence of non-dense invisible beings on the appearance of mental illness in people, a book - about the secrets of ancient stonemasons, and even a book about travel in time and space, which I am currently working

on. After all, every book needs to be translated into knowledge. This requires time, work and skill.

— You have a real treasure! Are these not the books from the Library of Alexandria that were saved?

— No, every book has its own story.

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The sun was shining brightly. On the shore of a large mountain lake stood a colossal size house, strewn with numerous terraces. On one of the terraces with a swimming pool, two men were sitting on soft, large chairs. One of them was dressed in a formal suit and tie, the other was wearing a woolen, light suit and sports shoes.

A man in a business suit was holding a folder with documents in his hands, and was clearly reporting something. His interlocutor looked quite impressive; his powerful physique, short black beard and stern, piercing gaze evoked unconscious respect. He sat lounging in a chair, and his confident appearance betrayed him as the owner of his position.

— Anything else, William? – asked the bearded man.

— Mr. Bardi, we have found the same “Fugitive” whom the Council ordered to find.

— If you knew how many times he was “found”, – the man in the wool suit looked carefully at his interlocutor. — They called him “Fugitive” with a certain amount of irony. Actually, he doesn't run away from anyone. And if he had run away, not everyone who caught up with him would have

managed to escape unharmed. This is a formidable opponent; he alone is more dangerous than all the armies in the world.

— How is this possible?

— Perhaps, believe me. What can the strongest armies in the world do? Destroy each other? Well, also redraw state borders, which are already not constant over time. What else? And one person can change ideologies, lead entire nations, and change the course of history. Especially if he knows a lot of things that no one needs to know.

— But was this ever a problem for you?

— He is a very brave, strong and infinitely talented person, and despite all this, he cannot simply be taken and eliminated.

— Then this is a really dangerous person.

— Do you think, my dear friend, if he were not dangerous, I would talk about it? – Bardi asked sternly.

— I had little initial data, Jacob, and even that was strange: time and place of birth, a description of personal qualities and a DNA conclusion. As a result, more than two dozen people were found, one of them was much more suitable than the others.

William took out several sheets of paper from the folder and carefully placed them on the table. His interlocutor took the papers and began to study them carefully.

— What can you say about this man, William? – Jacob asked, not looking away from his papers.

— A strong-willed person, ready to risk his life for the sake of unfamiliar people, clearly expressed leadership qualities

. The main occupation is providing protection to business workers who find themselves in difficult situations.

— Business protection? Extortion, in other words?

— No, he does not impose his services; rather, on the contrary, people turn to him for a favor.

— Do they turn to him for help? Accordingly, does he help people? It's already closer. It's already close.

— They call it business there.

Jacob looked carefully at the papers, and his face was filled with genuine excitement. With a satisfied smile he said:

— So, our "astronomers" have finally learned to count, and I already wanted to start doing it myself. Is he in Russia now?

— Yes.

— You did a great job, William. The budget of our "syndicate" has increased by one hundred million dollars, the money will arrive in your accounts tomorrow.

— Thank you, sir!

— That's it, William, the day after tomorrow... no tomorrow, meet me in Moscow.

— But I have meetings planned...

— This is my request, Mr. Burns, – Jacob Bardi said insistently.

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Two well-dressed tall men slowly walked out of a beautiful old building, their posture and athletic physique

showed them to be athletes. Silently sitting in the Mercedes, they instantly disappeared into the stream of cars .

— Welcome back? – asked the one who was driving.

— Where? – the other smiled.

The first one did not answer and, after a pause, continued:

—Now that you looked at him, I almost shit myself. This one definitely nailed it. And you told them beautifully. How do you do it? You increase the volume without raising the tone. You speak also evenly, with the same intonation, but twice as loud. And even I'm kind of taken aback.

— The conversation was not easy, but it went easily, – the passenger smiled.

— It's just, Andrey, for the last two weeks I've stopped recognizing you. And today, when we were driving here, I had the feeling that we were going to wash the floors in their office.

— Two weeks, two weeks. He probably started thinking a lot.

— Next time, warn me in advance when you're going to think a lot. I will need to prepare.

— Prepare? You buy a tank?

— Tanks...

Andrey remembered this strange incident two weeks ago in the guest house. It was the evening of a meeting of classmates. The meeting was fun, cool and fun. It was nice to meet childhood friends and chat. But something distracted him and did not allow him to relax.

Having left the cheerful company for a short time, Andrey went into a room in which there was no light. Standing at the window, he began to mentally check his affairs, looking for anything unfinished. Everything seems to be going as usual. What's annoying? He didn't notice how he was lost in thought and suddenly realized that there was a feeling that either he was doing the wrong thing, or he hadn't done what needed to be done. Another dream from childhood. Since early childhood he had the same dream, and recently he had it again. Some long corridors with high ceilings. Some Florentines... What is this — a palace, a castle? What does all this mean? Andrey tried to remember the continuation of the dream.

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— Wait, brother, but you promised us a book about time travel through directed rebirth, — came a question from the audience.

— I'm flattered, my brother, that you know more about my books than I expected. It is this book that I wanted to talk about now. I told you that I will provide books that will be useful in our work of helping people. Listen, brothers, this book will not benefit our brotherhood, will not help people, it will only harm us. Yes, we have a certain power, but there are things that are beyond our affairs and beyond what we can afford. We do not have the right to take someone else's property and go beyond the boundaries, which we are not

allowed to violate. We have no right to violate the laws that are given to us from above. I refused to take someone else's.

— You alone, my brother, will decide which laws we cannot break? — one of the brothers did not let up.

— I've already explained everything, brother. What else can I add beyond that?

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He was distracted by voices outside the door. Turning to the exit, he moved forward, the door opened, wild screams and squeals were heard, and the door instantly slammed.

— Damn, who is this?! Some guy, — voices were heard outside the door.

— I don't know, let's see. Just slowly.

Andrey opened the door. These were his classmates Ira and Ira. Both of their names were Irina.

— What are you girls? — Andrey smiled.

— Andrey, where is he? — Ira stammered in fear.

— Who?

— Well, this guy, so well... in a cap, — she spread her arms to the sides at head level.

— In a hat, — corrected the second Irina.

— Yeah, and with a sword.

— More quickly with a saber, — the second Ira corrected again.

— Girls, have you eaten mushrooms? — Andrey laughed.

— It seemed to us that there was some kind of guy here, from the Middle Ages... ha-ha. Maybe you ate something yourself and are turning into Comte de Bussy while no one is around? – the second Ira answered with a joke.

— Or did you hide him somewhere? Admit it, exclamation point you are playing musketeers here? – the first Irina did not let up.

— Bussy, let's go pour out the champagne for the mushrooms! – the second Irina laughed.

... Mercedes slowly stood in a traffic jam. The driver said something about general affairs.

— Sanya, do you have a "shaman" in mind? – Andrey interrupted him.

— A fortune teller or what? You yourself say not to go to a fortune teller.

— Don't go.

— Yes, there is one bioenergetics consultant here, ha-ha. What are you suddenly thinking? Maybe you are very hungry, and indecent thoughts are visiting you from hunger? There's just a barbecue on the road. Let's stop by.

— Yeah. At the same time, you will recruit your consultant.

The restaurant was not luxury, and the food there was without unnecessary bells and whistles, but fresh and tasty — barbecue, khan kebab, homemade wine. They visited here often and sat down at their table in the far corner, from where the entrance was clearly visible.

— How do you know this bioenergy? — Andrey inquired with interest.

— I don't know him; my friend was bragging...

— Well, you call, call him.

— I wrote her a message so that she could send me his address and phone number. Now we'll have a snack, and maybe this crazy idea will leave you behind, — Alexander smiled.

— Nope. "Chuika" wants to tell me something. I don't understand what.

— Wow, — Alexander leaned back in his chair. — Last time, when your instinct wanted to say, the resulting situation - was not simple.

— Everything can be decided, San.

— Yeah, I wrote it... 150 km... recording in a week, what time!

— No, it won't work in a week, we need it today. You have a "duty" phone number, call.

Sasha took out two phones and dialed a number.

The "duty" phone was a phone with a temporary SIM - card for important calls.

— Hello, hello, I want to make an appointment... with the master. This is at the meeting . No, it's a long time, today we need it... in 2-3 hours. Yes, okay. Yes. Alexander. Okay, see you later.

Alexander shook his head:

— The "shaman" is very smart, he wants five hundred bucks. For the urgency, I understand. I made an appointment at seven o'clock today.

— Probably, it's not he who wants it, but the one who recorded it. Okay, if it will be useless, you'll have to return the money, – Andrey smiled.

— And if the fraudster has to return a thousand, – Alexander winked.

Leaving the restaurant, the friends walked towards the car, and suddenly heard a confident, loud male voice:

— Men, sorry!

Turning around, they saw a tall, very mighty man in a dark, expensive coat, and with a short beard. The man was moving towards them. Alexander put his hand in his coat pocket and glanced briefly towards the parking lot.

— Please, tell me how to get to the French restaurant, – he spoke clearly with an accent.

— Three blocks straight, – Andrey answered, intending to walk further, but the man looked intently into his eyes, clearly intending to say something:

— Nos conocemos, señor? (Are we familiar? (Spanish))

— Tal vez (hardly (Spanish)), – answered Andrey, and moved on. The man remained standing still, watching them go.

— What did he say? – Sasha asked.

— He thought we knew each other, – Andrey grinned.

— What language does he speak?

— Spanish.

— Do you know Spanish?

— No, just a few words.

— He's kind of strange. On Demis Roussos is similar.

— More like Luciano Pavarotti.

— I wonder who it is. There's a new armored Maybach in the parking lot, apparently waiting for him.

— Yes, some foreigner got lost.

— There are five people guarding this foreigner, – Sasha noted.

— Seven, maybe more. To know is an “important bird”, –Andrey smiled.

— This “bird” is called an elephant, and if he accidentally steps on your foot, then you’ll probably have to go to the emergency room. On the contrary, people need to be protected from he.

The road was easy; behind their conversation, the friends did not notice how they had arrived at the right address. The “shaman” had a large brick house with a high fence. There were several cars parked in front of the fence.

— Sanya, stay here, – Andrey said, getting out of the car

— Then your name is Alexander. Now I'll call them to meet you.

Using the videophone, Andrey found himself in the yard, then climbed onto the high porch and entered the house. A beautiful young girl with a pleasant voice was waiting for him in the hall.

— Hello, Alexander, Pavel Andreevich is waiting for you, – she said smiling.

Entering the door, Andrey found himself in a spacious room, in the corner of which sat a strange-looking man, dressed fashionably, but awkwardly.

— Hello, — said Pavel Andreevich, pointing to the chair opposite, — take a seat.

— Hello, my name is Andrey.

— Pavel.

Pavel Andreevich looked carefully into Andrey's eyes and immediately turned them to the ceiling.

Andrey sat down in a chair.

— I need your advice on a very unusual issue, Pavel.

Andrey briefly outlined his dream.

Pavel, staring detachedly at the ceiling, listened attentively, then leaning towards Andrey, said:

— Who are you? When you entered my hair stood on end, even in those places where I thought there were none.

After a pause, he added:

— Chasing you. And for a long time. They are already close.

— Who are “they”?

— It’s scary for me to imagine who you are, but it’s even scarier for me to imagine who “they” are! And you... I’m sorry, but I can’t say anything more. It was nice to meet you. And all the best! No payment required.

— Not too much...

— It was very, very nice to meet you, and all the best, — Pavel was clearly nervous.

When Andrey left, Pavel Vladimirovich dialed the secretary’s number and quickly said:

— Book tickets to Vladivostok on the next flight, we’re leaving.

— Should we make no more appointments? – the girl asked naively.

— You grasp everything on the fly, – joked Pavel Andreevich.

— Cancel all meetings!

Turning off the phone, he added:

— Caution differs from cowardice in that it is devoid of meanness... Caution is from the mind. Bravado from stupidity.

Andrey fell into a chair and slammed the door.

— Let's go, San.

— What did the “Shaman” say? – Alexander asked.

— Didn't say anything, and didn't take the money, – Andrey answered, anticipating the question.

— Nothing at all?

— Talked some nonsense, is about some kind of chase...

— And who are you chasing?

— They're chasing me, – he says.

— What a twist! Ha-ha... these fortune tellers cannot be trusted, to be honest.

— Now we passed the parking lot near the store, there - was a shapeless car standing there, of an indeterminate color...

— And what?

— She already flashed today.

— Well, you never know. ... And what?

— Stop by your namesake today, agree on the route, - we'll go for a ride tomorrow. Let him check, maybe we are being followed.

— Do you think...

— It won't be superfluous.

By namesake, Andrey meant Alexander's namesake. Alexander Platonov was a longtime acquaintance of Andrey and had worked with him for a long time. Being a former employee of these same structures, Alexander was a great specialist in external surveillance, wiretapping and other "counter-intelligence" .

The very next day, Platonov found out that Andrey was being monitored externally. He immediately reported this, and began to find out, who had set this tail.

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Andrey and Alexander were sitting in the car, discussing business.

— Andryukh, well, while the guys are figuring out who and what, we can get through to Uncle Vova. He is an experienced person, maybe he can tell us something, maybe he can help us with something, – Alexander suggested.

— To St. Petersburg? The path is not close. Should we take these clowns with us? – Andrey nodded back.

— Well, let them go for a ride, let the breeze blow through them, I guess.

— Logical. Let them relax and lose their vigilance for now . Then make an appointment and we'll get going. By the way, let 's goes to Sasha, let him check for "beacons", and at the same time how the "jammer" works.

— Shall we take the boys with us?

— No, us self.

The road to St. Petersburg was monosyllabic. Music was playing in the car. Robertino Loretto sang "Jamaica". Sasha happily sang along with him one word, and Andrey looked at one point, somewhere far into the sky. When Sasha had finished singing, Andrey, looking far into the distance, said:

— Turn on Antonio, San.

— Now. Are you going to "Chuika"?

— Yeah.

Andrey enjoyed listening to Vivaldi's music when he needed to think and review a situation. This music helped him "go into himself." Leaning back in his chair, he completely relaxed and slowly began to ask himself questions that had long formed by themselves. From the outside it looked like he had fallen asleep, but it was not a dream.

After remaining in this state for about half an hour, he opened his eyes and looked at his watch.

— Well, what did "Chuika" say? — Sasha asked, noticing that his friend had woken up.

— San, what do you think conscience is? — Andrey asked, as if he had not heard the question.

— I don't know, we studied this in first grade, I was still little then — I don't remember.

— In the first? And in the tenth?

— When I was in grade 10, I went in for sports, I had no time to hang around at school, — Alexander answered.

— Well, yes, well, yes.

— Why did you suddenly remember about conscience?  
Torments? – Sasha smiled.

— No, I'm just interested in your opinion. It happens that it is there, sometimes it is not heard yet, and sometimes it is not there at all. That is, not at all, never has been, and never will be. And that such people, without conscience, are not entirely human.

— Well, If I have no conscience then I'm not entirely human?

— What do you mean, “no conscience”?

— I mean, it's a little tight with her.

— Where did you get the idea?

— People talk.

— People say in Moscow they milk chickens, and we went and didn't find udder. Everything is fine with your conscience. I'm talking about something else. It happens that it is not noticeable, but it is there, and sooner or later it will appear. And it happens that it is not there at all. Absolutely! And it wasn't. Pushkin wrote about this a couple of hundred years ago, but modern humanities scholars have only just... not even gotten around to it yet.

— So, it was Alexander Sergeevich who first remembered conscience? – Alexander asked with a smile.

— Earlier, much earlier, Socrates.

Andrey looked at his watch again and continued:

—And “Chuika” said that you need to take “my people”, and disappear into the space of our vast homeland.

— What? – Alexander looked at Andrey angrily. What are you saying, Commander?

— San...

— Why do you want “to write me off the ship”? — Sasha sneered angrily.

— And you say that you have no conscience.

— What does conscience have to do with it? I don't owe you, I just...

— You just decided not to shy away from putting your life in danger, — Andrey interrupted him. — What motivates you? What kind of motive is that? The thirst for profit, vanity and similar benefits disappear. What remains is conscience! Conscience is an irresistible force, it is a reward for a feat that has not yet been accomplished, it is a guiding preload, a compass so that we do not go astray. I read that conscience is in DNA, and those who do not have it at all, in its place either have some kind of talent —stuck in, or a second intelligence.

— A “thermonuclear chip” — a second intellect instead of a conscience, — Sasha said thoughtfully. — Actually, it seems that I have come across such people.

— It's even more “thermonuclear” when the second intelligence is inhuman.

— Do you mean — “inhuman”?

— Well, the other one, the one above.

— No, well, this is fantastic...

— Yeah, a fantasy thriller, okay already... In any case ... What are we, approaching? — Andrey asked, looking out the window.

— Yes, we'll “fly in” to the ring road now.

— Sash, stop “flying in”. We're not late for anything, go slowly, — Andrey said, turning up the volume of the radio.

On the radio, a girl's voice, very joyful and cheerful, was broadcasting about the weather.

Without listening to the end, Andrey laughed heartily:

— Ha-ha-ha. Did you hear? She says: "Cloudy"! And still so joyful! Ha-ha. Cloudy is when clouds are floating across the sky. And here everything is dark gray, without shades, from horizon to horizon. This drizzle. We ourselves are simply inside a huge cloud! Well, beautiful! The girl knows how to cheer up! She made me laugh harder than Mr Bean and Fomenko together.

— Yes, she's a cheerful girl, – Sasha smiled. — So, you don't like the St. Petersburg weather?

— How can I tell you ...

— What about St. Petersburg? Like?

— St. Petersburg is the most beautiful city in the world. How can you not like him? Peter captivates at first sight and forever.

— And Paris?

— What?

— Have you been to Paris?

— Been there. It's beautiful there. In some places.

— And in London?

— Shame.

— At all?

— Almost.

— Thank you for warning me, – Sasha smiled.

— Now, this is San, we'll stop somewhere for a salad, buy a cake and a bouquet for the hostess.

— The owner would also like a gift.

— And this is what I took for the owner, — Andrey took a box from his coat pocket, and from the box a very shiny pistol, made of white and yellow metals.

— Beautiful! Lighter?

— Lighter, — Andrey raised the barrel up and pulled the trigger. A blue flame burst out of the barrel with a noise. — It very quickly turns into a weapon. If necessary.

— Is the gold solid?

— Naturally. An expensive thing, the grateful manufacturer gave it as a gift.

— Uncle Vova doesn't really like such things. He doesn't light his pipe. Give it to me better, — Alexander jokingly suggested.

— I don't really like these things either. However, you see, it came in handy. Why do you need this? Are you starting to develop a superiority complex?

— No, well, to increase self-grade, ha-ha, — Alexander laughed.

— For a man, the main thing is not self-grade, but self-respect! And for this don't need golden pistols.

Uncle Vova's office was exactly like the office of a people's commissar. The curtains are thicker than ever, the table is Soviet, huge chairs and leather armchairs. There was a persistent smell of unburned tobacco in the room.

The owner stood up from the table, greeting the guests.

— Hello, guys. Have a seat. Take a break from the road.

Aunt Marina, the wife of the owner of the house, appeared at the threshold of the room.

— Guys, tea, coffee?

— No need, thank you, Aunt Marin, – answered Sasha.

— Tea please, – Andrey said firmly.

Uncle Vova plopped down into a leather swivel chair, and, throwing himself back, moved on to the business part of the meeting.

— What brings you men to me? I hope you have not yet reached the point of simply visiting a pensioner for the sake of respect and a friendly conversation?

The pensioner loved to joke, and he did it without smiling, so it was immediately unclear where he was joking and where he was talking seriously.

— Vladimir Vladimirovich, – Andrey began. – We came to you for advice, we need your expert opinion on one very important issue.

— One at a time? – the pensioner raised his eyebrows.

— Important questions don't like being alone.

Andrey spoke in detail about surveillance and beacons. The owner of the house listened attentively, then took out his pipe and began to fill it.

— What do you, young people, want from me?

— We are very interested in your opinion, Vladimir Vladimirovich . Could it be “office”?

— “Office,” – Uncle Vova chuckled. — Okay, at least not “stationery”. What you call “office” went into decline back in the mid-80s. Even then, the team was divided into “grabber-traitors”, “burdocks” and “onesizeshoes”, the rest submitted their resignations. The “grabbers” were stealing gold in bullion from the country. They literally filled the airliners with gold, and

it flew away from here. The “burdocks” helped them in this, thinking that this was necessary for the security of the country. Well, the “felt boots” just sat straight and were glad that they were getting paid. “Felt boots” don’t mean stupid, but in the sense that they lie in the corner and don’t bother anyone; when the time comes, anyone will wear them, they will suit everyone, and everyone will use them for their own purposes. “Onesizeshoes” doesn’t care what’s happening in the country, he can simply shift unnecessary papers from one pile to another, the main thing is to receive a salary and then a pension.

The pensioner crushed the tobacco in his pipe and continued.

— So, you guys need to decide who is interested in you -  
— the “commercial” part or the honest composition. If you are being followed, it means that they either want to arrest you or remove you. Which, in turn, means that either you got into someone’s commercial interests, or there’s a big crime behind you, guys. And if you are very “lucky” and you run into honest professionals, then don’t even think about running away, or bribing, it still won’t work.

Uncle Vova shook the tobacco out of his pipe into the ashtray, and looked intently at Andrey.

— As for the “handwriting”, it looks more like foreigners, — he concluded.

— On foreigners?! — Andrey was surprised. Foreign intelligence services? Where do they come from, and why do they need us?

— From a camel, – Uncle Vova chuckled. They have been at home here since 1993. Some of their management team are even shown on TV. Power groups, of course, are created from our compatriots. From former employees who are ready to work for the enemy for a bigger handout. Just b...and! – the owner of the house shook his fist in the air. — As for the second part of the question, “Chercher de l'argent” as the French say. Most likely it's about money. Unless, of course, you are the great scientists who invented laser weapons. Or maybe you are key political figures? If someone with resources decides to remove you, then he will succeed, sooner or later. So be happy, guys, if they just put you in prison. And yes, by the way, there is no need to explain that they are listening to you attentively?

— Even here, Uncle Vov? – Alexander asked.

— Well, no, not here. Although if you really want...

— Thank you, Vladimir Vladimirovich! – Andrey thanked from the bottom of his heart.

— You guys need to disappear, get off the radar, and for a long time, – the pensioner said thoughtfully, looking out the window. — Call me if anything happens.

Coming out onto the street, Andrey suddenly felt for the first time the full danger of the looming situation. Turning to Sasha, he said quietly:

— Tomorrow, organize a meeting with Sanya in our park. Without telephones, but with a “jammer”.

— No phones, but with a “jammer”, – Sasha repeated.

— Right.

Andrey called Victory Park — “our park”. Special collective meetings were sometimes held there. When using certain equipment, it was possible to communicate here, avoiding wiretapping as much as possible.

The meeting took place in an extremely friendly atmosphere.

— Happy to see you in good health. San, you’re kind of tense, — Andrey smiled.

— I’m focused, — he answered.

— Is everything okay?

— Everything is fine.

— When are you on vacation?

— In a couple of months.

— Where are you going?

— To the village.

— To the village to visit grandfather?

— To my grandmother.

— Ha-ha, with pies?

— With “cabbage”.

— Dollars?

— Nope, yuan.

— The ancients said: “the dollar or the yuan — the ruble is better.”

— Maybe better... sometimes.

— Sash, what’s wrong with our “spies”? Did you manage to find out anything?

— Not much. Apparently, they are not full-time employees. It’s not clear who they are. Professionals — for

sure. They broke through our outdoor surveillance, even though we did it technically.

— Who do you think they are?

— “Private owners”, most likely. To find out, we need to continue working. What are we going to do with them?

— Nothing yet. In a few days, will need a house outside the city with a large yard and enough space for five cars. Three cars and about seven guys, and take Grisha. I'll send the date to messenger.

— Picnic? – Sasha smiled.

— Yeah. And take the kebabs.

A large company gathered at a country house — Andrey and his friends arrived in six cars. There were about two dozen of them. Kebabs, fruits, drinks on request. They relaxed noisily, joked, laughed, and sang songs with a guitar. The bathhouse was heating up, and the sound of billiard balls was heard in the house.

After it got dark, they began to leave. Andrey's car was the second to leave, but instead of those who arrived in it, there were other people. Within an hour, all the cars had left, with intervals of five to ten minutes. In one of them, in the back seat, Alexander and Andrey left. Having reached the nearest gas station, and making sure that there was no “tail”, the friends moved forward, leaving the driver and passenger in gas station. Having reached the nearest settlement, they stopped for the night in a private house specially prepared for this purpose.

— It's a shame we didn't go to Moscow, – Sasha grumbled. — And so, there are already such spy techniques —

someone else's clothes, someone else's car, someone else's house and no phones. What do you think, are they intelligence geniuses or something?

— But we'll check it now. Let's find out their capabilities, but we won't take risks.

— What to risk?

— Well, in vain we played such feints?

— Yes, these are nice feints! Okay, I'll go and check which of them are spies.

— Don't forget to change into grandma's clothes.

— Yeah, I'll change into "Little Red Riding Hood".

Sasha returned five minutes later with big round eyes:

— Here they are, commander! But how? Unreal! No, but this is only possible with a beacon. I heard that there are — bullet guns "that shoot with —beacons". The beacon in the coat gets stuck and is "led". But even our coats are someone else's! Maybe there were beacons in the kebabs? We ate them and...

— In vodka.

— I didn't drink vodka. But then how did they figure it out? There were such cool feints.

— Such feints only work with amateurs. But these people are professionals.

— Whose professionals are these?

— Now we'll find out. Or rather, not now, but about four o'clock. They will just relax, and we will persistently ask them. Will they tell us?

— Of course! They will tell you everything, even what they don't know.

— Well, that's great. Everything is going according to plan. If only they didn't throw out some kind of surprise.

— We can invite the guys. Can borrow a phone from neighbors.

— For what? Is there only one car there? There are at most three people in it. We will carefully ask them who they are, so what, we will tie them up, by the time they get untied, we will already be in Moscow.

— How will we connect them?

— Leave your hints, — Andrey smiled.

— Ammunition is not so hot.

— Are you planning to fight? I'm telling you, we'll ask carefully and that's all. Okay, let's make some tea. We had some cakes somewhere.

— Let's throw everything on the table, and at twelve o'clock we'll turn off the lights. Let these guys have their guard down.

Having placed the tea on the table, your friends sat around and you turned on the light.

— Grisha and "my people" have probably already left Moscow. Without a phone it is extremely inconvenient.

— Everything will be fine there, the guys with him are reliable.

— Where did he work? What's the story? Just don't tell me about Article 283. Ok?

— Naval units of the border troops of the KGB of the USSR, there was a special unit there. The main direction of combat —missions is the liberation of captured warships.

— KGB of the USSR? Looks younger.

- Healthy lifestyle.
- Freeing your ships captured by the enemy?
- That's right. Information has been received that a potential enemy has prepared units to capture warships across all oceans, before the start of large-scale hostilities.

And ours were obliged to respond, and the approach was thorough.

- Extended conscripts?
- Necessarily. Only eleven people per cruiser, crew. Not everyone will get on the ship. On the cruiser are five hundred people there, five to ten of them specialists. Ten minutes are allotted to capture the cruiser. You have enough weapons and ammunition with you. If after ten minutes the radio operator does not knock that everything is in order, then the ship is subject to liquidation.

- Uncompromising.
- There is no other way.
- Is anyone else in our team from there?
- A few more guys.
- Did you serve there too?
- Somewhere there.
- Why were you silent?
- Signed non-disclosure document. Not allowed.
- Why did you tell me now?
- I understood something.
- Now it's clear where you got such preparation from. I pretty much assumed that we the best team in the world. Just wait, great things await us.

— Now let's deal with these "foreigners" first, – Sasha smiled.

— We'll deal with them, this is "business-nonsense". The main thing for me is to figure it out with myself, but I'm already close to that, – Andrey nodded his head. — What was tough there?

— No, it's tough here, but it was difficult there. Hard to learn, easy to fight. The teaching was there.

— What didn't happen there at all...?

— Yes, indirectly, – Sasha smiled. — When the aircraft carrier was hijacked... I really want to sleep now.

— What aircraft carrier? Want to sleep to the point of impossibility, I pinched and held...

— Heard?

— No. What?

— This is an attack!

Sasha raised his index finger up. Then he quietly jumped up and stood on the side of the window, then deftly ducked under the window and stood on the other side of the window, pressing tightly against the wall, already holding a pistol.

— There are maybe five more here, which means the same amount at the entrance." In black and masks they are like "ninjas".

— I'm at the entrance.

Approaching quietly to the front door, Andrey saw in the light falling from the window a slowly turning door handle. Then the door opened sharply, and in front of Andrey was a man in a black camouflage suit, who instantly received a blow to the jaw and quietly fell to the floor. The sound of sudden

movements was heard in the darkness. Andrey took a step forward...

## Undefeated

Andrey woke up in a chair, in a large room with a minimal set of furniture — a sofa, two armchairs and a coffee table. Several windows in the room were tightly covered with blinds. Opposite him, across the table, sat the same “Demis”, in the same dark coat.

— Tu Te sens bien, Louis? (Are you feeling well, Louis?), he asked, peering into Andrey’s face.

— Great, Paul, — Andrey replied.

— Peut-être pourriez-vous passer au français? (Perhaps you could switch to French?)

— No, Paul, we will speak Russian.

— But why “Paul”? — the stranger made a fan out of his fingers.

— I’m not asking why “Louis”, — Andrey answered from under his brows.

— My name is Jacob Bardi.

— You forgot to say the word “let’s say”, Paul, — Andrey chuckled.

— Humor? This is good. So, you feel great ? Is your name Andrey?

— Andrey Viktorovich.

— May I know your last name?

— Of course not, — Andrey grinned. Do you think, I'll believe that you don't know my last name? Listen, Barbie, let's skip the stupid questions, okay? Now it's my turn to ask. Where is Sanya?

— Your bodyguard? Where do you get such fighters, Andrey? No one could defeat him, only a sniper. Sniper - defended his comrades and broke the rules.

— Listen, man... Wherever you are...

— “Will I find, and kill you?” You mean? For what, Andrey? Weren't you and Alexander the ones who attacked us first? My people were looking for a meeting with you, in order to invite you to communicate with me. They had no orders to attack you. But if you want it...

Bardi took a pistol out of his coat and put it on the table, moving it closer to Andrey.

— You can do it now.

Andrey looked closely at his interlocutor.

— I sense a catch; I can't figure out where it is.

— You are in no hurry to shoot at me. That's right. This makes no sense. You probably have other things to do. Perhaps you want to help some people. Alexander is now in the clinic, he will receive qualified assistance. The sniper shot for a slight wound, — Bardi explained, taking the pistol from the table.

Andrey leaned back in his chair and straightened his shoulders.

— You are... sorry for the bad reception, without cabbage pies. We just look for meetings differently, — Andrey said with a serious face.

— Yes, my people miscalculated, I'm also sorry.

— For some reason you don't value your life, Paul, —  
said Andrey, unbuttoning his jacket.

— I value my life, Andrey. I just enjoy taking risks.

— But there's more to it than that. You act like you have  
two.

— Maybe. Do you want to have two of them?

— Were you looking for a meeting with me to ask this?

Bardi stood up, took off his coat, threw it on the sofa  
and walked around the room.

— Are you satisfied with what you do? Are you happy  
with what you have?

— Let's get straight to the point, man. Any suggestions?

— Offers? Yes, I have. I offer friendship.

— You wanted to say mutually beneficial cooperation.

— I offer friendship. I'm sure you have great potential. I  
will help him succeed. What would you like to do? Could it be a  
scientific activity? Maybe you have some scientific works?

— What kind of work? You seem to have confused me  
with someone.

— It's difficult for me to choose Russian words. Why  
don't you want to communicate in French?

— I am less familiar with French, than you are with  
Russian, and we are in Russia.

— It took me three days to learn Russian words. How  
much did you spend to learn French?

— Two, — Andrey joked without a smile.

— I think you will find some time in your schedule to  
learn European languages?

— No.

Bardi spoke firmly, confidently and slowly:

— Do you think staying in Russia is good for you? – he asked, sitting down in a chair.

— Russia is my Motherland! – Andrey proudly said “in a chant”.

— Your homeland... Why do you need this country of self-disrespecting, robbed beggars? – the interlocutor asked a question, knitting his eyebrows.

— Listen, you, sh... once again you will say bad things about my Motherland...

— I'm not even interested in the meaning of the word “sh...”. Your insults don't bother me at all, Andrey. Any insult is an assessment in its essence and assessment is almost always biased. In any case, I am only interested in the assessments that I give to myself. Why are you threatening me? Did I tell a lie? Then why did my words offend you?

— The truth is that I am Russian, and Russia is my Motherland.

— Andrey, how many Russians are there in Russia, not counting Ukrainians and Belarusians?

— One hundred million.

— Twelve.

— For me, a Russian person is someone for whom Russian is their native language, and Russia is their Motherland.

— What is the national idea of these Russians?

— Don't understand yet?

— Are you saying that Russian is not a nationality, Russian is an idea? So, you love your homeland, and you care about the prospects of your compatriots? Why don't you care

about the future of, for example, the country that recently broke away from India, Bangladesh? There are 165 million of them. Do you consider them less worthy?

— Are you agitating for me at Greenpeace?

— If you want ...

— Signor, Bardi, what organization do you represent?

— Many different ones. Now I am speaking to you on my own behalf.

— What is your interest?

— I think we will be useful to each other. I'm familiar with your potential.

— Where?

— The birdie brought on its tail, – Bardi smiled.

— You say you studied Russian for three days? – Andrey clapped his hands. — And yet where from?

— I have strong connections in different organizations.

— You don't want to talk, – Andrey looked intently into the face of his interlocutor. — What is my interest?

— Do you have the feeling that you are surrounded by people who do not correspond to the level of development of your consciousness?

— No.

— You know that your potential is enormous, and you have the prerequisites to do great things. In this country, you alone will not be able to use your power, and it will dissolve in time and space. Is this what you want? Don't you want to develop your talents? Isn't this what man strives for? The doors of the world's best scientific institutions will be open to you. You will be able to create a global corporation, you will have

the means and patronage for this. You will be able to help people. Do you want to help people? To all the people who live in this world? Or do you want to help your compatriots? They will soon need help, very strong help.

Bardi fell silent abruptly.

— From now on, in more detail, please. Why suddenly? What help?

— There will be problems. More on this later...

— Aren't the organizations where you have connections the ones who will cause these problems?

— It's not even about them, it's not just... This world is again ready to wash itself with Russian blood. Neither you nor I can change this. Although you can try. I will help you if we cooperate.

— I don't understand what your interest is, man?

— I said...

— Come on, no fog!

— I can't tell you everything right now.

— So, we talked. We'll continue when you can, – Andrey concluded.

— My offer will be valid for three days, the contact person's card is in your pocket, – Bardi took his phone out of his pocket.

— If you do not find the correct use of your strength, then it will move in the wrong direction. Sooner or later you will really want to make the most of your abilities. You don't have much time to think. You are one of us and should be with us.

— I hope we never meet again, Mr. Bardi? – Andrey smiled aggressively.

— I can't promise that, – the big man smiled in response. – We will meet at least one more time. Besides, you'll have to meet some of the... people I work with.

— More riddles...

Bardi jumped up again, walked around the room, and said:

— Listen to me, Andrey! Once upon a time, many hundreds of years ago, one talented researcher created an influential community, which included significant people of that time. The organization was created to provide assistance to large groups of people who found themselves in a dangerous situation.

— Is this organization still active today?

— It still works.

— Can I find out what kind of things it is famous for?

— The community operates in strict secrecy, – Bardi answered and clasped his hands on his stomach.

A certain clarity suddenly came over Andrey, a stream of thoughts and feelings and images poured into his consciousness. He remembered the end of his dream and understood its meaning. Not fully realizing the huge amount of information, partly on a whim, he said:

— Did this researcher know that the community he created was joined by another influential community that pursued completely different goals? *Serpens in nidum avis iaculatur et ibi ova serpentis ponit.* (A snake makes its way into a bird's nest and lays its snake eggs there (lat.))

Bardi raised his eyebrows, looked meaningfully at Andrey, and played with his phone.

— Louis De Vermont? So, you still took someone else's... De quoi parlait toute cette émission, Louis? Très intelligent pour une personne. (What was this whole performance about, Louis? A lot of intelligence for one person? (French)).

— Have you thought about who you sat down to play with?

— Tu t'es surpassé cette fois. (This time you have outdone yourself (fr.)).

Bardi pressed a button on the phone and placed it on the table in front of him.

— And how many strictly secret societies have you corrupted, Mr. Bardi? — Andrey asked, looking intently at his interlocutor.

— All, — he said indifferently, turning around and looking at Andrey.

Suddenly, Andrey was overcome by a feeling of irresistible fatigue, and he began to fall asleep.

— We will win, even if we die, because we will not give up! — Andrey said firmly, fighting sleep with all his might.

— It sounds nice, but it doesn't work effectively, — the big man grinned. — Although it might be interesting. They died and won. Simple solutions come last. See you later, Louis! Or, maybe, farewell! — Jacob took out another phone and pressed a few buttons on it.

Ten seconds later William entered.

— You will take him home and guard him like the president. No, much better than the president, — commanded Bardi.

— This madman — is his bodyguard, he is flying at maximum speed towards us in an ambulance, followed by five cars, people in them may be armed, — Burns reported.

— I would like, such a crazy person to work for me! — Bardi looked at his interlocutor from under his brows. — Possibly armed? Ha-ha. Knives? Then you'll need luck.

— In what sense?

— In the sense that there are no more snipers, and no more shooting! Your task is to hand it over to his people unharmed! Or deliver it home! And for this you are responsible personally and with everything that you have: protruding inside, and protruding out! Feel it! This is very important, William!

— Everything will be done!

— You will assign your best people to him! Let them guard him, as if he were more valuable than all the kings combined! — Bardi said sternly, then went to the door, stopped and turning sharply, said, looking towards the sleeping Andrey:

— Thanks for the tip Andrey Viktorovich.

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Bardi, wearing wool trousers and a short silk robe, was sitting on a sofa on the terrace of his huge house. He had a

large clay mug in one hand and a pistol in the other. Streams of rain trickled down the retractable glass roof of the terrace. In the far side, on a small stage, a famous singer was singing a famous Latin composition. She was accompanied by several musicians. The sounds of violin, guitar and double bass filled the area with uniquely beautiful sounds. In front of the sofa, ten meters away, there was a large screen. At the entrance to the terrace, on one side of the door, there was a guard in a black suit and a white turtleneck, on the other, a waiter in a white shirt.

The door opened and William entered.

— Hello! – he said, looking around the terrace with a critical look and heading towards the sofa.

Bardi, putting the pistol aside, greeted the approaching visitor.

— Hello, dear friend! Please sit down, – he said, pointing to one of the chairs, at the table in front of the sofa. – I hope the long car journey didn't tire you? The weather, you understand.

— I'm used to the road, – William replied, sitting down on a chair, and turning to the approaching waiter, he said, –A glass of "Old Friends", please.

Meanwhile, Bardi again took up the gun and began to aim at the screen. Figures appeared on the screen, which after an accurate hit scattered, then appeared again.

— Jacob, we had an unforeseen incident... The person - you ordered to guard... Andrey... he fell on a grenade. In a shopping center, a hand grenade was thrown at his feet. He covered it with himself to protect other visitors.

The owner of the house, as if not hearing, silently continued, without aiming, to shoot at the figures on the screen.

— None of the visitors were injured, – the “reporter” continued. — The attackers managed to escape. Everything happened too quickly. In this situation, my people were powerless to do anything.

All this time, William carefully monitored his boss's reaction. However, he, with an indifferent look, continued to shoot at the screen, and did not seem to listen.

— Were powerless to do anything, – he repeated indifferently, then looked somewhere into the distance and took a sip from his mug.

— Jacob, you didn't even ask when. For two days now I have been haunted by a thought that I initially declared nonsense . But your reaction... Jacob, did you arrange this? Did YOU do this?

— It doesn't matter who did it now, friend William. The main thing is that it's done.

— How could you afford this? Bypassing the “Council”! You never cease to amaze me, but this is too cool even for you. So much noise! For what? Because of what? How did you know how he would behave? He had no more than a second to make a decision. What if he didn't have enough reaction? – William shook his hands up.

— I'm very familiar with him and his reaction. And you too, in some way. Do you really think that I can't calculate the situation? Evaluate according to the fact. Why did you decide that I am not capable of making decisions without “Council”?

Do you rate your status as high, William? Think about what makes him higher, the fact that you serve the “Council”, or the fact that you work for me? There are many “councils” in this world, but I am alone. There is no need to answer, just think carefully. And keep in mind that your value is not only in your professionalism, but also in your ability not to ask unnecessary questions, – Jacob answered evenly and firmly.

– I can’t even imagine what made you do this.

– You can’t. You don't have all the information. You can just trust me that everyone won.

– All? – Burns was surprised.

– Well, almost everything. Everyone except me, perhaps.

– What?! – William exclaimed in surprise.

– Well, your “Council”, for example, got rid of the trouble.

– And this man is Andrey Shelestov, he also won, in your opinion?

– What could the “Council” offer him? A prison at a depth of a hundred meters, and then...

– What?

William looked questioningly at his interlocutor.

The big man took a sip from the mug, and after a pause, continued:

– I am sure, that now he will be given another power, and he will be transferred to another “composition”. In any case, he is on the way to where he has always strived, consciously or unconsciously.

— It's not easy to understand; it's easier to not understand. But you said you lost. What is your loss?

— Now I'm bored.

— Do you miss him? Did you have an attachment to this person?

— If I could feel affection for people, this would probably be the only person, I would feel it for. He was a worthy opponent, and the most unpredictable player, I have ever interacted with. It was extremely difficult, and very interesting to calculate this person. Most of his moves were unpredictable, – Bardi rubbed his chin.

— Sorry, but are there really not enough characters for your games? Are there not enough smart and influential people in the world?

— There are many important figures, but no players.

— Why did you remove this man then? – William asked raising his eyebrows.

— There is always something above us, – Jacob answered, looking into the distance.

— I can pay a lot, to find out what is superior to you.

— I don't even know what is really more important to me: me, or what is higher for me than me. And this is the only question, that I cannot find an answer to for a long time.

— It's very foggy. Well, what about the book now, this legendary book, the source of eternal power? After all, he was the only lead to this book that everyone is looking for?

— Who is everyone?

— "Council", for example.

— Who else?

— Intelligence services of some countries.

— Ha-ha, let them look for it. Bastards. This book was not written by them, and not for them. Why do they need it? They still won't be able to read it. For anyone who could read, understand and apply what is written in it, it is no longer necessary. And this book has long been where it should be.

— You can't imagine how interesting it is where she must be.

— This is not a report, William, – Bardi said harshly, raising the gun with the muzzle up.

— Please forgive me. Please forgive me, but you also make mistakes. Your message that you sent to him came after the explosion, a few minutes later.

— My message? Any evidence?

— There is no direct evidence...

— Not in your position to make unsubstantiated statements, William, – Jacob said dryly. — What message?

— A message came to Shelestov's phone: "Thank you for the tip."

— Why do you think, that whoever sent it, wanted it to arrive before the explosion?

— But what is its meaning then?

— Much of what happens, and is incomprehensible to us, seems meaningless to us.

William, lost in thought, looked up at the transparent ceiling, and twirled the glass standing on the table.

— What about his people? This Alexander alone is worth something. Knowing these crazy people, I wouldn't be

surprised, if he now flies out from behind that mountain, in a Su-25 attack aircraft.

— That would amuse me. I would really like, very amusing, – Bardi perked up. — It's a pity that the weather is bad. Let his people continue his work. He deserves it. As for Alexander, try very carefully to offer him a job in your structure. If he refuses, then... don't let him out of your sight.

— Jacob, can you please tell me, this Shelestov — who is he? Your attitude towards him is surprising. He's, a coincidence, not your relative?

— He was once my brother.

— Was he a brother? Once upon a time? – William was surprised.

— Would you like young wine? Russian. It is produced at home, – suggested Bardi, as if not hearing the question.

— White?

— Red.

— No thanks. I drink white.

— Very in vain. In the house where I buy this wine, they buy wine for themselves in the store. I take all their wine, ha-ha. And you don't know what you're giving up.

— Well, if you praise like that...

Bardi motioned to the waiter. He came up and poured wine from a jug on the table into William's glass.

— Very tasty, – Burns said, taking a sip from his glass. — Where exactly was it made?

— Near the city that Richelieu built.

— So, the wine is Ukrainian?

— Who cares? As far as I remember, the city was built with the money of the Russian Tsar.

— The difference is that now it is a different country, a different state and even a different ideology.

— Oh, William, listen! Countries, states and even ideas dissolve in time, but wine remains.

— As far as I know about wines, this wine is prohibited because it is poisonous.

— Bravo, my friend, this is “Isabella”, this variety is banned in Europe and the USA, ha-ha. Do you agree that this wine has a unique taste? But taste alone is not enough, you need to be able to make wine so that it properly improves your mood, and is very invigorating. Wine should not intoxicate, wine should invigorate.

— Can you answer me, Jacob, if Shelestov had not fallen on the grenade, it would not have exploded?

— Notice, William, it’s a simple thing, but you didn’t understand right away, ha-ha-ha, – he burst out laughing.

— Often, we don’t immediately understand simple things.

— But you said that he would be forgiven for his actions. I think I can guess what you mean. But you stole his forgiveness. After all, in fact, he did not save anyone.

— My dear friend, William, do you think the main thing here is the result? How many proud people who tried to change the world were disappointed? All because they wanted to take someone else’s. Changing the world is not their result. Their result is to change yourself. There is no need to try to

take someone else's result, it won't work anyway, and it will cost you a lot of trouble. The main thing in this matter – is the aspiration. A person consists of his actions, and his aspirations are not in vain, even if they do not produce results. And you are a bureaucrat, ha-ha-ha. You don't have to worry about Shelestov. He behaved with dignity in the duel, and - received the right to emerge undefeated.

— A duel?! But you sent him...

— You think too flatly, my friend, here you need to think in volume, what you focused your attention on and consider to be the essence, in fact, are just technical details. No one can change a person's path except himself. He chose his entire path himself. If he didn't want to go down, let him go up. The main thing is that this "cruiser" does not cruise here, on our territory. Such a person can disrupt the most reliable plans, and make the most faithful goals inaccessible.

— But if Shelestov is a winner, then you, excuse me, are a loser?

— No, – Bardi grinned. – People, like Shelestov, are always among the winners in the end. And I can't be a loser. The one who experienced the bitterness of defeat lost. I am not given the opportunity to experience this feeling.

— And the joy of victory?

— Same.

— What, for you personally, is the meaning of the fight?

— The process itself is interesting! It amuses me to watch how you easily succumb to deception, serve your primitive instincts, and dubious beliefs, and do not understand basic things.

— What instincts did Shelestov serve? – Burns asked ironically.

— William, don't touch Shelestov! This is a completely different, exceptional case. Those whom you place at the top, in your thoughts, are not worth his little finger. He knew how to find, perceive and use deep, secret knowledge. Shelestov itself was a most dangerous weapon, that could fire at any moment.

— Not everything is clear, Mr. Bardi, – William shook his head.

— There are things that if you don't understand, yourself and right away, no one will ever be able to explain to you. Be glad that you did not understand them, so much the better for you. Better understand how true the goals, you are striving for are.

— What are my goals?

— You strive to become a full-fledged member of the community, and do everything to enter the “Council”, don't you? Do you understand well why you need this? Are you sure that this is your goal, do you know what price you will have to pay for it?

— What will the price be?

— Your eternity, ha-ha, – Bardi laughed loudly with an evil and frightening laugh, which made his interlocutor feel uneasy. — Define your goals correctly, so as not to be disappointed, when you achieve them. Anything else Mr. Burns?

— Because of everything you said, there is a feeling that Shelestov can only be envied? – Burns continued calmly.

— Maybe. It's just not for you and me to do this. To walk his path, you need to have an ability that neither you nor I, especially, have.

— Which one?

— Love people!

— What people?

— All people. People in general, – Bardi answered, nodding his head slightly. — Will you rest before the journey?

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A man armed with a sword, wearing a hat and a dark cloak, walked along the long corridor of the castle, in the light of torches. The sound of his footsteps echoed loudly under the high ceiling of the corridor. Suddenly, a large male figure appeared from around the corner. Then another one, and a dozen more. Approaching them, the man stopped, put both hands on the hilt, and looked back. There were three more armed men standing there, one of whom was holding a net.

— Give me your sword, brother! – approaching him, said a man of powerful build, with a thick, black beard.

— Excuse me, what?

— You broke your promise, and will be arrested on behalf of the Brotherhood.

The “prisoner” with a sharp movement of his left hand pulled the blade halfway out of its sheath by the hilt, and at the same second, hit the bearded man in the chin with his right fist. He, after standing for a second, fell first on his fifth point and

then on his back. At the same time, the man completely took out the blade, and threw it into his right hand.

— Dear gentlemen, I highly recommend that you let me pass, – he said, throwing aside his cloak and hat. — Otherwise, I will force you to do it!

Finally emerging from his stupor, the commander of the attackers gave a sign to his men, and they, drawing their swords, rushed forward. The commander himself was left without a sword, without even having time to use it. With a deft movement, the defender snatched the sword from his hands, and became the owner of two blades. Moving easily and wielding blades alternately and simultaneously, he pushed his enemies towards the exit. The number of attackers was rapidly dwindling. And so those who remained were ready to run away, but on the other side of the corridor, one of the attackers shot him in the back with a crossbow. The man stopped for a moment and immediately received a blow to the chest with a sword.

— Stop, bastards! – there was a menacing cry from the "bearded one", who, all this time, was coming to his senses. — Told you, stupid animals!

The guards stepped aside. The big man, moving forward with long strides, passing by the fencer with the bloody blade, gave him such a slap in the face that he hit the wall and "drunk" to the floor.

— Louis..., – he picked up the prisoner who had fallen to one knee and bent low over him for a few seconds. — We'll meet you, Louis, I'll definitely find you.

With a sharp movement, he pulled out the arrow from the back of the defeated man, clenched it tightly in a huge fist, and cast a destructive glance at the shooter.

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