

Nabokov Prize Library

Alem Kengerli

18 STORIES ON THE TRAIN



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Аннотация

Alem Kengerli is one of the well-known writers representing the Nakhichevan Region of Azerbaijan. He is famous for his short, instructive stories. Recently, his book titled “18 Accidents on the Train” was published in Baku and then also in Moscow. The readers, even the critics, reacted positively and really appreciated his stories, which are accounts of simple truths and ordinary people.

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18 stories on the train

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1

I like being on the way. I especially like traveling long distances. It may be by car, by train, by plane, anything... A man can spend some time in the privacy of his or her mind, have some internal talks and build a few plans for the future. Being on the road is good for me also because of my creative work. Please, don't think that literary characters have no after-book life and that their lives end with the final page of the book. In my world, they live forever. I talk to them, and I ask for advice when I need it, sometimes even gossip. A person chooses friends from his or her inner circle and from the same sex. There are old and young people among my characters, men and women. Therefore, the assortment of my friends is quite a large one.

Today, I am in a train. I am going to the west of the country. For some reason, the first ones that come to my mind are Tale and Kenul. Why them? Maybe because it is cloudy today and the rain keeps beating against the window of my compartment. After all, rain always causes sentimentality, and sentimentality is what the sad story of this young couple does not lack.

Many moons ago, they loved each other, but ended up parting. Maybe Tale does not even remember Kenul. He has a family now, a family he loves dearly. One day, he feels unwell and goes to a clinic. He meets Kenul, dressed in white robe, in the doctor's office. The unexpected meeting is especially important for the

woman.

Seeing her lost love, she starts thinking that she could somehow change her life and renew their former relationship.

Now, what does Tale think about it?

An Unexpected Meeting

The birds seemed to sing their song louder than usual this morning. The rays of the spring sun played on the window pane. He slowly got out of bed. At night, he did not sleep well, tormented by pain. He thought it would be appropriate to go to a clinic and do a complete checkup. He went to a neighboring room and checked the kids. The babies were sleeping peacefully. He felt satisfied. Quietly, he left the children's bedroom and went back to his. He stretched the blanket over his wife's naked back. After that, he went to the kitchen. He lit the gas and put the teapot on the stove. After a while, he thought that he would probably need to do some tests and so he decided to abstain from breakfast. He switched the gas off and returned to the bedroom. He started putting his clothes on. He thought of going to work after visiting the clinic. He had to come in time so he quickly packed up and left the apartment block.

As he was leaving the entrance hall, he looked at his mobile phone to find out the time. There was still time before the clinic opened, so he could walk. He looked around. There were buds clearly visible on otherwise bare branches. The breath of spring could be felt. The clean spring air that he inhaled and that filled his lungs did not dissipate the ache in the back. He felt some kind of premonition. As if something bad was going to happen.

There were not many people in the clinic. He went up to

the registration desk, explained the reason of his visit and got his referral. Having paid for the services, he got the receipt and went to room No. 15. Paying no attention to the sign that read "Mamedova Kenul", he knocked on the door and quietly entered. The doctor wearing a white overall raised her head and, seeing him, cried out: "Tale?" She became petrified with surprise.

He also stood there, frozen.

"Is it really him?" the doctor was asking herself. She could not believe her eyes. She couldn't believe that it was Tale standing in front of her.

Her face turned red and her eyes widened.

Tale was confused as well. He was so lost that he even forgot to say hello. His throat became dry and he couldn't swallow. With his anxious eyes, he looked at Kenul Khanum as if not from a two-meter distance, but from 10 years ago, full of tender memories. It was obvious that the long separation could not extinguish the passion in the souls of two persons who were once madly in love with each other. Each one had a hurricane inside. Some time passed. The guy was the first to pull himself together:

"How are you, Kenul?"

The girl lowered her head and began to sob so loudly that the clinic workers could have heard her and run to the noise. The back ink outlines became smeared across her face. Tale regretted that he caused such suffering in the girl with his visit, but, at the same time, he could not leave the room. He made two steps toward her and said quietly:

“Kenul, please, don’t cry. Otherwise, it will be full here in a few moments.” He didn’t expect to receive a tough response from her:

“Let them come. I don’t care. I am tired of living this way. Do you know the way I live, the way I feel? I don’t have any strength to support it anymore, Tale...”

Having calmed down a little, the girl began to wipe her tears with the sleeve of her robe, then continued:

“Tell me the truth, why did you come? You want to irritate me? Maybe you want to burn me in the fire of past memories?”

Tale began to swear that he came by accident.

“What are you talking about, Kenul? I swear I didn’t know you worked here. Neither did I expect to meet you here. And I came because I don’t feel well. I thought I needed to be examined.”

“The plate on the door told you nothing?” Kenul asked angrily.

“I swear I didn’t even pay attention to it. If I knew you were working here I would turn and walk away.”

“Would you? Hmm. So, you’d walk away? Where did your passionate love go, then? So, you don’t love me anymore. I am a stranger now. Right?”

Tale realized that his answer could aggravate the situation even more, so this time he kept silent.

“Wasn’t it you who promised that “Only death can separate us. There is no such power that can take you away from me?”

Tale, who was trying to figure out what Kenul was trying to

say by this, took a deep breath and asked in a hoarse voice:

“You want us to break our families apart and start everything over? You should have thought at the time that you would have to shed tears later. You don’t have the right to accuse me, Kenul. I see no guilt in me. If you want to know the truth, I do think of you always, and I lament the fact that you have not become mine.” Kenul reminded him of what he had just said:

“And you say that you did not know that I worked here. Otherwise, you wouldn't bother me.”

Tale was having a hard time justifying himself:

“I didn't want to see you again and hurt my old wound. After all, a return to the past is...”

A knock on the door prevented him from finishing his thought. A bearded middle- aged man in a gray hat opened the door and stuck his head out:

“Can I enter??

“No,” Kenul answered angrily. “Tell them to refer you to another doctor. I don’t receive patients.”

She started dialing a number on her phone:

“Zarifa, do not send any patients to me today. I feel bad,” she said into the phone. Apparently, she heard something in response and objected:

“No, I don’t need anything, don't worry.”

The woman hung up and turned to Tale:

“You say you didn't want to wake up your old wound, right? What about me? Did you think about me? As if it was not

enough that you did not look for me, but you also did not want to know how I was getting along. Why? Is it just because we are not together? You used to call me “My Kenul,” and now I am just “Kenul.”... You forgot your promises of eternal love so easily. You gave me your word that you would never allow me to suffer. Do you know what I had to go through? I have no strength anymore, I can't live that way. A heart is not a stone after all. It breaks apart, it hurts. Do you know the amount of suffering I had to endure?!”

Kenul spoke sobbingly, as tears rolled down her cheeks without ceasing. She took a heart-shaped mirror from her bag and put it on the table. Tale gave her this mirror in a gold frame and with the same handle 15 years ago.

Seeing the mirror, he became confused. Does it mean that all these years she was carrying his gift with her as a reminder?...

“This gift for me is the dearest and most valuable in my life. I cherished this mirror like the apple of my eye. I never parted with it. I thought if I lost it, I would lose you. Every time I look into it, I see you, not myself.”

Kenul wept bitterly, as if trying to cry out all her pain and ease herself that way, free herself from suffering. Tale was confused. He did not know what to do. And Kenul just would not stop.

Tale approached her with caution. He stroke her hair and uttered: “Kenul, please. Don't cry. If you love me, don't cry.”

She seemed to become drunk from his touch. Wiping away

her tears, she said, “My marriage turned out to be a torture for me. At that time, I was envied for the fact I was being married to a rich man. What do I need his money for if the man drinks every day and spends his time with his drunkard friends? He is not an educated man, far removed from any ideas of decency. He is not bothered by his family or by his only child. His son is 9 already and there were hardly 9 times when he would ask something about him. Believe me, Tale, if it were not for the son, I would have laid my hands on me long ago.”

Tale mentally plunged into those years full of pleasant memories. Without taking his eyes off Kenul, he carefully put his hand on her shoulder.

“I understand you perfectly, Kenul. But what can I do? We have to endure it. Don’t worry. Everything will settle down over time. And throw these blasphemous thoughts away from your head. Keep thinking about your son’s upbringing only. He will grow into a good man and will cure all of your wounds. You’ll see for yourself...”

Tale’s fingers trembled slightly while resting on Kenul’s shoulder. The latter continued to sob. Her shoulders were shaking from time to time. Some time passed. Kenul was finally able to calm down. She wiped her tears again with the sleeve of her robe. Seeing Tale embarrassed she thought that maybe he was sorry for the past, so she said:

“Alright, I did manage to upset even you.”

They opened the door again. Kenul kept asking the guy: “Tell

me, how are you? How is your life with your spouse?" "Nothing to shout about. Just normal life."

"You don't love her, do you? Tell me you don't. Admit it, you did not love anyone after me."

The man did not like these questions. He tried to avoid answering.

"I have two kids: a boy and a girl. They don't go to school yet. They're too small yet. My son resembles me, while the daughter... I think she is your lookalike. Maybe it's not the truth, but that's how I feel."

She was delighted at his words. But soon she declared with sadness in her voice, "You did not change at all, and I have become old. My destiny made me old." Kenul has really turned uglier. Her former beauty was gone. In her eyes, one could see the pain from the hard life that she lived. Tale could not resist and began to reproach, even accuse her, "It's your own fault, Kenul. You didn't believe in me. You didn't follow me."

Kenul seemed to have shrunk somehow.

"I couldn't. Did not dare. I wanted but I didn't make it. I sacrificed my life for mother's tears. I couldn't say no to my father who would always say, "I promised Ali-kishi, do not dishonor me in front of the people!" I ruined my life for my parents. And they traded me for gold, wealth and fame. Nowadays, while being in that mansion, brightly lit by powerful chandeliers, I feel myself in darkness. My whole life went downhill. I am utterly unhappy. I really miss my old house, where I lived before marriage. How

happy I was at that time. I guess you cursed me.”

The man became very affected by these last words.

“What are you saying? What cursing? I am not like that. I am unable to curse anyone. Besides, by doing this, I would have cursed myself too. Don’t you think so, Kenul?”

She got up slowly from her chair. She took his hands and looked into his eyes. “Why didn’t we unite, Tale? What did we do to anger God?”

“ ... ”

“You have preserved your youth and charm up to this day. I keep on loving you. I love you like crazy, with all of my heart.”

Tale could not pull his hands out.

“Kenul, what if someone enters. Don’t create problems for yourself, he said quietly.”

“Let them come. You know, Tale, all these years I have been living with you in my mind. I kissed you and I caressed you. There was not a single day that I spent without you. Every time they humiliated me I remembered your pride and I endured. How could I forget your warmth, your caress, even the funny jokes you used to tell me? I must have spent all the happy days that destiny had for me with you.”

Kenul calmed down and Tale came to his senses. He stroke her head and tried to cheer her up:

“Just be patient, Kenul. All will pass. You will see, gradually everything will be settled. I can visit you if you want. You can trust me.”

What woman does not get soothed by such comforting words coming from her beloved man?

“So you say you will visit. You know, that would be great. Don’t worry about me. I am not afraid of my husband. I just couldn’t divorce him. My parents are against it. They say “don’t dishonor us.” I don’t know what to do. I have lost my mind. Life does not mean a thing for me anymore. And now, I am happy that you exist, Tale. You know...”

He didn’t let her finish:

“You are wrong, Kenul. After all, you have a child, you blood son. You have to live for him. You have to educate him well.”

Clutching his hands in hers, she sighed:

“You just keep on supporting me, huh? You’re a good man. You don’t want to see me down, you encourage me to live.”

Then she added,

“Tale, if you really love me, make me forget my suffering. Press me against your chest and kiss me passionately, from the heart, as in those years when we were young. I want to feel as if I am yours. Do not deny me this happiness, I implore!” The man glanced uneasily at the door, trying to gently push her away from him. He knew he could not allow such closeness.

“Be smart, Kenul. Don’t say such things. You’re not a child, are you? You do understand what you are saying. You want to destroy your family? And what will your parents say, your relatives, your coworkers? What will your son’s friends say? He will hate you...”

“...”

“It’s late, Kenul. I am leaving. We have already been here for a long time. What the others might think?”

Annoyance could be clearly heard in her voice.

“I don’t care. I have missed you all these years. You cannot imagine the relief I felt today.”

Once again Kenul began to persuade her beloved to hug her. She assured that there was nothing bad about this. But Tale did not agree and she had to retreat.

“Let me examine you at least, and then you’ll go,” she said.

Tale felt satisfied that he was able to lighten the mood, and therefore went on: “Not worth the trouble, dear. I have no serious complaints. It's too late, I am leaving. I need to get to work. I’ll come tomorrow, you’ll take a good look at me.”

She could not object:

“Okay, Tale. You have no idea how you made me happy with your visit. I will be waiting, be sure to come.”

Kenul put her arms around him and pressed her cheek against his chest. He felt her heartbeat by his own heart. It was as if two hearts were beating in one chest. She hugged his chest so hard... He kissed her in the forehead and went out quietly.

The next day, Kenul waited for Tale for a long time, but he never came. He did not appear on other days either.

She waited for many days. Every time the door opened, she hoped it was him. These expectations were exhausting for Kenul, but at the same time, they brought some meaning to her monotonous and dull life.

She lived in the hope that one morning at nine o'clock, Tale would open this door and embrace his Kenul with a smile on his face.

2

The rain seemed to have gained force. The raindrops were beating hard against the glass. When you go out on a long journey, for some reason you feel yourself in a foreign land. My next hero is Safar. Following a friend's advice, he went to work in Ukraine many years ago. He thought he would make some money and then come back to his native land, to his family. It turned out differently, though. He wanted to earn more and more. While there, he married a woman named Larissa. They had two children. But over the years, Safar began to understand that the second wife and children did not correspond to his mental considerations, were alien to him, so to speak. He began to be tortured by longing for his relatives, whom he left in his homeland.

This is how he understood that he had to make a final decision.

In a Foreign Land

It seemed to be an ordinary day, but for Safar, it was to be not quite an ordinary one and it became clear from the very morning. He woke up earlier than usual, went into the kitchen, poured himself a glass of yesterday's tea, and plunged into his thoughts. When he came to Ukraine, encouraged by his childhood friend Kerim, he was a young, healthy and handsome guy. Years have passed since then. He has grown old. There was not a trace left of his former enthusiasm.

Lately, he has been thinking only about one thing: how will his future fate be? Previously, he could serve himself: pour some tea, cook a dinner, even wash his dirty laundry. Today he is not the same he was before. The years took away a lot from him, and most importantly, his youth. Worries and problems lay on his shoulders now. Longing for his homeland, concern over the future of his children born to Larisa...

He was confused.

The daughter Marina, after graduating from high school, left Kharkov for Kiev with her classmate Zakhar. And when the guy was drafted into the army, she went to live with Vadim, who was renting a room in a hostel. Her father's words, telling her that she should not do this and that it was a shame had no effect. The young couple was not married officially, but Marina gave birth to a daughter named Vera. The girl was already two years old.

And his son Ilya lived with his parents. He was already 30 years old, but he didn't even think about getting married.

When Ilya was born, Safar was very happy that his firstborn was a boy. But when it was time to give the child a name, he and his wife had a disagreement, which upset him very much. Safar wanted to name his son Veli, which was his father's name. But Larisa began to object.

“What kind of name is that – Veli? I don’t like it.”

And she named the child Ilya. Although he was upset, Safar then thought that this name was somehow consonant with the name Ilyas, that reminded him of his late uncle. He began to console himself with this.

Ilya spent his free time drinking with friends. He led a carefree life of a single man and did not take his father's advice seriously. He changed many jobs due to not being serious about it. Although he loved his father, it was not part of his nature to take care of him. He did not even take care of himself, let alone his father. He slept and ate whenever he could and didn't think about today or tomorrow. Often he would not come home. He stayed with his friends until late hours and slept wherever he could. Safar did not manage to raise his son the way he would have liked to, although he tried very hard. It looks like the environment and entourage in which the guy grew up played an important role in the formation of Ilya.

Now, in his declining years, Safar was full of problems. This is the law of life: in advanced age, a person often remembers the

past years. He was haunted by the longing for his homeland and for his former family, which he once left in his homeland. He was tormented by an irrepressible desire to be close to his family and friends, with whom he parted through his own fault. At the same time, he could not find the strength to return to his homeland, although he was thinking about it day and night. A long time ago, he left his wife there with two young daughters for the care of his parents and left under the pretext of finding a job. He came to Kharkiv and never returned. He blamed himself: "I should not have left my family." But at the same time, he knew that a late remorse was of no use and so he rushed about in despair.

His present condition was not an easy one. He was thinking about what he could say to his ex-wife, who raised two daughters with great difficulty, dressing them in rags left by relatives and neighbors and feeding her loved ones with leftovers. How will he introduce himself to his children, who did not know him by sight, and who, through his fault, grew up without knowing their father's affection? How will he look into the eyes of his old sick mother who raised him, serving in other people's homes, and who was waiting in vain for her ungrateful son? After all, she was pretty weak now and almost never got out of bed.

Will his conscience allow him to visit the grave of his father, who perished, having drowned himself in the sense of longing for his prodigal son?

Will he be able to stroke the gray hair and heal the wounds of his only sister Zuleikha, who raised him together with his

mother?

He did not know that. He only knew that he could not live far from his homeland anymore. He felt abandoned and alone in a foreign land.

Lately, he has also suffered a lot from insomnia. Homesickness robbed him of sleep.

“Why didn't the curse of my daughters, abandoned to the mercy of fate, strike me?” he thought to himself and groaned. “I am getting along somehow, but what will I do in five years from now? After all, here people keep away from each other, they are indifferent to the problems of others. Maybe I should commit suicide and free everyone from me before becoming bedridden?” it occurred to him suddenly. And then immediately drove this thought away. “Where will I be buried if I die?

And what will happen next? Who will visit my grave?... God knows where they will bury me. Surely, my wife and children will drink after my funeral and will party a lot.”

Safar has been thinking about himself for hours. He thought: could it be that after death Allah would forgive him his sins and allow his prodigal soul to return to his home and rest in his native land? Over time, he became more and more convinced that he could not live in places where elders were not honored. What could he expect from strangers when your own children did not give a damn and could not care less about you?

Actually, homesickness haunted Safar for five years already. During these years, there was not a day that he did not think how

to escape from suffering and live in peace. He was paying for his mistake that he committed in his youth. After much reflection, Safar came to the conclusion that today was the best day to make the final decision. He had to return to his homeland today. His wife Larisa was not at home. She was with Lyudmila, her friend. This came in handy.

He took a paper, a pen, and began writing a letter to his daughter Marina: "My dear Masha! I am leaving for my homeland. Forever. I feel that I don't have much time left. It is better for me to die in my native land, among my loved ones. I wish you happiness. Try to save your family this time. Daughter, never change husbands like gloves. Nothing good will come of it. S. W. K. Your father!"

Then he went into the bedroom of Ilya, who was sleeping until late as usual, and called him:

"Wake up, son, it is late already."

"What's up dad, let me sleep a little," Ilya murmured, rubbing his eyes.

"I have to tell you something. Get up, let's talk."

"Early in the morning? Okay, let's talk, I'm listening."

"Ilya, my dear," Safar began, getting one step closer to his son's bed. "You know how much I love you. I even wanted to give you my father's name, but your mother did not allow me to."

The son felt melancholy in his father's voice, but even that did not move him.

"I know, dad. Now tell me what happened?" Ilya asked.

Safar kept silent for a while, trying to pull himself together. Finally, clearing his throat, he said:

“Son, I want to go back to my homeland, forever.” Ilya, who could not believe his ears, asked in perplexity:

“What did you just say?”

The father repeated what he had said earlier. Ilya could not resist asking: “At your age?”

Safar voiced his arguments as to why he suddenly made this decision, and at the end, he remarked:

“Son, I am old already. I feel my strength leaving me. I want to spend my last days in my homeland.” Ilya did not even think of arguing with his father. He agreed immediately.

“Look, dad. You know better. If you decided so, then so be it.” And then he asked:

“When are you thinking of leaving?”

Safar expected his son to be against his decision. He did not think that Ilya would agree so easily to part with him.

“Today... now...,” the father replied, upset.

“Does mom know?” the son asked.

“Not yet,” Safar answered and handed the paper to his son. “I want you to give this letter to Marina.”

Ilya got up and sat on the bed, taking the letter. “Okay dad, I will, don’t worry.”

He looked at the letter, then asked about the transport his father was going to use: if it was by plane or by train.

Safar answered:

“I don’t care. The main thing is to leave.”

Safar contemplated the upcoming conversation with his wife, as the son got out of bed and said: “Dad, I’ll walk you to the door.”

He had not yet started his journey, but already he felt a sense of relief. As if a mountain had fallen off his shoulders. After all, he was going to end many years of melancholy and find himself in his native land. Making a decision is a step to success.

At the moment, he was even glad that his son agreed so quickly with his decision. The last thing he needed now was his son opposing what had already been decided on, standing in his way and saying: “I will not let you go anywhere.”

He smiled. The anxiety of the last days vanished as if by magic. He no longer worried about where and how he would live in his homeland. He didn't even think of looking for answers to the different questions. He could only think of one thing: he wanted to arrive to his homeland as soon as possible. He recalled an episode from a book that he had read in his youth, and which had haunted him for a long time. The book read something like this: after the shah listened to the song performed by a young singer taken as a prisoner, he realized that his mournful singing was caused by longing for his homeland, and said to him: you left your soul in those places.

He knew that this was something from the work of the writer Elcin, but from which one?... he could not remember. “This is it,” Safar thought to himself and smiled.

Now he himself was in the state of the hero of that episode.

* * *

He got off the train at the Baku station. Full of joy, he looked around and took a deep breath. Then he sat down on a bench nearby and thought. It was beginning to get dark. At this moment, a hand lay on his shoulder:

“Safar?!”

He turned around and tried to remember the person with a familiar face. Even if he didn't remember, at that moment he became one hundred percent convinced that he did the right thing to have returned to his homeland. A person would never get in trouble at home. There will always be someone you know, some relative, even a stranger who will reach out to you and help.

3

Jabrail-muallim and Bahlul-kishi are completely different people with completely opposing views. They are neighbors. Jabrail-muallim holds a high position, and Bahlul-kishi is a person who does not have a permanent job. And they are united by a single hobby: playing domino in their yard. Jabrail-muallim sees this game as a filling for his leisure time, but for Bahlul-kishi it is a matter of life and death. He goes all out to make their team win and to cheer up Jabrail-muallim. Perhaps, he will get a favor as a result of this, and he will be able to get at least a simple job from his neighbor.

One day Jabrail-muallim suddenly suggested Bahlul-kishi going on vacation with their families. The latter was overcome with joy, thinking: this is a real chance to resolve the employment issue. But, as it turned out, it was not to happen.

A Clumsy Assistance

It was the last Friday of December. The residents of the five-story building were sitting in a self-built room arranged in the courtyard for various events and domino playing. People were waiting for their turn. It was very noisy. The losing pair left the game, giving way to another one. When someone made a wrong move, a clamor was heard. As a result of the squabble, the pieces of domino flew to the floor with such force that the noise from it could be heard in the nearest apartments. Everyone was equal here. No one was superior to any other. It could be a teacher, a scientist, even a simple worker – everyone was called “a neighbor.” They were united by the game of dominoes. In principle, they were not bad neighbors. They shared both their troubles and their joys, they helped each other.

It was hot in the room, even though it was December. A wooden stove was burning at one end, and a samovar was boiling at the other. Those who dropped out of the game, those who lost, were obliged to put hot tea in front of the players instead of the cooled ones.

When the turn came to Jabrail-muallim, who was the head of a company, the audience died down and the jokes stopped. After all, this person enjoyed high authority. Jabrail-muallim took his place and turned to his partner:

“Bahlul, my neighbor, please be careful, we must take revenge

for the latest defeat.”

“Yessir,” said Bahlul-kishi, who was recently hired as a watchman in the yard market. The Jabrail-Bahlul pair was considered the strongest in the quarter. Both were graduates of the University of Economics and were good at calculating moves, as well as guessing the result of the game. The first round passed at quite a pace. They won and took revenge for their previous defeat, but were unlucky in the next round. They hardly sat down when they had to get up again.

The passions were burning. No one cared about tea anymore. Upset, Jabrail left the room. “Damn it, what an awful thing to happen,” Bahlul thought to himself and went out, following his neighbor. He had to solve his problem somehow. Having caught up with his neighbor, he began to apologize:

“Excuse me, for god's sake, I tried my best. We were unlucky somehow...”

“Take it easy, you lose once, you win later,” the neighbor tried to calm him down. These words made Bahlul-kishi cheer up, so he decided to move on:

“Jabrail-muallim, you promised to give me a suitable job if the opportunity arises.”

“I remember, neighbor,” Jabrail-muallim replied. “There’s no vacancy yet. Have some patience. I am a responsible person. If I promised something, I’ll do it.”

“I know, brother. Heaven bless you,” said Bahlul-kishi, expressing his gratitude. It was cold outside. Bahlul-kishi decided

not to hold back his neighbor, said goodbye and thought to leave. Seeing this, Jabrail-muallim, apparently remembering about something, turned to his neighbor:

“Neighbor, what are you doing tomorrow?”

“Why are you asking, dear? I can ask my son to watch over the market for me. I'm at your service.”

“There's no service. I haven't travelled for a long time, I want to go on vacation to Kechresh, Quba, with my wife tomorrow. If you want, you can join us. Take your wife too. It will be more fun having a company.”

Bahlul-kishi was very happy with the proposal of his neighbor. To be honest, he did not expect it and considered it an honor to set out on the road with such a respected person, so he was quick to agree:

“With great pleasure. But I want to ask you for something. Just don't be offended, please.”

“I am listening.”

“I'll pay my expenses.”

“Come on, what kind of expense are you talking about?” said Jabrail- muallim. Bahlul-kishi answered quickly:

“No. Please, don't say so. I have to spend money as well, otherwise I will feel myself uncomfortable.”

At 9 am, both neighbors stood at their respective entrance doors with their bags and spouses. Despite the insistence of Jabrail-muallim, Bahlul-kishi did not agree to get into his new Jeep. “I cannot be so impudent,” he thought to himself and turned

to Jabrail-muallim:

“Don’t you worry, neighbor. We don’t need to go far after all. Let everyone use their own car. It will be more spacious this way. And then, my Zhiguli needs a test drive as well. I have never traveled out of town on it.”

Jabrail-muallim was not a fan of high-speed driving. He always said, “The quieter you drive, the further you get.” This characteristic was beneficial for Bahlul-kishi, since his car was old, but at the same time reliable, having never let his owner down on the way. Bahlul asked God to make sure that nothing happened to his car on the road. This might annoy Jabrail-muallim.

They reached Kechresh. Then they went to the Ulduz hotel, located on a mountain covered with forest.

The hotel staff went out to meet them. Jabrail-muallim greeted them by shaking hands:

“How are you, daredevils?”

“Thanks, dear,” the guy who stood in front of everyone said. “Everything’s ok, your rooms are ready.”

Bahlul-kishi realized that Jabrail-muallim had called and booked rooms before leaving.

In the hotel, the two good neighbors were also located next door. But the difference was that in the city they lived opposite each other, but here they lived side by side. Each family had their own room. About an hour later, Jabrail-muallim went out into the corridor and quietly knocked on the door of Bahlul-kishi. The

latter, as if standing just behind the door, waiting, immediately looked out.

“What can I do for you, dear?” he asked.

“It’s time for lunch, neighbor, let’s go eat. The shashlik is great here,” Jabrail- muallim said.

“I swear by Allah, brother, I am not hungry,” Bahlul-kishi answered immediately. “In the morning we left the house in a hurry and did not have time to have breakfast, so when we arrived, we began to eat immediately. Feel free to go and dine. Bon appetite.”

Jabrail-muallim began to object:

“What are you saying? Listen, we don’t eat shashlik every day, do we? Get ready, let’s go. This one’s on me.”

“Don’t insist, neighbor. We are not hungry. Otherwise, we would surely accompany you.”

* * *

Although it didn't snow, it was still cold. Jabrail-muallim and his wife were sitting in the spacious, bright salon of the restaurant near the hotel and having lunch. The couple chirped about something sweetly, while contemplating the landscape.

Jabrail-muallim was a busy man, and as such, he rarely could find the time to leave the city and somehow relax. This means that he was greatly enjoying his trip. He took a break from the bustle of the city and felt relieved. He decided to go with

Bahlul-kishi thinking that he would have someone to talk to when bored. But he could not imagine that his neighbor would show his stubborn character. Such a person is not good for a company. At the moment, his role was assumed by Laman – the wife of Jabrail-muallim.

Only the devil knows what Bahlul-kishi and his wife were doing back there in the room. They never opened their door until evening, and never left the room. When it was time for dinner, Jabrail-muallim knocked on his neighbors' door again. Less than a couple of seconds later, Bahlul-kishi already opened the door:

“Please, brother, come in. Welcome.”

“Thanks. That’s not what I came for. You two did not leave the room today. I thought I’d ask what was happening.”

“Nothing special, we’re just chatting here, me and my wife,” Bahlul- kishi replied.

“Look, go out and enjoy nature, admire the landscape. You don’t have this clean air in Baku. You’ll have plenty of time to chat at home,” Jabrail-muallim advised.

“To be honest, we were afraid to catch a cold, that’s why we stayed here. And you know how expensive the drugs are.”

Shaking his head, Jabrail-muallim changed the subject:

“Alright, get ready, let’s have dinner. You did not share lunch with us.”

Bahlul-kishi took his neighbor by the hand and answered:

“My dear, maybe you can be our guest? My wife brought excellent cabbage rolls from home, she prepared it herself.”

Jabrail-muallim realized that the neighbors did not want to be a burden to them, so they were not a good company, and decided to be clear:

“Bahlul, we want to taste the turkey shashlik. We invite you too. If you change your mind, feel free to come.”

* * *

The night came. Like all the other vacationers, our neighbors slept soundly in their rooms. Waking up in the morning, they could not believe their eyes. It snowed at night and everything was covered in white. Bahlul-kishi was very upset: “What am I going to do? How do I get out of here in my wreck of a car? How can I get to Baku?”

Jabrail-muallim, on the contrary, was happy as a child:

“You see, how lucky we were, wife? Did you expect that we would see such snow?”

“I did not expect at all,” Lyaman replied, delighted, and then joked: “If I had known, I would have brought a thermos with me to collect and take some snow to the children.”

This time there was a knock on Jabrail-muallim’s door.

“Brother, there is snow everywhere, how can we get out in this weather?” Bahlul- kishi asked, agitated.

Jabrail-muallim began to calm him down:

“Don’t worry, neighbor. We’ll come up with something.”

It was about 12 in the afternoon. The snow would not stop.

Bahlul- kishi was deeply worried. His wife Sakhne Khanum, seeing her husband's condition, began to calm him down:

“Look, why all this agony? Who forces you to race with your car? We’ll go slower and we will get there somehow.”

“What are you saying, wife? We saved money for 20 years to buy this used car. And now you say that I have to ruin it over bumps? You think it is easy to go downhill on bald tires? What it slips and crashes against the trees? Do we have extra money to pay for the repairs?”

“What do you propose, then?” the wife asked.

“We’ll walk down the hill. Then we’ll catch a ride with someone and continue. When the snow melts, I will come back for the car.”

Jabrail-muallim and his wife were also going to leave. Lyaman Aliyeva said:

“Jabi, the roads are covered in ice, maybe we should leave the car here and go down on foot. We'll catch some car and go home.”

“What are you talking about, wife?” Jabrail-muallim objected. “You want us to slip and hurt ourselves? To the hell with the car, let it break down. At least we will be alive and well.”

Secretly from Jabrail-muallim, Bahlul-kishi went and paid for his room, which greatly upset his neighbor. But he nevertheless accepted his offer to go in his Jeep, although he tried to refuse at first.

... The neighbors arrived safely at home.

Bahlul-kishi was going crazy. He just kept thinking about his old “Zhiguli” car. As for Jabrail-muallim, although he was in a good mood, seeing the concern of his neighbor, he also felt guilty somehow. He was not even particularly happy that he had travelled to Kechresh.

* * *

Bahlul-kishi could not keep still. It was two weeks already that the car had been waiting for him on the mountain. Every day he called the hotel and asked about the local situation, but the snow would not melt. He had to wait, there was no other solution.

Another week passed. The snow did not melt – on the contrary, it snowed harder now.

When they were playing dominoes again, Jabrail-muallim, seeing Bahlul-kishi's frustration, offered unexpectedly:

“Neighbor, our opponents beat us last time. If you play well and we win, I promise to bring your car from Kechresh using a tow truck.”

Bahlul-kishi almost jumped of joy. It was as if he was not facing a domino game, but a struggle for survival.

4

It seems that this rain will never stop. In fact, the story of Bahlul- kishi, although it seems funny, is in fact sad. It reminds me of Nijat Bey. His story is very different from that of the previous hero. What happened to him brings up a smile, but not sympathy. It is a story with a good ending. Nijat Bey is in no hurry to get married, he is passionate about his work. He doesn't even want to think about the fact that it is time to create a family. His mother, Nargiz-khanum, complains to her son's friends all the time, saying that they have all got married and that they could try to convince her son to follow their example.

Aunt Nargiz has more than enough candidates for the position of her daughter-in- law. But the problem is, the son says that he will marry only the one he will love. Moreover, he is in no hurry, as I have already noted.

One fine day, friends on the street drive him into such a situation that he is forced to get to know two girls. And the girls are far from being of the timid kind. They test him so much that the poor fellow runs home and tells his mother: "Marry me with whoever you want, I agree."

The Choice

The house where Nijat's family lived was located near the Central Department Store. Nijat was busy in the office five days a week, and the other two days he spent at home. His mother Nargiz-khanum kept swearing: "How long are you going to stay at home, go out into the city, enjoy life." But everything was useless. Sometimes friends managed to pull him out of the house by force and take him on a walk through the boulevard or to the cinema. But it happened extremely rarely. When at home, he would sit by the window, watching passers-by: he observed the way the people were dressed, the shapes of their faces and reflected on human society.

Nargiz khanum's cherished dream was to marry his son, who was already over thirty, as soon as possible, and devote the rest of her life to raising grandchildren. Actually, her husband Nadir-muallim dreamed of the same thing. But due to the respectful father / son relationship, he could not tell him about it directly, always passing a hint through his spouse, Nargiz-khanum. However, last time they talked, the head of the family put the question bluntly. His order was clear and concise. "Tell him that his father says that it is enough already, he has to have some mercy. I am giving him two months. If during this time he does not decide himself, he has been warned. I myself will go and marry him with the daughter of some relative." Nargiz-

khanum passed her father's words to her son, word for word.

The poor woman asked her son's friends so many times to try and influence him. And at each meeting, they tried to start a conversation about marriage in order to ignite a spark of interest from their friend. All these young people were married and tried using their own example to convince their friend how important and necessary it is to have a family, how good it is to be a married person.

The office where Nijat worked belonged to a computer programming company. Sometimes he did not have time to complete a job and then he took it home. He loved his profession and therefore did not get tired at work. And when he achieved good results, his joy had no limits. All of his attention was given to specialized literature and scientific research. He did not even want to think about the need to arrange his personal life. Over the years, he became more indecisive. He didn't know how to approach young girls, how to start a conversation with them. He could not imagine how he would behave if they refused. At the same time, he was actually aware of the need to start a family.

It was Saturday afternoon. A bit earlier than at noon, Oktay and Huseyn, the guys from neighboring families, knocked on their door and began to call him. Nargiz- khanum rejoiced at seeing her son's friends on the doorstep:

“It is so nice to see you, please, come in.”

“Thanks, auntie Nargiz. Is our nerd at home?” Huseyn asked.
“I’m coming, I’m coming,” Nijat’s voice sounded.

While he was preparing himself, Nargiz-khanum, as usual, made it clear to the guests that they should again somehow bring him to the question of marriage.

In the presence of his mother, Nijat just could not refuse the offer of his friends to “go get a breath of fresh air” and agreed reluctantly. They all went out into the street and stood under a wide pine tree that grew at the edge of the sidewalk.

Huseyn lit a cigarette and started chatting about stuff. Oktay, though, was more to the point:

“Why don’t you marry, Nijat? It’s time, brother. Time to act. Arrange a wedding, we would enjoy hanging out with you. You don’t have pity of yourself – ok, but have mercy of your parents. You promised you would soon decide yourself, didn’t you. So?”

Nijat kept silent. This time, it was Huseyn who interfered:

“Say something. Aren’t there enough girls in the city? I swear that if you don’t marry, I’ll let my grandma to your place and I want to see how you will manage to expulse her.”

Husein's humor brought a smile to his friend’s face. But he still didn’t say anything about the case:

“Nijat, maybe you have problems that prevent you from marrying? Don't hide from us. We won't tell anyone,” Oktay said. He was so ambiguous that his friend was forced to answer:

“What are you talking about? Don’t even think about it. You know, Oktay, I do understand myself that one cannot wait too long with that. I am also aware that my father and my mother are extremely worried. They are desperate. But you have to

understand me as well. At noon I am at work, at night I am home. Where should I find a girl? Let's say I managed to find one. But then, I will have to get to know her well. I can't get married blindfolded, can I?"

"Isn't there a girl you would know well among your colleagues or relatives?" Huseyn asked.

"At work, no. Everyone's married. As for relatives, I don't know what to say. I think it is better to marry someone who is not your relative."

"How many times did we tell you? You didn't want to listen. Girls are girls. They are quick to get married. Now, it is not easy to find a girl who would match your age," Oktay remarked.

At this moment, Huseyn noticed that two young ladies were walking towards them, and said, pointing at them:

"Look, Nijat, what pretties: nice and without makeup. Maybe they're not even married. Maybe it is God sending them to you? What do you say? Which one do you like most?"

"Ok, ok, enough jokes already."

"No jokes at all. He is right" Oktay said. "Come on, they don't bite." "Are you serious?" Nijat asked.

"Of course I am," Oktay replied. "We'll have plenty of time to get to know them better later."

And when Huseyn said "Look, if you don't approach them, then we will have serious doubts and assume that you have problems and that's why you don't show interest in girls," it assaulted his honor. As soon as the girls walked around them,

he summoned his courage and followed them. One of them was wearing a green jacket, the other a red one. He accelerated and walked over to the girl on the right, the one wearing a green jacket. He braced himself and said in a shy manner:

“Excuse me, you remind me of someone. Maybe we know each other?”

“Maybe you saw me in a dream?” the green jacketed girl replied with a bold face on.

“No, I’m serious. My name is Nijat.”

“No, young man, we don’t know each other.”

“Maybe we could know each other then, if you don’t mind. My intentions are pure. Please don’t think anything bad about me.”

They approached a department store. The girl in the green jacket said: “Please, Nijat, don’t follow us. Otherwise, some relatives can see us, which means trouble.”

“If you say so,” Nijat answered and stayed outside. He stepped aside and decided to wait for them to come out.

While in the department store, the girl in the red jacket told her friend:

“Ulker, I think he is a nice guy after all. Tidy, handsome, educated... Maybe we should agree to get to know him better, what do you think?”

“Don't talk nonsense, Jamila. How do you know what kind of person he is? If he is handsome, does it mean that he is a good man? Besides, his intentions are not clear. Maybe when we go out, he won't even recognize us.”

“Impossible. Are you kidding?”

“Of course not, I am dead serious. Let’s swap jackets and see if he can make it out?”

“It’s a deal!”

The girls were delighted at the original idea they’d come up with. They huddled in a corner and, giggling, exchanged jackets. They walked a little, then looked at themselves in the mirror and slowly went out into the street.

Nijat stood about ten meters from the exit. Seeing them, he began to approach. He went up to the girl in a green jacket and asked:

“How was shopping? Did you buy anything?” The girls laughed together.

“What are you laughing at?” the guy said, confused. “Did I say something funny?”

Jamila replied:

“You got it wrong, young man. We exchanged jackets while we were there. And you quickly forgot who you fell in love with. From now on, be attentive when choosing a girl, and now bye-bye. You can go.”

Nijat blushed intensely with embarrassment. He didn't know what to do. Then he gathered himself up and said:

“Excuse me^ I am really sorry...”

But no matter how he tried, he just could not say anything good in his own defense. He even forgot how and which way he took to reach home. In his heart, he did not stop cursing

at Huseyn, who persuaded him to go after the girls: “Alright, Huseyn, you’ll see what I will do with you.”

His mother brought him tea and then, stroking his head, asked: “Dear, what should I say to your father? What did you decide?”

“Mom, I decided that you can find a daughter of one of the relatives for me to marry.”

Delighted at what she just heard, the mother, began to hug and kiss him, and then ran to pass this message to her husband.

Nijat went to the window and gazed at the dark sky.

He immediately cheered up. His anger towards Huseyn disappeared somehow. I even thought it was actually a stroke of luck. He would never have dared to marry if Hussein had not forced him to go after the girls who fooled him.

5

In my life I have met many honest and decent people. One of these is the teacher Seville, who has chosen for her the glorious profession of teaching children. I will not even mention how kind she is and how much she loves her job. Actually, the world rests on such honest people. I really think so.

When her favorite pupil, the standout Ilkin, suddenly began to fall behind, she realized that it was impossible to resolve this matter with bad marks alone. It was imperative to find out the reason for what was actually happening in the child's life. She remains multiple times to study with her pupil after classes, although this fact doesn't add harmony to her family. But the teacher keeps pushing on and resolves to find out the reason for her pupils' lagging behind. As a result, she comes to the conclusion that serious efforts are needed in order to save the boy, and the teacher begins to act.

A Mission

The teacher Seville had a hard time falling asleep. Every now and then she turned from side to side. She just could not get rid of the thoughts in her head. The dawn was yet to come. She glanced at her watch: it was about 4 a. m. She realized that she would hardly get any sleep, and got out of bed. She was haunted by the fact that the excellent pupil Ilkin suddenly began to lag behind, became disobedient and joined the bad guys. She could not understand what exactly happened to the boy, who was always considered an exemplary pupil, not only in the classroom, but also at school as a whole. His photograph adorned the honors board, his behavior and studies seemed to warrant a bright future.

Peering into the dim lights of the street, she decided that today was the day when she should talk to Ilkin in private and find out what was happening to him, and, if necessary, provide the necessary assistance.

Worried, the teacher left the house without even having breakfast. As soon as she came to school, she went into the classroom and made the necessary notes in the journal. After that she turned to Ilkin:

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