

Rashad Majid

September 10

Leaving the hospital he went towards the car. It was an old “Zhiguli” “06”. He bought it by entering his name in a queue in soviet period 15 years ago in 1986. He opened the door of the car, sat down, took “taxi” board between front seats and with his left hand fixed it on the roof of the car.

He came to the hospital to see the surgeon. His middle daughter must be operated. Every doctor he talked to told him that the operation will cost no less than 300\$. One his old friends recommended this military surgeon saying “He is both professional and he is not an avid man”.

Their talk was not so bad indeed. They agreed on 150\$. He will spend around extra 50\$ on assistants. 150\$ was already ready. Since doctors convinced him of the importance of the operation he cut down his expences on children’s food and collected that money dollar by dollar. Now he should found 50\$. He thought that he can make it by borrowing from his friends and relatives. “Damn this time! Even in borrowing one faces hardships - he who has money has no heart and he who has heart has no money”.

Reaching “Narimanov” underground station he thought that may be he should go and gladden his wife. But he changed his mind when he saw no car at the car park where he was always waiting for a client. This car park has become his working place for more than 7 years. The plant at the end of the street where he had worked for 17 years and received rewards reduce its production gradually till it was shut down. He had been looking for a job for 7-8 months after that. When all his efforts failed he attached all his hope to the car. On the advice of his neighbor Islam he made his car a taxi. Islam used to work at once famous Trade Center Base. He was a rich man. He was helping neighbors financially and sold goods they want for face value. After the base was closed though Islam wanted to become a businessman he suffered great losses and after paying off his debts he began to earn his living by driving a taxi. Though at the beginning he refused Islam’s offer then he agreed. First times he was shy a bit. Sometimes he came across with friends and people who knew him. He did not want to get money from them. Once though he dropped one insolent and arrogant client in the middle of the road and returned home questioning look of his wife and children didn’t let him seat in peace at home. But as the time was passing he was getting used to it gradually. He found new comrades and workmates in the car park. There were former workers from district committee, engneers and doctors among them.

...The tap on the windshield of the car brought him back from deep thoughts. They were foreigners. A short stout man and a medium sized thin woman. They were holding full grocery bags. He opened the rear door by saying” Please, please”. The woman explained that hey will go in city direction. He turned round by the underground and entered “Moskow” avenue. In the front mirror he saw man eating something. “They are also fond of eating”. He saw man taking baklava out of the grocery bag. In fact american was not chewing the baklava he was swallowing it nearly wholly.

He passed by little shacks and stopped in front of high recently built building on woman’s order. The woman gave him a shirvan- 10.000 manat and said “Thank you”. She got out of the car and opened the door. The man was still eating. He got out of the car with difficulty dragging the grocery bags. They went towards the entrance door saying “thank you”. He got into the car and drove homewards.

They were living in a shack. His father collected seven thousand selling from his cows and sheep. They bought it two monts after his marriage. There were two rooms. It has a little kitchen and a yard that could hardly hold a car. Bathroom and toilet in the entrance of his yard he built later. He was in a house queue at plant. Once they gave one –room flat. He refused. How could he live with three children ina one-room flat.”I will wait a bit longer but I will get a three-room flat. He waited again and again –state collapsed, the plant was shut down, house queues became history (when recalling he was reproaching himself for not getting one-room flat).

Reaching the gate he gave a horn his wife went outside and opened the gate. He usually did not put the car inside in the afternoons. He wanted to eat something and sleep a bit. His wife closed the gate. She was looking at him. He spoke about the talk with the military surgeon. He became glad. He dined at the kitchen and went to the back room. Little window of the room was facing the yard of his neighbor. The rattle of dishes, the babble of water,

children's noise must not let him sleep. But this time there was silence for some reason. May be his wife informed them. Their neighbors were aware of his wife's talent from God.

His wife used to work as a kindergarten teacher at kindergarten. There used to be mainly books about Lenin at kindergarten in soviet period. At period when state was about to collapse somebody brought religious books with large prints in Cyrillic from Iran and presented 5-6 of them to the kindergarten. As soon as the plant was shut down the kindergarten was also closed. His wife brought a few books home. It seemed strange to him to see his wife reading that books for hours. She sometimes spoke about Quran and Prophet Muhammad's life. Her words about hellish fire waiting for unbelievers frightened him. At such times for some reason he was recalling party card that his wife brought in her dowry trunk. He had been member of communist party for twelve years and every month paid party dues. When Russian troops entered Baku and killed unarmed people on January 20 he like everybody wanted to throw away his party card. But then he changed his mind. He blamed Gorbachov not the party. He thought that if Gorbachov wanted he could put Armenians in their place and prevent bloodsheds. That is why he didn't throw away his party card. But one day Yeltsin stopped party's activity with a decree. But again he didn't throw away his party card. He believed in return of communism. He did not believe that such a huge state would collapse so easily. At the beginning he thought that his wife's interest in religion is temporary. But little by little the number of books increased. His wife began covering her head at home too. Sometimes coming home he saw women from neighborhood in his house. Then some unfamiliar women began to appear in his house. One day his wife told him everything. She told him that in her dream a saint man in a white turban gave him something in gleaming gold basin to drink and waking up in the morning she felt extraordinary things. He was trying to find the explanation to strange changes in his wife he related it with unemployment, poverty. At the beginning he was angry with his wife and asked her not to interfere with anybody's life and not to let in strange women.

One day Islam invited him to teahouse. He has become more reasonable and given up drinking. He often went to mosque and was wearing short beard. He was totally different from previous self who liked to go to parties and have fun. Islam tried to convince him that such a gift is not given to anybody. God grants it only to righteous, honest people. Islam asked his permission "At least let her to fulfil neighbor's wishes not let them be in a desperate state, it will be pleasing to God." He also gave him advise "Give up drinking, go to Hadj pilgrimage, throw away your party card. There must not be anything bad in your house."

However hard Islam tried he did not succeed. But after some time he began to believe that there is some extraordinary ability in his wife. Once his wife said that in her dream she saw their middle daughter would be sick. In two week's time he indeed was to take her middle daughter to doctor. She was getting thin and didn't eat anything. Doctors told him that one of his daughter's kidney was not functioning and must be removed by urgent operation. Other two doctors told the same. After that case he totally believed in extraordinary ability of his wife and was a bit afraid of it.

...Opening his eyes saw his wife looking for something in the corner of the room.

-You slept pretty well.

It was some minutes to five. He washed his hand and face and returned the room. There was a glass of tea and a little yellow women handbag on the table.

-What is this?

-Our girls have found in your car.

-Have you opened?

-They did. I closed it and put it here.

He opened the handbag and began to put things out of the handbag onto the table. His wife was looking at him. His daughters were standing by door and staring at the table. He looked at his middle daughter and smiled. A comb, a credit card... Seventeen 100\$ bills, a few 10.000 and 1000 manat bills.

The first thing he recalled was the American eating a lot.

-Some time ago an American couple was his client. It must be theirs. I know where they live.

His daughters step aside from the door. His wife taking the glass said:

-It has gone cold, let me change it.

News at 5 on "Space" TV was broadcasted. They began with the news about arrival of Garabagh Armenians in Baku. They will be back tomorrow on September 11. Garabagh Liberation Organization posted a protest picket and some of opposition parties agreed to have a meeting with them refused it.

Drinking his tea left the house holding the handbag. Opening the door get into the car. Driving the car out of the yard he got out of the car to close the gate. His wife was in the yard –she pulled a leaf of the gate and with the voice loud enough for her husband to hear said “They do not look like brave people.” His wife’s ice cold words as if mixed with the heat that occupied his inside long ago.He as if understand what the heat is now. In the bottom of his heart he thought that not that stout man but his wife wouldbe glad to see him at their door and would give one out of seventeen 100\$ bill to him and he wolud be able to give the money for his daughter’s operation to the doctor tomorrow. Now after his wife words as if that heat has gone giving its place to a dull pain.

He stopped his car at the car park by the underground. There were only three cars. They have a habit to leave the doors open and have a talk in the shade of the nearby tree while waiting for the client not let the inside of the car get hot. Akif and “Doctor “(nickname) stood up as soon as they saw him. Akif spoke first:

-Two Americans came. They were looking for you and they left their visit card. They had a translator too. He said that they got into a red “Zhiguli” and left woman’s handbag there. The driver was black moustached and short. We guessed that it was you. Is there anything in the handbag?

-He was about to answer when “Doctor” interrupted him:

-He whould not have come üithout reason. An american üill not trouble himself for every trifle. I guess there was 1000\$ in the handbag. They will give you at least 100\$. You must give a little banquet for this reason.

-It is in the car there is more than 1000\$. I am going to give it back.

Akif held out the vizit card.

-"I know the address"- he said but also got the visit card. It was in English. He read name Jim easily but could not read surname. There was a scheme at the back of the vizit card and the arrow indicating 11th floor of their building.

-Do not forget the banquet!

He knew that they will not leave him alone easily:

-Be sure I will give you the banquet if they give me 100\$.

He got into his car and drove towards the “Baksoviet”. He passed by the shacks and stopped in front of the building. He approached the door of the building surrounded with iron fence and showed the visit card. Tall security man in black looked at the visit card and enterd his room. He talked with somebody through the phone and said “Enter the lift go to the 11th floor.They are waiting for you.” He took the handbag out of the car and went upstairs.

One of the two doors in the corridor was half opened. Sound was coming from inside. He approached the door and opened it a bit. The stout man said “Please, please” as soon as saw him smoothing curly dog in his arms went down the corridor. There came silence. After some time from the direction tha man went some minutes ago the women came up to him. He held out the handbag. She took it, opened and checked everything. Then she counted dollars and said “Right”. Then shoüing the money said:

-Jim will buy a dog.

Then put the money inside of the handbag and hold out her hand:

-Thank you. I am grateful!

The stout man came back again smoothing his dog and seeing him smiled and entered the room. He was eating as always.

He was stupefied and letting of thin, wrinkled hands of woman he left the house. He pushed the button of lift. He recalled first his wife’s then his middle daughter’s faces. Then he thought of his friends talking under the tree. He thought that he should have denied finding the handbag. Who could prove that it was left exactly in my car. He felt sick because of the thought he thought of.

The door of the lift opened and a little dog barked twice and began to scent his feet. He was scared. The boy taking the dog by the collar said “Don’t fear” with irony. At the entrance door A Jeep was parked. He went out of the door with difficulty. He got into the car and drove towards the city.

“No good will come of them.” In recent years he often joined political disputes and always supported Russians and Soviet government. He was giving examples to prove that Americans are only after their own benefit and they are interested in our oil only. Now the only Americans he has met so far even deeeperened his thought about Americans. He felt great desire to talk to his friends and share his sorrow. He turned towards the underground. They were under the tree.

They stood up gladly. Akif asked:

-How was it? Did they give anything?

-Yes. He said- they gave me 100\$.

-Now we are going to celebrate it aren't we? Said "Doctor"

-Let me garage the car first.

-You want to drink I see -said Akif.

He stopped the car at the gate. he was unwilling to drive it in. After his entering his wife asked

-How it was?

-It was exactly as you said.

He took off his shoes and entered the bedroom. Opened the built-in cupboard and from the top drawer counted ten - 10.000 manat bill and put into his pocket. Then put the rest of the money back.

When wearing his shoes his wife asked:

-Are going somewhere?

-I think I will be late. I must give a little banquet to the friends.

It was written on his wife's face that she is angry.

Akif was already at their door. He got into his car.

-Don't you leave your car?

-No I won't drink. You will drink with "Doctor."

They came to the cafe they come often. The doors outside were vacant. They sat down and ordered kebab. After ten minutes "Doctor" came. Vagif was children's doctor. That is why he was called "Doctor." He graduated from Medical University. Having worked as a doctor for some years he went in for business saying that there no profit in medicine and fled to foreign countries couple of times to bring goods to sell but went bankrupt like Islam and began to drive a taxi.

Akif graduated from Historical faculty of the University when it was prestigious and worked at Historical Institute for some time. When Soviet Union collapsed he was about to defend a thesis. After a while science was forgotten. He has been earning his living by driving a taxi for more than fifteen years.

They drank the first three toasts to him, his family and his middle daughter. Then to non-drinker Akif and then to "Doctor". The bottle was nearly empty. He had a desire to toast.

-I want to toast and to drink to us and our nation. I have always said that no good will come of Americans. I realised it one more time today. Anybody would give 100\$ out of 1700\$. But they did not give even 10.000 manat. Moreover they looked at me as if I am indebted before them. A Russian would give, a German would also give he stopped a while scratched his head – an Armenian would give as well but Americans can not give.

"Doctor" and Akif look first at each other in astonishment then at the fatty tail and Lule kebab getting cold. He went on:

-Don't reproach me! I give banquet because I never break my promise. God will help and I will find money to operate my daughter. I used to say to myself you have never seen an American and you don't know what they like why do you speak against them? I met and understood that I am right in my opinion about them. They collapsed Soviet Union -such a good state, instigate us to kill each other, left us unemployed, made us slaves -for their own benefit. They come take away our oil and look down on us. They even don't help us to get back Garabagh. Malay bring one more bottle of vodka.

Akif fidgeted in his place and wanted to say something.

-No. Let's just drink today.

... It was after 24.00 when they left the cafe. Akif was to drive first him and then "Doctor" home. They stopped at the gate. He was repeating his words against Americans in the car. Akif managed to talk him into getting out of the car.

-“What if I put the car into the yard?” asked Akif pointing at the car standing in front of the gate. He refused. He searched for the key in his pocket but couldn't find. Then he entered the yard. His wife was on her feet and in the yard for his voice.

-I don't put the car into the yard. Let it remain outside -he stammered.

His wife wanted to say that somebody can do something to the car. Recently there was a lot of stealing -they were stealing windshields, tyres and everything they could. Seeing him enter the house and throw himself onto the bed she kept silence.

-Don't take it to heart everything will be alright - said his wife looking at his face. But he was asleep.

Waking up in the morning he felt dull pain in his head. His wife was sitting opposite to him in the bed.

-I saw a terrible dream. Huge buildings were on fire.

-Have checked the car?

-Yes. It is o.k.

-What about the girl?

-She is also alright. I anticipate that something terrible will happen. I am very afraid. I beg you don't drink give it up.

-I will give up. I promise. I will get up and go to the mosque to repent -he said pulling the blanket to his head.

translated by K h a q a n i A l i y e v