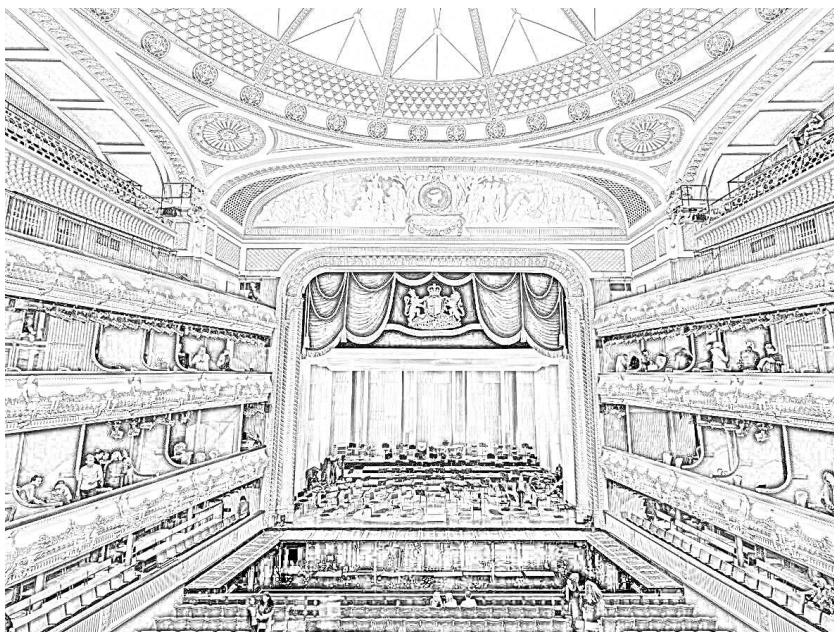


A
RUINED
EVENING
AT THE
ROYAL OPERA
HOUSE

ROBERT'S JOURNEY

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Author's inspiration is based on his work experience at the Secretariat of the United Nations, while honouring the ethical and professional principles of the Organization.

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A ruined evening at the Royal Opera House

Mozart's music filled the Royal Opera House. It was Robert's favourite piece, Don Giovanni. But this time he did not enjoy it. All his life collapsed in a minute, and all Robert's mind was taken by a single e-mail that he opened just after the first act. Robert thought how few simple lines can change his life.

Mary gave Robert her usual unhappy but resigned look, when he started browsing through his smartphone: "Can we have an evening just for two of us, Rob? Why is your office always standing between you and me?"

"I am a director, I cannot leave my office, the work would stop. They would be lost without me."

"Robbie darling, the cemeteries and hospitals are full of irreplaceable people. One day their work had to continue without them. Director or a simple assistant, all have a right for their free and private time."

Mary was right. But Robert believed that without following every step of his co-workers, he would have to redo everything again on his return. Therefore, also during his rest and recuperation breaks and vacations he never disconnected from his office. It was not always like this. Many years ago, when he worked in London for one of the UK humanitarian agencies, people lived without an e-mail. Even a mobile phone was a luxury, they were too heavy to carry, and it was not easy to write an SMS. How would he manage, if he was a director those days? Probably he would have to call in twice a day.

Robert's smartphone became his memory, his eyes, his mouth. But today he wished that the smartphones were never invented. As he opened the e-mail inbox, his eyes immediately fixed on a simple subject line: 'Administrative leave'. A single paragraph informed Robert not

to report to the office. Pending a disciplinary process, he was placed on a special administrative leave with a full pay.

Mary knew something bad happened: “Bad news, Rob? Some problem?” Her eyes must be an x-ray, she knows always what is in Robert’s mind.

“The usual things, there is always something what happens, but there is always a solution.” This time there may not be a solution. He did not know, whether he should tell Mary or not, but after some tense silence, he said: “My vacation will be little longer, they told me that I should not travel back to Baghdad.”

“Oh My God, did they fire you? Did you steal some money?” What does she think about him, is he a thief?

“No, the audit just finished a couple of months ago. All our accounts are OK, our substantive delivery is over 100%. We produce more than one would expect in proportion to our resources.”

“Don’t tell me that they just want you to enjoy a vacation in London. Something has happened. Something bad. I read it on your face.”

“It is the old thing three years ago. Three people from the office made a plot against me, but it was stopped by the legal office.”

“You should talk to them. They cannot do this to you, it is illegal to open a closed case.”

“Apparently, they can. This is the UN. It has its own legal system.” Robert’s mind was busy to this what to do next. He must do something, but what? “I will have to call the headquarters tomorrow morning. There should be a solution.” But Robert was worried this time, he lost all his self-confidence – at least for tonight.

Don Giovanni loses all in the second act of the opera. He is left by everyone, including his long-time servant Leporello. The audience is happy of the moral of the opera – the death of the evildoer. Robert loved Mozart’s music. He was never thinking much about the story. The music sounded very romantic and gentle. The story was sad. Today he felt that it was his story. But did he deserve the same fate as Don Giovanni?

With the flow of music, Robert browsed his memory. His whole life was played in his mind in parallel with the opera. Robert felt defeated, he did not understand, how could this happen to him.



Twelve years of Rob's career at the United Nations were ruined in a single moment. He felt betrayed by his employer, by his subordinates and by his management. There was a complaint filed against him three or four years ago. The complaint said that it was a harassment and abuse of authority, including a sexual harassment. But Robert believed that the real reason was in his tough and demanding management style. He was appointed a director of the office to ensure the integrity and good performance. Those, who were not able or willing to keep up the hard work with him plotted against him. Big John helped to close the case, he stood firmly behind Robert. Everybody knew that Big John carefully selected his people, he was demanding on them, but he supported them. A loyalty was compensated by a loyalty. Robert was a loyal member of Big John's group.

A year ago, when the new management took over, Big John left the United Nations – together with many members of the 'old guard'. Their spirit has survived for some time, but new managers made many changes. In old days, Robert had Big John's mobile number, he could contact him anytime. Obviously, it was more often in the opposite direction. Robert was called or texted by Big John quite often – day ad night, weekdays, weekends and holidays. At that time Robert started to monitor all kinds of messages on his smartphone almost 24/7.

What to do now. Mary showed some concern, and Robert felt

embarrassed. When they met two years ago at the arts exhibition, he was a strong and confident man, he did not want to appear defeated in front of her.

The damage happened already. “Maybe you can stay in London, leave the UN, and find a job here.”

“Maybe, but who employs a man in his fifties? Private employers seek ‘young and dynamic’ professionals, and the public sector has downsized a lot in the recent years. There are many former government employees seeking jobs.”

“Let’s have a look at some ads tomorrow.” Who says women are not rational? Mary needed no time to get into an action. “I took a day off anyway, we wanted to make a trip to my country house, we can check the ads when we are there.”

“We can try.” Is there really a chance? Who knows? He must try something anyway. “I wanted to call headquarters, but perhaps I should wait a little, and think whom to call. People have changed there. I am not as close to them as two years ago.”

“Do you think that they want to get rid of you? Maybe they want someone of theirs to take your post, and this is, why they opened that old case.”

“It is an interesting idea. I never thought about something like this. I worked for the UN the days and nights.”

“I know,” Mary said sarcastically, but then changed the tone. “I do not know what that old case was about.” Mary’s eyes tried to punch through Robert’s mind. “Everybody knew that you were one of Big John’s men. The new bosses can seek their people.”

Mary was right. Robert was seen by many as a man of Big John. But he got there because of his hard work, because his performance was exceptional. Robert had excellent evaluations before he met Big John, while serving on junior positions. This is what brought him up the ladder of the United Nations hierarchy so quickly.

“Rob! Rob, do you listen?” Mary’s voice took Robert to a reality Don

Giovanni already finished. They were in front of the Opera surrounded by the crowd.

“Yes, Mary. What did you say?” It was obvious that he did not listen. “I asked you, whether we go to your place, or whether I should take a tube and go home.”

“I go home, I need to think” Oh yes, they wanted to have an extended weekend with Mary. She brought her bag full of clothes already early afternoon. “Sorry, with you, obviously.”

“Are you sure? Don’t you prefer to stay alone?” Yes and no.

“No, no, I feel much better with you.” He would prefer to stay by himself only. He was about to lose Mary. Who would stay with a looser? Robert was a looser at this moment.

“You even do not listen to me. So, let’s take a taxi.” The skies were falling on Robert’s head. He wanted to run away from the crowds, to lick his wounds in private, just the two of them behind a closed door of his studio.

“Right, let’s queue at the taxi stand.” Robert gave a smile to Mary and tried to forget about the e-mail. He slowly started to feel relaxed in Mary’s presence.

“Let’s have a drink at home. A new day will bring new thoughts. Nothing is consumed so hot as it is cooked.” A man is made by a woman. Mary’s words were like a balsam on his wounds.

There was nothing that Robert could do at this moment. Mary became once again a bright light in the darkness, a support that he badly needed – more than ever before. At the end, the special administrative leave carried with it his full salary. At least he earns a time for working out a solution.



Robert was a director of a field office responsible to technical and humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in an area stricken by war and post-war conflicts. His office resided in a secluded compound. It was in a secured area in Baghdad and high concrete walls with a barbed wire at the top surrounded a group of buildings. The two largest ones were the office building and the residence. Some garages and a warehouse were glued to the outer walls.

A life in the technical and humanitarian assistance field office was almost entirely restricted to those two building. The same people walked in the morning to the office building, the same people met on the corridors, the same people walked at the end to the residence. They all shared the same kitchen and facilities. Robert was lucky. The top floor had only two rooms with a small hall in between and a relatively big terrace. One of the two rooms for the Director, the other one for his Deputy. Robert used to have two deputies earlier, Cathy used to live in the other room at the third floor. His other deputy, Wanda, lived on the second floor. When bosses in New York abolished Cathy's post, Wanda declined an offer to move there. Therefore, Robert was living alone on the third floor already the third year.

The closed compound brought with it a kind of a cabin-fewer effect. Everyone had to take a break, Robert was not an exception. The last two years he had one reason more. The reason had its name: Mary.

The last weekend with Mary helped Robert to recover from the first shock after he got that devastating e-mail. A prolonged weekend at her country house was relaxing. Mary's optimism turned his mind to thinking about options for his future. Robert admitted that she saw the job add the his eyes always skipped through: "A travel agency seeks customer advisors, look here."

Robert saw that it was not a great job, but it was something: "The salary is one third of what I have now. Client advisors are better salesmen. They sit at the desk and try to sell trips to customers, who put their feet

into the agency.”

“But with your experience, you can advise the customers easily. You have travelled a lot in your life, you can feel what each client wants.”

Robert admitted that this was an easy job compared to what he did at the UN, and Mary continued: “And the salary is enough for you, if you move to London. You own an apartment here. You have savings and you can get a pension from the UN in five years. After your shift, you are not obliged to look on your smartphone every five minutes.”

Robert thought for a moment that he would like the work of a travel agent. He had to convince people in more difficult negotiations. He was always good at arranging his travel, and he advised colleagues. He could make customers happy for sure. Just his lifestyle would have to become more modest, as his pay check would drop down.

Mary’s voice brought him back from a dream: “A post at the law faculty!”

“But I have a degree in economy, not in law.”

“Does not matter, they look for a librarian. The pay is relatively modest, but there are other benefits.”

“So, I would sit in a library and take care of catalogues and books borrowings?”

“Your mind stayed in the last century. The catalogues with cards are a history, and many books are digitalized. You were good in researching UN and government reports, you would do this service in a library – electronically.”

“Not bad.”

“You probably wanted to say not great.” Mary laughed. “I know that you were used to be a director, but as you said employers look for young and dynamic managers.”

“I would say irresponsible and aggressive managers, who take a risk without hesitation. Guys who left the university five years ago, and they believe, what is in their mind, is the only right idea.”

“True, a lack of life experience makes them to go ahead regardless of possible consequences.” Mary’s voice continued: “They are able to

sacrify anything and anyone, sure except themselves. You cannot compete with them.”

“Am I a dinosaur? Should I better look for a place in a retirement house?”

“Robbie, my little dinosaur,” She laughed “don’t hide yourself in a retirement house. How would I get to you? Can you imagine a matron at the reception investigating at every visit, why I want to meet you?”

“What else do you have on the offer?”

“A dispatcher of a shipping company. There are good conditions – a salary and benefits. They work 24/7 in 12 hours shift. A dispatcher is de facto a trouble-shooter and a planner in one...” Mary’s eyes said that something more is coming. “They engage with international organizations. Maybe you know them.”

“I don’t know them, but that is closer to my humanitarian work. When I joined the UN, I worked for a short time at the logistics base in Valencia. It was a nice job, but I got better offers.” Those were the happy days. He did not have to look to ‘office politics’, he just did his job.

“After seven or so years you will come back to your roots.” Mary laughed.

Robert suddenly felt again the frustration of Thursday evening. Seven years of efforts, long days and sleepless nights of climbing up the ladder got lost. He has to begin again.

“I was 45 at that time, it was a right age to accept such job. Now I am approaching my sixties. Shall I begin again from the bottom?”

“You are still far from sixties, three years to go. Don’t make yourself older than you are.”

All job ads that Mary picked up had some potential. If Robert wanted to eat, it was better to have a little chicken in his hands than a big bird flying over his head. They selected some ads that Robert was going to answer beginning Monday morning. Mary was a great woman. She was able to bring a hope.

A life can be great again. If not great, at least acceptable.



A new week began with a nice weather. Robert woke up determined to send his CV to job offers that they selected with Mary during the weekend. He rushed with his motivation letters and CVs in the morning, because early afternoon he wanted to call the headquarters in New York. Earlier he felt confident calling New York, but that was at the time, when Big John was still a big boss there.

When Robert finished his job applications, the afternoon already reigned for few hours. He looked at the wall clock showing that it was well over 3 p.m., and he felt hungry. Robert's anxiety, however, made him to call the boss in New York. He had the number stored as one of the favourites on his phone. The number was still labelled "Big John", but a new boss would answer the call. Robert thought whether he should make some notes before calling, but his question was simple: Why was he asked to stay away from his office, from his work? He pushed a button.

A signal was ringing for some time, when a female voice answered the call: "Office of the Assistant Secretary General. What can I do for you?" "Good afternoon", Robert realised that there was a time difference of five hours "Sorry, good morning, my name is Robert Allen, I would like to talk to Mr. to the ASG."

"Please hold the line, I will check." a minute has passed "Are you still there?"

"I am still on line, Madame."

"Can you repeat your name?"

“Robert Allen.”

“Do you have an appointment with Mr. Murphy?”

“No, but I received an e-mail...”

“I apologise, Mr. Murphy is very busy today, would you like to speak to his Special Assistant?”

“I would prefer to talk to the ASG, to Mr. Murphy. I need only five minutes. I am a director of the Baghdad Field Office.”

“Hold the line, please.” Three minutes passed. The background noise and voices told Robert that the secretary was dealing with other visitors and affairs, and simply kept Robert on hold. “Hallo, are you still on the line?”

“Sure, I am here.”

“I am very sorry, Mr. Murphy is fully booked today, and he is leaving for Bamako tomorrow. Ms. Isuako can talk to you.”

Robert was upset, he knew that the secretary did not ask, she was determined to pass him onto the Special Assistant. “O.K. I appreciate it.” In reality he did not appreciate the trick at all.

“Please hold the line.” The phone became silent and after few moments Robert could hear a ringing tone again – for a minute or two.

Robert heard a female voice at the other end: “Office of Ms. Isuako. May I help you?”

“Good morning, my name is Robert Allen, Director of the Field Office in Baghdad. I wanted to talk to Mr. Murphy, and they told me...”

“Please hold.” The line became mute again and a ringing tone came after a half minute.

“Good Morning, Mr. Allen. How can I help you?”

“Madame, good morning, I received an e-mail from the Human Resources the last week, and I would like to ask...” Robert got interrupted.

“Would you prefer to talk to the Human Resources? They are aware of the e-mail. I don’t know what e-mail you received.”

“It was about a special administrative leave. I think that there is some mistake.”

“Are you from Baghdad?”

“Yes, I am, Madame.”

“It was mentioned at the management meeting. I recommend that you talk to the HR, they proposed the administrative leave. There is some pending investigation going on. The HR initiated it.”

“But there must be a mistake. The investigation was closed two years ago...”

“I am not aware of the case, hold the line, my secretary will transfer you to the HR. Have a nice day, bye.” The line cut immediately.



The line was mute for a moment, and a busy signal came. No, the secretary will not transfer him to the HR. Robert will have to call the HR directly. iSeek was a name of the global intranet site of the United Nations. Robert was asked for his password, he had to retype captcha, and finally he had to authorise a connection through an application on his smartphone. Robert always thought that CIA databases could not be protected better than the UN intranet. It took Robert few moments until he found a phone number of the Human Resources office. He felt betrayed, and he knew that this call will not bring any solution. But he had to continue, he had nothing to lose.

“Human Resources, can I help you?”

“Good morning, my name is Robert Allen.” Robert was already tired and upset from repeating his name again and again. He knew the trick, when bureaucrats sent the caller from one to another. Bureaucrats only wanted to have their comfort and quiet life, they did not want to listen to Robert’s problems. “I received an e-mail the last week. It says that I am placed on a special administrative leave.”

“What is your department?”

“Technical and humanitarian assistance. I am a director of the ...”

“Please hold the line.” Silence.

“Human Resources. Good morning. May I help you?” A new voice. The first HR clerk was happy that he could pass the call to a colleague. Robert was not happy. He had to begin the explanations again.

“Good morning. My name is Robert Allen, I am a director of the Baghdad Field Office. I received an e-mail about a special administrative leave.”

“Whom would you like to talk to?”

“I don’t know. It came from the ‘NOREPLY_HR’ e-mail, and the attached memo was signed by Mr. Murphy.”

“You have to talk to Mr. Murphy’s office then.” Robert got annoyed, but he knew he had to remain calm on the phone.

“I called his office, they told me to call the HR.”

“Where do you work? Did you say Bissau?”

“No, I said Baghdad.”

“My colleague, who is in charge of Baghdad, is absent today.”

“Is there someone else, who may know about the case?”

“You should call the HR office in Dubai. They will be able to answer you.”

“But I am sure that the e-mail was sent from New York. And the attachment had a signature of Mr. Murphy, it could not be sent from Dubai.”

“Hold the line, please.” Silence again.

“HR Office, Middle East Desk. Good morning.”

“Good morning. My name is Robert Allen, I am a director of the Baghdad Field Office.”

“Baghdad is taken care of by my colleague Suzann. She is off today.”

“Can you help me, this is urgent. I got an e-mail that I am placed on a special administrative leave.”

“A memo was signed by the ASG Mr. ... Mr. ... Mr. Matthew.”

“Mr. Murphy.”

“Right, Mr. Murphy. His office asked us to process it. Susann got the instruction ten days ago.” Robert was just leaving Baghdad 10 days

ago. Now he understood that they planned to send it to him, during his vacation.

“I am sure that there is a mistake there. The investigation against me was closed two years ago...”

“The ASG’s office asked us to reopen it. They got a new investigation report.”

“But there was not any new investigation.”

“The team of investigators issued a new report. They say that they analysed voice recordings from witness interviews, and they brought new details.”

“Is that legal? Can a closed case be opened again?”

“I am not a lawyer. Maybe you have to talk to the legal office.”

“Do you have their number?”

“They are in the iSeek directory...” Robert saw himself retyping captcha a waiting for his smartphone to give him an authorisation code again. He was not happy about that counterproductive hassle, “...but I can transfer you, if you wish.”

Oh, at least something nice today from the headquarters bureaucrats.

“Yes, please, I appreciate it very much.”

“You are welcome...” Robert could feel that the lady at the other end of the line was happy to end the call with him, “...hold the line, please.”

Silence again, then the ringing signal for 15 second, half a minute, a minute,... a long wait.



Mary opened the door and entered the apartment. Robert did not expect her today, but he was glad to see her. The afternoon was frustrating. He was already over an hour calling from one office in New York to another, and nothing happened so far. Nothing was not the right word. Something happened. Robert has heard so many excuses from so different voices that he would be

able to write a book about them. Each bureaucrat, whom he called, was just trying to finish the call and pass him on to another bureaucrat.

“Robbie, darling, how are you?”

“Hi, Mary, I am happy that you came. I am calling the legal office in New York.”

“It seems you are waiting for them to pick up the phone.” Mary could always see the reality “Shall I prepare a tea, while you wait.”

“Would be nice, darling...” The phone suddenly woke up.

“Legal Office, Good morning.”

“Good morning, my name is Robert Allen, I am a director...”

“Whom would you like to talk with?” the secretary was probably busy, she was not interested in long introductions.

“I don’t know, they told me to call the legal office.”

“But I do not know why you call.” Sure, she did not listen to Robert, if she would let him to talk 15 seconds more, she would know, what was his issue.

“I received a memo that I am placed on a special administrative leave.”

“What is the case number?”

“I don’t remember.” Robert was opening his e-mail. As usually the internet connection was slow, when he desperately needed it.

“I need to know the case number, to find which lawyer is in charge of your case.” The log in page of his e-mail loaded. Who tried to hold a phone in one hand, and to type a password with one capital, three lowercase characters, five numbers and a special character (who invents these stupid password rules) knows how difficult it is, when you need desperately some detail from your e-mail.

“Let me to open the memo.”

“Do you have the memo in front of you?”

“I am opening it from my e-mail.” Why is the internet so slow right at this moment?

“The case number is written on the memo.” A stupid lady, she does not understand that he needs to open the file from his e-mail? How can be some secretaries so much out of reality?

Finally, the file opened. "The number is RM/as/738/2016."

"Sorry, I do not recognise the case number." Robert was sure that he was talking to a computer, not a real human secretary.

"But it is written at the top of the memo."

"The case number is below the signature." Robert could not believe, who was the genius, who decided to write the most important identifier at the bottom of the paper. The bureaucrats are able to turn things upside down.

"THA-2013-Irq-27-3."

The secretary repeated: "THI-2013-IRK-23-7."

"Sorry there is 'A' at the beginning."

"ATHI? There should be only three characters."

"Tango Hotel Alpha." Robert felt that he would lose a patience.

"What is that."

"A military style spelling – T like Tango, H like Hotel, A like Alpha."

"I see. Can you repeat the numbers."

"2013..."

"It is a case that is three years old. Are you sure?" Robert already regretted calling the legal office. He would be better understood in a madhouse.

"Yes, it is a three years old case."

"2013 ... what is the next?"

"India, Romeo, Quebec..."

"Excuse me, we do not have a mission in India."

"I am spelling: I like India, R like Romeo, Q like Quebec."

"OK, what's the next."

"27, dash, 3."

"Please hold the line." Silence, then the secretary came back "Are you Mr. Allen?"

"Yes, I am." Robert was sure that he introduced himself at the beginning. But the bureaucracy needed to search through his e-mail and the legal office's database to find the fact that was known at the beginning. Maybe legal processes cannot be so straightforward.

Silence. Ringing signal. Waiting again.

“Rob, here is your tea.” Marry came in the right moment. Maybe a whisky would be better.

“Thank you, dear.” A tea was refreshing, and Robert had to keep his mind clear.

“Hallo.”

“Good morning, my name is Robert Allen.”

“Oh, yes, you are from Kabul.” The lawyer evidently did not read the file well.

“No, I am from Baghdad.”

“I see. How can I help you?” Wasn’t it clear that Robert wanted to know his fate?

“I received a memo that I was placed on an administrative leave.”

“Right. There is an investigation of a complaint against you.”

“But that case was closed two years ago.”

“We opened it again. We reviewed the facts, and the investigators work on a new report.”

“Is it legal? Once the case is closed...”

The lawyer interrupted Robert: “We are not at the US criminal court. This is the UN administrative law, and we can re-open the case, if we get new facts.”

“I see. But There was not a convincing evidence against me.”

“The administrative law does not require a proof beyond any doubt. We allow for a reasonable doubt. And I told you that we had additional facts. The investigators brought voice recordings from all witness interviews.”

“I don’t know, what should I do now.”

“You just wait for the disciplinary proceeding. Do you have a lawyer from OSLA?”

“What is OSLA?”

“Office for Staff Legal Assistance. You are entitled to have a free legal assistance by the UN lawyer. You can hire a lawyer privately, but then you bear the costs of your legal representation.”

“How do I get the lawyer.”

“Go to the iSeek pages of internal justice system.” Yes. Robert will not escape the super-secured access to the UN Intranet.

“Thank you, I appreciate your advice.” Go to hell. Robert did not appreciate it at all.

“You are welcome. Have a nice day.”

“You too, have a nice day. Bye.”

“Bye, bye.” Disconnected.



Empty tea cups were taken by Mary. Robert was happy that she was here. His morning was more productive than the calls to New York. He wanted to tell her about all job applications that he sent in the morning. She motivated him to look for those jobs. They were less paid and less prestigious, but they were a big hope. A hope is important.

Mary was his light at the end of a tunnel. Mary was his hope. He was happy to have her. Robert did not know, how to ask her. He wanted to marry her, but he did not know whether it was right. When she met him, he was at the top of his career. Now he was at the beginning of a new life, maybe more modest life. Mary's optimism was contagious. Robert has decided. He decided to accept a job offer, if any of his applications succeeded.



Four weeks later, Thursday morning, a telephone woke up Robert. Who is calling? He felt so liberated from the difficulties of the life in his dreams. He wanted to sleep and nothing but sleep forever. His dreams were another form of a reality. A virtual reality is

also a reality. One can sense it. A virtual reality is more merciful than a real life. But someone was calling now.

“Good morning.”

“Robert, how are you?” The voice was familiar. Robert knew that this voice was stored deeply in his memory.

“I am fine, thank you.”

“Are you sure, Robert? What about your job in Baghdad? Is everything OK?” Yes, it was the voice of Big John.

“They reopened the old case. I was put on a special administrative leave and asked not to return back to Baghdad.”

“I see. I knew something happened, when I saw your job application?”

“Which ... which application?” Robert was surprised. How did Big John learn about his job search? Robert did not look for a high paid high-level job.

“So, you applied for many jobs, if you do not remember. You must be desperate to leave the UN.” Big John hit the target. 100% right, when he described Robert’s situation.

“I thought that it is better to find something. Many things have changed at the UN.”

“You applied to become a dispatcher of the shipping company?”

“I did. I thought that I could do it. Seven years ago, my first job at the UN was at the logistics base in Valencia.”

“Right. So, after seven years you want to come back to the roots?”

“I want to find a job before they fire me from the UN.”

“You want to leave before they kick you out. It may be a good idea.” Big John laughed. Robert moved the phone a little from his ear.

“I am in the management of the company, and I am very much interested in this post.”

“What is so important in a post of a dispatcher?”

“You want to do the job, and you don’t know, why it is important? I tell you. But not on the phone.”

“I can meet you. I am flexible. I am on out of work.”

“Out of work, but with full salary. Enjoy your freedom” Big John laughed so loudly that the phone felt like a vibrating alert. “Let’s have

a lunch tomorrow.”

Robert did not hope to see Big John again. They made an appointment for a Friday lunch. Robert was full of life again. He ran to tell Mary the good news.



Westminster is one of the most expensive neighbourhoods of London. One of the small cosy restaurants has seen two men meeting early afternoon. It was definitely not a place for a quick lunch of the working class. These two men were exceptional. They had a lot to share. Big John reserved a table in a box the provided enough privacy. It was not a job interview setup, but Robert was used to Big John’s style.

“How are you? And how is Cathy or what is the name of your lady?” Big John opened an old chapter of Robert’s life – a chapter that Robert hoped to close – Cathy. Was it by mistake or an intention?

“Mary. Mary is my partner now. She is a journalist.”

“Oh yes. I remember. She wrote that critical article about us.” Oh, boy, so Robert’s better half seemed to be blacklisted by Big John. “All journalists are critical about the UN.”

“Some are more critical, some are quite friendly.”

“Yeah, but good friends do not pull the chair from under your butt.” True, but that is their job. Journalists keep bureaucrats moving – from one chair to another. “But they help sometimes – when they attack your concurrent.”

“Good journalists do not discriminate. They are tough on everyone.”

“Now I am out of the UN, now I don’t mind, when they criticise you guys.” Big John’s laugh was like an earthquake. “And you will join me on this side of the fence soon.”

“I tried to call the headquarters a month ago...” Big John laughed even more.

“I tell you, what you did. You waited to be switched from one secretary to another. After you called No. 25, they told you to call again No. 1.” Big John evidently knew the trick. Was it just the UN, or all bureaucracies were alike? “And you would not believe how many people really do the second loop.” At least, Robert did not have much to explain.

“They told me to get a lawyer.”

“Don’t do it.” Big John did not stop laughing. “You get a lawyer paid by the UN, who will do the minimum, and at the end you lose your job.” Robert opened his mouth, but no sound went out.

“Or you can hire a private lawyer, and you lose also your money, not only the job.”

“But I wanted to fight.”

“If you fight them, they will remember you. You better live with your head up, while you can.” Big John was always pragmatic, and he had evidently something to offer.

A waiter came, and their talk was interrupted. Anyway, Robert was interested, what did have Big John on the menu. But before they had to choose meals for each course the sides, the wine,... Robert’s anxiety was about to explode.

“You know that I am in a management of a logistics company.” The waiter has finally left after asking more questions than a jealous wife would ask her husband that returned home after midnight. “The add says shipping, but we do much more.”

“You told me.” Robert’s eyes fixed on the vase between him and Big John. “I applied there for a post of a dispatcher.”

“They look for dispatchers, but I need a guy who will organize our operation in Valencia.” Big John has picked Robert from Valencia and brought him up the ladder, does he want to trash him back there? “We are starting an outsourcing business there.”

“Outsourcing? For whom?”

“I told you that journalists are nasty to the UN. There was a large load articles that the business of the logistics base is not well organized by the UN bureaucrats.” Were they innocent or were they paid by those interested to take that job over from the UN? “So, the UN has delegated the logistics operations the operator of the Port of Valencia. But that company does not have a know how to run a logistics base. They look for the ex-UN folks to run it for them. It means they need us.” Big John’s laugh brought another earthquake. “The guys, who got kicked out from the UN through the main gate, are coming back through the back door.” It looked more like a small and narrow garage window, but it was a way back to business. Robert did not understand, how can be such multi-level monster more efficient than if all was directly handled by a couple of the UN employees.

“Hmm... I see...” Robert, eyes and a mouth wide open, tried to order that avalanche of words. “So, you got a contract with the UN.”

“Oh no, we have a contract with the Port of Valencia. I told you they have a contract with the UN.” The chain connects. Isn’t that chain too long? But if it brings a job to Robert, he should not care.

“It looks interesting. Do you still intend to hire people?”

“I intend to hire you. I was thinking about a couple of the UN folks, including you. Your troubles made my choice faster.”

“Do I have to move to Valencia?” It would be sunny and nice there, and Valencia was just on a direct flight connection from London.

“Did you hear about teleworking?” So instead of a sunny Mediterranean, it will be a rainy and cold England. “We let you to choose your workplace. You have to organize the things, not to load the containers by your own hands.”

A waiter brought the main course. Big John and Robert still had to discuss the logistics of the change. People are not resigning from the UN every day. All depends on how quickly the company needs to have Robert on Board. Robert was impatient, wanted to hear more.

“So, the old case caught you. I thought that we closed it.” Big John did not look surprised, he was just summing up the facts. Robert thought

also that the case was closed long ago, but he was mistaken.

“Is it legal to reopen the case that was already closed?”

“It does not matter. The current management does, what suits them.”

Did they privatise the UN?

“They came to push us, the old guys, out of their way. They are cleaning from the top. They kicked me out the last year, now it is your turn.” They should not do it, but they can do it easily. The rules and the reality do not always match.

Robert and Big John finished their talks and went their way. They made a plan – resignation, new contract, salary, benefits, dates, job details. A deal was done. It was a win for all. Big John got someone, whom he could trust, Robert got a new job, new life and a new dream, and the UN got rid of Robert without a legal ping-pong.



Back at home, Robert could not wait for Mary, he had to tell her all news. They had to plan themselves. Now, when Robert would work from London, it was going to change many things. Was it too late to get married? What would Mary say, if Robert asked her. Would she marry a guy, who got fired from the UN? OK, they did not have enough time to fire him, as he was going to tell them goodbye earlier.

The last seven years appeared in Roberts mind overlaid with a picture of the future. He had a promising career at the UN, who could think that it would get ruined so quickly. The raise and a fall of Robert Allen. It would be a good title of a book.

But we would have to return fifteen years back. That would be a new story...

