

THE FLIGHT

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- Defendant Bazarov! Stand up and tell the court, do you agree with the indictment that you have heard right now? If yes, tell us in detail why did you commit this crime that is how you hijacked the airplane and why? And please start with introducing yourself, when you were born, where do you reside, what you do? – the judge, with a sharp nose and reddish face, touched his bright purple tie while turning his glance to the left corner of the courtroom where the defendant sat in an iron cage. The judge's iron, cold voice gave the defendant a sudden shock, he tried hard to keep his shaking hands between his knees tightly and looked at everyone in the courtroom with beseeching eyes.

The defendant, a small, dark-skinned man in his forties, with deep brown eyes and graying hair, stood up, helplessly trying to maintain confidence. Either the indictment that prosecutor read out right now or dozens of intently looking eyes made him too nervous, and somehow he took a painful gulp and began continuously touching the buttons of his shirt one by one.

- I, defendant Adkham Bazarov, was born in nineteen sixty-eight in our village...

- What village, name it, please?! - the judge interrupted him.

- I, defendant Adkham Bazarov, was born in nineteen sixty-eight in this... our village Sakkizkurgan in the family of a peasant. I graduated from school in this... our village. Then I went to college to study agricultural machinery and got a secondary special education. Thanks to the efforts of our government that created favorable conditions for workers to work and have a prosperous life, I was too doing my job honestly, helped my parents, got married, nowadays I am bringing up four children... - he suddenly paused and looked at his defense lawyer. The defense lawyer with a shortly trimmed prickly moustache that reminded a hedgehog looked back at him and slightly shook his bald head with satisfaction, then moved his eyeglasses up.

Adkham, like a school boy who remembered the multiplication table that he had

been learning by heart all night, got inspired by the look of his lawyer and continued:

- ...so I worked hard as a mechanic doing all my best to serve the public, my beloved country and to grow my children patriotic... But... but in the morning of July 9, 2010 I made the biggest mistake of my life. I committed the crime - hijacked a plane. I deeply regret doing this... I ask this fair court to show me mercy, take into account that I have four underage children, old parents that need love and care...

The defense lawyer suddenly raised his eyebrows to show his disapproval, wanted to give Adkham a sign, but did not make it, the judge was ahead of him:

- Defendant Bazarov! You were not given the last word yet. You will have enough time for it. Now tell the court why did you commit this such a serious crime, who were your accomplices, what was your goal? So, how did you do it?

- I, Adkham Bazarov, in mid-June that year, I can't remember the exact day, invited Orif Mannopov to my place.

- Can you remind us please, who is Orif Mannopov?

- This... pilot Mannopov, who operates the plane. He accepted my invitation. Then I slaughtered my only cockerel in my yard to cook plov, so we made a small party, ate plov, drank...

- What did you drink? Green tea or black tea!? - the judge asked ironically.

- We drank this... our vodka. Then we almost became friends. In the next fifteen days I kept slaughtering a hen daily to cook plov for him, most of the time we drank alcohol, so that I gained his trust, then I hijacked the plane... I am really sorry...

- Bazarov, please tell us, you were asking for a pardon citing your family's poor condition and that you are the only caregiver for your underage children and old parents. However, you had fifteen lush parties with the pilot. Where did you get money for that? - the judge wondered.

- I usually repair cars and farmers' tractors and sometimes manage to save some money... and then the hens... they were really not hens... they were only three-

month old chickens. This spring the governor obliged businessmen to give donations to needy families. Many were given young chickens; some families got a cow or a sheep. We have heard on the radio that the global food crisis was coming, food prices were on the raise and households were told to increase the number of domestic animals, like sheep, chickens, and plant more vegetables, fruit trees in their gardens. So our family was given fifty young chickens for free, many died and around twenty survived.

- Well, according to the indictment, before committing the crime you have been telling everyone and everywhere that you were about to "fly again". Rumors were spreading in your village about your "next flight". Tell us please, when did fly for the first time and how?

- This... I had flown in my childhood... on the rocket.

A loud laughter resonated in the courtroom. The judge got nervous.

- Bazarov, you are not in the circus. Do you realize how serious your crime is?

- Comrade Justice, I am telling the truth... I had flown by hanging up to the rocket which had a parachute. I was a fifth grade schoolboy then. I was grazing my cow on the verge of the cotton field, by evening time a strong wind started blowing and brought black clouds from over the mountain. I was certainly sure that a hell of hailstone and a storm were coming, so I rushed home. There was an anti-hail unit not far from our village that used to fire cannons towards the clouds. They started firing the cannons, the earth was shaking, the air was trembling, dozens of frightened bird flocks flew by, cattle was bellowing and dogs were barking, they could be heard from everywhere. Later the unit launched several rockets as well. The judge started losing patience and looked around as if he was looking for someone who was as indignant as he was. A people's advisor, who was sitting next to him, leaned to his ear and whispered: "There is a paramilitary anti-hail unit in this town to protect cotton plantations from hail. Back in the Soviet times they used to fire rockets which later landed on parachutes. Now they fire Russian-made "Alazan" rockets, no parachutes, they explode and disappear in the air." Now the judge looked at the defendant and showed a little bit of interest in what he was

saying.

- ... When I reached a hill just over the village, I saw a rocket slowly coming down with its bright red parachute. Back then some lucky people used to find parachutes the morning after the stormy night, hanging from the trees or in their orchards. The fabric that parachutes were made of was very useful, and people used to make sports shorts and T-shirts out of it. The school playground was full of red colored clothes then. Its ropes were used for cattle and could serve for several years, because they were very durable. My happiness was so endless that I started jumping and kicked my cow away, she knew the way home. When the rocket was about to land, a gust of strong wind raised it in the air again. I ran after the rocket, and when I reached it, it was about a meter above the land. I grabbed the rocket to stop and bring it down. It was still hot, a stinky smoke was coming out of its top. The rocket wasn't big, it was around one and half meter long. But even then I was a very small and thin boy, so I couldn't get it down to the ground. Then I just hugged the rocket firmly. A sudden gust blew the parachute and my feet could not feel the ground any more. I was flying, first one meter above the land, then two, three meters. The wind was getting stronger and stronger, I was higher and higher. In a few seconds I was flying over the village which was in disarray: the dusty storm was bending poplar trees, they were swaying and swinging back and forth, some roofs were ripped off, and sometimes there were flashes out of electric cables and noise. "I am flying, I am flying" I was shouting all the time hoping that someone could see me flying. But no one heard me... In a few minutes when a heavy rain started I landed in the middle of the cotton plantation. But I wasn't lucky; a worker who saw the landing rocket had phoned the anti-hail unit. When I was trying to rip the parachute away from the rocket they arrived and took everything away. On their way back they took me home and told my parents that I might had been poisoned and should drink yoghurt for a week. So I couldn't have that parachute and until now no one believes that I had been flying.

- Bazarov, did you know that anyone who saw a landing rocket had to notify the anti-hail unit? - the people's advisor asked.

- Back then I didn't know, - Adkham replied. The advisor turned to the judge to say that he has no other questions.

- Comrade prosecutor, do you have any questions to the defendant? - the judge addressed the prosecutor who was sitting down in front of the defense lawyer. The prosecutor was leafing through the investigation papers and asked without looking at the defendant:

- Adkham Bazarov, please tell us, do you have any special education or training to operate an aircraft or a permission from authorities to operate an aircraft?

Adkham almost whispered, "No".

- So you knew that operating an aircraft without special training and permission was a crime?

- No, I didn't know, - pale-faced Adkham looked at his defense lawyer.

- Adkham Bazarov! Your village is only ten kilometers away from the state border

- the prosecutor continued. - And now tell us, with no special skills to operate the aircraft you could leave our airspace and cross into the neighboring country thus provoking an international dispute, did you know that?

Adkham was speechless as if ice cold water was poured over his head. It took him a while to pull himself together:

- I didn't want to cross someone's airspace...I didn't want to leave my village. I have been in the big city a few times in my entire life, how I could leave my village. What I wanted was just to fly over the village, and that was it.

- Bazarov, during the preliminary investigation you said that you had hijacked the plane, and you are repeating the same words now. However, according to some witnesses, in return to your daily plov and alcohol pilot Orif Mannopov had trained you to fly. Thus one can be sure that Mannopov himself allowed you to operate the plane.

- No way! He didn't. Yes, he had answered my questions about the plane. That's all. I love machinery. Even when I was a child used to dismantle any toy I could lay my hands on to see its mechanism. Other boys used to hide their toys when I approached. The cars I dismantled and then put together are still on the road. When

I first saw this plane flying over the village something inside my chest started burning. I think Mannopov was too fed up with my questions and had to tell everything about the plane just to get rid of me.

- Well. Then tell us about a woman, could be a nurse, who emerged in some episodes but the investigation could not identify her. According to some witnesses you have repeated her name on many occasions in connection with your flying dreams before you committed the crime. Apparently, she was your childhood friend, then married a man in the neighboring village. Does she anything to do with your criminal plans?

- I have never said a word about a woman. This... I could tell stories from my childhood when I was drunk and someone must have misinterpreted it.

The prosecutor told the judge that he has no other questions. Then defense lawyer rose slowly from his chair and turned to his defendant.

- Adkham Bazarov! When did you first see this flying machine that has been referred to here as an airplane?

- First time I saw it in... mid June. It was early in the morning. Something flew over the village, children ran outdoors and started shouting "airplane, airplane!" Then I saw it.

- Well, we know that then you went to see this airplane. What did you see then, what was it?

- It was very small, like a three-wheel bike with a propeller behind its seat and with a wing over it. I have seen such light flying machines on TV when someone escorted endangered cranes out of Russia's Siberia to our region.

- When you sat in this aircraft, what did you feel, was it an airplane?

- I thought it was a motor-bike with a wing...

- Comrade Justice, on this paper that I printed out from the internet it is called a Russian-made motorized hang glider, Veter. Whether it's a conventional airplane or not, is another question. But for the time being I ask to have it documented in the trial transcript as a motorized hang glider, not an airplane.

The judge accepted the paper and handed it out to his secretary. The prosecutor

became impatient when heard the word internet, "how one can believe in something taken out of the internet, which is full of enemies," he told himself, but did not remonstrate openly.

- If you have no other questions, the court calls a witness, - he said.

A middle-aged man half-opened the door with extreme care and took himself in so as if he glided in. He had dark hair and black eyes, wore a white shirt that seemed light yellow, its collar dark yellow from too much washing and ironing. His black trousers were grey around his knees and a cracked leather belt's edge hung loosely. He walked to the center of the courtroom glancing at the judge and his advisor sitting high in the courtroom and people sitting down who were mostly from his village. The judge asked him to introduce himself to the court, then told him to sign a warning about giving false evidence.

- Sabit Atajanov! During the preliminary investigation you have been identified as a witness, now you are here as a witness. And please tell the court what you know about the issue at hand, - the judge asked.

- I work as a firefighter at a ginnery. This summer they brought this small airplane from Fergana. The ginnery has a big tarmac used for drying cotton, so they said the airplane...

- The motorized hand glider, - the judge noted out.

- That's right, the hand glider. The hand glider needed the tarmac for taking off and landing to spray pesticides over mulberry trees. Adkham Bazarov had lost his peace when he first saw it flying in the sky. I have known him since childhood and we were classmates. He approached me and asked to introduce him to the pilot, which I did. Then he invited the pilot to his home, then for the next fifteen days he visited the ginnery to see the hand glider. He has a passion for machinery, I have never seen him not covered with motor oil. One day he told me that he had to fly. He had flown once, in his childhood...on the rocket...

There was a loud laughter again in the courtroom. The judge made himself more comfortable in his chair and stared at Sobit.

- Honestly, he has flown hanging on the rocket with a parachute. Unfortunately, no

one believes in that. Back then no one believed. Especially girls... - he wanted to say more, but suddenly changed his mind. - ...Especially boys at school, then people in the village started laughing at him and mocked calling him "a rocket boy". Maybe then he made his mind to fly one day anyway. So he used to visit the ginnyery and enjoyed touching the hand glider, sometimes he used to sit on it and make movements like he was flying. The pilot used to explain to him how it works, how to handle the situation when the wind was blowing from the right or the left. But the pilot had never trained him to fly, he was just telling how it works. Maybe the pilot was just trying to please him out of mercy, knowing Adkham would never fly this hand glider anyway. I too thought Adkham's dream was just a dream. So one day, I think it was the ninth of June, around ten in the morning, a pesticide delivery was delayed and the pilot was drinking green tea in the gatekeeper's room. As usual my friend was playing with the hand glider and accidentally started the engine and the machine moved. My friend was too frightened and got confused, so instead of stopping he accelerated. In no time he was flying. He didn't know how to turn and land it, so he found himself over the neighboring village. Somehow he managed to turn the hand glider around, but crashed on the way back. That's all I know.

The judge turned to the prosecutor asking if he had questions for the witness. The prosecutor cleared his throat:

- What we know from the investigation is that you got on your motorbike and followed Bazarov all the way shouting to everyone "Adkham is flying!" And it leads to the conclusion that you knew it was not an accidental flight, wasn't it?
- No way. It could be accidental. Yes, I followed him on the ground on my bike, and yes, I shouted calling for help.
- Well, then explain to us please, why did you ride right to the clinic in the neighboring village and told nurses that Adkham was flying. When women didn't believe, you called them to come out to the street.
- Yes I did...just in case, save God, so they could give him first aid if my friend crashed.

- Well, then how do you explain that Bazarov flew low making circles over the clinic.

- He saw me and shouted at me saying "run you fool, bring the pilot, how I will land it". I told him to fly towards the ginnery, which he did. Because he was flying low the hand glider's wing touched a poplar tree and it crash-landed in Mahkam bobo's yard.

The prosecutor waved his hand meaning further questioning was useless. The judge glanced at his Rolex watch and ordered to call the victims in. A young man in a black silk suit with a bright red tie came in and introduced himself.

- Our "Blue Sky" joint venture uses Russian made motorized hand gliders to apply pesticides aeriially over agricultural crops. Recently we were asked to send a hand glider to this town to spray pesticides over mulberry trees. On June 9 this man, - he looked at Adkham, - hijacked the motorized hand glider and crashed it.

- What were your company's damages that resulted from this crime?

- Our engineers concluded that the engine and propeller are ok, but its wing and wheels were damaged. We know that the defendant is ready to fully compensate the damage.

- What punishment you would ask for the defendant?

- I ask to punish him according to the law.

Prosecutor said that he had a question to the victim.

- Please tell us, is Orif Mannopov your pilot?

- Yes, he is.

- Mannopov was first identified as the main witness and a victim. When he was summoned to the court it was said that he is not in the country. Where is he?

- Mannopov is the most experienced pilot in our company. We are buying a new model of hand gliders, the one that can carry with more pesticides. So we had to send him to Russia urgently for test flights, as you know it is very important for the country's agriculture and time waits for no one.

The prosecutor nodded his head, the defense lawyer said he had no questions. An old man in his eighties entered the courtroom. He had a long grey beard, had

several World War II medals pinned to his old suit. Though he used a stick to walk, he seemed to be in good health. When the judge asked him to introduce himself he said "I am Mahkam Rikhsiev, well!?" and looked at everyone one by one. First he could not recognize Adkham sitting inside the iron cage, then shook his head in grief.

- Otakhon (a father), you are identified as a victim in this criminal case. Please just tell us what you remember from that day.

- What I can tell now... It was a very hot day from the start. You just sit in the shade but still sweat. I was looking for water to wash my hands, feet and face before the praying time. My grandchildren used to put a copper kettle under in the sun to keep the water warm. But on that day under the scorching sun the copper kettle got too hot, it almost burned my hand when I picked it up. I sat under the apricot tree and was washing myself with hot water yelling. Then, S.O.B., something revving and roaring came down from the blue sky and crashed...boom... I run towards the house and yelled at my wife who was looking out of the window in panic "Run you fool, the Germans are attacking!"

People in the courtroom started laughing, the judge called for silence hitting the table with his pencil. Witness continued to talk without paying any attention to what was going on in the courtroom.

- I had a young bull in the far corner of the yard. He was a calf yet when I bought him spending all my savings, was breeding him well for my grandchildren's wedding. His hide was about to shine. When this S.O.B. came down with a deafening roar he tried to run but fell down entangled in his rope, then never got up. We hardly had time to call in butcher and slaughter him. Then we sold the meat, what else we could do!?

- What claims do you have against the defendant? Do you ask the court to recover your loss from the defendant?

- What I can say now. I have no claims against him. He, S.O.B., is hardly making ends meet. His parents are too old to help him. His wife's salary at the kindergarten is next to nothing. Yet he has four children to feed. He repairs farmers' tractors but

I doubt he would get hold of any cash in the nearest future since all the farmers are in debt... Our government is merciful, so I hope he would be pardoned. It was his foolishness only. You, S.O.B., what you were thinking, what the hell did you want in the sky!? You wanted to fly! In the government's sky, you, S.O.B.?

- Thank you, thank you. You can now take a seat, - the judge said to interrupt him. Then he announced a break before the debates, and left the courtroom. People in the courtroom moved towards the defendant, however the police guarding the cage did not let them to and asked everyone to leave the room immediately.

Someone lit a cigarette in the courtyard, someone went to for fast food. A man sitting under the pine tree approached Sobit who had just put under his tongue a handful of small green pellets – nasvay, smokeless wet tobacco.

- At least you could be here in time, - Sobit yelled at the man with mouth half open.

- I was late just a few seconds, but they did not let me in, - the man said. Then he gave Sobit a plastic bag. - She left it. She said Adkham might get a suspended sentence and be released if the damage is compensated. Then she hurried to her clinic.

Sobit opened the bag, there were several wads of cash.

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