

Alexander Cherenov

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# **PENNY CRIMINAL CASE**



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## Penny Criminal Case

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=42673624](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=42673624)*

*ISBN 9785449689573*

### **Аннотация**

In the city, a series of brutal murders of underage girls, in which the killer cuts the external genitalia, are being committed. Many people are suspected, including even the investigators of the prosecutor's office and the criminal investigation officers. In accordance with the nature of the damage done to the corpses, the investigation concludes that the killings were committed by two different maniacs separately from each other: one of them is a professional and the other is an amateur.

# Содержание

Оглавление	7
CHAPTER ONE	9
CHAPTER TWO	15
CHAPTER THREE	34
CHAPTER FOUR	43
CHAPTER FIVE	50
CHAPTER SIX	61
CHAPTER SEVEN	75
CHAPTER EIGHT	91
CHAPTER NINE	98
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	102

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**Alexander Cherenov**

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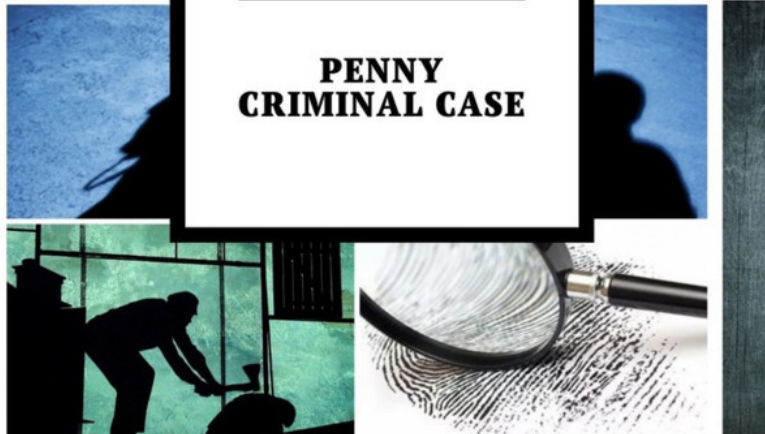
ISBN 978-5-4496-8957-3

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ALEXANDER  
CHERENOV

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**PENNY  
CRIMINAL CASE**





# Оглавление

PENNY CRIMINAL CASE  
CHAPTER ONE  
CHAPTER TWO  
CHAPTER THREE  
CHAPTER FOUR  
CHAPTER FIVE  
CHAPTER SIX  
CHAPTER SEVEN  
CHAPTER EIGHT  
CHAPTER NINE  
CHAPTER TEN  
CHAPTER ELEVEN  
CHAPTER TWELVE  
“I... I... I... I...”  
CHAPTER THIRTEEN  
CHAPTER FOURTEEN  
CHAPTER FIFTEEN  
CHAPTER SIXTEEN  
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN  
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN  
CHAPTER NINETEEN  
CHAPTER TWENTIETH  
CHAPTER TWENTY FIRST

CHAPTER TWENTY SECOND

CHAPTER TWENTY THIRD

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Starkov twitched his cheek laconically

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

CHAPTER TWENTY NINTH

CHAPTER THIRTY

CHAPTER THIRTY FIRST

CHAPTER THIRTY SECOND

CHAPTER THIRTY THIRD

CHAPTER THIRTY FOURTH

INSTEAD OF EPILOGUE

# CHAPTER ONE

“Comrade senior investigator! Boss!”

The senior investigator of the Central district prosecutor’s office, Alex Starkov, who was on duty in Ulegorsk, reluctantly opened one eye. Above him, with feigned participation and the same subservience in his face and voice, the head of the responsible duty police department Major Stoller was leaning.

“Alex, “I came to you with a greeting to tell you that the sun had risen!”

Starkov looked at the window “cheerfully”, then looked at the clock.

“Fuck you: it’s two o’clock right now! And, if you came to me “to tell that the sun had risen”, then you are really way-out!

“Get up, get up, Alex! The sun can still take a nap, and you are no longer!”

The Major’s wide face widened into a good-natured smile.

“Only half an hour, as my ass leaned against!” – continued to resist Starkov, already realizing, that “resistance is useless”. “Fear God, you godless sinner!”

“Alex, there is nothing to do – a penny job!”

Starkov raised himself on his elbow and swung his legs from the cot to the floor.

“That’s all: sleep well, so to speak...”

He began to grope his shoes under the cot. Finally, he felt,

with a painful grimace on his face, stuck his legs in them, and, groaning, slowly got up.

“Well?”

“The ordinary case, Alex: murder. There is nothing special.”

Continuing the “return to life”, Starkov dejectedly shook his head.

“Ordinary” and “nothing”... Oh, our sins are grave... Where... this “ordinary” and “nothing”?”

“In the Kirov district!” Major added cheerfulness. “So calm down! I’m telling you: a penny job! There is no to do there, in all fairness! You will go... you fool around there a little bit... well, there, the protocol of the inspection... witnesses... all this crap – and you will transfer the material on territoriality in the morning! All right, so here’s the deal! What the hell I teach the genius of the investigation!”

Stoller “knew the statute”: the investigator of the prosecutor’s office on duty in the city carried out primary measures at the scene of the incident, and if this place was not his “place of residence”, he transferred the collected papers to the prosecutor’s office from the area, that had “lucky” to acquire another corpse.

It was supposed to report to the city prosecutor, of course – according to the instructions – but after several cases of stupid red tape, which “successfully damaged” the investigation “without delay”, it was decided to immediately transfer the “waste paper” to territoriality. The task was simplified by the

fact that, despite the duty officer of the city, the prosecutor, the investigator of the prosecutor's office and the local detectives always traveled to their area. It is understandable: they also work on the case, because nobody cares about someone else's grief! And a "foreign" investigator, most often, just riding his time out, imitating an attack of labor enthusiasm.

Already it became clear to everyone, that the initial (theoretically) stupidity of the city prosecutor and the head of the Central Internal Affairs Directorate was suddenly confirmed by the harsh practice of investigative life. And how it began: the general meeting of the "investigative asset" of the city, slogans like "Together we will destroy crime in the city!"

But it is not for nothing that they say: "Negotiation – celebration, calculation – consternation". Truly, well-intentioned, the path, as a rule, is lined up in the wrong direction. The person on duty around the city only "was serving a duty" – and all for the same reason: nobody cares about someone else's grief! Everyone has "their own rattles"! For the "alien uncle" no one was going to drag the yoke – you never reap your criminal field!

And how this "one for all – and all for one" window dressing harmed the normal work of the on-duty investigator! After all, immediately after the surrender of the duty – angry, tired, and sleepless – you had to go to your place to the area, where your own murders, witnesses and the undetermined number of cases waited for you. No, of course, "according to the regulations", the

duty investigator on the day of delivery of his duty in the city was relieved of work in his area for the whole day, but who will do it instead of him?!

And the authorities first cut down this day-off to four hours, and then completely abolished it: “the state pays you such a huge amount of money, and you will be idle?” (“A huge amount of money huge money” is one hundred and thirty rubles a month for a novice investigator for a round-the-clock working day, without weekends and holidays! Is this not a “plunder of the working people”? !

“The locals are already there,” Stoller as if overheard the thoughts of Starkov. “All of them: the prosecutor, the investigator, and the detectives. Our operational team is waiting for you in the ‘UAZ’. You will pick up the forensic expert on the way – and that’s all!”

Stoller’s face radiated enthusiasm. It was easy to understand him: the man had less than seven hours before the shift of duty – and less than six months before retirement. Therefore, he tried not to stick out with punishable initiatives, but quietly sit out their twenty-four hours, so just as calmly return the ass to this chair in three days. The man had already “served his time” by as detective, a district police officer, even an investigator of the district department of internal affairs, and now he was not eager to perform feats in praise of public order. The solid belly, that has grown in the last three years, was a clear proof of that.

Already holding the doorknob, Starkov glanced at his watch.

“Hmm, leep is no longer possible...”

His words were “the bitter truth”: the duty was not set from the very beginning, when immediately after coming on duty he already served the first customer-hangman. Then the dead people went in a jamb, and by midnight there were already half a dozen of them. The first and only time Starkov managed to lean his back on the cot only at one in the morning, and after half an hour, Major Stoller had already “pleased” him with the prospect of another trip to the scene of the incident...

In the old “UAZ”, which was kept only by the enthusiasm of the chauffeur in matters of “taxing colleagues” with spare parts and gasoline, the entire small team has already gathered. The senior detective of the City Department of Internal Affairs, Captain Rubin, and the expert-criminalist, Major Pavlovsky, are located in the backseat. The place next to the driver according to tradition was given to the duty investigator of the prosecutor’s office.

“Good morning”, sir!” Rubin laughed. “Long time no see: probably, half an hour too, how! You, probably, miss the corpses already!”

“It’s “funny,” Starkov didn’t smile. “Well, let’s go for the “ripper!”

Investigators and detectives sometimes called forensic doctors as “rippers”. There were, of course, other “options” – even abusive, but these “nicknames” were received by either “favorite” experts, or, on the contrary, “unloved ones”.

It was about ten minutes to go to the forensic medicine bureau during the daytime: you had to stand at traffic lights more. Now, at night, the “yellow eye” gave a “green light”, the road was clear, “dead”, only occasionally “animated” by a lone taxi. Therefore, we arrived in five minutes. The medical examiner Tarsky was already waiting for the group on the porch at the entrance to the bureau.

“I am glad to see everyone... again,” he grunted in response to Rubin’s feigned-sympathetic grin. Rubin was already pushing Pavlovsky in the back, making room for Tarsky’s fat ass.

“Let’s go,” Starkov waved his hand, frowningly browsed. Shuddering with all the elderly guts, moaning and groaning pitifully, the car, as if trying to be strong both for itself and the road, carefully drove away from the porch...

## CHAPTER TWO

The place, where the operation group arrived, did not belong to prestigious areas. Ulegorsk, even being a regional center, did not belong to the prestigious cities, despite the glorious nickname of “one of the main stokers of the country”. The city grew on coal and due to coal. This determined the specifics of everything, including the buildings: huts of barrack type grew like mushrooms toadstools in the immediate vicinity of the mines.

Over time, already away from the mines and even at a considerable distance from them, luxurious “Stalinist” houses and “social and cultural facilities” began to be built in the city, which had already begun to remotely resemble such one. Boulevards, avenues, flower beds, and even barrels of kvass and beer began to appear in the wild desert.

But the original “neighborhoods” remained almost intact, except that they slightly “refreshed” the facade. The city stretched over an area of almost a thousand square kilometers, but most of this thousand was occupied by wastelands, from which coal was already taken out and which for this reason had sank considerably, covered with a thick layer of salt and thickets of bitter wormwood, which only could grow on this dead land.

These vacant lots were a link not only between the “Shanghais”, scattered here and there, but also between the

“subjects of the administrative-territorial division”. One of these vacancies was now a crime scene.. It was located on the border itself, dividing the territory of the Central and Kirov districts. One side of the wasteland rested in the Central district, the other – in the Kirov one.

“What a beautiful place!” forever resilient Rubin grinned. “I would like to live only here!”

The wasteland was really “pleasing to the eye”, impressing no less horror movie scenery in black and white. There was everything, that was not in the center: domestic and industrial waste in immeasured quantities, numerous dips and bald patches of salt performances, “framing” dumps of rock and even its own lake, which was formed by slime wastewater adjacent to waste treatment plant. The nearest dwelling, which consisted of single-storey houses for two owners and several veteran dugouts from the time of pioneers, was not less than half a kilometer on foot along a loaded track.

A few meters away from our car, there was a respectable – about ten people – a “group of comrades”, who had had time to get acquainted with the “sights” of this death spot earlier. Starkov knew them all, and not for one year: the prosecutor of the Kirov district, the deputy for operational work of the Kirov district department of internal affairs, his deputy – the head of the CID (criminal investigation department), the troika of detectives, the Kirov expert-criminalist, the senior investigator of the Kirov district prosecutor’s office. The “last on the list”

was a very colorful local police inspector, with whom Starkov had an “indescribable pleasure” to get to know closely two weeks ago when he was locating the next corpse from among “persons without a certain place of residence”.

These were, so to speak, the “unskilled laborers of the struggle for socialist legality”. Of course, the presence of the law-enforcement “white bone” was also noted – where without it. The “chiefs” were represented by the deputy prosecutor of the region, the head of the investigative department of the regional prosecutor’s office and the head of the criminal investigation department of the regional police department with a couple of their impudent and equally stupid “cops”.

Starkov was not too upset by the presence of the big bosses: they came here “for a tick” and distribution to useless “valuable instructions” from among those, with whom students of the law faculty learn more from forensic textbooks and all the “value” of which is in the positions of the characters, voicing these “valuable instructions”. Starkov knew: in about ten minutes from the demonstration of an official arrogance, these “aces of operational-investigative measures” sped away from here on their personal Volga, and no one would interfere the “laborer” to do their “black” work.

The authorities did not really test the patience of the “hard workers” for long, even “overfulfilling the plan” in terms of the standard of being in place: they did not disappear after ten, but after six minutes. To a large extent, this “efficiency” was

facilitated by the appearance of Starkov: this freethinker with fifteen years of experience as an investigator both the regional and city authorities knew too well to try to find out even better.

“Well, the air has become cleaner,” Rubin drew a line under the authorities. “Can we start work, comrade junior counselor of justice?”

Starkov – he is a junior counselor of justice (rank equal to police major) – grinned.

“You offend the aborigines, captain. They are already working. This arrival of ‘leaders’ tore them from the work. Let’s better ask, what they have ‘dug up’ and what they will share with the ‘city bums’.”

“God bless you, Alex, for kindness and affection.”

Major Bessonov, the deputy head for operational work, approached Starkov with an outstretched hand to greet him. Starkov respected this laconic, unpretentious and sensible “cop”, with which they repeatedly intersected in work, while never crossing each other’s paths.

“Hi, Major. Well, what have you got... we got, I wanted to say?”

“You said correctly: we got,” Major didn’t give too much optimism. “All the dubious ‘laurels’ are ours, of the Kirov district. This is what we have.”

Bessonov, with a meager gesture, invited Starkov to meet the main character of this action: a corpse. Starkov silently went to the body, prostrate in the dirt. The body was without signs

of clothing and belonged to a girl of fifteen or sixteen years old. It not only stretched in the mud, but it was smeared with mud: it rained at night, and with the pieces of dirt, that had been blown out of the waste ground, the corpse was further processed.

A piece of a badly brushed stick was sticking out of the corpse's vagina.

“What do you think: why?” Bessonov glanced at the stick.

Starkov shrugged.

“There are plenty of options, from murder of revenge to...”

“Only for God's sake, do not hint at the maniac!” Bessonov folded the arms on his chest appealingly. “This ‘happiness’ we just did not have enough!”

“So in fact, you already have it.”

Bessonov darkened even more.

“Are you hinting at the relationship of those corpses with this?”

“Those corpses” were the four bodies of girls aged 14 to 16 years old, which were found in the Kirov and Soviet areas – two in each.

“I do not hint: I think.”

“What are those dead bodies?” Rubin joined interested. “Why am I not aware?”

“Why should you be aware?” Bessonov looked at him gloomily. Major, being a sanguine person, clearly did not sympathize with choleric Rubin: “he is too fussy!” “These are our dead, not yours. We ourselves ‘lifted’ them – we will carry

this cross ourselves.”

“And what is the relationship between them?” Rubin did not lag behind.

“Get off me with your questions!” annoyed, as if from an annoying fly, Bessonov dismissed him, moving away to his “cops”.

“Why is he angry with me?!”

Rubin did not think to be offended himself. Including, for this, Starkov, in contrast to Bessonov, liked this firmly built, with a clear northern tan man. In just four months of work in the city, Rubin managed to “elevate the steppe without demeaning the mountains”: he was respected by ordinary “cops” and bosses, he was neither an intriguer nor a sycophant, he did not humiliate anyone and did not kneel before anyone.

“I really do not know. No, I heard something at operational meetings, of course, but city internal affairs department was not connected. I thought that these were ordinary murders, like in Kirov district, like in Central district, like dirt. What is the relationship?”

Starkov blew his lips thoughtfully.

“At first glance, there is no relationship. There, all four victims have genitals cut out.

“What are you saying!” Rubin shook his head sadly. “And you think that all the killings were committed by one person?”

“It seems so.”

The conclusion was given by the forensic scientist, already

working with the body, without even turning his face to Starkov.

“There, the nature of the amputation, the ‘manner of writing’ and the cause of death – all victims were strangled by a noose – are obviously from one comrade. I myself went to those corpses, and made an autopsy – so that you can believe me, captain...”

“The cause of death, you say...”

Starks narrowed his eyes, carefully scanning the neck of the corpse.

“Strangulation furrow is available...”

“I think that here, too, death came from strangling with a noose,” the expert nodded in agreement.

“Ana what about this noose?”

The expert looked around and almost indifferently shrugged.

“I did not come across.”

“Victor!”

Starkov raised his forefinger of his right hand above his head, calling Bessonov for “complicity”.

“Did your guys find a stranglehold... or something similar... a rope, for example?”

Having confined himself to a half-turn, Bessonov negatively waved his head. Starkov returned his eyes to an expert, who interestedly twisted his head around the stick.

“What?”

“May I remove this stick?”

“Go ahead!”

Expert gently pulled the edge of the stick with two fingers.

Starkov and Rubin bent over the body. Pulling out the stick, still squatting, Tarsky raised it over his head. The whole lower part of the tree was covered in blood.

“Is it blood?”

“Did you count on sperm – and in the same amount?” Starkov grunted.

The expert held elbow bend on the forehead, trying to wipe the sweat.

“There’s still nothing clear: there was rape, there wasn’t... I’ll take smears from the vagina, though...”

Tarsky twisted his head in doubt, and then spread his thumb and forefinger of his right hand and, from a distance, conditionally measured the length of the bloody mark on the stick.

“Stick stuck in twenty centimeters depth. Is it a hint, or what?”

“On what?” Rubin interested examined the stick with his eyes.

“On the size of penis in a state of erection,” Starkov worked instead of the expert.

Rubin puzzled patted the earlobe.

“And why did not cut these... genitals?”

“Who knows,” Starkov sighed. “Maybe, he decided to diversify the range of services.”

“Or, maybe,” the expert connected, jerking to him, “another person was working here.”

“Another?”

Rubin puzzled brow.

“You want to say, he is imitator, don’t you? Does he imitate the one who killed those four girls??”

“Maybe, he doesn’t imitate,” Tarsky spread his hands. “Maybe, he is an independent criminal. Although, he is the same beast... Let me pack the stick in polyethylene?”

“Okay.”

“That’s right: there may be prints there too!”

“In the movies,” Starks grinned. “Is there any blood on the part, that that did not stick in the vagina?”

The expert did not even conduct a “re-examination”.

“No.”

“Well, and what traces will we find then? This material evidence is not for examination, but for order... By the way, what about the tracks?”

The question was already addressed not to the expert, but to “local comrades”. This time, Bessonov did not “distance himself from half-turns” and immediately approached Starkov.

“Something we have already found, Alex. Here it is.”

A plastic bag, the contents of which consisted of a plastic comb in the form of a naked girl and a plaster cast from some kind of trace, moved into the hands of Starkov.

“What an interesting thing,” Starkov grinned at the sight of the spiky comb. – Is it prison homemade?”

“You make mistake: Czechoslovak, branded.”

“And the cast?”

“This is the cast of sneakers, also Czech production. Most

of the letters from the factory stamp have imprinted well, so our expert has already correctly read: ‘Made in Czechoslovakia’. But...”

“Alex, I found something also!”

Tarsky interrupted Bessonov in a voice trembling with excitement.

“What exactly?”

The expert handed Starkov a metal button with scraps of thread.

“Where did you find it?”

“It was clamped in the left palm!”

Tarsky was bursting with excitement and pride for his unexpected “operational talent”.

“I noticed that her hand was clenched almost in a fist. Well, I though... well, sometimes there you find a tuft of torn hair... there, the epidermis... the blood of the criminal. I opened her palm – and now... But I already held it in my hands...”

The guilty expression on the expert’s face immediately splashed onto the back of the celebration.

“Nothing wrong,” Starkov patted him on the shoulder with a good-natured grin. “If you are again about the tracks, then you need not worry: they are found on such items only in the stupid movies... A curious thing... What do you think about it, Victor?”

Bessonov bent over a button for a moment.

“I think it curious only in one sense: from whom is it? And so... The usual button from a police jacket. Not from the main

jacket: from everyday form.”

“Yeah, things...”

Starkov thoughtfully processed his chin.

“Only a maniac policeman, and although a jealous policeman, we lacked...”

Slowly, as if in oblivion, he looked at the body and his face stretched out.

“Fuck you: “I did not even notice the elephant!”

“What kind of elephant?” Bessonov “did not drive” honestly.

“Is the victim’s identity established?”

Bessonov suddenly began to turn his head around, as if he had lost someone and could not find it.

“What are you, Victor?”

“Where did the district police inspector go?” the major muttered. “It’s him, who found the corpse... Ivanov! Lieutenant Ivanov!”

“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and will find; knock, and will open to you”. Christ was proved to be right once again: in a minute, or even less, from somewhere in the night, from the part of the wasteland, the “borderline” with the Central district, a lanky figure appeared. It was not difficult to recognize the district police district inspector Ivanov in it: there was no other such inconsistent size among those present or in the Department of Internal Affairs staff.

It was a red-haired fellow with a pockmarked face and uncut hairs, always stuck out in all directions from under his uniform

cap. How many remarks at the drill he received for “breaking the uniform”, but it was all to no avail!! And, if this district policeman was a person, then only the one, about which they say: “he is still a person!”

Starkov met this character once only, but one meeting was enough for the character to make an impression on the city investigator. The impression was definitely negative, but unforgettable. The second such “handsome” Starkov saw many years ago, when he passed a real urgent in the army.

And this one was “still the same”: silly, slow, lazy and slob. When he had to speak, he was silent. When he had to go, he stood. When he had to think, he instantly acquired a “cow-eyed look” and picked his finger on his nose. He “thought”, in a word. When it was necessary to do it, without exerting any effort, it was only due to the “cow-eyed” that he instantly “sought reserves” in the person of those, who could no longer wait for the “beginning of the process”.

Everybody scolded him, but none of the authorities had raised a hand to sign an order of dismissal: the man was stupid, but simple-minded. He did not do evil to anyone, because he did not do anything. Others did everything for him, so there was little harm from him. There was no harm. It was not for nothing Starkov remembered lines from one poetic tale: “And we have no court for fools for centuries!”

And only once did Starkov think it was, or in fact, he noticed it, as soon as the “brainless” eyes of the district policeman acquired

an evil, intelligent and mocking look for a moment. Therefore, Starkov did not rule out that the inspector simply “entered the image” and did not intend to leave it: after all, “we have no court for fools for centuries!” Nobody saw how he was outside the police uniform. And he combined in his person Ivan the Fool and Emelya from the fairy tale “By the Will of the Pike” (two idlers, who are lucky to become rich).

Incredibly, according to his passport, he was called Emelyan Ivanovich Ivanov. By name and patronymic – hardly in honor of Yemelyan Ivanovich Pugachev (leader of the peasant uprising in the 18th century). And if it was in honor of the leader, then only in the context of the setting “Let it be at least a day, but it will be my day!” And, perhaps, giving him a name, his parents hoped, that the treasured pike will help him – at least, in the amount of three desires...

“Where the hell was you?” Bessonov “welcomed” Ivanov more on the way. “And what is this with you: material evidence?”

The people, gathered around the major, burst out laughing: there was a huge, black cat with a white “collar” in the hands of the lieutenant.

Ivanov lowered and noisily pulled his nose, pulling the green snot out of her nostril.

“I heard... meows... Well, I and...”

“Did you find the main evidence?” Bessonov continued diligently “wiping his feet”. “Did you solve the crime alone?”

Since the answer was quite expected to re-noisy tightening

snot, Bessonov only waved his hand irritably.

“Okay! Is it you, who find the corpse?”

Ivanov, with an incredibly idiotic expression on his face, silently nodded his head.

“Well, and whose is this corpse? Did you know its owner?”

Without answering the question, the district police officer returned to the snot service.

“Answer when I ask you!”

“I didn’t come close,” Ivanov sighed sadly.

“So come now... fuck you!”

The policeman sideways, with a slow step, approached the corpse and, without bending down, began to survey him from the height of his meter ninety. He observed slowly – like everything he did or did not do.

“Well?!” Bessonov could not stand.

Ivanov stretched his lips, making him even more like a hopeless client of a psychiatric hospital.

“Seem... this is... Tanya Kotova. I recognize her by the cat...”

Bessonov stared in awe at the lieutenant. What?!”

Bessonov stared in awe at the lieutenant.

Ivanov, in response, poked his finger into the cat’s neck.

“It’s their cat. So fat and black... with white – only they have.”

“Lieutenant, did you find a cat in the wasteland, or did you bring it with you?”” Starkov added his “legs” too.

“In the wasteland,” Ivanov did not even linger with the answer for some reason. “There.”

And he pointed to the “border line” between the districts.

Starkov suddenly stopped smiling. Looking at him, Bessonov left “footwork” too.

“Alex, you want to say, that...”

“The girl heard the meowing of a cat and went to look for him.”

Starkov pensive look went somewhere sideways.

“This was what our incognito needed...”

“He lured her deliberately, didn’t he?” Rubin joined.

“It seems so. The cat, most likely, was ‘privatized’ at the time. And, if so, then the killer knew in advance, that the cat runs away from home, and where he runs, and where he will be looked for...”

“Pre-planned murder?”

Bessonov paled: this kind of murder for years “hung” with heavy weights on the authority of the criminal investigation department. Starks sympathetically patted the major on the shoulder.

“Well, Victor, do not die before death... Lieutenant, do you know where these Kotovs live?”

“I know.”

“Lead us.”

Ivanov again hesitated.

“What else?”

“So their... this is... no home. They are at work... probably.”

“Ok, we’ll check it, Alex!” Bessonov waved his hand,

frustrated by the prospect of “dead case”.

“Well then...”

Starkov glanced at his watch.

“It’s time to do the protocol. Ivanov... Although, as you were! Victor, invite witnesses!”

For half an hour Starkov produced a protocol for inspecting the scene of the incident. It remained only to sign the protocol, when suddenly...

“Alex, I have still found something!”

Rubin lifted a plastic bag over his head.

“What exactly?”

The captain quickly walked to the open door of the “UAZ”, in the womb of which Starkov designed the protocol.

“Here, take a look!”

In a small plastic bag there were two cigarette butts: one from a filter cigarette, the other from a cigarette “Belomorkanal”.

“Look, Alex: the crumpled cigarette sleeve is characteristic!”

“It’s typical for most of those, who smoke Belomor,” Starkov said with curved cheek. “I myself crush the liner in the same way, so that the crumbs of tobacco do not pour into the mouth along with the puff. So what?”

“What are you, Alex?!” Rubin put his hands on his chest. “Am I talking about you??! I... ‘in general sense!’”

“In general sense...”

Starkov looked around at the cigarette butts again.

“Don’t you think, captain, that these cigarette butts are too

clean and dry after the rain, which lashed the whole evening until midnight?”

Zarubin puzzled brow.

“God knows, Alex... Actually, I found them under a piece of bark. Probably, the wind dragged it, it caught hold of the garbage and covered the cigarette butts.”

“Both in the same place?” Starkov shook his head incredulously. “It’s too good to be true... And in general: there are too many material evidence. And all some... from different people... You know, I somehow happened to read one Polish detective story. It is called ‘Too many clowns’. And here it is: too much evidence... Yes, even more such disparate... Yes, there will have to seriously deal...”

Starkov wrote a couple of lines on the found cigarette butts in protocol, gave it to the signature for the witnesses, packed the evidence and quickly sketched the “escort” to the Kirov prosecutor. Formally, this was a violation of the instructions: everything, that was acquired at the scene, was required to be transferred to the city prosecutor, so that he, in turn, redirect it to the prosecutor of Kirov district. But, having received a reprimand from the regional prosecutor, the city prosecutor recognized, though not immediately, the prompt transfer of materials – immediately to the district prosecutor.

“Sir Peter!”

“I am listening to you!” the Kirov prosecutor responded from his “Moskvich-412” (the gift of the “area” to the district

prosecutors).

“Accept a gift, so to speak, from a pure heart!”

Noisily puffing, Kirov prosecutor reluctantly got out of the car and glanced reproachfully at Starkov.

“This is a bad joke, dear Alex... Ok, give it to me...”

The prosecutor signed the second copy, made for a carbon copy, and, sighing heavily, went to “Moskvich”. Starkov looked at his watch, at parting sympathizing with Bessonov.

“It’s half past four am. Maybe I can still sleep, at least, half an hour...”

“Forget it!” the elderly “UAZ” driver did not hesitate “to please” the authorities. “They they are now on the radio reported: hangman in the Soviet district. So, get ready for a trip, sir... I don’t know how to get there: gasoline is at zero... Though on yourself drag a car!”

“Next time it will be so!” never discouraging Rubin “was in place” as always. “If you will “make us happy” once again, you will drag a car on yourself!.. By the way, Alex, I’ll be a bit late here: I’ll help the local man. I hope the hanged man will not be offended at me, because I did not honor him, so to speak, with my personal presence?”

“You may hope,” Starkov frowned.

“And you? You do not mind, do you? Will you get along with the dead without me?”

“What are you asking me?” Starkov sighed. “I’m not your boss. If you consider it necessary, you may stay here: we will

manage without you... Okay, let's go. A sleep, as I understand it, is canceled for today and is postponed for tomorrow..."

## CHAPTER THREE

Until the morning, as “prescribed in the statute”, Starkov could not even lie on the couch for a minute. Until half-past eight, without stopping by the police department, Starkov “landed” from one place of the incident on the other. But the “program of the day” had not yet been exhausted, although Alex himself learned about the “success” that had befallen him, only upon arrival at his “native land”.

Without going home and barely having time to rinse his hands and face with water from a spring at the last place of the incident, Starkov went to work. (The duty on the city was not considered as such – at least, by the district prosecutor). Having barely crossed the threshold of the office, he was invited by the head of the office to the district prosecutor. And since the call took place early in the morning, boss invited him clearly not “for tea”.

Without even asking the senior investigator, how the duty went (why be interested, when this is not his own?!), the prosecutor spread his arms out of the way – for some reason with a dejected look.

“Bad things, dear Alex...”

“I didn’t understand,” Starkov did not sin against the truth. Knowing the tendency of his boss systematically fall in spirit for any reason and without them, he was in no hurry to be alarmed.

But the prosecutor was in no hurry to “confess”.

“How many cases do you have now, Alex?” he went to the senior investigator from afar.

“Do you really want to ease the burden?!” Starkov allowed himself to grin.

“And yet, how much?” the prosecutor, who usually surrendered without command, did not surrender.

“Fifteen. I will transfer fourteen cases to the court with an indictment: five to the regional, nine to the district. One I will stop in the absence of corpus delicti.”

“Hmm... hmm...”

The “shyness”, permanently inherent in the prosecutor, was clearly beginning to “overflow”. And Starkov did not hesitate to ask about the reasons – in his characteristic spirit.

“Boss, what happened? Is the auditor going to us? Is he incognito with secret prescription?”

The prosecutor, who was not the greatest connoisseur of elegant literature, but at one time at school “passing through” Gogol, smiled faintly.

“No, dear Alex, an auditor...”

“He has not reached us yet, has he?”

“Well, yes... That is... In general, the case you went to yesterday... that is, tonight...”

“Which one exactly?” Starkov was wary: “the girlish shyness” of the prosecutor was beginning to like him less and less. “I served eight places of the incident on duty. Which one?”

With trembling hands more than usual, the prosecutor began

to shift papers from one edge of the table to the other. At other times, Starkov would have laughed in his heart over the “role of a loader”, which boss had enough for the whole day, but now somehow didn’t have enough mood. The behavior of the prosecutor – the eternal coward and alarmist, although not a bad person (deep in the soul) – he liked less and less.

Finally, the prosecutor finished the “movement of goods” by organizing an even greater mess on the table, than he had before “time X”.

“No, then... the Kirov case... with the murdered girl.”

Starkov honestly lengthened his face.

“What’s wrong there?! I ‘made’ all the required measures, the material I submitted to the Kirov prosecutor with the accompanying information, indicated the ‘bright path’ to the Kirov ‘cops’ – what else?”

“Hmm... hmm...”

“Boss,” Starkov could not stand it, “as one character in Sholokhov’s “And Quiet Flows the Don” said: “If you swung, then hit!”

Proceedings in the course of the novel: “I will hit you!” did not follow, but the prosecutor unexpectedly cut the road to the truth – and “went to confess”.

“This case was given to us, dear Alex...”

“What does it mean?!”

No, Starkov was not stunned by surprise – such a reaction is inherent in the heroes of the novels – but the format of his face

has clearly undergone even greater changes.

“What the fuck, boss?!”

“By territoriality, dear Alex,” the prosecutor moved his eyes further away.

Starkov could not resist and grunted.

“And what, boss, overnight there were changes in the administrative-territorial division of the districts?! Now this wasteland will add us mileage, doesn’t it?!”

“I would have joked myself,” the prosecutor sinned against the truth: he could not joke from birth, “but...”

“Zarathustra does not allow?” Starkov joked instead of the authorities grimly.

Boss was clearly not acquainted with Zarathustra, which was proved by the unexpectedly interested look of his sad-dull eyes.

“No, dear Alex, this one... as his...”

“Zarathustra.”

“...Yes... he had nothing to do with it.”

The prosecutor boyishly sniffed.

“It turned out, that the murder was committed on our side of the wasteland...”

“And then he was ‘transferred as a Christmas present to the dearest patron’?”

Starkov joked, but with every joke, it became less and less vigorous: comprehending the inevitable had a bad effect on nerves and facial muscles.

“You guessed, dear Alex.”

“And who so pleased us?” Starkov immediately showed a gloomy face: the jokes were over, despite all their traditionally inexhaustible stock.

“Someone... someone... I can have a look right now...”

The prosecutor dived his head into the pile of papers he had constructed and removed a thin folder with a red police cover from it.

“Here: Rubin.”

“Rubin?!”

Starkov ran with his hand over his overgrown chin: he intended to shave in his office, with an old electric razor “Berdsk”.

“And how did he find it out?”

Instead of answering, the prosecutor handed Starkov a thin folder.

“Take a look, dear Alex.”

The case – this is only due to the exceptional thinness – consisted of the Starkov’s incident report, the decision to open a criminal case, the extremely laconic protocols of interrogations of the medical examiner Tarsky, an expert-criminalist Pavlovsky, lieutenant Ivanov and the senior authorized officer of the City Department of Internal Affairs captain Rubin. The scheme and photos from the scene were attached to the case. The last document in the case was the resolution on the transfer of the case on a territorial basis and the “highest” resolution of the city prosecutor of the “Let it be!” Format.

“That’s not bad for one night and a piece of morning,” Starkov approved colleagues through teeth and gnashing of teeth. “Although you can immediately see, how the guys were in a hurry to get rid of the work... Hmm... Well, what did Captain Rubin confess here?”

The interrogation protocol of Rubin, like the other “defendants”, fit on one sheet of the standard prosecutor’s office form of interrogation of a witness. It was felt that the readings were minimized and fixed with only one purpose: to “make happy” colleagues from the Central district in shock terms.

Starkov quickly looked through the sheet. Rubin confessed that, while developing a version of the senior investigator Starkov about a pre-planned murder, he, waiting for the dawn, decided to examine the part of the wasteland, from which local policeman Ivanov brought the cat to the deceased girl. Preliminary Ivanov oriented him in place.

“Did Ivanov orient him in place?!” Starkov grinned out loud. “What a progress! Yes, he himself must be oriented, and not only in that place, but also in the place in life! No other way, now he will be transferred to the detectives, and at the same time from fools to clever people – for their ingenuity!”

Concisely “admiring” with lieutenant Ivanov, Starkov returned to the case file. Then Rubin said that within a radius of several meters from the location of the cat indicated by Ivanov, he noticed brown spots on the ground. They stretched in a broken chain towards the part of the wasteland, where the corpse of the

girl was found. Soil samples with brown spots on them were taken by the investigator of the prosecutor's office of the Kirov district to the forensic medical bureau for a forensic biological examination, and it turned out, that this was blood, which coincided in group with the victim's blood.

“Quickly!” Starkov shook his head. “And the blood is it, and the blood type is known... Too fast! It takes days to establish both ‘in peacetime’!”

In conclusion, Rubin found on the October side of the wasteland bloody women's panties with initials on the inside of “TK”. Being presented to the identification of the mother of the victim, they were identified as belonging to her daughter.

“And where is the identification protocol?”

Starkov quickly leafed through the sore business: there was no protocol. Probably, they just waved with panties in front of the face: the usual police disorder of the format “That's not bad, but who really needs it – let it rework!” And “comrades from the Kirov district” were in such a hurry to “move the clamp from their neck to someone else's”, that they did not even bother to draw up an inventory of documents, not to mention the identification protocol.

Starkov closed the folder and placed it in front of him on the console to the table, behind which, hunched over and pressed his head into the shoulders, the prosecutor sat – not at all in the image and likeness of the high authorities.

“Well, what do you say, dear Alex?” the prosecutor faltered

in his voice.

Starkov threw up his hands.

“And what can you say? We will not go to refute these facts and beg for the ‘city’ to get the case turned back to the Kirov district... The deed is done... Well, in the sense that it is now with us, and we cannot get away from it... Although the Kirov ‘comrades’ could have merged these cases: because they have two almost similar corpses... And what the city prosecutor thought, hell knows...”

Suddenly he shook his head, which had already acquired a mine of bewilderment.

“It is not clear, why such maneuvers? Who needed to drag the corpse from one area to another? For what purpose? It would seem, is it not one hell, on which part of the same waste ground will a corpse be found?!.. So, not one... I am – in the sense of “one hell”... So, there was a goal. But I cannot understand what. If you wanted to throw a corpse to us, why drag it to the Kirov side? It’s unclear...”

“Well, here, dear Alex, reveal this crime!” the prosecutor suddenly “came to life” – even his face, of parchment color, slightly got rosy. “Take this case to investigate!”

“Why me?!”

Starkov was clearly not in a hurry to share the bosses’ enthusiasm.

“This week, Meshkov is on duty in the district, so all the dead are his ‘booty’. I have nothing to do with this! Moreover, he has

only four cases in production! No, boss, whatever you want, and I disagree!”

“Dear Alex...”

The prosecutor with a combined expression on his face: confusion plus embarrassment – turned the palms of his hands “inside out”.

“Well, you know that Meshik is no investigator! He has already He ruined those three unpretentious cases, all with a judicial perspective – what, then, can we speak for this case! It is too tough for him, dear Alex! Well, think about it yourself! And you, after all, are already aware of this case! What do you say?”

Starkov reproachfully looked at the prosecutor and shook his head.

“Eh, boss... You twist the rope out of me!”

“Help us out...”

“...our Savior?” Starkov finished with a wry grin, very far from optimistic. “Okay, boss: you are now indebted to me...”

Holding the folder under his arm and pretending to sag under its “weight”, Starkov left the prosecutor’s office. “Life has become better, life has become more fun”...

## CHAPTER FOUR

Returning to his office, Starkov opened the safe and threw a folder on the bottom shelf, where he traditionally defined a “legacy to descendants” in addition to the old “dead cases”, that went to him – also by inheritance – from previous office residents. He identified the folder there, not because it would not have found a place among the “living” cases on the shelf a little higher. The senior investigator just had a good feeling, that the case about this dead person was from the category of “non-living” itself. He will collect all the necessary waste paper of course, but no more...

Ten minutes after Starkov finished smoking the second cigarette for this “decade”, he remove the case from the depths of the safe. This was a clear indication of the “rehabilitation” and “reanimation” of the red skinny folder.

Without opening it, Alex twisted the disk of a bulky antediluvian phone, probably of the “Stalin’s bottling”.

“Is it the prosecutor’s office of the Kirov district? I would have a senior investigator Yun.”

“Stop making fun, Alex!” the tube responded with the guilty voice and a very loud bass – one of the few advantages of the Stalinist apparatus. “I would ‘thank’ anyone for such a ‘gift’ myself... But, honestly, Rubin did it all! I have already accepted the case for production, when he decided to work as explorer!”

“I’m calling you on another occasion, Vlad,” Starks smiled.

“I listen to you, bro!”

The voice on that end instantly became optimistic and even joyful. It always happens, when “the cat feels whose meat has eaten”, even if the situation was different from the classic one.

“Bro, those two, who were killed on your ‘sponsored’ territory... well, with the genitals cut off... are they your ‘wealth’?”

“Yeah...”

The enthusiasm in Yun’s voice disappeared as quickly as it appeared. It was felt, that the “wealth” was already pretty “fed up” with the “honored”.

“Do not share?”

“Do you want to combine in one production?” Yun re-revived.

“No,” Starkov laughed, “just asking you to ‘confess’.”

“A-a-a-a...”

And the Kirov senior investigator “died” again. A short pause followed the lingering, sorrowful sigh.

“Well, what can I tell you, bro... ‘Dead case’ is the most suitable words for defining the current state at the current moment.”

“Nothing?” Starkov “delighted” also. “Really?”

Anticipating the answer, Yun additionally “reassured” the counterparty with a secondary woeful sigh. This moment of “mourning ceremony” in itself and in the case ended with a sound, even by telephone, identified as the loud joint work

of the nose and handkerchief.

“Well, what can I say...”

“Speak as it is!”

“There is nothing, but corpses, bro. We didn’t even find the genitals cut off...”

“What was cut from the vagina?”

“As stated in the conclusion of the forensic examination, the large and small labia are removed. Surgically.”

“Surgically?”

Starkov’s face immediately acquired an “otherworldly” expression. He even took the phone away from his ear for a few seconds.

“It is interesting.”

– Nothing interesting, bro!”

Even on the phone it was “visible”, as the counterpart on the other end of the line “waved an arm in disgust”.

“At first, we also grabbed this trace: a maniac has to do with medicine.”

“And?”

“No shit!”

Yun’s anger on hopelessness has already “overflowed its banks”.

“In the city there are four clinical hospitals, eight clinics, a hell of a lot of emergency centers – and surgeons work everywhere not in the amount of one piece! And also there are a medical institute with a surgical faculty, an institute of plastic surgery,

four morgues with pathologists, a forensic morgue, a medical examiner bureau...”

“Did you include the bureau?”

Starkov was not so much surprised, as he was on his guard: there was something in this “something”.

“From happiness,” Yun grinned into the phone. “And then ‘one familiar uncle’ told me, that the list was incomplete. It turned out, that it is necessary to include here also workers of the meat processing plant, working on cutting carcasses, and butchers from the shops, and their colleagues from the ‘Fish Fridge Refrigerator’, and the criminal element, noted and not noted by the ‘arts’ along this line, and the craftsmen of art craftsmen on bone, on wood – even on metal! And all this is not only in the city, but also in the region!”

The tube sighed wearily.

“It’s good, that we rejected immediately the version of the guest performer, otherwise we would get even more ‘happiness’! But even so, bro, there are more than a thousand men in our list! And we have no materials for any of them!! But to learn so skillfully cut the pussy can any man in the street if you have the desire!”

Starkov chuckled into the phone: the vis-a-vis was well rounded. But with this “joy of life” ended.

“But you collect waste paper, didn’t you?”

“Yes, of course, bro!” the tube immediately came to life. “As they say, ‘the plan for the shaft – the shaft for the plan!’ We work

on volume, sparing neither ink nor paper! I have already begun to fill the third volume with papers! The bosses are very pretty with all our work... except for the result.”

Starkov laughed shortly: even despondent, Yun was not discouraged, and if he was discouraged, it was somehow cheerful.

“Okay, Vlad, we will assume that you confessed to me... I have a couple more small questions: did you find anything during the inspection?”

“Nothing. Not a single piece of paper, not a single poop. I am silent modestly about the tracks. No one saw anything, heard nothing. So with your case there is a complete discrepancy here. This is in your case there are a lot of material evidence, but we have nothing! And work with the corpse does not fit: a stick in the hole, the redeployment from area to area...”

The tube “thought” for a moment.

“It seems to me, bro, that these are different cases, and they were made by different people... in the sense of: nonhumans. There is no relationship, except that our corpses and yours are found in depressed areas, at a considerable distance from housing.”

“Are you suggesting that a maniac did this?” Starkov “delighted” colleague additionally.

“God save us, bro!” the tube “crossed” right away. “We do not need such a ‘happiness’!. . And in the killings there is no chronology, no ‘moon’... Just in case – for waste paper – we

made inquiries both in place, and in the republic, and to the centre, of course.”

“Have you received a formal reply already?” Starkov “admired” with interlocutor.

“Yes, we have!”

Both of them were silent for a while. Finally, Starkov was the first – and not too optimistic – sighed into the phone tube.

“Ok, bro, thanks for the info.”

“What are you talking about?!” Yun “waved his hand” again. “Is this information?!”

“This is information for thought” Starkov “parried” these words surprisingly seriously. “I have not ‘moved in’ yet, but I feel, that we are marking time... hmm... on the right track.”

“From there” they shortly laughed.

“To the point, bro: we are marking time on the right track!”

“Then let’s wish each other to get to the point as quickly as possible... Good luck, bro!”

Starkov hung up. At that moment, his face was not wearing nothing “from Sherlock Holmes”: the presence of deductive abilities was countered by the absence of an “application point”. But there was a smoke – and Starkov lit a cigarette of a pack almost finished in the night. Immersed in a cloud of smoke, he, unlike the hero Conan Doyle, now completely did not expect, that the “entrusted” case to him would be “a matter of one pipe”. Therefore, it remained to not fool your head with leisurely thoughts, but just to enjoy the “deadly poison” from the famous

tobacco factory...

## CHAPTER FIVE

The murder was attributed to the Central district, but it was not possible to attribute the place, where material evidence was found, and the place of residence of the current and potential defendants. That is why Starkov immediately requested Kirov detectives about their “catch” and results of “other earthworks, which were made by nose and a horn”.

The guys honestly – and even with great pleasure! – gave Starkov all their poor “wealth”. The composition of the “inheritance” did not strike either with value or quantity: having learned, that the case was transferred to the neighbors, the “Kirov residents” cheerfully “conducted it on the last journey”. No one – not even a pro forma – has already “loosened the soil” with either “nose” or, especially, “horn”. No one did not try to “lure them to the collective farm” with a hopeless appeal to conscience, the “corporate fraternity” and other “proletarian solidarity”. The Kirov neighbors had a lot of sins, for which they were scolded by their superiors.

But before the blessed surrender of authority, neighbors, nevertheless, managed to “open to the world” something. So, the Kirov “cops” “at a waltz pace” ran around the whole district, hooked up the population – and found, that the hairbrush in the form of a naked girl was repeatedly seen half protruding from the jacket of a tenth-grader of a local school, whose name was Petin.

It turned out, that the sneakers with a rare “tread pattern” and the “Made in...” brand of the factory, which took part in collecting material evidence at the scene of the incident, were also not strangers to this character. Moreover: for the past several months, they formed a single whole with his legs. The aim was to make an indelibly-favorable impression on the contingent, especially of the female sex. Judging by the photo, attached to the material, this boy could not attract the attention of the girls, except that the unmeasured number of acne on the face, long nose, huge protruding ears and crooked teeth – but only girls with perverted taste.

Neighbors also “bothered” something along the line of his surroundings. It turned out, that the boy was “surrounded” by a twice convicted father – a subject very much exalted because of a past heavy time and a tendency to abuse alcohol in the present.

Neighbors promised to send information about the button, found in the murdered girl’s hand, “from minute to minute”: within three to four days. The little “harvest” of “Kirov citizens” was exhausted by it: there was nothing more to reap, but they were not going to: “the fields had already been transferred to the neighboring collective farm in the order of delimitation”.

Starkov decided not to philosophize and take advantage of the advice of the unforgettable Ostap Bender: “Of two hares, they choose the one that is fatter”. Therefore, he “decided” to start with the family duet Petukhovs. The first in the queue

“to conduct explanatory work among themselves” was Petin Jr. – as the most “material favorable for work”.

The Central detectives already knew about the “happiness”, that fell upon them: the head of the criminal investigation department Major Lapin, with his dead voice, managed to “share the joy” with Starkov. But the detectives have not yet rushed into battle: the initiative is traditionally punishable, and there were enough local battles on the other parts of the front. So they waited for the “guidelines” of the “main victim” from the transfer of the case: Starkov.

And he did not try the patience of the detectives, who “got used to in the trenches”. Having finished the last cigarette, he called the first deputy head of the Central district police department (for operational work), Lieutenant-Colonel Petrov.

“I greet you, sir: Starkov.”

“Dear Alex, come hear: we are all gathered here.”

So, for which Starkov especially valued Lieutenant Colonel Petrov – he had a lot of operational merit – it was for his laconicism and the usual priority of the matter. Petrov did not like to talk a lot, preferring to work with his head, hands and feet – including on the “objects of work”.

Ten minutes later – the “Moskvich-412”, although it was listed behind the prosecutor’s office, was immediately “privatized” by the prosecutor and his wife – Starkov was already entering the building of the Central district police department. On the move, greeting everybody he met, Starkov went up to the third floor.

(For some reason, the authorities always love to climb the very “upper loft”: “I can see everything from above – you should know this!”)

Lt. Col. Petrov was not an exception to the rule, although unlike the head of the district department of internal affairs, with whom he had offices next to each other, he was not seen in the inclination to show off his bossy ambition and other “components of the boss’s reputation”. The furniture in his office was simple and “mixed”: the desk and the console, as well as the shabby Viennese chairs were clearly not closely related to each other.

Starkov entered the office without knocking: Petrov hated the timid civilian “May I?” “If you have a business with me, come in; if not, you have nothing to do here!” The lieutenant-colonel immediately got up and left the table with the hand extended for the greeting.

“Hi, bro. Glad to see you... “without a noose around your neck.”

The lieutenant-colonel’s jokes were of the same epoch as the furniture, but the subordinates, as it was “prescribed by the charter”, laughed together, despite the fact, that these jokes could compete with the legendary “thousand Chinese warning” in terms of frequency of listening. Starkov limited himself to a slight deformation of the cheek as a sign of “comprehending” the joker and his joke.

“And I am glad to see you, bro. I would be even more glad, of course, when I saw you ‘in peacetime’, with a bottle of brandy

in your hands and a pair of glasses.”

They laughed laconic. At the end of the process, Petrov pointed to a chair and sat down opposite.

“Well, let’s start, bro?”

Starkov raised his eyebrow slightly.

“Sorry?”

The lieutenant-colonel moved his eyebrows displeasedly, even his huge bald head, occupying ninety percent of the head area, reddened with displeasure.

“Do you think we are fools?”

Starkov laughed, and, as if surrendering to captivity, jokingly raised his hands.

“Neither for those, nor for others, Boris! You are my friend, comrade and even brother!”

“Okay,” the lieutenant-colonel smiled too. “You and I drank so much together... all the shit – and you decided that we leave you in trouble?! We never let each other down. Therefore, we will get out of this shit together!”

“I’m ready!” Starkov laughed, and immediately became serious, as if he himself commanded in the manner of Ostap Bender: “Oh, well, leave the laughter!” “Is the ‘object of work’... hmm...ready to work?”

Petrov, right over Starkov’s head, immediately waved his captain Andrey, who was leaning against the window sill.

“Bring him!”

They didn’t have to wait long: after two minutes Andrey

pushed a lusty, red-haired and utterly pimply teenager, who was trembling like a classic bath leaf, into Petrov's office.

“Sit here!” commanded Andrey, seating the newcomer on a chair. The chair was chosen even earlier – in strict accordance with the classics: strictly in the center. “Having arranged a temporary resident”, Andrey stood behind him: this was a classic also.

Petrov slowly – in spite of his lively character, he had already acquired a belly, even more “outstanding” in the context of his “meter with a cap” – got out of the table and approached the person under investigation.

“Did you kill the girl?”

This was a characteristic feature of the lieutenant-colonel: to straighten the road to the truth as much as possible. He never “suffered of all these approaches”, but he worked directly in the forehead – when with words, and when with deeds.

The youngster shook his whole body, although it was possible to confine his head.

“N-no...”

Petrov made a small circle near the chair and the “work object” sitting on it and again “went abreast”.

“Why did you stick a stick in the vagina?”

The “object” shook even more vigorously.

“What stick?”

“What stick?!” baldness of the lieutenant-colonel began to turn purple. “Now you find out, what stick is it!”

He returned to the table, rummaged in the drawer for a few seconds, and took out a rubber hose measuring eight inches in diameter. He patted the hose across the palm of his hand, approached the “object” and spread his legs wide apart, as if strengthening the point of support.

“Do you see this thing in my hands?”

The youngster, from somewhere below, gazed with caution at the “strange object”.

“I see.”

“Do you know what it is?”

Instead of answering, the youngster shook his head.

“Do you want to know?” the lieutenant colonel continued to approach him.

This time the answer was silence: the “object” had not yet decided, which answer would be less painful for him.

“But I will still say,” Petrov smiled somehow not kindly. “This is a rubber hose, but not simple, but filled with sand. Do you know why? And in order for people like you, then did not run to the forensic doctors for a certificate of injury! That’s because this thing leaves no traces! But what kind of ‘unforgettable sensations’ it gives, you cannot even imagine!”

The state of the “object” could already be defined by the words “neither is alive, nor is dead”. But the lieutenant colonel of this “intermediate state” was clearly not enough.

“Don’t you believe me?”

This is a tricky question: “I do not believe.” – “Then get it!”,

“I believe.” – “Then confess!” The youngster gave an answer with his head – vertically: he ventured to “believe”. The lieutenant colonel slightly “passed back”: both in the sense of an onslaught, and simply moved one step back.

“Then answer: is it your comb?”

“W-what comb?”

Without looking back at Starkov, Petrov sent a palm over his shoulder, into which Alex promptly put the comb. Petin Jr. glanced at the comb and dropped his head.

“It’s my comb...”

“And the sneakers? Yours?”

Sneakers from Czechoslovakia were immediately offered to the “object”. Starkov raised an eyebrow in surprise: it doesn’t matter who got it, but the guys didn’t lose all the time in vain.

Petin glanced fearfully at the sneakers.

“Mine... probably...”

“What about this crap?”

Petrov stuck a plaster cast from the track right under his nose.

“Is it also yours?”

“What is it?” youngster flinched.

“It’s your sneaker, which was noted at the scene of the murder! The expertise has already proved that it is yours! Answer me, son of a bitch: did you kill?”

Petin convulsively shook his head, but he was prevented from completing the process by a rubber hose, that had passed impressively along his back.

“Aw!”

“It’s not ‘ay!’, but only the very beginning!”

“Mister policeman, I did not kill!” Petin whimpered.

“Still lying, you bastard! If you didn’t kill, how did your comb and the traces of your sneakers end up at the scene of the murder? Answer me!”

The hose was again the stimulating response. But the answer turned out to be the same, however, “in double volume”:

“Aw, aw!”

Petrov turned to Starkov.

“Bro, do you want... how to say this?”

“Do I want to see the sightseeing of the district department of internal affairs?” Starkov came to the rescue with a grin.

“Yes!”

Starkov shrugged.

“Well... I think half an hour is enough for me... I will give you as well... and to him...”

As soon as Alex closed the door, he heard three times from the office... no, not “hurray!”: “Aw, aw, aw!” Starkov, who had already set the direction to the dining room for the footsteps, suddenly stopped, silently moved his lips with a pensive look for a few moments, and turning abruptly, he headed in the opposite direction.

In the opposite side was the office of the head of CID (criminal investigation department), Major Lapin. The major, like all real detectives, who did not tolerate bureaucracy,

gnashing his teeth, poured over the papers.

“Well, what, bro,” he instantly and even readily broke away from the papers, “did this son of a bitch confess?”

“Not yet. And I doubt...”

Wincing painfully, Starkov patted the earlobe. Lapin puzzled his lips in surprise.

“You think, that it’s not him?”

“God knows,” Starkov shrugged uncertainly. “He is shy for this business... Bro, have you sent a man to check his entourage yet?”

“We have already checked!”

Lapin even jumped up from the table.

“We got sneakers... and so on!”

“Have you been to school?”

The major turned his eyes away.

“Bro... we did not have time... But don’t worry: I will send a detective right now!”

“Do it, bro,” Starkov nodded approvingly. Let him ask the schoolchildren, if this youngster was pestering the girls, and how did they reject him? I am interested in Kotova most of all.”

“We’ll do it, bro!”

The major had already pressed the dial key. A few seconds later they responded from that end.

“Senior Lieutenant Koval. I have not had time to finish the report, sir. If you give me...”

“I’m not giving it!” Lapin “worked on the interception

energetically”. “You will finish it later, and now run to the school! Ask if Petin molested the girls? Particular emphasis will be on Kotova: maybe, he harassed her. Pimpily youngsters – they are all the same!”

“I’m already running, comrade major!”

Lapin pressed the key with his finger with force, and turned to Starkov with the air of a winner.

“Abgemaht, bro! Requests? Questions?”

Instead of answering, Starkov silently extended his hand to him and left the office.

## CHAPTER SIX

On the nature of the work “among the object”, Starkov could have a complete idea even “on the distant approaches” to the Petrov’s office. The characteristic “aw, aw, aw!” was already flowing in a continuous stream, interrupted occasionally by no less characteristic sounds of dull beats, “of course, even remotely having no similarity with non-procedural methods of interrogation”.

The picture, which Starkov opened behind the door, that opened a little earlier, for some reason did not strike the imagination: all in tears and snot, with disheveled red hairs, Petin was actively “subjected to explanatory work among himself” from two sides: Lieutenant Colonel Petrov and Captain Andrey. But everything was “grand, noble”, without deviant assault. Continuous cuffs from Captain, who was standing behind the “client”, fit into the norm fully and corresponded to the “local customs”.

True, a purple-faced Petrov so energetically leaned towards the “object of work”, that he almost rested against his physiognomy, while trying to keep his distance, so as not to catch someone from aggressive acne.

“Will you talk, you bastard?!”

The “creative process” was interrupted by the appearance of Starkov. Petrov slowly moved away from the object, and,

turning to Alex, negatively moved his head from side to side.

“I think, Boris, we must give the suspect time to think about his difficult position... almost hopeless...”

Starkov “made a proposal” deliberately in a loud voice, obviously not so much for the lieutenant colonel, as for Petin, who was choked up in snot. Clever Petrov not only did not begin to ask again in surprise, but did not even use a “surprised” shoulder to demonstrate a lack of understanding.

“Captain, take... this... to the camera. Let him sit there and think.”

When the door behind the “object” and the guard closed, Petrov immediately, but very slowly, headed for the tiny rest room behind the commanding chair, where there was a sofa, a refrigerator and even a wash basin. Thrusting his head under the tap and snorting noisily, he freshened up with cold water and rubbed vigorously with a dry towel. Then he removed a bottle of mineral water from the refrigerator, and, without asking Starkov’s wishes, he poured it into two tall glasses of thin glass.

Clutching glasses with Starkov, Petrov swallowed mineral water. Then, noisily puffing and belching, he slowly looked at Starkov.

“Well, what is in the dining room today?”

“Have I been there?”

The lieutenant colonel blew his lips in surprise.

“And what did you do?!”

“I gave the task to Lapin about the school. Marat has already

sent Koval there.”

“It’s reasonable,” the lieutenant colonel approved. “It is possible, that the ‘legs’ of this case grow from school.”

“Well, maybe not of the case, but of the version – for sure.”

Starkov slowly sips “finalized” the glass.

“It is possible, that this pimply jerk has a past, albeit of a ‘school bottling’. He probably ‘loves’ girls for the fact, that they ‘love’ him ‘even more’. Conflicts of ‘mutual misunderstanding’ are not excluded... But...”

Starkov shook his head doubtfully.

“You think we waste time with him?!” Petrov joined energetically, immediately determined with the continuation of the insidious “but”.

“It seems so. No, it is necessary to work out ‘in full’, of course. You, bro, put your ‘cop’ into his cell.”

“This has already been done,” Petrov frowned.

They paused.

“What have you gained?” Starkov interrupted pause.

The face of the lieutenant colonel immediately “snapped of vinegar”.

“Nothing interesting.” He shook his hand irritably. “This jerk says that when he came back from school, he stained his sneakers with mud... sneakers, they say, were new, so he decided to ‘wash’ them. Then he allegedly hung sneakers on a fence around the house... well, to dry it.”

“Does he hints, that they were stolen?”

Starkov, as if deliberating, shrugged vaguely.

“The version, of course, is shaky, but theoretically... And what about the comb?”

“It was stolen also!”

Petrov added anger and crimson to the “vinegar” on the face.

“Under what circumstances?”

“He says, that his comb... well, because of this comb, many boys in the class were jealous. And, so, allegedly, when he was on physical education, someone ‘took away’ the comb from the locker room.”

Petrov shook his head and, with a frown, “aimed” at Starkov.

“What do you think?”

“We need to check it,” Starkov didn’t even bother to think. “That’s why we need information from school... Although...”

Starkov chewed his lips, with doubt on his face.

“It may well be, that this pimple invented the story with a comb for the ‘excuse’. He could lose his comb easily at the scene of the murder...”

“And I have the same opinion!” Petrov caught fire immediately.

Starkov twitched his cheek condescendingly.

“Don’t get excited, bro. Listen first. I’m not saying that a comb, lost or abandoned at a crime scene, is proof that this jerk is murderer. Even if we prove the loss of a comb in the right place, we cannot draw the necessary conclusion from this.”

Petrov moved his eyebrows displeasedly.

“What do you mean by that?”

“He could lose his comb there before the time of the murder, and after. For example, knowing, that the girl is always looking for the cat-reveler in the same place, he could watch her out there to clarify the relationship, but he was late: someone had already found out his relationship with her before him. The jerk got scared, of course, fled the crime scene and lost the comb!”

The lieutenant colonel sighed sadly and shook his head slowly.

“You are right, bro. It could well have been... And what remains for us?”

“And what remains for us?”?”

Starkov did not become “artistically”, a la Sherlock Holmes, to think using tobacco and a proud profile.

“Well, first of all, we will work out Petin Jr to the end.”

He raised the little finger of his right hand.

“Then we have a couple of cigarette butts... By the way, does this jerk smoke?”

“I did not ask!” Petrov wrinkled face irritated. “There was no time: I beat out the confession...”

“Okay, we will find out. Farther...”

Starkov bent the second finger.

“We have a button, that looks like a police one. So, here...”

“Wait, bro!” the lieutenant colonel interrupted him energetically, picking up the phone from the levers jerkingly. Twisting the disc, he began to nervously stamp around the apparatus. “Major Bessonov? Lt. Col. Petrov bothers you!..

Nothing... your prayers!.. Listen, bro, I immediately – to the point: you ‘threatened’ us to work out a button... well, that – on the killings in the wasteland!.. Worked out? Well, ‘report’!.. What?!..”

For some time, the lieutenant colonel was standing as a pillar, staring blankly somewhere past a telephone into a wall, on which “there were no patterns and no flowers grew”. Then, jerking off the stupor, he “returned” to the conversation.

“Give him immediately here, bro!.. What does it mean: ‘He will come himself’? ! No, bro, you provide him with a ‘personal carriage’, but put your guard, so that your ‘guardian of the law’ will not run away from custody! I ask you, as a friend!.. Well, that is another thing! We are waiting for the ‘guest’ with impatience! By!”

Putting the receiver on the levers, he slowly turned to Starkov. The expression of confusion has managed already to replace the enthusiasm of a second prescription on his face.

“Jesus Christ, what a mess! What things we have here, bro!..”

“Don’t waste time, bro!” Starkov could not resist.

“The button belongs to the fool-lieutenant!”

“Ivanov?!”

Now it was Starkov’s turn to work his eyebrows in amazement.

“I could imagine anyone in this role – only not him!”

Alex was amazed for a short time: after a few seconds, astonishment had already surrendered to the authorities of doubt.

“No, it is excluded! This is from the field of unscientific

fiction, bro! He is not even a cretin, he is an idiot, moreover, clinical idiot! I will never believe, that he may be interested in women – in any capacity: as a woman, as a carrier of wealth, as an object of irritation! Although... I noticed his look once..."

"That's it!" Petrov caught fire once again. "No wonder they say that 'in still waters run deep!' Well, here is another 'live' version!"

Petrov rubbed his palm on his palm vigorously.

"Now this son of a bitch will be delivered to us – and we will start to work him out until Petin confesses to murder! Thank God, there is a choice now – we will define someone for the role of the murderer! We will 'bring this dish to readiness' necessarily!"

"Okay..."

Starks patted his nose with his finger almost embarrassed.

"I wanted to leave you: there in the prosecutor's office I have a couple of witnesses on one rape... but if such a thing..."

"Stay with me, bro," Petrov patted his shoulder vigorously, "it won't be boring!"

"Fun" had to wait no less than an hour: everything happens quickly only in a fairy tale. But no matter how long they continue, will eventually be stopped: at the end of an hour of waiting, the duty officer called and said, that the district police officer Ivanov had been delivered. In the meantime, he was led into the office, Captain Andrew managed to get ahead of them with information about what our agent in the cell cannot please anything: Petin only whines, that he is not guilty of anything.

“Our ‘snitch’ says,” Andrey lowered his glance guiltily, “that this ‘nothingness’ does not look like a murderer.”

“Let him work on! Petrov wrinkled huge forehead displeasurably. “We spend such money on this public, and no benefit from them! Go and tell him: if he fails, I will punish him! I will leave him not only “without sweet”: without pants!”

Andrey, who never crossed the threshold and leaked only with his head, considered it best to instantly melt in the doorway.

“Oh, boy!” Petrov “approved” vigorously. “Like a sieve from a dog tail” – so you seem to say, bro?”

“Not me: Ostap Bender.”

At this moment there was a knock at the door. Petrov raised his eyebrows ominously: he did not want the appearance of any of the subordinates. But the “disapproving informer” turned out to be a guide from the Kirov district department of internal affairs, who brought lieutenant Ivanov.

“I was asked to give you papers, Comrade Lieutenant Colonel.”

The attendant handed Petrov several sheets of paper, that were fastened with a paper clip.

“Allow me to go, comrade lieutenant colonel?”

“Go,” Petrov waved his hand absently, completely absorbed in Ivanov’s review. Having surveyed the latter, he turned to Starkov with a cheerful grin and shook his head, as if to say: “You were right, but I did not believe it!”

Ivanov did not change himself in the constancy of the image.

He stood looking down at the freshly painted floor, so awkward, lanky, thin, with the green snot, which traditionally fell out of his nostrils, which he tried in vain to put in place.

“What a handsome guy!” Petrov laughed. “And where is the button?”

The button, which was absent on the cuff of the left sleeve, was only “designated” by scraps of thread sticking out of the fabric. The answer to the lieutenant colonel was another silent attempt to “work out” green snot.

Petrov took Ivanov by the sleeve and turned the “face” towards Starkov.

“What do you say, bro?”

“What can I say?” Starkov scoffed, removing a shaped metal button from a plastic bag. “Even apply is not necessary, if for the order only...”

Starkov “took over the baton” of the sleeve from Petrov and set the button in place. The place and the button turned out to be “blood relatives”. The ends of the dangling threads are so perfectly suited to each other, that the lieutenant colonel did not keep the triumphant grin.

“Yes, there is no need for any expertise: exactly the same!”

“No, bro, expertise is needed – for order,” Starkov opposed gently. “But what a good fellow our brave lieutenant is! What is it you still have not bothered to sew a button, at least some? Then you would answer all claims: I know nothing! What, bro? What is the reason: laziness or hope for the Russian ‘maybe’?”

Starkov could not stand it and laughed.

“Boris, for the first time in my life I see a suspect, who has not even tried to cover his tracks!”

Having laughed to tears, Starkov took advantage of a not quite fresh handkerchief, more often used for its intended purpose (for the nose), and returned “seriousness” to the face.

“Where is the button, Ivanov?”

The policeman even tried to wrinkle his forehead, but it did not help revive the memory. Then he engaged his shoulders – in the form of an uncertain shrug.

“I do not know... it come off...”

“Well, we see it.”

Through the stifling laughter, Starkov barely pressed seriousness on his face.

“Where did it come off exactly? And how did this button end up in the hand of a murdered girl?”

This time lieutenant answered in a more familiar way: he sniffed and shook his nozzle.

“Oh, boy!” Starkov shook his head, gleaming with his eyes mischievously. “By the way, Boris, let’s see what papers our ‘Kirov friends’ sent us.”

Petrov, a great “lover” of messing around with papers – like any real detective – readily reassigned this event – along with the documents – to Starkov. Alex quickly ran through the text – it did not have long: the accompanying document of Major Bessonov was packed into ten lines, and the explanatory text of Ivanov even

did not reach this “record”.

“What do they write?” Petrov looked over Starkov’s shoulder, unable to endure a long pause.

“Rehabilitation,” Starks grinned. “Our... either the suspect, or the defendant... in short, the loss of this very button was found during the parade, right at the time when, according to the testimony of the neighbors, the future murdered girl was seen in the courtyard of her own house. Alive still, of course.”

“This is alibi,” Petrov shook his head sadly.

“Yes, bro. Major Bessonov, who conducted the parade, made a remark to our ‘hero’ and sent him to sew a button.”

“And?” Petrov showed sluggish interest.

“And that’s all!” Starkov laughed. “No buttons, no lieutenant!”

Petrov could already hold back and grabbed Ivanov – no longer by the sleeve, but by the throat.

“Why didn’t you sew a button, you motherfucker?!”

Wheezing, either from excitement, or from suffocation, the policeman suddenly became generous with a whole monologue, if, of course, these few words could be elevated to the dignity of a monologue.

“So... it is... well, when I... when I... took the needle already – and then the call to the service area... a household fight... right on the waste ground... here.”

Petrov turned to Starkov with a question in his eyes – and Alex “approved” the testimony of the district police officer.

“Bessonov writes that Ivanov really went to the service area

due to the fight between young hooligans. He even managed to make the protocol there.”

Petrov let go of the district policeman’s throat and sank into a chair with a heavy sigh.

“What a beautiful version was it: real jam!”

Starkov went to the phone.

“Do you mind, bro?”

The lieutenant colonel waved his hand wearily. Starkov scrolled the number quickly.

“Major Bessonov? Starkov bother you. We have dealt with your lieutenant, bro... Yes, a complete alibi... No, we will carry out an examination, of course. So you give him a new button, please.”

Starkov broke down and laughed.

“So I informed you: we let him go... No, let him get on foot!.. Good luck, bro!”

Starkov returned the receiver to the apparatus and turned to Ivanov.

“Get out of here, you son of a bitch!”

Ivanov stumbled a little more on the spot, tried unsuccessfully to tighten his snot, then sighed, muttered something like “goodbye” and, hunched over, went out the door.

Looking at him from behind, Petrov “accompanied” the district police officer with “a few kind words” for a few more minutes, but then he could not stand it:

“No, bro, we let him go in vain... so early!”

“Sorry?” Starkov did not lie.

“How did the button end up in the girl’s hand?”

Starkov laughed.

“Was you going to find out from him?”

Petrov shrugged uncertainly.

“Well... in general... But somehow, after all, it was there?”

“In hand or in the wasteland?”

“Both!”

Starkov thought for a moment.

“Well, as for the wasteland... There is only one option: this ‘little fool’ is still a policeman, albeit a bad one. And he visits the wasteland once a day, at least. He has a small area, and he loves to walk. And since he is a slob...”

“Got it,” Petrov frowned once again, and right there he “turned into a fighting cock”. “How did the button end up in the girl’s hand, eh?”

Starkov first went away to the side, and then “moved to the ceiling”.

“Well, I think, that our girl did not die immediately, and while the murderer was strangling her, she clutched in agony for everything, that came under her hands. A button could well have been caught – unless, of course, this one... Ivanov has dropped it there... if he dropped it...”

Starkov frowned under the bewildered look of Petrov.

“There is another option, bro...”

“What?” Petrov guarded.

“Someone put this button in her hand, most likely, the murderer himself.”

The lieutenant colonel frowned.

“Leads us on a false trail?”

“Or he laughs at us, trying to confuse in a pile of assorted evidence. And if our ‘fortune telling on the coffee grounds’ is true, then this means, that Ivanov did not lose button – it was stolen from him... for us especially.”

Similar in content views of Starkov and Petrov met and did not diverge anymore.

“Yes, bro: in this case, we will not soon get to know him... if ever we meet...”

With difficulty, as if stuck, Starkov tore his backside from the tabletop, on which he had settled down even during a conversation with Bessonov.

“It seems, my friend Boris, that with this case we are in full ass...”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Starkov returned to the prosecutor's office, but as soon as he managed to cross the threshold of the office, the telephone rang.

"This is Petrov, bro. Come back soon: Koval returned from school, and information passed 'on the bottom' also."

Starkov, frustrated, hit his fist on the table.

"Let me have lunch, Boris. There is a pancake store around the corner... damn, well, you know..."

"Lunch together with us!" the tube banded indisputable tone. "Today there is a very good lunch here: borsch, meatballs with mashed potatoes with milk, compote of dried fruits. The discount is one hundred percent for everything! Well, and alcohol, we find, of course! We are waiting for you!"

Twenty minutes later, instead of the standard ten, due to the "buzzing" legs, Starkov opened the door to Petrov's office once again.

"I'm sorry, bro, but me without you – like without hands!" Petrov obeyed immediately. "And don't worry about the dining room: they will bring our lunch here! But first, let's finish the program of the day!"

Starkov wearily sat down on a chair.

"Boris, the first point immediately: what information is 'on the bottom'?"

The lieutenant colonel winked at Starkov conspiratorially.

“We have something! Our man, after all, ‘unwound’ the boy. Well, this is not a sincere confession, of course, but, so to speak...”

“Do not hurt, bro!”

Petrov jerked himself up to Starkov, almost buried his face in his face.

“The boy confessed that the school regularly scoffed at him, and, not so much the boys, how many girls. Well, did you see this jerk?”

Starkov nodded his head.

“Here you go. He was freed from physical education ‘for outstanding sporting achievements’: he could not even run a hundred meters, he came last, after all the girls. On physical education, he always sat on a bench against the wall and ‘heard’ insults, with which he was presented during the whole lesson. Kotova tried to insult him especially.”

Petrov grinned.

“The girl had a pretty face, a beautiful figure, an arrogant character. Petin got more from her than anybody else. This is an ‘iron’ motive!”

Petrov stared at Starkov with his gaze: he was looking for signs of approval, but he did not find it.

“Do not be distracted, bro,” Starkov winced wearily. “Got more than anyone else”. And?”

The lieutenant colonel snoozed offendedly: he did not expect such a reaction to his deduction.

“Okay... Once, when Petin, who was already pissed off because of insults...”

“The soul of the poet could not bear the shame of petty offenses?”

“Something like this... So, one day, after the lessons, Petin decided to build muscle. He sneaked into an empty gym, hooked on the crossbar on the horizontal bar... and hung like a sausage! Here he was caught...”

“In flagranti delicti,” Starkov couldn’t restrain again.

“What?” the lieutenant colonel was honest.

“At the crime scene” – this is Latin.”

“Well, I am talking about this,” Petrov returned to the image. “Petin thought he was alone, but he was wrong. This Kotova and girlfriends tracked him down, and when he hung, she jumped out from the ‘ladies’ dressing room and... What do you think was next?”

“Called to thinkers,” Ivanov, with a weary reproach, was “noted” at Trofimenko.

“And why should I think if you yourself tell me everything?”

“Why are you insulting me?” the lieutenant colonel grunted sadly. But after a moment there was no trace of his grief on his face. “They pulled off his leotards and underwear!”

“And they didn’t find anything under his underpants?” Starkov “guessed” with a grin.

“Exactly!” Petrov almost roared with delight. “His penis turned out to be...”

“No more acorn?” Starkov guessed again.

“Precisely, bro!”

Colonel was bursting with delight. It was felt, that the information did not just give him “aesthetic pleasure”: it fit nicely into his “iron” version.

“The girls began to laugh, and Kotova said bluntly, that he had nothing to do on a woman with such a ‘good’! So she said directly: he has nothing to do on the woman, because there is nothing! Do you imagine it?!”

“Go on, go on,” Starkov “imagined”.

“The boy got so angry, that he promised to kill her, but before that, show her ‘how he has nothing to do with the woman’!”

Petrov was so tired of his own enthusiasm that he had to turn for help to a glass of mineral water. He shared fraternally with Starkov, of course. Having wiped out his wet chin in a popular way – with a sleeve – he could not stand the test of glory and “dressed in triumphant” again.

“That’s where the stick in the ‘hole’, bro! This is what he wanted to show by this – and he showed! That’s how, and most importantly, with what tool he fucked her! I no longer speak for the motive: revenge! This is understandable even to a fool!”

Petrov again moved towards Starkov with the expression on the face of a regular conspirator.

“By the way, the ‘booty’ of Koval fully confirms the fact... well, the incident in the gym and the ‘solemn promise of the young pioneer’. Koval has eight explanatory letters from girls and

boys. And besides...”

The kind of conspirator has become “intolerable conspiratorial”.

“... we have something for the father, for Petin senior. They say that the tearful-pimply son complained to dad, and he promised his son, that the bitch will be punished for insulting.”

“Where does this information come from?” Starkov interested narrowed his eyes.

“From Koval, of course!” Petrov spread his hands, surprised by the “inconsistency” of the counterpart.

Starkov grinned.

“Comrade did not understand”: I ask, what objectively confirms the rumors that Koval got at school? “They say” is not proof.”

The lieutenant colonel ceased to radiate a glow and wrinkled his “Leninist” forehead.

“Well, you are welcome to all we have. Do not worry: we will complete the work! The main thing is to make a start!”

“There are no objections to this, bro,” Starkov said in a soft voice. “And by the way, have you already given a task to your subordinates about Petin senior?”

Petrov’s broad face blossomed with a condescending smile.

“You underestimate me, bro! My two detectives are already there! And not for peeping from behind the bushes: as soon as he appears, we will seize him immediately!”

“Okay!”

Starkov sentenced the question with a sonorous slap of the wide palm.

“And now, what: let’s work out a pimply boy?”

Since the text didn’t even resemble the question, it was Petrov, who oriented himself instantly: Starkov was just “putting on a sign”, but the lieutenant colonel was already pressing the dial key.

“Andrey, bring this son of a bitch here!”

Three minutes later, Captain “extremely politely”, just with his hands and feet, pushed Petin Jr. into the office.

Petrov met the appearance of the “object of work” with a wide “good-natured” smile... and with already familiar to him a rubber hose, which the lieutenant colonel laid out on the table immediately after placing the “object” on the chair.

Seeing the “good friend”, the youngster recoiled back in horror, but was immediately returned to his original position with a weighty jab in the back of captain behind him.

“Well, let’s talk?”

Petrov, tapping on the palm of his hand, moved “from point A to point B”. According to the conditions of the school task, the meeting should take place at point C. But life is not a school, and, at least, in this room, the meeting should take place at point B. And, judging by how still on the way there is a smile on the face of the lieutenant colonel from good-natured transferred to the category of bad ones, this meeting did not promise the “object from point B” anything good.

“I warn you at once: my patience is running out, as well as time. And if you test it again, then I will test the strength of this rubber on your back. You can’t imagine, how disappointed I will be, if we don’t reach a mutual understanding.”

Petrov turned to Starkov.

“Comrade senior investigator for particularly important cases!”

“Promoted in rank” – for the benefit of the cause – Starkov instantly filled with theatrical importance.

“I ask you to give me documents, confirming the guilt of citizen Petin in committing a serious crime.”

Starkov put the thin binder into a folder with a hundred blank sheets of paper and with an important look handed the “documents” to the lieutenant colonel.

“Are protocols interrogation of students, teachers and neighbors here?” Petrov continued to play.

“Of course, Comrade Lieutenant Colonel,” Starkov also corresponded to the image.

“Your sorrowful work will not disappear”: the list of the defendants, especially the mention of the school, clearly shocked the youngster. He dropped his head between his knees: the text was already coming from there.

“I’ll tell you everything.”

“Well, everything you want to say, we know even without you,” Petrov winced. “We would like to hear not this, but what you can say, but you don’t want to say, trying to hide it from me

and my comrade senior investigator for particularly important matters.

– So about the school is not necessary?”

Petin Junior timidly looked out – with eyes only – from somewhere below.

“Is it you – about panties, penis and girlish sneers?”

“Object” shook his head between his knees mournfully.

“No, this is not necessary,” the lieutenant colonel waved idly with his hand. “Better – from the place, where you threatened to ‘kill’ and ‘fuck’. You threatened to do both?”

There was no reaction to this question: not the smartest even in his school, Petin, however, felt where this question led him and where his answer would lead. But he “played with fire”: Lieutenant Colonel Petrov was not “kind investigator”, who confined themselves to testimony, which, in turn, the defendants were ready to give. Petrov professedly confessed the slogan on the theme of the mountain and Mahomet, but he also did not intend to play the “kind investigator” and the “evil investigator”: he was always himself, that is, the “evil investigator”.

“Are you deaf, you son of a bitch?”

The lieutenant colonel is already out of his image and “has returned to himself”

“I asked a question: did you threaten Kotova to kill and fuck her?”

Having clarified, how Petrov’s voice vibrated and how the hose vibrated even more in his hands, Petin immediately “set

aside the deaf-mute”.

“Yes... I threatened...”

“So it will be better!” Petrov “become kinder”. “Now tell me, how you carried out your plan?”

“I didn’t carry out.”

Petin did not have time to gaze in the direction of the vibrating hose, because the hose did not vibrate anymore, but did work on the back of a youngster with might and main.

“Aw, aw, aw!”

Petin, nevertheless, had time “pay tribute” to the hose three times.

“But you had the same plan?” Petrov roared, twisting the hose at the very nose of Petin.

“I had,” “object” did not tempt the fate.

“Very well,” The lieutenant colonel approved Petin congenially, and immediately recovered. “That’s very bad, of course, I wanted to say... Well, and what was this plan?”

Petin was “embarrassed”, but not for long: the new “portion of hose” returned to the investigator his image with all his existing duties and absent rights immediately.

“I... wanted to prove to her that my penis... that I...”

“That you have penis too, haven’t you?” Petrov specified with a cheerful smirk.

Petin tried to be embarrassed again, but the sight of the hose made him change his mind.

“Well, yes... That is, that I... well... I am a man...”

“And how did you want to prove it to her?”

The youngster frowned and sighed.

“I wanted to track her in the wasteland... well, where she was found later...”

“And how could you know that she was there?” Starkov connected to the conversation interestedly.

“Their cat constantly runs away there.”

“Got it: next.”

Starkov and Petrov worked almost in unison.

“I wanted... this...”

“Watch her,” Starkov said gently: lieutenant colonel was ready with a “more popular” version.

“Well, yes... then I planned to hit her in the head with brick, and when she faints, undress her and shove in her... in... this...”

“Into the vagina,” Starkov did not change the intellectual in himself, ahead of Petrov, who tried to offer another option.

“Yes: in the cabin.”

This time, Starkov and Petrov were unanimous: they burst out laughing a capello. Not dead girl amused them, of course – there is nothing funny: an ordinary human ignorance amused them.

“Delighted with understanding,” the youngster immediately put his hands on himself.

“But I did not kill her!”

“You didn’t want to kill, but...”

The lieutenant colonel was the first to grab this “thread”.

“No, I did not want to kill!” the youngster began to tear the

“thread” resolutely and with tears. “Yes, I waited for her that day, but I did not wait, although I saw their cat there, in the wasteland...”

“This is an interesting movie,” Starkov muttered thoughtfully, from somewhere “from abroad... of himself.” “So, the cat, nevertheless, left ‘to walk by itself’... or ‘it was left’...”

“What are you talking about?” Petrov raised an eyebrow in surprise.

“So... thoughts out loud... Okay, Petin Jr.”

Starkov jerked the seat off the seat.

“You have no alibi – not even one percent. The fact, that you was too loudly indignant about the ‘theft’ of the comb, it could well be work for the public to ‘excuse’. You lost your comb in a wasteland, and then you made up a story with a dressing room.”

“But I...”

“Shut up and do not bother to work!”

Petrov helped the “senior investigator for particularly important cases” immediately – with the assistance of the hose and the participation of Petin’s ribs.

“Go on, comrade senior investigator for particularly important cases: he will not interfere with you anymore.”

Starkov gave a bow of thanks and became thoughtful for a moment.

“Tell me, Petin, did you tell about your plans to your dad? Just do not lie!”

Petin lowered his eyes.

“Well, I told him... I said I want her...”

“Want her”?! ” Petrov “worked to intercept” instantly.

“No, well, not that... Well, in general... what I already told you...”

“And dad?” Petrov’s eyes lit up with speculation. “How did dad react?”

The youngster lowered his head.

“He said that there is no need to write nonsense... that he will deal with her himself.”

“And?”

The eyes of the lieutenant colonel were lit with predatory lights now: a tiger, not a policeman!

Petin puffed.

“Well, he went to them... to the Kotovs in the yard... well, and there he promised... that is, he said...”

“He threatened,” Petrov corrected cheerfully.

“Yes... that he would fuck her, because she offended his son...”

“And to whom did he say this?” Petrov continued to perform as a soloist: again, “having gone through the window”, Starkov obviously thought of something of his own, obviously not connected in any way with the testimony of Petin.

“He said this to all Kotovs...”

“Who heard these words?”

“Neighbors...”

Petrov turned to Starkov energetically.

“What do you say, bro?” Exactly the same!”

However, for some reason, Starkov was in no hurry to share the enthusiasm of the lieutenant colonel. Instead of a cheerful connection to the celebration, he first chewed on his lips vaguely, and only then issued a text, but not at all the one, that Petrov, still emitting a glow, expected from him. And the recipient of the text was not the lieutenant colonel.

“And tell me, Petin Junior, when you stated to your father your plan regarding Kotova, was there anyone else besides you at home?”

Ignored by the “diversionist bro”, Petrov was offended at first, and then he blew out his lips in surprise. His whole appearance did not even speak, but it cried out: what about this? Why divert the conversation – along with the guy – from a promising topic?

Suddenly, Petin also shared the chagrin of his “torturer”, but for a different reason. The question of the “senior investigator for particularly important cases” did not please him only because the guy obviously did not object to his own replacement with the “sacrificial bed” and prison bunkers. The younger one obviously did not object to his father replacing him in the role of the accused. Therefore, he was upset at first, and only then began to recall. Remembering, he even ventured to pull his shoulder once, as if doubting the reliability of the memory.

“No, it seems no one... Mother was at work... She works as a cleaner... Although...”

“What?” Starkov perked up slightly.

“Some ‘cop’ came to us... sorry: a policeman... in a jacket...”

“In civilian clothes.”

“Yes.”

“What kind of ‘cop’ he was?”

“I saw him for the first time,” Petin scowled. “A lot of them go to my father... If something happens somewhere, they immediately interrogate my father...”

“Can you recognize him?”

Petin wrinkled his narrow forehead and shook his head.

“He talked to my father. I came out of the kitchen at that moment. And he stood back to me.”

“Can your dad recognize him?”

“Well, it’s necessary to ask him,” Petin combined the bolder and insolent: he clearly felt, that the interest of the investigation was switching again in the direction that was saving for him – to dad.

“And at what point did this ‘cop’ appear?”

Starkov generously forgive this insolent: now he was more interested in the continuation, than in the reward. Petrov stiffened with his mouth open – clearly not because of the perturbation of Starkov’s “softness”: with each question, Alex went farther and farther away from the “mainstream” direction.

“I do not remember.”

“Well, you have not finished setting out your plan to your father?”

Petin ventured to move his shoulder again.

“Well, the policeman... came... this evening, when we talked with the father... well, about all this...”

Starkov sat back in his chair with obvious satisfaction on his face. Finally, Petrov, judging by his clarifying glance, had already begun to guess, that the “off-topic questions” were, nevertheless, on the topic, even if not completely clear to the lieutenant colonel.

“Okay!”

Since Starkov did not express any intention to continue the inquiry, Petrov vigorously thumped his hand on the table and “sentenced” the situation.

“Sign the protocol: here, here and here!.. Signed? Captain, take this rapist away...”

Petin flinched and pulled his head into his shoulders.

“... back to the camera and come back!”

When the doors closed behind both of them, Petrov – already with a dull face: the inimitable master of the transition from one state to another – switched to Starkov.

“Bro, do you think that the real killer came to them under the guise of a policeman?”

“Or a real killer as a real policeman,” Starkov did not hesitate to respond, swaying in his chair.

This time, the lieutenant colonel did not gawk indignantly. For some time he frowned, silently sniffed and ruffled the earlobe: he thought. Finally, he decided:

“This is not from real life, bro! This is a movie! ‘Maybe, somewhere out there, high in the mountains, but not in our area’...”

The quote was quite recognizable, but for some reason it did not add enthusiasm on Starkov’s face. But its absence – exactly according to Lomonosov – added determination on the face and in voice of Petrov.

“Let’s better deal with Petin senior instead of composing the image of a maniac!”

“Okay,” Starkov shrugged indifferently.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Petin Sr. was delivered an hour after his pimply son was returned to the prison meal. Dad turned out to be a colorful personality, but despite the visual involvement in the criminal world: two impressed rings on his fingers, some faded tattoo on his shoulder – he obviously didn't be an "authority". His whole appearance spoke rather of a hooligan past and an alcoholic present. And now he was drunk, wrinkled and sleepy.

"Sit down."

"I'll still be in time," Petin began to pretend to be "authority", "not moving away" from the chair, but not even approaching it. He failed – in contrast to the hose, which briskly walked on the back of the "dissident". Next to the rubber was connected the knee of captain, which helped the defendants to realize their place in this office: in the center of the chair.

"We know everything," Petrov, who was pretty tired to talk – not from physical assault – began his work immediately.

"What to talk about then?" Petin grinned.

"About confession."

"Don't bluff, 'cop'!"

The "opposition" cost him two more sobering sets of rubber hose.

"Let's start, or what?" Petrov bent over him.

"So you already started."

Grimacing painfully, Petin rubbed his “bruised” shoulder.

“True, not from the end...”

“Should I hit you in the face right away?” Petrov “specified the coordinates of the end” immediately. This time, Petin thought it best to remain silent: apparently, he began to understand, that this “cop” was too straightforward for a “courtly” conversation.

“Will you talk?”

Petrov patted rubber on the palm.

“About what?” Petin glances at the hose with cautious.

“About how you and your son discussed the plan of rape and murder of a minor Kotova.”

Petin frowned.

“We did not discuss anything with him.”

“But your son claims the opposite.”

This time, the lieutenant colonel did not pick up the hose, but the interrogation report, which he waved in front of the person under investigation.

“What do you say?”

Instead of answering, Petin tried to take his eyes off – along with his head – from the lieutenant colonel, but his head – along with his look – was immediately and without unnecessary courtesy returned by captain to the place.

“Should I repeat the question?” Petrov smiled “promisingly”.

This time Petin was not silent for long – five seconds, not more.

“Yes, son... he came up with some nonsense... And I told him

that I would deal with this bitch... so as not to offend my son... Already there was no strength to endure her arrogant antics! And her parents are the same bastards!”

“Well, and how: did you deal with this bitch?” Petrov leaned even lower over him.

“I would do it,” Petin grinned grimly, “but I was overtaken by some kind person...”

“And what kind of a policeman was at your house?” Starkov connected “contrary”. “On the day, when you decided to deal with Kotova?”

Trying to remember, Petin wrinkled his forehead and honestly “plunged into himself”.

“A hell knows! I saw him for the first time. A lot of your ‘cops’ visited me: I am tagged, where to go! Especially our local police inspector... he bothers me especially! But I have not seen that ‘cop’ before.”

“Can you recognize him?”

Petin went away to the side for the answer again.

“I do not know... It was dark... I drank a lot... All of you are the same...”

“What was the conversation about?”

“With son?”

“With a policeman!” Starkov didn’t even raise the voice: he was carried away by the version again.

Petin made a face and spread their hands, turning their palms “face out”.

“So, about that, about this... He asked me about where I was, what I was doing... and so on.”

“What case?”

“I don’t remember”, Petin shrugged his shoulders, as if surprised at the inconsistency of the investigator. “He told about some kind of theft, but I don’t remember, what kind of theft it was: I was drunk...”

“Where was you on the day of the murder?” Petrov barely waited for his turn.

Petin “peeled off his eyes” from the floor slowly.

“And when was this day?”

“The day before yesterday.”

Remembering, Petin several times rode a dirty palm over the overgrown cheek.

“The day before yesterday?..”

The palm “was already going back”, when suddenly it changed its mind and worked on her forehead with a resounding slap.

“So in fact, it... we drank!”

“What a “wonderful alibi”! The lieutenant colonel grinned. “You are “getting drunk” every day!”

“No, no, chief!” Petin put his hand to his heart, as if he had sworn. “The day before yesterday, the advance was given! I work at a construction site as a concrete worker! We have an advance the twentieth of each month always! Twentieth – advance payment, the fifth – pay! You can ask anyone!”

“We’ll ask, do not worry.”

Petrov did not like the answer of the defendant clearly: the “strong version” gave the first crack.

“And what: did you drink all the day?”

Petin “embarrassed”, even sniffed.

“Well, why ‘all the day’, chief?.. Well... we started after lunch... after getting an advance...”

“After lunch” – is it still during working hours?” Starkov grinned: upset Petrov chose to keep silent.

“Well, what about that?” Petin “opposed” only slightly.

“And who drank?”

“The whole team!” the defendant has cheered up.

“And where did you drink?” Starkov was amused also: at least, this is some variety. “Or, as in the song of Vysotsky: “then in the garden, where children’s “mushrooms”, then I don’t remember: I reached “to the point”?”

“Something like this, Petin twitched his cheek. “We started, as they say, without departing...”

“From the cashier?” Starkov laughed.

“No, we moved far from the cashier,” Petin appreciated the humor. “We started drinking at a construction site. Then we went to visit Markov – this is our brigadier... Then we moved to me, then we walked along the street...”

“You drank near the fence,” Starkov “corrected”.

Women took us home. “In the bushes,” Petin clarified the correction. “There we fell asleep... Women took us home after midnight.”

Starkov turned to Petrov. In his view, there was no expected question, but the lieutenant colonel was already “utterly pleased” with the testimony of Petin. As a man of direct and frank, he did not intend to “save the face”, so he immediately “went on the code”.

“Okay, Petin, now the investigator will write down your testimony, we will check them, and if you did not lie, then you will go home.”

“Downgraded to the real rank”, Starkov quickly recorded testimony in the protocol and pushed it to Petin. He did not even read, and, casting an indifferent glance at the protocol, boldly put a clumsy painting next to the “Starkov’s check marks”.

“Take him in, captain,” the lieutenant colonel said with distress.

Already in the office there was neither Petin, nor Andreev, but the lieutenant colonel still continued to lament. His grief was genuine: everything “burst”, that could “burst”, and nothing came to replace it, nor did it come to mind.

“Now what, bro?”

To his surprise, more than disappointment, Starkov did not connect to the three-day party, nor to think about the future, so bleak in Petrov’s view.

“We will work out dad.”

“This dad?” the lieutenant colonel, perplexed, jabbed his finger at the door. Starkov shook his head.

“I mean Kotova’s dad, or rather, stepfather.”

“That’s not bad!” Petrov caught fire immediately. “This is a classic: stepfather and adult stepdaughter!”

He immediately mercilessly “subjected” the selector key to his index finger.

“Koval? Run to the Kotovs immediately... No, we do not need them: ask their neighbors about stepfather! Yes: all the ‘dirty laundry’, which only you will find! Collect it ‘in the bag’ and immediately back! Like a fly!”

“Boris!” Starkov glanced at the door expressively – with a clear hint of recent visitors to the office.

“Oh, yes!” Petrov slapped himself on bald head with annoyance. “Koval, do you hear me? So: on the way, look to a certain Markov – this is the brigadier and neighbor of Petin the elder! Find out the details of all, with whom they celebrated getting an advance the day before yesterday! Understood?.. Well, come on!”

He returned his eyes to Starkov’s face.

“Is that all now, bro? Then let’s wait for the results...”

## CHAPTER NINE

The efficient Koval worked as Figaro: half a dozen sheets of paper, only half written up in a small but legible hand of a senior lieutenant was lying on the Petrov's desk after two hours.

"Is everything here?" Petrov's eyebrows were raised menacingly – it will not be superfluous.

"Everything is here, comrade lieutenant colonel. This are..."

Koval put aside five sheets.

"... explanatory from neighbors..."

Explanatory – not protocols – are disorder in a criminal case, but Starkov did not criticize Koval: the main thing is that they benefit.

"... and here it is the data of the participants of drinking. By the way, I interviewed Markov also: the man confirms, that on that day they drank until midnight and 'got drunk like pigs'."

Looking at Starkov, Petrov gave a sigh of chagrin and spread his hands with regret.

"Do not worry, bro!" Starkov did not "sprinkle ashes" again. "A negative result is a result also, especially since you and I are not counting on another. A version, no matter how flimsy it is, needs to be worked out. And I will do it myself. Now I am more interested in what is there – by stepfather?"

The lieutenant colonel instantly switched his eyes – already

“on the road” demanding – to Koval. Senior lieutenant crept a little, but he could not resist and snorted.

“What?” the lieutenant colonel frowned in displeasure: he did not tolerate “free-thinking” from his subordinates, even if it was not in the ranks.

“Our stepfather seemed to live up to our expectations,” Koval said, not grinning. “Two neighbors said, that they had heard – and one of them had even seen – how her stepfather was pestering the girl. Well, the maiden, God rest her soul, was, comrade lieutenant colonel, with considerable virtues... well, you yourself saw...”

“I haven’t seen some part of her virtues,” Petrov’s eyebrows even more moved. “You do not get distracted by the lyrics – report on the merits!”

Koval cleared his throat in guilt.

“Well, so, here, comrade lieutenant colonel... Neighbors said, that the girl threatened to tell everything to her mother, and...”

“And what these threats threatened stepfather?” Starkov interested wedged. “How mom can help our version?”

“Sir”, Koval turned his gaze on him, “her mother is business, energetic woman. By the way, she runs a large store. And this stepfather, judging by the testimony of the neighbors, is a typical gigolo, a parasite, lives at the expense of his wife’s money.”

“He is much younger than our trade worker, of course, isn’t he?” Starkov grinned.

“For seven years, sir. But this difference in years, as far as I understood from the words of their neighbors, in case

of something will be not useful as an ‘excuse’. ‘Our trade worker’ will kick him out like a lousy puppy without the slightest regret. There are a lot of those, who want to take a place of gigolo: mom has access to scarce goods!”

“Where is the hell now?”

The lieutenant colonel was obviously tired of listening: he wanted to act – with all his arsenal.

“He is already here, in the third cell.”

“Have you brought him here already?!” Petrov “resurrected” vigorously. “Well done, senior lieutenant: you are rehabilitated! Bring him here!”

Three minutes later, the chair, only recently freed from the Petin, occupied the next “object of work”. The “object” was scared and did not hide it.

Lieutenant colonel Petrov did not conceal something also: his intentions. And his intentions were more than eloquently confirmed by the “rubber assistant”, playing in the hands of the lieutenant colonel.

“Well, you bastard,” Petrov “greeted” right off the bat, smiling to the suspect “with a kind smile from the starving cannibal”. “Do you tell everything yourself – or should I turn to the ‘assistant’?”

And Petrov eloquently looked at the hose almost with affection.

“I don’t understand what...”

The “object” did not have time to explain the “reason for misunderstanding”: rubber was connected to the interrogation.

And it connected so vigorously, that the defendant almost fell off the chair. Koval, who “took over duty” instead of the irreplaceable hitherto Andrey, “asked” the citizen to return to the place with energetic cuffs

“Should I repeat my question?”

Petrov hung over the “object” with his “meter with a cap”. The “object” flinched with anything that could tremble in him – and everything trembled in him. A glance was not an exception.

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