

Innokenty Slanevsky
Political Phantasmagoria

Three short stories, 2017



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Аннотация

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Содержание

About the AUTHOR and the STORIES	5
1. THE LAST HOME	7
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	14

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Innokenty Slanevsky

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About the AUTHOR and the STORIES

Innokenty Slanevsky is a Russian author of short stories who has developed his own unrepeatably style: the mixture of political satire with fantastic elements and the revelation of social problems with satirical mysticism. His first seven stories were published in 2016, and in December 2017 the book with 80 stories came out in Russian. He works as a neurologist, married. In this book there are three of his stories: THE LAST HOME, THE IMMORTAL PICTURE and THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL.

THE LAST HOME has an anti-war theme. The allegorical presentation of the situation can be easily recognized by a reader though there are no real names of politicians or countries. The story can be called a political satire with elements of fantasy and satirical hyperbole.

THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL highlights the problem of what is considered normal under different political regimes. The events of the plot could be called fantastic if the things criticized by means of hyperbolic absurdity were not so real and well known to a reader.

THE IMMORTAL PICTURE is an allegorical political sketch where the Picture is an undying embodiment of struggle

against a cruel and unfair political regime. The story resembles impressionists' pictures by its plot developing in visions.

1. THE LAST HOME

“I congratulate you, Captain, now we are submariners!” told me the colonel. “We were pilots, and now we are submariners. We have changed our profession, so to say. Or rather, we have been re-qualified. The only difference is that me a little earlier, than you.

“What the hell is going on, Commander?” I asked. I did not fully realize the change that had happened with me.

“To put it simply, Captain, you and me have been scammed and formatted anew, as they say now. You have probably noticed that we are on the bottom of the sea. Instead of lungs we have gills. We can breathe only when we are in the water. Now we no longer have any voice ligaments and we can no longer speak. We communicate mentally. You send me your thought, and I send you mine, that’s how we understand each other. Over time, both your body and mine will have other changes: membranes between fingers, scaly skin, a tail will grow, and so on. At first it will seem unusual and even unacceptable to you, but this is not fatal, and you will get used to it and feel comfortable.

“Who did all that with us and why do you speak about it so calmly, Commander?” I asked indignantly. “Did you really accept your new body without any protest?”

“Not at once, Captain,” the colonel said unconcernedly, “but after some time, when I realized that another option is

impossible.”

“But what happened with you, Commander? And with me? Could you give me any intelligible explanation at all?”

“I’ll try, Captain,” said the colonel. “It happened in the third year of the war. I flew to bomb an enemy on the other side of the sea. It is in that sea where we live safely and happily now. My plane suddenly became uncontrollable in the sky over the sea. But I swear that the plane was in order, absolute order! I had checked it! I checked it before every flight. By that time, I had already flown for many years, I had made hundreds of combat sorties, and I could operate my plane as easily as my arms and legs. My plane was like part of me! But on that ill-fated day, in the sky over the sea, the plane suddenly refused to obey me. It began to control me instead. Despite all my great experience I failed to manage it!”

“How could it happen?” I asked in surprise.

“I do not know. I had a feeling at that moment that someone else was flying my plane, but not me, and this someone was deliberately directing the plane into the sea. Desperate to change anything, I had to catapult. I cannot remember what happened after that. I probably got disconnected from my consciousness. And when I regained it, I found myself in an altered state of the body at the bottom of the sea ... ” the colonel made a short pause and then continued, “It is because of that damned war! If I had known what it would turn out to be! I remember the day when the war began very well. One of the deputies made

a historic speech in the Parliament of our Democratic Republic. He said, “A lot of bombs have been accumulated in our country. What have we made them for? To let them become rotten? The weapons produced must be used and no matter against whom! To find an enemy is not a problem, it is easy enough! Besides, if our pilots do not regularly train themselves to bomb, they will completely forget how the bombs look like! One day, one of them will think that this is not a bomb when he sees it, but sausage, and he will try to eat it and will break all his teeth or will choke with it! Do we need such pilots? Will they be able to defend our country in case it faces a military threat? No, they won’t!”

“Yes, I remember that speech, Commander”, I said. “I saw and heard it on TV. In our Democratic Republic, all Parliamentary sessions are always broadcast.”

“That’s true, such are general democratic norms and principles,” the colonel agreed with me, and then continued, “That speech, as you remember, caused a storm of enthusiastic emotions in the Parliament and a flurry of prolonged applause. The enemy was found very quickly. It became the nearest country on the other side of the sea. We started flying there and bombing it. We used to fly across the sea, strike a few blows from the air, and then fly back home, to our airfield.”

“And then, the enemy’s planes began to fly to us from the other side of the sea and bomb us,” I added.

“That’s true! “the colonel exclaimed, or rather he passed me his thought silently, for we communicated in the water

exclusively mentally, as I have mentioned before. “It was just the thing that made me suspect that something went wrong! Why did we allow the enemy to bomb our territory?! Why were we sent to bomb exclusively peaceful settlements of the enemy, but not its airfields, for example?! It occurred to me that our leadership was absolutely uninterested in the outcome of the war, that they did not want to win the war. They seemed to be interested in something that was absolutely the opposite, in never finishing the war, in its lasting as long forever. Our grandfathers and fathers had fought in a different way, hadn’t they? With those and other considerations, I decided to go to our General Staff. When I came into the General Staff office, I saw a man sitting on two chairs at the table because one chair was not large enough for him. He was a civilian, a noncombatant rat, who had never sniffed powder. He was snapping seeds and spitting them out in all directions, and a cleaner was running around the office and skillfully catching the husks of the seeds right in the air and putting them in a small bag for garbage. How stupid and imprudent I was then to express my thoughts on the war to that noncombatant rat! The rat listened to me reluctantly and indifferently, and then blurted out, “Shove your military considerations, Colonel, somewhere deeper into yourself!” With these words, he spat out the husks right into my face and ordered me to get out. After that, I did not raise that issue any more. It was just that wretched third year of the war. Soon I was sent with another task to the enemy’s seaside, but I didn’t reach it, and

I found myself here, under the water ...”

The colonel thought for a while and then he asked me, “Captain, is the war still going on?”

“Yes, it is, Commander,” I answered. “It is likely to last forever.”

“And which year of the war is it now? I have failed to count the years”.

“The thirteenth.”

“Has the strategy changed?”

“No, it hasn’t. We are ordered to bomb peaceful civilian settlements and to avoid bombing the enemy’s military airfields. However, the enemy does not touch our military airfields either, it bombs only our peaceful civilians. They are the ones who suffer most. Once, the residents living near the sea coast, resented the enemy’s bombing and demanded the introduction of the IPC.”

“The International Peacekeeping Contingent?”

“Exactly. It was in the third year of the war, when, as official sources reported, you disappeared in the sky above the sea, Commander. You are still considered to be missing. In response to the demand of the residents to introduce the contingent, one of the deputies of our Parliament made an indignant speech, which was also broadcast on television. He said, ‘Who will pay for the maintenance of this contingent in our territory? We will have to empty our own pockets, won’t we? This contingent is like a dog’s fifth leg for us, because they do not bomb us! Is it fair to us, I wonder? Therefore, the contingent must be maintained

by those who need it, who insist on its introduction, that is by the peaceful residents living near the sea coast! In addition, let me note that none other than these peaceful residents are guilty that they are bombed, or rather their own laziness! After all, they themselves can reduce the number of bombs hitting their homes! For this, they should stop being lazy! When winter sets in, peaceful residents should repaint their houses white under the color of snow, and when summer comes, they should repaint them green under the color of foliage and grass. After that it will be much more difficult for the enemy to notice their houses from the air, won't it?" For such a speech, the deputy was awarded the Order 'The Wisdom of the Universe'. And the question of the contingent was no longer raised by the peaceful residents living near the sea coast."

"So, the peaceful residents have resigned to the bombing of their houses, haven't they? Are they used to it now?"

"It is difficult to say, Commander, whether they are used or not. Many of them don't live in their old houses now because their houses were destroyed by the enemy's bombs long ago. People live in dugouts which they have made for themselves. They do not want to leave their native places, for there are the graves of their ancestors there. Food supply has stopped to arrive in the coastal areas because food vendors say that they do not want to get under the bombing of the enemy and lose their goods. So, the inhabitants of the coastal strip are forced to risk their own lives and go fishing in the sea by their boats under the enemy's

bombing. Fish has become their only food. They have developed an amazing reaction speed, unthinkable even for the most agile and fastest beasts in the world! They catch fish and at the same time they maneuver their boats so skillfully that they manage to dodge bombs!”

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