

Igor Bondar

An underwater scene showing two large sharks swimming towards the camera. The water is clear and blue. In the background, the hull and rigging of a boat are visible, suggesting the sharks are near a fishing vessel. The lighting is bright, likely from the sun filtering through the water.

Gravitation

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Gravitation

Stories



“Zolotoye sechenie”

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A collection of short stories on various topics with elements of humor, philosophy and at times fantasy.

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Gravitation

1

‘I can’t understand you, friend,’ Harry said, ‘she left you, cheating on you for the whole year as it was later discovered, but you’re having fun. Wow, I wouldn’t be able to do what you’re doing, for sure.’

‘It is not the most difficult puzzle,’ Mike replied smiling, ‘everything’s simple: my Bonnie did not leave me, it was a girl who has the same name and looks similar. But as it turned out, I didn’t know her. And a girl with such an approach to life is completely uninteresting to me. However, my true and kind Bonnie remains in my heart; nothing happened to her. There’s no doubt I’ll meet her again in my life.’

Then, the lad laughed loudly.

‘Why are you laughing?,’ his friend asked, amazed.

‘Well, it’s just, there’re some interesting moments in this story.’

‘So? What exactly?,’ Harry looked at his friend curiously.

‘Well now, when I walk past a deer at the zoo, I realize they must be very jealous of the size of my horns.’

Having said that, both lads burst into laughter.

‘So, you rock!’ Harry reflected, catching his breath finally. ‘I couldn’t do the same, if I were in your shoes, for sure.’

‘I hope that your wonderful Sue will never give you a reason to check this,’ his friend replied in a serious tone.

‘I hope she won’t too,’ Harry responded.

2

Having swayed treacherously on the edge of bread and butter, a slice of cheese fell right onto her jeans.

‘Misfortunes never come alone,’ Betty thought philosophically and, having sent the guilty slice into her mouth, stretched her arm to take a table napkin.

The girl sat on her bathing towel on her favourite sandy beach. That day, she was watching the seven hundred and twenty fourth part of a wonderful TV series titled ‘Waves’. What made her especially happy was that the director and script writer of the film would always manage to create a continuation for it, even right at the time of her coming.

‘Hey, girlie! You’ve got a two-seat towel, in fact,’ she heard a voice near her.

What could one say? She hoped that the words her loved young man will address to her someday will be completely different, and she will recognize them at once. Betty did not doubt that for a slightest moment.

‘I’m just a mirage,’ she replied not raising her head. ‘Your water well is somewhere further along the beach.’

After that, Betty heard the sound of footsteps mowing away from her which made her pleased.

The girl was twenty five years old but she had not met her other half in life. To be more precise, she had always felt it inside her, but it had not happened for her yet to see it live, with arms and legs, a cheery and kind look. Her parents and girlfriends have dinned her ears that she was now at a serious age and it is time for her to start a family.

However, Betty did not understand the meaning of the words: ‘it is time to...’. She associated it with a nasty alarm clock going off, a school bell ringing or the sound of a departing train. Let those trains come and go whenever they want, what does that have to do with her?

‘Lassie, you’ve got a two-seat towel,’ she heard a new voice near her.

Betty sighed. It was just not a coincidence that the cheese had fallen on her jeans today.

Grouper did not want to give way to divers. A huge one, weighing nearly half a tonne, was looking calmly and even with some pity at two awkward, bubbling creatures. The friends

respected its tenacity, having taken several photos and swam further.

Ahead, an enormous shoal of trevally fish was waiting for them. It broke beautifully, as if it were a cloud, in front of Mike and Harry and came together densely several meters behind them.

4

Later that day in the evening, the friends settled at a table on the rear deck of a yacht. The clouds in the sky started sparkling with all their beauty as the sun almost disappeared, dropping below the horizon.

‘Certainly, I know you’re an optimist, friend! But sometimes, it’s hard for me to believe that you ain’t angry at Bonny at all,’ Harry said thoughtfully. “How d’you manage to do that? She’d been fooling you for so long.’

‘Not me,’ the friend smiled in response, ‘herself.’

‘How’s that?’

‘Well, I thought that she was faithful to me and that’s why I was happy.’ Mike replied. ‘And she was deceiving me, therefore she was unhappy. A deceiving person can never be happy and I feel pity for her with all my heart. But, that is what Bonny has chosen. She isn’t my property and she has the right to act as she wants.’

‘Hum, don’t you feel sorry for your love?’

‘Love?,’ Mike shrugged his shoulders, ‘of course not. Nothing can happen to love. Simply, my love has returned to my heart, but it will surely come out when the time comes.’

‘And Bonny’s love?,’ Harry asked with interest.

‘Oh, how do I know what kind of a *rollercoaster* she’s got in her head around that word.’ His friend replied with a smile making Harry laugh cheerily. ‘True love is simple, open and honest. If it isn’t, then it’s fake’.

‘How’s that?’

‘Well, if a fungus formed on this slice of bread, would you really want to eat it?’

‘Well, if it’s the last slice on the ship amid an open ocean...,’ Harry laughed.

‘Right.’ his friend agreed. ‘However, Bonny ain’t *the last slice*. Apparently pal, you haven’t walked at our beach for a long time at noon, have you?’

They laughed together cheerily again.

‘Well, friend, it seems you were reading too many beautiful and romantic fairy tales during your childhood.’

‘Aha, they’re still lying on the balcony in a suitcase where Bonny carried them out to once.’

At that moment, Mike slapped himself on his forehead.

‘You’re a genius, my friend! Now, I know why she didn’t like the fairytales at all...’

That day, Mike was walking slowly along the beach. It was raining lightly and nobody was around. However, he was not bothered much by the weather: the rain was warm and the ocean is always beautiful under any conditions. He even felt slightly happy to be walking in such a place alone.

Suddenly, Mike saw a silhouette of someone sitting on the sand far ahead. The person looked like they were well-covered by the raincoat.

‘Hum. I wonder what weirdo likes a rainy beach too?’

Mike decided to move closer; he started to look at the person intently. It seemed that it was a girl. As the lad was treading on the sand, his heart started beating faster.

‘And what’s that?,’ he wondered.

It was quite apparent that the silhouette in the raincoat attracted him.

‘Curious,’ the lad could only think and went on.

Having moved very close, he stopped. Yes, it was a girl: her small pretty nose could be seen from under the hood. Mike was sure that she heard his footsteps but the girl did not even turn her head towards him.

Mike smiled broadly.

‘Excuse me, I certainly understand that you’re most likely a local mirage,’ he said cheerily, ‘but I need a water well and there’s no one else around to simply ask.’

The girl shuddered. A moment later, she took her hood off and Mike saw an enchanting face. They both looked at each other – silently. Interested Betty was looking intently into Mike’s kind and cheery eyes and he peered into her romantic and very warm ones.

‘Is he my other half?’ Betty’s heart began to beat from happiness, but at the same time some doubts haunted her.

She decided to ask a test question, just in case.

‘How many people should sit on my towel?,’ she enquired.

‘Instructions for a towel are always written by its owner only,’ the lad replied smiling, shrugging his shoulders.

The girl rose to her feet and stretched her hand cautiously. At that instant, a happy smile on her face shone so brightly that it overlit all the rainy weather around there.

‘Betty!’ she introduced herself.

* * *

The year 2033

‘Dear,’ Harry looked at a 3D hologram of his wife with a tint of reproach, ‘you promised to return yesterday!’

The image of a pretty blonde-haired woman in the air fidgeted a little.

‘Um, you see dear, I was held up a little longer at my mom’s home,’ she began justifying herself guiltily, but then her expression instantly changed and she cheerily looked at her husband, ‘but I sent my phantom yesterday so that you would not get bored...’

‘What phantom?’ Harry wondered sincerely. ‘I haven’t received anything.’

The blonde raised her brows without understanding anything and turned to a screen that gleamed in the air. Having made a couple of movements with her hands in front of her, she covered her mouth with fear.

‘Oh! I haven’t updated the antivirus on it and yesterday, my phantom was intercepted by some hackers,’ she giggled embarrassed, ‘maniacs... But don’t worry, dear, I’ll make another one right now and send it to you.’

Harry smiled contentedly.

‘Alright, darling, there’s nothing to worry about,’ he waved to her, ‘I’m waiting for the phantom and for you to return soon.’

His wife smiled in response and then, her voluminous image slowly dissolved in the air.

The intellect

Doctor Henry Lebinsky was cheerfully walking to his home, without noticing the puddles on the pavement. That day was special for him: the project – ‘Artificial thought’ – that he was directing for more than six years produced a significant result again.

For several months, he and his collaborators experimented with prominent historical personalities and crucial historical events. And today, their artificial intelligence made an accurate decision in the events that had happened eight hundred years ago. It corrected the actions of a famous conqueror in the big battle. In those aspects where – according to the opinion of the historians – that commander had made mistakes, it acted more correctly. Henry had something to be proud of today.

In general, the idea of simulating turning points in the history of humankind was not original. Many institutes that conducted research on the problems of creating artificial intelligence experimented in this field. However, Henry had not yet heard

about anyone besides him who had a serious success in this field of research.

Artificial intelligence. The very thought about it made his heart palpitate. Certainly, many other people were concerned with this subject too. The number of movies humankind filmed on that topic already! And there he was, professor Henry Lebinsky, standing right on the edge of one of the greatest discoveries.

The doctor remembered the joy that shone on the faces of co-workers in the department; they even had Champagne to celebrate such a success that day.

To be honest, however, the project was very unstable. Very often, a series of experiments following some outstanding success ended in failure. Despite that, professor Lebinsky was a rare optimist. He knew well that the path to great discoveries layed only through great work. So day by day, he – together with his collaborators – made the project ‘Artificial thought’ advance towards victory.

* * *

A team of workers were carrying out some furniture at the entrance of the apartment building where he lived and loading it onto the truck. He decided to wait until they finished and stood by the house wall. He looked around in confusion at his surroundings and at the people working. Suddenly, one armchair caught his eye. Henry looked closely at the furniture and it dawned on him that the furniture was all from his apartment.

‘Hey lads, where are you getting it all from?’ he asked.

‘Apartment 47B,’ a worker who was older than his assistants replied, ‘something wrong?’

‘No, nothing at all,’ the professor replied somewhat lost and having pushed through to the entrance, he flew up the staircase to the third floor.

His wife Elsa was standing in the corridor giving out orders.

‘Darling!’ Henry addressed her, ‘what does it mean?’

His spouse turned her head to him slowly.

‘Nothing special – I am leaving, And Henry, your work has been *your darling* for a long time. I hope that some of your more tolerant intellectual creations will take my place soon. I am sorry, but I am tired of such a life. Don’t worry: I’ve only taken my furniture.’

Elsa turned to the workers again.

‘You can’t do that to me...,’ the professor began to speak.

‘I’ve already done it,’ his wife replied and, having given a parting glance to her husband, walked slowly to the staircase, ‘and, don’t try to find me.’

The professor was left standing at the door silently watching the workers coming out of his flat. Then he heard the sound of heels fading away from him at the flight of stairs. He felt very bad at that moment. His control over life was completely lost.

* * *

Sometime later, professor Lebinsky was driving on a hilly road at night. Earlier in a bar across his street, it had taken him exactly one hour of thinking to realize that it was best not to stay home that night. The only place where he could gain a mental equilibrium was at his mother's house; this would require about two hours of driving through the mountains.

Having stopped to make a short telephone call, he got into his car and soon drove out to the motorway. Lebinsky normally liked to drive at an unhurried pace but that day he desperately wanted to go home, where he had always been loved and understood well, as soon as possible. So, Henry would often press the gas pedal beyond all measure.

'Don't try to find me,' Elsa's words were constantly spinning in his head like a gramophone record, and that was after they had lived together happily for twenty years, or so he thought! From time to time the professor would shed long-forgotten tears.

'Don't try to find me.'

During one of these moments, while taking his hand off his wet eyes, it occurred to the professor instantly that he had lost control again. This time, over the road.

As if in slow-motion, he noticed the speedometer disc showing 120 km/h, a sharp turn and glaze ice on the asphalt. Then while being absolutely calm, he observed his car run through a road fence and flew above a dark abyss. Sometime later, the light in his eyes faded.

* * *

‘Wake up, my little son, above the roofs already sun,’ a soft voice near him sang his favourite children’s rhyme.

‘Mother!’ Henry lifted himself up slightly, opening his eyes.

What he saw around him afterwards kept him silent for a while. From the effort of lifting himself up he began to rise above the ground, to be more precise – above the place which resembled a wonderful botanical garden. Everything, as far as the eye could see, was flooded with flowers and plants of beautiful forms. For some reason, Henry continued to rise higher and higher, approaching the top of the tallest trees.

Some white-coloured figure with wings flew up to him and while taking him by his hand, drew him downwards.

‘Careful, Henry, the laws here are slightly different,’ he heard the same warm voice.

Henry was silent. While looking around in amazement, he tried to recognize at least something. But, the mind of a professor in this place gave out only spaces and question marks. It continued for a long time. Finally, Henry focused his attention on a bright face with very kind eyes.

‘Am I dead?,’ he told quietly the only conclusion that came to his mind.

‘Not quite,’ the kind face replied.

Once the professor touched the ground, he heard the warm voice again.

‘Look.’

Instead of the garden, something resembling a big screen with a 3D image inside appeared in front of Henry. He began to watch an unusual film on it. A blue car had not turned right at high speed and while breaking through a road fence, it flew out from the cliff. By some inner instinct, the professor recognized his own car.

In an instant, the picture changed and the professor saw a hospital room. Someone was lying in the middle of it with heavy bandages all over the body. The patient was connected to medical units with flashing lights with several thin tubes. Henry looked closer.

‘It’s me,’ he said with a more affirmative tone, rather than a doubtful one.

The bright face with the kind eyes nodded.

‘Will I die?,’ asked the professor a while later.

The white person with wings shrugged his shoulders.

‘It will be your decision, Henry,’ he replied, ‘but only after you look at something.’

A moment later, the screen lit in front of the professor again.

* * *

Several hours later when the film was over, Henry was sitting on the grass with his head resting on his arms, silent.

‘So it means that there is God and Paradise,’ he spoke out finally. ‘What a fool I have been! I have never taken this seriously.’

The man with bright face and a slightly saddened smile shrugged his shoulders.

‘It is so,’ he said, ‘the good news is that you have remained a kind and honest man.’

‘Is it important?,’ asked the professor.

‘In general, it is the only thing that is important,’ the white man smiled.

Henry thought it over for a moment.

‘Following the logic of what I have seen, you must be an angel,’ he said looking at his interlocutor.

‘Correct, it was not in vain that you have been given the role of a professor!,’ the angel replied, after which they both laughed out loudly.

‘Yes, I am your angel. My name is Elios.’

‘Elios?,’ Henry shuddered, ‘when I was a child, I had a kitten with the same name.’

The angel laughed.

‘Well, we angels like to play jokes at times. As a result, my dear ward pronounced my name ten times a day without even suspecting it.’

The professor smiled broadly. After that, he carefully looked into his angel’s eyes.

‘Elios, I have got a feeling that I should to know something even more important.’

‘It is so,’ the angel nodded, ‘you should know something about the artificial intelligence you have been working on so hard for so long.’

‘The reason why my Elsa left me,’ Henry dropped his head.

‘Well, don’t worry about that so much,’ the angel smiled.

The screen flashed once more and the professor saw his wife running into his hospital room and taking him by his hand, wept out. There was no sound during this scene, although everything could be understood without it.

‘Elsa!’ professor spoke out with tears rolling down his eyes from happiness. ‘She come back.’

‘She loves you very much,’ the angel said quietly, ‘but with your work, you have been distancing yourself from her for a long time.’

Henry stared at the screen and felt how his life is gaining purpose again. Soon the screen went out. Sometime later, he recalled the angel’s words.

‘The artificial intelligence, what is wrong with it, Elios?,’ he asked in a serious tone.

‘Everything, Henry,’ said the angel and looked closely at the scientist, ‘your life, my life, your body, my body, your mind, my mind. All these things can only be created by God – our Creator and Father. No one else can do this.’

‘No one?’ Henry asked slowly once more, ‘but why?’

The angel laughed.

‘Do you really want to know why bolts of an automobile cannot create an automobile? And why specifically a constructor is needed for it?’ Elios smiled.

Henry thought over slowly what he had heard.

‘But, we manage to obtain some success in that, at times...’

‘What kind of success did you obtain exactly? Correction of the behavior of a man being who brought disaster to thousands of people with his war?’ asked the angel ironically. ‘In fact, beyond the limits of a little Earth, only love and kindness have value. Meanwhile such *great men* have a completely different future after their death, and for a very long time.’

‘Indeed?’ Henry wondered.

‘Would you like to have a look at it?’

‘If I may,’ the professor nodded.

* * *

The screen appeared in the air again, this time consisting of grey and black tones. There, in its center, a little dark creature was moving that reminded Henry of the animation troll. The creature was constantly looking around afraid.

‘Who is this?,’ the professor asked the Angel.

‘Your «great» conqueror,’ he replied.

Henry choked.

‘He looks horrible...’

‘After death, every human has a look in accordance with what he has done in life,’ the angel explained.

At that moment, another creature of a much bigger size sprang out from behind a stone and rushed to seize the little one with a cry of joy. The latter shrieked and broke off to the side. However, after several dozen steps another big creature sprang out from behind a stone again and attacked him.

‘How long has he been living like this?’ Henry enquired in a quiet voice.

‘For almost eight hundred years,’ the angel replied, ‘it is not only him, but all the others who committed evil on earth. Everything bad should inevitably return to a human being after death – it is the law. Unless he repents for it in his physical life.’

‘Oh, my God!,’ the professor could only utter.

‘Exactly. And you are trying to copy his intellect,’ Elios smiled, ‘it is not the intellect that you should copy, but love, kindness and honesty. As you can see for yourself, only they have value. Many beloved children of the Father could not even read in their earthly lives.’

‘Oh dear,’ Henry could only say.

The screen was off for a while already but the professor still kept looking at it for a very long time.

‘Elios,’ he finally spoke out, ‘why are you showing me all this? As far as I know, it is not a custom to do so here.’

The angel looked closely into the eyes of the scientist.

‘You are very kind and honest,’ he said in a soft voice, ‘and I managed to get permission from Father to help you figure some things out.’

‘Thank you,’ Henry spoke out in a low voice, ‘thank you.’

‘It was a pleasure for me to do this for you,’ the angel replied and then added, ‘well, now you know the main things. The choice is yours: you can remain here forever or you can return to Earth.’

The professor slowly stood up and wandered around the garden without haste. Sometime later, he walked back to Elios.

‘May I have a look at my wife once more?’ he asked.

The angel nodded. The screen shone in front of him again. Elsa was sitting on a chair by the bed in the hospital room. She was holding the hand of the patient with both hands. Tears were still rolling down her face, while her lips moved as she whispered something warmly.

‘I will return, if you don’t mind.’

The angel nodded.

‘And,’ Henry paused for a moment, ‘maybe, I will manage to do something useful on earth, indeed.’

‘Keep in mind that nobody will believe a single word you tell’, the angel pronounced slowly, ‘generally, it will be very difficult for you to make things move there.’

‘That we shall see,’ Henry’s eyes shone with the ardour of a true scientist.

‘Well then, good luck, my dear,’ Angel Elios said warmly. ‘All of us will be waiting for you after your earthly life.’

* * *

The patient’s hand suddenly began to interlock with his wife’s hand – tenderly and tightly.

The butterfly

A girl was happily playing on the screen of her favourite tablet with her fingers. Her rabbit, Sindy, was surpassing obstacles cunningly and avoiding various monsters. At times, the little girl would take a short pause to drink some juice and then would come back to play her computer game.

Several minutes later, the tablet made congratulatory sounds upon reaching a third level. The girl laughed from happiness and began to clap her hands. After that, she stretched and looked in the window.

Instantly, the girl froze: an enormous butterfly was right on the glass of the window. The child turned off her tablet and began scrambling out awkwardly from the children's chair she was sitting in. Soon, she trod in a child's wobbly manner – to the window. The butterfly was still sitting on the glass: big, beautiful, with large yellow wings and long black feelers. The child smiled cheerily at it and the butterfly moved its feelers in response, in a friendly manner.

The girl was looking at it for some time in fascination; then, she decided to take a closer look at the newcomer. To do this, she placed her fingers against the glass and began to spread them like she did with her tablet. But for some reason, the butterfly would not become bigger. The child stood thinking it over for a moment and repeated the action. Nothing changed, the butterfly would not become bigger in size.

The girl stood still – bewildered. In a brisk moment, she intuitively clapped on the glass with her hand. The butterfly flapped its wings gracefully and took off towards the forest.

The wonder-stricken, open-mouthed child stood there for a long time watching it fly away.

Cat and Whale

A big red cat was sitting on the sofa staring at the tip of his tail, very much surprised. Sometimes, its tail would shudder slightly which made the tomcat even more surprised, so it continued for a long time.

* * *

Jeff had never been tired of watching whales. He greatly loved marveling at these wonderful giants of the sea. And thank goodness, he had such an opportunity: each year, a big group of whales would stay in the bay for several months not far from his home. Therefore, the young man would often take his trailer with the boat there, to the seashore. His eight-meter *Red Cat* was not so big, but it was a quite comfortable and reliable vessel.

That morning the waters of Harvey Bay were unbelievably calm, except the slight rippling which spoiled the impression of a vast, endless water-mirror.

Jeff steered slowly to a stop at his favourite location where the whales would normally swim by. The depth in that place reached twenty metres. He dropped the anchor and turned off the boat's engine. Then, the young man took his thermos filled with aromatic coffee and went to the bow.

Having glanced at the anchor rope that went down into the blue sea, he smiled cheerfully as that day underwater visibility was perfectly fine. Having sat in his favorite place on the deck, he unscrewed the cup and poured himself a drink.

About fifteen minutes later, the whales appeared in the distance. First, Jeff saw their glistening black backs and tails through his binoculars. A little later, their sounds reached him. Having come to the rear deck of the boat, he took a wetsuit that was drying on the rope and put it on. After that, he took the mask, snorkel and flippers out from the box.

Despite their enormous size, the whales can be frightened quite easily. That is why Jeff had to be very careful: he had to avoid making any noise. So, at that moment he switched off all electronics including the radio and slid quietly off the rear deck into the water. While swimming gently along the side of the boat to the anchor rope, he grasped it and waited.

Within minutes, the whales approached the boat closer. Jeff breathed deeply for about a dozen times and began diving, creeping by the rope. At the depth of nearly eight metres he glanced at the diver's computer he had and stopped.

This time, the whales swam past very closely. There were three of them: two adult whales and one baby-whale, about seven meters long. Jeff, who could easily hold his breath at this depth for a couple of minutes, turned his head slowly and watched these gracious sea giants with excitement. The two big whales came from both sides five metres away, then went further, but the small one slowed down his pace. It swam close to the young man and held still. They looked intently at each other for a few moments.

Soon, Jeff felt that it was a good time for him to take a breath. He warmly waved the little whale goodbye and began to ascend by the rope.

Having reached the deck, Jeff watched the glistening black backs and spaying fountains disappear. Then, he began to heave the anchor up. It was time for him to return to his dryland pets.

* * *

The big red tomcat was still surprised by its tail jerking when he suddenly heard the front door click. Instantly forgetting about the tail, he leapt to the floor and began to purr, preparing to meet his owner. The tomcat felt as sure as ever that his return would result in a tasty fish.

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