

## Life After War

*by George Gasparyan*

From one side burst bombs, another side tanks coming in on him. He will remember that scene all his life. Before, he could do anything he wanted, but now he could only sit home and dream about the time when everything was awesome.

“Hey, Hey does anybody live here?” asked the teenager behind the veteran’s door.

“Yes, yes you can come in,” answered the veteran.

When the young boy came in and saw him, he asked: “What happened to you?”

“Who are you? Why are you coming here?” the veteran asked.

“I am a traveler. I saw your house painted with military colors and thought that it was empty.”

They had a very interesting conversation, but the teenager felt that the veteran’s heart was broken and he didn’t want to live. He hesitated – should he stay or go?

After a long silence, the veteran asked, “Are you lost here, dear son? Maybe you came to camp with your friends and got lost on your way.”

The teenager was surprised. “Wow, you are absolutely right, I am perplexed”.

“What is your name, son? You didn’t introduce yourself.”

“My name is Leo, I’m from Germany. I came to England to learn jurisprudence, but I have had some difficulties. Anyway – our university gave us a chance to come camp here for a month, but in a week we will go back and continue our courses.”

“Ahhh, lawyer’s sons don’t have their own lives. They only take care of their job, and put their own life second.”

“Maybe for you it’s a boring profession, but I visualize myself in a court of justice.”

Leo’s friends found him and came back to camp around sunset. Around the camp, birds tweeted on tall trees. There was also a river where students could swim and catch fish. When they had free time, Leo continuously thought about the veteran who lived in the middle of the forest alone.

One day, Leo suggested to his friends that they go to the veteran’s house. He would tell them about the war, about what a difficult time they’d had.

When they visited the veteran’s house, he told them stories about war. The boys collected mushrooms and fish; they made some barbecue and ate some delicious food. In the evening they returned to the camp. The holidays were over.

On the last day, the veteran came to the camp to send off Leo to Oxford university. Of course, a veteran’s life wasn’t easy, but he got a good pension from the state. When they reached Oxford, the veteran said:

“Leo, I knew you only for this week, but you are fair and have a kind heart. I want for your dreams to come true. Call me when you are alone and won’t know what to do.”

A real veteran is as strict and demanding as a real soldier, but if a man is good, he will accept them with an open heart. In Oxford there are many students whose fathers are ministers and rich men. But Leo was able to study there for free because he had very high grades. When the veteran arrived at the university the week after, he was surprised to hear that three students broke the university’s windows and blamed Leo, and the rector didn’t want them expelled because their fathers were influential. Fortunately for the veteran it was still very interesting to see how these students were spending their time in the educational system. And on exactly that day the rector was about to say his last word about who would leave the university: Leo or those three students.

Before Leo’s visit to camp, Bobby, Ken and

Sonny were breaking the biology classroom's windows because they didn't want to do the assignments and were angry at the lecturer; when one of the lecturers saw the broken windows, they immediately suspected Leo, who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was a very interesting moment: just as when Leo was trying to defend himself, the veteran and his driver entered the justice hall of the university.

The rector said:

"Who is this blind man?"

The veteran, with the help of his cane and the driver, climbed the stairs and sat there, observing in silence. He listened to how they were holding the case. Finally, when the rector decided Leo was guilty, the veteran stood up.

"What kind of justice is this?"

"Hey, you can't speak without my permission! Sit down and don't speak," said the rector.

"Son, I will tear your tongue out and you won't speak anymore," the veteran said.

At that moment, the hall burst into laughter. But the veteran kept on:

"You sit here and make decisions for young students who can become good professionals in their spheres. Don't break their dreams— if you do, they will lose their belief in their own power."

"Mr. Veteran, there are rules and somebody violated them," answered the rector.

"When we fought against the Germans, I didn't remember that rules were preserved. We fought for our children, so that they could get a dignified education here. You are making such a big mistake. He is a good boy, I know him. He can't just break the windows and if he does it, it means that there is an important reason for it..."

The hall's students were silent and observant, listening to him. Finally, moved by the speech, they demanded justice for Leo. The veteran's speech was convincing; even the rector couldn't argue with him. At the most important moment, the rector said:

"Leo, you are justified."

People stood up and applauded for the veteran and Leo.

"Bobby, Ken and Sonny get a warning," he went on. "And if this kind of thing happens again, there will be no forgiveness."

When the veteran and Leo left the hall, many students took photos with them.

This is the last thing the veteran said to Leo:

"Never be shy to tell the truth. I will return to my house, but when you will be in camp again, come to me, you are always welcome."

