

SHOVELING SNOW BY ALEXANDER TSYPKIN

Translated by Paul Lazarus

Victor jumped out of bed. He felt dizzy, as he often did lately - all he wanted to do was stay cozy and comfy, but he took a deep breath and gathered up his strength.

His college friend, Boris, was being buried at a cemetery in the boonies. It might seem like death is the great equalizer, but there's no fooling around with location and money. That's why very few people actually show up at funerals and anniversaries for low income folks, who go to their eternal rest in out-of-the-way places.

This was exactly the case for Victor's old pal, Boris - he was buried inconveniently. If you didn't have a car, it would take you an hour by subway, a transfer, and around forty minutes on a bus. For some reason, on these remote routes, passengers speak less loudly on their cell phones and the drivers tend to be nicer than the ones on the typically crowded runs. Or maybe it just seems that way.

Sitting in the back of his Lincoln town car, Victor was reflecting on this when his chauffeur pulled to a stop and grumbled, "Why would you ever come out here?"

It was pretty cold outside, but still no snow. The see-your-breath air gave Vic an energy buzz. These days, he barely went out, so this was quite a hike.

Not many came, Bo was only forty-nine. Usually, when you pass away at that age and a lot of your peers are still around it tends to get crowded at your funeral. But not this time. Cold, far, poor.

Victor remembered just about everyone, but not everyone remembered him. The past year had really taken a toll on him and it showed. Those who hadn't seen him in the last ten years, weren't able to recognize the man standing next to Bo's family. Expensive threads; looking sick. Even Michael, their mutual university friend, took a good minute to recognize him.

"Hi, Mike."

"Good G...Victor, is that you? Shit...you're so skinny..."

Vic didn't want to get into it. He shrugged the comment off casually: "good diet."

"Yeah, that's real popular these days. I just got back from a detox trip. How's life?"

"Not bad. Yours? Thought you weren't gonna make it."

"Well, we're classmates. I always wondered who'd be the first to go, but I never thought it'd be Bo."

Victor couldn't believe Bo was gone. He remembered the last conversation he had with his friend. It had been four days ago, but it felt like just a few hours had gone by. Bo's