



Ukrainian
Jewish
Encounter

Українсько
Єврейська
Зустріч

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Grey Bees

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Seven or eight minutes passed before Sergeyich himself was caught in the headlights, which belonged to a large minibus.

Pulling up to the beekeeper, the vehicle stopped. Its right door opened right in front of Sergeyich, almost hitting him. He took a step back.

“Good evening,” said the man emerging from within.

The voice seemed familiar to Sergeyich, and this puzzled him. After all, he hadn’t made any friends here: he had barely spoken even to anyone other than Aisylu and her children. He might have occasionally exchanged a few words with some locals down at the shop, or with some tourists walking or cycling past the apiary, but, come the night, those random voices, heard once, would sink into the abyss that swallowed all the day’s unimportant sounds. This voice, on the other hand, was not like that, was not random.

“Don’t you recognize me?” the man said.

Sergeyich strained his eyes, but the man’s face, partially obscured by darkness, told him nothing.

“You came to see me in Simferopol,” the man prompted him. “Ivan Fyodorovich, in case you forgot.”

Sergeyich tensed up. He remembered the endless corridors of the F.S.B., the tall doors and the office where he had spoken with Ivan Fyodorovich.

“Oh...what...brings you here? Passing through?” the beekeeper said, unable to square the presence of the newly arrived officer with his bonfire, his tent and his apiary.

"Not exactly," Ivan Fyodorovich responded in a perfectly friendly voice. "We came to pay you a visit. A short one. Whereabouts are you staying?"

"Over there," Sergeyich said, pointing. "See the fire?"

"Alright, then, you walk back, and we'll drive," said Ivan Fyodorovich.

The door of the minibus slammed shut, and the vehicle drove towards the tent and the fire. It stopped with its headlights trained on the beekeeper's green, windowless Lada. As Sergeyich walked up, he noted that his long-suffering car looked even more miserable when bathed in yellow light.

Now the driver emerged from the minibus too, leaving the headlights on.

Ivan Fyodorovich loomed up in front of the beekeeper.

Sergeyich spotted a military emblem on the minibus's door. This surprised him. He was also surprised to see that the minibus had no windows, except for those at the very front – which meant it was made to transport cargo, not people.

"This is Vasily Stepanovich," Ivan Fyodorovich said. "He's not really a driver. It's just that there's too much work and not enough people to do it, so I asked him to drive. Well, where are your bees?"

The beekeeper pointed. "Over there."

Let's have a look," Ivan Fyodorovich said, exchanging glances with his companion. The two of them set out for the hives, and the owner of the bees hurried after them.

Vasily Stepanovich turned on a torch and began to lift the hives' roofs, peering inside. His behaviour alarmed Sergeyivh.

"What this about? What are you looking for? I've already extracted the honey," he rattled off nervously.

"That's precisely why we didn't bother you earlier," Ivan Fyodorovich said, turning to the beekeeper. "We'll have to take one of these with us...just for a couple of days. Run some tests."

"What sort of test?" Sergeyich said, dumbfounded.

"When you entered the country, you violated the rules. The department of health and sanitation didn't clear your bees. You know, of course, that bees can transmit diseases, putting the local Crimean bees at risk."

"But...nobody said anything. They just let me through."

"Yes, they were being humane. But now they've realised their oversight. In any case, it's nothing to worry about."

In the meantime, having examined all six hives, Vasily Stepanovich stopped beside the third one from the fire. He directed the torch at the entrance, then lifted the roof again and reached inside.

"We'll take that one," Ivan Fyodorovich declared, nodding towards the hive beside which his companion was standing. "Lend us a hand?"

Sergeyich and Vasily Stepanovich lifted the hive and carried it to the minibus. Ivan Fyodorovich had dashed ahead to open the door. They placed the hive inside.

"But I'm leaving...soon," the beekeeper said, sounding somewhat confused.

"I know, I know," Ivan Fyodorovich replied. "Don't you worry, we'll bring it back in a day or two – if the bees are in good health, that is. And if they aren't – well, you'll forgive us, but we'll have to confiscate all the hives....Never mind that for now, let's not get ahead of ourselves."