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FEUILLETON

A HISTORIC MEETING

A tale of one Saturday, one bag of seeds and one certificate, as told by eyewitnesses and the newspapers

I. THE NOTICE

In Tryokhstoronsk there were three bosses to one bathhouse, and on Saturdays each of them got exactly a third of the steam room. Since morning a notice had hung at the bus stop:

> **HISTORIC MEETING**
> *For the first time in the town's history*
> *the council chairman,*
> *the market director*
> *and the bathhouse manager*
> *will meet all three together.*
> *Agenda being drafted.*

Science has established that three bosses in one town never meet: the bathhouse timetable gets in the way. In Tryokhstoronsk this law had held since the town was founded. Now the meeting was set for Saturday, on the sidelines of the market, and called historic, the first in history with all three.[1]

Under the notice stood Gosha Syurprizov's kiosk. It had been raining since morning. Gosha sold sunflower seeds and dreamed of getting onto the agenda with one item: an awning. Without an awning the seeds went soggy in the rain, and the customers did not: they simply left. The agenda, however, was drawn up by the council secretary, Nabroskov, and he did not care for awnings.

Nabroskov drafted the agenda literally, by drafts: they flew into the bin and from the bin back onto the desk.[2] That, the town said, is how all historic meetings are prepared.



The competition was healthy; only one of the competitors had caught a cold.

FACT FILE

The APEC summit will be held in Shenzhen on 18–19 November, with Xi Jinping chairing the leaders' meeting. According to the White House, the first ever trilateral meeting of the leaders of the United States, China and Russia will take place on its sidelines.[1]

THEIR WAYS

The US President will take Elon Musk with him on his trip to the Philippines and China, but Musk will not take part in the trilateral meeting of leaders, AP reports.[2] In Tryokhstoronsk travelling companions are seated at the table: it is cheaper than explaining why not.

LETTERS

Dear Editor, I have gone to the bathhouse every Saturday for thirty years. Please count me as a participant in the historic meeting: I got there before anyone.

A regular

— Notice —

KIOSK "SURPRISE"

Seeds under an awning. Above estimates

A glass	**5 kopecks**
A bag	**free**
Advice	**no bill**
Agenda	**backdated**

Sources (RBC, 14 November 2026, in Russian):
1. The White House announces a "historic meeting" of Trump, Putin and Xi — rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/6af7a8710de4b07c4ce6c10b
2. AP reports that Ukraine is not on the agenda of the Putin–Trump–Xi meeting — rbc.ru/politics/14/11/2026/6af7ec0abe686526a9ce0d79
3. How Russia's third-quarter GDP growth became a "pleasant surprise" — rbc.ru/economics/14/11/2026/6af70818900d07cf07f3387a

"Will you put the awning on the agenda?" asked Gosha.

"Awnings don't go down in history," Nabroskov replied. "Know your place, and your agenda."

"So what does go in?"

"Whatever fits on one sheet. Your awning won't fit: it's too wide."

II. THE RIVAL

Next morning an identical kiosk opened opposite Gosha's. In it sat Nabroskov's nephew, selling the same seeds, but under an awning. The awning was council property, with a fringe, and it looked down on Gosha.

The customers stood between the two kiosks like a voter between two candidates and went under the awning. Science has established this too: under a roof the seeds look bigger.

"Competition," said the nephew. "Healthy competition."

"You've got a roof," said Gosha.

"I've got an uncle. The roof follows."

"And if the rain stops?"

"Then I'll have an awning and you'll have fine weather. Not bad either."

Gosha decided to go round the uncle. On Saturday a delegation with a foreign consultant was passing through town. Gosha reasoned that a consultant gets onto an agenda faster than a secretary: at least he is brought by car.

III. THE STAMP

The consultant, Eduard Poputchikov, travelled the world with delegations. They always took him on trips and never let him into the talks.[2] He was paid well and had long grown used to taking part in history from the corridor.

Gosha found him by the station buffet. Poputchikov heard him out about the awning, not without a certain interest, and gave him advice. The advice was free; the bill for the advice came separately.

"An ordinary man won't get into a historic meeting," said Poputchikov. "A pleasant surprise will."

"And who's that?"

"You. It only needs paperwork."

He took out a form and a stamp. The stamp was foreign, with an eagle looking the other way. Gosha paid the bill with a week's takings and received:

> **CERTIFICATE**
> *The bearer is*
> *a pleasant surprise.*
> *Came in above estimates.*

The consultant had taken the phrase from the morning paper: that was what it called growth that had slowed but beaten the forecast.[3] Gosha was not quick either, but nobody had ever made a forecast about him.

IV. THE MEETING

On Saturday the three bosses sat down at a table on the sidelines of the market. They took a round table so that nobody sat at the head, and each sat at the head of his own third.

Gosha showed his certificate. They let him in: nobody had seen a pleasant surprise at a historic meeting before, and there was nothing to check it against.

"This meeting will draw the attention of the whole town, without exaggeration," the chairman announced.[2]

Then Nabroskov held the certificate up to the light. The eagle on the stamp was looking abroad, and the signature belonged to a consultant who was never let in anywhere.

"Foreign stamp," said Nabroskov. "The surprise is void."

Gosha could have kept quiet, as a surprise should. Instead he poured his whole bag onto the round table, an equal heap for each third.

"I'm no surprise," he said. "I'm Gosha with the seeds. Help yourselves. Free."

"And the bill?" asked the market director, who was used to consultants.

"No bill. And call him in too," Gosha nodded at the corridor. "He's never tried it without a bill."

V. THE AWNING

For the first time in his life Poputchikov was asked to the table. He sat down, took a seed and took part. He stacked the husks in a neat pile, out of habit, as a separate invoice.

Within an hour the three bosses, for the first time in history, agreed on one item. The item was the awning. The agenda was drawn up afterwards, and Nabroskov drafted it at the first attempt.

"A pleasant surprise," said the chairman. "Slower than we'd have liked, but above estimates."

"Whose estimates?" asked Gosha.

"Ours. We expected nothing of you."

"And the consultant?" asked Nabroskov.

"Finished his seeds," reported the market director. "Didn't send a bill. Also a first in history."

Gosha carried the first bag from under the new awning across the road to the nephew. The nephew thought it over and took the fringe off: under two awnings it looked superfluous.

The rain over Tryokhstoronsk fell as before, finely and with no agenda. Now it fell on the awning.

From press reports



The historic meeting took place in a warm, seed-cracking atmosphere.

Sources (RBC, 14 November 2026, in Russian):

1. The White House announces a "historic meeting" of Trump, Putin and Xi — rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/6af7a8710de4b07c4ce6c10b
2. AP reports that Ukraine is not on the agenda of the Putin–Trump–Xi meeting — rbc.ru/politics/14/11/2026/6af7ec0abe686526a9ce0d79
3. How Russia's third-quarter GDP growth became a "pleasant surprise" — rbc.ru/economics/14/11/2026/6af70818900d07cf07f3387a