THE PLAIN
TRUTH

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FEUILLETON

REASONABLE NEEDS

A true story of two friends, one rebus and one light bulb, as told by eyewitnesses and the newspapers

I. THE REBUS

In Rebusov there were two weather forecasts for every resident and not a single umbrella. The forecasts were made by two men: Arkady Savvich Predskazuev and Frol Chetvertak. For forty years, every November, they hung a rebus for the coming year on the wall of the water tower.[1] On Saturday the friends meant to hang the forty-first.

The rebuses had never once come true, and the town valued them for it: you could see at once what would not happen. In fairness, let it be said that these were the best rebuses in the province. There were no others in the province.

On Monday the post office announced that the bank would report to the tax office everyone who systematically received transfers to a card.[2] The friends had been sent a rouble from every yard for forty years running, every November, like snow.

— They'll count us, — said Chetvertak.

— Let them count, — replied Predskazuev. — We hang the rebus on Saturday all the same.

— And if they forbid it?

— Then we hang it on Sunday.

II. THE AUDIT

On Tuesday Inspector Sistematikov arrived, and the town became exemplary at once. The water carrier began writing receipts for water. Granny Karpovna handed in an inventory of her seedlings, including one suspicious marrow. The barometer at the post office declined to comment.



The forty-first rebus goes up without a receipt.

NOTE

The authorities have returned to the idea of obliging the Bank of Russia to pass to the tax service data on individuals who systematically receive transfers to their cards.[2]

THEIR WAYS

A British magazine that has printed forecasts for the year ahead for forty years has admitted: “We do not strive for flawless accuracy in our predictions.”[1] In Rebusov the forecast never comes true, but it does so accurately.

WEATHER

Snow in Rebusov on Tuesday. According to the rebus, heat and drought. No significant change.

— Advertisement —

FORECAST BUREAU “REBUS”

Not come true in forty years. Pay unsystematically

Forecast ..... **a rouble**
Rebus ..... **in November**
Accuracy ..... **not the aim**
Light bulb ..... **40 watts**

Sources (RBC, 17 November 2026, in Russian):
1. Мир после Трампа и эффект «Оземпика»: о чем новая обложка The Economist — rbc.ru/society/17/11/2026/6afc23bdefedbc664f975532
2. Власти уточнили планы по усилению контроля за переводами россиян — rbc.ru/economics/17/11/2026/6afb56933137febb8f504baa
3. «Я внимательно наблюдал за Путиным». Что рассказал в мемуарах Джо Байден — rbc.ru/politics/17/11/2026/6afc4b0c7f0b6452f3f79495
4. Суды проверят детей на роскошь. Как КС изменил подход к алиментам богатых — rbc.ru/society/17/11/2026/6afc8e4c49b3d78d99d0501e
5. Не будем умирать: какой обещает быть бондиана с Робертом Паттинсоном — https://style.rbc.ru/impressions/6afc69bd7d8710b557c643ac

Transfers in Rebusov stopped that same day. From then on the town transferred only its spirits, and those in cash.

— Every rouble into the light! — the inspector proclaimed by the water tower. — Shadow is the enemy of the treasury!

— And the rebus? — asked Predskazuev.

— The rebus is income! Forty years at a rouble a yard. A quarter to the treasury!

— But it never once came true.

— Income that never came true is income too!

— We have only one Chetvertak, — said Frol. — I won't hand him over whole.

The friends decided to sit out the audit at Chetvertak's dacha. They rolled the rebus into a tube and carried it off under an arm, like a thermometer: the future can be measured outside town just as well.

III. THE CONTRACT

The inspector followed. He walked behind them along the sleepers, across the ravine and past the village shop, exactly twenty paces back. He walked systematically.

— Will he fall behind? — asked Chetvertak.

— He will, — said Predskazuev. — That is my forecast.

— Then he won't, — sighed Chetvertak.

Their neighbour at the dachas was a retired foreign consultant. He was writing his memoirs, “Promise Me, Rebusov,” and recalled in them how closely he had watched the town: for forty years, through binoculars, over the fence.[3]

The consultant at once offered the friends his care: to print the rebus in his memoirs. The care came drawn up as a contract:

CONTRACT OF CARE

1. The consultant takes care of the rebus.
2. The rebus is printed in the memoirs.
3. For every forecast that comes true the consultant gets forty per cent.
4. The consultant's promises do not count as forecasts.

— So this is care? — asked Chetvertak.

— This is care at interest, — the consultant explained. — We don't stock any other kind.

The friends signed without reading. In forty years nothing of theirs had come true, and forty per cent of nothing was, by consultants' standards, almost charity.

— And if it comes true? — asked Chetvertak.

— Then we'll be famous, — said Predskazuev. — Fame is worth more than interest.

IV. THE RULING

On Thursday the inspector caught them at the garden gate and demanded a quarter of forty years. The friends decided to stop running and went to the justice of the peace: at their age running cost more than the tax.

The judge had just read that a payment may be reduced if a quarter of a large income exceeds reasonable needs.[4] He asked the treasury to prove its needs.

— What does the treasury need? — asked the judge.

— A light bulb, — said the inspector, after some thought. — On the water tower, above the rebus. So the income can be seen.

— Forty watts, — Chetvertak specified. — The tower won't take more.

— Ruled: a light bulb, — said the judge. — The rest exceeds.

The friends, by the way, had predicted the judge fourteen years earlier, when he still carried the prosecutor's briefcase. He himself had said then that he would become a judge in about twenty years. He made it in fourteen.[5]

It was the first rebus that ever came true. Over the fence the consultant was already running towards them with his bill.

V. THE LIGHT BULB

On Saturday the rebus went up on the water tower as always. In forty years the tower had grown used to rebuses and felt undressed without one. Inspector Sistematikov screwed in the bulb himself and stayed to watch.

The consultant got his forty per cent of the judge who came true. He was given forty per cent of the light bulb: two evenings a week it shone for him over the fence.

The new rebus promised record heat and drought for the coming year.[1] In Rebusov that meant snow up to the waist.

— A forecast is a forecast, — said Karpovna, — but my potatoes have been in the cellar since September. Winter doesn't give me orders.

The queue at the water tower heard her out and resolved to send the friends money again, but unsystematically: now on a Wednesday, now on a Friday, and now in a leap year.

— Unsystematically is allowed, — the inspector decided, after some thought. — We call that the weather.

Ever since, in Rebusov there have been two weather forecasts for every resident and one umbrella. Inspector Sistematikov holds it over the rebus.

From press reports



The escort was systematic.

LETTERS

Dear Editor, for forty years I have sent the friends a rouble and never once received a forecast that came true. Please count my rouble as charity and the forecast as change.

The water carrier of Pump Street

LOST AND FOUND

An umbrella has been found by the water tower. It will not be returned to its owner: the town has only one umbrella, and it is on duty.

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1. Мир после Трампа и эффект «Оземпика»: о чем новая обложка The Economist — rbc.ru/society/17/11/2026/6afc23bdefedbc664f975532
2. Власти уточнили планы по усилению контроля за переводами россиян — rbc.ru/economics/17/11/2026/6afb56933137febb8f504baa
3. «Я внимательно наблюдал за Путиным». Что рассказал в мемуарах Джо Байден — rbc.ru/politics/17/11/2026/6afc4b0c7f0b6452f3f79495
4. Суды проверят детей на роскошь. Как КС изменил подход к алиментам богатых — rbc.ru/society/17/11/2026/6afc8e4c49b3d78d99d0501e
5. Не будем умирать: какой обещает быть бондиана с Робертом Паттинсоном — https://style.rbc.ru/impressions/6afc69bd7d8710b557c643ac