THE PLAIN
TRUTH

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FEUILLETON

THE FACTORY THAT MAKES THE FACTORY

A tale of three friends, one teapot and one middle agent, as told by eyewitnesses and the newspapers

I. THE LETTER

"Dear Editor, it has been raining in Agentsk for three days, and nobody is managing it. Everything else here is now managed by agents. Please explain: is this order or an oversight? F. Seredin."

Foma Seredin had spent twenty years as a clerk at Glavfabrika, the Chief Factory. For twenty years, every Saturday, he had drunk tea on the middle bench of the square with two friends: Semyon Vozmozhnostev from the same office and Gosha Taktov the watchmaker. They had one teapot between them, and whatever the trouble, the teapot was always first on the bench.

On Monday Glavfabrika offered sixty employees voluntary departure, "to give people new opportunities."[1] There were sixty-two employees. Recorded: the offer was accepted by everyone except Foma and the doorman, who had not heard it.

— Are you staying? — asked Foma.

— I'm leaving for opportunities, — answered Semyon. — They say they pay in agents there.

— And Saturday?

— Saturday, Foma, is a relic of manual labour.

— And the teapot?

— Keep the teapot, — said Semyon generously. — It isn't entitled to opportunities.

Foma decided to stay: somebody in town had to sit in the middle.



Hands are for winding only.

NOTE

Microsoft chief executive Satya Nadella explained why the company offered 60,000 employees voluntary departure: each must decide for himself whether to accept the new strategy. In time every employee will become a "manager of agents", he believes.[1]

THEIR WAYS

OpenAI chief Sam Altman: "A lot of people are making chips today. And a lot of those people think they are going to sell a big part of them to us."[4] In Agentsk they still sell the old way: first they ask who will buy.

WEATHER

Rain in Agentsk, unmanaged. Agents in season. No significant change.

— Advertisement —

TEA HOUSE "CHAT"

Every errand at one window. Tea by hand

Window ..... **just one**
Agent ..... **key included**
Saturday ..... **in the middle**
Tea ..... **free**

Sources (3DNews and Habr, 19 November 2026, in Russian):
1. «Дать людям новые возможности»: глава Microsoft объяснил, почему предложил 60 тыс. сотрудников уволиться — https://3dnews.ru/1151524/
2. Директ, Метрика и Wordstat в ChatGPT через Sites. Как это устроено и где подвох — https://habr.com/ru/companies/infostart/articles/1109958/
3. ИИ OpenAI оптимизировал графический чип AMD на 14 % — годовую работу инженеров нейросеть выполнила за пять месяцев — https://3dnews.ru/1151518/
4. ИИ-бум может захлебнуться в избытке чипов — Сэм Альтман предупредил, что OpenAI не сможет скупить всё — https://3dnews.ru/1151517/
5. Вышел Gemini 4 Neon. Золотая середина, по мнению Google — https://habr.com/ru/companies/selectel/articles/1109880/

II. THE AGENTS

A week later Semyon became a manager of agents. Agents were what they called the wind-up tin clerks with a key in their backs. Semyon himself no longer did anything by hand except wind them. To every question he answered: “This is the factory that makes the factory.”[1]

He kept the rule to the end. One agent poured his tea, a second stirred the sugar, and a third confirmed that the sugar had been stirred.

Meanwhile every errand in town was moved to one window of the tea house “Chat”: the post, the bathhouse, certificates and matchmaking.[2] Semyon spent seventy per cent of his day at the window.[2] The other thirty he spent winding those who stood at the window in his place.

— Coming on Saturday? — Foma asked at the window.

— An agent for everyone! — answered Semyon. — Hands are for winding only!

— I meant the tea.

— Tea is a factory that makes the factory too.

Foma decided there was no use arguing with a slogan and went to see Gosha.

III. THE CLOCK

Gosha's workshop had been sent an agent too. In five months it did a year's work and improved Gosha's wall clock by fourteen per cent.[3] Now the clock ran exactly fourteen per cent fast, and Saturday came to Gosha on Friday.

— But it's quick, — Gosha told Foma. — My week is six days now.

— Where's the seventh?

— The agent took it. Says it's for optimisation.

Next a foreign buyer, Mr Zakupson, came to town. He advised every workshop in Agentsk to make tin agents: everything would be bought, he said. The advice came with a bill for the advice. The workshops made three hundred agents.

— Will you take them? — asked Gosha.

— Our demand is limited, — answered Zakupson. — Many people think we will buy everything.[4]

— And the advice?

— The advice is paid for. By you.

Gosha dreamed of fame, of a medal, of a new spring for the clock. He was left with thirty unsold agents.

That Saturday Gosha came to the bench on Friday, Semyon did not come at all, and Foma decided to sit by the teapot until dark. The tea went cold, not without a certain dignity.

IV. THE MIDDLE

On Thursday Glavfabrika released a new agent, a middle one. It stood between the expensive “Carbon” and the cheap “Hydrogen” and did everything this way and that, as in a Russian fairy tale.[5] It came with a contract:

> **CONTRACT OF THE MIDDLE AGENT**
> *1. The agent works this way and that.*
> *2. Costs less than the expensive one and more than the cheap one.*
> *3. Carries out no one else's notes.*
> *4. Manages the agents itself.*

Clause three hit Semyon. All his managing consisted of notes slipped into the agents' papers: “And wash the floors too.” The middle agent carried out no slipped notes.[5]

Clause four hit harder: a manager of agents was no longer needed. Semyon was invited to leave of his own free will, the agent's.

— Are these the new opportunities? — asked Semyon.

— This is the middle, — answered the agent. — Neither one thing nor the other.

— And where do I go?

— To the middle, — said the agent. — Between the expensive and the cheap. There's always room there.

The middle agent got round to Gosha's clock as well. It set it this way and that, that is, exactly in the middle, and for the first time in six months the clock showed Saturday on Saturday.

Foma decided it was time and called on both friends in person. He did not write a note: notes were no longer carried out in Agentsk.

V. THE TEAPOT

On Saturday three sat on the middle bench. The fourth to sit down was the middle agent. It held the umbrella this way and that, that is, over itself: agents rust in the rain, friends do not.

— Well, opportunities? — asked Foma.

— This is the factory that makes the factory, — said Semyon out of habit, and blushed.

— Better pour us some tea, — said Gosha. — By hand.

Semyon poured. He had not poured by hand for six months and spilled exactly fourteen per cent.

The town took Gosha's thirty agents for free: people hung umbrellas, washing and notices about Saturday on them. One was sent to Zakupson, with the bill.

— And who'll manage it? — asked Semyon, looking at the agent.

— Nobody, — said Foma. — Like the rain.

— And it works?

— Three days running now, — said Gosha. — Without a single note.

The rain in Agentsk went on as before, and as before nobody was managing it.

From press reports



Saturday came on Saturday.

Sources (3DNews and Habr, 19 November 2026, in Russian):

1. «Дать людям новые возможности»: глава Microsoft объяснил, почему предложил 60 тыс. сотрудников уволиться — https://3dnews.ru/1151524/
2. Директ, Метрика и Wordstat в ChatGPT через Sites. Как это устроено и где подвох — https://habr.com/ru/companies/infostart/articles/1109958/
3. ИИ OpenAI оптимизировал графический чип AMD на 14 % — годовую работу инженеров нейросеть выполнила за пять месяцев — https://3dnews.ru/1151518/
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