

ALI ILDIRIMOGLU

THE GLOWING LINES



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Ali Ildirimoghlu
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The famous writer-publicist, Honoured Journalist of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ali Ildirimoghlu has published thousands of critical articles, essays, topical satires and stories. He has authored such works of art as the “Light Houses”, “To write or not to write”, “Chinarli”, “Sorrow”, “Telepathic”, “The indelible tracks” and the novels such as “The same man”, “The willy-nilly diplomat” which have won the sympathy of their readers.

Ali Ildirimoghlu’s new novel-memoir “The Glowing Lines” is edifying for grounding on the origin, customs and traditions, moral values of our nation. The novel calls the readers to manhood, nobleness, to protect our national values and not to reconcile with ignorance and imperfection that we face in society.

Here, the stories are told in simple language of ordinary people, which is a kind of history of our past, present and everybody should read and know them.

ALI ILDIRIMOGHLU KNOWN AND UNKNOWN TO ME

Who will soothe that baby?

Ali's mother Firanguiz will smile at him once again. He hardly felt the care from his mother, he could not return his duty to his mother as a son.

"I fell ill, they said it was measles. Nearly losing consciousness I put my head on her knees and I could hardly concentrate. I winced sometimes, hardly opening my eyes and looking at my mother. The tears were rolling down on her cheeks like heavy rain. And that's all! I can't remember anything more about my mother. I know only one thing that she disappeared forever when I was six. She vanished without trace!

I was weeping and fretting day and night. My relatives were comforting me and playing with my mind by saying that Firanguiz was not dead, she had simply fallen ill and was taken to the doctor in the city centre. They assured me that she would come home soon. And I impatiently waited for her to return."

That baby was Ali Ildirimoghlu who was born in the village of Aligoulouushaghi and now is living in his Eighth Decade. His mother Firanguiz's grave is in her motherland Balahassanli.

That was Ali Ildirimoghlu's childhood. Now being at the peak of his old age he is standing and looking out and remembering the black-white, joyful-sorrowful, successful-unsuccessful days and months of his life and the dearest, affectionate people that are passing one by one in front of his eyes. The frosty wind and freezing weather of the past years makes him feel feverish.

Ali Ildirimoghlu is very sad. His native lands of Gubadli (his countrymen's graves as well) are moaning under the Armenian occupation. The winds, cool breeze, mountain rivers, ice-cold springs, grasses, flowers and roses of that land are calling Ali Ildirimoghlu and us for our help.

Ali Ildirimoghlu remembers the years gone by and a wave of joy rises in his heart because the seventy years of his life did not belong only to himself. Ali Ildirimoghlu's life is mixed with the lives of those who loved him as a human being: his friends, his children and others. This life transferred to books in the form of meaningful words and feelings. This life has been scattered throughout the land of Azerbaijan and mixed with the woes, the joys and successes of his creative activity as a journalist, publicist and a writer.

To cut a long story short it is worth looking out from the pinnacle of a wise, perfect seventy year old life!

At the beginning of this book I mentioned his languor for his mother was not in vain.

For me a Mother means the whole world. And the existence of that world in Ali Ildirimoghlu's "The Glowing Lines" has increased my respect and sympathy for the author a hundred times. I have never seen Ali Ildirimoghlu up to now (Can you imagine!) and I have created his image only from his writings. For me the life of Ali Ildirimoghlu begins with his love and languor for his mother and her grave.

II

Writer and publicist Ali Ildirimoghlu's "The Glowing Lines", presented to its readers is a memory rich novel full of documents, facts and interesting information. I would like to call this novel a documentary, but in a documentary novel the documents, the facts and the sources play the leading role. Alongside with these important aspects in Ali muallim's (muallim – a form of address to a respected and intelligent man, but the word itself means "a teacher" – **trans.**) novels are lively and warm memories that draws the readers' attention in more deeply. Naturally those memories embrace the exact time of month, date and year. But these memories, feelings and emotions are so sensitive (sometimes hot-tempered) and plaintive that they prevail over the documentary-based truth and overstep the limits of this sphere.

That's why "The Glowing Lines" is more interesting as a memory rich novel.

III

Memoirs, as well as a memory rich novel have never been simply a biography of a person but the world of that person. Of course, it is not a complete and entire world but a literary world of words and word pictures. A world revived in live descriptions... Ali muallim has created his world in "The Glowing Lines". And for me as a reader and a master of words, after observing Ali Ildirimoghlu's world, his humane portrait rose before my eyes: Ali Ildirimoghlu – Azerbaijani, born in Gubadli, the fellow-countryman of Gachag Nabi, Hajar, Igid (Brave) Amrah, "Kishi (Manly) Tavat" and Sultan bey.

Ali Ildirimoghlu grew up in that land and imbibed water and air of that land to his spirit. If he is now proud of such brave people of that land permitted the life he lived...(Today 20% of our Azerbaijani territory is occupied by Armenians including Gubadli where Ali muallim was born. And today people of our country, where this world is going to the dogs, if they could look back into the past and understand who Nabi, Tavat, Hajar were ...then in our veins would boil not only blood but fury, spite and disgust against our enemies).

Ali Ildirimoghlu is a man who loves his land, his country and his birthplace. He should be living out his life in Lachin, Shusha, Gubadli, or Kalbajar – in the lap of mountains, not found in the shelter of an old and folded up mulberry tree in Shuvalan – in a suburb of Baku.

But this mulberry tree has grown in his motherland as well. Doesn't this mulberry tree remind him of the past recollections?

"For ten hundred years this mulberry tree has existed in this way. ...Now it has grown old and bent over completely.

Once when it was a young tree, a gardener took care of it willingly, weeded it, loosened its root in time, irrigated it, and it's owner rejoiced seeing its shoots. Now it lives a hard life."

And Ali muallim's love for that mulberry tree moves me to tears. I don't know from which prism Ali muallim looks at that

tree. But I see parallels in the destiny of the mulberry tree and Azerbaijan.

In every sentence of “The Glowing Lines” I feel Ali Ildirimoghlu’s love for his native land. No, his love for the motherland is not limited to only his birthplace, to the region where he was born as the most of us do in that way. However it is also clear that the GREAT LOVE FOR AZERBAIJAN that Ali Ildirimoghlu has begun from his childhood love of his village Aligoulouushaghi. And I felt this love sufficiently in the “Glowing lines”.

IV

Reviving Ali Ildirimoghlu’s humane portrait in front of my eyes (I should mention that Ali muallim and my father are nearly of the same age) I remembered the Soviet period in which I lived as well.

Yes, I am the descendant of that period as well as Ali muallim. I have been a pioneer, a comsomol, a communist during that time. I grew up in the spirit of that epoch, I have loved genius leaders of that period as well under the influence of propaganda.

But now I can’t bring myself to draw a black line on everything as the others do. How a man can spit on the way he has passed, on the history he has lived? As we see from his works Ali muallim doesn’t spit on everything of the Soviet period because just that period ranked that poor country boy among the famous and respected intelligentsia. That epoch played a great role in Ali Ildirimoghlu’s becoming famous as a writer and a publicist.

A human being, especially, men of art could be a slave of the period he lives in or could not reconcile himself to the epoch spiritually and inwardly. Ali muallim belongs to the second group of people. Reading “The Glowing Lines” I felt that Ali Ildirimoghlu being a regional correspondent (in some regions) of the Azerbaijan Communist Party newspaper “Communist” he was able to call a spade a spade and he had never trembled in front of high ranking officials. As he wrote the truth he was often discussed in the highest instances but he had always won,

because he fought for justice and the truth was on his side (I have visited Nakhchivan for several times. Being a special correspondent of the “Communist” newspaper in 1960-s people in Nakhchivan called him the messenger of justice).

V

Ali Ildirimoghlu is a talented, erudite journalist with deep knowledge. I witnessed it once again in “The Glowing Lines“. One of the best qualities of a journalist is to know perfectly well what’s going on in the country and in the world. Without this quality that wouldn’t do. A journalist can describe the life, the reality, the relations between people very well but if he is not knowledgeable and erudite he reminds the dumb beauty. In “The Glowing Lines “the thousand year of history, especially, the social-political panorama of the 20th century is a fantastic fruit of a erudite author that attracts our attention.

Ali Ildirimoghlu has a very simple style which is understandable for everyone. The shepherd and the academician of his land love him equally (of course, shepherd as a shepherd and academician as an academician). And they have always loved him. But in this simple journalist-writer manner there are deep multi shades of meaning that cause one think, be lost in thoughts, frown or even get into a wax. This is a literary attractive power.

VI

Finally, instead of the final word: Ali Ildirimoghlu is now one of the 5-6 prominent and high moral members of the seventy-year old generation. Such people are a man of their word not of wealth. Such people are pro-Azerbaijan, pro-Turan and pro – Garabagh. Unfortunately, such people are on the eve of leaving us. And I say: May your life be long! You are a man of dignity!

VAGIF YUSIFLI

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I PUT ASIDE THE SCRIBBLES I HAVE BEEN FAGGING AT FOR A LONG TIME, DREW MYSELF UP FROM THE WRITING-TABLE. I sat on a hand made couch put in a longish corridor head to head and plunged in. The bent over mulberry tree leaves turned yellow and whispering by the cold autumn breeze, bidding farewell to one another for the last time were falling down by two or three and joining the majority in the soil as all the creatures of the world. I am wondering how old can this stout mulberry tree be?! The unanswered question which arose in my soul is still threatening me. My close neighbour who was nearly ninety one told me that he had seen that tree as it is right now since he opened his eyes. To cut a long story short nobody exactly knows how old this mulberry tree is. For ten, for a hundred years this bent over mulberry tree feeling the breath of the spring smiles, it turns green, casts a thick shadow around itself, spreads cool and makes its presents sweet fruits to its owner. When winter comes it turns pale, its leaves fall down, it becomes naked, falls into winter sleep and stands against the strong cold wind.

Feeling the warm breath of the spring it awakens again, gladdens, turns green and becomes the charm of the world .This mulberry tree lives such a life for ten, for a hundred years. Under the shadow of this tree many many parties, wedding parties have been held, people enjoyed very delicious meals and time together. Now it's grown old, it has become weak and bent over. There remains no sign of its once nice figure.

Once when it was a young tree, a gardener took care of it willingly, weeded it, loosened its root in time, irrigated it, and it's owner rejoiced seeing its shoots. Now it lives a hard life. But now from day to day, from year to year it grows old and becomes weak. People have lost interest in it, it has fallen into a disgrace. Now it grieves because of becoming fruitless, shadowless, not to be needed anymore and it has fear of drying, and at last being cut into pieces with an axe or a hook, becoming a black smoke and a handful of ash.

ONE NIGHT I HEARD A TERRIBLE NOISE. I stood up hurriedly and went out. The mulberry tree couldn't stand the violent autumn wind and bent down, but the wind failed to uproot it. And what was that terrible noise?! I couldn't understand the language of trees, but I thought that the old tree called its owner for help, who planted it, took care of it enjoyed its fruits. The next day I put a pole under the tree to stop its becoming uprooted, falling down and dying. I have been keeping alive this old, bent over tree for more than ten years. To be honest, it has not forgotten my kindness. In its old age it still bears fruits. It stands my grandchildren's caprice...Some prattlers sometimes say that it should be cut, because its branches occupy more space, it grew old, bent down and it blocked the passage at the entrance.

Hearing these words I remembered an old, alone widow Ismat from our village. Looking at the bondman from the city center, who was breaking ruthlessly the branches of the cherry tree from her orchard and was pushing the fruits into his mouth she said:

*I don't blame you my child!
Birds in the sky can't appreciate the lake?!
Those who have never kept bees and cut the comb,
Can never appreciate the honey?!*

As the old woman Ismat said, he who has never taken a spade in his hand, planted a tree in blood and sweat he will never value the hundred year old mulberry tree. To cut! It is easy to cut?! It is difficult to plant and grow. That's why I ignore all the treacherous words about the old mulberry tree. And there is a similarity between my fate and the fate of this old mulberry tree. Sometimes we stand face to face and secret to each other. We understand each other. Sometimes I put aside my pen and and we talk pleasantly, sometimes languorously and dumly. We talk about the ruthless

autumn storms which breathe down our necks. It goes on like that for many many years. Today it is also like that. What have I to say today to this old, bent over mulberry tree which is looking sorrowfully at me as a human being? How many years do remain until the end of the 20th century? Only two years. You! mulberry tree, nobody knows how old you are? But I reached seventy this autumn, at the gateway of winter. I spent this seventy sorrowful springs, in my native village of Aligoulouushaghi, in my part of the world of Gubadli as a teacher, in Nakhchivan, Garabagh, Mil-Mughan, Guba-Gusar regions as a journalist. More sorrowful, less joyful years of my life... And finally, in the declining years of my life unexpected storms of fortune made me live in a quiet and out of a way one storeyed summer house with garden and parterre in Shuvalan town of Baku which faces the Caspian Sea. And my fellow sufferer the old mullberry tree! Unbelievable and strange judgement of my fortune! We cannot go against the God's will. I like it or do not like it I should reconcile with the situation!

THOSE READERS WHO ARE NOT ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE REAL MEANING OF THESE LINES CAN REPROACH ME BY ASKING: Isn't Shuvalan good place to live? No, this is not absolutely so! I don't mean so. Every inch of this land is native for me as a son of Azerbaijan. Shuvalan is also a charming corner of this land and a lot of people dream to live there. Saffron grows in this fertile soil and the climate of Shuvalan is very healthy. But it is real truth that Shuvalan can't replace the village of Aligoulouushaghi of Gubadli region, with which the first pages of my life are connected. The village where for the first time I opened my eyes to this world, the village which looks like a powerful fortress. Balaban Hill, Shishgayalig, Qibla Dashi, Chay Baghi, Hassanali Lake, Aynagli Darasi, Galin Kahasi, Yazı Duzu, Garachi Yurdu, Davadami, Alchali Dara, Gala... I left footprints of my childhood and youth in many many mountains and in many many valleys. I have hunted in native

passes, valleys, hills and slopes, picked up mushrooms, truffles, asparagus and ferula... When I remember these native places I get excited, sometimes I am moved to tears and suffocate with sorrow and want to cry bitterly. I can't help crying and salty tears are rolling down over my faded and wrinkled cheeks. Oh my God, how terrible are the tears rolling down silently!! My dear reader! I do ask you to understand me rightly, don't think these tears are because of the author's old age, his being touchy, sensitive and impatient, but I want you to understand it as a longing of a languishous person who has lost his native land. A child cries when he is hungry or has a pain or when he leaves his mother. I am nearly seventy years old but comparatively with my thousand year old native village of Aligoulouushaghi I am a child. It is very very difficult to live without those old, great mountains. These mountains are now hostages of Armenian occupants. The mountains in the arms of which I opened my eyes to this world! The Christ's – thorns, milk vetch bushes which tore up to pieces my hands, even they are native to me!

I

SOMETIMES I AM LOST IN THOUGHTS AND THE STORMY MOMENTS OF MY LIFE FLASH THROUGH MY MIND VIA THE ENDLESS SKY, THE HILLS AND THE PASSES OF MY NATIVE LAND AND FINALLY THESE THOUGHTS ARE LINED ON THE PAPER BY THE TIRED AND DREAMING PEN ON MY WRITING- TABLE.

ONE DAY... One day I visited Nakhchivan which put my pen to test for ten years and where I gained a lot of unforgettable and reliable friends. On a hot morning I took a taxi in Aghdam. Passing via Martuni, Fizuli, Jabrayil regions I got to the passings of Gubadli region. From here one could see the mysterious panorama where Bargushad and Hakarli rivers hurry with a great longing to join the Araz River. I asked the driver to stop the car and observed how these two rivers find a common language.

Because the Armenian satanic charactered so called writer Zori Balayan in his book “Ojag” (“Fire”) in which he only sows the seed of enmity among the Armenians and Azerbaijanis says that the river of Araz speaks only in the Armenian language. According to his foolish judgement Bargushad and Hakarli rivers should speak in Azerbaijani and Kurdish. If it is so how these three rivers can find a common friendly language? But Araz, Bargushad and Hakarli are singing dismally in the language of nature hand in hand, arm in arm. And they are singing not in Armenian but in the language of nature which is understandable to all mankind. And it seemed to me that the river of Araz is fed up with the slander of Armenian nationalists, being out of breath by running through narrow passages of Mehri rocks then spread the Mil and Mughan plains and hurrying with great joy to give boon to these endless lands which give thousand of abundance to people.

WE MADE OUR WAY ON THE LEFT BANK OF HAKARLI RIVER TOWARDS THE MOUNTAINS.

Three or four elder men were sitting on the roadside and there were many melons in front of them. This road divides the village of Khanlig into two parts. They were having friendly discussion about bygone days, about the future. I greeted them, inquired after their health and not introducing myself I asked them:

- Are these melons for sale?
- Yes.
- Five – ten kilos...

The man who was selling the melons smiled at me softly and said:

- I don’t recomend these for you.
- Why? – I asked surprisingly.

The decent face of the seller blushed and he said:

– I see you are not native, you are a guest. If you take the melons you will swear at me for them not being delicious. They are not for you.

– Where do you grow these melons?

The seller turned his face showing me the fields along the reedy banks of the boiling Hakarli river said:

– It is there we grow these melons.

I took a three-four kilogram melon and looked it through attentively. How sweet it smells! – I thought. How many lines, how many cross-lines are there on the melon... I was lost in thoughts, it seemed to me that they were not ordinary lines but it was the chronicle about the rivers, meadows, forests, mountains I visited as a teacher, an editor of a newspaper. The chronicle is written in such letters that we can't perceive. May be these are the lines of the history of bravery of Gachag Nabi, Amrah, Gachag Gabil, Khanjarli Tavat, Abdalanli Jabrayil, Ibadulla which has not been investigated and written. Suddenly hundred thoughts flashed across my mind. I looked at the seller said half in jest:

– My uncle, the sun of Gubadli, the water of Hakarli, the soil of Khanlig can never grow tasteless crop. Give me five-six melons. The seller:

– Look here, my nephew, by God, your impressive appearance and the way of your speech prompts me that you are also from this region, tell me, please, who are you. I knew the people Khanlig very well. If I told him that I was also from that region he would never take money for the melons. I degressed from the the subject and avoided introducing myself. I sliced up one of the melons immediately. How delicious is the crop of the native land! The melon was as sweet as honey. I gave one of the melons to seven-eight year old shabby-dressed, innocent-looking boy who was standing and looking at us sadly and put other melons into the car and left that place.

II

We crossed the concrete bridge which divides the village of Khanlig into two parts and rode up towards the plain of Yazi via

the dusty and country road. More than twenty villages of this vast plain suffer for the lack of water and people grow wheat here only in the dry-farming land. As the soil is very fertile the farmers get enough crop every year.

When we crossed the valley leading to the village of Balahasanli the warm breeze of the stubble-field turned over the faded pages of the note-book of my childhood and youth years. I remembered Mirhbali Amiraslanov who by origin was from the village of Balahassanli where there were ten-fifteen houses. I felt the breath sound of open-hearted, faithful and great people of this small village. I remembered the meeting deciding the fate of the leader of Azerbaijan Mirjafar Baghirov which was held in 1950's and where took part the representative of Moscow Paspelov. The tyrant of the Kremlin Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushov has already pronounced his tendentious and revengeful judgement about Baghirov. The discussions of Baghirov's case carried a formal character. In order to comfort high-ranking officials in Soviet system most people were willingly beating a man who was down. Baghirov's companions and friends who hold high posts and lived very well for his support and always fell on their knees in front of him and considered him as an idol and leader for twenty – thirty years, completely changed their position and began to accuse him in the spirit of Kremlin. In such a hard time the first deputy chairman of the Cabinet of the Ministers of Azerbaijan Mirhbali Amiraslanov acted according to his conscience and called a spade a spade:

– Comrade Paspelov, I can't agree with some biased and unfair judgements against Baghirov such as: “Mirjafar Baghirov victimized us.” – “He didn't give us a chance to work.” – “He hated me“ and so on. That's nonsense! Of course I can't say Mirjafar Baghirov has not made mistakes. But we worked, achieved perfection and occupied those posts under his leadership. What he told us considered the opinion of communist party and Moscow and had to be realized unconditionally. And all these

accusations belong to all of us. One person should not be blamed, as all the leaders of the republic we all are to blame...

When Amiraslanov left the rostrum, people in the hall began to whisper: He is the only person who has told the truth.

Amiraslanov's speech had repercussions in Azerbaijan. People said:

“He is a manful person”.

Mehbali's true words about Baghirov was the sign of manhood, bravery and determination. Mirhbali Amiraslanov has done his best to construct many many buildings in Baku. He who was born in a small village of Balahassanli which is situated between sheer cliffs with ten-fifteen houses!

MIRHBALI DIDN'T HAVE A CHILD. Many people insisted he should divorce his wife and marry a woman who can give birth or to have affairs with other ladies to have children, in order not to remain heirless. But Mirhbali said that he would never divorce his wife because they were childless as they were married for many years. Mirhbali lived with his faithful wife till the end of his life. He referred to the child. Mirhbali has always said that if you had bread and salt with one person you should greet him for forty years. During the 2-nd World War he was fighting in Mozdok. A lot of victories were connected with his name as a commissar of the 402-nd division which proved him to be a man of high intellect.

My grandfather Mashadi Pasha told us such a story:

– Nicolas's throne has weakened. It was a chaotic time. Some people from the village of Gayali attacked the village of Balahassanli at night. During fighting many people were wounded, one person from Gayali was killed. Since that time the people of Gayali and Balahassanli became deadly enemies. Having the right moment people of both villages killed each other. This vendetta continued for many years. One day the inhabitant of our Balahassanli Haji Firidun seated his ten-twelve year old son Mirhbali on the croup of his horse and rode to the village of Gayali. He rode his horse

directly to the house of Garakhan bey whose son was killed in the fighting in the village of Balahassanli. People were very surprised that Haji Firidun being from deadly enemy village of Balahassanli dared to come directly to the village of Gayali and directly to the house of the man whose son was killed in Balahassanli. He looked at Garakhan bey who had much sorrow of his son in his heart and said: – Hey the inhabitants of the village of Gayali! I have one thing to ask you. Deuce take it! The inhabitants of two villages faced tragedy. One of our countrymen by chance killed Garakhan’s son! His sorrow is our sorrow! This vendetta has been going on for many years. There are victims of this vendetta from both villages. In order to stop this vendetta I have taken my son Mirhbali with me, let Garakhan bey kill my son and complete this deadly enmity forever. Let us end this enmity once and forever. Me and my son are in front of you! This is a rifle and this is my son!

The young men wanted to take the gun but Garakhan bey said: Hey children, stop! Garakhan bey’s wife took her kerchief and threw it in front of furious young men .Everybody calmed. Garakhan bey said: Blood shouldn’t be washed by blood. It is not a manly act to raise a gun even to your enemy who has come to your house. The most respected man of the village of Balahassanli Haji Firidun has come to my house, since this time our deadly feud is completed! Go away to your houses. Haji Firidun and his son Mirhbali are my dearest guests...

Garakhan bey sacrificed a ram, invited the respected elder of the village of Gayali, organized a party and they had bread and salt together. In this way a deadly enmity between two villages finished.

When the names of noble men of the region of Gubadli are remembered, the name of Mirhbali and his father Haji Firidun are remembered with respect as well. And it seemed to me that lots of sheer cliffs here were the monuments of noble men of the village of Balahassanli such as Haji Firidun, Mirhbali turned into

stones. I bowed, kneeled in front of these brave men. And in my world I can't imagine any village bigger than Balahassanli. And one reason of this is that my mother Firanguiz lies in peace in this land. My ill-fated mother's care I could hardly feel, I couldn't return my favour to my mother as a son, and I couldn't be her fellow sufferer and interlocutor. My mother lies in peace in my native land Balahassanli.

III

I REMEMBER ONLY ONE MOMENT CONNECTED WITH MY MOTHER.

"I fell ill, they said it was measles. I put my head on her knees. I nearly lost consciousness and could hardly concentrate. I winced sometimes, hardly opened my eyes and looked at my mother. The tears were rolling down as heavy rain. And that's all! I can't remember anything more about my mother. I know only one thing that she disappeared forever while I was six. She vanished without trace. I was weeping and fretting day and night. My relatives were comforting me and playing with my mind by saying that Firanguiz is not dead, she had simply fallen ill and was taken to a doctor in the city center. I was impatiently waiting for her return. Many times I wanted to steal away from my father's village of Aligoulouushaghi to the village of Balahassanli. My aunts stopped me and said:

– Oh, our son, where are you going alone? You can meet wild animals of all kinds. Aren't you afraid of anything?!

– I remembered my mother, I want to go and see her.

– I uttered these words crying.

– She has not yet returned from the doctor, when she recovers she will come, said my aunts.

They deceived me and I believed them and returned home.

A day, a week, five months passed... still my mother didn't return! Once again I left the village of Aligoulouushaghi for the village of Balahassanli which is 5-6 kilometers away. This time

I was running not on the road but on the path, because if I went on the road my relatives would see me and bring me back. Finally through thorns – and –shrubs passing hilly paths I arrived at the village of my mother. My trousers were torn to pieces by thorns, stones and clods. My hands bled. New bast shoes made of bull's skin bought by my father were torn to pieces. My grandfather Mashadi Pasha and grandmother Girvhar seeing me in such condition choked with sorrow:

– Oh, my baby where are you coming from alone, why are you in such condition?

– I have come to see my mother, I had a dream that my mother had returned from the doctor.

– Oh, my baby, in a dream everything happens contrary in real life, in a dream returning means not returning. Don't take it close to your heart. A person who came from the regional center told me that Firanguiz was still in the hospital and would return as soon as she recovers.

My grandmother Girvhar embraced me saying these words and tried to soothe me. I stayed for one week with my grandmother. Every day I was standing on the big white stones at the end of the village and looking at the roads leading from the regional center to the village.

I WAS WAITING FOR MY MOTHER.

Once I saw that she was coming from far away. – Mother! Mother! – I shouted and ran towards her. I was running at top speed out with joy. I was running so fast that nobody could reach me. Suddenly I hitched a stone and fell on my front. I stood up immediately. I cleaned the dust of my clothes. My knees were wounded but I didn't feel the pain. I hid myself behind the bush of Christ's thorn at the turning and wanted to come out unexpectedly and embrace her. My mother was coming slowly. "Maybe she was tired of being at the hospital, debilitated at being ill, that's why she was walking weakly. – Oh, my merciless grandfather, you have a horse, you had to seat her on the croup of a horse and

ride home. If you did she wouldn't be so tired and weak "– I thought. She had scarcely reached the bush that I hid behind when I shouted at the top of my voice: – Mother! Then I ran towards her. I wanted to throw myself into her arms. But... But, it was not my mother. She was the mother of another. She looked like my mother with her figure, walk, glance, white face and rosy cheeks. She was as beautiful as my mother. But she was not my mother. She was somebody else's mother who was coming from a neighbouring village. She thought that I was a naughty boy and wanted to frighten her hiding myself behind the bush. She looked at me sourly but said nothing. Without a word she casted a cold glance at me and went on her way. That strange woman took away my last hope and joy with herself. I stood rooted to the spot. My heart was broken. I looked behind the strange woman pitifully until she disappeared. Then I flattened myself against the mass-grown stone and sobbed my heart's content out. I sobbed so much and I could not feel how I fell asleep in the hole of the mass-grown stone. After a long time somebody nudged me:

– Wake up my son, – he said. Why have you fallen asleep on this stone? Here could be a snake or scolopendra. Let's go.

I could hardly open my damp eyes. The cold stones numbed my back. I could hardly stand on my feet. When my grandmother saw me in such condition she was moved to tears... My mother was her only daughter. In order to hide her tears she raised her veil and turned her face aside. She took me by hand and led me home. In order to distract my attention from my mother and distract me, she told me different interesting stories:

– Do you know what happened today? I was baking bread on a saj (iron disc – **trans.**). A flock of partridge suddenly squeezed into our corridor. A hawk was chasing them. Your grandfather wanted to catch them but they flew away. As the door of the room was open, two of them got confused and flew inside. And your grandfather caught them saying that they have come to you as a chance.

– Where are the partridges now, granny?

– They are at home, my darling. Your grandfather has tied them with string to the foot of the bed, – answered my grandmother.

I rejoiced and quickened my steps. I enjoyed looking at the patterned wings, coral eyes, slight and nice feet of the partridges. Both of them were pullet and looked like this year birds. I caught one of them, her heart was beating very fast.

– Maybe she also misses her mother, I thought and immediately untied them and they flew away. They were flying very joyfully, but I did not know if they found their mother.

MORE MONTHS PASSED, BUT MY MOTHER STILL DIDN'T COME. THIS TIME MY RELATIVES DECEIVED ME IN ANOTHER WAY:

– Your mother has always begged the God not to show her kolkhoz. Better to die than to work with strange men together in kolkhoz. That's why, in order to get rid of kolkhoz she turned to bird and flew to the skies, to the stars. Once she will come back.

I believed them again. Since that time I began to stare at the sky. When it grew dark I got on the roof of the house and was looking for my mother among the stars. At last kolkhoz was created in our village after that time I completely lost hope. I thought that my mother would never return again.

WHEN I WAS ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THIS LIFE EVERYTHING ABOUT MY ILL-FATED MOTHER WAS CLEAR TO ME. Seventy years passed since that time and I am moving in this thorny path of life.

IV

Going downwards via the top of the deep virgin valleys leading to the village of Balahassanli I was reading with great interest these fragile, languishous and frozen inscriptions on the stones. I remembered those times I spent in these steppes. My grandfather used to say that the inhabitants of Balahassanli are shia kurds

moved here from Iraq. Our family tree belongs to Babali kurds. The inhabitants of Balahassanli never break from their nomadic traditions. When summer comes the inhabitants of the village move to the summer pasture in mountains. Only four-five people stayed in the village in order to look after the garden and parterre.

WHEN THE CHERRY JUST BEGINS TO RIPEN EVERYBODY BEGINS TO PACK HOUSEHOLD THINGS FOR REMOVAL. In order to keep bread fresh baked on an iron disc they were wrapped by four and put in a small rucksack. The wineskins painted with the root of Christ's thorn and the goatskin jugs were filled with sour clotted milk and tied tightly with very firm string. The tinned copper jugs, kitchen utensils, water jugs have been washed and separately packed. The food-stuffs were put into the hand-made saddle bags and carpet-bags. First the cattle moved. Then the horses, donkeys, mules, bulls loaded with switches, felt, packed bedding, palaz (a kind of carpet usually made of cotton- **trans.**) and rug followed the cattle horning one another. Then the horses and mules mounted by elderly women, men and children followed them. As a cherished child of the family I was sitting on the bedding which put on the back of the grey mare as a saddle-bag. My grandmother Girvhar tended me from morning till night. She said that I was Firanguiz's only son, her only memory. The boys of my nearly same age mounted the horses, donkeys, young little unpractised donkeys but I was comfortably sitting on the mattress put on the bedding on the back of the horse as a saddle-bag and looking at the stars in the sky, dozing, sometimes winced at the ballyhoo, stood up and turned from side to side. The nomads left the village, ascended slowly the stony and rocky rapid ascents, reached the plain where having a rest, moved away again at dawnbreak. We went many days, many nights, at last passing the city of Gorus of Armenia, via Uchtapa mountains arriving tiredly at Ganlija summer pasture in mountains. The farms of the villages of Goru, Mughanjig of the Gorus region were in our neighbourhood as well. Our and their

nomad tents leant against one another. We have never thought about discrimination that we were Azerbaijanis and they were Armenians. The Armenian and Azerbaijani shepherds have never thought that they belong to different religion and nationality. The first days only the dogs were not accommodating, they were setting on each other. The tall multi-coloured dog of Hassan from the village of Balahassanli used to defeat the other dogs. But the fighting of dogs didn't create any problem between the neighbours. They said that one shouldn't hinder the fighting of children and dogs, because they fight today but tomorrow they can play with one another. The fighting of dogs lasted for a long time, after some days they also found a common language with one another. Sometimes the dogs growled at one another for a mash but didn't fight. The cows, heifers, bulls firstly horned one another, then accomodated and licked one another. There is a good saying in Azerbaijani that people become friends by arguing, animals by sniffing one another. In this way, not only among the herdsmen of Balahassanli, Goru, Mughanjig but among the animals as well friendly intercourse existed.

I HAVE READ FROM SOMEWHERE THAT THE CITIES CREATE BLOOD – SUCKERS. The social environment in cities corrupt the morals. Though the mountains, forests make people brutalized but can't deprive them humane values. Though these words belonged to a famous writer, at first I couldn't get it well. But when I compared the intercourse of Azerbaijani-Armenian shepherds of the period of my childhood with the immorality of nowday's Armenian intelligentsia educated in big civilized cities and were the culprits of Khojali genocide I understood the truth in the words of the writer.

Thus I spent the summer days of my youth in this way in the snow-capped and misty mountains. My uncle, my grandmother always took me to the mountains. They said that if I stayed in lowland I could catch malaria. Only my grandfather stayed in lowland. He said that someone should take care of garden and

parterre, he got accustomed to lowland and he was strong enough to stand the dog days in lowland. He saw us off to mountains and stayed in lowland.

ONCE IN FOUR-FIVE YEARS WE CHANGED OUR SUMMER PASTURE IN THE MOUNTAINS. We have stayed for many times in Tagh summer pasture as well. The closest of them to our village were Uchtapa and Ganlija summer pastures. When I visit Nakhchivan I could hardly see the summer pastures in Armenia from a distance where we stayed every summer of the year. Upwards from summer pasture was Shirshir spring. On the opposite side on the top of the hill was a Yahar dash (stone saddle) which I used to saddle and ride... Once I saddled the Yahar dash and looked at the road leading from Gorus to Sisyan and Nakhchivan. When the dust rose in the road I understood that it was automobile. Hundreds of things came to my mind. I thought that someone was coming from lowland and bringing fruits for us all. I gladdened myself. Then I saw that a black spot passed by and disappeared, my gladdening was in vain.

ONE DAY AGAIN... I girthed and mounted the Yahar dash again. The flock of sheep spread in the valleys. There was no fog or mist. Everywhere could be seen clearly, as if I was watching a silent film. Someone called me from our nomad tents. I went running and saw my uncle standing at the nomad tent. He had a rope in his hand made of goat's wool. He asked me to go and drive to him the horse with her foal as soon as possible which were grazing in the field on the other side of the hill. He said that he wanted to domesticate the horse because he has become bigger than his mother and is only three years old. He is at his age of being ridden and loaded.

I HAVE SEEN WITH MY OWN EYES HOW THEY BRUTALLY DOMESTICATE AN UNPRACTICED HORSE. When I thought how they will domesticate the white-faced and legged young horse I felt sorry for the animal. In a flash I got over the hill and drove the horse and her three year old foal to my

uncle. They drove the horse and her foal into the place surrounded by a high and clumsy fence. The young people tried to capture the starred young horse with a lasso. The young horse jumped up and down but couldn't be freed from the lasso. They tightly tied the four feet of the young horse. At first they incised her nose-trils with a sharp razor. Then they hooked the tip of the big needle to the cartilage which was white and looked like vermicille and was thinner than a finger. Then they pulled it up and cut it with a razor. The old and experienced people used to say that the cartilage of the horse should be cut in time. If not cut the horse becomes out of breath when you gallop the horse or ride upward slope. When the first stage of operation ended they untied the feet of the starred young horse. The horse had a pack-saddle put on, then they put a carpet-bag full of stones on the back of the horse. The young horse could hardly bear the 150-200 kilogram load. The horse couldn't jump up and down. They took by the halter of the horse and drove him for some hours. The horse was dead tired. The horse yielded to persuasion. The next day they began to ride him. Finally the young horse stood as quiet as a lamb. He stopped tyrannizing. The horse moved with a strong trotter and could carry a heavy load. They said that he looked like his mother in trotting. He avoided being whipped. On the road there was not any horse that could overtake him. My uncle liked the horse very much saying that the horse came from a good breed. He said that as soon as they return to lowland he would sell the mother of young horse even at an inexpensive price as the young horse was enough for them and the government did not allow to keep two horses.

When I was sitting in my hut in Shuvalan in my seventies and thinking about my mysterious younger years spent in those mountains and hills, all those events letter by letter, sentence by sentence, line by line streamed onto paper.

V

I THINK OUR ROAD EXTENDED SO MUCH. Some people can think so But... To write in detail about the out of sight out of mind events behind my nearly one century lifetime is not such an easy task. In order to do that I should crawl on all fours in my stormy turns and painstaking paths of my life, otherwise the grain that you have planted may remain shallow in the soil, the root of the plant can't grow deep, you will not gather the harvest, your writing abilities will be weakened, And what I have in my mind and memory for writing will be covered with mist and cloud.

Now I was passing through the dusty roads at the foot of Uchtapa mountains and remembered the moments how I was sitting on the stone saddle and watching the view. We crossed the Batabat mountains on which there were a lot of lakes which were glittering in the sun like diamonds. Then crossing the winding roads in the woody Shahbouz valleys, we reached the Khalkhal forest. I was looking for footprints of mine which I have left in this area. I greeted the plane tree under the shadow of which together with Islam Safarli, Adil Babayev and Aliagha Kurchayli we laid the table, had tea and lunch I was lost in thoughts of the years of youth when I was a correspondent of "Communist" newspaper in Nakhchivan. I looked for those days in the passes, roundabouts, slopes, ascents of my memory but I couldn't find. I remembered Islam's recently written, but not published poem "Batabat" which he had read here passionately. I listened to Islam's non existing breathing sound in the whirlpool of my memory. As if the high and mighty plane tree having sensation of my feelings stood silently, absolutely not moving. As if the tree shared my grief and remembered with respect the spirits of young poets who passed away. Islam, Adil, Aliagha... How pleasant and modest people they were. Their ambitions stood very very low comparatively with their talent. Sometimes when I turn over the pages of my album I see the photos taken here

with them. We look at one another but we can't speak. They are all dead but I am still alive. This is also fortunate.

THIS PLANE TREE REMINDS ME THE DAYS I SPENT WITH SULEYMAN IN NAKHCHIVAN. To say it in the words of unforgettable Samad Vurghun Suleyman Rahimov who was the long-range artillery of our prose. In one of the hot summer days we were going to the village of Nehram with the native writer Hussein Ibrahimov to visit Jalil Mammadgouluzade's daughter Munavvar. Suleyman turned to the camp in the middle of cotton plantation. Hearing him coming the collective farmers put their spades and spuds on the ground, switched off the tractors, gathered round the elder writer under the shadow of the willow tree. The speedy stream of water ran under the tree. Suleyman got interested in their living conditions. When Suleyman spoke of Jalil Mammadgouluzade about eighty year old Ali raised his forefinger and asked to take the floor. Suleyman addressed him respectfully:

– You are welcome.

Elder Ali smoothing his grey beard said:

– Comrade Rahimov, first of all you are welcome to Nehram! You are our dearest and respected guest. But even if you get offended I will call a spade a spade. All the inhabitants of our village are witnesses of God, if I say something wrong they will confirm that I am telling a lie. During the Armenian–Azerbaijani fight the troops of damned Armenian Andranik occupied all the villages and towns close to our village. When he attacked our village we locked all the women in Karbalayi Mukhtar's hut. We gave a match and a bottle of oil to two-three boys and warned them that when Andronik attacks our village with his troops it will be a life and death struggle. We all young and old should fight together. If we can defeat the enemy that's good, if not you should set fire to the hut where our women and girls are locked away, the Armenian occupiers must not affect our honour. We can stand all kinds of torture by Armenians but we can't stand dishonesty. We can't even rest in peace in our graves. Comrade

Rahimov, I don't want to talk too much. That time we defended our land with might and main and drove the enemy out. The whole population of Nakhchivan knew very well that the inhabitants of the village of Nehram beat to death the troops of that damned Andronik .What I want to say is that Nehram is a village of people as brave as the lion. But Jalil Mammadgouluzade being our countryman called us dunderheads. Even God can't accept this. Comrade Rahimov, on behalf of our fellow-villagers and on behalf of myself I do ask you when you return to Baku, either collect all those books and burn them or at least change the title of that book. Wherever we go we feel shame, whenever we hear the title of that book we are ashamed to look people in the face...

Suleyman Rahimov was in a desperate situation. He tried to prove with many examples that Jalil Mammadgouluzade's book "The stories of the village of Danabash" (Dunderheads –**trans.**) is not only about the village of Nehram but it is a very valuable book against the intellectual darkness of the East. But the people absolutely didn't agree with him. He couldn't make elder Ali change his mind. Another man who was leaning on the spade said ironically:

Uncle Ali, sit down, and shaking his head and turning his face in disgust went away. It meant that he didn't agree with Suleyman Rahimov.

Middle-aged man who was leaning on the handle of his spad was muttering to himself:

– We also know that Jalil Mammadgouluzade is a great man! No one can deny this! Let him be world famous! What I want to say is that how he could see the ignorance of our fellow villagers Khudayar bey and Mammadhassan but he couldn't see how bravely we fought against the Armenian butcher Andronik. It's not fair to close one's eyes to what is positive but to make a mountain out of a mole hill which is negative. I would call him a great writer if he wrote about the bravery of our fellow-villagers who fought against the damned Andronik.

The offended and displeased whispering began to boil among the people. Suleyman Rahimov understood that the situation would become complicated, he stood up. It was in vain to argue the topic.

WE VISITED JALIL MAMMADGOULUZADE'S DAUGHTER. The house was built of air-brick. In the small yard one could see nothing but a copper aftafa (a jug with a long spout used for ablutions – **trans.**). The wooden doors squeaked as they opened into the inner rooms. Munavvar khanim greeted us in an optimistic manner, her luxurious grey hair combed back. When Suleyman muallim asked Munavvar khanim who spent her life in such a miserable hut about her health, she answered:

– I am not in need of anything. It is very pleasant for me that you have come to this region you visit my father's dwelling. Thank you very much! My father's dreams came true. Our sputniks are discovering the moon, the stars in the sky. What my father wrote and what I see now there is a great disparity between them...

THE NEXT DAY AFTER SOME OFFICIAL CEREMONIES ME AND SULEYMAN MUALLIM OF HIS OWN ACCORD DECIDED TO HAVE A REST IN A QUIET PLACE AND WENT TO KHALKHAL FOREST. At that time the grapes had just begun to ripen. Under this plane tree we laid a friendly table. The writer was not tired of speaking about the customs, traditions and the hospitality of the people of Nakhchivan. He often repeated that I was lucky to work in such region. Of course, it is very difficult to earn one's living here, but people here are very sincere, honest, fair and are able to call a spade a spade. It is very easy to work with such kind of people. And I see you have been adjusted to this area and became closely linked with native people. But you should try to be honest with the people of this region. What you write should be fair but not ill-intentioned.

I was listening to the wise advices of Suleyman muallim under the silent whisper of the plane tree which has been the witness of many pleasant meetings.

... At the end of the party Suleyman muallim was standing proudly and stately five-ten meters far from the plane tree in the thin place of the forest and turned his face toward the Shahbouz mountains which were saying good-bye to the sun. I felt languor in his wise glance. What he was thinking about I didn't know but he said as if speaking to himself:

– This is also one day of our life passes today. And turning his face to us he said: The life is unfaithful, who knows if we will be able to come to this area again or not. If you don't mind despite it is getting dark we would visit Shahbouz otherwise these areas can get offended from me. When I worked here there was a spring in the river-bed between the town of Shahbouz and the village of Shahbouz. It has drinkable water. Let us see if that spring lost as some of our friends. When I worked as the regional communist party head here, I often asked to bring water from that spring. Very tasty tea was made from that water. But nobody should know that we go there. I know how hospitable the people of Shahbouz are, if they know that I am here they will never allow us to leave not being their guest.

Let us go. The spring still existed and was seeing off its last guests. When two ladies with water jugs talking disappeared we came up to the spring. Suleyman bent and drank to his heart's content and washing his face with two handful of water drew himself up and said:

– Looks like the springs of our Ayin. It has very pure water.

We surrounded the spring. We had half a bottle of brandy, one thick tea glass and one bunch of not well ripened sourish black grapes. The fast food supper table was poor but was an unforgettable memory for us. Suleyman muallim said that during his five day stay in Nakhchivan they have organized very many luxiorous parties for him but for him the fast food supper around the spring in Shahbouz was the most unforgettable one...

And this is some pages from my memory notebook about Khalkhal. The unforgettable moments I spent with

Suleyman, Islam, Aliagha, and Adil in green nature's lap of Nakhchivan...

VI

THE NEXT DAY OF MY STAY IN NAKHCHIVAN I HEARD THAT THERE WAS A WEDDING PARTY. The son of one of the distinguished ministers married the daughter of honoured physician, member of parliament and the famous surgeon. I knew both of them well enough. Knowing that I am in Nakhchivan they invited me also to the party as an old friend. I accepted the invitation and took part at the party. They organized a small party in the garden of their yard. People of different ranks were taking part in the party. As a journalist I was interested in the issue of dowry of the wedding. The physician with enough financial possibilities has given a very small, very modest dowry for the couples. The dowry was so little that they even didn't need a lorry. Some one or two close people carried the dowry in their hands. But nobody assessed it as the bride's father's greediness, stinginess and evaluating his daughter not properly. According to the physician the dowry given to the daughter consist of firstly the diploma of good manners, secondly the diploma of good education and at last some necessary home things. The diploma of good manners!.. I would call that diploma the crown of the bride and would add without hesitation that it is the lamp lighting the path which leads to the top of moral perfection.

... IT HAPPENED BY CHANCE THAT I APPEARED TO BE IN THE HOUSE OF THE MINISTER WHO WAS MY FRIEND AND I TOOK PART AT HIS SON'S WEDDING PARTY. How many years passed after that wedding party?!

I thought to myself, precisely thirty years passed. As they usually say the life of one brave person. What is the condensed essence in the meaning of the diploma of good manners? I put a question to myself. And at last I found the answer to this question.

It was the deepest and sincere respect of the daughter-in-law for her father-in-law, mother-in-law, in her polite behaviour with her husband, in her great love to her children. How happy and pleased was my friend with his daughter-in-law. My friend was a retired old and wise man. He said proudly:

– She takes care of us not as her father-in-law and mother-in-law but as her parents. She has not done anything up to now tactlessly that could make me, my wife, my relatives and friends get offended. Of course they say the grave can't be without torture and the family without a conflict. But thank God that my daughter-in-law has never treated us badly. All my kith and kin are proud of her and she stands high in their esteem. She deserves that. It is possible to buy everything but not esteem. And the esteem of the daughter-in-law in a family is kneaded of decency, chastity, politeness, sensitiveness, tenderness, courtesy, modesty and intellect. They are not sold in shops and markets.

My old friend was speaking about his son and his daughter-in-law with good manners diploma in high terms. This time the telephone rang. My friend's daughter-in-law went to other room and took the receiver. I heard what she was talking about:

– You are still a student. Why do you need varnished shoes? Try to distinguish yourself not by your varnished shoes but with your knowledge.

With his words it was clear to me that my friend's grandson studies in Moscow and wants to buy new varnished shoes and that's why he called and asked for money and the consent of his parents. His mother refused saying that the student should try to be proud not of his varnished shoes but of his good manners, good behaviour, intellect, mind and good education.

I HAVE NO DOUBT ABOUT THE SON WHO GROWS UP IN THE FAMILY WHERE THE SPIRIT OF MUTUAL RESPECT, SINCERITY AND MODESTY RULE, THAT SON WILL BE FAR FROM THE PHYSICIANS AND JUDGES.

My life experience prompts me that. The sprout roots deeply in such conditions and grows high. The bride with the diploma of good manners is happy and the family she joins is the happiest one.

AND NOW I REMEMBERED ANOTHER RECENTLY MARRIED COUPLE. When I worked in Garabagh I went out of my house and was going thoughtfully to the office. Two women standing on the neighbouring balconies of the second floor of the four storey building and they were discussing a sensational and luxurious wedding party held two days ago. The old woman said to the young one:

– Do you know where the bridegroom works?

– Where?– the young lady asked with great interest.

He is a militiaman and makes much money. They say he has a “Volga” car as well.

The young lady shook her figure surprisingly and said:

– The bride is also from a rich family. They are my brother’s close neighbours.

I have seen with my own eyes that three lorries could hardly carry her dowry. Ten blankets, three suites of imported furniture and many many other things, including the key from brand new “Mosevich” car.

The old woman:

– She is lucky. Money makes money. They are rich and happy.

– They have given to the bride jewels weighing in kilos, pearl necklace, very expensive clothes, expensive fur-coats, added the young lady.

Nearly a year passed from that luxurious and everybody’s envied wedding party and I got a letter from the bride’s mother. The letter said: “ I made a mistake evaluating the bridegroom by his good-looking form, the post he occupied and the rank on his militia uniform and agreed with my daughter to get married. Damn that day! I brought up my daughter as a princess. And he

appeared to be ignoble and dishonest. She has become a bag of bones with grief. God will not forgive him such torture. Now she is expecting a baby, and they turned her out of the house in such a condition. They made my daughter unhappy. I have complained about it to different instances but they don't deal with this case fairly. The police, the prosecutor, the heads of the region, everybody defended him. Because he is a policeman and has money to burn. And that's why I am obliged to write to you about our problem, I want you to defame this scoundrel in your newspaper..."

I got interested in that problem... This family conflict has already grown and reached the court. I also participated in the court. The bride's mother has accused her son-in-law five times more than in her letter addressed to me.

Her daughter whose dowry is spoken of everywhere and by everybody having a lot of expensive jewelry on her neck, ears, fingers this educated lady made a more racket than her mother:

– Do you also think that you are a man? You fell on your knees and begged me for several times. Have you forgotten those days?

– Yes, I made a mistake when I married you. It is a shame, don't shout, the boy answered.

The lady rose her voice more and said:

When the lady poured out the boy began:

– To tell the truth I feel shame to speak. But I can't stand it anymore and I should wash our dirty linen in public. I have no choice. Though I am a lawyer I like reading and writing. There is such a saying that better to marry an ugly woman of your native land than the beauty who is a stranger for you. Thinking that she was native to me with higher education, and she was not a bad looking woman and her behaviour seemed normal to me and so I decided to marry her. And my parents didn't object saying that beauty lies in lover's eyes. My mother and father said that everyone had a fated lot in life, if I love her I can marry her. Finally, we married. We are five brothers and two sisters in a family.

I am the youngest in the family. We lived in one and the same house with my parents. Nearly a week passed from our wedding party and she began to insist on leaving my parents' house and living separately. She grounded it by saying that she was squeamised about my parents and preferred loneliness and independence. For the first time I did not agree with her and said that people could condemn me for leaving my parents. When she heard that she flew into rage and shouting and crying hit her head against the wall, the floor. I called the ambulance, the physicians gave her injection and pills. They said that there was nothing serious with her, she simply felt nervous. She closed her eyes tightly and pretended to be dead. Suddenly she stood up and said: I have told you many times and tell you again, you should make a choice in this house either me or your father and mother and then taking the dishes from the sideboard one by one slammed them on the floor and broke the glass of the window. Then she took the cloth-line, tied it her neck and said that she would kill herself. I calmed her down with great difficulty. Then she pretended to be ill and didn't come out of the bed-room. My father was a serious and noble man and understanding the situation he agreed that we should live alone and said:

– We are old people and we have lived our lives. Our hour of death is coming. Today we are alive, tomorrow we can die. We wish you were happy and be kind to each other. Don't ruin your family for us. A wife is not a cap to change every day for minor reasons.

A woman and her daughter tried to interrupt him but a judge stood up and calmed them with difficulty. The boy went on:

– Leaving my parents and living alone with her was useless as well. Getting a medical certificate about her illness she didn't go to school for tens of days. Taking her long bag she strolls about the shops and markets from morning till night. I ask her not to do that because it is against our morals. I offer her to go with me when doing shopping or me to do that. Hardly I say it

she sets up a clamour at home and makes a row: – You interfere in my affairs?! I have no right to go and do shopping?! – she says and makes a great scandal. Her so called attack of nerves begins and she “ falls ill “. In order to comfort her, I beg her insistently and entice her. Thinking that it is a disgraceful behaviour in front of my parents and friends and not to gladden my enemies I don't want to divorce her. There is not a single window in the house that has not been broken. All of them are broken. When she gets angry she breaks all the kitchen utensils. In order not to see her face my father and mother, my sister and brother, none of my relatives visit my house. She doesn't wear a dress the next day if she has had it on today. She says that I should buy a new one because the people have already seen it. And I can't afford it. If I give her advice or make any minor remark it becomes the reason of the scandal for weeks. She doesn't make tea, doesn't prepare meals saying that her hands can smell of meals and makes me go to restaurants and have dinner only there. She even can't peel the potatoes and fry them. Because her mother has not taught her housekeeping.

The trial ended. They were divorced. The relationship between two families turned into enmity and it still goes on.

OH! IT WOULDN'T BE A PROBLEM IF SUCH YOUNG GIRLS WITH MORE DOWRY, WITH LESS GOOD MANNERS WERE ONE, FIVE IN NUMBER, WE NEVER WROTE ABOUT THEM. BUT UNFORTUNATELY... I was talking with more than forty year old man who was the head of a big office. I have got a complaint letter about him leaving his wife and three children. His hands were trembling. He often was mopped the embarrassment sweat from his forehead and said:

I suffer from nerves. Imagine that I sleep and get up with the help of pills. In the second World War I was in a reconnaissance party and we often worked at nights in cold and stormy weather. I was never afraid of being killed. I stole a lot of enemies. But now when I am alone at home I scare. I have nightmares. I spend

a lot of my time getting treatment. And he took a lot of pills out of his pocket: *Seduksin, Belloid, Tazepam, Mepropomad, Elenium...* I take handfuls of nervous pills. When go to any neuropathologist, the first question to me is: On what terms are you with your wife? Is she a shrew? Do you have problems with your wife? And of course I answer no out of my embarrassment and say that we are very friendly. Finally I understood that I can't stand it any more and I opened my heart to a physician. Everyday she found groundless reasons and drove me crazy saying:

Why are you late home? A woman called you?! I don't like this dress, you should buy me the same fur coat that woman has. Why should my neighbour's wife wear better than me? I should rest in this or that sanatorium. Why are you dressed to kill? You seem to want to make an impression on someone. And I feel shame to tell you a lot of things. Now I have two choices: either I must sacrifice my life to my family, to my children become crazy and spend the rest of my life in a madhouse or I shouldn't care a straw and leave my wife. Finally, I have chosen the second way. I have taken one of my dresses and necessary documents and left my house. I live alone for nearly one year. Now I am recovering. But I still take pills. I have not left my family for well-doing but for unbearable life.

Taking one soothing pill he said: – I know that you will reproach me but I should say that the woman's stubbornness, trick, claim and querulousness destroys her husband's life completely. Even a baby she gives a birth will be worthless for society. He will never become the hero as Spartak, Koroghlu or Nabi.

THE ADVENTURE OF A LADY WITH A LOT OF JEWELRY ON HER FINGERS, WITH LUXURIOUS DOWRY AND AND THE ADVENTURE OF THE WIFE OF CHIEF OF THE POLICE OFFICE WHO DROVE HER HUSBAND NEARLY CRAZY AND COMPLETELY DAMAGED HIS HEALTH REMINDED ME THE STORY OF *KHANPARI*: As the legend says, Amirgoulu and his wife Khanpari were passing

through an endless desert and they found a deep well. The wife and the husband looked at the well out of interest. As the man was fed up with his wife's unbearable behaviour he pushed her into the deep well. Sometime passed and Amirgoulu wanted to check up if Khanpari was dead or alive he came up to the well in the desert. He let the rope down the well. When he pulled the rope he found out that it was very heavy and when he pulled it up to the mouth of the well he was horrified. It was an ugly dragon. Amirgoulu wanted to run away but the dragon begged him not to release the rope and said that if he helps him to get rid of Khanpari the dragon will do for Amirgoulu whatever he wants and he can become a very rich man. Hearing that his greed overcame his fear and he pulled out the dragon out of the well. The dragon thanked him and said that he would go and wind round the neck of padishah's daughter and whoever comes he will not set her free. Then you will promise to save the girl and the padishah will give you a lot of money for that.

It happened as the Dragon told... And when Amirgoulu came up to the dragon he made a sign and the dragon set the padishah's daughter free but coming up to Amirgoulu the dragon whispered to him that he promised and kept his promise and they were quits if he comes for the second time the dragon will kill him...

When the dragon left, padishah said:

– Who respects me should give Amirgoulu a present.

Amirgoulu returned home with fourty camels loaded with jewelry.

After some months the news spread that the same dragon in other land wound the neck of other padishah's daughter. Nobody is able to help her. They looked for the person who can help her, at last they found Amirgoulu. Amirgoulu persistently refused and said that he would better die than to go there. But padishah's people forcibly took him to that country. Seeing Amirgoulu the dragon coiled up, became very frustrated and setting free the padishah's daughter attacked Amirgoulu. Amirgoulu stammered and could

hardly say to the dragon that he had not come there for padishah's daughter but to inform the dragon that Khanpari got out of the well and was following on the dragon's heels. Hearing that Khanpari is following him the Dragon thanked Amirgoulu and ran away...

VII

IN ONE OF THE REGIONS WHERE I WORKED THERE LIVED A JUDGE IN OUR BLOCK. As it was a small town everybody knew one another. The judge's wife changed the colour of her hair, her dress, jewelry every day. She was very pleased of her own behaviour and considered herself a very clever woman. People said that she kept her husband in check, in other words the last word at home was after her. Besides the family affairs she interfered in his office affairs. She made him employ or dismiss someone. What he earned she knew perfectly well. It was very strange that when he had a case at court and took bribe she went to her neighbours and borrowed from them saying that their family was large and the wages her husband got ran out till the next salary. She borrowed 20–30 manats from her neighbours. In this way she wanted to distract people's attention from money he earned dishonestly. In other words if people talked about her husband the neighbours should say that if her husband bribed they would not be head over ears in debt. He can't return people the money that he had borrowed. His wife's such cunning behaviour pleased the judge very much. He said that his wife was unique. But everybody understood his wife's trick. When she wanted to borrow from her neighbours or relatives, everybody understood that her husband made good money dishonestly that day. Finally, these rumours reached the high ranking officials and they fired the judge. And this miserable judge lost his job for his "clever" wife. His wife who dressed fashionably since that day stopped borrowing.

Once ... I wanted not to speak about one event that I witnessed. I couldn't help whispering: A man should be able to keep a secret.

As they say in the village of Aligouluushaghi: One should act tactfully and bear accordingly. One should not cast everything in a person's teeth. Maybe someone won't like it and get offended. As if I told all these words to stones. There was neither reaction of my pen nor the paper in front of me. I felt myself alone. That's why I was obliged to speak about this event as well. And if you want to tell something, do that, don't hesitate. Let each person judge it as he thinks fit.

ONE OF MY OLD FRIEND'S WIFE WHO WAS A VERY DECENT AND HONEST WOMAN called me and asked me to meet with me for a very important issue. There was a tremor in her agitated tone of speech. And I thought that something was wrong with her and didn't refuse. We met. My friend who was a respected person and held a good post in the region was not at home. His wife Mrs. S. showed me a young lady with two eight-ten year old sons and said in a hoarse and constrained voice: She is my unhappy daughter. She lives in Baku and arrived here yesterday.

Saying these words she sighed sorrowfully and said shamefully:

– For God's sake, forgive me for troubling you, I did it in friendly way. I want to talk with you frankly. This has happened not once but a lot of times. Up to now, me and my daughter could bear it thinking that they have children, may be her husband will come to his sense. Now we agree with such saying: Can the leopard change his spots? I think he will never grow wise and I decided to tell you everything. My daughter has been married to him for ten years. Her husband is a scholar in the field of philosophical sciences. He is going to get the doctoral degree. My daughter says that besides teaching he is sometimes invited by the Central Committee of Communist Party to deliver a lecture in different organizations. A scholar, a philosopher shouldn't behave like that. Can you believe that her damned husband buys high quality and low quality tea. He brings the low quality tea for his family but keeps high quality tea in his old bag. In the office, at school

wherever he goes makes tea out of high quality for himself but his family have the worst tea at home. Secondly, there is no bathroom in their house and when my daughter wants to go to the public baths he makes her go with the neighbouring lady in order to go Dutch.

– I am very very sorry she went on talking: When I talk on such topic I feel very shy. Her husband says that he doesn't want more than two children. When my daughter is pregnant he makes her get rid of the baby. My daughter agrees but asks him to take her to a doctor but that damned professor says that if she goes to a physician they should pay for that. And he himself instead of gynaecologist he makes abortion and my daughter undergoes agony. She had bleeding for many times and hospitalised. Please, tell me isn't it terrible?! There are other things but I feel shame to tell you. For many times she came to me and begged to divorce them saying that he is not a husband, he is not a human-being.

But we didn't do that for the sake of two children and sent her back home saying that her coffin can go out only from her husband's house. But we can't bear anymore. I have troubled you to come here because I wanted you to know the truth and publish it in the newspaper. Let this article disgrace him and our family. The last straw breaks the camel's back. We can't bear anymore. My daughter has become a bag of bones out of grieving. She has become ill lately. The only way out is to get rid of him.

Her daughter kept silence and the tears were rolling down over her cheeks. Her sons pressed themselves close to their mother sorrowfully.

Her husband, the philosopher understanding that his family will be disgraced in the newspaper arrived at the region with agitation. He found my friends who asked me not to publish an article in the newspaper about his family. And her father didn't want it as well considering it disgrace for himself among his relatives and friends. With the advice and support of the elder, distinguished people this conflict solved.

Her husband was a knowledgeable philosopher. He spoke of Hegel, Engels, Feyerbach, Kant, Makarenko, Marx, Homer in such a way that everybody was admired. But as far as his human being values are concerned... This Mr.Know All was deprived of all necessary humane values such as politeness, courtesy, norms of behaviour and completely lost his human dignity.

VIII

WHEN I WRITE ABOUT THE EDUCATED PERSON DEPRIVED OF THE “DIPLOMA OF GOOD MANNERS“, ABOUT THE WOMEN WITH GOOD DOWRY, MORALS OF PHILOSOPHERS AND THEIR FAMILY DISGRACES I REMEMBER MY GRANDFATHER MASHADI PASHA AND HIS WIFE GIRVHAR WHO WERE THE SYMBOL OF HOLINESS. And what I have learned from them consider for myself divine happiness. My grandfather has been in Mashad and Karbala. He knew arabic and persian a little. He regularly performed the ritual prayers of Islam and kept the fast. My grandmother did the same. My uncle Salim was their only son. All of them lived in one and the same house. My uncle was married and had two children. My uncle was the only person who worked in the family. Though he was over forty he still felt shy before my grandfather. My grandfather was a hot tempered person. When he became angry he would give a good rating to my uncle. He couldn't dare to raise his head and look at his father or object to him. There was a rule in the family which seemed strange to me. My uncle never coddled his children in his father's presence. Five-six year old child wanted to come up to his father in presence of his grandfather but his father looked at him threateningly in order the child didn't come up to him. The children understanding their father's mint stepped back and didn't come up to their father. Only in the absence of my grandfather my uncle took their children by hand, sleeked down their hair, took them in his arms and coddled them. Even the children understood that in presence

of elder people they should not come up to their father. But I didn't like it then. But when I stood a grandfather I understood why my uncle didn't come up to their children in presence of his father. Those rules which obeyed for hundred years, still exist in seldom families as a mystery where honour, decency, good manners reign. In order to understand this mystery one should be able to know the philosophy of courtesy and humaneness in all its minute details. And in a civilized world it is not achievable to everyone...

MY GRANDMOTHER EVEN IN HER OLD AGE WAS ASHAMED OF HER SON. When my uncle came she raised her veil, changed her sitting position. My uncle never talked with his wife and never sat close to her in presence of his parents. My grandfather and grandmother talked with their daughter-in-law and she in her own turn explained them what she wanted to tell by gesture. But not as nowadays daughter-in-laws who argue and dispute with their father-in-laws and mother-in-laws. There existed honour, respect and esteem among the family members.

MY GRANDFATHER DIDN'T LIKE READY-MADE CLOTHES. My grandmother by hand-spinning made a fabric out of the wool of the black sheep and my grandfather ordered at tailor's long waisted outer garment. He said that it kept it him cool in summer, warm in winter. He had a cap made of long and curly hair of the lamb.

My grandfather loved me so much as the memory of his ill-fated daughter. He never allowed to lay the table without me. We ate from one and the same tinned copper plate. He took a piece of lavash (bread baked of the thinly rolled dough – **trans.**), put it under the plate from his side in order I could eat from the delicious part of pilaf saying that as I was young I should eat more and have meals full of energy to become strong. My grandfather and his dressing smelled sweet and spesificly which I liked most of all. The smell of the pasture, hay, wood, garden and parterre, saddle and also the smell of the painstaking work

sweat. I have never met such a fantastic perfume in my life. And I don't think that there is a laboratory which can make such perfume. It is possible to find a very expensive perfume but not the scent of my grandfather...

IT WAS HARD TIMES AND COLLECTIVE FARMS EXISTED. Very few people kept the horse. And my grandfather couldn't manage without a horse. He always kept a mare because a male horse needed more expences. The whole year you should feed him in stable with barley and hay. But as far as the female horse is concerned, if the weather is wild let her go to the pasture and she will return with full stomach. And my grandfather didn't like every horse. He was very experenced in choosing the horse. When he bought a horse he checked her legs, neck, tail very attentively and evaluated the horse. It was difficult to make him like every horse. The horse of the chairman of the collective-farm ate 16 kilogram barley every day and became as a crazy horse. It was impossible to control her even with a curb. For many times I made a bet with the chairman's son on a horse race and each time I won it. Each time the son of the chairman of the collective-farm lost the bet and disgraced himself in public. Even the horses of the government officials who had the best horses visiting our village could never win the race with our horse.

Most people in the village leaving their horses in the pasture used to shackle them. It was done in order the horse could not go far away and the wolves couldn't come up to the horse because of the noise of the shackle. But my grandfather never shackled the hose. He was sure that he had such a horse that the wild animals of all kinds couldn't come up to his horse. Once spring evening our horse didn't return home from the pasture. My grandfather was very worried about it. He took the knife, the handle of which made of the cow's horn, to the mullah who got his education in Najaf (Iraq) and asked him to read a prayer against the wolves. Early in the morning after the breakfast he went to look for the horse and I followed him. My grandfather

said that he was not afraid of that something could happen to the horse but he was worried about that the horse could give birth and the wolves could eat the foal.

We climbed up the Garghi Valley and went down the other side. There were a lot of flowers around. The birds were singing around merrily. Sometimes I stopped, picked up the the fresh yellow flowered goat's-beard and ate tastefully. The snow-white milk of the goat's-beard blackened my hands. We moved forward and a black spot was seen in the distance. The mare has given birth at the end of the valley in the hole and was guarding her foal. A wolf was coming up to them and trying to attack them but our horse turning her back to the wolf was kicking him. My grandfather asked me to whistle as he had no teeth. Putting my finger on my lip I whistled aloud. Hearing our breathing sound the wolf put his tail between the legs darted out and squeezed into the shrubbery of the nothern part of the valley and disappeared. My grandfather said that if the horse was not cold-blooded the wolf had already broken her to pieces. If the horse shies at the wolf and darts out, the wolf chases her in roadless place and breaks her to pieces. But if the horse is not shy and stands still, the wolf is not crazy to be kicked in the head by the shoed horse.

I was listening with great interest to what my grandfather was saying. Seeing my grandfather the horse seemed to be heartened. Raising her head lively the horse neighed. Then she began to lick the long-legged foal which was trembling and hardly standing on her feet. Looking attentively at the foal my grandfather smoothed his beard and said to himself: Resembles her father in colour, she is starred and legs are white stripped. As far as I understand she comes of good stock. Turning his face to me he said:

– This falls to your lot. Let some time pass, the foal grows, it is yours, you can take her.

– Hearing that my heart filled with joy. My grandfather has made a horse gift to me and at that time the horse was very

expensive. A week ago the brother of the chairman of the collective-farm gave two cows with calves, four sheep and got five year old horse. And that horse was beyond comparison with our horse.

Hearing that my grandfather has made a horse gift to me my father smiled. Then he faltered for a while and said:

– Now the government doesn't allow to keep two horses, but never mind when the foal comes to the age of riding I will sell our horse for nothing. My horse is also a good horse but she is old and her teeth have fallen out. She can't even eat the barley.

If the doctoral degree in the field of HUMANENESS, COURTESY, HONOUR, HONESTY was founded without doubt my grandfather Mashadi Pasha, my grandmother Girvhar who were illiterate people and had no idea about Hegel, Feyerbach, Marx would be awarded it first. – How should relations be between people, how should mutual respect be between a husband and a wife?! – I found the answer for that in mutual relations of my grandfather and grandmother. They even had the sincere brother-sister love. I have never heard any conflict, any useless arguments between them that could damage their relationship or offend each other. In my understanding only that caravan can reach the ninety-hundred year destination of life honorably whose cameleer is wellbred and courteous.

IT WAS HARD TIMES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR. All the young people were in the war. Only old men and women stayed in the village. My uncle was in the war as well, that's why I often visited my grandfather and grandmother in order they didn't have tedious time. I helped if they had a job to do. I went to them in one of the cold autumn evening. The distance between my grandfather's native village of Aligouluushaghi and my grandmother's native village of Balahassanli was not too far. If I walked fast it took me an hour. My grandfather's house was at the end of the village on the top of the hill. When I entered the yard there was nobody. My grandmother was sitting on the

mattress by the fireplace at the end of the long corridor. Seeing me she became very glad. She put aside the woolen stockings she was knitting and took me in her arms. I also embraced her and lifted her up and then put her down again. She was very light-weight. She was very elegant, thin and fine lady. Her hair hadn't turned grey so much for her age. Most of her teeth were in place. My mother's early death advanced her in years. She had a soft, timid, delicate smile and voice. But after my uncle went to the front she was never happy. We sat face to face in front of the fire-place. Sometimes she opened her heart to me about her sorrow. I put two pieces of wood into the fire-place and asked her:

– Where is my grandfather?

She kept silent for a while and I felt that she was keeping something from me. Suddenly bitter tears rolled down over her cheeks. Then in a low and trembling voice she said:

– In the morning the damned chairman of the collective-farm came and made him go ploughing. And your grandfather didn't reject him. He ploughed for a while and the strap pressed him and your grandfather felt badly and came home. I made his bed and he is sleeping now. I wanted to apply cupping-glass but he refused. He has just fallen asleep. Saying that she burst into tears.

– He is too old for ploughing.

My grandfather falling ill was another sorrow after my mother's death and my uncle going to the front. I stayed with them for some days. When I stayed with them they never had tedious time. My grandfather recovered. My uncle's wife was cleaning the house, the yard and churning but my grandmother was preparing meals because my grandfather didn't like the meal prepared by others. He liked only meals prepared by my grandmother.

MY GRANDFATHER AND GRANDMOTHER HAVE SET UP STRICT RULES AT HOME THAT THE OLD AND THE YOUNG KNEW HOW TO BEHAVE AT HOME. MY GRANDFATHER WAS THE GOD AT HOME.

They took care of their daughter-in-law as their own daughter. Their daughter-in-law in her own turn considered them as her own parents. The relations among them based on mutual respect, good manners and decency. When my grandfather and grandmother were performing the ritual prayers of Islam I was standing aside and looking at them amazingly. My grandmother was muttering the prayer but I could hear nothing. But my grandfather was performing the ritual in a loud voice that I could easily hear the prayer and try to commit it to memory. I had the feeling that my grandfather was casting a furtive glance at me and smiling.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR MY GRANDMOTHER UNEXPECTEDLY FELL ILL. She was ill for just two days and then passed away... As if a candle lighting this house for ninety six years was snuffed out. A person was sent to the neighbouring villages to inform the inhabitants about my grandmother's death. A lot of people came to the funeral ceremony.

After the funeral ceremony my grandfather entered the house. He had a glance at the house as if he was looking for something but was not able to find it. Suddenly he called for: – Girvhar! Girvhar! No answer. The walls were keeping quiet as well. The doors and the windows seemed gloomy. What was my grandfather looking for?! – I thought. He was looking for the love of Girvhar, I thought to myself. I felt that my grandfather choked in this world without her love. He went out of the room, standing on the stair leading to the yard, he addressed the people taking part at the funeral ceremony:

– Thank you for the trouble and taking part in the funeral ceremony. But I have something to tell you:

*Harverst from the garden is good
Pomegranate is better than the quince,
Gathered here all the relatives and friends,
But my soul is with my lifelong love.*

And my grandfather said this:

– God gave us two children. My daughter died very early, I could stand that.

I sent my son to the bloody war, I could stand that as well. But I can't stand Girvhar's death.

MY GRANDFATHER LIVED ONLY A WEEK AFTER MY GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH. Only a week! At the same day of her death my grandfather joined the majority.

OUR VILLAGE HAD NOT YET ELECTRICITY, NO RADIO, NO TELEPHONE LINE AND HAD NOT ASPHALTED ROADS. But the living beings and non-living beings seemed unchanged. The flowers smelled sweet, the fish were swimming, the birds were flying, the bees were making honey from the nectar of the flowers, the ants were carrying feeding stuffs to the holes. The frogs croaked but didn't sing like nightingales. The foxes barked but didn't roar like lions. The dogs barked like dogs. The wolves howled like wolves. Each of them can be identified by their appearance and voice. People as the children of the Adam followed the right way of God. A man was a man and a woman was a woman. The old and the young knew how to behave. In this virgin land people were very healthy, didn't take pills and they lived more than hundred years.

IX

I WAS HAVING BREAKFAST TEA IN THE GROUND FLOOR BUFFET OF THE INTOURIST "HOTEL" WITH ONE OF MY ACQUAINTANCES WHO WAS THE HEAD OF ONE OF THE BIGGEST REGIONS. HE WAS A NOBLE, QUICK-WITTED, WISE AND COMMUNICATIVE MAN. At the neighbouring table was sitting his back to us the accountant of the collective farm we knew. When he stood up he leaned forward and said carefully to the young man sitting face to face with him: Hey niece, I have a question?

The young lady whom the accountant addressed as a niece, kept silence, didn't answer. The accountant understood that the young lady couldn't hear him. And repeated the same question loudly:

– Hey niece, where is the Institute named after Kirov situated, maybe you know. There is a patient whom I should visit.

The niece stood up without answering his question looked at the accountant disgustingly and sourly and left the buffet disappointed. The accountant looking at smiling people around understood that the young lady he addressed was not a lady but a young man, he was disappointed and left the buffet too.

As if this situation touched on the sore spot of the head of the region who was sitting face to face with me. He said:

Long hair, gold necklace, expensive ring, the silk shirt with big flowers on it...I don't blame the accountant from the rural area who mixed up the boy with the girl. Nowadays the young people are not able to sheathe the sword of Koroghlu, Babek, ride Qirat and Bozat, wear the cap of Soltan bey. By all the above mentioned parameters one can easily identify who is a boy and who is a girl. A man coming to a city from a rural area once a month or a year how can understand that the parameters specific to men have been changed. In other words not only the values but the dressing of men have been changed as well. Going mad on immoralities of Europe young ladies demonstrating their body under the mini skirts started trading of their honour and chastity with the dollar kings. The poor accountant doesn't understand that the decent people are bored to death with dishonourable people. The bearded betrayers sell at very cheap price the native lands of our ancestors buried in Zangazour, Kurdistan, Garabagh for ten-fifteen square metered parqueted offices with a table and a chair. I don't again blame the accountant in such a period it is difficult to identify a boy and a girl. Saying that my interlocutor looked at me and it seemed to me that he was reproaching himself for his such a sharp speech and using

rude words. But he didn't demonstrate it evidently. He put his hand into his pocket, took out a wrapped paper. He unwrapped the paper and took one of the pills and said:

– I felt nervous and my heart ached.

WE WENT TO OUR ROOM WITH ALL CONVINIENCES ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF THE “INTOURIST” HOTEL. We were watching TV in the evening. A middle-aged good-looking more or less known in the country a poet was reading a poem passionately. Every hemistich was call for people to be brave, courageous, to be ready to die for the motherland, to consider the family saint, to take care of the parents. My interlocutor took one more pill and turning to me showed me the poet who was reading a poem.

– Do you know him? – he asked me.

– Yes, but not so well. I have read his books. And he is not a bad writer.

My interlocutor smiled ironically. He kept silence and concentrated on the screen of the TV. When the literary-artistic program ended he said regretfully.

– I have worked for ten years as the first secretary of the communist party of the region where this poet lived. I couldn't solve his family conflict for ten years. His father came to me and complained that he had grown old and his son didn't take care of him. His mother also complained that after his marriage she even didn't know where her son lived. His wife complained a lot of times that she was fed up with him and had no patience with her husband's behaviour, every day he had beaten her and used to swear at her. He didn't come home for two-three days. The children had nothing to wear. When I called him to my office he used to say that his parents had told me a lie. He always complained that he earned very little money and couldn't afford to help his parents and his wife appeared to be not as good as he had expected and didn't respect him.

My interlocutor took a cigarette, lit it puffing away he added:

– I have been recently told that this “heroic” poet has left his family and children and now lives with a rich woman. When you read his books on honour and good name, listen to his speech you consider him to be a good writer. But when you analyse his behaviour, I feel sorry for this nation that has such a writer. A man either should be as he seems, or seem as he is...

X

I FEEL SORRY FOR THESE LINES THAT I WRITE. Sometimes I think that different people will judge them differently. When I was young I went to one of the publishing houses to have my book published. It was for the first time that I got acquainted with the editor of the book. What he said first was that he was very strict person. He said that he had rejected the books of many writers or made other writer write his book again. And he asked me not to hurry him. He should read the book attentively. He asked me to leave him my telephone number and he would contact me when necessary.

He seemed very serious and exigent and his words frightened me at first. Then I thought that his being exigent and attentive was good for me. There is such a saying that don't take me to the person who makes me laugh but take me to the person who makes me cry. Let him read my book attentively. What he does not like I will try to change. In this case the critics will have nothing to criticize and the readers will not find anything wrong to reproach me for.

The editor called me after a month and a half. After greeting me he said:

– I have read the book, it is not bad. And he said these words unwillingly. But you have made a lot of mistakes.

– Which mistakes do you mean? – I asked.

– It is not a telephone talk, come and we will discuss it.

I went to him, he wore his glasses and began to turn the pages of the typed original variant.

– You write here that they were stuffing straw into the net. In another place you write that as the hook was not watered well when they cut the wood it immediately became edgeless.

Making his remarks he rose his head took off his glasses and said:

– Dear author what is the connection between the straw and the net? The net is for fishing. Is the hook a cow, a horse, sheep or a goat to be watered?!

FIRST I FELT SORRY FOR THE EDITOR THEN FOR MY BOOK. How this poor editor could know all this if he has not been in the village, he doesn't know how to thresh the grain, he has never seen a threshing board. He can't know what is to stuff the straw into the net. He doesn't know how to winnow the grain by a wooden shovel. He who considers himself to be a very good editor if he entered the blacksmith's shop and he would see with his own eyes how the bellows open and assemble like an accordion, and hiss like the venomous snake.

He has never seen how the sultry hook and axe after being stricken hoot when put into the troubled water. If the heat of the forging furnace has once burnt his face he would understand the possibility of turning the steel to wax. I was sorry for my book that such "exigent", "attentive" person will be the editor of my book.

Poor is the book that will have such an editor. In such cases the literary critics should call a spade a spade. But unfortunately it keeps silence as well. There is such a saying in our village: Feed the horse due to his master. That means if the guest is an influential person, a stable man will feed the horse with full sieve of barley. But if the guest is a quiet and decent person the stable man will feed the horse with handful barley half of which is dust and soil even if it is a flying horse. Some critics look like such stable men. Taking a pen in their hands in order to evaluate the book they don't take into the consideration the content of the book but the position, reputation, position and his relations with high-ranking officials.

THERE ARE SUCH POEMS THAT, are full of such expressions: evil spirit, death, hell, boiling in oil, tomb. And when you read such kind of poems at night you have nightmare and become ascetic. But some so called critics praise such kind of scratchy writing and present them as the best sample of poetry. They raise them to the top of poetry even the poetry of Nizami, Fuzuli, Samad Vurghun remain in the shadow. And you become astonished. If the hobby of the poetry sky Mikayil Mushvig was alive he would call not only those narrow-minded poets but their laudators as well barefaced people.

We had a nice winged and tailed, spotty necked and cople-crowned hen. It used to lay an egg once in two or three days which was without shell. But this hen after laying an egg was cackling in such a way that passed all bounds. If the recently appeared critics witnessed this event without doubt they would call it a delightful miracle of the century, justifying it that it has no shell,when boiled you do not need take out of the shell. The scholars should try to hybridize and increase the breed of such spotty necked hens which lay an egg without shell. Such kind of eggs can bring fame to us not only in Europe but the world market as well. But one day my grandmother said that such hens are not worth feeding, because it is impossible to keep such eggs and they do not hatch. She said that such hens should be sacrificed. And we did it as she said.The meal out of the hen's meat was very delicious.

WHEN I WAS WRITING ABOUT THE ATTITUDE OF THE CRITIC ON EMPTY EGG LIKE WINESKIN I HEARD THE VOICE. As I was lost in writing I thought it was the noise of the cackling of the hen. When I drew myself up and listened attentively I found out that it was a telephone call. It was ringing instantly. I immediately stood up and took the receiver, it was one of my old ccleagues. Although we couldn't meet the latest time but sometimes called each other and asked each other's health. He asked me:

– What is your job now?

– I don't hold any post now and I am involved in reading and writing in order to kill time.

– What are you writing about?– I felt irony in this question of my friend.

– I write about the family, son-father, husband-wife, mother-in-law and – daughter-in-law relationships, as well as the other problems of society which trouble me so much. I write about the diploma of honour, weddings, dowry. I write about the events that I have seen, memorized and witnessed in the ups and downs of life. I detailed the story to my friend on the telephone. I wanted to know his view point on this matter because the exchange of views is very important.

My old colleague was very harmless person. He is very indifferent to life events. He absolutely doesn't care. As he was an indifferent man, he said carelessly:

What are you talking about at such a time? It isn't the proper time to write a book. Suppose you have written a book, who will read it? – he added. Now everybody is involved in business. Haven't you heard that courtesy doesn't cost a penny, it is the epoch of gold and jewelry. If you have time, if you have a chance enjoy your life! It isn't period of writing a book. Imagine that you have written who will publish it, who will buy it? It is not you to settle the problems of the world. You are writing about the diploma of honour, about husband-wife problems, the daughter-in-law's being impudent to her mother-in-law. The professor acts ignorantly to his family. Do you think that if you write about all these problems they will be settled?! Forget, my friend such kind of things, nobody needs them right now.

After these words it seemed to me that a mug of cold water had been added to the boiling pot. I suddenly had a feeling of hopelessness. I have had such a conversation with one of my very rich friends. I met him when I went out of my house. Seeing a big portfolio in my hand he asked me:

– What is that?

– It is the handwriting of my new book and I am taking it to the publishing-house.

He shook his head merrily and said:

– Oh, my friend you have nothing to do, I think. Which book? It isn't the proper time to be writing a book. Who reads books nowadays?!

– What can I do this is my job, this is my profession. Everybody should be involved in his or her own profession.

– Leave all these scribbles aside. I can help help you to open a shop. I can cover all expenses for that. You can live on the income of that shop very well. What will you gain from publishing a book. It seems to me that you have been so closely involved in reading and writing that you know nothing about the market economy. My friend's half jest, half serious proposal offended me.

– It seems to me that either you have a high temperature or you are drunk. What are you talking about, how can I be involved in business at my age, what will people be thinking of me?! – I answered offensively.

My friend showing his gold teeth said good bye and sat proudly in his “Mercedes“ car which was waiting for him and disappeared.

I don't blame my friend because for him the meaning of life is the stock of wealth and dollars. As far as the wealth is concerned he is rich, as far as the intellect is concerned he is poor. I didn't pay much attention to his talking nonsense.

My old colleague's such talking dispirited me and I put my pen aside which fell down under the table.

He destroyed my thinking completely. I stood up and left my writing table. Though the boundary of dream is endless, a small orchard is enough to disperse one's thoughts. I walked to and fro among the trees and thought that they are right saying that it's not worth to put one's heart and soul into reading and writing, what I have written up to now is enough. Working hard damages

my health as well. Now it is the epoch of making money, everybody is interested only in making money. In our cities they cut hundred year old trees down and instead they build European style commercial centers. The shops abound with the imported goods. The children and grown-ups are involved in business. As the salary is miserable the scholars are involved in business as well and work hard in order to make money. On one side my old colleague is right one should keep up with the time – I thought for a moment.

IN THE WHIRL OF HESITATION I SAT ON AN UNCOMFORTABLE SLOVENLY WOODEN BENCH IN THE ORCHAD. Leaning my elbows on my knees, put my hands on my sweaty face. Suddenly one rumpled paper blown by the wind caught a branch of pomegranate. I stood up and took the paper. The writing on the faded paper was hardly readable. I concentrated and looked through some lines of the paper. The lines seemed familiar to me. Those lines were from the book “Buick Jargal“. I read that book 30–40 years ago and without a pause. It looked like the event that the fall of apple from the tree conditioned the formulation of the laws of gravity. Of course I am not Isaac Newton who formulated this law. I am not pretending to be that. But the rumpled paper reminded me of Victor Hugo whose books I have read with great interest. Nizami, Fuzuli, Shakespeare, Cooper, the writers of whole mankind stood before my eyes. Their books were always a light-house in my life and creative activity.

Who were the owners of wealth, jewelry and lived luxuriously and had rattling life in their times? – I thought. Who can answer this question? Nobody! They have been completely forgotten. But the centuries passed this faded paper tells a lot of things about its author. A lot of things?! Can you imagine the mystery of this paper?! So even the caravan of camels loaded with gold and diamonds cost is not comparable with the price of this paper...

This faded paper cleared away the mist and fog from my dream and I returned again to my own world. God knows which ignorant person in the neighbourhood has torn this paper up and put it into the bin. He can be one of those rich people like my friend who advised me to give up writing and get involved in business – I thought. Of course, it was a strange coincidence. The genius Pasteur said properly that coincidence helps a man of great intellect. As if I awoke. I began to reproach myself. Because I am very afraid of myself and God who created this world. I have been made to become pessimistic several times. I began to turn the pages of my life.

SUCH A STORY. During the Great Patriotic War Gurban from Nakhchivan worked a driver for senior lieutenant Veniamin Aleksandrovich Kholin. During the heavy battles they helped each other and even saved each other's lives and shared a piece of bread. After the war was over Gurban returned to his native land and drove a broken old bus. He kept his parents and his family with this broken old bus.

The senior-lieutenant Kholin served in many countries and for a long time he served in China and had risen to the rank of lieutenant-general. After twenty years he opened the languor of his heart to his wife Antonina Ivanovna:

Antonina Ivanovna, I can't forget Gurban. Sometimes I dream of him. I have written a letter several times to find out his address but it didn't work.

I have no information on him for twenty years. Who knows maybe... That's why when I am on my next leave I will absolutely visit Nakhchivan. If he is not alive I will visit his family. I will help his children. And in this way I will find comfort.

General Kholin leaves for Nakhchivan with this mission. Getting instruction from the Moscow generals from the military units and the officer staff in Nakhchivan met general Kholin at the railway station ceremonially. And the driver Gurban was found and informed about the general's arrival. "Chayka" and

“Zim“ luxourous cars were waiting for the general. But general Kholin visited the places of interest of Nakhchivan in Gurban’s broken and old bus. He refused to stay in a special guest-house with all conviniences. He stayed in Gurban’s poor hut for ten days. This information spread all over Nakhchivan.

Of course this was a very interesting topic for a feature story or a monumental novel.

I wanted to write about this story. At this moment my telephone rang. I took the receiver and heard the voice of the telephone girl: Please, answer Baku. It was an editor. And his first question was:

– What are you doing and writing?

I gave him brief information about general Kholin’s story and informed him about my intention of writing about it. But his answer was:

– You have nothing to write?! There are a lot of books about the war. You should write on topics facing your region. In your region people’s tendency to relegion is very strong, cotton, tobacco production grows slowly. You should write about such kind of things. But a general’s visit to his friend isn’t a sensational topic?! Find a more normal topic and write about it...

I grew pessimistic. Even the paper and the pen in front of me seemed miserable.

– Why should the editor talk like that? I know a lot of people if they rise to higher rank they even don’t recognize their brothers. In one of the regions where I worked when a minister visited his native village, he didn’t stay in his father’s house as it was not luxirous but he stayed in the house of the chairman of the collec- tive farm. But such a famous general coming from far away to visit a driver, stays in his miserable hut. This is the symbol of confidence, faithfulness, modesty and all the best human values. Why should the editor reject such a topic?! I thought it over and over. If I insisted on the importance of that topic the editor will tell me that I should not teach him.

Nearly a month passed and a new editor was appointed. In one of our meetings I told him in detail about the story of Gurban and general Kholin. A new editor said inspiredly:

– What an interesting story it is! We need such ethical and edifying topics.

It is boring to write so much about the official meetings and economic problems. The readers are fed up with newspapers. The topic was to my liking. I wrote a feature story under the title “From general Kholin to driver Gurban“ and sent it directly to the editor. The feature story was published after two days. When I dictated a material over the telephone, a brave stenographer of the newspaper Jeyran khanim said:

They praised your feature story very much at an emergency meeting. When I read it I couldn’t help crying.

The feature story which made the stenographer cry, gladdened me. I stood as “The Republican Golden Pen“ prize-winner for that feature story.

ONCE ... Then I have been working only for a year as a regional correspondent. I was young, inexperienced and not-known so much among my colleagues. There were people who tried to force me out and they used to say:

– It is not difficult to keep one’s head above water as a correspondent at the newspaper in the region.

– To work for republican newspaper isn’t so easy!

– You shouldn’t agree to work as a regional correspondent hurriedly!

Sometimes I was subjected to such reproaches. There were some people looking down on me. There were people who were obstacles in the way of my career. I didn’t know what would be the outcome of my career. But it was too late I was already in the battle-field and I couldn’t run away from it. I could not step back. I was especially afraid of being called a clumsy person which could make my father feel embarrassed for me in my native village. My father took pride in me very much. People would say everywhere:

– Ildrim’s son appeared to be clumsy. That’s why I worked day and night in order to occupy a fitting place in the world of mass media.

I wrote a critical essay in a new style on the city trade and sent it to editorship. Some days passed and the head of the department of “The regulation of the activity of special correspondents“ Mr. N.J. called me and said:

The head of the department of “Soviet Society“ Mr. H.I. is looking for you. You should call him. He is very displeased with your article on the city trade. In my understanding he is looking for you because of that article. You should contact him and find out why he is looking for you. Be careful when talking to him, you know what kind of person he is. He easily makes a mountain out of a mole-hill. And you are just a beginner.

The head of the department of “Soviet Society” H.I. studied in Moscow. He worked there as an editor in the newspaper “Vilayat (Province)“. As he was removed from high rank to lower ranked position and he always seemed resentful. Sometimes he used to take vengeance on the employees. I telephoned him. Hearing my voice he said:

– What is that you have written? The beginning and ending of sentences are not clear. And all of them are nonsense. You have used such strange sentences that even I don’t understand, how those poor readers will understand?! I rejected the article. Avoid such superficial writing in future. Let it be a lesson to you.

– Dear Mr. H. maybe the article needs some corrections but to reject the whole article...

I could not completed the sentence the head of department said:

– Comrade author of the article, I said what I had to say! You are wet behind the ears but I have mass media at my fingertips. We should not debate this further. Saying that he put the telephone receiver down.

I telephoned Mr.H.J., the head of the “Department of Special Correspondents“ and informed him about my conversation with Mr. H. And Mr.H.J. answered in this way:

– Don’t deteriorate my relations with Mr.H.I. for one article. And I don’t advise you to clash with him. Think about your future activity, damn that article that he has rejected. It isn’t worth deteriorating your relations with him. You can write another article.

– OK, I am not against him but I remain of the same opinion. Maybe the article needs some corrections but to cross out all my efforts is unfair. But I said these words cautiously.

– OK, if you want it so, I will inform the editor about it. Call me in an hour or two I will tell you about my discussion with the editor. Mr. N.J. told these words with dissatisfaction and offensively.

He dropped a gentle hint to make me understand it isn’t worth it to be stubborn for an article and I could have a problem with.

After two hours I telephoned the “Department of Special Correspondents“. Before I opened my mouth Mr.N.J. said that he had given the article to the editor and told him that the head of department refused to publish the article and you as an author was not satisfied with his rejection. The editor said that he had to leave for Moscow for an important issue if he had time he would read the article and tell his view point.

I was lost in a thought: Even if the article deserves to be published the editor will never support me. Dog does not eat dog. I got myself into trouble. And the worst thing is that I have deteriorated my relations with the head of department. I had not to intensify the contradiction. I reproached myself.

At the end of the working day the head of the “Department of Special Correspondents“ N.J. telephoned me and said in high-spirits:

– My congratulations. The editor read the article and liked it very much. He appended the instructions on it and sent directly to the printing-house for publishing in the next issue.

This article was praised at the emergency meeting as well. Mr. H.I. was very disappointed. Seeing me he was crestfallen for a while. But the tension between us did not last long...

Oh, men, men! Men making people feel upset, men gladdening the souls of people! Goodwill people, malevolent people! Men subjected to sympathy, hatry! That's why one shouldn't be depressed by ridiculous words of worthless people. You should not carry on your shoulder the burden of disappointment. This is dictated to me by the lines coming from my heart. This is dictated to me by the stones and clods, the thorny bushes causing my knees to ache in the turns of my stormy life.

THE EVENTS THAT I REMEMBERED AS IF NUDGED ME. I turned to my writing table again which I had left for a moment and we seemed to miss each other. My pen fell on the floor, covered with dust and the tip of it was to other side, as if it was offended from me. I bent down and took the pen and dusted it. I wore my glasses and stared at my pen which was a guide in my road of life. Oh, my pen you have been my bosom friend since I started spelling out by syllables, since I started stammering in learning alphabet up to now. You have not changed at all. When I was young, haughty, healthy, my arms were strong, my hair was black, my teeth were in place, I had keen eyesight and was earning much money all my friends were around me, now they have grown cold to me, they visit me once in a blue moon and ask after my health by the way. When the sky was clear they were running after me everywhere, when the fog of my old age appeared over my head, my shadow friends disappeared at once. My fickle friends! There was time when I scratched my hand with a knife my friends came to visit me with groups. Now I fell ill and lie in bed for ten days but my friends are uninformed. Some of them have forgotten or lost my telephone number. The friends of need, the friends of post, the friends of party... But my pen has never been fickle to me as my friends. When I was healthy and wealthy my children embraced me every day, but

now day by day, little by little they change entirely and become strange. The direction of their fanatic love is changing. How can the children's love towards their parents reduce and become poorer as they grow?! Some of my children grew cold and became indifferent and I don't see that they are at all embarrassed about that. All these pains obscure the sensitive, virgin, honest part of my heart where love for my children is kept.

IN ANCIENT TIMES a padishah who was walking about the country met with an old man. The old man came up to padishah, greeted him decently and said:

– Your Excellency! I want to tell you about my grief.

– You are welcome – padishah said respectfully.

The old man said: I have five sons and three daughters. Only God knows how I brought them up in poverty. I have ploughed fields, built a stone house, cut down my expences, fed my children. I have lived myself half-starved. When I was able to earn, all of them were ready for my order. All of them have made much from me. They took care of me, respected me. When I called them they were running toward me. I have organized everything for them for normal life. My sons have houses, positions and wealth. My daughters married. I have lost my health, wealth, the light in my eyes and energy for my children. Now I live with my old wife alone. We are old and poor. And all my children whom I brought up with great difficulty enjoy their own lives. We have a tedious time. I haven't visited them for years. I have become cheap, have no authority and I am penniless.

After the old man's words padishah started to think. Thinking over he turned to vizier and said:

– Give this old man a post, wealth and power.

The next day he became authorized. Everybody bent in front of him. He became very rich. He built palaces for himself. Hearing about it the old man's sons, daughters, grandchildren, great grandchildren surrounded him. They were whirling around him as a moth to a flame some twenty to thirty years ago.

OH, MY PEN, you are more and more reliable than such children. How you have treated me in my youth, you do the same now. You haven't changed absolutely. Even today you are my patronage and support. You don't give a chance that I was forgotten, that I was deprived of the authority. You bring me respect and fame. You raise me to skies in magazines and journals. You encourage me and don't give a chance to be disappointed. Listening to the advice of one ignoble man I threw you on the floor just now. You fell on the floor, you hurt yourself, you were offended! Forgive me! I am to blame! You have rescued me for several times. You haven't give me a chance to sin, to be reproached.

OH MY PEN, DO YOU REMEMBER ONCE THE EDITOR INVITED ME TO HIS OFFICE AND SAID:

– Postpone everything that you have been involved. This serious order comes from the high-ranking official. You must write a neat newspaper satire. I think you know Gazanfar Mamedov, don't you? He has worked before as the secretary responsible for ideology at the Central Committee. Then he worked as an editor of our newspaper "Communist". Now he is a deputy minister of the Ministry of Culture. I have been told that they are planning to fire him from there as well. After he stood the deputy minister he wrote a play and deceived in selling it for three thousand manat to Nakhchivan theatre. As the play was very weak they could not dramatize it. I was called to Central Committee of Communist Party. They gave me this information there.

The editor handled me a thin file with documents inside and said:

– Read this attentively and check up when you return to Nakhchivan. Meet with the director of the theatre, have a talk with the actors, they will tell you the truth.

Write it as soon as possible and send to me.

After the editor gave me this serious task I was thinking about the public reaction on the newspaper satire that I was going to write. Of course, narrow-minded readers, the readers

not seeing an inch in front of their nose would say: Oh my God! What a dare the correspondent has! How a correspondent could disgrace the former secretary of the Central Committee, the former editor of the newspaper “Communist“, and now the deputy minister. And what my grandfather Mashadi Pasha, my father Ildrim would say?! – Ali, we have not brought you up in such spirits. It is not good to disgrace a man who was removed from his post for a need he did something wrong and earned miserable money. The bigger they are, the harder they fall. You shouldn’t defame him in public. One shouldn’t beat a man when he is down. Even a wise man stumbles. If he worked as a secretary at Central Committee those actors would willingly put his play on a stage. Even if that play was of such a low level play the actors would play it on the highest level the author could be compared with Shakespeare and Jafar Jabbarly. I think who wants this article to be published they are his enemies at Central Committee. Those people who don’t put this play on stage are afraid of the high-ranking officials. Ali, you don’t know that if one is removed from his post and if his words weighed in gold, it would cost a penny. Those who entered the office of Gazanfar Mamedov bowed down in front of him, now they sabre his shadow. Now they have left you alone to fight with him. They want to make a mountain out of a molehill. Be fair! How can they publish a satire in the newspaper where once he has been an editor?! What do you think those wise people who read your name under the article as an author won’t reproach you?!

Oh my pen, you listened neither to the editor nor the Central Committee. You did not write any word against Gazanfar Mamedov who lost his job. You completely ignored the order of high ranking officials. You listened to the wise words of your ancestors and acted according to your conscience. You prevented me from libelling that man.

AND ONCE the editor sent me message that head of the police office of one of the regions was awarded the highest prize

of the country for his achievements. He was decorated with an order. The Central Committee gave instructions that an essay should be published in the newspaper with his photo in the middle. I went to the region where that police officer worked. I talked with a lot of people and everybody talked of him in lowest terms and curled their lips to show their dislike. All of them called him corrupt and dishonourable. They said that he was very stingy and his principle was: grasp all! I was puzzled. So if I write an essay due to the instructions of the high-ranking officials about the chief of the police office, people who know that policeman very well will tear the our newspaper into pieces, throw it into the bin and condemn me – I thought. And that time my pen stopped me and I didn't write that essay. Me and our newspaper were not condemned by the readers. Of course, I paid dearly for that... Long time later, when the editor was in good mood, he said:

– It turned out that you were right. One of the employees of the ministry who knew well that chief of the police office said that he was good-for-nothing. One of the high ranking officials of the ministry patronizes him. And he was decorated with an order for... It is very good that you have not written about him.

As the editor admitted the truth I found relief.

OH MY PEN, I THREW YOU AWAY IN VAIN! You have had a lot of problems. Ignorant, illiterate, editors, chiefs, proof-readers bored you with useless corrections, abridgement in writings, distorting the content of the whole article. They made you write in the framework of bureaucrats", muddle-headed people"s way of understanding. It was forbidden to you to write as freely as you want. You have been fed up with old styles, insincere words, dull citations and the standard sentences. Now, listen to me my pen... You inspire me, you hearten me, you fill me with enthusiasm to write. You are completely free, go forward and I will follow you. Wherever you go I will crawl after you but on one condition, you should not offend the readers. Because a reader is the best expert who fairly evaluates you. Try not to get such a grade that will

sadden you. Write my pen, write! Nobody can stop you if you have a clean aim and a good will and I will act in accord with you. If the readers benefit from only your two sentences that should also be appreciated because it means our efforts were not in vain. If people didn't benefit from our writings not only you but me as well would blush with shame. Our talk lasted for a long time. We started from the topic of wedding party of my friends from Nakhchivan, spoke of the diploma of good manners and went on many many other interesting issues. I return to the unfinished subject in Nakhchivan again.

Though I wandered from the subject but I had to talk about the painful family problems worrying me for many years.

XI

LATE AT NIGHT the wedding party of my friends with my participation in Nakhchivan ended. Everyone went home. Friends can be more but home is single. And I went home where I was a guest. It was nearly one o'clock in the morning. They made a very good bed for us in one of the rooms. I could easily see a clear sky of Nakhchivan from my bed at the window. I have spent ten years of my life in this land. I lived in the building in Pushkin street. Before falling asleep I used to be lost in thought looking at the majestic view of the starry sky. Maybe because in my childhood they told me that my mother had not died but gone to the sky. And in this way they comforted me. And I believed that. I used to stare at the stars in hope to see my mother. Once a bright star flew down from the sky leaving a long, straight line and disappeared in a flash. I was glad thinking that it was my mother, she had seen me and was coming to me. But unfortunately it was a heavenly body, meteorite. In my village people sometimes called it a star with tail (comet). Knowing that I was disappointed and completely lost my hope. I thought to myself: I wish I were a child again and couldn't understand it. When I grew up I understood that in order to comfort me they told me

that my mother had gone to the stars. And I stopped looking for my mother among the stars. But since that time I consider the stars my bosom friends. Even at present time I stare at them. Being a guest in Nakhchivan I began to look at stars again. The seven stars in the sky reminded me the first moments of my arrival to Nakhchivan.

Nevertheless I have had more or less experience in the EDITORSHIP OF THE REGIONAL NEWSPAPER to meet the requirements of the higher instance press was not so easy for me. From what to start, how to write?! First times my pen was not able to answer all these questions correctly as it was not experienced. I went to Sharur (former Norashen) region. I was sitting in the large office of the second secretary of party committee Ali Valiyev who was responsible for issues of ideology and talking about the article I had to write. His office was furnished with a red carpet. I have been told more or less about him.

He grew up in poverty and was an ordinary but very strict person. He has never been involved in knotted questions. He loved honesty, was not interested in wealth, and never cringed before somebody in order to stand for the secretary of the regional committee. Once a special commission from Moscow and from the Central Committee of the republic arrived to check up the condition of the ideological issues in Nakhchivan. Neither promising nor gratifying was expected from the behaviour of the commission members. And most of high ranking officials were worried greatly. Very serious, very ambitious member of the commission who was the department head of the Central Committee was responsible for Norashen region. He was sitting in the office of the second secretary Ali Valiyev who was directly responsible for ideological issues. The workers of the regional committee were in panic. The head of the department was looking through the documents, cross-examining the individual employees and Ali Valiyev who was sitting face to face with him.

He often stood up and was walking in the long office hither and thither as if he had missed Baku. His such finicking behaviour made Ali Valiyev lose his patience.

He looked at the chairman of the commission who was walking here and there and sometimes looking through the window and said:

Comrade, the people of Sharur feel great respect to a guest, especially plenipotentiary of our senior office. But that doesn't mean that you can pass all bounds and behave here as you wish.

The head of department flushed to the roots of his hair. In order to force Ali Valiyev to hold his tongue he said:

– I didn't understand you. Speak openly, what do you mean by that?

– I mean this is the office of the secretary of the regional committee. Here is neither a seaside boulevard nor the asphalted street of Baku that you are walking here and there – Ali Valiyev answered his haughty question sharply.

The naughty chairman of the commission could never imagine that there can be a person in the region dare to say these words to his face. He stiffened in astonishment and said:

– If you refuse to sit in your office I can sit in other office.

– I find it difficult to give advice to such a respected person who stands much much higher in position than me. That's why in which office to sit is up to you.

Not only in Norashen, but in the whole territory of Nakhchivan as well an information spread that Ali Valiyev disgraced the authorized employee of the Central Committee and turned him out of his office. This rumour exploded like a bomb.

EVERYBODY COMES TO THIS WORLD EQUALLY. And when they die the soil doesn't discriminate between them. The distinction created by wealth and position is temporary. That is why a man should treat a man as a human being. There is nothing in the world that can be easily gained as politeness and which is highly appreciated by other people. As far as the young

secretary of the regional committee is concerned, since our first meeting he made a great impression on me, nevertheless I have been told his being hot tempered man. It was my first meeting with 30-35 year old secretary of the regional committee. And that's why our conversation went on very officially. Due to the principles of that period their behaviour was normal. At this moment the telephone rang, Ali Valiyev took the receiver:

– I am listening.

– This is the chairman of Bash Norashen Village Committee. Comrade Valiyev, there is a patient who is seriously ill. I have been calling the Ambulance Service, the Department of Health Care, it doesn't work. They deceive us. We ask you...

The Secretary of the Provincial Committee with the help of his assistant found the head of the health department, reproached him on the telephone and gave him instructions to render a medical aid to the patient.

He put the receiver down, looked at his watch stood up and turning to me said:

– Let's go.

We took our seat in the car and went to the villages due to the instructions given by the editorship of our newspaper. We visited the villages of Yengija, Damirchi, Sadarak...

It took us four five hours to come back to his office. While opening the door Valiyev asked his assistant who was looking unhappy.

– What news do you have about that patient? Could the doctors render him any medical aid?

– No, they couldn't find an ambulance. They said that the ambulance was sent for another patient, he answered sadly. I think the patient has died.

This bad news shocked Valiyev. He began to speak ill of the doctors. By judgement of his assistant it turned out that it was too late...

... Three days passed a satirical article was published under the title "The Emergency Aid" in "Communist" newspaper. It

was my first satirical article in republican newspaper. I was beside myself with joy. But I was dispirited. One of the heads of the administration of Nakhchivan Provincial Committee congratulated me on that article but feeling sorry for me said:

– You have demonstrated inexperience. If I knew beforehand I would advise you not to publish that article, you will have a problem for that article.

– Why?

– The head of the Health Care Department is a close friend of the first secretary of the regional committee and the senior doctor of the Ambulance Service is a relative of one of the high ranking officials. My interlocutor warned me he was very sorry for me and I would have a serious problem for that article.

... Though this topic belonged to the field of ideology, a commission was set up under the chairmanship of the head of the department of industry and construction of the provincial party committee to check up the facts shown in the article.

The checking of the process lasted for ten days and after all as the author of the satirical article I was also invited. The chairman of the commission was a number one specialist in making a mountain out of a molehill, and he had never called a spade a spade. For his characteristic features the chairman of the commission was the right hand of the First Secretary of the Provincial Party Committee. Turning the pages of the checked up documents not raising his head and not looking at me the chairman of the commission said haughtily in the way of party employees:

– OK, where have you taken all these facts from?! – he asked me. None of the facts of the satirical article were confirmed – he added.

– The head of the Health Care Department says that he has absolutely no information about such an accident. The Ambulance Service has given a certificate confirming that nobody addressed them connected with this event. The head of Bash Norashen Village Committee has given evidence where he

has confirmed that nobody has called them in connection with this accident. The certificates presented to us confirm that nobody fell ill in Bash Norashen village and nobody died. I don't understand how you have fabricated such a satirical article?! And the opinion of the First Secretary of the Provincial Party Committee is very negative. This issue should be discussed at the bureau of the Provincial Committee. If you have any facts, please you can present them now.

A thick red file filled with documents refuting the facts in the satirical article. But I didn't have any document confirming the facts in the article. That's why I kept silent for a while and said:

– And what is the opinion of the Second Secretary of the Regional Committee? He himself witnessed the event.

The head of the department frowned and not raising his head and as if addressing to the file said:

– Of course we didn't have a conversation with Mr. Valiyev as it is not necessary. And everything is already clear. I think the article has been written by the order of someone not based on facts. And I want to draw your attention to one fact that the people whose names you have mentioned in the article have sent a telegram to higher instances complaining about you. You will pay for that...

The only person I could rely on and was the witness of the event – the Second Secretary of Party Committee. That's why I asked the chairman of the commission to have a talk with Ali Valiyev who was the eye-witness of the event.

The chairman of the commission, the head of the department shrugged his shoulders and said in hesitation:

– There is no necessity for that at all, but if you insist, I am not against it. We will ask Ali Valiyev to give official evidence. I am perfectly sure that he will say the same words. The facts in the article are completely fabricated.

... The First Secretary of the Regional Committee who held higher position than Ali Valiyev tried to persuade his colleague:

– The Provincial Party Committee wants you to give evidence concerning the facts in the satirical article under the title “The Emergency Aid“ as if you have been the witness of the event. However, I don’t advise you to be involved in such a conflict. The best thing for you is to say: I haven’t seen! I don’t know! How barefaced the correspondent is! He defamed our region in the republic and wants you to give evidence in his favour. Write that everything is a blatant lie, that’s all! And the Provincial Committee is interested in not affirmation of facts in the article. Our fate depends on the Provincial Committee not on the correspondent. And not much time remains until the forthcoming elections. And I want to reveal one secret that I was at the Regional Committee yesterday and had a conversation with the First Secretary for a long time. After elections I can hold a higher position. The First Secretary asked me who can replace me and I recommended you as a deserving candidate. And the First Secretary shared my view point. That’s why you should take into your consideration all these things. You should settle the satirical article problem to comfort the high ranking officials. Otherwise you can damage your own career. I Hope you have understood what I mean.

The Second Secretary listened to the First Secretary attentively and said nothing, he stood up silently and went to his own office and wrote such an application:

To Nakhchivan Provincial Committee. In response to your oral inquiry I can tell you that I have read the article under the title “The Emergency Aid” and I am the witness of that events. The facts that the correspondent has written are completely true. But has written less about this accident. ... And he put his signature under the application.

All the efforts of ten day activity of the commission were in vain after the application of the Second Secretary. The problems shown in the article found their fair solution.

Those smoothed-tongued politicians in order to comfort high ranking officials were reproaching the Second Secretary:

– You are not a good politician, you have made a great mistake. You are a person without kith or kin and in order to hold this position you have faced a lot of difficulties. Instead of supporting the interest of the Provincial Party Committee you have supported the correspondent and it will cost you dear. Just you wait!

– I have not supported neither the author of the article nor the newspaper, I have supported the truth. I acted according to my conscience.

Those Mr Know Alls who gave advice to Ali Valiyev stumbled in the competition of getting a good post. But Ali Valiyev stood as the Chairman of the Executive Committee, the First Secretary, the Secretary of the Supreme Soviet of the Autonomous Republic.

There is such a saying: Honesty is the best policy or Truth will conquer all.

But the problems I faced with for my first satirical article was a lesson for me. Since that time I have written more than hundred satirical articles based on convincing documents confirming the facts.

XII

I COULDN'T ABSOLUTELY SLEEP. Now I was as a guest here but I could not forget my days spent in Nakhchivan. Maybe one of the reasons of it is that my four children were born in Nakhchivan, in the land of courageous people. I have had as many footsteps, words, writings in this land of fresh air and honest people as the number of stars in the sky. To write my memories can take months if not years. If I don't write some of them my sweet and bitter recollections can get offended in my memory.

I have had a lot of people that I used to communicate with. The discussion with one of them was quite different from the others. He used to talk about his mother. I mean Rahim

Karamoghlu, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Nakhchivan. When we were together he always used to speak about his mother and with heart-ache.

– My father died untimely. My mother was a very brave woman as her name. She has been a mother and a father for me as well. Her hair turned grey, she suffered greatly to bring me up. Once ... When he said this word he stopped talking. I felt that he was deeply moved. But he tried to control himself in order to conceal it. He controlled himself and went on talking with restraint: – I was in the fourth form then. I was playing on the lawn at the end of the village with the children who were nearly of the same age. I had a quarrel with a naughty child who was four-five years older than me. He beat me and called me an orphan. I couldn't help crying. If I had a father nobody dared beat me– I thought to myself. At this moment my mother arrived with a stick in her hand:

– Son of a bitch, you think that he is fatherless?! Saying that she began to beat him with the stick. I became so glad as if I gained the whole world. Seeing how brave my mother was I heartened. – Nobody can defeat me, I thought. I dressed better than those who had a father. Now my mother has grown old. – Saying that Rahim muallim sighed. I insist on her coming and living with my family but she doesn't agree. She says that she can't live her native land. She devoted her whole life to me. In a day or two I will visit her even if I have something else urgent to do. When I don't see her I go crazy, it seems to me that I have lost something. Rahim muallim told a lot of stories about his mother and I felt that he morally lived with his mother. – It seems that the light of love of mother elucidates my interlocutor's road of highness, fame and happiness – I thought to myself. His high positions, his children and untroubled life... On the foundation of his divine happiness stood his respect for his mother.

XIII

Mother-son love lightens our life but sometimes I face a contrary situation for which I feel sorry. There is a family in our quarter. An elderly woman has a very strong son, an attractive daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. One day I met her. She was very gloomy and she was ready to cry. I felt supplication, revolt and protest in her eyes. She also knew me a little bit. I came up to her and asked how she felt and comforted her. She covered the torn part of her blouse with the tip of her shabby kerchief and told me blushing with shame:

I will not conceal it from you my daughter-in-law doesn't get on with me and my son supports her. And seeing their attitude towards me, my poor grandchildren don't respect me as well. I have put a folding bed in the corridor and hardly sleep there. What can I do, nothing but to bear it! Nobody in the family respects me. I am terribly sorry, my son and his wife behave unmannerly before my eyes. They have become shameless. And my daughter-in-law says she is crazy about him. She says she can't live a day without my son, she is ready to sacrifice her life for him. I am sorry for my words, I have given birth to him, I have brought him up and what has she done for him, nothing. They don't like me saying that I smell meal. In my presence she says to my son that he is her mother, he is her father, he is her everything.

Saying all these things she asked me to find a job for her as sweeper or a washer-up for ten-fifteen manats. I don't want to be dependent on them. The house you see there has been built by my late husband and me. But now they enjoy their lives there but I suffer. If you can organize me a job I can live there as well. It is better to live in a small mud-house alone than with them under the same roof.

I comforted her and helped her...Days, months, years passed and one day her son was arrested for embezzlement and was sentenced to five-years imprisonment. Once saying that she

would not live without him, she would die for him, left her husband and started a new life with other man. The mother returned home, took care of the house, lit its lamps and with great difficulty saved some money and visited her son in the prison. Sometimes when I was passing by of that house I heard the mother weeping, which made my heart bleed. In which house there is no respect, love to a mother, in which house they forget about the mother's efforts, sufferings, one can hear in that house only weeping and crying.

The years passed and he was set free from the prison. His mother was waiting for him at home but his wife has already found for herself another husband with a shoulder-strap.

Happiness is at the feet of mothers, who said these words is right. A son or a daughter who doesn't bend down or fall on knees before a mother and without a mother's blessing one can't be happy. The more you love your mother the less problems you will have in life.

The higher posts RAHIM KARAMOGHLU occupied the more modest he behaved before his mother. Indestructible ties existed between me and him for his love to mother. When we met he used to speak mostly about his mother and the problems facing the Autonomous Republic.

ONE MORNING Rahim muallim telephoned me. After greeting me he said:

– I have to go to Iravan, let's go together. You always complain that you have not seen Iravan. I have something to do there for one or two hours, then I will show you the city and come back.

I went to his office. He was waiting for me. The driver entered after me and said:

– The car is ready.

– Which car?

– “Pobeda” – the driver answered.

– Go and come with “Zim”. You don't know what delicate people these correspondents are. If he doesn't tell it to our face

but he will think inside that we show greediness for “Zim“ – Rahim muallim made the driver understand with a delicate joke.

The “Zim“ car was rushing about at high speed on the not so much comfortable Nakhchivan-Iravan highway. We felt very comfortable in the car. The head of the Council of Ministers Rahim Kramoghlu was in very high spirits today than ever before. He turned to me and asked in a friendly manner:

– Comrade correspondent, why don’t you ask me about the reason of my visit to Moscow?

– You will tell and I will know.

My interlocutor stood thoughtfully and said:

– The Soviet society has been founded for forty years but Nakhchivan has still a problem with electricity. There are five-six power stations working with black oil. And they are not enough. We have worked very hard and succeeded in including Nakhchivan in a project of this year in order to have a high voltage line from Iravan. But climatic conditions have not taken into consideration in the project. The project says the line should be on wooden not concrete poles. And that doesn’t meet our requirements. It is nonsense to save some tons of metal and a miserable sum of money. But the wooden poles can’t stand the damp, rainy area at the foot of Ararat. After five-ten years they will rot. This problem is beyond the competence of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. This problem can be settled only by Moscow. And that’s why nobody has to trouble himself for the solution of this problem. I was obliged to be involved in this problem and for this I went directly to the Kremlin. Nevertheless I occupy such a high position with great difficulty I could meet with Malenkov. I spoke in detail about Nakhchivan’s being bordered on two foreign states, about the climate of this ancient land, geographical situation, economic problems, especially about the lack of electricity, about still use of oil lamps in the villages. He listened to me attentively and gave immediately the instructions about the

use of concrete poles for high voltage electricity line from Iravan to Nakhchivan. And in this way this problem was settled.

It seemed strange to me that he was deprived from the posts of the General Secretary of the Central Committee, Chairman of the Council of Ministers and was responsible only for electrification of the country. He listened to me attentively, gave his instructions, that's all! He didn't tell me any more word. As if I told everything to a stone, got my answer from him and left. I couldn't feel anything from the expression on his face. – And there is a little problem to be settled with Iravan affiliated with this issue and it should be completely solved today – my interlocutor added.

I understood why Rahim Karamoghlu was in high spirits. He settled the problem of high voltage electricity line from Iravan to Nakhchivan. If he had wings he would fly regarding this issue. To light the land where you were born is a great achievement.

Rahim muallim stopped his optimistic talk and sunk in thought for a short time. He shook his head surprisingly and regretfully and said in hesitation:

– When I was in Moscow before we had very strange conversations with the authorized people of the Central Committee. Rahim muallim said these words and hesitated for while and went on talking:

– To tell the truth it is difficult to talk about it. This was a confidential discussion between us. I have no right to talk about it. But I rely on you. I know you are able to keep a secret. They asked me how many teachers have been sent to Nakhchivan from Russia? I answered that we had a lot of Russian teachers but didn't know the exact number. Then he asked me how many of them married and have a family. And I couldn't answer exactly this time also. They were very displeased with my answer and cavilled at me. And I promised that when I go back I would be deeply involved in that issue. And their last words were that since that time had to be at the focus of attention and those teachers sent

from Russia to Nakhchivan should marry in time and stay there, otherwise they could come back. You shouldn't give them a chance. The head of the Council of Ministers lost in thought again, then broke the silence:

– Of course I didn't like their cross-examining like that. Because in every word from them I felt nationalistic spirit. This policy can't lead us to a good destination. Once Lenin said that when the great nationalistic claim creates, the small nationalistic spirit arises without a doubt.

XIV

RAHIM MUALLIM with some difficulties nearly settled the problem of high voltage electric line from Iravan to Nakhchivan connected with Armenia. That's why he was in a good mood. We visited the places of interest of Iravan hurriedly and turned back. When going to and coming from Iravan as they hardly arrived in Vedi the driver switched off the radio and slowed down. Rahim muallim's good mood disappeared. It seemed to me that the river Araz seemed gloomy and angry. And the mountain Aghri seemed sad as well on other side. There was silence, perfect silence everywhere. I was hearing a terrible noise periodically. But that didn't like the noises of human beings. It sounded like the weeping of the land which had lost its natives. I have been told that the mountain of Aghri is not as mighty as before it bent down a little bit. It turned out that the mountain of Aghri was full of sorrow. From Iravan to Tabriz along the river of Araz, Azerbaijan was divided into two parts, they tore up to pieces the lands of Azerbaijan for making a present to one another, they wounded this land. That was the sorrow made the mountain of Aghri bend down. Feeling that it made my heart ache as a writer. We all kept silent. And the car was moving heavily as if the road was misty and foggy. Maybe the soil was offended, moanful, displeased. And the car felt that it had to move slowly.

Rahim muallim showed the near and far villages and the cemeteries the tombstones of which have been destroyed by Armenians and said:

All these lands have been the native settlements of Azerbaijanis since ancient times. The Armenians have killed most of Azerbaijanis and drove out the others from these lands. Now a few Azerbaijanis live in far areas. It seems they all will be driven out in the near future. And that's why when I pass by this area I am in low spirits and can't come to myself.

My interlocutor was lost in thoughts, then turning to me said:

– The dashnak (Armenian chauvinism – **trans.**) nationalism is worse than cholera disease. Unfortunately we can't get rid of the affects of this disease. When my interlocutor told that such an idea came to my mind and I thought for a moment – after a child is born he is vaccinated against some terrible diseases. I wish such vaccination were against the violent nationalism. Then the Armenian nationalists could get rid of such disease and their neighbours could live in peace and safety.

My interlocutor was talking without pause – if to say exactly, up to the beginning of the last century the independent ruler of Iravan was Mahammad khan. And he used to consult all important issues with the ruler of Nakhchivan Kalbali khan and always followed his advice. When the commander of the Russian army Sisianov visited Iravan, the opinion of Mahammad khan carried much weight for him and he conducted talks with him. Now Armenians wail that these lands belong to their ancestors. And wherever they see the Albanian church they cry loudly and try to prove with groundless facts that the foundation of that church has been laid by Armenians. How barefaced one can be?! How can Armenians make Azerbaijanis leave their ancient and native lands?! Since these Armenian evil-doers stood as our neighbours they have used hundreds of cunning stories and driven out naive Azerbaijanis from their native lands.

RAHIM MUALLIM WAS TALKING WITH HEART-ACHE:

It can be interesting for you as a correspondent– he went on talking. Once I was going to Moscow by train. I happened to be in one and the same compartment with Mr. S. who worked together with the Secretary of the Central Committee Mirjafar Baghirov. I have known him for a long time but he saw me for the first time. We had a very interesting discussion. He told me such an interesting story: – I was the second person in the administration of the Central Committee. I carried much weight for Baghirov. He used to agree with me on some issues. Once he invited me to his office. He was walking here and there as usual with some pencils in his hand. I knew his character and understood that he was in a bad mood.

He was very upset. But I didn't ask him anything. It turned out that Mikoyan (Armenian by nationality –**trans.**) crept into Beriya's favour and they could convince Stalin as well that the Second World War had ended and the Armenians living abroad want to come back to their coreligionists. But the territory of Armenia is small and their accommodation causes difficulties. There is only one way out. The construction of the Mingachevir water basin has been completed and thousands of hectares of virgin lands in Mil-Mughan Plain equipped with the irrigation system. A vast working labour force needed to cultivate these lands, that's why where in Armenia farming possibilities are restricted from those regions Azerbaijanis should be moved and settled in Mil-Mughan plain. And in the regions from which the Azerbaijanis have been moved should be relocated Armenians from foreign countries.

Stalin liked Mikoyan's and Beriya's idea. But he asked them:

– Have you talked with Baghirov about it?

– No – Mikoyan and Beriya answered.

– I am not against it, but you should learn Baghirov's opinion about it as well.

By Mikoyan's trick Beriya telephoned Baghirov and informed him about it and convinced him that that was Stalin's idea. And Stalin has already made his decision.

Baghirov was in a desperate situation and answered Beriya in this way:

– If it is Stalin's final decision then what can I say?!

Mikoyan and Beriya were waiting for such an answer. And they immediately informed Stalin about that Baghirov agreed with that.

Stalin signed the letter with a blue pencil compiled on this issue: *Only based on the voluntary principals.*

Stalin's voluntary principals were conducted by the Armenian authority in the way of barbarian violence. Those Azerbaijanis that have been moved couldn't stand the heat of the Mil-Mughan plain and died.

My interlocutor changed the subject of the discussion and asked:

– Have you seen Stalin's gigantic monument in the above part of Iravan surrounded by the forest?

– Yes, I caught glimpse of it...

– This monument was erected by the recommendation of Mikoyan and was the best and unique from the point of view of mastership and greatness. in the country. Of course, Mikoyan was ready to sacrifice his life for Stalin. And Stalin knew that and relied on his faithfulness. How he trusted in Mikoyan?! But much regret! The giants in policy Roosevelt and Churchill could not cheat Stalin but Mikoyan could cheat him easily and abused his confidence. What happened in the end? Mikoyan was the second person after Khrushov who insulted his coffin. Mikoyan was the first person saying that Stalin's book "The economic problems of USSR" does not meet with our requirements. Mikoyan made Iravan understand that they should be first in destroying Stalin's monument. It could be the demonstration of Mikoyan's faithfulness to Khrushov. Now it was time to creep into Khrushov's favour.

WHEN I WROTE DOWN THE WORDS OF MY INTERLOCUTOR FOURTY YEARS AGO I REMEMBERED ANOTHER STORY. When everywhere the campaign of destroying Stalin's monuments began all the workers and employees of *Ali Bayramov State Farm* protested. They didn't allow Stalin's monument in front of the office of the collective farm to be destroyed. The high ranking officials in the regional and republican level interfered in it. But then the inhabitants of the village protested persistently. They hid the monument in the hayrick for a while then again demonstrated it. Of course among them there were enough Azerbaijanis who have been forcibly deported from Armenia.

The famous literary critic Abbas Zamanov and poet Abram Plavnick visited me in passing by. They spent a night in my house. During our discussions I told them that story. They did not believe me. In the morning we went to Ali Bayramov state farm. When Abram Plavnick saw Stalin's monument he choked with sorrow, then the poet controlled himself and said:

– I was moved to tears not because of saving Stalin's monument in Khrushov's despotic period but the faithfulness and determination of your nation. What a faithful people the Azerbaijanis are!

If that moment Stalin could return to life and open his eyes, I am sure that he would strongly condemn the Mikoyans who were considered to be the men of sense of Armenians who claimed to be the noble race and he would feel embarrassment before the Turkic world for such unfair treatment and kneel and beg pardon more than once before the Azerbaijanis mercilessly deported from their native lands in Armenia and settled in Azerbaijan and would say:

– Oh my God, how I have been cheated for my trust in him!

XV

WE HAVE ALREADY LEFT VEDIBASSAR BEHIND. The far plains of Sadarak were seen. I turned back and had a farewell glance at the mountain of Aghri. The sun lit up some part of the mountain. I considered it the light of hope. It seemed to me that the light will amplify as time goes on. And those who have been forcibly deported from these areas will return to their ancestors' native lands. I parted with the mountain of Aghri in such strong hope.

Alongside with the light of hope, I can't get rid of the trouble to live anxiously.

Since the last century the ghost of dashnaks has committed and expected to commit tragedies against ill-fated Azerbaijani turks. Can it be a lesson to us? Absolutely not! Maybe our great poet Sabir set all the bells ringing with a heart ache:

*Epoch demands us to be adjusted to the time, but we don't,
Even the cannons cannonade and can't awaken us.*

Could we get reasonable results from reproaches of our great poet for for this national defect?! Absolutely not!

I am not going to investigate profoundly the history and write a historic novel. But I can't ignore some important moments that my pen faces. And I am not very sure that these mute shouts of the lines of this book will be able to awaken those who were not awakened by cannonade.

ON NOVEMBER 28, 1945 AN ICED-COLD LETTER WAS SENT FROM THE SNOWY KREMLIN SIGNED BY MALENKOV AND ADDRESSED TO MIRJAFAR BAGHIROV. This letter affiliated with the claim of Arutinov, the Secretary of the Armenian Communist Party Central Committee who raised the issue before the Kremlin about annexing the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast of Azerbaijan SSR to the Armenian SSR. Arutinov wailed with great appetite that the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast became the territory of Azerbaijan in 1923

and as if 137 thousand of total 153 thousand population of Daghlig Garabagh were Armenians. And the unification of Daghlig Garabagh with Armenia would create an opportunity to improve the development of agriculture, science, education and culture. This could ensure the reconstruction of Daghlig Garabagh and the city of Shusha. And so on, and so on...

Malenkov wanted to know Baghirov's opinion on Arutinov's claim.

And Baghirov knew well about the existence of Mikoyan's hand in that letter and he felt that the letter smelled of the dashnak spirit. Baghirov knew that Arutinov nudged the Kremlin not because of his sympathy to his coreligionists in Daghlig Garabagh but his following trick based on the illusion to enlarge the territory of Armenia by all possible means. And Baghirov didn't behave like Vazirov and didn't turn his face to Arkadi Volski who sympathized with the Armenian nationalists and had no idea about Alaskar's saz (an Azerbaijani folk musical instrument like guitar – **trans.**) and acted willingly by the instructions of Armenian chauvinists like Agambekyan and Shahnazarov. He himself wrote such a frank letter to Malenkov one of the main figures of the Kremlin:

“Top secret. To comrade Malenkov. In reply to Your telegram concerning the suggestion of annexing the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast to Armenian SSR made by the Secretary of the Armenian Communist (Bolsheviks) Party Central Committee comrade Arutinov, I inform you:

Territory of the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast had been within the Garabagh Khanate since ancient times, the capital of which was the Panahabad city built in 1747 by the khan of Garabagh Panah khan.

In 1826, Garabagh was annexed to the czarist Russia. Later, the territory of the current Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast was within Shusha, Javanshir, Garyagin and Gubadly uezds of Yelizavetpol gubernia.

1918-1920, in the period when musavatists were reigning in Azerbaijan and dashnaks in Armenia, the musavat government set up a governor-general administration with Shusha (former Panahabad) its capital.

Due to the national bloodshed organized by the musavatists and dashnaks, Shusha was also destroyed and razed to the ground as were many other cities of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

In 1920, the initial period after the Soviet power was established in Azerbaijan, the common Oblast Revolutionary Committee was heading the agricultural and political life of entire Garabagh.

In 1923, the issue of annexing the mountainous part of Garabagh settled mainly by Armenians to the Armenian SSR, was raised. However, since this territory did not share borders with the Armenian SSR and was separated from Armenia with Gubadly, Lachin, Kalbajar and Dastafur regions populated by Azerbaijanis only, the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast was created with Khankandy, currently Stepanakert as its capital by the decree of the Azerbaijan Central Executive Committee dated on July 7, 1923 based on the instruction of the party authorities. Thus, the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast has never been connected with Armenian SSR territorially and is not as well presently.

Much has been done in the fields of agricultural-political and cultural development of Daghlig Garabagh during the years of Soviet power in Azerbaijan. One of the brightest examples of this development is that the current capital of the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast, the city of Stepanakert has been transformed from a desolate and destroyed village into one of the most beautiful, prosperous and cultural cities of Azerbaijan. Armenians, mainly from the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast make up 20.5 % of the students of all higher education institutions and technical schools of Azerbaijan SSR.

There are many comrades from Daghlig Garabagh among the republic's party, soviet and agricultural leaders – secretaries of Azerbaijan Communist (Bolsheviks) Party Central Committee, their deputies, peoples commissars, deputy peoples commissars etc.

Nevertheless, we do not object to the annexation of the the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast to the Armenian SSR, but we do not agree that Shusha region populated mainly by Azerbaijanis as well presently, though it is a part of the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast, should be given to the Armenian SSR.

Since the day the city of Shusha was built, it has not only been the administrative-political and cultural center of Garabagh, but also played an exceptional role in the struggle of Azerbaijani people against foreign invaders for its independence.

One of the most bloodthirsty conquerors, butcher of the Caucasian peoples Agha Mahammad shah Gajar was killed in Shusha.

The rich music culture of the Azerbaijani people has been formed in this city. The names of Ibrahim khan, Vagif, Natavan and other distinguished political and cultural figures are linked with this city.

At the same time, we regard it urgent to draw to the attention of All-Union Communist (Bolsheviks) Party Central Committee while considering the issue of annexing the Daghlig Garabagh Autonomous Oblast to the Armenian SSR, the issue of annexing Azizbeyov, Vedi and Garabaghar regions of the Armenian SSR adjoining the Azerbaijan republic and populated mainly by Azerbaijanis, into the Azerbaijan SSR.

Taking into account the very big cultural and economic lack of development of these regions, their annexation to Azerbaijan would create opportunity to improve the financial welfare standards of the population and cultural-political service to it.

We ask the All-Union Communist (Bolsheviks) Party Central Committee to consider as well the following issues in addition to the above-mentioned:

Comrades from Georgia raise the issue of giving Balakan, Zagatala and Gakh regions of Azerbaijan SSR to Georgian SSR.

Despite the fact that the total number of the population in the mentioned regions is 79 000, while Georgian-Ingiloyts make up only 9 000 of it, we are not against the consideration of this issue, but the issue of annexation of Borchaly region of Georgian SSR adjoining directly to Azerbaijan SSR and populated exclusively by Azerbaijanis only, to the Azerbaijan SSR must be considered simultaneously with this issue.

Finally, we ask you to consider the issue of annexing Darband and Gassimkand regions of Daghestan SSR, which were a part of the Baku gubernia within Azerbaijan in the past and presently adjoin to the Azerbaijan SSR. These regions are populated mainly by Azerbaijanis, in addition, more than half of the population engaged in cattle-breeding spend 9 months of the year in the territory of Azerbaijan.

We regard it expedient to establish a committee of the All-Union Communist (Bolsheviks) Party Central Committee to include interested representatives from all the republics.

Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist (Bolsheviks) Party Central Committee M.J.Baghirov.

*December 10, 1945, № 330,
Baku city*

HAVING READ BAGHIROV'S RESPONSE LETTER, PROARMENIAN KREMLIN LEADERS STIFFENED WITH ASTONISHMENT. AS MOSCOW FROST THIS LETTER FROZE THE BLOOD IN THEIR VESSELS.

They weighed Arutinov's groundless claim with Baghirov's letter which based on irrefutable historic facts and understood that truth is on the side of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis can raise a territorial claim against Armenians. And all efforts of territorial claim of so-called wise Armenian leaders are in vain. To raise the Daghlig Garabagh issue is not in their favour. And they stopped touching this issue.

YES, THEY STOPPED BUT STOPPED TEMPORARILY!! The dashnaks kept silence for a while but adhering to their "tradition" Armenians began to struggle for the realization of their "Greater Armenia" illusion as soon as favourable conditions emerge. The doctor was feeling pulse of famous Armenian writer Avetik Issakyan who was on the verge of death. The writer comforted the doctor and said:

Don't worry doctor, my heart will not beat normally until Daghlig Garabagh and Nakhchivan are not annexed to Armenia.

The poetess of Armenia Silva Kaputikyan standing before Andranik's monument abroad and called him to raise his bloody sabre and to fence it over the head of Turkic world again. Academician Agambekyan was not tired of giving interviews about the importance of the annexation of Daghlig Garabagh of Azerbaijan to Armenia. Zori Balayan, the author of the book "Ojag" ("Fire") taking his book and going from city to city, from village to village in Armenia and Daghlig Garabagh day and night and sowed the seed of enmity among Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Some members of intelligentsia in Stepanakert living in Azerbaijan, getting a profit out of its wealth were collecting signatures from Armenians on annexing Daghlig Garabagh to Armenia by the instructions of Iravan nationalists. And we were waiting and observing the situation without taking

responsive measures. We were not awakened by the provocation of dashnaks. We were dead to the world. Well done! How wise we are! Are we awake now?! Absolutely no! We are busy as a bee in founding a new party, publishing a new newspaper and fighting and bickering with one another to occupy a good post!

AND FINALLY... The only influential leader of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev was removed from his post in the Kremlin by Gorbachov. He seemed to be a very miserable and weak politician in comparison to Heydar Aliyev. In that period Azerbaijan was ruled by narrow-minded, inexperienced, casual leaders who even didn't know our language and were not aware of our religion. And since that time tragic days of Azerbaijanis began in Armenia, Daghlig Garabagh and the adjoining regions...

Each time I crossed over the river of Arpachay which was a lovely song of singers, I felt a scream in its song which was difficult to understand. Arpachay has heard that Armenians intend to cut off its head. That's why in the song it sings it cries to the people of Sharur for help. But nobody could help Arpachay in time. The Armenians cut off its head and changed the course of the river.

Oh my pen, please, don't go in detail and don't increase our trouble. Don't put salt in our wound. Change the topic. And don't weary yourself. Promlems are endless. Every dark cloud has a silver lining. Soon or later the history will put everything in order. Trust in it and don't be hopeless for the future.

XVI

OH, THOSE YEARS. The time of my youth that I came to Nakhchivan. Those years a hot campaign has started against the cult and personality of Stalin. In mass media, radio, TV, in daily meetings Stalin was strongly condemned as an unskilful leader, not being even aware of a map, not having an active participation in Great Patriotic War and only revolving around the globe in the office. But Nikita Khrushov was presented as a famous theorist,

genious military leader, erudite in military science, a quick country leader, worldwide politician and praised to the skies. But those critical remarks about Stalin and those praises about Khrushov were not said sincerely by people. There was a sympathy for Stalin in souls of people, Khrushov's shallow and stupid behaviour excited disgust in people. These two things stood face to face.

The film "Our Nikita Sergeyeovich" which was the PRODUCTION OF "MOSFILM" was spoken of. In the columns of the authoritative newspapers of the country "Pravda" and "Izvestiya" that film was presented as a rare pearl and all soviet people were made to watch that film. The instructions were coming from Moscow and Baku children and grown ups must watch that film. One evening we went to an outdoor cinema in the center of Nakhchivan. The heads of offices and enterprises were making the workers watch that genius film in the outdoor cinema. Some minutes after the beginning of the film the spectators one by one started expressing their dissatisfaction and were leaving the hall and condemned those who made them come and watch that film. Seeing such a situation the head of the department of ideology of the Provincial Party Committee sitting next to me lost his temper, called the director of the cinema, insulted him in public and ordered him not to allow anyone to go out until the film ends. But that didn't work as well. The doorkeeper couldn't stop those who wanted to leave the hall, on the contrary he was punched once or twice. Till the end of the film only my two interlocutors and five – ten officials remained who were afraid of high-ranking officials.

The next morning I was at the Provincial Party Committee. The employee of the department of ideology was giving information to Baku about the demonstration of the film "Our Nikita Sergeyeovich" and about the sympathy of the spectators: – The number of spectators in outdoor cinema were two times more than the places in the cinema. As the space was not enough hundreds of spectators were watching the film in standing position

and they climbed the trees around and watching it from there. The spectators were coming up to us and expressing their willingness to watch the film repeatedly. The Provincial Party Committee received hundreds of letters from the spectators on their willingness to watch the film again...”

Of course if they informed about the real situation in outdoor cinema to Central Committee that could make a great problem for the leaders of Provincial Party Committee. So Moscow was informed in the same false manner by Baku.

XVII

I WENT TO NORASHEN REGION WITH THE SECRETARY OF THE IDEOLOGY OF PROVINCIAL PARTY COMMITTEE. The pupils of Aralig secondary school stole Stalin’s broken bust which was in front of storehouse, repaired it and hid it in the banks of Arpachay river. And every day the pupils visited his bust and laid flowers in front of it. The head of the province severely reproached Regional Party Committee secretaries and the members of the Bureau and gave them formal warning for such kind of blunders.

After his return the Second Secretary of the Provincial Committee complained that there exist a lot of problems. On their way home they should visit the village of Garabaghar where a machine-operator wrote a letter to Khrushov and disgraced him. That nonsense letter is under a special surveillance and sent to us for further investigation. I took the letter and began to read it in the car: “Comrade Khrushov! I can’t even call you a comrade. You don’t deserve this post. It is a shame for the leader of such a major power to ride an elephant in India and expose himself to ridicule. You can’t rule the country, since you stood as the head of the state our country proclaimed it to be lagging behind. The discipline and the rules in the country have been weakened. Party and government have lost respect. Injustice is widespread across the country, as

a collective-farmer I can't bear it. My heart is breaking. Maybe people around you are afraid of telling you your mistakes to your face. I ask you to receive me in your office. If I can't prove what I have written to you, make them cut off my head....”

I read the letter till the end and returned it. The secretary said that he was not sure of the existence of such a person. Maybe someone has written his name under the letter. I shared his view point. We turned to the village of Garabaghar. We sat in the office of the collective-farm and began to investigate the case. They found that machine-operator. He was about thirty years old. The secretary first tried to persuade him:

– I have heard a lot about you. You are a brave man. As a leading person in the village you have been awarded the order and medal. The chairman of the collective-farm and the chairman of the party committee speak of you in high terms. But someone has sent a foolish letter to Khrushov on your behalf. But I don't believe such a hard-working, brave person as you could behave in such a dishonest way. It seems a swindler on behalf of you has written this letter. Take a sheet of paper and write an explanation. Write that you have never sent a letter to Khrushov.

The machine-operator said to the secretary with restraint:

– Show the letter to me, please.

The secretary opened the file in front of him and handled the letter to him and said:

– Here you are.

The machine-operator glanced over the letter and said to secretary angrily:

– Please, don't persuade me. That is my handwriting. That letter was written by me. I keep my word...

The chairman of the collective -farm interrupted the conversation and tried to persuade the machine-operator. The secretary tried to reprimand the author of the letter. The Secretary of the Provincial Committee tried to persuade the machine-operator.

But all their efforts were in vain. The machine-operator said persistently:

– I have written the letter and I will keep my word I want Khrushov to receive me. If I can't prove what I have written let him cut off my head.

The machine-operator was persistent in his view point. The secretary lost his temper.

– If it was Stalin's time, you would disappear without leaving a trace.

– Stalin was a man I would never write such a letter to.

– Stalin was not a man, he was a butcher. He sent the innocent people to Siberia and killed them. Do you know how many innocent people only from the region of Norashen have been killed?! The secretary began to talk as a party leader. And the machine-operator's answer was:

– You are not right, comrade secretary, Stalin was the leader between the sunrise and sunset. He said that scoundrel people should be killed and then people could breathe easily. And the leaders like you sacrificed not only guilty but innocent people as well. And Stalin's good name was stained. Let's be frank, did Stalin know Norashen? Stalin is not my relative but he was a genius. He could make laws function, peace and stability reign in the country. But Khrushov in America in the meeting of the United Nations took off his shoes and banged on the table. When I heard it and I felt shy and said to myself: Such a master such a servant. We stood unlucky when Khrushov stood as the head of the country.

– OK, I see you go too far, you may have a serious problem. If you insist that you have written this letter, ok, we will investigate it. Khrushov has no time to receive every machine-operator as you are. This is the answer to your letter. Now, you are free, you may go – the secretary said angrily.

The chairman of the collective farm forced him out from the office making him shut his mouth. They prepared a certificate

with the signatures of the chairman of the collective-farm and the chairman of the Party Committee that there was not a person with that name and surname living in the village of Garabaghlar.

XVIII

... SOME DAYS PASSED and I got an instruction from the editorial office that I had to prepare a leading article with the signature of one of the distinguished persons on the cult and personality of Stalin. The leading people of the Provincial Committee have already written about this issue in mass media and they mentioned the following: Stalin was a scoundrel, killing hundreds of innocent people. In the personality of Khrushov we have found a leader like Lenin and so on ...

I MET WITH COLONEL NEMAT KARIMOV WHO WAS A VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE PERSON IN THE FIELD OF MILITARY AND GRADUATED FROM MANY UNIVERSITIES IN THIS FIELD. AFTER HE RETIRED HE IS LEADING A BIG INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISE. Marshal Tolboukhin was amazed by his commanding skill in battle of the Great Patriotic War. Fyodor Ivanovich used to say that the army led by Nemat Karimov can never be defeated. He has always made his country, place of birth honourable and devoted nearly his whole life to the field of military. How the people of Nakhchivan loved this ordinary, brave and decent person! I explained to him the aim of my meeting that as a famous military specialist he had to write a comprehensive article against Stalin and show the harmful aspects of the cult and personality. The colonel had an eagle glance and a convincing speech. He put his hand on his forehead plunged into thought for a while and said:

– First let us talk with you not as government officials but as educated men and ordinary citizens. This conversation should be between us and should not go out of these four walls. I have more experience than you. I have participated in bloody wars. If you want to know my personal view point it is senseless to reproach

the geniuses. It looks like in order to prove the non-existence of the sun to put a black kerchief in front of your eyes. I don't exclude that Stalin has made mistakes. But subjective and wrong arguments are not enough to prove that he is not a historical personality. But a time will come and all these historical truths kept in archives will be opened to the public. Then we will have a fair evaluation of this period. We should take such just measures at this time in order not to be condemned by the forthcoming generation. Stalin was a keystone of the current state system. Khrushov not thinking about the consequences pushed out that stone with his nose and in this way he terribly weakened the moral background of this system. In my understanding this system will collapse without doubt soon or later. Evidently, we will witness those moments. Look, Stalin didn't exchange his son for marshal. But Khrushov sacrifices such a major power in order to take a vengeance on Stalin for his son.

HE PUT HIS CHAIR CLOSE TO ME and said:

One of my general friends knowing the root of this enmity told me about it in detail. As he told me, Khrushov's eldest son Leonid, Stalin's son Vasili, Frunze's son Timour studied at military aviation school before the second world war. The children of high ranking officials behaved badly. Hearing about it Stalin called his son to the Kremlin and gave him a good lesson for his bad behaviour, even whipped him with a belt.

Stalin's punishment made Vasili avoid bad behaviour from then on. But Khrushov treated his son under the principle as Mirza Alakbar Sabir said –don't say anything to my son he is a child. His son went on spending an idle life. When Stalin's and Frunze's sons finished aviation school they had the rank of lieutenant but Khrushov's son had a senior lieutenants rank. When the Great Patriotic War began, in one of the night battles Frunze's son shot four aircraft of the fascists down and he himself was killed. Vasili Stalin has gained victory over fascist aircraft several times. But Leonid Khrushov was as drunk as

a lord in one of the autumn days in 1941. He persuaded one soldier and put a glass on his head and fired at it, but instead of the glass he shot at his forehead. Nikita Sergeevich Khrushov hearing that was very worried and came to Stalin for help and said:

– Iossif Vissarianovich, I have come to you not as a state leader but as an ordinary father to an ordinary father. And he told him everything.

Stalin said:

– What your son has done is very bad. But we should pronounce a wise judgement. Do you know whom your son has killed?

– No, I was not interested in knowing, – answered Khrushov.

– That's very bad too. The father of the soldier that your son Leonid shot was killed in the Finnish war. His mother remained alone. What we should do and ask from her. As Leonid is dear to you, her son is dear to her as well. If she forgives the killer of her son, then we can find the way out somehow.

Of course, a mother would never forgive the killer of her son. So, Leonid stood before tribunal, lost his rank and became an ordinary soldier and was sent to penal battalion.

In one of the battles he was taken prisoner. As soon as he was captured he promised to serve German fascists as they wished but on the condition to live there with privilege. They organized a very comfortable condition. And he was bound to do his best for the favour. By the instructions of German officers he was sitting in a special loud-speaker automobile and alongside the front was shouting that he was the son of the member of the council of war, member of politbureau Nikita Khrushov. I know everything exactly. We have already lost the war. I address my Russian compatriots to yield themselves prisoner. You don't need to be persistent and die in vain. Still is not late behave like me and yield yourselves prisoner.

Colonel's eyes became serious:

Certainly, – he said, – apart from rendering considerable costs to our fighters, such counterpropaganda at the outbreak of war was also shattering the morale amongst soldiers. The news of this treacherous act of SPOON-FED Leonid was instantly delivered to Stalin. At that time, partisan regiments were wide-spread in Belorussia. There were regions lapped in woods unfooted by fascists and heavily protected by partisans. The rules and laws of the Soviet government remained intact in those areas. A leader of one of those partisan regiments, Dmitry Matveyevich Korkin received an order from Stalin to kidnap Leonid Khrushov from the fascists by all means and silence his dangerous shrieks... With great difficulty, the partisans managed to kidnap Leonid, who was used to living in clover and took up treachery and betrayal at such a hard time. Stalin was informed of the successful end of the mission. The Politburo was having a meeting when the radiogram was delivered to Stalin. Stalin glanced at the text and read it to those present in the meeting. Members of the Politburo unanimously agreed to remand Leonid for court-martial so that he would be punished in accordance with the law. Commander of the partisan regiment Korkin arranged the implementation of this order. The court sentenced Leonid Khrushov to death for betrayal of motherland. Leonid did not deny his guilt. Thus, Leonid Khrushov was shot there.

Nemat Karimov finished his story:

See, this event marks the beginning of Khrushov's slanders and aspersions against Stalin aimed at discrediting, defacing and shrouding him in the stained pages of history. That friend of mine, the general, with whom I was quite close, persuaded me using facts and evidences that after this event, Khrushov himself took up acts of treachery in several military operations. Using his authority as a member of the Military Council, he succeeded in blocking Vatyutin's plan for defence of Kharkov. Kharkov's surrender is a result of Khrushov's sophisticated approach. (I also read those same words of colonel in a letter by the

Professor Roman Hovoseletsky, published in the edition №166 (1293) of the *Rabochaya Tribuna* in September 20, 1995).

Karimov summarized his words:

– Therefore, I find it difficult to express an opinion about Stalin based on the judgement of Khrushov and his errandboys. There are some facts, which are impossible to reveal today, but which will sooner or later be revealed as time passes. Hence, those, who nowadays have resigned to emotions and prate endlessly for various causes, must understand that tomorrow it could be them or their children facing heavy criticism and reprimand. Also, – he added, – there is no totally good or bad person in life. We have been created from the half-dark, half-bright existence of nature. Every person has both noble and ignoble features. We can choose to highlight solely his decent features and exalt him to the skies or discredit him by underlining some of his mistakes. However, those holding such a preconceived and biased position will sooner or later find themselves tumbling down the sewage of disgrace, too. I think, giving anyone a proper assessment takes objective weighing of their good and evil deeds. Then we can see which of those deeds weighs heavier, otherwise... I am not excluding the possibility that Stalin committed some mistakes, irrespective of whether or not they were committed willingly or unwillingly, intentionally or unintentionally. Yet, my conclusion is that Stalin's mistakes look like a drop in a bucket when comparing them to his merits. And I would say that there has been nobody in Russian history, who organized Russia, yes, exactly Russia – the colonel repeated, – and raised her to the level of the world's super states. It is stupid to deny or not to recognize it. The time will come, when Russians themselves will taste the bitter results of this attitude.

XIX

AT THIS POINT, I REMEMBERED AN EPISODE FROM HISTORY, let me tell it while I am on the subject, – the colonel continued his story. – In one of his meetings with Spartacus, Marcus Crassas looked admiringly at this legendary hero and said: – What a dignified warrior you are. Yet, sadly, you a Thracian! I wish, your mother would bear you as an Italian. – Karimov smiled. – What can Stalin do if his mother bore him to this world as a Georgian? That is why today they are not letting even the spirit of this Caucasian man rest in peace...

I knew which tunes the resigned colonel was hinting at. Thus, he refused to write an article against Stalin. Arguing with him was futile. Our conversation ended at that point.

XX

As the countless caravans of stars gazing at me were twinkling in the depths of skies, the memories I had left in the ancient land harboring the As- Habi -Kaf Pilgrimage were starting to flare one after another. Now and then I was hearing the native echoes from beyond. This voice was the first gurgle of my children born in the land of Ajami, which was the symphony of happiness for me. This infant prattling separated me from the world of memories and cast me into the land of sweet dreams. However, my memories would not let me take a nap and I would often shiver and open my eyes. The stars watching me for a while were getting scarcer thus uncovering the glimmer of the full moon. A piece of white, sparse cloud on top of the Ilan (snake-trans.) Mountain watching over the land was joining the darkness of the night and leaving the place inconspicuously for somewhere else. Reminding myself of the long road awaiting me, I got up from the soft and comfortable bed and dressed tightly. As I did not wait for the morning tea, they gave us some bread, food and fruits to take for the road.

The driver woken without getting enough sleep sat behind the wheel of the Volga car rubbing his eyes...

We passed the Pushkin Street and stopped for a moment in front of a building marked ninety two, which was built of pink tuff stone of Iravan. The three-floor building, where I spent ten years of my youth... How many friends and acquaintances I have exchanged glances with and greeted smiling from that tiny balcony and that large, bright window... Some of them stealthily... I have waved from that window to my children going to school holding their bags in their hands. How many essays, feuilletons, small and large articles have I written in my room in that building with windows opening to the Ilan Mountain. Farewell, the comfortable room with my desk, in front of which I was bending, kneeling and blinking for ten years! My unforgettable shack stretching at times its magical wings in the solitude of night, transgressing mountains, hills and joining me in my sweet dreams!

MY SHACK, seeing you here reminded me of an event I once faced, when I was still with my Nakhchivan, and it once again flared up the burning in my heart.

MY ABEYANT SHACK! I do not intend to fling a stone and hide. The reader would not forgive me that, either. You would wonder what that event was about?! Let me dissipate this unrest filled with doubt by retelling that event as well using the language of lines:

I had somehow managed to complete the text in front of me. Even my pen was already tired and stuck unable to move further. I looked at the clock. The working hours had long finished. I went to the balcony of my flat on the second floor of the building. The gentle voice of music seeping through the neighbouring room enchanted me. It was Bulbul's (a famous Azerbaijani Singer – **trans.**) voice. He was singing the "Goy Gol" song by a friend of mine, the composer Suleiman Alasgarov. A man thinking only about himself, caring only for himself can become

a distinguished scientist, philosopher, scholar or a composer, but cannot become a true, mature person. Suleiman is a man, who would come to help his friends and associates and support his relatives in the time of need. His “Goy Gol” song took me on its wings and flew far away, far-far away. The high and low peaks of Abragunis and Bananyar were hardly visible in the edges of Nakhchivan plains, as well as the magnificence of the topless Ilan Mountain. I was feeling comfort and ease soothing down my body while walking through this ancient land with my exhausted eyes.

I heard the ring of my white and flat telephone resting on the desk. Ah! My phone delivering the happy and unhappy news to this room from a far and near! My phone capable of raising the mood and disappointing! I answered:

– Hello! How are you, compatriot?! Probably writing again.
– It was my friend Assad Assadov, head of the Central Committee Group of Lecturers. – If you have time, come to the park, let’s meet and talk. I have got a couple of important things to tell you – he added.

I changed my clothes and started towards the city center. I met Assad at the entrance of the city park. After greeting him, my colloquist said:

– I arrived from Baku two days ago, we have some work; we should prepare a reference for Moscow on the course of ideological commitments. Today I have spent the whole day in the office and I want to breathe some fresh air now. I have bought train tickets and I must return to Baku tonight. If you don’t have something important to do, let’s take a walk for a while, I still have time...

ASSAD MUALLIM was a simple, sincere and considerate scientist and respected me as his compatriot. He would speak only the good things about me whenever asked. The arrogance and claims of superiority characteristic of some leading party members were alien to his character. We walked towards the

quiet spot near the park talking. We could see the glimmering mirror of Edilagha Lake and waters of Araz curving and straightening like a broken string on the plains between Nakhchivan and Iran. My colloquist was contemplating the picture and asking me some ambiguous questions during the conversation. Suddenly, he stopped walking, looked at my face and asked with a steady and reprimanding voice:

– Ok, haven't you made a conclusion for yourself after the events of the past?! – He rebuked me in friendly way. – What a mess have you caused again?!

Assad Assadov was aware of the things that happened to me many years ago and was hinting at them. At that time I was about twenty five. I was working as editor-in-chief of the *Avangard* newspaper published in Gubadli. I was not very experienced in the field of press. Picking up a pen I was never thinking whether someone on the top could dislike the article making me taste the bitter result thereof or I could anger the small shah of the region. The only thing I cared about was writing the truth and finding a way into the heart of the reader, that's it! It would often cost me dearly... Finally, the district committee's secretary stuck his heels in that two bears don't go in the same den, either you, or I can stay in this district!! The decision was made to release me from the post of editor-in-chief... When the issue grew spiraling out of control, the Central Committee of the Republic stepped in. As I was right, the Central Committee revoked the District Committee's decision and returned me to my post...

Eh!!! STRUGGLES, UNNECESSARY DISPUTES, CALLED AND UNCALLED FOR CONTROVERSIES RUINING A HUMAN LIFE... My return to the position blew away the District Committee Secretaries. People started gossiping that a young and inexperienced editor pinned the powerful district committee secretary to th ground... Passions escalated again... Swords and shields were brought into play... The Central Committee seeing our incapacity to come to terms took into consideration

my righteousness and relocated me to the *Communist* newspaper. From there, I was sent to Nakhchivan...

Assad muallim was aware of all these. He was hinting at that scandal by asking “why haven’t you made a conclusion for yourself after those events?!” He was trying to show that he cared about me and wanted to know why my pen is not still after the Gubadli events. I should swim with the tide. I should be like all the other correspondents. If I don’t want any problems, I should do what the others tell me to do. I should pander to their taste. Do I really think I am the only one to care about all the evils of this world?!

I was startled when Assad muallim asked “What a mess have you caused again?!” I did not know what my interlocutor was trying to say with this. My thoughts wandered in different directions. I was silent for a moment unable to find words.

HE CAST A CONCERNED LOOK AT ME AND SAID:

– You know, I hold a responsible position, I am not supposed to say such things anyway. True, we also speak about the freedom of press and freedom of expression, but nobody supports anybody in a tough time. That case was exceptional; they led you out of that mud while you were editor-in-chief. Also, forget about the district, here you are in a region. Those personalities in the Central Committee, they are no longer there, people are getting more and more degenerative with time. Especially in our party structure. Now nobody reads anybody’s reference. If you stick, you will hardly get out. Do not saw off the bough of the tree on which you are sitting. You should try and find a common language with them. Otherwise they can smudge you. I see, you are young, you don’t have a lifetime of experience, you don’t know a lot of things. I have seen troubles, and I have undergone them, too... I am saying all of these for your good. Be careful with what you write. My friend, who was much older than me, became grieved:

– As I have heard, recently there were again some unpleasant talks about you in the Bureau of Regional Party Committee. Is it true?! – He asked.

– Yes, you have heard correctly, such a thing happened, – I answered and retold the story in details considering his interest: There was a Bureau meeting with participation of the Central Committee Secretary Ali Amirov. The tension arising in the agriculture was being discussed. Ministers, secretaries of district committees and other people holding leading positions were invited as well. During the discussions, one of the district party committee secretaries took the floor. After speaking briefly about the general situation and steps taken and to be taken to make things better, he turned to the Secretary of the Central Committee sitting in the working group:

– Ali Jabbarovich, I would like to mention another important issue using the opportunity of your presence here as the Secretary of the Central Committee. The *Communist* newspaper in Nakhchivan is considered a personal property of Ali Ildirimoghlu, not the Central Committee and does not hold itself answerable to anybody. It criticizes whatever it wills! I would not even call it a criticism, I would call it an insult!! I am in the Bureau here, I should speak openly! Recently the newspaper again fired criticism at our region. Those points mentioned therein are mostly lies, bluffs! There were such sentences used about me that I could not go out to walk among people for three-four days from shame. I am the first secretary, a deputy, a member of the Regional Party Committee’s Bureau!..Please, I am pleading you! Put an end to such freewill behaviour of a press representative!

The oldest of everybody in the meeting and having trouble with hearing, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet added from his seat:

– Pravilno! (Correct – in Russian – **trans.**)

Pravilno! – supporting the speaker.

Another speaker, a member of the Bureau of the Regional Party Committee repeated the same things and expressed his objection to my critical writing. He insisted on the Secretary of

the Central Committee to be involved in this issue and take drastic measures regarding me.

A BREAK WAS ANNOUNCED. In fifteen minutes, the Bureau continued its meeting. The chairs of the Republican Prosecutor and Minister of Justice, who were sitting in the same row with me and some other high-ranking officials sitting behind me were now empty... The people of “today” acting “vigilantly” cautious of the possible trouble I would face after all these attacks had changed their seats... A “fellow” correspondent working for the republican press, with whom I used to be very close and who was sitting right beside me at the beginning of the meeting sent a message to me saying – I have strong headache, I feel bad, I am going – and was gone. The glances that were friendly only few minutes ago had become alien...

DISCUSSIONS STARTED AGAIN. Taking into account the presence of the Secretary of the Central Committee, the confidant speakers were given floor in accordance with the list carefully weighed in advance. The name of the local Minister of Industry was not in that list. Even after raising his hand several times and insisting on speaking, he was given the floor. When the Minister stood up and walked calmly and unhurriedly towards the tribune, there was uneasiness among the working staff. Members of the Bureau were glancing at each other worriedly and thinking – where did “he” appear from! Again he will say something thorny to spoil our mood!

There was only one reason for this uneasiness. Everybody knew that this Minister is not a kind of man to take into account the current state of affairs, hold the pulse of the mighty officials and utter the fake or praiseful words they would approve of. He would speak only his mind. Therefore, he was not an effective man for those at the top. If it was another time, no problem, let him say whatever he wants. Right now, we have the Secretary of the Central Committee sitting here.

The Minister, however, had taken into consideration what the people were thinking about. He spoke about the general situation, expressed some suggestions and said at the end of his speech:

– Ali Jabbarovich, I would like to express my opinion regarding one issue. I am among the people allocated by the Regional Committee to the regions to be involved in the course of agricultural measures. In this sense, the recent criticism of the special correspondent concerns exactly me. However, this is not a reason for me to use the opportunity to express biased opinions aimed at disgracing that correspondent. I am asking the comrades, who have been accusing from this chair that newspaper and its representative: – which part of his writing is a lie?!

He stopped his speech in order to get an answer to his question and looked at the hall. Nobody spoke. The Minister shook his head:

– I think, attempting to build a false opinion about a newspaper and its employee instead of realizing our mistakes and trying to redeem our misdeeds is, at least, shameful for us.

The Minister's challenging of those disputing officiously the newspaper and its employee did not please those sitting in the working committee at all. Some even turned their faces away and frowned.

... FINALLY THE FIRST SECRETARY OF THE REGIONAL PARTY COMMITTEE SUMMARIZED THE DISCUSSIONS. He characterized the accusations against my article as inability of some high-ranking officials to draw a right conclusion from the critic.

– Okay, how did Ali Jabbarovich respond to that issue then?
– Assadov asked.

– As I have heard, he criticized the secretaries of the REGIONAL PARTY COMMITTEE for having allowed such attacks against a newspaper review. Even during a break he said: I cannot understand, whether you are discussing your

shortcomings worrying the Central Committee, or a newspaper that reveals your mistakes?! Or the activity of its correspondent?!

– Are you closely acquainted with Ali Amirov? – Assadov asked.

– No, only from a distance, I know him as the Secretary of the Central Committee. I have not had any business with him – I replied.

– But Ali Jabbarovich has a certain view of you – my interlocutor said. – You have caused some trouble to his relatives living here. Intentionally, or unintentionally, you have written a feuilleton about his close relative, who is the district secretary, is this true?

– True, such a thing did happen. How do you know all of these? – I asked. – Yet, I am not aware that they are relatives.

Assadov said:

– I live in the same building with Ali Amirov. We are next door neighbors with him. It is located a little downhill from the New Europe Hotel, in an old building towards the sea. We visit each other; he is a quite simple, sincere and unbiased person, as well as a very good neighbour. One evening we were drinking tea and talking together in his place. That secretary relative of his, about whom you wrote a feuilleton, entered the room together with his wife. Ali Jabbarovich greeted them respectfully. After some time, Ali Jabbarovich asked his guests: – What’s the reason for such a late visit?! Maybe you have something to say, or need something...

The secretary whom you criticized mentioned your name first. He said, a special correspondent of the *Communist* wrote about me a feuilleton by somebody’s order. It is filled with lies and slanders. Therefore, they want to smudge me now using the feuilleton. We came here to see if we can get some help...

Assadov lit a cigarette and said with surprise:

– I would never think Ali Jabbarovich is that kind of a person. Such a simple man, he got suddenly very angry. He said straight-forwardly to his relatives:

– It seems, you have come to the wrong place. This is not the Central Committee, this is my personal home and such governmental issues are not solved at my table. The newspaper is a press authority expressing the opinion of the Central Committee and if it has revealed such mistakes of yours and made them public, we should thank its correspondent. As to your words that they are all a lie, this is your personal opinion. If you truly consider yourself to be right and are totally sure of this, you will prove it in the course of a control. Besides, if either you or any of my other close and distant relatives allow such freewill acts relying on me as the Secretary of the Central Committee, this is disrespect to me apart from anything else. My relatives wishing to display their respect to me should be more ethical and simple in their actions and obey the laws and rules more than anybody else...

Ali Jabbarovich's last word to them was this: – You are welcome in my house as a guest, but do not involve me in such government matters... You will be personally responsible for your own faults!

My interlocutor took a step towards me and said:

– Look, I know Ali Amirov's opinion about you from those conversations. After that article of yours, that regional secretary was fired both from his position and the Party. It seems that the incident has not caused Ali Amirov's spite against you. Unfortunately, the number of such high-ranking officials not letting their personal emotions cloud their judgment is quite scarce. If it was not for that, he could have flamed the Bureau's attacks against you. This would have put an end to your career. Yet, you see the nobility in him!

My interlocutor finished his word and held my arm:

I am tired of standing, – he said. – Let's go and sit on a clean chair there. Such things happen in life.

After speaking to me for a long time, he said:

– I don't want to spoil your mood. Your situation is not good again. People above have raised an issue about you. However,

this conversation must remain between us. Are you aware that your editor is supposed to come here because of your issue?

– No, I am not. – I replied.

– I cannot believe, hasn't anyone from the editorship or the District Party Committee told you anything about it?!

I was morally shaken:

– I guess, they are hiding this from me considering the measure they take will not be for my good – I said.

– What about your relationships with this new editor? Aghababa Rzayev. – He asked.

– They've appointed him as our editor only a few months ago, – I replied. He has not invited correspondents to meet him yet. I know him only from a distance.

– I also know him. Yet, I do not know what kind of a person he really is. They say, those brothers are quite brave. As far as I know, Rzayev began his press career as a courier and corrector in a publishing house. I have even come across an article about him in a Moscow press. It was written by Ilya Shotunovski, head of a department in *Pravda*. According to the article, Rzayev was an active participant of the Great Patriotic War. He participated in liberation of Berlin. He inscribed his autograph on the columns of Reichstag.

Seeing my dispirited mood, my interlocutor added:

– Such events are not so uncommon in life, my friend. There is no meaning in getting angry. A man is supposed to be in a fight all the time. – He smiled and asked: – Or you were expecting a reward from those you have criticized and wrote feuilletons about you?! Hah! This is a very erroneous position. I was together with Belov, the second secretary of the District Party Committee this evening. He does not know of my acquaintance with you. Our conversation went in such a direction that he told me some things related to the arrival of your editor tomorrow. If I have already started talking about it, let me finish it, so that you are aware of the situation and know how to act in advance. But,

I must repeat, this conversation must stay between you and me. Be vigilant, they are a large group of people. They are all interconnected. And they don't want to see you at all. Because you are not swimming with them in the same tide, you are always by yourself. Besides, you punch whenever there is a chance. That's why they do not trust you. They are trying very hard to slander you and get rid of you. You are lucky that they have not found anything wrong about you. They cannot find a reasonable fact. I touched Belov in the raw; he opened up and told me everything. Apparently, someone wrote an anonymous letter about you to the Central Committee a month ago.

My companion knitted his brows:

Also, it is quite strange, the letter was not forwarded to the ideological department, but instead to the Party Authorities Department, – he said. Probably, there is some other knot in this whole issue as well. The head of the Party Authorities Department delivered the letter directly to the second secretary of the Central Committee Yelistratov. The latter forwarded the letter to the inspector of Party Authorities Department. This in itself is unexplainable. It causes suspicion. Why a letter about a correspondent was not sent to the ideological department or the editor-in-chief?! As I am in the Central Committee apparatus myself, I am aware of certain things. All employees of the Party Authorities Department are in their hands led by the head of that very department. In short, the inspector called his “friends” here. When you were in another region, he arrived here from Baku. Apparently, they thought if you are here, you can cause some problems for the investigation. The inspector took all measures in order to prove the facts indicated in the anonymous letter. He truly did his very best. Yet, he failed to find anything grounded.

After the inspector gave this up as a lost cause, he informed the Central Committee that ostensibly all the facts mentioned in the letter are true, but the correspondent's authority in the region does not let him prove it. This way, the head of the Party

Authorities Department and the inspector manage to persuade Yelistratov that the content of the letter is true. In turn, Yelistratov called your new editor Aghababa Rzayev to meet him and charged him to come to Nakhchivan immediately. There are some bad discussions about your current correspondent there. Even the District Party Committee is unhappy with him. We should put an end to this issue once and for all. You should either relocate the correspondent to another area, or fire him. Belov said he has met Yelistratov in person as well. We have decided to be resolute about this issue. The correspondent should leave this place, that's it! It appears from Belov's words that they have even found you a replacement here. Associate editor of the *Sharg Gapisi* newspaper has already passed the interview. They want to appoint him as a correspondent to replace you.

My interlocutor summarized his words:

– Now you know what the situation is like and why the editor-in-chief is coming tomorrow – he said and added. – As a matter of fact, I am not supposed to tell you any of this. The position I am holding does not allow this, either. However, we are compatriots; also, I see they have singled you out. Therefore I want to fulfill my duty of conscience and let you know of the situation...

My mood was spoiled. I was dumbstruck, did not speak for a long time. Then I pulled myself together. I was feeling there was certain discontent about me. However, I did not know the matter was escalated so strongly. Now everything was quite clear for me.

I thought to myself: – Tomorrow my issue will be solved. Yet, I am not aware of this?! How should I comprehend editor's visit?! Maybe it would be better to go to some region, where I have worked before! What then?! Several months ago a friendly caricature about me was placed in the editorial stand paper and a colleague at work, Zakir Suleimanov famous for his satirical pen even published a small poem under that picture:

I AM A YOUNG CORRESPONDENT, ALI IS MY NAME, SOMETIMES I WRITE SERIOUSLY, SOMETIMES AMUSINGLY.

Now, I am suffering for my serious articles. The amusing part is that nobody from the editorship and the district committee said a word to me about any of this.

Different suspicions arose in my head. I called an employee of the editorship and asked if the editor was supposed to come the next day or not...

XXI

THE BAKU IRAVAN TRAIN reached the Nakhchivan railroad station approximately between four and five a.m. Taking into account norms of ethics, I went to meet the editor in a car of one of my minister friends. The head of the District Party Committee's Propagation and Agitation Department and his deputy Armenak Saahakyan had left for the railroad station before me to meet the guest. Both of them were aware of what was in front of me the next day. Therefore, my meeting with them was as chilly as the frost of a March morning. This did not surprise me. I was disappointed inside. Besides, how else would they treat a man to be fired sooner or later and shown the door in this world of ours, where a man is only regarded in accordance with his position and status?! Armenak Saahakyan seemed quite optimistic in the twilight of the morning. It was as if he had wings grown. He took a few steps towards me and said reluctantly:

– Your editor should be in the fifth carriage. However, we do not know him by face. It is good that that you came, you will show him to us.

– Then why didn't you tell me, we could have come together...

The deputy shrugged his shoulders and bent his neck as if to display his helplessness in revealing a secret. It was not difficult to understand him. He wanted to say, look, but who are we?! The ones on the top have decided so.

The train approached the platform rubbing the iron rails. The three of us were standing in front of the fifth carriage and looking at the passengers getting off the train carefully. Dressed in grayish raincoat and holding a folder in his arms, Aghababa Rzayev descended briskly from the steps of the carriage. We approached him and greeted him. I acquainted the editor with the responsible officials of the District Party Committee. We turned towards the station square together. I stopped when we reached the car park, turned to the editor and said officially:

– Comrade Rzayev, we have arrived in different cars not knowing of one another’s arrival. That new black Volga car on the left is from the District Party Committee; these comrades arrived in another car. I came in the blue car on the right. It is the Volga, belonging to an acquaintance of mine. Now, you can decide, we can go in any of those cars.

The editor asked:

– Which one is the car in which you arrived?

I showed him the blue Volga on the right. Aghababa Rzayev turned to the officials having arrived to meet him, shook hands with the head of the department and his deputy and thanked them:

– Thank you, you have gone to lots of trouble. Please, go, do your jobs. I will go with Ali muallim. – He grabbed my arm softly.

We departed from them and sat in the car that brought me there.

IT WAS DAWN. There was almost nobody in the streets of Nakhchivan. None of us was speaking. The driver was turning the car to the left and right without uttering a word or taking his eyes off from the road. When reaching the central street of the city, I broke the heavy silence in the car and said with the same official tone:

– Comrade Rzayev, a special room has been allocated for you in the guest house of the District Party Committee. Yet, there are also other people staying there, also it is a wooden Finnish house

and is not that comfortable or convenient. Taking this into account, I have reserved for you a room in the newly constructed city hotel. Which one do you prefer?...

– Let's go where you had intended me to stay, the editor replied.

The editor-in-chief stayed not in the special guest room allocated for him by the District Party Committee, but in the new hotel in front of the city resort park...

– Good night! – I said and left.

... In the morning, I returned to the city hotel again. I went upstairs, to the second floor, knocked on the guest's door and entered. Someone else's voice was also heard from the back room. The editor was talking to somebody. I was surprised, as I had left him alone in the hotel just a few hours ago. In the big mirror I saw a head of a stranger with his face turned away. I recognized him from his neck. It was the inspector of the Central Committee constantly unhappy with me. They were discussing something standing face to face. It was easy to understand what they were talking about catching certain words. The inspector took the opportunity to prejudice the editor:

– Aghababa Samadovich, I am inside the case, I know this. Last time it was also me checking out that anonymous letter about him. I swear to my communist conscience, majority of the facts are correct. Yet, you don't know, how people fear him here! That's why nobody wants to speak the truth and put himself into trouble. Besides, irrespective of whether or not the facts are confirmed, it has nothing to do with the matter in hand. We should take into account the opinion of the District Party Committee in this issue. The Central Committee does not have a good opinion about him, either. My good man, what do you care! Why would you have Pyotr Matveyevich or Belov put you into trouble! You are a clever man! If they are insisting on this, either change his area, or fire him once and for all. Then this dispute would end forever. As if there is a lack of correspondents. We

have selected someone here, he is an honest fellow. He works as the deputy editor-in-chief of the *Sharg Gapsi* newspaper. The regional committee has made their choice in him. It would be good if you would sign his order right here, let him start working...

Aghababa Rzayev was standing and listening to him while combing his silver hair. He interrupted the employee of the Central Committee and entered the dining room where I was standing, the inspector followed him. The inspector was startled when seeing me and turned a bit pale. However, he tried not to show it, came up to me smiling, rubbed his face onto mine and took me by the arm:

– Welcome! Welcome! You are also here?! – He said and added. – Aghababa Samadovich, I have a deep respect for this man himself, as well as his pen. He is a very gentle person. I am following his article attentively. I like them very much, he writes straight to the point. We need that a lot. A true correspondent should not fear anything... Bravo! Bravo! You have found a right position regarding the Central Committee. True, some people are unhappy with him here, but let them be, you do whatever you want to do! Clearly, nobody likes criticism.

The editor lit a cigarette, bent down and took something from his folder on the desk, straightened himself and said as if not hearing the inspector's words:

– I would like to drink tea.

– Comrade Rzayev, the restaurant opens after ten o'clock. The buffet is also not open yet, – I said and added hesitantly: – Honestly, I am unable to invite you to my home because of the known reasons. If you do not mind, I will have some food prepared and bring it here.

The editor looked at me with surprise and said:

– For the first time ever I hear a host speaking to a guest so indistinctly. In fact, we would not want to trouble you, either. However, in case the hotel lacks the proper conveniences now, why wouldn't we go and drink a cup of tea at your place?

Inspector saw the sincerity of editor's words and changed his attitude. He turned to the editor thus turning his back to me and whispered in Russian:

– Aghababa Samadovich, under such circumstances, neither our visit to his home, nor his bringing tea and food to us is appropriate. You know this... Then they will make a rumor out of this, too! Better if we go to the Regional Committee and find something there.

Aghababa Rzayev put out his cigarette in the ashtray on the table without expressing an opinion about these words, started towards the coat hanger, put on his gray raincoat, started buttoning it and said to the inspector:

– You go and wait at the Regional Committee. I will drink a cup of tea with Ali muallim and then come back.

This was unexpected for the inspector and spoiled his mood. The inspector gulped and his speech became incoherent, whatever he was trying to say. The editor slammed the door disappointedly, left the room and said to himself:

– I wish your Belov, and your Yelistratov... and you... Ringing in my ears from morning...

A car was awaiting us in the hotel yard. Aghababa Rzayev asked:

– How far is it from here to your place?

– Three to four hundred meters.

– Then we don't need a car, let's walk and breathe some fresh air.

When passing in front of the Regional Prosecutor's Office, we saw a tall, young boy standing in the opposite side of the road and looking at us stunned. The way he was standing and the concerned look in his eyes made him look like someone whose dear person was going to be executed, but whom he was unable to help. The editor asked who he was.

– He is Fataliyev, – I said. He is a former KGB officer, currently working at the Prosecutor's Office.

– Are you close to him?

– Yes, I am, – I said.

We did not speak during the rest of the walk. The editor did not say a word about the purpose of his visit. I did not ask him anything. We climbed to the third floor of the building number ninety two in the Pushkin Street. My wife had prepared the breakfast table. We ate and stood up.

I went to the other room and told to my wife to prepare something for lunch just in case.

Worried even more than me since yesterday, with her hands on her heart, my wife asked despondently:

– Is he the editor of your newspaper?

– Yes, our new editor Aghababa Rzayev is this man – I replied.
– Why?

– Nothing, I am just saying what a simple man he is.

When a man has a rough period, it is his heart that suffers the most, also his faithful woman.

XXII

We walked towards the Regional Party Committee. After some time walking, the editor asked:

– I guess, you know why I am here?!

– Nobody has told me anything about it officially. However, I have heard the reason of your visit from some friends, to some extent, – I replied.

– Even though it is our first meeting, I must speak to you openly as a member of our collective, our creative family. There is some unhappiness about you both in the Central Committee and the Regional Party Committee; there are many right, wrong and unpleasant rumors about you. However, I cannot say whether all these rumors are true or not for now. Nevertheless, we will have a detailed conversation about this with the comrades here. I must know everything in advance so that we are not at disadvantage in front of them. That's why tell me the truth, what is your mischief?! What are they caviling about? What grounds

do they have?! Also, please, do not hide anything from me. Anyway, things will be clarified soon...

– Aghababa Samadovich, – I said, – my reply might sound different. – That’s why I am asking for your forgiveness in advance. I am no longer a child. I have said farewell to the school benches a long time ago. I am also capable of managing myself in life. As a journalist, I also understand the delicacies and challenges of my position. Despite being young, life has tested me a lot. I have stumbled, true, but I have not fallen. Finally, my passions are not managing my brain yet. There may be speculations, empty gossips, unfound assumptions about me, but do not even think that I’ve done anything unsuitable for a journalist.

– If that is so, then what is this entire story about?! – Secretary of the Central Committee Yelistratov, head of the Party Authorities Department, responsible organizer and the secretary of the Regional Party Committee Belov are all of a bad opinion about you. If they would have their way, you will have to leave both the party and the position.

– It would be better if you ask this question from those, who create misunderstanding between the editorship and the Central Committee – I replied.

The editor thought for a while:

– Strange, – he said and added: – In any case, there is a reason for all this discontent against you. There is no smoke without fire...

– There might be.

– Look, as the head of our department, I would like to know the core of the situation.

– I am having trouble explaining it, – I said. – Because finding a solution for the existing problems are beyond my capabilities as an individual. The thing is that our regulations and constitution, which we have adopted and consider holy, fail to leave the dusty and age-yellowed books in shelves and influence

anything, thus being replaced by the perspective of the high-ranking officials managing the republic, the region, districts and authorities. If anyone asks me how many laws are in the country where I am living, I would reply without hesitation – as many as the number of officials we have. In short, the laws are not in power in our society, each one of the shahs is a law for himself. It is very difficult for me to adapt to such an environment and to consider the rules each one of them has established in separate, very difficult. See, this is where the disputes arise. This is the core reason you want to know about.

The editor smiled:

– I see you are getting nervous; you don't need to go too deep into this issue. He blinked, retreated into dreams and said:

– But there is certain truth in what you are saying, – he shook his head.

– People's inner worlds are different just like their outer appearances – I said. – Everybody has his own path of creed. I cannot be similar to anybody, or crawl behind anybody like a shadow. Others consider their actions as righteous, but I also have my laws of belief. Who is right? We should identify it through the perspective of society, as the most precise criterion is not the opinion of an individual, but that of majority. Most of the regional and district leaders may be displeased with me. In my turn, I believe their manner of working is wrong. I can say with certainty that when looking at them, society sees the lackeys of a group of people sitting in the center, not the people, who take care of the society. See, this is where our paths separate. Our perspectives start differing. Should we join this group with power or should we fight them?! My consciousness drives me to the second path. Those adhering to the first path can gain the esteem of a minority temporarily, but they are doomed to the eternal hatred of majority.

THE EDITOR SMILED:

– Okay, okay, – he said. – I see you are getting angry. You said your words here; do not speak them anywhere else.

He asked again:

– In short, I would like to know if they have any solid argument against you?!

– Of course, I do not imagine anybody without a fault in life. From this point of view, I am also not without mistakes. Even the geniuses make mistakes. Though, I do not consider myself a genius. Nevertheless, I would never do anything as unpleasant as they have fabricated so that today I could kneel down before anybody or put the head of our department in a deadlock. Besides, even if you rightfully take it as a sign of immodesty from my side, I have to say that after God, there is a mean and cruel supervisor over me. He tracks my every step and questions me every day, every moment as a human being, a child, a parent and a journalist. It calls me to account for my faults and rebukes without mercy. It does not forgive even the faults or mistakes I have made five, ten, twenty years ago. It throws those mistakes to my face repeatedly, even today, escalating my pain.

The surprised editor asked with astonishment:

– Who is that?

– It is me, – I replied. – Yes, I am the one whom I fear the most. While thinking of doing something, my consciousness dictates many times over to me, think very well, will this action of yours please God and his creations?!

Aghababa Rzayev was lost in thoughts, and then said:

– Aren't you being emotional?! I know you, even though not very closely. I have also asked a few colleagues at work, I think, this was uncalled for. Besides, I would be glad if the words you have been saying so nervously find their substantiation in the arguments and discussions awaiting us today...

During the conversation with the editor, maybe I was being emotional, crossing the borders and giving harsh replies unfitting my character to a man, who was my superior? Nooo! It was not me, who was saying those things, it was the ill-disposed wearing angel's robes rising from the nest of evil, catching up with me in

the curves of my life and annoying me sick, who made me say all of these...

XXIII

WE REACHED THE BUILDING OF THE REGIONAL PARTY COMMITTEE. We greeted the dumpy militiaman standing in the queue with curled mustache and stout face and climbed upstairs. The First Secretary Ibrahimov was sitting at the head of the table covered in blue broadcloth in a large and long chair filed with cigarette smoke. When seeing us, he stood up, came to us, greeted us warmly and showed us to a place to sit.

A few minutes later I stood up in order to avoid making them uncomfortable to discuss the known issue and said:

– Please, proceed with your conversation. I have something to do as well, so I will go to the Assistant Secretary Ali Safarov's office. Please, call me if you need me.

They understood perfectly what I wanted to say. Therefore, they expressed their agreement and saw me off.

I left the Secretary of the Regional Party Committee and the editor of the *Communist* free to talk and left the room.

XXIV

ALI SAFAROV WAS AN INTELLIGENT AND OPTIMISTIC PERSON HAVING HELD VARIOUS POSITIONS AND SEEN DIFFERENT FACES OF LIFE. I could always talk easily with him. Another reason why the Assistant Secretary would not move from upstairs down was his righteous speaking and never bowing in front of anybody. He was aware of press affairs. He would always tell me edifying stories. I would never get tired of listening to him. He was taking good care of himself, despite being over sixty. This consistently well-dressed man was a history alive. Seeing me indisposed, he asked boldly:

– Namesake, what's wrong, today you don't look okay again?

I was silent. Ali Safarov's eyes became concerned expressing sympathy with my condition. He said:

– I am more or less aware of the situation. Yesterday, when I was with Belov, he also leaked a word. Your editor's arrival is probably related to that matter. Yet, such a problem is not worth spoil your mood over. Eventually, you will get either Siberia, or the grave, – he joked. Seeing me still frowning, he pulled me towards the window:

– Look there, – he pointed the mountains, valleys and plains in distance.

– The trails of life are also like this, – he said. – Sometimes even, sometimes plain and sometimes rocky. There is such a saying that the path of life is not always plain, sometimes is rocky. Thank God, you are a journalist, you should know such things very well. Besides, I don't see a reason why you should be worried. I know you very well. You would not hurt a fly. I spend a lot of time among people. I do not feel any discontent towards you except for your writing. On the contrary, everybody likes you. If you are an honorable person, let them talk, what does the Moon care if dogs bark at him?!

He paused and asked:

– What kind of a person is your new editor? Do you know him well?

– How can I answer, really, this is a very difficult question. It is quite complicated to trust people these days. They can smile at you, hug you, make a sweet conversation, boast of esteem and allegiance, but as soon as you step aside they stab you in the back and speak all kind of nonsense about you. Nowadays a lifetime is not enough to get to know someone you are close with. It could take two life times. As to the comrade Rzayev, they've sent him to us recently. My first impression of him was not bad. Yet, people are too shifty to be trusted. What can I say about him in advance?!

My reply did not satisfy him. Therefore, I had to add:

– I understand very well what you mean by asking if I know the new editor. Certainly, a lot depends on the personality of a leader. If to particularize this subject, I think, a leader means a person expert, the one who knows the most, as well as someone superior in intelligence to those under his authority. Yet in many cases, the one who knows the least is promoted to lead. This is a tragedy. Especially in a creative collective. I have witnessed such facts more than once, or twice... Sometimes an ignorant incapable of writing a simple article is solemnly assigned to lead a big creative staff. It would be endurable if at least that person had fidelity to his principles, or organizational skills, let alone wielding the pen. During this small life, I have seen many such cases, namesake. One can compare it to a case, when a person unable to prescribe a receipt is appointed as the senior doctor of a hospital. The powerful anchored in the top consider the docile, the meek, the submissive and the slow-witted to suit them. As to the brave... An attempt to achieve justice in such an environment is like drawing a picture in water with a pitchfork.

An ironic smile spread on Ali Safarov's face:

– If the conversation has already begun, let me ask something else as well. Clearly, your paper is the official newspaper of the Central Committee itself. Then why does the responsible organizer employed by the Central Committee join the opposite side and pick on your articles? I know the case inside out, I see everything. He speaks badly about you; I am simply petrified with all of these.

– Your reasoning is strange, – I said. – The Central Committee is a conflicting apparatus serving interests of certain powerful people. What else can be expected from its inspector doing errands for them?!

My companion did not agree fully with my response:

– This is true. However, I would explain it differently, – Ali Safarov hinted at my pocket book and pen on the table, – look

attentively, not a single fly approaches either the pen or the notebook. Yet, all the flies attack the candies and the jam jar.

My interlocutor put his thumb through his large belt, crossed his legs and said:

– Now, namesake, did you understand what I am trying to say? Clear as daylight. This is a simple example. Such is the law of life. A fly seeks a juicy place. The responsible organizer of the Central Committee does not need a man with a notebook and pen. He needs secretaries of Regional Committee, its executive officials, juicy heads of offices shoveling up money? Now you know why the responsible organizer dances their fiddle?

– Yes, I know, – I nodded.

Ali Safarov started swinging on the armchair and said:

– You know, namesake, nowadays the laws about men are mostly reasoned by subjective, not objective reasons. A man is a friend, comrade, brother to a man – our ears ring of hearing these words. Yet, men have turned into wolves and are tearing each other apart. Besides, all these lacerations are led by the authors of that very slogan.

I was deeply in thoughts. I was thinking about the events of today. My ears were with Ali Safarov, but my thoughts were wondering somewhere else. Therefore I was not speaking, just nodding from time to time.

Ali Safarov stood up and started walking behind his table thoughtfully. Then he stopped, turned to me and said:

– Now, namesake, we are just chatting here, let me say that you are also nobody's bargain. You always grab the biggest fish in your articles. You do not reckon with anybody. See, eventually these things lead to such an end...

Ali Safarov came forward, stood right in front of me and said with an expression of restraint in his face:

– Actually, if they approach your case objectively, there is nothing to fear. However, involvement of the big guys in the matter spoils everything. Right now, a lot depends on your editor's position.

I do not think he would like to get into trouble because of you. You are neither a cousin, nor a nephew to Aghababa Rzayev. Nowadays everybody protects his own fly. A brother betrays his brother for a song because of getting a higher position. Therefore, I do not think this issue will be solved in your favour.

Having said this, my companion started calming me down:

– I don't want to spoil your mood, but they have selected another person in your place, – he said. – To my mind, the editor will not throw you out onto the street entirely. He will either replace you or give you some easy job in the editorship. Yet, I don't lay much hope on that either, because both Yelistratov and Belov are standing on his way. Better we find you a job here. I am close with the chairman of the society spreading political scientific knowledge. They even have a vacancy there. The salary is not bad, either. They also pay additional money for the lectures and reports you deliver. It is meaningless to leave your house here and move back to Gubadli again. We can find you a job also in the editorship of radio or television channels here. In the worst case, you can return to your old profession. In fact, there is no better job than that of a teacher... The calmest profession is teaching.

I was just starting to answer him when the young girl standing at the door entered and said to Ali Safarov nervously:

– The secretary calls!

XXV

After I had left the room some time ago, the first secretary of the Regional Party Committee Ibrahimov had changed his seat and was now sitting in front of Aghababa Rzayev. They were drinking tea and speaking about various things. Then they started the official conversation. Aghababa Rzayev asked: – May I smoke? – He took a cigarette:

– I think, you know why I am here? – The editor passed to the point.

The first secretary drew himself back as if to show his lack of interest in the subject and said hesitantly:

– I am aware of the issue more or less, – he blinked and added.
– In fact, I did not want the matter to be exaggerated to such a state. This is Belov’s scenario. Let me call him so that he replies.

The editor said while opening the folder in front of him:

– If I have travelled such a long way and Yelistratov is also interested in the matter, then we should invite not only Belov, but all of the Bureau members here. Maybe they also have something to say regarding this?

The first secretary of the Regional Party Committee agreed with the editor’s proposal. He called his assistant Safarov and assigned him to invite the Bureau members to the room.

... Members of the Bureau were entering the room one by one, greeting us officially, sitting down silently as if having come to solve a very important issue and remaining speechless on their chairs. The first secretary and editor had cast their eyes down. Nobody was speaking. The long and large room was filled with a cold and boring silence. Ibrahimov raised his head from the table and looked at Aghababa Rzayev. The editor moved his head for Ibrahimov to start the discussion. Ibrahimov took a serious expression and said:

– I think, all of you know Aghababa Samadovich as editor of the *Communist* newspaper quite well, – and cast an inspecting glance at the Bureau members.

– Yes! Yes! – The Bureau members replied with a feeling of slight relief.

– The purpose of the comrade Rzayev’s arrival and your invitation here is to clarify one issue; – Ibrahimov started, sipped from the tea still hot in front him and continued: – We have a deep respect for the *Communist* newspaper and its creative collective. I know Aghababa Rzayev for a long time. He is a good man. The thing is that the special correspondent Ali Ildirimoghlu has been serving in this area for almost ten years. There are many rumors about him, some right, some wrong. There is certain discontent among comrades. As you know, some

officials stated their objections to his writing also in a recent Bureau meeting held with participation of the Secretary of the Central Committee Ali Amirov. There are also a lot of letters sent to us regarding the correspondent. I do not remember it precisely, it happened almost a month ago. The responsible organizer of the Central Committee brought a very long letter with Yelistratov's signature on it. The responsible organizer himself is also here. We conducted an inspection for a week. True, the things mentioned in the letter were not confirmed, but the responsible organizer himself is sure that they are true. He has expressed his opinion to the Central Committee as well. Finally, our second secretary Sergey Andreyevich has been to the Central Committee, met comrade Yelistratov and said that the correspondent must decidedly leave this place.

When hearing his name, Belov playing with a pen in his hand looked upwards at the first secretary, who was standing and speaking. Their eyes met and both smiled contentedly. The first secretary continued:

– So, because of all these, comrade Yelistratov has personally sent Aghababa Rzayev here to solve this issue of the correspondent once and for all. Whoever has anything to say in this regard can now speak.

The tension among Bureau members grew even higher. They were sitting speechless just like the big pictures of the leaders hanging on the wall. It seemed as if the accurately framed pictures were following every action of the Bureau members attentively with wise eyes and thinking what will happen today, right now in this long and large office, where destinies of hundreds of people have been resolved. Firstly, Aghababa Rzayev turned to the respectable person sitting at the top and asked:

– May I say just a few words?

– Please, – Ibrahimov gave the floor to the editor.

– So... I have been working as editor only for a few months,

– Aghababa Rzayev began. – That's why I am not closely

acquainted with most of the employees as yet. From this perspective, I don't know Ali Ildirimoghlu, who is serving your region, very well, either. I only know him from his writings. He is a ready writer. – The editor turned to the first secretary and said: – In fact, a correspondent should be judged by his articles, because just like every piece of literature demonstrates a writer's position in life, every essay, feuilleton, or a simple article reveals a journalist's inner self. One day before coming here, I gathered members of my staff and asked opinions of various employees about Ali. Everybody is happy with him, they say he wields a formidable pen and is a careful person at that. Of course, I do not intend to idealize or defend him by saying all of these. He definitely must have some faults. Nobody is infallible these days. Both you and I, everybody has some deficiency. Yet, for every small issue... In a word, the editorship's collective is satisfied with our employee assigned to your region. My opinion is that of the collective's. It could not be any different. However, it does not mean that a correspondent is irreplaceable. Maybe you know some fault of his, because of which the special correspondent can not only be reassigned to a different region, but also fired or even persecuted. If you have reasonable proof for this, please, go ahead. He is here personally and is waiting in the assistant secretary's room. If needed, let's invite him here and clarify the issue with his participation.

Nobody uttered a word. Everybody was looking at one another. The Secretary for Ideological Affairs of the Regional Party Committee, a livestock expert by profession, said:

– You know, comrade Rzayev, let's not go into detail in this matter. It is not good to invite the correspondent here, tell him our word and let him reply. I think, we should not drop the curtain of restraint. This would not suit the party ethics, either. If the Regional Party Committee does not wish to work with your correspondent and the Central Committee is unhappy with him, let's not start long debates. I don't see any serious problem here.

What is the difference, either this correspondent or another? For God's sake, take him away from here! Besides, who is he, anyway?! We have got our local cadre. We have already invited and spoken to him here before your arrival, he is a very nice boy. If you really want to know the truth, your employee's articles do not satisfy us!

Aghababa Rzayev's eyes turned stern. He cast a sarcastic eye at the Secretary for Ideological Affairs and said:

– I know you are a livestock expert by profession. Probably you have a solid experience in husbandry and stock-breeding. However, we are talking here about a person, a journalist, whose profession is harder and more complicated than that of a test pilot.

This offended the secretary watching over ideological affairs in the region. He seemed perturbed, but kept his countenance. He smiled artificially to hide his dejection, softened and said:

– Aghababa Samadovich, I have heard a lot about you, even though we meet for the first time. We respect you very much, but let's not complicate this issue. To my mind, there is no need for inspection or debates here. Probably, comrades will also agree with me. The easiest way is for you to change the correspondent! That will put an end to these disagreements. You can send anybody, whom you deem fit to replace him. We do not reject that. Only so that Ali Ildirimoghlu leaves this place.

– The easiest way! – The editor shook his head with disappointment and repeated the secretary's words. – Let the comrades forgive me, if the secretary of the Regional Party Committee considers reassigning a cadre an easy way, one can only grieve at it. Besides, I do not blame you. Sometimes when an ignorant person is assigned to a post he does not deserve, he begins with pressuring the people under his command, replacing their posts with or without a reason, or firing employees under any excuse in order to show off. This is very wrong. The respect an official achieves this way is very short-lived, while the hatred

emerging against him is not forgotten in a lifetime. Besides, the easier replacement of an employee seems to you, the harder it is personally for me. Particularly, of such a creative employee. A correspondent needs years to get to know the mood of the region, where he works, the specific features of the districts, to gain a deeper knowledge about its people and have a clear understanding of its cities and villages. I am not even mentioning the hardships of moving from one place to another.

The editor paused and then continued:

– Honestly, such a step is difficult for me to take. I would not like to take your time in long debates. Yet, the way this issue is it urges me to express my opinion clearly. Certainly, we should comprehend the responsibility of our position to the details. Otherwise, we might seem quite miserable and feeble to our employees, even if they would not show it openly. Therefore, a man of high position must continually filter his words and actions through his own intelligence before saying or doing anything.

Aghababa Rzayev turned to the bureau members sitting in the hall:

– Please, do not think that I am trying to teach a lesson to someone or to take someone under my wings. I apologize to all of you for my long speech. As we are discussing not only the issue of our employee here, but in general, attitude towards people and a fate of a journalist, I have to express my opinion openly.

The scrubby Second Secretary of the Regional Party Committee Belov with white and thinning hair stirred in his seat and took his napkin. He said wiping his glasses:

– Aghababa Samadovich, I see, you are being very stubborn, but it is meaningless. I have personally visited comrade Yelistratov, we have agreed on this issue and that's it. I don't understand what kind of a discussion is going on now?!

– What have you agreed with comrade Yelistratov about?

– The editor asked.

– About the replacement of your correspondent from this region, – Belov answered.

– If you are really telling the truth, I am ashamed to say that obviously both Pyotr Matveyevich and Sergey Andreyevich are exceeding their authorities either intentionally or unintentionally.

– Why?! – The remark had affronted Belov and he sounded cross.

– Because, a release or replacement of a correspondent is solved by decision of editorial board and order issued by the editor.

The second secretary lost his temper:

– Stop it, for God sake! Do not be offended. You are overreaching yourself. Do you know what kind of things they are writing about him?!

– Sergey Andreyevich, if I knew you would not be hurt with me, I would say they write quite a lot of things about you, too, – the editor replied.

– To whom? Where?

– To Me, – the editor replied somewhat harshly to the second secretary. – There are countless signed and anonymous letters about you delivered to our office. Yet, we are not very surprised at this. We reflect about the issue and believe that as you are a secretary of a Regional Party Committee, you sometimes rebuke somebody, sometimes demand a job to be done or, if needed, you raise the issue of relieving someone from a position. Under such circumstances, there certainly arises some discontent regarding you. That's why, people start writing the truth or lies to various places in order to have their revenge. An envelope costs two kopecks... The orders we give, the decisions we make should not be based on such cheap envelopes, but on specific facts and the real conditions. Otherwise, we would cheapen ourselves in public opinion and cost the same price as that envelope.

The second secretary said insistently:

– Aghababa Samadovich, fine, I share your opinion regarding the anonymous letter. I am putting aside all of these signed and unsigned letters. What about his bulletproof flat?! A close person

of mine, who visits him at home frequently and whom I trust, told me such things about his flat that I was truly horrified hearing it. A Czech piano, imported bedroom suite, dining-room furniture and crystal chandeliers?! My good man, don't make us blurt out the whole story! I see from the course of this conversation that you are openly defending him for quite some time already. Later you may also get a headache because of this.

Inspector of the Central Committee sitting behind the Bureau members cheered up. He confirmed Belov's words optimistically:

– You said it.

The editor looked askew at the inspector, ignored his words and turned to the second secretary:

– Yes, you have understood correctly, I am defending the correspondent, but not because he is an employee of our editorial office, but because he is innocent. You, however, are very wrong and I would also say, unfair. Your words about his flat give me grounds to say that you are also an unjust person. There is such a feature in you, the Secretary of a Regional Party Committee grieves me.

– I am grieved by the way an editor is speaking to the Second Secretary of Regional Party Committee, a member of the Central Committee and a deputy of the Supreme Soviet, and is refusing to believe him, – Belov expressed his rejection to Aghababa Rzayev and added firmly: – Okay, if such is the case, let's create a committee, inspect his flat and see, who is right and who is wrong.

The editor said with bitter irony:

– Do not be offended, Sergey Andreyevich, this claim of yours arises either from the insufficiency or total absence of your legal training. As a secretary, you must know that a citizen's right is inviolable. His flat can only be inspected with a warrant. However, taking into account your assiduousness, I would take such a responsibility with pleasure and inspect his flat with participation of your trusted men. Yet, I am afraid, your hopes

turn out to be deceived and none of your words proves to be right. Therefore, I would not want to see such a respectable person as you at your wit's end and ashamed.

– Maybe you are more afraid of the shame of your employees, whom you are supporting so enthusiastically, and the possibility of finding yourself in a deadlock?! – Belov replied.

The editor-in-chief said sardonically:

– No, Sergey Andreyevich, I would rather not. You are referring to slanders of toady and chatty people, who dislike the correspondent, while I am referring to what I have seen.

Sergey Andreyevich Belov got confused, his face turned pale. His voice thinned like a gramophone with loosened spring:

– Aghababa Samadovich, do not exaggerate... When did you see his flat?!

– Only a few hours ago. I drank my morning tea in his place, – said the editor, turned to the left facing the first secretary and continued:

– The only valuable thing in his flat is a black Belarus piano, that's it! There was an old carpet on the floor, with his name, surname and birth date inscribed on it. I got curious and asked about it. He said his mother wove it, in 1930. Also, two beds made of iron in his bedroom...

The editor plunged into thoughts, shook his head slowly and said to the people around:

– I don't want to set myself apart from you. We have been entrusted with high positions. However, let's admit that we are spending our time on small, tiny issues and have digressed from the subject matter. Because, we cannot help being imprisoned by our personal and, I would say, faulty feelings...

Nobody said a word. The first secretary lit a cigarette thus aggravating the already smoky air of the office. Belov and the responsible organizer of the Central Committee following attentively the discussions to this point winked at each other, stood up and left washed out. The Secretary for Ideological

Affairs followed them. Other Bureau members were motionless staring at the speakers as if afraid of expressing their opinion regarding the subject. They were only waiting for the moment when the one sitting at the top would put submit an issue to vote and they would raise their hands. There was no need for that now...

XXVI

The assistant secretary, in whose office I was alone, had left for somewhere and still not returned. It was a great opportunity to complete my article unfinished since yesterday. The opening door drew my attention away from the papers in front of me. The secretary said with a pleasant smile:

– They are waiting for you.

... The first secretary's large office was empty. The big pictures on the wall were silently gazing. The pointer of the clock with a heavy stone hanging on its golden chains was waving from side to side ticking calmly and breaking the room's silence. The editor-in-chief and the first secretary were sitting face-to-face in the rear room and drinking tea. They offered me a seat coldly as if nothing had happened. Throughout the conversation, they did not utter a word about the issue that had been so tensely discussed. Then the first secretary looked at his watch and said:

– We have received a call from Baku. A guest from Moscow will soon arrive here. He will take a plane today and we have sent someone to meet him.

The editor said:

– Let's not take your time then, – and stood up.

– Yes, it is one o'clock, just the time for lunch. Let's go, eat something, – he said and stood up from his soft armchair.

– Where will we have lunch? – The editor asked and looked at the secretary.

– There is a separate room for us in the Regional Committee's canteen, – the secretary replied.

The editor said half-jokingly:

– Why should we eat in a canteen if we have premises here?
The editor expressed his opinion of the secretary’s suggestion.
– Which premises is that? – The secretary asked curiously.
The editor turned to me and put his hand onto my shoulder:
– A correspondent’s home is in fact an editor’s flat, – Rzayev answered. – This man will probably have some bread and butter in his place. I can also dare to invite you.

The first secretary said:

– I would join you with pleasure. However, as I said before, I am expecting a guest from Moscow. Therefore I cannot leave the building, you should excuse me.

... Walking away from the Regional Party Committee’s building, Aghababa Rzayev’s tired eyes wandered through the cloudy sky of the city, and then he stopped and cast a meaningful glance at me:

– They had really sharpened their swords, – he said. Nevertheless, they did not achieve anything, because there is nothing sharper than the sword of justice. Relax and work calmly, but be more careful.

XXVII

– THERE IS NOTHING SHARPENER THAN THE SWORD OF JUSTICE...

– Be more careful...

Those phrases I listened in my period of crisis came off the dumb walls of the building I spent ten years in and turned into echo of the pen in my hand.

HEY, PEN! I understand you. You cannot leave my uphill life in Nakhchivan. The ardent moments of my youth spent in this land have turned into unforgettable memories for you. Yet, as they are fumed and flared, my already sensitive old heart does not keep up with its fire. However hard you hail those days in your languishing lines, it is useless, they are not going to return. Neither you, nor I have enough power for that. So, don’t be obstinate. I know you are stubborn. You have written when you

were told not to, and you have not written when you were told to. Because you have a pathfinder named God and a ruler named conscience. You only obey their commands. Please, listen to me too in this age. I am begging you, let me go! A farmer named Ildirim is awaiting my arrival. The longing to join him does not leave me even for a minute.

As if my pen felt my heartfelt suffering just like a living being and was touched. It put a big dot in the end of Nakhchivan-filled lines and let me go. The car under us began to move. We headed towards the land, where I once crawled, stood up trembling and took my first shaky steps.

XXVIII

On the way out of Nakhchivan, our car picked up its full speed and flew on the half-asphalt, half-soil roads. Shikhabali-Didivar-Shahbuz-Kolanli and finally, Bichanak, the most distant village of the Autonomous Republic on the direction we were headed for. Our road was now uphill. We passed the roundabouts and reached the Batabat passage filled with shining crystal lakes, tents and yells of shepherds together with the sunrise. There is a good saying that every uphill has a downhill. Moving downhill, we saw the villages of Zangazour district, forfeit of the enemy smartness and Muslim simplicity, undergoing Armenianization with every passing year. The villages of Shaki, Gizilaghaj, Urud, Arafsa, Jomardli, Sofulu, Aghadi, Vaghadi with pathways overgrowing and trails almost vanished. I had a more or less clear idea of the pain imprisonment can cause to people. It appears that imprisonment of soil, river, spring, mountain and valley is much worse. I was feeling a kind of hurt and moan in the tender voice of the icy spring trickling among stones on the road leading to the village of Shaki. Until the day the word Soviet appeared, this spring used to host religious sacrifices and people of faith would do namaz and iftar at its source. The phrase “Bismillah-hir-Rahman-nir-Rahim” (“I begin

in the Holy name of God, Beneficent, the Merciful” – **trans.**) would merge with the spring’s gentle whispering. Now, bottles of vodka and wine, twisted cans and trash covered in old papers were all over the spring’s virgin trails and around it. How can one open a table and have dinner at this spring?! How can you feel joy or appetite at such havoc?! How can one dare to wash his face with this pure water?! We were unable to deny our guilt. I was silent at the presence of the spring symbolizing the clarity of our dreams and trailing off somewhere offended. Maybe the spring is in a hurry to find its protectors and call upon its brave men for help?! Maybe the spring is headed towards Bargushad, Araz and Kur to speak of its sorrow?! Hey, the mountain spring, let my pen flame and flare your moan of protest and anger in its lines and bring you to your saviors of the twenty first century holding the sword of Ali and calling upon Ali... And let Zangazour find its original inhabitants, language, religion and faith.

THE SUN WAS HIGH ABOVE. We had not yet had breakfast. In the land of mountains, we could not find a place to open a table. We descended to the Gorus city surrounded by forests, gardens and orchards on the slope of Uchtepe mountains. To a beautiful city with pure air, rivers and springs. I thought to myself – maybe we can have lunch right here. Yet, I changed my mind immediately. The place reminded me of a golden cage. Suddenly I felt bored, as if I could not breathe. The land of Aligulouushaghi positioned among the high and low valleys, covered in Christ’s-thorn bushes and located just ten-fifteen kilometers from Gorus was drawing me to itself like a magnet. This insane longing made me forget the strange city’s beauty and my hunger. I did not even drink water there.

WE REACHED THE GORUS-GUBADLI ROAD PASSING VIA THE PASTURE OF OUR VILLAGE. As if understanding its owner’s intention like a living being, our car was flying over the bumpy soil roads. Soon, we reached the Yazı Plain, the sowing and planting area of Aligoulouushaghi. Seeing the Yazı Plain,

where there was no tree to shelter in its shadow, nor a drop of water to drink, I felt relieved. We stopped under a Christ's-thorn bush at the end of the track and laid a table in a hand-sized shadow.

I called a young man standing nearby resting on his stick, raising his cap and observing his herd and invited him to our table. When he was approaching us with neglectful steps, he reminded me of my fellow countryman Eyvaz. I asked him to check if I was right:

– Are you Eyvaz's son?

– Yes, I am. The young man cheered up and smiled. I asked his age. It appeared that this young man, whom I met for the first time, was born several years after I had left the village of Aligoulushaghi.

OF COURSE, I AM NOT AN ASTROLOGER, but the children of this land are almost an exact copy of their parents; whether this has something to do with the soil, water or air of this region, I don't know. You know whose child one is just casting a glance at him/her. Explaining this mystery is difficult for me in many aspects...

SHEPHERD, DRIVER AND ME SAT FACE TO FACE AND HAD LUNCH. With a good appetite. Having finished, we stood up. There was a gentle breeze. I thought – threshing time is approaching. I covered my eyes from the sunshine with my hand and took a look at the Yazı Plain. Nobody was around. The fields had already been harvested. Cattle were now grazing there instead.

UNTIL THE 1960s, when mulberry season was over, the entire village used to move from the valley to these plains to make various preparations. Only two old guards, a few gardeners, the mill and miller would stay in the village, that's it. Tents were lined up in the Yazı Plain at nights. Families and relatives used to build tents near each other. These broad plains were filled by joyful yell of countrymen from dawn till sunset. Everybody, old and young, used to work non-stop, willingly and avidly. Nobody

would say he/she was tired. People did not know a disease. Our village had capable men like Alif, Abil, Teyyub, Savalan, Gambaroghlu Hussein, Uzun Garash, Chirish Karim, Lozan Mamish, Sari Karim, Gasham, Mashadi Ibrahim, who never missed a namaz or a fast, Surkhaybey, Ajdarbey and mad Musa, who had a roar of Koroghlu. They used to pick up the deepest dams, the biggest scythes and the heaviest loads. They enjoyed a special authority among people. Fields seemed insignificantly small when they stood shoulder to shoulder and started to work. Bull carts were carrying hay cocks all day long. Hay stacks with a cool shadow used to line up. Young-spirited guys whirling their sticks on the air and whipping the bulls forward were circling around the stack-yards singing songs. At sunset, when a waft of wind was starting to be felt, the bulls were relieved from yokes. Carts would leave the threshing-floor in twos. Shovels, spades, hay forks and brooms would be used to clean up the area. It was the time of finishing off in the stack-yards. All the straw was placed in nets and carried to barns. Ebony wheat was filtered over and over again, the seminal were separated and placed in deep wells covered in straw. The wheat to be distributed among people was placed in special ancient stone hollows. The pure grain to be handed to government was ardently loaded on mares and sent to Akara railroad station twenty five-thirty kilometers away. The chaff of barley was mixed with straw and given to horses, donkeys and mules.

XXIX

In those days, the sowing of seminal wheat in autumn was entrusted to my father. The entire village knew that Ildirim is an honest man and brings luck and abundance. Everybody was saying that not a single wheat sowed by Ildirim would be wasted. My father would sometimes reason this saying a sowing does not take haram (forbidden by shariat-trans.). A sower should be a truthful person. A man's profusion came before the Qur'an

(Koran). My father would feel a kind of discomfort whenever there was a heavy snow. He used to say that snow is the blanket of sowing; if it covers the soil, the harvest will not be damaged by insects and the wheat will not be cut down by the frost. The spring sowing was also my father's responsibility. He used to bring me a bunch of primroses in his big and callous hands every time on his way back from the sowing. My farm labourer father was to be the first one to deliver me the news of flowers. Seeing my joy, he seemed to forget all his pain and exhaustion. The breath of spring, fragrance of primroses and caress of father... I searched for my happy moments in the Yazı Plain with a frantic yearning. Yet...I failed to find them! Those days had flown away from my hands like a swallow.

This whole story has been eliminated since the day machinery and iron appeared in human life, now machines do all the work. Therefore, people do not move to the Yazı Plain like in the forties and fifties. The wells have sunk, the tenting areas have been filled with grass and tracks have vanished. Occasionally, one can see hearth stones blackened by smoke. There is no trace of the then clamor of the Yazı Plain. Yet, I felt the embedded trail of my father and his breath smelling of soil in the abundant Yazı Plains.

THE CATTLE SCATTERED AROUND THE FIELDS WAS SLOWLY LINING UP, MOVING DOWN TOWARDS VALLEYS AND THE TENTS TO DRINK WATER AND FIND SOME SHELTER. The shepherd Shahbaz, who had spent all his life in valleys and mountains apologized shyly and headed towards the herd...

I wanted to visit my native land and my father. We drove forward and to the right and reached the village road via criss-cross tracks. The uncomfortable road descending from Yazı Plain to the village passes through steep slopes and pockmarked rocks. An insignificant mistake of the driver could finish in a tragedy. The road was called the Volga Car Road. We were taking a risk. The scariest part of the road was the abyss on top

of the Alchali Valley. The experienced driver drove easily through the spot.

The village children having heard a car were out in the streets with a hubbub. Not every car can drive into the village. Especially, the appearance of a Volga car in the village seemed like a miracle to the kids. I stopped in the middle of the village and greeted my friends and acquaintances gathered in front of a shop. I asked them how they were doing. The children circling our car were ardently arguing:

– You say this car can catch up with our horse running?!

– I am not sure about the uphill and downhill areas, but on a plain, it can never catch up with your horse. – A skinny boy with razor-shaven head replied to him.

Another boy asked:

– If it dares, let us take it to the river and see if this car can swim to the other side, or our mare?

– Look, do not compare a car with a horse, a car cannot get into deep water. It would sink and suffocate there. After that, it would be quite a trouble to try and get its corpse out of there!

– Horse is much better in that aspect – the boy with shaved head considering himself smarter than his peers replied. – Just give it barley and straw and drive it wherever you wish! It does not differentiate between valley or a plain, uphill or downhill, while you cannot possibly force the car to climb onto that hill!

– Look, pal, do you have any idea what nonsense you are talking? – The gloomy boy listening to them quietly so far said to the one that kept boasting. – Neither your mare, nor even the praised horse of the chairman can withstand this car. A car can reach Baku from here in an instant, if it wants. What about your mare? I swear by my dad's life, it cannot reach Baku even in a week. It would get exhausted and remain in the middle of the road...

I bid farewell to my countrymen standing in front of the shop. Children moved aside when I turned towards the car. I was

looking enviously at them. My thoughts wandered. – I wish, I were standing near these careless children with bare arms and legs burnt under the sun and join their argument. Then I would play hide and seek and various other games with them... go together to the river to swim... meet the herd in the evening...

I reached our house facing the Kaaba. My father was cutting a horse load of wood he had brought from the forest and grouping them in accurate bunches in the corner of the corridor in front of the haystack. Hearing my arrival, he lifted up and turned towards us. He approached me wiping off the wood crumbs from his dress, lifted the ear-flapped hat from his heavily-wrinkled and sweaty forehead, extended his hand to me and gently pressed his cheek onto mine. My father was never nervous when meeting me. His small eyes would smile inadvertently. Most of all, his heart and soul would smile. Only I could understand him. The old walls of our house, the entire place and the yard lighted up from his joy. Even our horse bridled aside lifted its head from the crib, looked towards us and snorted. Probably, it wanted to say something. My longing eyes were frozen on my father's wise face, big hands, clothes smelling of saddle and curb and his proud stance. Suddenly I felt something hot and salty flowing down my cheeks and wetting my dried lips. It appears, I have been crying unintentionally. At such moments, I fail to subdue my tears to my will, however hard I try. I used to be like this only when meeting my father. I used to be flooded in my own tears. At other times, I can easily pull myself together. I become submissive, pitiable, lose my will and burst into tears both when meeting my father and parting from him... I cannot control my eyelashes. I have never seen my father crying. Only when he would lose his close ones... Even then, quietly, without a noise... My farm labourer father was standing in front of me like the magnificence of the mountains surrounding this village. Despite of my position and abundance of my life, I needed his presence. I was relying on my father. Today he is not here, but I still feel

his breath around me. I turn to the absence of my father whenever I undergo some difficulty. I imagine my father living in the invisibility of my faithful world. One of those mountains guarding our village is the eternal presence of my farmer father constantly keeping an eye on me.

XXX

WE APPROACHED THE TABLE UNDER THE LOFTY TWIN PINE TREES IN OUR YARD AND SAT FACE TO FACE. My father asked:

– I heard, you visited Nakhchivan, what was the deal about?!

– Yes, I did, – I replied and explained him the reason of my trip to Nakhchivan.

My father said approvingly:

– The people of Nakhchivan have not treated you badly, you are very right in participating in their life.

– Tell me, how is Yusif? – He changed the subject and asked about my elder son. – God bless him, he is a warm-blooded kid. He is quite quick-witted, too. I think, he is finishing the ninth grade this year. Is he really preparing to enter a higher school? Keep an eye on your children's education. Try to do your best so that they study well. – He added. – A child should not be left on his own. In that view, my daughter-in-law has a nice character, – he expressed his content of my wife, – I see her position when I visit you. All day long she is keeping an eye on the children's school affairs, clothes, food and sleep. – Otherwise, those kids will not achieve some position in this life, they'll be left without a profession.

– You are right, – I expressed my agreement with my father's opinion. He said with a nice smile:

– TELL YUSSIF THAT I AM COLLECTING MONEY FOR THE CAR, I am putting all the money I can afford to the savings bank. I add there all the money you are giving, too. I took something from it recently for some business, but this fall I'll sell

some cattle and put the money back. Tell him that the car money will be ready until he finishes the higher school. True, I can buy it even today, if I try. My yard is full of livestock. Yet, a child could be spoiled if he gets a car while studying. He will think about the car all the time, not focus on education and cool away from his lessons.

– It is true, – I said.

– How are you doing? – My father passed to another subject.

– Fine.

– Newspapers rarely reach this place. Whenever someone goes to the district, I ask them to bring your newspaper. Recently I cannot see letters quite well. I ask someone to read your articles for me. Try to write the good things; do not make enemies writing bad stuff about people. Let yourself enjoy the abundance of people liking you. One cannot advantage from malevolence.

Relatives, friends and acquaintances hearing the news of my arrival were entering the yard in twos or threes, congratulating my father and greeting me. Some were reproaching me for visiting the village rarely. I accepted their just remarks. My father was defending me:

– What can he do, he is also a head of a family and has a work to do. He has thousands of problems. He cannot throw away his life and come here. I only wish him to be safe and sound. It is enough if I hear good news about him.

Gold-toothed Mamish speaking through his nose took his black cap with creasy beak from his head and wore it on his knee. Then bended down towards me and asked with a big curiosity:

– You know about the high-ranking officials, you must know this. What do you think about this new government? I mean, they overthrew Khrushov and placed someone new instead of him.

Before I could open my mouth, the storeman Goshunali, who had lost an arm in the war, said:

– Hey, whoever it is, I just want him not to conflict with anybody and cause the death of people. He confronted Hitler, but we paid the price. Look, how many families are left without a man just in this village alone?

Khosu attacked Goshunali:

– Hey, Goshunali, – he said, – you are always like this, you talk about things you know and things you don't know! Be smarter, would Stalin ever launch the war?! Hitler was too much above himself. He had subdued and captured all the neighbouring states. Then he turned his cannons against us. Stalin sent several messages to him suggesting peace and avoiding massacre. Hitler wouldn't come to his senses. What could Stalin do? He saw that Hitler is not repeating what Allah is saying, so he beat him. He broke Hitler's horns and sat him down. Now, let's speak openly, what guilt does Stalin have in this whole story?!

The gold-toothed Mamish lost his temper:

– Hey, I am asking Ali about an entirely different thing, look where you brought the subject! What I am saying is asking whether the man replacing Khrushov after the latter was dethroned is a sane man or not. Will he be able to do something for us or not?!

The oldest of the people sitting around, Mahmud coughed and joined the conversation:

– Mamish does not know what he is talking about, who does anything for anybody these days?! Everybody is taking care of his own problems. Let the new government make this village's radio, light and phone arrangements and repair the roads, we don't want anything else.

Tapdig confirmed his words:

– Mahmud is speaking righteously. We are embarrassed of carrying oil in bottles. In order to make one call, you have to go the regional center passing through so many villages. If the new government does not consider these issues, then it is as useless as the previous one.

Alhussein who had been keeping his silence so far, but was always full of words, shook his head:

– I have been listening to you all for some time now. None of you is speaking right, – he said. – How can those sitting in Moscow or Baku know about the problems of Aligouluushaghi. Nowadays, even a quiet baby does not get his milk. The leaders of this village and district should wake up those in the upper circles so that the latter do something about our problems. Otherwise, you can keep on writhing in hysterics under this valley as long as you wish, complaining about the lack of electricity, phone or radio connection... What can you or I achieve by saying these things?!

All of the men gathered around me were old men, white-haired and white-beard, much older than me. I was considering myself little among them, as always. Therefore, I was not joining the dispute. I was lost in thoughts. I would only reply shortly whenever I was asked a question. Suddenly, the miller Abish said ardently, as if remembering something:

– ALI, DO YOU REMEMBER A GOAT STORY! – He was speaking about an incident that happened twenty years ago. – Whatever happened, happened. From one perspective, Ildirim did the right thing then. We are the same people, whether or not that goat was sacrificed and eaten. Yet, head is above the waist.

I understood the miller Abish's point. At that time, I was working as deputy director for education affairs in our village high school. It was late autumn. The surrounding mountains were covered in snow. Since the weather had cooled, there started an inflow of duck flocks to the Bargushad River passing two-three kilometers from our village. On a Sunday evening, I cleaned and greased my hunting gun. Then I filled the empty shells with powder and pellet.

I began hunting since I was thirteen or fourteen years old. I did not have a gun. I would secretly take the gun of my cousin, who was working as accountant in the kolkhoz and go for duck,

quail, francolin and rabbit hunting. This act of mine was causing arguments in the family. My father would grumble saying, that I was wet behind the ears and had not to play with a gun. He was afraid of my possible causing some tragedy eventually. However, I was ignoring these words. My cousin was a nice person. He was not forbidding me from taking his gun lest he would hurt me. The gun was his in his name, I was the only one using it. Finally, he gifted the gun to me.

I had found my way of hunting. I was rarely missing. Therefore, I would never return home empty-handed. My father and cousin saw that I am used to hunting, so they left me be.

This time I had left house at dawn. It was cold as hell. Aside from precise aiming, hunting has many other important conditions. I was used to this. I had prepared special observation posts in river banks using reeds. A prey was clearly visible and easily approachable from those spots. I began from the bottom of fortress first. Yet, I was soon disappointed. Two fishermen had scared the ducks. There was not a single bird around. I grumbled after those men. Then I moved towards the pebble area. Ducks rarely come to this place, as there is no raw rice sown in these parts of the river. Ducks are mostly attracted to watered raw rice butts, because they can easily find and eat its remnants on the surface of water.

I was unlucky also in this part of the river. I could not see any duck there. I circled around the upper side of river orchards and climbed upwards. Then I turned towards the road leading to the mill. The area was as boggy as usual. I was frustrated seeing this. Once, when I was studying at the fifth grade, I was carrying some wheat to the mill. Our donkey sank here. It wouldn't rise however hard I was pulling its tale and bridle. A gardener cleaning guts nearby came to help me. He unfolded the sacks full of wheat attached to the donkey's waist. After that, the donkey rose easily. I loaded it and tried to ride it on the same spot. Yet, the donkey wouldn't make a move. There was no use of my beating it, however

hard I tried it on the poor animal. The gardener approached me and said:

– Son, we have a proverb about this, a donkey will never pass from the same spot it once sank in. Do not hurt the animal, ride it from some other direction.

I grasped deep meanings in these words, which might as well seem to be shallow... I remembered the people, who were trying to get the same position, in which they once sank and were sunk.

I stepped over the big stones in the bog and moved down into the yard of mill echoing its raucous noise around. The miller Abish dressed in old soldier shoes, woven trousers and undercoat with cotton protruding from its holes and an old cap with earflaps hanging on the sides was standing with his back to me and cleaning the canal with a spade. He turned back hearing me. He smiled seeing me and said brushing off his clothes:

– Teacher, you have come just in time, I have cooked excellent bread.

We both entered the room through the low and narrow door of the ancient mill. The owner of wheat was huddled near the stone tandoor still heating slightly and warming up. Abish cut a piece of the bread he had hidden among the sacks folded in a ragtag cloth and gave it to me. I sat near the tandir (oven made of clay in a hople in the earth-**trans**.) and ate the piece of unsalted bread made of ard flour. Abish raised his heel and looked at the mill's grain-holder, bended down and took a pinch of flour, checked its grinding, passed to the rear side and had a look at the mill-dam water. Having assured himself, he sat near the tandir folding his legs and turned to me:

– It is the time of ducks' arrival, – he said, – but there are a lot of fishermen down there, so the birds do not approach the water. They are moving upwards in flocks.

We were hardly hearing each other from all the noise around: water flowing down the mill-dam, water-wheels, and the

humdrum of the whirling mill stone. So, the miller was shouting. He bended down towards me and said:

– This night it was very cold, so water is frozen in many places. We have been keeping an eye on the tandir fire all night. If the mill-dam freezes and the mill stops, we are finished. We will just have to pray to God so that there is no frost for five-ten days and we can grind off the grain and get rid of it. Do you know how many people are waiting in the line?! There would be no problem if it was only our village's people! The smaller villages nearby also bring the grain to us. We are not stone-hearted, you cannot return the people coming here back. Just look, – he showed the sacks full of barley and wheat piled on top of one another. – The mill is filled to the top. We don't have time to grind all of it in time. The day before yesterday, one man came from Dovutlu. He had a horse, a mule and two donkeys loaded with grain in front of him. He was my acquaintance. He said, he will just leave all of it to wait its queue and go. I swore to him there is no place even for one cup of grain. If you don't believe, go in and see it with your own eyes. I will be speechless if you find a spot to put these eight sacks of yours. I saw he was hurt, I somehow managed to find a spot for two sacks, but returned the rest. I told him I'll let him know when his queue reaches, so that he brings the rest. He left. Do you know how many people are hurt at me?! Because, this is an ancient mill. I have been wasting my life here since my childhood. So far, it has never burned or damaged flour. I have heard about new fire mills, which work with electricity. They say, one was built in the regional center. You cannot possibly compare its flour to this one's! Fire mill burns the flour and wastes it. What can you expect from its bread?! Isn't our mill much better than that? The dough of the flour grinded here stretches like a gum. The scent of the lavash, bread and thin bread cooked in tandir fills the entire village.

Abish was talking ardently about the mill. Having eaten the bread, I drank a full cup of the thyme and cephalaria tea boiling

in Abish's black copper kettle and stood up. When I was leaving the door, the miller Abish said aloud:

– If you catch a lot of birds, do not forget me, do come visit me on your way back. I have replaced the nets, maybe I will even have a fish. I might even cook some more bread, I can give you one or two to take home.

THE AIR WAS A BIT SOFTER, IT WAS DRIZZLING SNOW. I continued my way up the river over the raw rice blocks. I climbed on the Lalazar Bridge ahead and checked out the banks of the river. I could see nothing. I turned towards the Aynagli Valley bordering on the Armenian territories. The snow was picking up speed. This was a place, where the high mountains covered in oak, hornbeam, wild cornel, apple and pear forests were facing precipitous rocks. These distant valleys are always full of lynxes, bears and boars. Therefore, I had moved the gun's hammer back and placed my finger on the trigger, just in case. Taking into account the possibility of stumbling upon any kind of prey, I was moving ahead ready, carefully and without haste. Otherwise, I could scare away a nearby prey and miss it. The place was filled with silence, except for the sound of the Bargushad River suffocating in the valley's narrow passage. Suddenly, I heard a bleating. I blanched. Then I turned the gun in that direction. Yet, nothing was to be seen. – Maybe, it is a mountain goat, – I thought. Or, am I hallucinating? I scanned the area carefully. I did not see anything. I turned back and began to move, when I heard the bleating again. I stopped and looked back. Then I began searching the jungles. I saw double horns in the dried and deep dam of the canal downhill, leading to the raw rice and orchard plantings. I stepped ahead in that direction. A goat with its saddle wiping the ground was standing still and staring at me. It was not wild, it was undoubtedly a domestic animal. I was dumbstruck. There is no village or a farm nearby, how did this goat appear here?! – I thought. What should I do now?! I tried to move away after

long reflections. The goat, seeing this, bleated after me with a begging noise. I had a pity on it, so I turned back again and looked at it. It would certainly get scared and move away if I approached. I was now thinking of a way to catch it. At this moment, I saw some passer approaching us from the Lalazar Bridge. – Very good, I will call him for help and catch the goat, – I thought. The man reached us and I recognized him. It was Maharram from Gurjulu. After greeting, he began talking first:

– I am heading towards the Mughanjig village. I have something to claim from a mean Armenian there. Three months ago, I sold him a springing cow. He paid me half of the money, the rest remains to be paid. He has kept me coming and going for it. He promised to pay its cost today. I am going there now to see what will happen now. In some sense, it is my own fault. There is a good proverb, a stupid head makes the poor feet suffer. I have given it with my hands, and am now claiming with my feet. I should have asked for the full price in advance and only then hand him the cow. He begged me that he doesn't have money yet, he will pay me half for now and deliver the rest in a week, however difficult it might be. I, be damned, trusted him. Now, the week has become three months. I am unable to drag the money from the Armenian. If he does not pay it also today, I'll have to talk to him in a different way. I have to solve the issue today, even if I have to fight with him over it. Either I get the rest of the money, or I take the cow back with me. There is no other solution for it. I also need to buy a mule for myself. I have even chosen a proper one. I am afraid, if the Armenian delays the payment a bit longer, I'll lose the mule. Do you think it is easy to find a mule these days?! See, I am left a pedestrian. Every week I destroy a pair of shoes. If I had a mule, I would have no problem! I would get rid of all the trouble. I am forced to ask people around ashamed for a load of wood. An owner of a horse or a donkey can lend his animal once, or twice. I am ashamed to ask for it all the time...

The goat was chewing something and looking at us. It had a precipice at its back and us in front. So, it could not run away from us.

I told the story to Maharram.... He looked attentively at the goat and said:

– It does not look like a goat from our village, you see how frisky it looks. It has fourty kilos of meat. It is a mountain goat. Now, what are you thinking about it? – He asked.

I shuddered hesitantly:

– I am not sure, – I replied. – I wanted to leave, but it began bleating after me, so I had a pity at it. What do you think we should do about it?

Maharram smiled:

– What can you do, it must have appeared in your fate. You can take it home and sacrifice.

Maharram helped me and we somehow managed to catch the goat. I took the belt off my waist and folded it around the goat's head. I returned to the mill dragging it after me... Abish was surprised seeing this:

– Teacher, what goat is it you have shot?! Is it wild?! – He asked in surprise.

I told him the whole story... Abish moved his finger to his lips...

– Yeees, – he said, – I was now thinking, yesterday evening I was at the dam. I saw a nomad tribe settled there. Shepherds said they were from Imishli. They were on their way back from mountains. Probably, a goat somehow hindered away when they left at dawn. You can say from its looks that it is a mountain goat. Otherwise, you can never find such an animal in plain areas. It could replace two goats of our region.

I left the goat at Abish's place and left for hunting again. I shot only three ducks and returned to the mill. The goat was nowhere to be seen. Abish said he saw some people returning from the village and he asked them to take the goat with them and deliver it to my

house. I thought, people will see you bringing a goat, it will not be good. Also, it would be a trouble for you.

I was thankful to Abish. I gave him one of the ducks I had shot. Abish said ashamed:

– Teacher, today I was so busy that I could not catch a fish or cook bread. You should forgive me. Next time, I will pay you off. Yet, do not forget about me when you sacrifice the goat, send me my share. You know that the finder and the witness should divide up the spoil, – he joked.

...The goat was bridled in the other end of our yard and had dry grass in front of it. My father saw me, pointed at the goat and said:

– What did you want with this animal, don't we have enough? One of these days, twenty more will deliver calves. There is no space in the barn. Are you so much into money? You have bought another one.

I told to my dad that I did not buy it, I found it in a pasture. Then I retold him the story as it was... My father said reluctantly, without looking at me:

Okay, you have found it, then add it to our goats. Whenever its owner appears, we will give it to him. You have put yourself into trouble.

Five or ten days passed. The chairman, party committee, my teacher colleagues and the school director talked me over. They said, it is something you have found. Bring the goat, let us sacrifice it and sell the meat to us. I agreed. The chairman sent someone to the pasture. They took the goat from the herd and brought it. Then they fastened it to the mulberry tree in front of the office and called a butcher. As the butcher was moving ahead grinding his knife off the sharpener hanging on his belt, my father appeared from aside. He seemed very angry and impatient. He moved ahead without a word, unfolded the goat from the mulberry tree and relieved it. Then he turned towards us and reproached me harshly. After that, he reprimanded the chairman, party committee leader and the school principal:

Hey men, – he said, – if you want meat, I have got a herd of sheep and goats, just take any and sacrifice it! I am not a man if I say something against it! You were going to sacrifice a custody animal! You are not thinking about tomorrow, if its owner appears in a month, five months, a year, what am I supposed to tell him?! What will people say about me when they hear all about this story?!

My father is a very gentle and kind person. He rarely gets angry. Yet, if he does get angry at something, one should better avoid him and keep silent. So, I was silent. The chairman, party committee leader and the school principal were all very embarrassed of their wrong behaviour, so they were unable to utter a word, either.

THE WINTER WAS VERY HARSH. Therefore, cattle was not let to pastures, they were kept in barns. Due to the lack of forage, my father was giving them grass and straw in small portions. He was only filling the trough of expecting and milky animals to the top. One day, my father woke me up from a sweet dream early in the morning. I left the bed wiping my eyes. My dad said disappointedly:

Son, let it not be a bad news, the goat you found went to the trough of the cow that just delivered. The cow plunged its horns onto the goat and pushed it on its back into the piles. The goat is dead. Now, go quickly and call the chairman here. He represents the government somehow. He should see the goat's corpse and witness it. Otherwise, this thing might turn out wrongly for us...

When mentioning the goat, Abish was hinting at this story that happened so many years ago. Abish was now different Abish. He was old and exhausted. He had left the mill long time ago. Now, listening to his stories or looking at him, I live through those moments again, when I used to wander around the valleys.

The native people surrounding us at our door, under the twin pine trees reminded me of many events that happened... After they left, me and my father spoke together until the midnight.

Neither my dad, nor I could sleep, because, one cannot fall asleep always. The moments when a dad and a son are talking face to face...

I had to leave early morning. I told goodbye to my father at the end of the village. I was unable to control myself even then. Tears were dropping down my cheeks. What is causing my crying?! I could not find the answer to this. I only knew that I was crying like a baby. Also that I always consider myself like a baby in presence of my father. Maybe that is why I was crying like a baby? Finally, we separated. Yet, me and my dad were left behind, but my dad left with me...

XXXI

OUR CAR WAS CLIMBING THE STEEP ROAD WITH DIFFICULTY. Its howl and roar had filled the entire valley. I was thinking that Volga car was finding it difficult to carry the burden of the separation moment of a father and a son, not the steep road or the heavy load.

When we reached the top of the white steep, I suddenly heard a slap. I was startled. What kind of sound is that?! I had a look from the car's cabin at the mossy stones on the road. I remembered it instantly. What had startled me was the sound of a slap my father gave me once right here.

At that time, I had finished the sixth grade and passed to the seventh. My sister was studying two grades before me. Pupils had summer vacation. Schools were closed. Our village moved to the Yazi Plain. We were moving from the river gardens full of fruits throughout a year and were ascending towards the Yazi Plain, where our tents were built. My father was picking up me and my sister after one another onto his horse. When we reached this white steep, my father dismounted and said:

Children, your bones are still not strong enough. I see, you are tired. This time, you should both mount on the horse. I am strong and used to the roads, I can go by feet.

My sister and I had an argument over who was supposed to ride the horse first. My father scolded both of us. I said stubbornly:

I should ride the horse first.

My sister went angry and revealed my secret to dad:

Liar! – She said. – You have got four satisfactory marks in your yearly assessment list. You are hiding it from my dad. My father thinks you are studying well, that you are an excellent-pointer.

My father lost his patience hearing this. His gentle glance changed instantly. He looked at me obdurately and asked:

Is your sister telling the truth?!

I looked down embarrassed as if I had done something very wrong. Then, I admitted my guilt. I said gulping:

Yes, she is right.

My father slapped me on my face.

My sister was sad for what she had done. She had a pity on me. She began sobbing and crying and said:

Are you a government official?! Why are you hitting my brother? – She expressed her protest to dad.

MY FATHER HAS BEATEN ME ONLY ONCE, THAT DAY. When he heard my marks were low. Otherwise, he never hit me. His hardest reproach was getting hurt at my faults. Only I know how much I suffered when he was slightly discontent at me.

XXXII

THIS WHITE STEEP IS ALSO A WITNESS OF MY OTHER PAINFUL DAY.

It was the years of 2-nd World War. I was hunting a prey in the bushes and valleys around this white steep. I rose to the peak aside and was searching for something to hunt. Someone was hailing me from below, over the Injirli Valley, standing on a stone. I could hardly hear these words out of the wind:

Come to the village! – To the village. It is important! They are waiting for you! Come quickly! Hurry up!

I had a bad feeling about this. I had a feeling that this was not a good news call. My mood was spoiled. I ran downhill.

People were again soaked in sorrow. Chairman of the Village Soviet and a representative of the district military commissariat were walking up and down in front of the medical station. They were holding a list of seven men, who were supposed to go to the front today. I heard that one of those enlisted for service is my father.

There were a lot of people in our yard. My aunts were preparing something for my father's road and crying silently. My father was holding on quite strongly. From time to time, he was scolding my aunts:

What are all these sobbing about?! Am I a better man than those going to the army?! Who knows, maybe I will return safe and sound! Do not cry while I am still alive! God will not take this. Whatever is written in one's destiny will surely happen. Nobody knows God's ways, maybe this is the best way...

The village brigadier extended his neck from the other side of the fence and said:

Uncle Ildirim, all the other enlisted are standing at the foot of the village and waiting for you. Move a bit faster so that you don't leave at dark.

My father dressed well, took his change clothes and the meal for the road and left the yard. They threw water after him. Relatives followed him crying. Everybody knew that this was a road from which none returned. Therefore, my aunts couldn't stop crying. Before leaving the village, my father stopped and turned to the people following him and frowned:

Whoever wishing to show me his respect must return home from here and not follow us, – he said. – I am leaving calling for God's help. You can mourn when you receive my death news. Or else, crying while I am walking safe and sound here... You will anger God.

After these words of my father, all of the people following him returned, except for me. I walked together with my dad until

we were two kilometers away from the village. Secretary of the Village Soviet and the representative of the military commissariat were both mounted on horses. The seven men leaving for the war were walking. Because there was no horse left in the village. All of them had been taken to the war. My father somehow managed to assure me and forced me return. I told him the final goodbye and left. Then I went to a high hill and watched them until they were lost in sight... The mourning mountains and stones of Aligouluushaghi were also watching my father and his soldier friends heading towards the bloody front in silence.

I returned to the village. Sounds of bitter sobbing were heard from many houses. I entered home and shut the door. The house was whirling around me. I lied on the wooden bed and thought about my father's fate. My heart was beating like the heart of a bird just placed in a cage. I saw that I was unable to stand it, so I found a meter of white cloth to distract myself. I took a brush. I put Nizami's hand-sized picture in the literature book and began blowing it up on the cloth. Then I saw it was getting dark, so I turned on the lamp. Since its rope was short, it was not reaching the oil very well. Our oil bottle was also empty. I poured a cup of water into the lamp and the oil went upwards. The lamp's light went brighter. I continued drawing. My family told me several times, kid, it is late after midnight, go to bed, but I wouldn't listen. I had concentrated all my attention on the picture in front of me. The entire house was sleeping covered in blankets. Only I was awoken, drawing a picture under the lamp light...

I did not even realize when I went to sleep still holding the brush in my hand...

...I felt a hand patting my hair. Then someone held me on my shoulder and began shaking. – Stand up, son, stand up, I have arrived! I have seen many dreams of this sort. However, it appeared not to be a dream. I saw my dad when I opened my eyes. This was an unbelievable miracle for me. All the people

sleeping around woke up. We were so happy! Yet, a dark doubt wandered deep in my soul. – Maybe my father deserted the service. – No! My father has always hated those escaping from army or service. He would never do such a thing himself. – I quickly departed from this thought. My father said exhaustedly:

We were over three hundred men. The military committee lined us up. Then they read names one after another. The names of five men together with me did not come up. They said, those, whose names were not called, will not go this time as the plan has been fulfilled. They should return home and wait for the next call.

My father's bag was left untouched for several days. Every day we expected for the call. One day the news came that those of my father's age are not taken to the service any more. So, my father stayed home. He did not go to the war...

XXXIII

WE REACHED THE YAZI PLAIN IN THE WHIRLPOOL OF THOSE MOMENTS THE WHITE STEEP REMINDED ME OF. However, I could not pass directly ahead from here. I had to stop for some time under the lonely pine tree growing in the place of the old threshing-floor. I was unable to separate from this land.

I departed from the car quite farther away and descended to the Yazi Plain just like in those happy days, when we used to build tents in these places. Mountains covered in forests, valleys, steep rocks and naked hills are all clearly visible from here. The eagle nest in the hollow of the white rock in the west was right where it was before. Thirty-fourty years ago, I would never get tired of standing in front of it and watching the winged inhabitants of this nest with a childish admiration. Despite so many years passed by, the forest, the rock, the eagle and the nest were all in their places.

Suddenly the eagle departing from the rock and flying in the depth of the sky began circling over me accompanied by my longing eyes and then returned back to its nest. See, my soul bird is the same as that eagle. No matter how many lands and places it wanders around, eventually it returns to the Aligouluushaghi village of Gubadli and settles down in my father's shed facing the Kaaba. There I find the comfort and peace of my heart.

Watching the eagle, I was feeling fragile emotions. I was thinking, I wish, I could fly like that bird. Whether I am in Iran or Turan, in the evenings I could return to my shed, where I opened my eyes to this world, tasted the bread and water and took the messengers of spring – the primroses from my father's hand.

Once, a respectful minister of the country was chatting the chairman of kolkhoz in the Khindiristan village in the corridor of a guestroom in Aghdam and saying ardently, moving his hands in the air:

You and me both should wake up the people from this illusion. We should value highly our nation, language and religion. Do you know that Azerbaijani language is the key of all Eastern languages! The entire world knows Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Gara Garayev and Fikrat Amirov. A nation's greatness is measured by the personalities it yields. We should be proud of the gods of world poetics like Nizami and Fizulu. Our nation!.. Our people!.. Our language!.. Our religion!..

The minister finished his words and said goodbye to us. After he left, the chairman looked at me, shuddered in surprise and asked:

What was this comrade minister saying?! By God, I did not understand him very well?!

Yes, though the chairman was listening carefully to the minister, he failed to understand his words properly. The "patriotic" minister pretending to be a fighter of his native language and motherland was saying these words not in his own language, Azerbaijani, but in Russian, because, he was not able to pronounce many words in his own language.

A great Indian writer Rabindranat Tagor said that though English is a very comprehensive and secular language, my elder brother made me study in the Bengal language. I think, a pupil studying in another nation's language has his teeth broken right in the first class. The speed of my moral advance is rooted in the fact that I was educated in my native language, Bengal...

The minister's words to the chairman could be compared to a blind man's showing the way to healthy people. I think, it is a fault not to know the language of the state, in which you are a citizen, but inability to speak and write properly in your own language is not only a shortcoming, but a national indignity. Besides, even if you know a hundred languages, but do not know your own, then you have no speech.

A general holding a high position in law enforcement authorities, as well as three guests having arrived from somewhere else were standing in front of a hotel in a regional center and waiting for a car to go to some place. The general's words full of love and respect towards his father were causing envy in his counterparts surrounding him:

If I do not visit the man at least twice or thrice per month, I cannot forgive myself. Today I have also arrived from Baku to visit him... We spoke from night till morning. He has suffered a lot for me, if anything happens to him, the world will become meaningless to me. I cannot live without him...

At this moment, an old man with a ragtag silver hat appeared from aside walking towards us relying on his stick, which spoiled the general's mood. The general quickly separated from us and approached the old man. Whatever he told him, the old man turned sadly back and disappeared at the corner ahead.

Without waiting for our question about the identity of the old man, the general put a false expression to his arrogant eyes and said:

He is an acquaintance, he used to be our neighbour. He had something to tell me, I explained it to him and he left.

Later the old man appeared to be the general's father. He heard that his ungrateful son, whom he had not seen for months who was staying in the hotel and came to see him. The general considering he could appear in a stupid position in front of us got rid of his poor father and made him leave. Certainly, if anybody would start asking questions from the father, he would answer like the King Lear and say, yes, this able-bodied general is my seed in this world. Yet, he is not a child for me now, he is a microbe dressed like general whom I have seeded.

Gazing from the fortress of trust and dignity of the shepherds and farmers praying upon their parents after God and thus dragging their own village closer to God, I am saying, God, save us from those ministers and microbes disguised like general "burning" with the love of motherland and respect to a father! God Almighty, take this Aligouluushaghi of pure soul and dear to me with all its youth and elders to your wings and protect them from such ministers and generals!

XXXIV

In the hot August of eighties, I was dispatched to Gubadli as a journalist. We were sitting in the office of Zohrab Mammadov, the first secretary of the regional committee. The First Secretary said during the conversation that he was in the Aligouluushaghi village yesterday. We were building a new place for highbred livestock. Yet, some people are interfering in our plans. I saw one named Rahman talking too much nonsense, so I ordered him to Isgandar bey's jail.

Since there were other leading officials near us, I did not go into the details of this issue. We finished our work and at midnight left for a walk together with the secretary in the small settlement covered in green, where I used to work as a newspaper editor thirty years ago.

Reaching the building with red roof that hosted militia department and the State Security Office on its second floor and

a jail on its ground floor, I stopped. Isgandar bey once built this building for himself, he used to live on its second floor and made the ground floor a horse barn. Therefore, whenever someone was put in jail, local population called it: He was placed in Isgandar bey's barn.

My legs refused moving when we reached the building located at the end of the central street. The special guestroom arranged for me, with foreign furniture, soft blanket and bedding, all kinds of things in it... And the wretched and harmless soul of our village, Rahman placed in Isgandar bey's barn. – I began reflecting for a while. – The entire Aligouluushaghi population knows very well that Rahman has never hurt a fly in his life; he is a shy, quiet and pitiful person. It is a very big injustice to place such a person in jail. Besides, without a prosecutor's sanction or a court decision... Just like that, out of blue, by an order... Put him in jail! – That's it. At that time, nobody dared to make a party leader repeat himself. Yet, in many senses, it was inappropriate to officially interfere in this issue as a journalist... Therefore, I told to the first secretary half-friendly and half-jokingly:

Maybe we can visit the jail on our way?! What will people say if I don't visit my countryman? Besides, I know Rahman very well. He is not a man for jail! It seems, the regional committee secretary had a bad day. – I said the last sentence with a tone of disappointment and hurt.

The first secretary, who always respected me and was good to me, understood my point and smiled softly. We turned towards the militia department.

At this time of night, the first secretary of the regional committee and the special correspondent of the Communist newspaper... The militiamen on the night watch were agitated. The chairman of militia department Ilich Karimov, who used to be my student once at the Dondarli high school, heard of our visit, left his house and was soon there to see us... They brought Rahman. I did not feel any expression of joy, disturbance or

protest in the reserved eyes of this simple-looking man dressed in old ragtag clothes. Seeing me, he said with a villager pride characteristic of the old men, as if nothing had happened:

It's nice to see you, Ali. What are you doing here at this time of the night? – Then he kept silent. – I heard you were here, so I came. How come you are here? – I replied to Rahman's question with a question.

Rahman shuddered reluctantly and said:

It happens, a man has trouble from time to time. A new barn is being built in the village, – he continued, – this man was also there, – he pointed at the secretary with his chin, – I couldn't stop my tongue. I said, this is a stony-rocky place, not appropriate for a barn. Choose some proper place, so that it is closer to water and pasture. The secretary did not like my words... The secretary did not allow for any discussion. He smiled:

Okay, okay, let this countryman of Ali muallim out. – He ordered daringly.

Without looking at us, Rahman said only two words with the same pride and obduracy.

– Thank you. As if, a heavy mountain was taken off my shoulders. I felt a strange lightening inside me. I slept very well that night. I had no right to be proud of this, as I had simply fulfilled the duty of an inhabitant of the village, where I was born.

I have never forgotten the duty of inhabitant of the village, where I was born and grew up, as well as the value and respect of my parents, who delivered me to this world. One day, my father sent a message via some visitor asking if I could come to the village when I have time, he has something to tell me. I drove for four-five hours and visited him. It appears, the double pool Mashadi Allahveran Spring with stone vaults at the valley dividing our village into two had long dried. Women and girls were suffering from lack of water, carrying it in jars on their shoulders. My father turned to me and said: son, a strong flood

has ruptured the valley and the water is flowing in another direction, so the spring is long time dry. Mashadi Allahveran's spirit is not letting me be indifferent since that day. I keep hearing his voice around me. As if he reproaches me saying the spring he had built with a million suffering has been ruined, while you, my grandchildren are alive... My aim in separating you from your work and life and bringing you here is that you have a position, your word is heard everywhere. You should take care of this problem. We have dug the valley and found the source of water. We don't need much, just a two-three hundred meter iron pipe and some cement, then the people will gather and repair the spring. You know that this is a distant region, how can we get cement or pipe here?! I thought, I could ask only for your help. See what you can do. If only the population's water problem is solved, you will have enough blessings of this land's people, Mashadi Allahveran's spirit in the other world will also find some peace.

I returned to Aghdam, which never lacked manly and capable people and involved the friends and acquaintances, whom I knew and trusted, and who had the necessary power to solve this issue... Aligouluushaghi was rid of the water problem.

Sometimes, when the central press writes about my father's grandfather Mashadi Allahveran's kindness and the vaulted spring he built, people close to me read about it and called me. I think, what a happiness it is to do a good deed and bring respect and esteem to your own grandson and grand-grandson! I feel proud whenever Mashadi Allahveran's kindness is mentioned. Also, I think, what I could do to leave my trace, so that the future generation tells –Bravo! – to my deeds. So that my grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren feel pride and confidence because of it and say proudly, see, I had such a grandfather.

Going into the depth of this issue and analyzing it, I feel horrified. How hard is the citizenship road! How difficult it is to

do a good thing and cause the right actions in this world! Whenever I remember that I have supported many poor people in my land and gave them education without a charge, I have helped the people, who were deemed guilty without guilt, reached out to the helpless, I calm down a bit. I say to myself, thank God, I have done something, however small it was. Yet, what are these deeds compared to the material riches and moral maturity our village abundantly bestowed upon me?! It is a drop in a bucket. How indebted I am to the fertile soil of Aligouluushaghi, on which I took my first fragile steps, the wise men, who taught me, the rivers and lakes I used to wander around, the springs in front of which I used to bend down, kneel down and drink water, the mountains, valleys and the roads I walked every inch of and rode on a horse...

As a man of pen, I have to admit also that I have praised and publicized the harsh life of my land and its brave men. In this sense, I am guilty in front of you, people of Gubadli, my countrymen!

XXXV

In the time of Nicolas, Khudayar was quite famous in Aligouluushaghi. Even today people speak of him. Ostensibly nobody questioned any of his actions. He murdered so many people, who upset him while working in Baku as a worker. Finally, he escaped from Baku and returned to Aligouluushaghi in order to avoid prison. In the village, he caused the blood of many people again; they say he would cut the tongue of whoever daring to speak. Many would avoid getting involved with him – God keep me out of harm's way.

Khudayar's relatives were allegedly proud of his position in the village. He would overtake whomever he would get and stone whomever he would not. As Khudayar would only hear his own name, he was pretending to be beyond God's command. (The name Khudayar consists of two words – Khuda – meaning God and yar – meaning loved one – **trans.**)

One evening, Khudayar orders to cut the lame yearling that broke its leg in the pasture and cook bozartma (Azerbaijani national meal – **trans.**) from it. They circle around the fire flaming in the middle of the four-pile hut and set the dinner table. After the happy dinner, Khudayar’s wife Qizbasti hints at her husband that she wants grapes. Normally, Khudayar might have ignored this desire and frown at his wife asking how he is supposed to get grapes at this time of night. However, as Qizbasti was pregnant, Khudayar does not want to hurt her. – I’ll get it, – he says. Getting grapes is not a problem for me?!

Khudayar takes the gun on his shoulder and leaves the house in the darkness of night. He thinks it would take too much time to reach the vineyards far away and return home, while the grapes in nearby gardens have been mostly harvested. Only his uncle Amrullah has nice grapes in his garden. Most of them have not been even touched yet. His uncle has left for the Gorus bazaar. So, there should not be anybody in the garden. He even remembers a village saying – Steal from your uncle to avoid being beaten up when caught. Khudayar smirks and smiles to himself. – Yes, I’ll just go to my uncle’s garden, there is no better option than that, – he thinks.

The gardens under cliff are located approximately one kilometer from the village, in between the Galin Cave rocks and a river. Dense mulberry trees are the first to catch a glance at the garden’s entrance. Amrullah’s accurately lined vineyards come after that. Khudayar carefully crosses over the fence and enters his uncle’s garden. He climbs one of the trees with the gun on his shoulder. He starts picking the bunches he can lay his hands on and throwing them to the ground when suddenly someone appears under the tree and starts threatening him:

– Hey, who are you! Climb down before I come for you!

The reply comes from Khudayar’s gun, not from Khudayar himself. He fires three shots one after another. A terrified voice from under the tree cries:

– Ah, scoundrel!

Khudayar climbs down. He lights a match to see whom he has killed. The man silenced forever. It was not a stranger, either. It was Khudayar's own cousin.

Apparently, as Amrullah had left for the Gorus bazaar, he was guarding the garden tonight. It was his cousin employed in an oil field in Baku. He was granted permission to come to village by his father's request to marry a girl he had long been engaged to and return to Baku again. Amrullah had left to the Gorus city to buy things for the wedding.

Khudayar sees the job has been done, so he escapes. He does not say anything about it at home, either. The next morning the news of Amrullah's son's murder spreads in the village. Running to his uncle's house, Khudayar starts beating himself and says:

– You have turned a wedding into mourning, cousin! – And starts crying bitterly.

During the funeral, Khudayar turns to the visitors and says:

– People, listen all and be aware! I am Khudayar, you know. If my cousin's blood is not revenged the Khudayar of Aliglouluushaghi, descendant of the Zabikhli tribe does not deserve to wear a cap! I'll pay 50 ten-ruble golden coins to whoever that helps me find the murderer.

So many innocent people have faced Khudayar's bullet. People blamed Khudayar also for murder and burning of Ismayil at the entrance to the Yazi spring.

Yet, the saying goes: THE PITCHER GOES ONCE TOO OFTEN TO THE WELL (BUT IS BROKEN AT LAST). One summer morning Safar and Khudayar plan to go to some place. Safar is said to have been a brave, but a tranquil man. He would not show his thorns to everyone as Khudayar. He treated children as children and adults as adults. Still, Khudayar was quite arrogant with him. He did not respect Safar in the least. Having reached the plain, both of them set their horses loose. Safar's horse was

ambling while Khudayar's was trotting. When Safar's horse outpaces his own, Khudayar says arrogantly:

– Hey, Safar, slow down your nag. The proverb says quite rightly don't be friends with the one whose horse ambles or whose wife is pretty.

These words ring in Safar's ears, because Safar's wife was a woman beautiful both for her morality and for her outer appearance. Safar understands what Khudayar hints at. However, he decides to let go of it for now. He draws the bridle and waits for Khudayar. This time, the horses pace briskly together. Khudayar feels from Safar's mood that those words have offended Safar. Yet, Khudayar thinks Safar is too timid even to have a look at Khudayar's corpse. Who the hell is Safar?! In Khudayar's world, nobody! He can't stand in front of Khudayar with a thousand tricks. They talk coldly about different things and reach the Gasham spring. Both dismount. When Khudayar turns toward the spring, Safar grabs the pistol stripped to his waist and shouts imperatively:

– Khudayar!

Khudayar turns around, sees Safar with a pistol aimed at him, does not get tangled and quickly grabs his own gun. Safar does not give him a chance and shouts:

– Khudayar! Tell these words on your way to the other world! A man does not touch another man's dignity. Then you will say the bloods you shed returned to you.

The pistol fires as Khudayar tries to make a move. Two shots in succession...

Safar leaves Khudayar's corpse at the Gasham spring and gets on his horse. On the way, he meets Khudayar's cousin. Safar thinks the next day this cousin will take vengeance for this blood. He might choose blood for blood. Therefore, after greeting, he asks Khudayar's cousin to girth up the horse so that he himself does not dismount. When the cousin moves towards him, Safar fires another shot at him...

XXXVI

EH, WHAT EVENTS THIS VILLAGE HAS WITNESSED! This village has seen the final lot of many, who defied the odds claiming they were strong and wild. This village has raised endless number of brave men, who taught a lesson to and curbed others tearing around. We consider expedient to talk about some of them, even if it is too late now...

My uncle Amrah was my father's elder brother. His sisters Aghja and Shakhanim were drowning in tears remembering him and would call him – our worlord brother! A book titled "*In the Zangazur Mountains*" by Nazar Heydarov, who was from the neighbouring Gurjulu village, used to be Amrah's clerk once and was working as the Chairman of the Republican Supreme Soviet during the soviet times, provides broad description of my uncle's bravery.

ONE SPRING MORNING, Amrah hears a scream. He heads towards it and sees the village constable scourging Haji Misirkhan beating him ruthlessly on the head. In tsar Nicolas' times, there was a rule that a government official visiting a village would stay as guest in different houses each time. This time, the constable was Haji Misirkhan's guest. When looking at the barley given to his horse, the village constable sees a few tiny stones there. The guest loses his temper. Ostensibly, the host "disrespected" the guest, did not have his horse's barley cleaned. That's why the constable went wild! He began whipping Haji Misirkhan. Nobody dared to approach and interfere. Amrah gnaws his lips in rage and says twice to himself:

– Damn you, devil! Damn you, devil!

The sisters knew their brother's character very well. They know that if Amrah used these words, he will definitely do something. Aghja and Shakhanim run towards Amrah. However, it is useless... Amrah reaches the village constable like a hawk and manages to get Haji Misirkhan out of his hands. Then he puts the government official under his legs and beats him black

and blue. The entire village rush there, but nobody manages to take the constable away from Amrah. Eventually, women throw a kerchief between them...Amrah throws the bleeding constable onto his horse and drives him out of Aligouluushaghi.

The elders hearing of this event do not approve of this. Everybody sings his own tune:

– Amrah, you can't play a government with a government. You shouldn't have beaten the constable. This will lead to a catastrophe.

– I wish this conflict doesn't incur trouble on the village.

– He threw us to wolves because of Haji Misirkhan...

Yet, the job was done. In the morning, the village receives news that the bailiff has sent 50 armed horsemen. The bailiff ordered the village of Aligouluushaghi to be destroyed and razed to ground and Amrah brought to him with arms tied up....

The village plunges into mourning at the bad news. Everyone tries to find a solution to escape from skirmish. Women and children get scared. Amrah arms himself and gets on his horse:

– People! – He says. – Do not be alarmed! I am the one, who has done it and I am ready to answer for it! Do not worry! As long as I am alive, I'll not let any child be harmed.

Amrah gathers the trustworthy men of the village capable of handling arms and establishes barricades around the village. His condition is this – I don't recognize either a government, or a bailiff! We should not let any strangers enter this village. I prefer to die rather than surrender! The majority will have more corpses, the minority less! God help us!

Amrah says these words and loosens his horse scrolling under him...

The elders of the village gather together and start discussing how to save Aligouluushaghi from this bloody conflict... The respectable elders – Pasha, Mashadi Ibrahim and Firdovsi take bread and salt and greet the fully armed bailiff horsemen at the

Alchali Valley. Pasha moves toward the head of the armed men and says:

– Son, we are still Muslims. We don't do eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. Amrah has accidentally done a wrong thing. In fact, the constable himself put a stick to a honeybee. He is the guilty one. Nevertheless, it is too late to talk about it now. One hand hit, the other cut. We don't want a slap to cause blood of hundreds of young men. Both you and we know what kind of a man Amrah is. He has also blockaded the roads everywhere and speaks blood. No slave is perfect, no owner is merciless. For the love of God! Please, give up this conflict! What's done can't be undone! Forgive this event to our old age!

The bailiff's horsemen looked around. Their leaders start whispering between themselves. Then they come forward and take the bread and salt from the elders. The government fighters who came to shed some blood now entered the village as guests. Two bullocks are cut. A table of reconciliation is opened. The bailiff's horsemen and Amrah's armed men sit in front of each other and eat together. Who can forget the bread and salt shared in Azerbaijani tradition. People would lynch such men.

If it wasn't for the elders, what could have happened! So many hearths would have been trampled. The proverb says quite fairly: Better a godless place than elderless.

Old men would also tell this story:

– Between Nicolas' dethronement and establishment of soviet government, there was a time of chaos. There was absolutely no law. It was a time of the strong and the weak. Kalba Amrah, who had been repeatedly exiled to Siberia for robbery and banditry finally came back and settled in a stone cave called the Kilsa Kaha (Church Cave-trans.) located between Aligouluushaghi and the Khinzirak village of Armenia. He was oppressing the people of neighbouring villages. He wouldn't recognize God or men. His sword was constantly bleeding. He would gather the cattle of neighbouring villages in the middle of the day, hail them

into the Kilsa Kaha, sell them dog-cheap to Armenians and buy instead golden money, fabrics, sugar, tea and clothes. Who would dare to stand up against Kalba Amrah, or tell him anything? He would rarely be seen in the village. – Kalba Amrah is coming! – Hearing this, women and children would get scared, run into their huts and lock it from inside. Everybody was trembling with fear in front of him. In the neighbouring villages, people were sending women to the drove thinking a man would not approach the cattle herded by women. Kalba Amrah did not care if it was a man or a woman! He did not know day and night. He was stealing livestock village after village. This was bringing misery to the people of Aligouluushaghi. Nobody dared to stand up against Kalba Amrah. Nobody was sick of his life in order to put his head before Kalba Amrah's bullet. Everybody was on the edge.

One day, as usual, a few people were gathered in the middle of the village talking about the past, the present time and hoaxed of Russian government to let their hair down. Amrah was also among them. In the middle of the talk, someone let slip out inadvertently: Kalba Amrah is coming! Hearing this, women and children move away from doors, everybody enters their home. Kalba Amrah turns from the corner in front of him and moves toward the people gathered in the middle of village, with a gun on his shoulder, cartridge belt on his waist and himself full of beans. He greets his countrymen standing in a circle and talking. They greet him back. They change the topic discussed so far. Kalba Amrah also stands aside and listens to the conversation. Amrah was silent leaning his wide shoulders against a wall. From time to time, he would cast an obdurate glance at Kalba Amrah out of the tail of his eye and weigh him down with accusing gaze. Suddenly, he turned to Kalba Amrah and said:

– Nobody here is a stranger, it is just us. I have to say this, whether you like it or not, if Gubadli has four or five large villages, Aligouluushaghi is one of them. We are densely populated. It would not suit us to use our strength and loot the neighbouring

smaller villages. Even if you are older than me, you are wrong in your actions. You have passed all the borders recently seeing the government powerless. A snake crawls everywhere crooked, but straight to its nest. Do not disgrace our village for the delights of this world. Whatever happened, it is in the past. Move from the Kilsa Kaha back to the village. True, they say a wolf needs a dark place. However, you are a Karbala pilgrim! I am not talking about us; you have abandoned your own relatives and dwell lonely in the darkness of the Kilsa Kaha. You are feeding the livestock of the poor to Armenians...

Silence settled over the gathering after Amrah's words. Nobody spoke. Kalba Amrah reddened up to his ears:

– You are talking too much, Amrah, – he said. – You want to teach a lesson to me now?! These words will cost you dearly! Thank the people gathered around here, otherwise...

– Otherwise, what would you do, Karbalayi?! At least, be ashamed of that pilgrimage title! –Amrah replies.

Kalba Amrah's reddened and his furious eyes pop out. He starts moving his hand to his sword and says:

– Hey, Amrah, you are one step too far! You are lecturing me now?! I have cut many heads like yours that look like a sparrow-head, – and attacks Amrah.

Amrah also throws himself toward Kalba Amrah. People stand in between them and draw them away from each other. They don't let bloodshed. Kalba Amrah departs from them grumbling and steps over to the other side of valley. He enters a destroyed building and fires a couple of shots at Amrah. Amrah quickly takes his gun from home and fires at Kalba Amrah. The village is driven into panic. Women's screams and dogs' barking become unbearable. Kalba Amrah threatens Amrah, while Amrah threatens him back. The elders of the village rush to the place and somehow end the fray. Luckily, nobody is injured. Only a widow's mule standing in the yard with a sack of barley and chaff on its head is slightly injured on its thigh.

The next morning, Kalba Amrah sends a message of warning from the Kilsa Kaha that Mammadbaghir's son talks too much; I swear to cut out his tongue. Amrah sends a message back: you are not a man if you don't use all your abilities. If I ever again hear you touch a calf of the poor, you will pay for that! Then either you or I will remain in the Aligouluushaghi village!

Only three days pass after this event. One morning at dawn, five or six women from the neighbouring Dovudlu village with a rafter of vealers they brought dragging along with them appear at Amrah's door. The women start wailing and screaming that Kalba Amrah took our cows right in front of our eyes in the pasture! Their calves have been bleating from yesterday! Amrah, dear, how can God stand such a torture?!

Amrah does not know what to answer from shame. He says twice – Damn you, devil, and quickly arms himself. He mounts his chestnut horse. Aghja and Shakhanim stand in their brother's way, hug his horse's legs and scream:

– Don't go, brother! Kalba Amrah has wrecked so many people's lives! Do not go to your own death this dawn! Rage fills Amrah. He does not see anything; hear anything at that moment heading to a fight. He pushes sisters on their chest and whips the chestnut under him. The horse snorts, prances, sprints and leaves the yard.

Everybody knew that Amrah is going to meet his death. Therefore, Amrah's brothers and sisters try to stop him, but cannot reach him.

Amrah reaches the place only when each of Armenians has tied a string around a cow's neck in the valley between the Kilsa Kaha and White Rock plain. Kalba Amrah transacts with them a black jacket on his shoulder. The bleating of milk-cows with utters wiping the ground has filled the valley. Amrah ties the headstall on a bush somewhere behind the valley and moves to the back of the rock. First, he fires two warning shots in the air and shouts, Kalbayi, I have kept our promise, I am here! Now the

God will be favourable either to you or to me! Remember that I am not a betrayer; I am not shooting you from the back without notice, leave aside!

Kalba Amrah departs from the “bazaar” and throws himself onto a flooded valley before him. They shoot at each other for a long time running from stone to stone, from bush to bush. Kalba Amrah shouts, hey, so far not a bird has perched on my preserve! A stupid boy! Have you run so amuck you want to actually ride a horse in my field?! I swear to kill you like a rat in a hole! Soon your sisters will wash your bloody shirt!..

Amrah’s precise shot cuts Kalba Amrah’s voice forever. Armenians run away and cows scatter around in fear. Kalbayi’s corpse remains in the bottom of the mossy rock with cotoneasters growing on it.

The Aligouluushaghi Cemetery has only one road. That road passes straight from the middle of the village. When relatives gather and lift Kalba Amrah’s corpse, Amrah says the Aligouluushaghi village cannot make a lane for the corpse of someone having stained its name with robbery and banditry. Kalba Amrah’s corpse will not pass through the village, that’s it! Let this decision of mine be a lesson to our land!

Kalba Amrah’s corpse was the first one in the ALIGOULUUSHAGHI VILLAGE THROUGHOUT ITS HUNDREDS OR THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF EXISTENCE to be carried to the cemetery not from the middle of village, but from the surrounding valleys. Solely for having dishonored the village’s name.

There are orchards along the left bank of the Bargushad River flowing two versts from the village. Therefore, this place is called the River Orchards. This paradise yielding various boons has only belonged to royal families. Khanlar bey, Mirzali bey, Habib bey, Amrullah bey, Garash bey... The only person not belonging to a royal family in this list of names was my grandfather Mammadbaghir. This estate somehow passed to my grandfather and father through my mother’s family line. The royal families

were said to have raged seeing a stranger among themselves. Our garden neighbour Mahammad bey was offending my grandfather Mammadbaghir a lot. After Amrah's appearance, the royalties stopped nosing around. Nevertheless, they would reveal their grudge at every opportunity.

XXXVII

MY FATHER USED TO SPEAK:

– At that time I was ten or twelve. Amrah was full-aged. He was not married yet. In the heat of summer, we had moved to the River Orchard with families to gather mulberries and cook them. Cauldrons were boiling on one side; Amrah was in a mulberry tree on the other side shaking branches, while his sisters Aghja and Shakhanim were gathered around a big pit under the tree. I was taking care of the fire for the cauldrons and collecting the scum of boiling juice with a copper colander. Amrah asked me to do another job still shaking the branches on the tree:

– Ildirim, the orchard and garden are decaying. Go and turn on the water on the top so we can irrigate this place.

Our orchard's water was passing through Mahammad bey's garden. Mahammad bey was a very decent person. He wouldn't touch an apple or a pear falling from our garden to his. On the contrary, he would throw them back to our garden. Yet, he was a very stern person. He had caused a lot of bloodshed. Because of water, he murdered a young man soon to marry. He had scared everybody so much that no one dared to speak up. A passer-by would never dare to look at his garden with a tail of his eye. He was a very frightening man. We were always scared to death when passing by his garden to turn on the water. Usually we would guard each other; when Mahammad bey would leave for somewhere, we would go to his garden and bring water. When Amrah said, – Ildirim, go turn on the water, – Mahammad bey was in his garden to make things worse. If it was up to me, I would never take a step to that side. However, Amrah is my elder brother. I was

supposed to obey him even if he would send me to death. I crossed the fence and made a few steps when Mahammad bey saw me and growled at me angrily:

– Hey, son of a bitch, where are you going trampling the grass and clovers?

– Uncle Mahammad, our garden is drying I am going to the canal to turn on the water, – I replied holding back.

Mahammad bey moved his hand to his trousers.... And said:

– Come, take this instead of water.

He was an impudent bey leching for blood, while I was an unarmed kid wet behind the ears. What could I say to Mahammad bey?! I came back in distress.

Amrah was still shaking the mulberry tree. He saw me and asked:

– Hey, Ildirim, what about the water?!

I lowered my head. Amrah asked again:

– Hey, why aren't you talking, where is water?!

Mahammad bey's abusive language, plus my failure to fulfill my brother's request... I was choked with sorrow and could not stop myself...

Amrah understood the situation and began descending from the mulberry tree. Unable to control his anger, he jumped out of a tall branch to the ground. However we tried, we could not stop him with my sisters. He took the spade, ran to Mahammad bey's garden and crossed the fence. We followed him...

Mahammad bey's gun that I had seen previously was broken in half and thrown under the plum tree. We heard a raucous voice from above. When we reached there, we saw Amrah beating Mahammad bey black and blue. Then he grabbed Mahammad bey on the nape with his left hand and began dragging him along the garden while closing water on every single canal with his right hand. We managed to get the bey from Amrah's hands somehow...

After that day, Mahammad bey was as calm as a lamb. Hearing Amrah's voice he would seek a hole to hide in. The neighbouring beys having heard of this story came to their senses. Whoever heard

this story would say, thank you so much, Amrah! Mahammad had lost his way; he was thinking he is no longer a creation of God. You have cooled him down; blessed be your mother Kheyransa who raised you!

AMRAH MADE QUITE A NAME IN BRAVERY AND COURAGE. Tsar Nicolas' time was at its very end, there was chaos in the country. At that time, people saw he can control five-ten mountain villages and create some order, so they appointed him a sotnik. After becoming a sotnik, Amrah appointed Nazar Heydarov from the neighbouring Gurjulu village his clerk. In those hard times, Amrah and Nazar supported each other.

FROM THEN ON, the Amrah-Nazar Trust has eternalized in their humane features and passed on through generations.

I have witnessed many cases when people forget their friends once they get promoted failing the companionship of thirty-forty years. A position and wealth is ostensibly the enemy of simplicity, trust and fidelity. Yet, this is not true in the case of Amrah, or Nazar.

YEARS PASSED, the soviet government was established... Nazar left for Baku and was promoted from position to position. Eventually, Nazar Heydarov was appointed the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. He became one of the three men leading the republic. However, his loyalty, sincerity and modesty characteristic of the old men were much higher than his high-ranking position.

I remember very well, a man of such a high position came to Aligoulushaghi to visit Amrah's relatives in 1949. He spoke to my father Ildirim and aunts Aghja and Shakhanim for a long time and remembered the days with Amrah. He put his arm around Amrah's elder son Shiraslan's neck, lifted his cap and said:

– Hey, Shiraslan, you used to be a frail, bald kid. Now, look at you, you are a grown man, thanks to God.

Nazar Heydarov wanted to give some money to Amrah's brother and sisters so as to help them as the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. However, my father refused:

– Nazar, you know that we have never lacked bread in our trough or a guest in our door. We have not felt any hardship even during the war that is now over. None of us needs money. However, I have a request, if you can do something about it, of course.

– Go on, Ildirim, please, do not hesitate to say your word. I have had bread and salt with Amrah for long years. I am in debt before him.

My father said as if speaking his grief to a relative:

– You know, Nazar, my elder sister Shakhanim has two sons. The elder one was Abdullah, he went to the war. His death news came at the very end of the war. The smaller son is Fatullah. He has just graduated from the teacher training school. He is now taking care of Shakhanim mostly. I am ashamed to say, Fatullah has done something unsuitable for our family and origins. We caught him when he was trying to abduct a girl who was a teacher. We took the girl away from him. The girl was not a stranger, either. She was our distant relative. The case was brought to the government. The court sentenced Fatullah for three years in prison. Now his mother is helpless. Check it out, see, if you can influence this somehow, please, help her. If it appears complicated, let it go. Let him be punished, he deserves it.

After my father finished speaking, Nazar asked:

– Has he done anything to the girl?

– Noo, we caught him right in the spot. We did not let the girl be harmed in any way, – my father answered.

Nazar took a white paper out of his pocket and noted something. Then he put the paper into his spectacle-case... In a couple of weeks, a paper arrived from the government informing Fatullah was released on a conditional sentence.

In our village, when the topic is brought up, people speak of an honest man, or a dishonest man. At that time, I did not dive into the meaning of these words. Yet, a long time after that, I understood it. I have seen many times how the friendship of many people demonstrating sloppy endearments to each other at a table of vodka, proposing long toasts, hitting their glasses, hugging

and kissing each other later rotted. I wonder why? Sometimes my old grandma would get upset at the spoilt milk she was trying to prepare for some time. She would explain this with the bad yeast. When clabber was too acid, she would also explain it with the yeast. Maybe this comparison is not fit. Nevertheless, I think, the deteriorating friendship among people also arises from the bad yeast. Such people are also called descendant of an unreliable blood. Those, whose yeast was kneaded with haram, those with unreliable ancestry cannot be friends for a long time. Eventually, they'll reveal their treacherous essence.

A QUOTE FROM PROF.R.P.IVANOV'S BOOK: Once Eisenhower disappears in the decisive moments of his presidential elections. They call him and search him for a long time... Finally it appears that Eisenhower went to see his childhood friend, who had gained invalidity. This sentence from his book did not evade me: – Coming to help has become a usual thing for the Eisenhower brothers.

How many leaders of states do we know?! Yet, trustworthy friendship and a faithful brother is a human feature uncharacteristic of everybody. Therefore, in my heart, the true friend and trustworthy brother Eisenhower is on a higher position than the president Eisenhower.

MIRHASHIM AGHA WAS A DEEPLY RESPECTED SACRED PERSON in Gubadli, if to speak the local people's language. When he was alive, he could settle vendettas between people. Nowadays, his grave near the Novlu village has become a big pilgrimage. I remember, my maternal grandfather Mashadi Pasha who had never missed a fasting or namaz, had a guest during threshing. My grandfather met Mirhashim Agha with deep respect and reverence. He had an animal sacrificed and laid a table. After food, the guest received also many gifts. When leaving, Mirhashim Agha thanked my grandfather and finally said: I have a favour to ask you Mashadi.

– Please, tell me, Agha.

– Mashadi, I am not speaking about the respectful relationships between us. Let's be friends from today.

My grandfather shook his head:

– No, Agha, – he said. – The path of friendship is very hard. Our mutual visits to each other are enough.

I HAVE SEEN SO MANY WITH BAD YEAST ESTIMATING THE HARD PATH OF FRIENDSHIP CHEAPLY. I was working in my office in the Guba Regional Party Committee's building. The head of a small office having arrived from the republic's remote region and whom I knew distantly entered the room:

– I have come to meet the first secretary, – he said. – I have a few words to tell him face to face, – he added. – We have been schoolmates. Once he even worked under my leadership, I have helped him a lot. I have even influenced his promotion. We even have godfather relationships. I wanted to see him, the guard wouldn't let me in saying he is busy, and there is someone with him.

I left the guest in my office and went to see the secretary for a work-related question. After our conversation, I informed an old friend of his was there to see him. The secretary's mood was spoiled, he frowned and said:

– For God's sake, get him out of here! I have got many things to do! You have this news and I am not aware of his presence here! Tell him that I have left for Darband; I have some business there for two or three days! Is it clear what I am trying to say?! – He stood up, locked his office hurriedly and escaped...

I returned to my office. I repeated those words to the guest having arrived to see his old friend through so many regions, even though those were lies, but I was trying to find a way out of the situation. Then I invited the secretary's friend to the Regional Committee's canteen and ordered a few things. Finally, I saw him off gently...

This act of the regional leader cast a black shadow over my long-term respect for him. It appears that position of those with bad yeast is the enemy of bonds of friendship and loyalty; it rots those bonds, corrodes and destroys them.

XXXVIII

THIS IS WHEN WE REMEMBER THE REAL FRIENDSHIP OF THE OLD MEN. The fact that the head of the republican government Nazar Heydarov crossed a long and uncomfortable path in order to visit the relatives of his old friend Amrah, who had died thirty years ago, urges my pen to speak up. When Nazar came to Aligouluushaghi and delivered his regards to Amrah's relatives, he stopped talking for a moment and looked fragiley at the mountains facing each other. He lived through the uphill period of his life, his youth, when he was a clerk of the sotnik Amrah. The mountains where Amrah used to reign riding on his chestnut with a gun strapped to his shoulder and a pistol on his waist, those mountains were just as they always were. Yet, neither the Aligouluushaghi's brave man's voice, nor the chestnut's neigh was heard.

Nazar looked around with wise eyes and lost himself in dreams. He drew a gentle and languishing sigh and said:

– It is a day, comes and goes. What a pity, Amrah! God damn the Armenian dashnaks! Amrah could still be living.

Nazar's thoughts straightened peeking from a mountain of sorrow and grief at those tumultuous years, when Amrah faced an Armenian bullet...

How many times Armenian butchers trying to show themselves to the world community as a miserable and poor nation having suffered so-called a Turkish genocide have ferociously plundered and looted these villages! The old Balahassanli village with over five hundred houses was burnt so savagely that there remains nothing else than destroyed walls and holes here. A few people having escaped from Armenians have established a new village consisting of ten-fifteen houses. There is no trace of the Sofulu, Garabashli, Galaboynu, Chomchali and Garachiyurdu villages. Therefore, Amrah was always vigilant. He knew that Armenians have thousand faces. One should not be deceived by their talks and tricks. He knew that an old enemy cannot be a friend. So, the

sotnik Amrah was constantly vigilant. Having called him to Panahabad, which was later renamed into Shusha, and giving him arms and weapons, Khosrov bey told him: Amrah, I only rely on you in those regions. Only you can deal with Armenians.

Not a bird dared to fly over the bordering villages. Armed Amrah would ride his horse right into the center of any shooting. No Armenian pest dared to approach these places fearing Amrah.

It was a drizzly night. The people of Aligouluushaghi, Malikahmadli, Teymurmuskanli, Novlu, Gurjulu, Dovudlu, Sofulu, Eyvazli, Gadili... villages working from morning till night and hardly earning their living through tense labour were all exhausted and sleeping. At dawn, Amrah heard a fire. Despite being ill, he quickly got up and armed himself. He got on his horse and took his neighbour and distant relative Balaja bey with him just in case.

It appears that he had been secretly gathering news for the shoemaker Khachatur Andranik's gang that was preparing for an attack wandering around the village for several days and patching up people's shoes. He had returned to Gorus a few days before and delivered the collected news to his Armenian landlords. He also informed them of Amrah's illness. So, Amrah is sick! Who would miss such a chance?! Andranik's bandits do not miss this opportunity and attack that very night with their weapons.

Amrah crosses the Lalazar Bridge with Balaja bey near him and passes to the right bank of the Bargushad River. From here, the Armenian side was clearly visible. The noise of fire strengthens as they advance. Yet, due to the thick fog in the valley, it is not clear what the shooting is about. When they reach the Sofulu village, bullets rain onto Amrah from the other side of the river. The issue becomes clear. Armenians have attacked without a notice. Amrah quickly dismounts and hides behind a stone examining the surrounding area...

The dawn was breaking. The roads started getting visible. Armenian bloodsuckers had blocked all the roads like a pack of

wild dogs. There was a danger of encirclement for the Dovudlu and Sofulu villages. Amrah chose himself a good position and took well-aimed shots at those trying to pass to the village by crossing the wooden bridge on the river; they fell down one after another. Seeing the situation, Armenians couldn't move towards the village any more. However, the shooting continued. Amrah says to Balaja bey, I have stopped the enemy, if I leave the trench, both Dovudlu and Sofulu will be gone. You try to escape somehow and inform the people of Aligouluushaghi to come.

As if, Balaja bey was waiting only for this, he immediately escapes. And never comes back! No help follows. Amrah fights alone. First, his horse gets shot. The horse prances and runs into the Sofulu village. As if, it goes to deliver the news. It goes to calm down the people. To say that Amrah is alive, he protects you. Armenians cannot come near you. Thus, perishes Amrah's chestnut... Then Amrah himself gets shot. He is shot not from behind, but on his left chest. Yet, Amrah does not yield to the enemy. He continues firing single-handedly until the darkness appeared.

XXXIX

It was now dark everywhere. Since anyone trying to move forward was falling to the ground, Armenians had stopped the attack. The bellow of burning cattle running about, howl of dogs and screams of women and children in the light of dreadful fire rising from the barns aside was stretching to the depth of dark night terrifying not only the poor people, but also the mountains and stones.

The people of Dovudlu and Sofulu villages were hurriedly collecting their lightweight but valuable things and leaving their native land. As Armenians had blocked the main roads, the people were forced to scatter to the forests and climb on cliffs. A respected man of Dovudlu named Movlanverdi first saw off his wife and children and then left himself. When passing the Sofulu

village and climbing the valley ahead, his loaded, bridled horse suddenly stops and won't move, snorts and perks up its ears. Movlanverdi understands there is some danger ahead. He looks around in the darkness of night. He heard a moaning from the deep a few steps ahead. Movlanverdi approaches the silhouette and lights up a match. Amrah's pale face and bloodstained stones light up in the match's vibrant glow. Amrah recognizes Movlanverdi once he opens his eyes. He draws himself up and lifts his head despite having lost a lot of blood:

– Movlanverdi, – he says. – I'll not heal from this wound. Do not lose your time here. Go, don't let your wife and children be caught by rats, – and faints.

Movlanverdi takes out his knife and starts cutting the rope of holdalls filled with gold, silver, silk and other valuable items:

– AMRAH, I CAN'T TAKE THE WEALTH OF THE WORLD AND LEAVE YOU HERE IN THE HANDS OF RATS, – he says, holds the Aligouluushaghi brave man by his armpit and somehow drags him onto his horse...

Writing these lines, I remembered those shooting their friends and buddies from behind for a gun in the battles of thus demonstrating their absolute lack of dignity, conscience and honour thought with a tear at my heart: – Why is the Movlanverdi dignity so scarce nowadays?! Why is the Movlanverdi bravery so scarce these days?!

Yes, as Amrah was shot, everything went upside down. Armenians felt a solid ground under their legs. People began leaving their native villages. The people of Gubadli carried the wounded Amrah on their hands from village to village and finally delivered him to Khanlig.

Five or six horsemen from the Zarisli village had returned from Iran and were spending a night in the Khanlig village. They hear Amrah lying on his back in a village house there and visit him. They get very upset seeing Amrah so bad. They looked out for a herbalist in the vicinity and had Amrah's wound patched up.

... Amrah was feeling a bit better. He stands up, takes the gun and holds it in front of his face with one arm thinking – I can shoot. The next morning he gets on a horse. Despite the village doctors' objections, he moves towards the Horovlu village settled by the refugees in order to gather some people around himself. The chilly frost of Araz beats up his shoulder. Amrah gathers the refugee countrymen having found shelter in the Horovlu and Tinli villages. He calms them down: – Do not be afraid, bad days do not last long. Prepare yourselves, we must go to battle.

These were Amrah's last words. The heavy wound was hardened and advanced to his heart... he was buried in the Horovlu village of Jabrayil region. Thus, a star of bravery shining over the Aligouluushaghi village faded.

Casting a departing glance at the people standing above his head and surrounding his pillow, Amrah said his final words:

*Snow covered the mountains,
Darkness fell within.
Crows became falcons,
Falcons turned into crows.*

Nazar Heydarov finished his story and stopped talking.

I felt as if a gloomy silence cast upon the high and low mountains surrounding Aligouluushaghi.

XL

Standing in front of my text and gazing down at the downhill roads and deep valleys I was remembering all of these and telling to myself: I am guilty in front of you, my village! I haven't described thoroughly and elaborately the chronicles of bravery of my native land, its rises and falls and conflicting stories, I haven't delivered this gift of memory to the future generations. I haven't spoken about the loyalty of Nazar, courage of Amrah and nobility of Movlanverdi in the language of my pages to today and tomorrow.

The land of Nabi and Hajar have so many brave men. Who are they? Unfortunately, my pen is ashamed in front of this question.

Once I heard a rumour about a Chechen saying he is not an Azerbaijani to run from the battlefield. I am not sure if such a phrase was actually used or not. Nevertheless, it tore my heart apart. Have we really become so miserable. My mood was spoilt, my spirit flew to the land of valiant men... I remembered an event I faced in the Muradkhanli village: In 1950, I was working as an Assistant Director for Educational Affairs in a high school in this village. The school, its medical station, house of teachers and hostel were all located approximately a kilometer away from the village, on the Gubadli-Lachin mainroad. At that time, I was a single man. From time to time, I would visit the medical station to chat with Doctor Alabbas Karimov, who was originally from Baku and interested in literature and art. One day, when we were sitting in the doctor's office and talking, the door opened. A strict looking woman dressed in a top welted in fur, long skirt and thin shawl on her head boldly entered the room. She greeted both of us politely and said:

– How are you, the Baku man, do you have sulfide? If you have, give me also a bottle of iodine, – she said.

The doctor immediately stood up as if powerless in front of her and said with a submissive smile:

– Yes, I have, sister Tavat. Any drugs are available for you, even if for nobody else.

When this stern woman of male attitudes bent down to take the drug from doctor's hand, her top lifted slightly revealing the tip of a silver sword. Miss Tavat took the drugs and nodded us goodbye without saying a word.

AT THAT TIME, PEOPLE WERE CAREFUL EVEN TO CARRY A HUNTING KNIFE ON THEM. I am not even mentioning a sword. If anybody was caught with a weapon, he or she would be definitely persecuted. Then, how does this woman dear to wear a sword?!

I was very curious. I was told that she is from the Basharag village. She is famous as Manly Tavat among people.

They told me a brief story of the word “man” in front of her name. A few men from the Armenian village of Khozabird suddenly catch her only brother and bring him to their village beating him up. The horseshoer Sarkis punches a horseshoe under her brother’s leg and they poke his eyes out after he dies.

Tavat kneels down in front of her crying father and swears holding Qur’an (Koran) to revenge this blood. From that day, she moves to the depths of the Basharag forests and starts living in a secret corner, totally alone and learns how to fire a gun, wield a sword and fight an enemy hand-to-hand. After that, she starts ambushing the Khozabird village at nights... First she kills Sarkis and his son. Then she affronts many treacherous Armenians bathing them in blood.

Though many years had passed since that event, the “Manly Tavat” wouldn’t let go of her weapon. She would say, a sword of revenge is long. I cannot give it up. Besides, there is a proverb, wear your weapon a hundred days, you will use it once. I do not trust Armenians...

I am reflecting: Why have our penmen having been embroidering our small faults for a very long time, I would say, as far back as since the last century, making a mountain out of a molehill have ignored the clear realities about this brave woman famous with the names Manly Tavat and Sword Tavat?! Why have these legends of heroism of ours been overlooked?! How have we pinched ourselves seeing the mote in the eyes of famous Sultan bey and Khosrov bey brothers of Kurdistan renowned for their national dignity?! Specifically knowing that it was exactly due to the elaborate and successful military operation planned by Sultan bey, which had an excellent military command, that saved the people of Garabagh from Andranik’s slaughter plans and led to destruction of Armenian army in the valleys of Lachin. What can one say to those among us, who are willing to stain such

a warrior just to write something agreeable to the standards of current time, instead of erecting his bust in the Lachin Mountains?!

IT WAS THE MID OF 1950-ies. Editor-in-chief of the *Communist* newspaper, where I was working, invited me to discuss an issue. I was in his office. The newspaper's photographer holding a few pictures in his hand entered the room:

– The pictures are ready, I've brought them, – he said.

The editor-in-chief put on his glasses, had an attentive look at the pictures, shook his head and seemed unnerved:

– I just cannot explain it to you! – He said. – What kind of picture is this?! I have told you thousand times: a Russian should be in the front.

I took one of the pictures discarded by the editor and returned to the photographer, and ran my eyes over it. It was from the Oil Rocks. An able-bodied, black-browed and black-eyed man standing in the front drew attention in these clear and interesting pictures. However, the editor-in-chief was very angry that it was an Azerbaijani man, not a Russian; because according to the editor's political perspective, another nation's, a kind of elder brother nation's representative should be standing in the front.

The editor-in-chief grumbled a long time about the photographer:

– He is a good photographer, but a politically dumb person. We can't publish such a picture... I have told him a hundred times we should put a Russian in the front. Such things are carefully observed in the higher circles...

The photographer left totally abashed.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE: I wrote a feuilleton about an Armenian named Matevosyan having appropriated a colossal governmental property in the Nakhchivan Winery and sent it to the editor's office. A few days after, the editor-in-chief called me:

– Ali, I read the feuilleton. It is a good article with reasonable facts. Still, you are a young man, you should be slightly careful

in such matters. You have written a feuilleton about an Armenian. How do you think you will get away with this story?!

That feuilleton was never published; it was buried in the cemetery of archive. Nevertheless, any kinds of critical articles, pamphlets, slanders about people like Zeynalabdin Taghiyev and Sultan bey always enjoyed the green light both in press and literary pieces. In a word, we are very talented in ignoring the faults of others, while exaggerating our own faults. We did not dare to say a nice word about our nice people.

THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO CONTROL OVER THE ARTICLES OF ARMENIAN HAYRO SARKISOV WORKING WITH US IN THE EDITOR'S OFFICE. Every single article by him was longer than a page. When we, Azerbaijani correspondents wrote something for lower part of newspaper, the editor would get angry:

– What is this! It is too long, – he would say. – I have told you many times that an article should not be longer than five, maximum six column galleys. Big articles exhaust a reader.

Hayro Sarkisov, in the meantime, had large newspaper spaces to fill with his weedy and nationalistic nonsense like “We arrived in the Gorus city, met and talked to its nice and kind people drank water from the spring and washed our faces with it”.

BY THE WAY: once a famous writer and journal editor from Baku was on a professional vacation to Nakhchivan. At that time, my feuilleton titled *Decision of the Public Prosecutor* was published in the *Communist* newspaper. In this article, a helpless village teacher was defended. The regional prosecutor, head of the education department and other arrogant officials were criticized for their unjust position and actions against her. When meeting me, the respectable writer said, Ali, I read it, I liked it. It is a bold article. Unfortunately, we have such journalists that bombard only those who have been relieved of their position or arrested. This is called beating someone who is already down. Do not take that path.

Thanks to the involvement of that journal editor from Baku in this issue, the regional prosecutor criticized in the feuilleton was relieved from his post and assigned to the Julfa region as inspector.

I was trying to say something else about the editor, though. He visited the Norashen (present Sharur) region. When he returned, the first secretary of the Regional Party Committee asked him half-jokingly:

– How did your trip go? What impression have you received?

The editor shook his head reluctantly with a tone of disappointment:

– I was not satisfied, all my trouble was in vain, – he replied unhappily. – You get hurt when I criticize someone, you say a blind man stood up and robbed his own village. There is no writable or reasonable fact to write an essay, either. After a long walk, I met a woman doing namaz in the cotton-field of Aralig village. This is the result of your ideological propagation.... People still pray.

The first secretary laughed and put his hand on the respectable editor's shoulder, who was also his countryman:

– Hey, teacher so and so, – he said, – you are exaggerating. Hey man, people there produce thousands of tons of cotton and tobacco, build palaces of culture in villages; even big cities do not have such palaces. I cannot believe that you only notice one woman doing namaz in such a big region...

The editor was slightly offended, but did not show it. The secretary did not push the topic, either. Their friendly laughter ended the discussion of this topic. In fact, there are countless number of laborious people in the land of Sharur, which I am very well acquainted with, whose work would not fit either into essays, or even novels.

IT APPEARS, A SINGLE RELIGIOUS WOMAN'S NAMAZ WAS WHAT HAD SPOILED EVERYTHING... What a big tragedy is the lack of subject for the writers.! Yet, step aside from the asphalt roads a bit, do some physical labour, cross a few valleys,

speak to sandal-wearing farmers delivering countless varieties of goods mixing their sweat with soil, then you will hear stories. You will suddenly find yourself drowning in topics. Also, you will not mix a sparrow with a vulture. You will not call a colt a gazelle. Everybody can hit a sparrow in his own yard. If you throw a stone at them, you can catch ten in one go. Yet, you cannot make even an evening's meal out of it. As they say, it is tasty for the tongue, but bitter for the stomach. You cannot even get full with such a meal. Professional hunters seek their prey in steep rocks, thick forests or sharp slopes. A bullet fired at a deer or an elk echoes powerfully reaching the other end of the world.

XLI

I GUESS, THE TRAIL OF MY THOUGHTS BAGAIN RAMIFIED HERE SLIGHTLY. Eh, the endless trails... They speak of a following story in Aligouluushaghi: Winter was at its height. The snow was up to knees. Waters had frozen, ice was hanging on rocks. Jabrayil and his little brother Ibadulla from the Abdalanli village, as well as three other men arrive in our Aligouluushaghi village. Elders meet them. Jabrayil says, hey, people of Aligouluushaghi, you should all be aware that the damned Andranik's men sitting in Iravan are instigating the Armenians of Stepanakert, Hadrut and Martuni to capture the Aliyanli villages one after another in order to make a corridor between Armenia and Nagorno Garabagh. So, now the Armenians of Garabagh are working day and night to gain hold of the Aliyanli village and drive its population out of their native lands. Gabil came forward, gathered the people of Aliyanli and began shooting anyone who was trying to do something in Hadrut and Martuni. So, the Armenians made a plan and caught Gabil. They are holding him in the Gorus Prison. Now Gabil is in the hook, sleeping in Armenian jail for months. Yesterday he managed to secretly send a letter to Abdalan. It says: Jabrayil, Ibadulla, Armenians want to finish me. They have made a plan to take me

to the house of every single Armenian, in whose family I have killed someone. Each family is supposed to cut a piece off me. Gabil's letter reveals that he will be brutally murdered within the next one or two days. Gabil also writes that, Jabrayil, Ibadulla, all the Gubadli people knows very well that I am not scared of death to tremble facing it. Yet, I don't want to die in the hands of Armenians and shed my blood on the soil of rats...

Jabrayil turned to the people of village surrounding them:

– Our purpose in having crossed five or six villages from Abdalanli up till here is to see if anybody in Aligouluushaghi is willing to support us. We are here two brothers and three trusted men, to see who from Aligouluushaghi will move forward and join us. Look, hear me out! I am saying in advance that this is most probably a one-way road. We, two brothers, are going there having accepted our death and laid our grave-clothes on our necks, relying exclusively on God. Only the God knows who will die and who will survive in this bloody trip. Do not make me an object of curses afterward. We are not forcing anybody. We are fine with all of you, whether you choose to come with us or not! Even a dog does not accept shame or disgrace! Why should an Armenian kill a man like Gabil while we are all standing here?! Then we should not put a cap on our heads as a man, we should wear handkerchief like women! We are going, even if we fail to release Gabil, let anybody who hears about this say they did everything for their friend and died for that. We prefer this to letting Armenians torture Gabil in the middle of the day, kill him and start dancing and singing. Look, I am saying again, this is a path leading to death! We are going having accepted shroud on our necks! We have to reach the Gorus Prison tonight, even if the whole world comes to an end...

At dusk, two more men moved forward from the Aligouluushaghi village and joined the Jabrayil and Ibadulla brothers' team, a total of seven men left Aligouluushaghi and headed towards Gorus.

The ten-fifteen kilometer road between Aligouluushaghi and Gorus city passes through tall mountains, many valleys and steep rises and falls. These mountainous places are permanently covered in snow up until the middle of May. Spring is short in there, while winter is long. The Jabrayil and Ibadulla brothers did not care about the snow in the least! Besides, the proverb says quite clearly, the path leading to your friend will have both storm and snow. They were leading the team of saviours. When they descended to the Gorus Valley having passed the Khinzirak, Goru, Mughanjig and Karavinj villages of Armenia, it was already in total darkness. The city covered in snow was blanketed by thick fog. The frost was working right into the bones. The roads were covered in ice. They crawled around the upper side of forests surrounding Gorus and descended behind the Gorus Prison with ancient and tall walls. The city plunged into winter sleep was silent. From time to time, they would hear the steps of jail guard trembling with cold and unable to stand in one place. Jabrayil was following attentively his every step looking for an opportunity to finish this issue. A single mistake could turn their plans upside down. Jabrayil chose an appropriate spot. They climb onto each other's shoulder in a dark side of the wall. Ibadulla tells to Jabrayil to let him pass the fence. Jabrayil does not agree. When Ibadulla starts pushing it, Jabrayil gets angry at him and slaps him on the face. Then he quickly throws himself to the other side of the prison wall. He catches the guard skillfully and holds his mouth... The prison gates open wide. Jabrayil and Ibadulla save Gabil. When they leave the city, policemen notice something and start pursuing Jabrayil's team. Shooting takes place in a frosty night. However, Jabrayil's team does not give a chance to Armenians. Gabil is brought to Aligouluushaghi safe and sound.

...At dawn, Mirzamammad's yard was full of people. Everybody came to see the Fugitive Gabil. Mirzamammad's mother, aunt Goychak was rubbing snow on the frosty legs of Gabil, who had spent many long months suffering in an Armenian jail...

XLII

The Fugitive Gabil returned to his home with the help of his brothers Jabrayil and Ibadulla. When saying home, we should mention that his original and eternal home was the endless forests of Aliyanli, mountains and valleys where no human foot had ever stepped. The tsar government kept him on the run by Armenian dashnaks' instigation. Why? A bear uses thousand tricks to get to a pear. The objective was to destroy the Aliyanli villages, which were the closest and strategically favorable spot to connect Armenia to Nagorno Garabagh and drive its population away from their home. Thus, the Armenian dashnaks would achieve their dirty goals. The Fugitive Gabil had gathered a group of people around him preventing this evil intention.

AFTER THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT APPEARED, Stepan Shaumyans and Mrizoyans (ideolgists of Armenian chauvinism – **trans.**), who were the contemporary judges of Baku, began hounding the population of Aliyanli using various methods. The Armenian slanderers accused the inhabitants of the village Aliyanli being riotous and not letting the poor and miserable Armenians breathe. Hundreds of families were exiled to other regions from Hut, Deshdahat and Basharag villages by instigations of Armenian dashnaks ruling in Baku having wriggled into favour of our leaders and drawn the wool over their eyes thus preventing these people from getting in the way of Hadrut and Martuni Armenians. The people settled in the vicinity of Barda city are the very refugees from Aliyanli. Presently, this place is called the Aliyanli village. Yet, the Fugitive Gabil wouldn't let the Aliyanli villages to be destroyed as Armenians wanted it. Eventually, those among us pouring water onto the mills of Shaumyans, Mirzoyans, Amirkhanyans and Khorenyans (Armenian nationalists – **trans.**) realized they will not be able to remove Gabil and decided to use Hussu Hajiyev to eliminate him...

Hussu Hajiyev arrived with his armed group in the Basharag village to put the Fugitive Gabil off with fine talk and make him

reveal himself by his own will and draw him to the Soviet government's side.

Hussu Hajiyev first asks the advice of local population regarding this. They tell him Gabil is not a kind of man to trust anybody. He might only meet you with request of his cousin, Fatma...

As soon as Fatma's word is delivered to him, the Fugitive Gabil gets on his horse in the foot of Kirs Mountain, where he was settled, and arrives to meet Hussu Hajiyev. They greet each other icily. Hussu Hajiyev starts to speak:

– I have heard a lot about you. Thankfully, we have met now. I have come here with good intentions. You know very well that the tsar government does not exist anymore, it has collapsed. Now we have the Soviet government, there is no need for you to wander around in valleys and mountains. I have come to ask you to reveal yourself. Let's unite and work together for the new government... I am a part of this process; I am responsible in front of the people gathered here if you are in any way harmed...

The Fugitive Gabil raises his head slowly and asks without looking at Hussu Hajiyev's face:

– Have you called me here just because of this? – He asks sarcastically.

– Yes, I have, – Hussu Hajiyev replies.

– Then answer a question for me, – Gabil says and stretches himself.

– Go ahead.

– Which road have you used to arrive in our Basharat?

– The Martuni road, we have passed through the Khozabird village.

– You should have met the people of Lachin and Gubadli and spoken about the misery of our Aliyanli villagers following your consultations with the Khozabird Armenians, and only then stepped onto these lands. In that case, our conversation would have yielded a result. Then I would have known that we are having

a man to man discussion. Hussu, now you understand what I am trying to say.

Hussu Hajiyev was startled and his speech became indistinct:

– Gabil, – he said, – what’s the difference, now all the nations are the same, whether they are those in Lachin, Gubadli, or those in Hadrut or Martuni.

– Hussu, there is no difference from where I am standing. You are trying to speak to me by the method of Armenians. Those methods will hardly get to me. – He replies and quickly stands up. – Goodbye, I am leaving; – he adds and mounts on his horse.

Hussu Hajiyev tries to hint at his people to catch Gabil. Gabil’s cousin Fatma immediately understands it and wakes up Hussu Hajiyev to have a look at the village surroundings. Hussu Hajiyev realizes that the Fugitive Gabil’s armed group has encircled the entire Basharat. Therefore, he orders his men to stand down.

In the evening, village elders Mukhtar, Pasha, Jamil and Abbas again go to the Fugitive Gabil by Hussu Hajiyev’s insistence to ask his favour:

– Gabil, ponder over the matter deliberately, – they say. – Do not compare this to Nicolas, this is Soviet government. It is difficult to withstand this new government’s power. Do not try to play government with the government. Now, the government’s armed people are on one side, and you are on the other side fighting it with your toes and nails claiming not to recognize anybody. This will end in bloodshed. Give it up, damn this whole thing and reveal yourself.

The Fugitive Gabil does not say either yes or no to the men. He only asks them to give him a few days to think.

So, he sees off the elders respectfully. Then starts thinking – if the wind is blowing this way, this government cannot be trusted, either. Hussu Hajiyev is one of us, but he dances to the Russians’ and Armenians’ tunes. I also have some respect among people. I cannot come out and do whatever these foolish kids tell me to

do. There is only one way out, to leave this land forever. If I stay, conflicts will arise again. I will have to face the new government this time. In that case, the village will bear all the trouble, the miserable and poor people will have to suffer the result. Better I pack up and leave, this very night. Tomorrow will be too late...

The Fugitive Gabil takes his wife and children and crosses Araz from the Khudafarin Bridge together with his few loyal horsemen at night... and never to return again...

XLIII

Fugitive Gabil, sotnik Amrah, “Manly Tavat”, Movlanverdi, Jabrayil... Yet, our writers and journalists including me have forgotten to erect a fortress of honour for these noble men, whose bravery wouldn't fit into epics. Some writers looking for a subject wander around in vain and go as far as Sharur. There, meeting a religious woman doing namaz, they return disappointed, with empty hands and mouths full of complaints. Ah, the poor warriors of pen... Look, they are suffering from lack of subject!! All right...

In three-four years I would reach half of a century of my life. To be more precise, it was spring of 1946. I was standing in front of the Khandak village primary school, where I was working as a teacher, and watching the Garaghajli and Garajali villages and the overflowing waters of the Hakarli River on the other side as usual. From time to time, I was talking to an old Turkish officer Gulu Assadov from the neighbouring Ishigli village about the past and future. He was a colleague of mine. He was a man of deep reflections. I always needed his conversations. He was an old-minded man. Yet, he had an echoing past. His voice was low as he had once served in Turkish army. He was uptight all the time. As soon as he raised his voice slightly, they would shut him up saying – you have been a Turkish officer, you don't have a say in bringing up children in communist spirit. Therefore, Gulu muallim was only taking five-ten hours of work per week and hardly making his ends meet. Gulu muallim pointed at the

Gubadli-Lachin main road passing in the bottom of the Khandak village with houses scattered all around the Chingilli Valley and said:

– Do you know what kind of people this road has seen?! I remember as if happened just yesterday. At the very beginning of the soviet government, most of the people with active brains ran to the mountains, while some crossed over the Araz River. People were saying, this new government does not recognize God, or obey a prophet, and they burn mosques. So, they began living in the woods and conflicting with government officials. How many fights took place even after the Fugitive Gabil left for Iran! Unarmed fugitives were smashing the Red Army soldiers like rats in this valley. Therefore, Mirjafar Baghirov organized himself a brigade and began eliminating all the suspicious people in these places. One day we received news that Baghirov's brigade is headed towards this very Khandak village. Everybody – children or adult – was worried. Once, Baghirov arrived with his brigade and stood in the bottom of the village. I remember it quite clearly. I was a young boy. I was watching from Nasir's roof. Everybody was scared. Baghirov's horse was in front. He bridled his horse and asked the people gathered in the yard of a house near the road:

- Is there a man named Ali in this village?!
- Yes, there is! There is!! – People answered in unison.
- Where could he be now?! – Baghirov asked furiously.
- He is in his house! At home!! – Some of the people replied.
- Can you call him here?!
- Yes, sure, why not!!

Ali was informed that a group of horsemen were standing and waiting for him at the entrance of the village. Ali was a tall and stout man wearing a black knitted jacket and a big cap with purls reaching his shoulders. Even his sneeze would make a big noise. He had countless herds of horses and sheep. Hearing the call, he immediately understands it is Baghirov's brigade. Probably, they've come to settle the scores with me.

Ali gathered his wife and children around and calmed them down:

– I am going, – he said. Maybe, I’ll not return. You never know. Destiny does not ask. Probably, my life was supposed to end here. Do not lose your self-esteem among other people, friends or enemies. Anyway, we all owe a life to God, if my time has come...

My companion pointed at the white building in the bosom:

– See, Ali’s four-column house was located in the place of this building. All of those things happened right in front of my eyes, just like today, – he continued. – Such a powerful man, he stumbled twice while descending and his cap fell down. Ali lifted his cap from the ground and put it back on his head. Then he began walking slowly straight to Baghirov’s horsemen. After greeting, Baghirov asked

– Are you Khandakli Ali?!

– Yes, that’s me.

– How much wealth do you have?!

– Agha, in the name of your ancestors...

Baghirov interrupted him:

– Not agha! We don’t have bey, khan or agha any more, you should say comrade! Comrade!

– Agha, in the name of your ancestors! – Ali repeated the same words. – I know, you have come to kill me, I have even seen it in my dream. What can I do, go ahead, kill me! You have my permission in God! Yet, the people of entire Hakarli, whoever hears of it, will say, agha shed a blood unjustly! Why, it is true, I have got herds of horses and sheep, as well as enormous wealth. However, all the people in Khandak gathered here are well aware that I haven’t gained all of it by torturing or betraying someone. I haven’t harmed anybody. I have got loyal brothers, brave sons and relatives. We have earned everything by strong labour. People know that I have helped orphans. I have assisted the poor. I have never missed a wedding or a funeral in this village. Agha, now you do as you wish, or as your God wishes...

Everybody standing there, children and adults repeated Ali's words unanimously:

– He is right! Ali is saying the truth!

As if someone threw cold water into a hot kettle. Baghirov's attitude changed. A young horseman standing behind him in a ready state withdrew his fingers from the trigger.

Baghirov asked Ali:

– They say, you have a horse prepared for your fortieth anniversary, is it true?

– Yes, agha, I cannot lie to you, you have received correct information. We have got the other world to face. I have sworn to visit the holy land of Karbala. Therefore, I have prepared the horse for my fortieth anniversary.

– Will you give that horse to us?!

– It is yours, agha, what is a horse to spare from you. My whole herd is yours.

– Then we are waiting, bring that horse prepared for your fortieth. – Baghirov said calmly.

Ali returned home and brought the horse out of barn. He also fitted an English saddle on it, which at the time cost the same as horse. Tetchy horse kept out of daylight! It was well-fed and strong! Ali somehow managed to calm down the skittish and restive horse and presented it to Baghirov's men. For the sake of truth, Baghirov's brigade did not touch anybody in the Khandak village. They thanked Ali and departed all together. The most interesting part of the story is that Ali received a package signed by Baghirov in less than a week after that containing a generous payment for the horse.

Gulu muallim turned to me and said: You were not born then yet, I have seen this event with my own eyes. Baghirov had crossed the Iranian border tracking the fugitives. The Iranian government even announced its objections to Moscow...

MY COMPANION REMEMBERED THE PAST DAYS AND ADDED:

– These villages around Hakarli have witnessed so many things. While I am on the subject of Baghirov, let me tell another story about him. It was the middle of war. Every day someone received death news of his relative. There was nobody to cultivate raw rice. The village was left to the old population. Germans were in the vicinities of Makhachkala. In those days, Mirjafar Baghirov would sometimes visit villages and ask people about their problems. One day, he arrived in Muradkhanli without informing anybody in advance and accidentally met Almammad muallim while passing near the village’s high school. Almammad muallim was once a worker in Baku. He arrived in the village recently and was teaching Russian language at school. As you have seen, the gates of the Muradkhanli School open right into the main road. Seeing the Almammad muallim, Baghirov ordered the car to stop. After greeting, Baghirov asks if he works as a teacher. Almammad replies – yes. Baghirov asks him about the condition of teachers, the school and education of children. Almammad muallim pulls himself together and says:

– Comrade Baghirov, except Gubadli, we also have pupils arriving in this Muradkhanli School from Lachin, Zangilan and Jabrayil villages. It is a big school. Our main difficulty is that some of those pupils have lost their fathers in the war and mothers as well; here... they don’t have anything to eat or dress with. They are like beggars. We are unable to draw such children to school...

Baghirov starts thinking and asks:

– Teacher, so what should we do, how can we solve this?!

– Comrade Baghirov, it would be best, if possible, to open a boarding school for thirty or forty pupils near the school. We would accept those wandering children to the boarding school and give them education.

– If we establish a boarding school for hundred, can we get those wandering children out of this condition?! – Baghirov asks Almammad muallim’s opinion.

– Comrade Baghirov, in that case, this whole region will be praying for you.

...In a week, heavily loaded lorries stopped in front of the Muradkhanli High School. There was everything in them for a hundred children from spoons and beds up to clothes...

XLIV

BY THE WILL OF DESTINY, I worked as head of the teacher assigning department four years after that conversation with Gulu muallim. I witnessed Gulu muallim's words. So many poor children were surrounded by the state care in the boarding school established by Almammad muallim's request and Baghirov's help.

Looking at my career path as a pedagogue, journalist and writer, I would say that a center of education disrespecting its teachers or a nation deprived of a daily and comprehensive care of the state can hardly achieve any progress or organization and escape the vortex of chaos and anarchy.

I remember very well one fact: how Baghirov raised a storm and brought all the regional leaders to account for a slap on a village teacher, as if he was the one hit:

– The first secretary of the Gubadli Regional Party Committee, who was quite active in the support line during the war, was very famous. He even had a rare luck bestowed in exceptional cases – he was rewarded with the Lenin Award. Nobody in the Center would make him repeat his word. His big authority had become an insurmountable barrier between Baku and Gubadli. In the background of this fame, an environment of anarchy emerged in Gubadli...

... Some high-ranking officials in one of the villages raises his hand on a teacher... The teacher informs the then Minister of Education Mirza Ibrahimov of having been attacked and humiliated. Mirza Ibrahimov immediately delivers the news to the Central Committee. Mirjafar Baghirov hears of this incident...

Three regional secretaries and chairman of executive committee were invited to the Bureau of Central Committee regarding this issue. When Baghirov sees them, he stands up and asks nervously:

– They say, madcaps have appeared in that region, is it true?!

...

– I have heard they beat up and humiliate people's children in Gubadli, is this true?!

...

Nobody utters a word. None of the Bureau members speaks. Regional leaders keep silent. Baghirov turns to those sitting and says:

– I believe, leaders of a region treating its own teachers so cheaply do not cost a cent themselves. – He then orders the relevant officials and leaders of administrative bodies of the Central Committee sitting in the Bureau:

– Without any delay! Tomorrow! Go to Gubadli! Check, investigate and see for yourself, why are they beating up and disgracing people's teachers there?! Why are they hounding teachers?!

... Investigations began in Gubadli... Chairman of the Regional Executive Committee, as well as several fussy heads of offices, institutions and agricultural centers treating people arrogantly were arrested...

When the outcomes of the investigation were discussed at the Bureau of Central Committee, majority of the regional leaders were fired. The last words of the first secretary with the Lenin Order hanging on his chest were these:

– Comrade Baghirov, we now understand our mistake. We are guilty in front of you. Please, send me to the Mingachevir construction as a worker. I will carry stones and mix concrete there; I'll approve myself that way...

Yet, nobody escaped punishment. Yes, just because a teacher's dignity had been trampled! This was as if the black clouds riding on the skies of Gubadli and driving people mad were scattered

away with one breathe. The thunder struck, waterfall washed the dirt of the Gubadli valleys and the sky brightened up...

At that time, Abdurrahman Shirinov, the then Head of the Land Department, nephew of Nazar Heydarov, who was the Head of the Republican Supreme Soviet was also arrested. Abdurrahman's mother, Zinyat was a tall and proud woman. We were quite close because of the Nazar-Amrah relationships, also because we were neighbours in the village. One day, aunt Zinyat told me putting a cup of tea in front of me:

– Son, those were different times. When Abdurrahman was in jail, my heart could not take it as a mother. I said to myself, I should go to Nazar, speak to him, and see what he says about Abdurrahman's issue! Nazar was fond of me. We were a good brother and sister to each other. He was sending five hundred manats to me every month in a package. I reached Nazar's house slightly after midnight. When I entered, I saw him playing nard with Temir Guliyev. Temir was the Chairman of the Council of Ministers at that time. Seeing me, both of them stood up. When Nazar hugged me, I couldn't stop myself any more, I began to cry. Nazar asked, why are you crying, sister?! What happened?! I said, why shouldn't I cry? Abdurrahman is rotting in jail, while you are playing nard here. My brother smiled. He said, sister, your son is a criminal and he must be punished. The Soviet government hasn't appointed me to this position to take my criminal relatives under my wing and protect them. The law is the same for everybody, whether it is me, or someone pasturing bulls in Gurjulu, no difference...

Zinyat lifted her yashmak and said:

– Yes, such was Nazar's character; he didn't violate the law, even though he loved me very much. He said, do not be hurt at me, sister, but I'll not do this!

– You will not do this, fine! I did not want to ask him any further. I spent the night there and in the morning, returned from Baku back home empty-handed.

ZINYAT TURNED TO ME AND SAID:

– I do not blame Nazar, either. At that time, law was law. Even shahs were afraid of the law. Nowadays, whoever has an average position does not respect the law, says he is almighty and does whatever he wishes to do and does not care about anybody. You cannot find abundance or respect anywhere, where the law is trampled.

By the way, permanent exile of many respectful people in our republic and repressions of innocent people during the leadership of Mirjafar Baghirov, whom I have cited and mentioned a few events of his activity are bitter facts tormenting our souls and pens. He answered for all of these acts. When Baghirov realized either his time's or his own mistakes, and understood he trusted certain people and was deceived, these were his last words to the judges:

– It is not enough to shoot me; I should be cut into four parts.

Yes, he gave himself a verdict heavier than the one given by the judges.

I think, Mirjafar Baghirov was sentenced to death mostly because the Kremlin leader Nikita Khrushov was concerned of his authoritative existence besides, Khrushov's desire to take a ruthless vengeance upon him... Khrushov did not trust or rely on Baku for implementation of such an unjust intention. Only the Kremlin accusation could suit Khrushov. Therefore, the Chief prosecutor of the USSR, general Rudenko was demonstrating mostly his humble subordination to Khrushov during the court. I don't think his accusation could be met with louder applauses in other republics than those in Baku. Rudenko was more satisfied by the applauses his accusation met in Baku than Khrushov's gratitude.

THIS IS US AND OURSELVES. If to speak the language of those days, we are still not tired of agreeing with verdicts of the Kremlin butchers appearing in Baku in the light of "our Sun" rising in the north and admiring them. Those of us, who listened to that

verdict in the bellies of our mothers, are more active in this respect. We lack the intellect dictating to accept the storm coming from the north as the Sun rising in the north.

AS THE WISE MEN SAY: if you fire at the past with a gun, the future will fire at you from cannons. One should have intellect to comprehend the environment in which a person lived in order to identify the good and the bad, the right and the wrong of the actions of someone, who has died before you and joined the other world. Otherwise, you will commit a sin. Do not ask for food holding out your plate if you don't know what is boiling in the cauldron. If you don't know what a tight pricking means, don't boast yourself as a farrier. Our prophet has said: remember the good deeds and forget the evil deeds. However, what can we do? We are quite skilled in exaggerating the evil among us and ignoring the good. Anyway, this was just a thought, I felt like writing it, let those interpreting figure it out by themselves... A famous French author and theorist Boileau calling writers to take example of nature said that sometimes a stupid man shows off as a scholar and destroys both the personages and the bright phrases of a beautiful piece of art. Do not pay any attention to such people. A person criticizing you should be clever, noble, lacking a feeling of jealousy, deep and multifaceted. Do not believe the flattery praises of fake fans. There are writers praised to the skies, but their books are dusting in shops.

I put down my pen for a moment remembering Boileau's words. I separated myself from the papers in front of me. I detached from my world of thoughts. It felt as if I woke up.

What kind of things I am remembering on the Nakhchivan and Gubadli trails of my life?! – I thought. When I had a look around as if awoken from a dream, again... again Shuvalan surrounded by gardens and orchards, a one-storey house looking at the sea, a low corridor under which I was sitting and an old mulberry-tree standing miserably in front of me resting on an iron plate not to collapse. I wonder, what a faithful dog called

Graf in a clumsy kennel aside is thinking about looking at us with amazement with its head on both paws. Maybe the poor Graf is tired and sick of protecting an old journalist and a rotting mulberry-tree standing face-to-face to each other?! It stands up from time to time, prowls about in front of the small kennel, whines, whimpers and again crawls up in a corner. Life, such is the life! A one-storey house, a low corridor, rotting mulberry-tree and a faithful dog signaling at its owner upon a tiniest hum...

XLV

AH, AGAIN MY PEN DETACHED ME FROM MYSELF AND BEGAN DRAGGING ME SOMEWHERE ON THE TRACK OF MY THOUGHTS. Inadvertently, I walked away from Shuvalan, the land of green orchards and blue waters, my shed herein, passed the cities and villages laid ablaze by hostile Armenians, mined dams and ferries, grassy roads and stopped at the dusty bosom of that Christ's-thorn bush on the Yazı Plain, which is the planting spot of Aligouluushaghi village. I moved a bit forward and climb to the peak of the Shir-Shir Spring flowing down from a high rock. The native valleys and magnificent mountains covered in thick forests and stiff rocks are visible from here. Unable to control myself, I hailed the valleys down from the top of cliff. I didn't know whom I was calling. Who is left in this land, anyway?! Only the mountains and stones yearning from loneliness replied to me with echo. I felt as if it was the hail of the Fugitive Nabi, sotnik Amrah, Fugitive Gabil, Sword Tavat, Jabrayil and Ibadulla brothers. No! I did not understand these mixed sounds at all!!! My presumptions ramified hundredfold.

Maybe the mountains stretching from Aligouluushaghi down to the Araz River have forgotten our language because of the Armenian captivity?! Do not blame me, these voices sounded like strange hums, too. Our mountains plunged into heavy silence hearing my hail. As if these glorious plains, deep valleys

and precipitous rocks turned away from me for a moment. My native land scolded me! It condemned those of us, who appeared to be betrayers, ran away and left these places to Armenian captivity. One can get hurt at closest people, so the land of Gubadli and the land of Aliguluushaghi are right! You are right to turn away from your children, whom you raised on your chest, native land! You are right, my captive land...

I think the eagle, just like the bird of my heart, eventually returning to its nest having seen many other places, was more faithful than the God's creatures of this land. The high rock, on which the eagle had built a nest, is in front of Armenian villages within gunshot. Therefore, the cannons and fires of Andraniks, Manucharyans, Agambekyans, Zori Balayans and Silva Kaputikyans (Armenian nationalists – **trans.**) once aimed at the people of Gubadli have racketed over this poor bird's head. An enemy bullet has shattered also its laboriously built nest before its newly-born could open their eyes. The eagle's finest feelings have been trampled. Yet, the eagle withstood all these tortures and did not leave the stiff rock it had chosen as its settlement and built a nest on. Maybe that's why the eagle has gained fame as a symbol of valor, pride and bravery?! Though the eagle did not want to show it, I felt sorrow in its stance. It was not as happy and joyful as before. The eagle was not sailing through the depths of sky periodically and darting down on its prey with its wings clenched. It was standing at its nest, silent and sad. It was alarmed and worried, staring at nowhere. Its dumb silence was speaking of many things. Sometimes the birdie would wriggle, change the direction of its gaze and peep out at me. As if it wanted to start talking, inquire about many things, ask when those displaced from their lands would return, maybe even express its grievances and reproach me. I was feeling ruthless accusations against myself from its proud and slightly longing stance. I plunged into dreams for a while. I began experiencing a dream in which I found a way to speak to the eagle. I became

the eagle's companion and interlocutor. The eagle turned towards the ruins of Aligouluushaghi burned to the ground and asked me:

– Do you know who has destroyed that village?

I couldn't speak, I had clammed up. My flesh crept, I panicked; the bird's preeminence overwhelmed me. The eagle rebuked me with sarcastic eyes and said:

– At that time you were not yet born. When Andranik's bandits having washed their hands in the blood of thousands of Azerbaijanis attacked the Gubadli villages, a twelve-year-old Armenian pest named Shimavon was a guest at Mirzamammad of Aligouluushaghi's house. He was Mirzamammad's godfather's son. The Armenian child would always sit at the head of Mirzamammad's table. They would cherish the stranger as a dear guest. When the people of Aligouluushaghi heard of Armenian assault, several people wanted to attack Mirzamammad's house and kill the pest exclaiming – He is a limb off the same tree. At that moment, Mirzamammad's old mother Goychak, who never missed a namaz or a post, ran towards them. She protected the Armenian boy with her chest and threw her kerchief on him. She did not let her dear guest to be murdered.

– A guest comes from God, – she said. – One cannot raise a hand on him. God will not forgive it.

Those having rushed to kill the pest threw up their hands. Everybody left in distress. Mirzamammad and his mother Goychak did not let him on the harm's way. When the darkness covered the Aligouluushaghi mountains, Mirzamammad took the Armenian kid named Shimavon, led him secretly to a valley and saw him off safe and sound to his own village – Khinzirak...

THE EAGLE'S HEART WAS FULL OF ANGUISH. Having said all of these, it stopped talking for a while. Then the eagle began wriggling about in its nest. Again turned towards Aligouluushaghi, looked at the village ruins and addressed me:

– Whenever Armenak visited Aligouluushaghi, he stayed at Seyfi's house. They would put the best mattress under Armenak. He would get the softest pillow under his head. They would give the silk blanket to Armenak. Armenak's table would be filled with the best food. His mule would be tied at the head of manger and fed full with barley and chaff. Armenak would stay at Seyfi's house for five-six days, exchange the potatoes and artichokes he had brought for barley, wheat and millet, pack his things up and seen off respectfully back home with gifts.

THE EAGLE'S IMPETUOUS EYES FILLED WITH IRONY:

– When Armenians were sieving blaze upon Aligouluushaghi with Ter-Petrosyans', Silva Kaputikyans' and Agambekyans' instigations, people of the village left their homes and wealth running for their life. Armenians began plundering the village. The pest named Shimavon saved from death by Mirzamammad and his mother Goychak was then leading the plunderers of Aligouluushaghi. The pest had grown older and become an enemy of Aligouluushaghi. He was the first to shed oil onto the Aligouluushaghi houses and set them ablaze. The very Armenak ripped off Seyfi's gates from its bolts. He loaded the twin holdalls of the house, where he stayed as a guest for many years and knew every hole in it. Armenak took also Seyfi's livestock. Then, still unsatisfied, he took a match from his pocket and set aflame the house of his friend, whom he would call – Sepi Kirve (Godfather-trans.!) Sepi Kirve! He and Shimavon saved by Mirzamammad razed the village to the ground...

The eagle was saying these words with spasms of grief, twisting with pain. Remembering the Armenian treachery was burning the eagle with anger. It wanted to enounce and awaken people; this is the Armenian essence, this is the Armenian perfidy. It wanted to explain that it is enough! Stop being fooled by this nation's talks and faces! It wanted to say, Azerbaijanis, whatever misfortune Armenians have brought upon you is because of your naivety and kind-heartedness.

*Armenian, Armenian,
Take me to the carriage.
Bring me to the Sabir Garden,
Speak to me until morning.*

– Haa! Ha! – The eagle cited these lines and laughed heartily from anger: Hey, Azerbaijanis, have you forgotten the days when you taught these very words to your children?! Do you know what the Khankandi (city in Daghlig Garabagh – **trans.**) Armenians were teaching their children?! – Turks are ancestral blood enemies of Armenians! Miatsum! Miatsum! (Unite! – **trans.**)

THE EAGLE WAS STANDING ALOFT. It appeared to be aware of the hardships of our history. When we were lying on chesterfields, placing a soft pillow under our heads and plunging into deep and profound dreams, the eagle was vigilantly soaring in the depths of sky and watching Armenians digging deep pits and slowly heaping fuel to the flame.

The eagle stopped talking for a while. Probably, it was analyzing the things it had seen and the things it wanted to say. I've known this eagle from childhood, I recognize its nest. I understood the eagle very well. It was making the actions of humans considered to be the diamonds of earth in this big and temporary world its own tragedy. This grief was hanging on the poor eagle's free heart like a heavy stone. The eagle was thinking how many wild and violent animals, bugs and worms... are wandering around the Armenian hills in front of its eyes. Yet, they do not gawk at foreign lands. Throughout their entire life, they never attacked these territories, never obliterated their own congenetics. They sufficed with the land they lived on and the sky under which they walked. While the Armenians... Occupied more and more territory of Azerbaijan. How many times they have attacked the Aligouluushaghi village and burnt houses during the twentieth century only. How many Azerbaijani villages have been obliterated? The traces of ruins of Eyvazli, Dovudlu, Gadili, Sofulu, Garabashli, Galaboynu, Garachiyurdu,

Gabagli, Chomcheli... Balahassanli villages show there once was a settlement here. Displaying themselves as a poor and miserable nation having suffered genocide, the Armenian savages have razed these villages to the ground.

As if, the eagle was getting terrified remembering the disasters committed by Armenians. Looking at the ruins of my native land, Aligouluushaghi, the eagle was cursing the inhuman acts of Armenian betrayers, who shared bread and salt in this village to their own weight, with its perfect silence.

Keeping company to these orphaned lands, the faithful eagle suddenly rose from its nest and flew upwards. Probably, it saw a human being around the Aligouluushaghi School. The eagle winged joyfully in that direction. It was thinking, maybe someone returned to the village, maybe they are the refugee or displaced teachers. They are coming to the school and preparing for lessons. However, the eagle returned before long. It perched on its nest disappointed and aggrieved. What teacher?!! Armenians from the neighbouring village were breaking the school's walls, carrying its stones, doors and windows and burning whatever they could not take. The bitter smoke of ill-omened fire whirling upward from the village seemed to irritate also the eagle's eyes. Tears guttered down the eagle.

THE EAGLE'S REBUKING WORDS, Aligouluushaghi's ruins, bitter tears of the hawk of fields, abandoned gardens and orchards, roads filled with grasses. Springs lost in weeds horrified me. I heard a voice from beyond:

– Hey, children of the land kneaded with dignity of Nabi, Hajar, Gabil, Tavat, Ibadulla and Jabrayil!!! Why have you run away and left this native land in the time of trouble, while you used to call it your mother every single day in the good old times?!

XLVI

I FELT LIKE it was the eagle's voice! Maybe it was the cry of our longing mountains? Or was it the voice of my land, where

I crawled on my knees leaving my cradle, stood up and took my first fragile steps trembling?! Without knowing the reason, I lost my speech. I was frozen facing this ruthless and rightful accusation. My speculations again ramified hundredfold. I turned to my pen in this tough moment. Why did we suffer these harsh times? The things I wanted to say began fuming in the fire and blaze of my yearning heart and incandescing in my lines:

– During the seventy years of MY CENTURY, a giant Soviet Empire was built controlling an immense territory from the east to the west. This state structure, the first and the only one in human history for its political and economic principles was created based on Marxism and Leninism ideologies and governed by a polished and very complicated typewriter. Stalin, who was steering the typewriter, was quite familiar with its mechanisms. Under his command, the rural and benighted Russia passed many harsh tests of history and became the first guide in the path leading to space. Such a progress combined with the slogan of its leading force, the Communist Party – Unite, the proletariat of all countries! – staggered the capitalistic world and haunted their leaders’ dreams. Therefore, the American President Eisenhower said in a press conference as far back as in 1954: “We should watch the communists 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 52 weeks a year”. The President was also saying that as long as the Eastern Europe and Soviet Baltics have not embraced their western civilization and joined the society of free men, America’s conscience cannot calm down....

STALIN’S DEATH marked the beginning of collapse of the Soviet state and fulfillment of its competitors’ long-term dreams. His replacement, Malinkov failed to take the weight of a huge state on his shoulders. Malinkov’s leadership mission was short-lived like a butterfly. Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushov took over the Kremlin through adventurism. He put the interests of state aside and placed his own personal interests to the agenda. He became a captive of his own prejudices. He stepped onto the

path of vengeance against the spirit of his predecessor under the curtain of noisy campaign he launched against the personality worship. He destroyed the Kremlin reserve of intellect and mind. People lost their faith in the existing system. Khrushov's vulgar and trite behaviour created an environment of anarchy in the country. Certainly, sometimes a LEADER'S STUPID ACT is also praised by the flatterers surrounding him. The grey mob applauded him with shouts of Hurray! Hurray!

When the impostor leader dragged the country to a cliff, they gripped his arms, even though too late, and threw him out of the political stage with quite big disrespect at that. His replacements, Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko comprehended their lack of scientific and theoretical excellence sufficient to establish a new system of government. Therefore, they were somehow steering the old train and dragging it along the worn out rails. Yet, as there was no intelligence to restore the Khrushov whipper-snapper formed within the walls of Kremlin, the fracture was widening with every day. At the same time, the tight lines connecting the Baltic, Middle Asian and Caucasian republics to Moscow were gradually loosening and thinning. At such a critical time, a man appeared at the peak of Kremlin, whose general level of intelligence was not higher than that of a leader of a small district, or even a province, I would say. His name was Gorbachov. Yet, even Gorbachov's two high school diplomas for two different specialties did not help the Soviet Empire as much as Stalin's seventh grade certificate. On the contrary, due to the history's winds of accidents, Gorbachov's ascend to power sped up the collapse of the regime's columns that had already creaked during Khrushov's reign. This green, inexperienced leader, who did not possess scientific or theoretical skills to rule a giant country, became laughing stock in the political arena and the society's object of ridicule. The ideas of perestroika and glasnost that he threw to the mob were nothing more than a political chit-chat. People were applauding and acclaiming

Gorbachov's ideas in the open and secretly composing such pamphlets:

*Damage came after damage,
People left to protests,
Disease flanked the nations,
This is an evil, a fever, a sickness,
They claim it is perestroika,
It is a lie, a bluff, a deception.*

Nevertheless, Gorbachov had no idea that people were openly applauding at his dreams of innovation and secretly composing such pamphlets. Rival forces of the Soviet regime, both outside and inside, would not grow tired of supporting this egghead's yaps determined to follow the method of inciting an insane man. As if it wasn't enough, Gorbachov was even rewarded with the Nobel Prize. In fact, this was a prize Gorbachov received not for restoring anything, but for destroying whatever was left. I would say, the most appropriate prize Gorbachov actually deserved was the blow on his head by an elector when he tried to submit his candidacy for presidency the second time...

IN A WORD, a shah lacking the brains to invent a bull-cart shot out his lips at the huge locomotive and destroyed it ignorantly. The poor passengers were left in the middle of the road.

A close neighbour of mine, who couldn't help mocking and scoffing, was sometimes saying – I wish God brings such an evil, from which I can derive a benefit. Gorbachov's evil saved Azerbaijan, just like all the other republics, from the claws of the Empire. Our republic had a chance for independence. A nation that lives in a state, where its own language rules and its own religion is free, is a happy one. Finally, we also reached such happiness, for which we had been longing for hundreds of years. This process had to happen sooner or later, because just like one man cannot rule over another forever, one nation cannot own another through eternity.

WHEN THE DAWN OF INDEPENDENCE WAS UPON US, our performers, being used to the Moscow conductor's baton, now confused. They did not know how to hold a tar or blow a clarinet... As described in a famous fable, a weird picture appeared where a donkey's buddies – a nasty monkey, a cripple bear and a squint-eyed goat began playing tar and kaman...

The rules were broken, the laws lost their power. A wrestle began between the incapable leaders not willing to give up their fancy offices in the magnificent building covered in marble and noisy and inexperienced persons burning with the desire of obtaining a position. Those, who were unlucky during the Soviet power, began to arise here and there and grabbing the best and most delicious pieces of the omelette they did not cook. The screams of – Resignation! – thundering for this purpose covered the cities and villages. The people working in industry and agriculture surrender to populist calls of the avids of power and flowed blindly into the streets and squares. The work at factories and plants stopped, the country's economy was paralyzed.

HOWEVER, THESE POPULIST CALLS AND SCREAMS DID NOT TURN INTO A TANK, CANNON OR A GUN TO PROTECT THE MOTHERLAND; THEY WERE SIMPLY BURIED IN THE CASPIAN WINDS. On the other hand, gangs dressed in like soldiers of freedom and democracy were seizing power in the regions through armed assaults. Azerbaijan was being divided into Talish-Mughan Republic, Ganja Khanate and provinces of those claiming Baku is for Bakuis. Azeri lands were being disintegrated. The nation was in a miserable condition. Armenians watching vigilantly right in front of our nose and awaiting an opportunity to dig entrenchments, buy guns and cannons, arming from head to toe, creating an army and preparing plans for attacking us making use of this chaos and anarchy treacherously.

HEY, EAGLE! The path leading Aligouluushaghi to tragedies began right there.

There is a saying: When an orphan's mouth reaches food, his head also reaches the stone.

When the sun of independence and liberty shined upon our unfortunate nation, which was a titbit for major powers for centuries, divided into two, forbidden to practice their language and religion, we suffered outrageous tragedies and harsh misfortune. It appears that the mob overcrowding the streets and squares with slogans: – We must create a single Turkish world from East to West! We must unite the Southern and Northern Azerbaijan to an integral whole! – had absolutely different intentions! It appears that the republic was not having a fight over religion, but over power! The vagrant and ignorant forces dreaming about a position, stamp or a seal in the former government's strict regime were now busting their guts to climb to the unattainable positions they did not deserve and grab the biggest and best pieces around.

The Bargushad River passing near our village never lacks fish throughout the year, plenty of it, at that. The fish caught in a mountain river is a rarity. Those, who could handle a fish net, would go to the river whenever they wanted fish and return instantly with their baskets full. They would eat as much as they could and give the remainder to neighbours, orphans and the poor, thus gaining people's respect and gratitude. Some would throw fishing rods into the river. They would both listen to the whisper of waters, breathe fresh air and calm down, and take happily whatever would fall into the rod saying May God give us abundance! Sometimes five-six brisk men would unite, cut the small waters deriving from the river with woods and branches and start a big fishing. Some people were dreaming about fish throughout the year, as they did not know how to throw a fish net or a rod or wanted to go into the labour of cutting the river with branches. This requires a skill, which such people did not have at all. They were quite skilled in chattering, jawboning and making fun of the others in the village, though. Such people were expecting

the plums to fall into their mouth. They would wait for the clouds to turn black, thunders storm, cats and dogs to rain and floods to trouble the pure waters of the river. Then they would take the chance, roll up their sleeves and catch fish. Yet, that was a hit or miss affair, they could hardly grab a couple of tiny fish the size of a finger. Years used to be mostly dry. Not a drop would fall from the skies. Then woe onto those waiting for the waters troubled to catch a fish...

XLVII

WHEN I WAS GETTING TIRED and suffocating of my Guba (region of Azerbaijan – **trans.**) days, I would leave my office quietly, walk in the garden stretching towards the Gudyal River, take a rest and leave aside the mixed thoughts wandering in my head. The proud stand of centuries-old trees, the song of Gudyal River sometimes prancing and bubbling, sometimes calming down and waveless, as well as the soundless silence of the grayish cliffs in front of the city would remind me of our River Garden on the bank of Bargushad that my father built labouriously.

Once walking through the park quietly, I felt the smell of a newly-cut lemon. I looked around with an unstoppable longing. I searched everywhere step by step. Finally, I found it. It appears that geranium grew in that area. I first familiarized myself with geranium, whose odor fascinated me since childhood, in the native River Garden. Therefore, the smell of this plant reminds me of my ancestral land. Every time, when I watch this fascinating part of Guba, I stand before geranium and plunge into dreams, bend down, pick its leaves, smell them and enjoy the scent, which is called the shah of all scents. I would notice that some of my high-ranking companions walking with me were not approving of such naive behaviour. However, the negligence of such people, who saw the meaning of their life in narrow offices stenching with parquet oil and solemn ceremonies filled with false applauds,

towards the miracles of nature did not surprise me at all. I am not going to rebuke anybody for this, because, everyone has his own life and his own world. Besides, people not only have different outer appearances, but also different ways of thinking.

IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF FORTIES. We left the August conference of teachers and were headed towards the village. Having reached the Yazi Plain, we met Terekeme nomads returning from mountains to the plains. There was a beautiful bride sitting on a white camel covered in felt. As if the mountains had benevolently bestowed all their beauty upon this Terekeme girl. After the caravan left, one of my peer teacher colleagues said enviously:

– Did you see that bride? I don't mean any offence, but she was truly the beauty of the world. Guidonian Magdalena is nothing in front of her. God is the most skilled artist. A hundred masters of painting cannot repeat on their tableau the beauty created by God.

A middle-aged teacher joined the conversation and said with a longing:

– You saw the felt on the white camel in front. It was absolutely new. It is quite rare. I wish I had one, to cover the roof of the tent. It wouldn't leak a drop, even if the rain would pour down the whole week.

Yes, one of my teacher colleagues was astounded by a female beauty, while another by a new fret.

WHEN WORKING IN THE GARABAGH REGION, I would often visit a close-by region engaged in cotton growing. Every time I met the first secretary of Regional Committee, he would talk to me mostly about cotton pests. He would show me various bugs he was keeping in a match box with immense curiosity and say:

– This black, villous bug revives at that time of year and lays so many eggs. This white bug is immune against many pesticides... These bugs harm so many cotton bolls per day...

The blasted guy would never utter a word about the famous personalities, troublesome history or literary figures of the huge region he was governing. The most startling part was that for no obvious reason, he would cast his anchor early in the morning in a kolkhoz or sovkhov that was building a channel. He would be nicely welcomed, seated on a soft mattress, treated with fine tea and spend the day bluffing. He would return to his office at midnight and everybody would say there was no other secretary like him in the world. He does not like sitting in office. He visits kolkhozs from morning until evening; he sacrifices his life for our welfare.

This “laborious” secretary was also trying to avoid representatives of literature and art. Once he heard that a couple of revered writers were coming from Baku to meet the region’s intellectuals and readers. The regional leader’s mood was spoiled. During a meeting with me, he couldn’t hide his disappointment:

– Eh, these writers have nothing to do. Now I should take care of them...

The writers arrived and left disappointed after staying for a night, because they were met coldly. They left grumbling, with a lot of complaints.

XLVIII

Even though the negligence of my interlocutors, who don’t see or feel anything beyond the tent fret or a cotton pest, towards the beauty of nature, is frustrating, it is also natural. How can you talk about geranium with such people? Yet, if you start a conversation about a tent fret or a white or a black pest, that teacher and that first secretary will rush towards you with mouths full of words.

XLIX

EVERY FLOWER OR A BLOOM HAS NOT ONLY A SCENT OR A COLOUR IN MY VIEW, BUT ALSO IDIVIDUAL

OVERTONE RELATED TO MY LIFE. At the end of the seventies, I had health problems, I was undergoing nervous breakdowns. My old, and I would say, trusted friend, composer Suleiman Alasgarov arranged a health resort pass and took me to the *Green Garden Sanatorium* in Mardakan for treatment. It was March, the nature was awakening. Walking in the sanatorium's yard, I saw the golden daffodil with a pleasant and sharp scent for the first time there, while I was sick. In the days when I was in pain, tired of drugs and treatments, seeing doctors in white often around myself... Thirty years have passed since then. Yet, I avoid daffodils even now, because the colour and smell of this flower reminds of my illness and critical days.

WHILE GERANIUM... drags me to my nest, from which I flew away, to my native village Aligouluushaghi. It takes me by my arm and walk with me in the River Garden. I hang on the unbending branches of Abutalib apricot tree, where I used to spend nights building a loft to protect from birds and bugs. I become a child, a teen and play those old children's games – diradoyma, chilling-aghaj, ashig-ashig (Azerbaijani children's games-**trans.**). I gather my friends around and swim tirelessly in the Hassanali Lake. I catch fish in the Bargushad River, make a fire in the shadow of trees and cook kabab. In the humming of cherry-tree birds and golden orioles mixed with humdrums of grasshoppers, I enjoy a balmy sleep. I gaze upon my happy days from a 70-year distance. I listen to the noise springing from my father Ildirim's big and sharp cleaver challenging the blossoming trefoils. The salty sweat flowing from my father's shoulder and wetting his shirt saddens and upsets me. At that time, I had not yet carried a sheaf of woods on my back. I had not tasted the salt of labour. I was not doing any hard work. I would eat with everybody and walk aside. When the trees began growing fruits, my father would try to persuade me:

– SON, YOU ARE NOT A LITTLE KID ANY MORE. You are old enough to understand things. You see that I don't have

anybody to help me. The garden and orchard are full of harvest. You should also try to make yourself useful. The cherries are falling down and rotting. I can't climb up there, the branches will break down; but you are not heavy, please, climb up there, fill a couple of baskets, whatever you can pick up is good. Your peers already take care of an entire family...

I would always slip away with a thousand excuses. I cannot forgive myself the mistakes of those days. I say to myself – I am guilty in front of your spirit, father – and suffer quietly.

THIS WAY, I AM RUNNING AWAY FROM DAFFODILS REMINDING MY FEVERISH AND SICK DAYS AND FIND SHELTER IN THE BLUE FLOWERS OF GERANIUM HOLDING ME INSIDE ITS FRAGRANT LEAVES AND TAKING ME TO MY VILLAGE, where I can hear my father's breath, and walk in the River Garden.

I have the same attitude to music as to flowers. I was not yet twenty. I was going from Garabagh to Gubadli on a hot summer day sitting on a truck full of flour. It was past eleven o'clock in the evening, when we finally reached Turshsu. The driver pulled the car to the roadside, stopped and said exhaustedly:

– I have been driving for many days. I am totally exhausted and very sleepy. I might fall asleep while driving, which can cause a tragedy. Let's take a couple of hours rest here.

This suggestion appealed to all of us. I was lying with my back on the soft sacks filled with flour, watching the depths of the blue sky and listening to the Turshsu Spring's tender whisper. The surrounding mountains were spreading a cool breeze towards the Turshsu Village consisting of several houses and its inhabitants sleeping inside the temporary tents and sheds around it.

AND THIS IS A MOMENT OF LIFE. I was just going to close my eyes. A gentle music sprang up from the radio hanging on the wood stand aside the village. It was the first time that I was hearing this symphonic music. What symphony was that?! Who

was the composer?! I did not understand. To speak honestly, I did not possess broad knowledge about music then. How could I?! The contemporary century was ending, but my village located in the other end of the world did not have a radio connection. To put aside the unbelievable prices of battery-operated radios, where could we get one?! Only a few rich people in the region had a radio-receiver. We would hear music of ashigs at weddings or holidays and sometimes when visiting cities. Therefore, I later learned that the music I heard for the first time at that night in Turshsu was Fikrat Amirov's *Shur Symphonic Mugham*. As if the Symphonic Mugham was created for that very night, the Turshsu Spring, the mountains, forests, valleys and guests spending a night therein. I felt as if the music sometimes prancing like mountain-rivers and moving the rocks and sometimes calming down and flowing gently by was not coming from a radio hanging on a stand aside the Turshshu land, but from the endlessness of the sky with stars and moons above our heads. I felt as if the Symphonic Mugham was the echo of an invisible creature. Otherwise, I wouldn't be so charmed by it. I was at times marveled, stumble upon a world of joy, see all my dreams fulfilled and at times getting sentimental while listening to it.

I have been a companion and a friend of this Mugham for HALF A CENTURY. When I feel lonely, think I am becoming redundant with time, sadness outstrips me, the trusted people turn their back on me, or my pen refuses to move, the *Shur Symphonic Mugham* becomes my friend in sorrow. It takes me on its wings to the Turshsu Spring, brightens up my longing, consoles me, soothes me down like a child, and makes me forget my grief.

EVEN TODAY, when I hear the *Shur*, I wander around the mountains and valleys of Lachin with an insane longing and find my own, alienated and lost tracks in the criss-crossing roads...

L

AT THAT TIME, I HAD NOT YET FINISHED THE EIGHTH GRADE. We received news about Hitler's attack. Bad news! Everybody of appropriate age, teachers and pupils alike, set off to the battlefield. Most of the classrooms in our school emptied. The higher classes were cancelled due to the lack of pupils. I became a vagrant. My age was still insufficient to send me to war. They said, a two-month teacher training classes have opened in Shusha. They accept everybody, who finished the eighth grade, and the graduates of the class become teachers. I was quite interested. However, the family elders did not agree at first:

– Don't compare yourself to them, you are still a child, – they said. – A calf joining the herd gets eaten up by wolves. Do not be mistaken, city is different than village, city is a chaotic place. If you go in the middle of the war, some misfortune might befall you. I had put the Shusha issue into my head. So, I did not listen to them. – Should I wander around in the village?! – I thought to myself. I have promised to my friends, I have to go, that's it! My parents saw my insistence and did not push it, they agreed willy-nilly.

My childhood friend Khurshud, who was a master of all crafts, asked:

– I heard, you are going to Shusha to study?

– Yes, I am.

– Do you have shoes to walk in?

– No, sandals will do.

– What are you talking about?! Where will you go in those sandals?! Nobody wears sandals in a city. People will start laughing at you.

I was silent. My friend said:

– Then let me make you at least some light velvet shoes. I have got the upper part, I'll find some old soles or fells or something for the bottom.

I agreed. My friend worked day and night and prepared me light shoes. They were my first shoes ever.

THERE WERE FOUR GIRLS, ONE GUY, AND I WAS THE SIXTH... We set off with suitcases in our hands and bags on our shoulders. God was merciful, we accidentally met a truck on the road... We reached the Shusha ruins at midnight. The car turned to the right and stopped. The driver said:

– This is the school.

All of the teachers and students were Azerbaijanis. Only the director was an Armenian named Arsen Khachaturyan. The next morning, the lessons started. We were buying bread with coupons. Each of us would get four hundred grams. It was tasty in the mouth and spasmodic in the stomach. Yet, we were thankful. We only wished Hitler's army would not reach these places. Every day some news would come from the front. They said, Germans were almost in Makhachkala. They can reach Baku tomorrow. We were scared and wanted to pack our things up and run to the village. We thought if we die, we had to die in our own village. At such times, the school's baker Aunt Sureyya would hear us and come to our hostel instantly:

– Where are you running, kids, what are you saying! – She would say. – First of all, forget about such things. Stalin is standing for us like a mountain. No enemy can come here even in hundred years. Secondly, God forbid, if anything happens, I will hide all of you in my cellar. I will not let any of you in harm's way. Pull yourselves together.

So, the baker Aunt Sureyya was edifying us. She did not let us get scared and leave the school.

TWO MONTHS OF THOSE BLOODY YEARS PASSED BY. Each of us was given a teacher's certificate – four girls and two boys. I was the youngest among them. We said goodbye to the school and went to the main-road passing under Shusha with suitcases in our hands and bags on our shoulders again. We waited quite long, but there was no car. Our patience was over.

On sunset, we set off to our native village through shortcuts. The winds couldn't catch up with us. I was as if flying on those roads up and down. The longing of detachment was taking our minds off the exhaustion. Two lanes before the Lachin city, we reached a spring on the road. It was way past midnight. We couldn't see anything in the darkness. We opened a small dinner table under the light of the stars. We ate whatever we had, drank the water of the spring and recovered. Then we lay right next to the spring and took a nap. However, the fleas didn't give rest to us.... At dawn, we took our bags and suitcases and continued walking, two boys and four girls. We crossed the Hakarli River passing under the Lachin city and passed the mountain full of juniper trees in front of us. At midday, we descended to the Alkhasli Valley. We picked some fresh and sour grapes and ate them with dry bread. They say one can cross a mountain even with a piece of bread. After eating, we passed the Lachin Mountains and valleys. We reached our village at midnight. We saw our houses, yards and families. We were so happy. My father smiled:

– Hey, kid, in fact, I was not happy with this idea of yours, but you did well. There is even a saying, before the wise man began thinking, the fool crossed the river. It is a profession, all right, you have gained something.

WEARING THREE-NOSED SANDALS ON MY LEGS, BREECHES AND A LONG CAP... books and booklets under my arms, I began teaching the children ABC. My coat was sweeping the ground. Everybody was calling me a small teacher. Yet, there was a respect towards teachers. Despite my being small, everybody, young and old, respected me. I was proud of being a teacher. This title obliged me to behave like respectful men, decently and politely. I was cautious about my behaviour where I would go. I was trying to make all my actions suitable to the name of teacher. I got the following phrase into my head – Famous pedagogues, the personality of teachers affect a young soul through such a means of fostering, which cannot be replaced by a book, a pen or a bench.

...Near the end of the war, my father told me, son, that education you received in Shusha is not enough. It has no future. Go and finish some normal school. It will find you bread all your life.

My farm labourer father wouldn't laugh at everything. When he would smile slightly, my whole world would light up. When he was upset and frowning, as if darkness would fall onto me, I would get confused. So, I complied with the request of my rough-handed and slouchy father.

A small, eighteen-year old teacher dressed in sandals and sweeping the ground with his coat said goodbye to the primary school to set off to the big main-roads.

... I GRADUATED FROM THE LACHIN TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE. The director said that the college-leaving certificate would arrive later, now go and return in a month, or two. They gave us a temporary document substituting the school-leaving certificate so that we could enter higher school. I left for Baku. When the entrance exams began, I went to the university completely alone. The chairman of the admission committee said they could not accept the document because they needed the original of the school-leaving certificate. I returned disappointed. I was staying in the house of a distant relative living in the Akhundov Street in Baku. The hosts were staying in their summer-house. They had closed the main rooms and given only the corridor to me. I was cooking potatoes or eggs and somehow surviving. I had already learned my way around in the kitchen. At first as I was inexperienced, I would burn my hands so often. Then, gradually, I became skilled at it. I could make excellent tea. I was all by myself. However, the admission chairman's reply rained on my parade. My mood was spoiled. That day I did not eat or drink anything. I lay on my back and was engrossed in thoughts. My eyelids closed and I fell asleep. I saw my father in my dream. We met at the edge of village; he was on horseback with a cleaver on his shoulder. He greeted me sadly:

– WHY DIDN'T THIS COME THROUGH, SON? IT IS VERY BAD. – He met me quite coldly, didn't even want to shake my hand...

I tumbled out of bed. – It is no time to lie down or sleep, – I thought. What should I do? Whom I should tell my problem?! There is nobody to hold my back or support me.

I found the building of the Ministry of Education asking people on the roads. They showed me a door on the second floor. – Such issues are solved there, – they said. I made myself forget about shyness and somehow entered the room. It seemed like the office in charge of schools. The head of the office was a stout, red-faced man of average height dressed in sleeveless white shirt. He greeted me unwillingly and said wiping the sweat off his bald head with a handkerchief:

– I am listening, young man, go ahead...

– School-leaving certificate ... university...

– We do not issue school-leaving certificate here, or admit people to universities, – he replied. – You must have mixed up the address.

I was silent. The chief either understood my objection from my look or something. He said:

– Sit down, we will clear things up. – He brought a few folders, took on his glasses and began ruffling through them. Suddenly he lifted his head and said: – Your name is here. Your school-leaving certificates are here, we have just received them. Yet we cannot give them individually. We will send them to the college in five or ten days, you should go there and take your papers. If you need it urgently for admission to higher school, I don't mind, but you should take the labour of going back to Lachin and bringing me a power of attorney. We will then give yours as an exceptional case.

I wanted to say something, but the head of the office added:

– Our conversation is finished. Let's not open a debate here! You can go.

I HAD NO CHOICE. I was forced to go back to get the power of attorney. In the evening, I sat in a train and reached the Akara Railroad Station next morning. Most of the Gubadli villages are located on the bank of the Hakarli and Bargushad rivers joining here. I was supposed to continue upward along the Hakarli River, towards Lachin. That day, I made half of the way and reached Muradkhanli village in the evening. My legs were not listening to me anymore, I was totally exhausted. So, I decided to spend a night at my father's nephew uncle Karim, who was the chairman of the village of Muradkhanli. Yet, there was nobody in their house. Karim had left to the regional center and not returned yet. His family was in their house in mountains. Nevertheless, I was too tired to go anywhere else. I could see a bed canopy in the cellar in the yard. I climbed up into it and threw myself onto the soft bed. I fell asleep instantly. I saw our house in my dreams. My father was cutting woods in the yard. Seeing me, he turned away: – You are a ninny, – he said. – You didn't meet my expectations. You don't deserve the labour I spent bringing you up...

MY FATHER'S REPROACH FIRED RIGHT INTO MY HEART. I was trying to say something to him, when someone nudged me on the side and woke me up:

– Son, open your eyes! Wake up! It is your aunt Tamam, I am Karim's neighbour. Do not sleep hungry, I have brought you some soup. Stand up, eat a bit, Karim will soon come.

I emptied the bowl of soup sleepily and thanked aunt Tamam. Then again, went back to sleep.

At the crack of dawn, I stood up and began walking toward Lachin. I reached Malkhalafli village of Lachin at daybreak. Hunger had worn me out. I knew that Latif, who was working at the Lachin Highway Center, was from this village. We had got acquainted in a party several years ago. I asked people where his house was. Some graceful man took me to his house. Latif was at home:

– I am on vacation, – he said. He met me very well. After I told him the reason of my visit, he said:

– You don't know these roads. If you go, you will be lost. Stay here for the night, maybe I'll also need to go there tomorrow. I have some small things to do in the city.

Something else came up later and Latif had to change his mind in the evening. He couldn't go with me the next morning. I left alone. I reached a junction of two roads and didn't know which one to take. After a long time thinking, I chose the road descending to the valley. It was creeping by, twisting, passing through mountains, forests and bushes, never ending. I was running when reaching a downhill. A violet smoke was rising from the rocks in front. – Maybe it is a village, – I thought. I began moving in that direction. After some time, a village was seen at the bottom of the valley. I was very glad and starting moving faster. I was almost in the village when I met an old man walking ahead a donkey loaded with grass:

– Good day, uncle.

– Good day, son.

I ASKED HIM THE ROAD LEADING TO THE LACHIN CITY. He replied:

– Son, you have chosen the wrong way. Lachin is far away from here. This village is Mahmudbulaghi. You are too far away. Return back, go down that yellow hill, and then turn to the left. You will see three tracks, take the left one. After two valleys, you will see Lachin clearly. You won't need a guide once you see the village. Then you can find the city.

I turned back from Mahmudbulaghi and began climbing up that yellow hill. I passed the hill and after some time, I saw a village surrounded by gardens and orchards, with houses slightly away from each other. The mulberry tree in a yard with an old woman was full of fruits. A hungry man and a sweet mulberry! I stopped at the fence and looked towards the woman. I didn't know what to say to her. As if, the woman understood me. She said:

– You seem like you have something to say, brother. Do not hesitate, speak up.

I said shyly:

– Can I have some mulberry... I'll pay...

– Oh, what a shame, brother, who is talking about money?!

I am a lonely person and there is nobody to help me. Cross over the fence, climb up there and eat as much as you can, you are welcome to it. At the end, please, shake the tree a bit so that I can pick up those falling to the ground.

In a word, the helpless woman and the hungry voyager were both eventually happy. I left the village behind, crossed the hill filled with forests and saw the one- and two-storey houses with red roofs and the noisy Lachin city spread onto the mountain ahead. I passed the valley and reached a wide road. In an instant, I reached the Teacher Training College with familiar yard.

...SOON I HAD THE POWER OF ATTORNEY FROM THE COLLEGE.

Not losing any minute, I returned to Baku half way walking and half way on trucks or common wagons of trains. At the Ministry of Education, I filled in the white school-leaving certificate I received through the power of attorney and turned back towards Lachin to get it stamped.

...My exam marks were added onto the school-leaving certificate and signed. When it was the time to put a stamp, the assistant for educational affairs begged my pardon and said:

– You are not lucky, the director isn't here. True, I am the one replacing him, but he hasn't given me the school's stamps, he has left it at his home and gone somewhere. In case of necessity, we too get the documents stamped through his wife. Don't be ashamed, go to his house, maybe he will put a stamp on your school-leaving certificate. I shouldn't be saying it but she has such a character, even we can't ask her something every day. It is better if you go there yourself. I think, she won't mind. Besides, there can't be a problem, it is a legal school-leaving certificate and just needs a stamp.

I WENT TO THE DIRECTOR'S HOUSE SURROUNDED BY A SMALL FENCE. When I wanted to open the gates carefully and enter the yard, an indiscreetly dressed, plump woman with golden teeth in the sides and front of her mouth, looked at me obdurately and snuffled like a goose on an egg. She hung the wet cloth in her hand onto a rope and measured me up with angry eyes:

– Who are you?! What do you want?! – She asked.

– Sister, I am a student of the college, I have finished the school and received my school-leaving certificate. It needs a stamp... They say the stamp is here.

– Blasted be the one who says it and the one who sends you here! – The woman cut me short.– Is this a school here?! Every now and then someone comes: put a stamp here, put a stamp there! Where I should run away from these people?! Get out of here, leave! Whenever the director returns from his vacation, you can tell him your word! He will know if your school-leaving certificate needs to be stamped or not! I don't have an office here!

I WAS DUMBSTRUCK. I turned back right from the gates. – What am I supposed to do now? – I thought.

An old man squatting on haunches at a nearby stone and watching his calf was looking at us folding tobacco into a piece of newspaper and laughing. He took out a lighter from his pocket, lit his cigarette and waved a hand at me:

– Come here. – He said.

I approached him thoughtfully. The old man began interrogating me:

– Son, you seem to be a stranger here, what are doing at that yard?

– I have finished the college. School-leaving certificate... stamp...

– Which region are you from?

– Gubadli, village of Aligouluushaghi.

– We appear to be neighbours. What was that bitch saying?! Damn the good ones among women! Even if not all of them are the same, even God cannot restore a house destroyed by a woman. The poet was right:

*Look at the history, relentless woman!
What crime have you not committed?
Is it the devil you have chosen as master?*

– Son, a boisterous woman is very bad. The man does not have the stomach to bridle her. Woman is such a creature that if you just slightly loosen her bridle, that's it, you can give up on her! She will not be stopped. – The old man seemed imbibed with knowledge. He added:

– The woman who snapped your nose off is the director's wife. I know her father and grandfather very well. I know them inside out. She used to be a daughter of a poor man. She wouldn't talk unless talked to. People thought there was nobody more wretched than her. She was so thin and feeble. We wondered how she kept her soul and body together. The destiny turned out so that the director married her when he arrived as a new teacher to this school. Then they appointed him the head of the school and money began falling on them from all sides. So, they became more and more insolent and grew too big for their boots, they've stopped considering themselves God's creature. You saw what she said to you?! Can a woman talk that way?! I wanted to stand up and answer to her, give a sound thrashing to her, but then I said to myself, damn the devil! Let her go to hell! She is a hussy! I shouldn't put myself under her thumb at such an old age!

The old man finished his words and was engrossed in thoughts. He smoked his cigarette and looked at the Lachin Mountains. Then he continued shaking his head:

– I have seen the inferno of prison. I was married to a woman, but then I saw she has passed the boundaries. I even heard a few stupid things, I couldn't tolerate it. I wasn't planning to kill her.

Yet, the strike injured her too much... I was sentenced to ten years in jail. I spent seven years there and was released. If the woman behaved like a woman, why would I do that? I am so soft-hearted that even can't make myself cut a hen's throat. A woman should have a sense of shame, decency and dignity. When the director's wife was talking to you like that, I was very angry. I hardly suppressed my anger!

The old man stopped talking, then took a deep draw of his cigarette and said:

– Now, loneliness is killing me.

– Didn't you marry after that? Don't you have a wife, children?! – I asked.

The old man shook his head:

– I was married after that, – He said. She left me in less than a year. She didn't like me; she said I was too old, as weak as a cat. I had four children with my previous wife. They...

The old man inhaled his cigarette for the last time, threw it away and said:

– I raised a bitch, a dog took her away. I raised a dog, a bitch took him away on her back. This is the loyalty of a daughter and a son... Eh, son, do not touch my grief. The womankind...

I was deeply in thoughts while the old man was speaking. A gentle voice was heard from behind:

– Boy! Brother!

The old man hinted at the same gate:

– This is the director's sister, – he said, – she is calling you, go and see what she says. Quite honestly, she is a very decent woman. We are nextdoor neighbours, I know all of them. In all honesty, the director is also a very nice person. Yet, he behaves like a woman. His word is not sharp. He has let his wife loose. Such a man only needs a bullet between his eyes. Every day she dresses in something new and walks in front of people...

I felt that the old man's chest was full of words. He didn't have luck with women. He is seeking someone to bare his heart,

talking through his hat. Without expressing my opinion about any of his words, I turned back and approached the tender woman standing at the director's yard and calling me. She said totally embarrassed:

– Brother, for God's sake, please, forgive us. May her be damned. I was dying of shame hearing her words to you. Tell me, what do you need?

– School-leaving certificate, stamp...

– Do not stand here, come in. Pest on her, she dragged us into the mud. She is not here, left from the other door to do shopping, or wherever the hell she went! Bring whatever document you need to be stamped, I'll put the stamp before she returns.

I followed the woman into the yard and entered into a small room with open doors. The director's sister put a stamp on my school-leaving certificate in a hurry grumbling after her sister-in-law and saw me off respectfully.

LI

This is it... every time, when I listen to the charming melody of *Shur*, I return to those years. I feel as if I am in the Turshsu Mountains. I walk on the criss-crossed, uneven roads, which still contain my footprints in certain places, while in others, they are gone. I get tired, kneel down and drink mouthful of spring waters. I listen to its gentle whispers. I live through the bitter and sweet moments of my life in the light of unfolding memories. Sometimes I feel like the tracks joining and criss-crossing on the chest of these ancient mountains are the notes of a music that has enchanted me and were created from a mighty presence. *Shur's* echo derives right from those mountains, hills and steep rocks. The symphony bewitching me is the bitter-sweet tale of my youth lagging behind with every year and every day, and of the stormy corners of my life. I unfold the tangle of my thoughts, their complicated ravel with its spell. I can do this also when smelling the odor of geranium. Readers may reproach me for

repeating these phrases over and over again. Yet, that would be unjust! The tender language of music and the pleasant scent of flowers retell me the story of my life I have left in that place. They save me from the heaviness of oldness and loneliness pursuing me at least for a moment. They bestow the bright light of dawn upon me during sunset. Music and the smell of a flower called geranium.

IN REALITY, I WOULDN'T WANT TO REKINDLE THOSE MOMENTS. Yet, geranium mixed me with its odor and diverted me from the subject matter.

There are stories you do not want to retell. Even a pen tries to avoid them; it just won't stick to the paper. However beneficial a drug can be, you can't drink it without frowning. Like a living creature, my pen also wants to change its direction and escape when facing wicked intentions and evil deeds. Yet, what can I do, I am obliged to redirect it towards the storms of life that are too big to avoid.

LII

The tea-house smoking in the corner of an ancient garden NEAR THE GUDYAL RIVER was spoiling the air of this beautiful place. It was disappointing for me. The customers that appeared in the tea-house recently were gathering in threes or fours and whispering some confidences. I also noticed that the owner of the tea-house was fawning on them. I asked my companion, who was a leader of some region. He said with a tone signaling that it was not a proper subject of conversation:

– They are not renowned people, you do not know them. One of them used to be a village teacher, S., or something. He used to try his best to be accepted to the Party, but nobody lets him near it. The first secretary remonstrated with it. He said, the guy was not fit to become a party member. If we give such types a pass, people will throw stones at us. We sent his documents back. Now, he has reemerged from somewhere and gathered five or ten

people like himself around. They don't let us work. They say, you should pack up your gears, your time has passed. We should be the governing lot now. We are unable to do our job because of them, we are sick of them. The superiors say we shouldn't breach democracy. Do not touch them.

I HAD TO THINK THIS OVER BY MYSELF. – There was a time, when the people charged with the destiny of a village, region, city or republic were checked and double-checked many times over. Their education, organizational skills, capability of work, scientific-political training, entire ancestral line, authority in society and even family status were all controlled. To assign a newly-independent country to casual people?! Where will this lead us?! Does the democracy mean that an occasional man ashamed to walk among men so far and incapable of leading a few people should now sit at the same table with scholars of economy and law, who has a great life experience and respect of the people?! I saw this as a path leading to failure.

A FEW DAYS LATER, I visited the head of the executive power. He was collecting his belongings in his office. I asked him half-jokingly:

– How come? What are you preparing for?

He shrugged dispiritedly:

– It is impossible to work under such conditions, – He replied offended. – I don't know if I should do what the President is telling me to do, or what the Prime Minister is saying, or dance to whistling of the grovellers, declared themselves popular front members?! We are absolutely fed up with all of these. I am leaving, come what may.

I knew the executive leader more or less. He was a true-born man. His father was among the most respectful people in the Ilisu Village of the Gakh region of Azerbaijan. The head of the executive power himself was an Irrigation Engineer with high education. He graduated from the Academy of Social Sciences in Moscow. He has worked in many positions from a simple irrigation

engineer, up to the chairman of regional soviet and first secretary of several regions. He was a noble, elderly and tactful man enjoying total respect among people.

I WAS ENGROSSED IN THOUGHTS: – Why should an inexperienced person head such a big region in the republic's current tough conditions and the complicated historical time?! It cannot happen! – I thought. Yet, it did. In a few days, that very S. smoking his cigarette in the park's tea-house appeared with his band in Guba's throne of power. The people hearing the news were as if scalded by boiling water. The same year, the region's economy was paralyzed.

Even in the Soviet times, ignorant people were sometimes assigned to lead regions and I have seen many such cases. Such occasion would become a load of grief and torture me, mostly because the post of the first secretary was that of an absolute ruler. The welfare of cities and village depended upon their leader. When they were misplaced, people suffered a lot. When such power would fall into the hands of incapable and ignorant lot, poor people suffered both financially and morally.

Yet, when we reached the path of independence and democracy we were dreaming about, those rare cases revived and multiplied. The people of small "weight" grabbed big and heavy positions they did not deserve, which confined us to enormous disasters. Those popping up and pretending to take the nation to their heart were causing such a stir that people began missing the old rules. It appears that they were not the nation's guardians lighting up the rays of hope, but the maniacs of positions they never even dared to dream about. Occasional, inexperienced people, who, until yesterday, used to work for social catering services, served food to guests, played drums at wedding parties, climbed up the electric poles to mount some wires, received their hospital attendant diploma have today come and sat at the table of the regional leadership. A bricklayer was assigned to a responsible position at the Republic's National

Defense Headquarters. A teacher became the Minister of Defense. A simple militiaman was appointed the Minister of Internal Affairs. A man selling watermelons in a bazaar became the Prime Minister... Such people cast lots for the leading and responsible positions of the republic or gave them to each other as a gift... Hit or miss, grasp whatever you can...

CITIES AND VILLAGES FOUND BECAME BOUND HAND AND FOOT BY BRAINGLESS LEADERS.

HEY, EAGLE!!! That was exactly when the fate failed the flaming Aligouluushaghi so miserably and rode it for the fall.

Again the gloom filled my eyes. As if the sun had set prematurely. The mountains and valleys in front became invisible. The eagle keeping me company so far also disappeared. Different thoughts came to my mind. – Maybe, this is not the eagle that I saw then, – I thought to myself. Most probably, this is the spirit of my farm labourer father sleeping in the captive land set ablaze?! Maybe, it is the spirit of my uncle Amrah, who wouldn't let a bird perch on his reserve?! Maybe it is not an eagle at all?!

LIII

Suddenly I felt as if I woke up. My fantasies left my village moaning under captivity. I opened my eyes wide. Ah, again Shuvalan! The old and weak mulberry-tree standing face-to-face to me, one-storey house facing the sea and a faithful dog named Graf (count – **trans.**) taking care of the yard. Why are you sitting rampant in front of me and looking so startled, God's creature?! What are you thinking about in your own little world?! Maybe you deem yourself an unnecessary burden for this yard?! No! I am not hurt at you. You have never been ungrateful. You have never snarled at me, barked at me, or scratched my hands or legs. You have never been a hypocrite, spoken falsely or used trickery... You haven't changed your attitude after I grew older. You have licked the hard-working hands and legs of my wife

,who gave you food three times per day. Even though an animal, you probably think that you used to be a stupid puppy barking at everything and the hosts of this house made a dog out of you. How happy you are hearing my steps, you start jumping up and down! You crawl before me with joy. Seeing me and my old wife, your face brightens with delight, you start beaming and glowing with happiness. You do a thousand things to express your joy. Even if your name is dog, you are a perceptive and appreciative creature, Graf! You must be thinking: I am also benefiting from the labour of an old journalist having lived in many places and finally stopped in this unfamiliar land and his white-haired wife. I have a comfortable kennel protecting me from the frost of winter and heat of summer. They gave me a piece of their food. They don't let me go hungry. They take care of me, even if I am a dog. If it wasn't for this old journalist and his noble wife, who knows, what fortune I would stumble upon? Maybe I would come across some cruel and inhumane people, some relentless person with no fear of God, who would beat me every day and make my life intolerable. Maybe I would be wandering in streets, just like my homeless peers. I would be twiddling near the trash bins for a piece of bone. Nasty children would run after me and throw stones at me savagely. I would face a harsh destiny. Hey, Graf! I feel that you are thinking about these things looking at the wrinkles on my face and the pen in my hand. Unfortunately, you are called dog! I have come across such types, who benefited from my suffering... I can neither retell it, nor describe it with my pen. Luckily, you are far away from the intelligence to comprehend that the name you are carrying is used also as an insult, loyal and poor dog! I would like to advise you something, as your owner. Never bark unnecessarily. To speak the language of my fellow countrymen, know the time of your bark, do not snarl at people pointlessly spoiling their mood. Hold yourself respectful so that your food is permissible. In this case, people will treat you as a well-bred dog.

Graf stood up as if understanding what I was trying to say, fawned, shook, yawned, went to a corner of its narrow house and calmly scrolled... and began watching peeping at me.

The old mulberry-tree was infolded in silence. Maybe it was recalling its days a hundred years ago.

LIV

I got up from the WOODEN BED and switched on the TV. The news was saying demonstrations have filled the cities and villages. I was glad... I was glad that, finally, the nation woke up. I thought, probably everyone has gone to demonstrations to express their protest against Armenia, that occupied Kalbajar, Shusha, Lachin, Zangilan, Gubadli, Jabrayil, Aghdam and Fizulu regions and committed the Tragedy of Khojali and against those who just tried to take away someone's post and put another person in his place.

What are you talking about! What land, what nation, what dignity, what smirch! The same old bath, the same old cup... Again the fistfight over a position and the zest of presidency... Some types claiming these things do not put a big miracle in front of themselves, look at it attentively and think thoroughly if this intelligence, this brain, this appearance and shape suits a head of a country, or not. My dear, who would think about such things?! The only thing that matters is position. Power, office, bodyguards, Mercedes, new suits every single day, dollar, villas...

Here, I remember Napoleon Bonaparte's words: "The biggest immorality is to stick to some job you are incapable of doing. If an incapable general grabs the military command, then this immorality becomes the heaviest of crimes. Dear God, save my people from such immorality!"

Once, after Chaim Weizmann's death, Einstein was asked to agree to become President of Israel. He said the offer was very pleasant, but he did not consider his candidacy appropriate for that position. He added that he never did anything that did not

please him. And that he did not consider himself suitable for social activities.

Probably, these lines will upset those who are dreaming about positions, they will make a wry face and say: – Man, we don't have France or Israel over here, who is Napoleon or Einstein in front of us! We can lecture them on the rules of society's democratic development, military leadership and mathematical sciences.

EVERY DAY, OR EVERY SECOND DAY MEETINGS, demonstrations... rampant screams: Resignation... Endless parties, newspapers, magazines growing as mushrooms after rain... The lands remaining in captivity... Tent-cities of refugees scattered over waterless plains... Pitiful children in the streets stretching their hands over to people and begging... Capable and incapable people growing fussy and losing all their fortune with every single day... The intellectuals turning away from books and standing behind scales... What were you thinking! This is the true independence and democracy!!!

HERE, I REMEMBERED A STORY. My old fellow student Maharram, with whom I used to study in one class in Aghdam, somehow married a woman from Magadan, Russia. One day, my friend goes to his wife's relatives far away. He also takes a basket of pomegranates from the village of Shelli to them. In the morning, Maharram sees they've put the pomegranates into a pan and are boiling them. Another brother-in-law, who also received some pomegranate, says, Maharram, it is a good fruit, I liked it, but its skin is a bit bitter. It appears the brother-in-law rushed onto the pomegranate and ate it with its skin on.

CERTAIN SELF-CONFIDENT TYPES DRESSED IN DEMOCRATIC GUISE IN SOME OF OUR CITIES AND VILLAGES comprehends the notion of democracy and freedom just like Maharram's relatives in Magadan comprehended the pomegranate.

YET, IN THIS PERSPECTIVE, MY AUNT'S WISE HUSBAND MASHADI IBRAHIM acted even more briskly

than some of our heralds of freedom and democracy. Mashadi visited a distant mountain village in a neighbouring region to sell mulberry jam. A woman of the house, where he stays, hastily puts some honey, kernel of the walnut and jinjili on Mashadi's table and says:

– Mashadi, please, enjoy yourself with these for now, my husband will soon return home, – and takes the copper water jar and goes to spring.

Honey, hazelnut and sesame... Mashadi thinks how he should eat these things so that the children standing aside and looking at him wouldn't make fun of him. After long reflections, Mashadi calls a 10–12-year-old boy, sits him nearby and says:

– Eat! Eat, child!

The boy was embarrassed to eat near the guest. Mashadi starts asking him and makes him eat. The boy extends his hand to the table, takes a hazelnut, plunges it into honey and sesame and eats. Having learned how to eat the hazelnut, honey, and sesame, Mashadi says to the boy:

– OK! Now, go! If your mother returns and sees you near me, she will not like it.

The boy leaves the table. Mashadi comes closer to the table and starts eating with delight...

LV

HEY, PEN WRITE! I have said it, I am not turning back from it and I won't make any attempt to stop you. Besides, I am careful to say – Don't write this, you can make a mistake! There is not much trust to people nowadays. I am afraid, I'll say – Don't write this, – and you, just like some people, who don't act age, will get too big for your boots and say, I am a reactionary and don't want to get along with democracy...

See, right here my pen began to hesitate slightly. It stumbled and stopped before the line was finished. At that moment, I turned away from the pen and paper in front of me. I stretched

myself. My exhausted eyes looked around. I focused again and without taking a breath, turned to my pen that was grafting sentences conveying different meanings and wandering forth like an unbridled tetchy horse and asked it carefully, also softly: – Hey, my moral support using up oceans of ink, see, where you have started and where you have reached?! Maybe you have been caught by fog and mist and are lost?! Are your tracks of meaning dragging you to different sides?! Maybe you don't feel or comprehend fully what you are doing, talking, or writing about just like some accidental people sticking their tooth and nail into positions they don't deserve?! Two heads are better than one, they say. Maybe you need an advisor, a guide, someone to show you the path?! Thankfully, our newly-forming society does not have a problem with this. As parties multiply daily, they come up with personas, which can't help prattling and putting unbelievable ideas forward, you have no idea!! We have such stores of wits appearing, who boast here and there claiming they can solve the stuck Garabagh problem in a wink! Those having let go of Kalbajar and Shusha tear themselves apart in this context, beat their breasts in streets and squares and demonstrate such wits, skills and resources.

LVI

ONE OF THE FIGHTERS OF FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND INDEPENDENCE named Khandadash lives in our quarter. We are only separated by three-four houses. What a big happiness! Sometimes I wish I were Khandadash's door-to-door neighbour. Then I would know we also have someone to rely on just in case. Khandadash bey is not very old. He is either slightly younger or slightly older than fifty. He claims to have graduated from many schools. The man's allegations and appetite are quite big. He speaks so eloquently, one can't help thinking he is the wisest of the wise and he is the one, who created the higher mountains. He says, if I sit on the presidential post, I'll make the world right. I'll

demonstrate to everyone how a head of the country should be like!

The bey has knocked at all doors. He keeps talking about the famous poets, writers, actors and directors, who live near us or who have died long time ago. He says, you have moved here recently, you don't know many things. They wouldn't open a table without me, I have taught them how to make their yards clean, how to plant trees and water orchards and gardens.

– Yeess, what were you thinking?! Do not compare it to other places! Not every ordinary man is capable of bringing about an orchard or a garden in Shuvalan! Its water is salty, soil is full of sand and the sun drills heads in summer! How can you plant a tree here?!

I admire the proofs and edifying chats of this bey, who considers himself the wise man of the quarter, about housekeeping, cleanliness, accuracy and gardening. From time to time he hints that he does not enter casual people's house or keep friendly relations with ordinary people.

Having said all of these, he smoothed his droopy mustache and adding that he gets along with the writer-folk quite well. Therefore he visits my house often. – Eh, where are those days?! – He said and sighed sorrowfully. – May he rest in peace. We have shot so many woodpigeons and turtle-dive together with that poet and cooked pilaf with them! That minister would be offended if I didn't visit him at least once per day. That general would send someone after me if I did not visit his house for two days. He used to work as the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, I don't remember his surname anymore; he would send a car after me every time he arrived in this summerhouse. He would say, neighbour, if you don't keep your hands on this garden and orchard, all of it will dry out and die. I had built him such a yard and garden, everybody was shocked. The Dendra park was nothing compared to it. After the man died, I also stopped going there. Eventually such a beautiful garden was ruined. Now,

only a few pine-trees remain there. Even an enemy's heart would bleed at this.

Khandadash bey fumed a cigarette, shook his head regretfully and said with discontent:

– Nowadays, witty and clever people are very rare. Is that issue of Garabagh so difficult that none of them is capable of solving it?! If I were a president, they would see!!! I hope, I will become a president with God's help! Then they'll know what kind of men there are left aside. Our newly-established party is thinking about running me as a candidate in the next presidential elections. I have a presentiment that I have to be president sooner or later! – He beat his breast.

Saying these words, bey took a few steps forward, stood right under my jaw and stared pompously straight at my eyes:

– Neighbour, – he said, – please, tell me the truth! Am I worse than those barging in and cocking their hats at presidency?! Tell me! Which one of them is better than me?! I bet on my honour that none of them! I can fit all of them in my pocket for intelligence, wits and knowledge.

Recently, me and the bey have grown closer. He often visits me. Entering the house, the first thing he does is to have a look at the yard. Then he starts: neighbour, do not be offended, but I don't like your housekeeping. Look, you haven't planted this sapling properly, this is no place for it! You should have asked my advice beforehand. I am not satisfied with your vineyard either, there are some crooked grape-louses among them. Also, the vineyard is located quite low. You shouldn't have used underground water-pipes, either. Mardakan is not appropriate for this method of irrigation. You may have been deceived. Lifting the grapevines on concrete stands does not meet any agronomic rules. I can see a lot of weeds here and there. I have to say this, whether you are hurt at me, or not, this is not good! If you look after your trees, it will be an orchard, otherwise, it will be a wilderness, i.e. cause trouble to its owner. Besides, neighbour,

remember that a man's value and capability is seen in the cleanliness and accuracy of his household. I also don't like the fact that you haven't planted some trees or flowers in your garden...

Honestly, I was wholly at a loss before Khandadash bey. I can't make him approve of anything. He finds faults in all my actions. I was thinking that probably this bey's yard is like a heaven described in fairy-tales. I was filled with the desire to see his yard and garden. Yet, neither did I put on a bold face and visit his garden, nor did he ever unlock his mouth and invite me to his place.

FINALLY, ONE DAY... My phone suddenly stopped working. I had to call the phone company to inquire the reason. Whose door should I knock on asking, please, let me call from your phone? At last, I decided to turn to Khandadash, whom I at least knew more or less. Thus, I could kill two birds with one stone. Firstly, I can use the bey's phone and secondly, it is the time of edification, I can see his cleanliness and order and enjoy it.

...His door had no bell, so I picked up a solid stone from the ground and began banging the gates as hard as I could. After a long time, the rustic and corroded gate's door opened with a heavy squeak. The bey was not at home. I was met by his twenty-twenty-five-year-old scrubby, barelegged son with trousers rolled up to his knees. I greeted him politely and told the reason of my visit. The young man pointed with his long chin at the black phone with green receiver on the old table in the corridor. The chinked old phone was strapped with wires on many parts. I lifted the black phone's grafted green receiver and called the regional phone center. I had a quick look around while speaking on the phone. There were two old mulberry-trees, one elaeagnus and one fig tree in a hectare of garden. A bug called "American bug" had torn apart the mulberry-trees and a fig tree so savagely that only a few branches had some green leaves left on them. Stones stripped from the old walls were piled up in the middle of the yard. The scrap of metal heaped on top of one

another reminded of the old car cemeteries outside of some cities. The remaining field was full of carlines, thistles, reeds, nettle which could reach the height of a man. Feeling some horrible smell from the corridor, I took my handkerchief and covered my nose. Then I hastily settled the matter with the phone company and left Khandadash's "paradise like garden". It was my first and last visit there.

That very day, Khandadash organized a meeting in one of the squares. He was talking about human rights, democracy, independence, dignity and honour in front of the people with such a zeal, as if breathing thunder and lightning at the people. He was promising welfare and happy life to the nation. Everybody was unanimously clapping and shouting:

– Khan-da-dash! Khan-da-dash!! Khan-da-dash!!!

I was dumbstruck. I watched this picture for a long time... Hey, pen, a burnt child dreads the fire. We have suffered a lot because of such types. So, I recommend you to keep away from Khandadashes in the distance of thousand trees.... Write the way you know, on the condition that people reading your writings do not understand it the way the people in Magadan ate the pomegranate.

MANY YEARS AGO, I wrote in an essay such a phrase: the bay (horse) was standing at the brow. The assistant editor made me blush over that phrase: – What brow! What horse! What kind of a phrase is this! Our poets and composers line poems and create songs about the black eyebrows over the chasmal eyes, and you are bringing a horse into all of these... One of the editors changed the word "net" into "straw". Do you know how proud he was of himself claiming to have saved the press from a huge phraseological error?!

What else can you expect from an editor and assistant editor incapable of distinguishing between two homonyms (in Azerbaijani – **trans.**) – fishnet and a straw? Now, you, pen, pray to your God so that you don't face such editors and assistant editors again, just like the pomegranate faced the Magadan-folk.

LVII

I am talking to you, you should hear me out, pen! I am saying again, be careful with what you are writing. Right now, the skirmish over pockets and positions is ongoing everywhere. Just like in the “Garabagnameh” book, or “Surrounded by Blood” novel. At that time, the khan of Nakhchivan didn’t like the khan of Garabagh, while the khan of Shamakhi was threatening the khan of Ganja and the khan of Guba was intriguing against the khan of Baku. They were scraping, fighting and washing each other in blood. One of them was relying on the shah of Iran, while another on the tsar of Russia. The result was the separation of this land. We became the neighboring countries’ prey. Our language and religion were forbidden. One commanded us to speak in Russian, the other ordered to write in Persian.

– Whoever was the ruler, we were the slaves, whoever was the donkey, we were the saddle – we tolerated those torments with this rationale.

Many years have passed since, but we are still the same. The same old bath, the same old cup.. The intention of integrating, becoming free men and joining the other men is only in words. Our actions speak of something totally different. Opposition finds faults in everything the ruling party says, while the ruling party doesn’t understand what the opposition is talking about.

Those sitting in the embassies of certain interested states anchored in Baku pass the char around covertly and boil the cauldron slowly. Some of them are mixing the mess in the cauldron with their import scoops. The others are heaping fuel to the flame... Certain talkative party leaders riding the high horses can’t hide the dollars passed from abroad with evil intentions and peeking out from the pockets of their trousers...

BY ALL THAT IS BLUE,, nowadays one can’t understand hands, either. The hands claiming Applauses to Freedom, Democracy and Independence! – and clapping outwardly. The hands grabbing a spade and shovel secretly and digging deep

wells to those words, plundering the riches of our newly-reviving country and transferring them to foreign banks.

READER, THIS IS NOT MY VOICE, but the voice of the last years, last months, last days, last minutes and last seconds of the twentieth century we have just seen off. My pen ignores me and shouts these things out in its lines. The lines that some will find pleasing, some sickening.

Then I am deeply engrossed in thoughts. Poor nation, where are going so blindly taken in by alluring words of Khandadash consumed with desire of a position?!

I DON'T KNOW WHERE THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS DRAGGING ME?! I put down my pen for a moment. A one-storey house facing the sea, the old mulberry-tree that has seen Nadir in throne and Solomon in cradle, and faithful Graf lying with his jaw on his paws and looking at the old journalist. The incessant and ruthless winds often troubling the trees I have planted laboriously. Colorful birds of various sizes flying from branch to branch in the corners and seeking a beak of food. My turbulent, messy and worried world exposing me to bittersweet destiny at the twilight of time and century. Anarchy emerged in disguise of democracy, freedom and independence...

FILTERING THESE THINGS THROUGH, my reflections took me to the dark chasms of distant centuries involuntarily. I arrived in the ancient world of slaves and feudal lords. The legendary hero Spartacus having come out of many battles with triumph was upset, since his army was having frequent cases of disobedience leading to breach of order and union of gladiators. Most of the legions were addicted to plunder. The passion of post and wealth had defied the noble intentions. The army renowned for its valor was in a ridiculous condition. The warlords were dragging the army to different directions. The horrified legion Thessaloni had lifted his sword over his head and was shouting angrily at the fighters:

– If you understand freedom as anarchy, disorder and hunting trophies, I am spitting at it! We don't need that kind of freedom! We need order and rules. Otherwise...

Yes, otherwise, Spartacus realized with wise far-sightedness the eventual futility of his fight for freedom. The celebrated hero was deeply touched by this. Finally, he tasted the bitter pain of this disorder...

His rival Crassus was achieving the famous victories through the fierce discipline he had established in the army and the will of every fighter to hold the name of Roman high and defend its honor...

Yes... the fierce discipline certain heralds of democracy take as dictatorship and frown at!

And the anarchy interpreted as human freedom!

The crossroads of two paths....

I wonder, which of these decisive paths the long-suffering nation I belong to intends to choose? I cannot escape from the distress over such unanswered questions. My reel of thoughts is interlacing in the distant horizons of these two roads' junction...

When the moment of delving into the hypocrisy called politics spoiling the air of our world arrived, my pen shouting the voice of my soul in lines came to a standstill. It wouldn't move a letter forward. I felt that it, too, has grown sick of the ugly games of politicians screwing the fate of motherland. Therefore, I didn't push it, left it free on the papers in front of me and stood up. And I left my desk.

I went sightseeing in my native city at midday, as if it was already dark, to escape from the boring constraints of my thoughts. I began walking around our Baku... Necessary and unnecessary, expensive and cheap trade commodities scattered disorderly along the streets, parks, corners and turns, climbing over the walls, ground and skies stretch over and over again. All have "made in" pasted on, the commodities and money both foreign. Everybody, old and young, is seeking a gain. Drapers and dealers are having

a cat's concert. Teachers, engineers, scientists and intellectuals with ties on their neck are denying their dignity in embarrassment and earning their living. Kids of school and under-school ages, dignified women embracing their babies do not wary of begging people around for a piece of bread. On the other side are proud and arrogant boldfaces tracked like a shade by geared-up bodyguards with fingers on triggers, and the misplaced, pompous officials. Curtained and uncurtained Mercedeses, Volgas, Daewoos, Limousines, Jeeps... with inaccessible in black-tinted glasses... Incessant flows of cars... Also, rare book stores here and there. Piles of dusted books scowled by readers...

Watching all of these, I was dumbstruck. I thought: – Growing older, a man gets tired and loses the sharpness of his voice. Grief overcomes him, his body bends down, and he loses his looks. Children abandon him, friends leave him alone... Probably, our century is also getting older. That's why the weights are losing precision as their time is coming to an end. The days are growing darker and darker. Grief and sorrow are in abundance, while joy is no more. Wits and judgment grow shallower. Passions increase, controversies deepen, and people eat each other alive. Blood is running in torrents everywhere...

NO, I AM NOT MISTAKEN, this is it; our time has also grown old! Society is suffocating tormenting clamps of anarchy. Alas! Our century has grown old! It has lost the strength to resolve these ugly happenings in front of us. Hey, people, beware! Our time has grown old! Our century is rotting! The only gift it has managed to bestow upon us in the last years and last months of its life is independence. Even that is filled with diverse problems and mind-boggling deeds of devil terrorizing the calmness and freedom... That is why we are still fighting the eye-burning smoke of yet story-bound independence, instead of warming up at its hearth.

By a twist of fate, we have suffered bitterly during our century twice. Once – at its beginning, and the second time – at

its end, once in its “childhood” and then, in “senility”. It has condemned us to its bloody years. It has inflicted many cureless wounds upon us. Now, we are laying our hopes on the twenty first century extending its arms avidly and embracing us... This is also a console!

Feeling and thinking these things, I found the world narrowing around me. I felt contracted, my lips dried, I felt suffocating. I approached the water booth ahead. The impudent trader selected a bottle among the piles of full bottles brought from all over the world and extended it to me with exalt:

– This is Jeleznovodsk water, – he said. – I have just received it. Just look at it! It has a special bottle made for export.

I examined the exquisite label on the bottle: “Made in...” I opened the bottle, poured myself a cup of water and drained it empty. It smelled of a rotten egg. The seller understood from my wry face that I didn’t like the water too much. He giggled and said:

– Mineral water should be like that. You know, how many diseases it can cure? It is written right there, just read it...

I read it again attentively... “Made in” at the end...

I didn’t say anything to the seller. Yet I thought in myself: This can never be compared to the water of our Aligouluushaghi springs. By God, they are no more alike than chalk and cheese. The pure and cool waters of Yazi, Chomchali, Mashadiallahveran, Muradhasil, Iydali, Chinarli, Aynagli and Gabagli springs of our region taste like honey. I used to kneel down, bend down and drink the water of those springs to my fill. Those waters have made me more humane, I have felt absolute delight drinking them. Aside from drinking the water of our springs, I have also seen my reflection in their crystal mirror. I have looked at myself. I have taken handful of water, washed my face and felt revived. Those waters have brightened up my face. I have simply not understood what they were trying to say, listening to their tender and gentle whispers. It appears that nether those pure

waters filtering through the profundities of high mountains, precipitous rocks and thick forests, nor the ewers, jugs and goglets filled with that water and carried by young girls and brides on shoulders did not have “made in...” stuck onto them. That’s why our springs complain allusively of their lack of fame not only in neighboring countries, but also in our own, native cities. They reproach and rebuke their owners in their gentle whispers. They scold us.

You have the right to complain, my springs!!!

LVIII

MANY YEARS AGO I VISITED THE CITY OF JELEZNOVODSK to rest and treat myself in the sanatorium *Gorniy Vozdukh* (Mountain Air – *trans.*). After the first check-up, a white-coated doctor in front of me began the inquiry: What is your major complaint?

– I cannot sleep well, I have sleep disturbances...

– Probably from nerves.

– I also think so.

– What medications do you use for this at home?

– Meproamadol, Seduxen, Belloid, Tazepam...

– They are useless, my dear! True, those medications temporarily calm down the nerves, but they don’t cure anything. Besides, they have side-effects on the organs, quite a lot of harmful side-effects. – The doctor said and noted something in my sanatorium papers. Then he lifted his head and added: – Go to the third floor in the remedial building. They’ll tell you what to do in the room №37. There is a special cabinet, where you should take 12 therapy sessions, without any medication or anything. This is the best method of treating nervous diseases... After that, you will feel all right.

I went to the cabinet at the appointed time. A nurse took me to the therapy room. Ten-fifteen patients were sitting on chairs along the wall in a completely dark room. Nobody was uttering

a word. One couldn't see anything in the room as the lights were switched off. Behind the white curtain in the corner, I heard hens clanging, cocks crowing, calves bleating, dogs barking and frogs croaking... It appears that these were noises recorded in a tape for treating and calming nerves. You have to sit quietly in a dark room for forty minutes or an hour and listen to this mixed noise, that's it!

I sat down on a free chair. I closed my eyelids just like my sanatorium fellows and began listening to these noises. Yet, it was no miracle for me, as it was nothing compared to what I was hearing in our village at nights.

When I was young, I would sleep on an open cellar in our yard, four-five meters above the ground, as soon as the spring would come and the weather would get warmer. I would lie comfortably on my back on a soft bed and gaze at the skies, moon and stars with curiosity. I was listening to the warble of a spring with pool slightly away from our house, humming of the cobble waters flowing from the foot of village, song of the cuckoo birds heard from the deepness of night, barking of the dogs having sensed a wolf somewhere near, threatening voices of stallions in the surrounding pastures, horse neighs, clanging music of tie-chains, the quiet chewing of cows, sheep and goats sleeping around the shed and the mixed uproar of frogs in water places. Yet, the voices I was listening to at the *Gorniy Vozdukh Sanatorium* did not have any horse neighs, clang of tie-chains or the breath of cuckoo birds. Such a huge sanatorium that cost a fortune to build and hosts hundreds and thousands of people per year is trying to mimic the voice of Aliguluushaghi nights in order to treat the uneasy nerves and fails to do it properly.

I have heard many friends saying these words when looking for something very urgently:

– I need that like I need air and water.

Air and water... Not only humans, but also any living being can live without that.

The purest and cleanest of the air and water is in our village. Then, why nobody appreciates you truly, my village, the healer of all healers?! Why have you become out of sight and out of mind?! Anybody capable of holding himself on his legs is running to cities, particularly the youth. Before the city of chemicals, Sumgayit, had such an inflow. Miserable suburban sheds and enterprises producing poisonous chemicals inflicting deadly harm on human organs. How can you stand all of it?! Only a few out of all those people, who turned their back on village for the passion of city, are still holding on. Most of them were young... Would a human being root up his own life?! I remember a saying here:

– Run with the pack.

Those loyal to their own villages and lands are either almost hundred or have exceeded hundred. If there is no scientific rank, high position or happy life awaiting you in the city, where are you going abandoning the village, wretched man?

Sometimes you see several big stones delivered laboriously from plains and piled over in a busy area of city. Around them are artificial fountains. They wanted to imitate the stones and waters of our village, but failed. Yet, people admire this artificial picture and ostensibly enjoy it. Many even feel gratitude towards the initiators of such natural beauties in cities. Architects are proud of such “novelties”. The things I have seen in Aliguluushaghi... can be called a miracle. Our village is located on a white valley called Galacha built of granite rocks. Its northern area is hills covered by thick bushes, while southern part consists of high rocks only eagles could subdue. Waters deriving from distant mountains flow from its front. The broad plains of Aghja Yazı, as well as the Novlu and Gurjulu forests are visible from there. Blue-cheeked bee-eater, blue crow, many various and colorful birds building nests in the tiny holes of grey precipices soar over the village from morning till evening. The roar of the plash waterfalls flowing from the upper rocks of Yazı Spring shakes the mountains and valleys. Look at what the

invisible “architect” called God in whom I believe and obey has created.

These are the yearning and harmonious stories of my village, the land of miracles, praised in sad bayatis of the old-stagging grannies holding jugs and milking cows.

Then why are the messy cities in need of fresh air and beauty bestowed by God and the urban people unaware of each-other’s existence overlook you, my village?! Maybe you don’t have roads covered in tar, wireless and wire telephones, blinking lights, radios or TV singing and speaking in half-native and half-foreign languages, that’s why?! Is this why some treacherous inhabitants have abandoned you?!

LIX

IN THE THIRTIES-FOURTIES, ON THE FIRST DAY OF MAY, A LOT OF PEOPLE WOULD GATHER IN OUR VILLAGE,JUST LIKE ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. Schools, clubs, libraries, medical stations and kolkhozs would be decorated with carpets collected from houses by knocking on every door and slogans written on red fabrics. People would gather in a square in the middle of the village and party. The bee-keeper Izzat’s black zurna would resonate all over the place. His son Turab would play drums, storekeeper Savalan would blow the pipe. Uzundara, Shalako, Jeyrani, Galinatlandi, Heyvagulu... dance melodies would fill the village. Girls and brides, youth and the elderly capable of dancing would raise their arms and dance delightfully in front of the musicians in twos or threes.

Near midday, pupils dressed in new clothes would line up in order of height and go to demonstrations. Teachers would come in front followed by the pupils.

*This is a day, when the work force is controlled,
Millions of workers gather in streets.
Red flags wave under the wind,
Hearty words sound in streets.*

We would sing such words taught repeatedly to us by our teachers with a special harmony, pronounce loud slogans and walk in the village streets with red flags in our hands. Everybody, children and parents would come out to the yards, climb onto roofs and watch us. After the demonstrations, we would gather in the sycamore garden. We would sit cross-legged creating a big circle at the lake, on a green meadow shaded by thick trees. The forward pupils and A-students were at the front. Teachers would treat them nicely. The lazy pupils lagging behind and unable to prove themselves in knowledge would behave ashamed, like a cat having broken a cup. They would stick behind everybody else so as not to face the teachers' eyes.

The much loved teacher, Gurjulu Hussein would turn on his blue gramophone and raise the pupils' mood...

In the village, only three people had a gramophone. Two of them were teachers, one was the village chairman. People would envy the owners of blue and green gramophones with red velvet inner coverings as the village's rich and happy residents.

We would hear Izzat's black zurna and gramophones of the chairman and teachers also in village wedding parties. Asigs with saz and full of words would also visit out village sometimes. Hearing the voice of black zurna and singing of ashigs, which was very familiar to our souls, not only our village, but also the mountains surrounding it and even stones would rejoice and celebrate.

LX

HOT SUMMER DAYS OF 1948: When I graduated from the institute and returned to the region, Head of the Education Department, Ilyas muallim, who used to teach me geography at school and held me in respect, asked:

- Which village do you want?
- My own.
- Maybe I could send you to a bigger school? What about keeping you in the regional center?

– No, – I replied. – If possible, please, send me to my own village.

I would speak to Ilyas Safarov were not like to the Head of Education Department, or a teacher, but the old teacher-and-pupil way. He smiled slightly and said:

– Fine, if you want to work in your native village, I don't mind. I only want you to be satisfied. – Then he gave my assignment. He shook my hand and wished me good luck.

I have worked as a teacher in nine villages of Gubadli. Yet, my most unforgettable days have passed in Aligouluushaghi, where everything was familiar to me and because I was together with my father Ildirim and second mother Fatma. I was breathing under the same roof with them. My father was not scolding or reproaching me for not preparing my school-work, like in the old times, because, I was a teacher now. I was heading a big high school's class assignment department. Yet, despite of this, none of my faults would evade him. He would rebuke me when I made a mistake. I was steering clear of him, even though I was an adult by then.

LXI

I WAS BORED WITHOUT MUSIC. There was no light or radio in the village.

– What should I do?! I heard, new radio-receivers were invented. They worked with battery. They costed 850 manats, which was my one-month salary. I could buy also a cow for that amount of money.

If to put aside the price of radio-receiver I had heard about and never really seen, it was not easily to be found. People were saying it is sometimes delivered to the region. Yet, not everybody could buy it, as it was sold to the people duly selected by the regional or executive committee in special lists. However, it was on open sale in the neighbouring Gorus city.

During the winter school vacation, I decided to use the opportunity and buy a radio-receiver. There was no bus or car at that time. Our mare was unluckily expecting, too. My father was counting days till its delivery. So, we were not letting the mare out of stable. My father was afraid it would have a slink if ridden. Therefore, I had to go to the Gorus city in a frosty day by foot for three or four hours. My father shook his head when hearing about this:

– You have become a teacher, yet you haven’t grown wiser, – he said. – What radio are you talking about in such a snow and frost?! If you have money, go buy yourself a suit and dress. What do you need a pile of iron for?! Count by finger and tell me who in such a big village has radio?! If that radio or whatever it is you are talking about was a good thing, people would have bought it a long time ago. Are you the only clever and brisk man?! Do you want to play the story of the bicycle again?!

During my student years, I bought a bicycle without informing anybody at home. My cousin working as accountant in the village paid for it. My father was outraged when he heard of this:

– Yes, we only lacked a bicycle, – he said. – We have fixed all of our shortcomings and that was all we needed! Look at my son! He studied and finished a school, brought some money home, took care of me, and now he is buying a bicycle!.. You are still a student! A bicycle cannot be near a book and a pen. If you get addicted to it, you are finished! You will forget about your lessons! Eventually, you will become either a worker or a farmer like me.

In fact, I had distanced from my lessons after the bicycle. I forgot about my books. My behaviour was grieving my father. He wouldn’t treat me nicely after I bought that bicycle. He wouldn’t want to answer any of my questions even. So, I got rid of the bicycle in few months. After that, my father was on good terms with me again. He began talking to me nicely again.

Now radio... My father wouldn't approve of it at the beginning, too. I somehow managed to change his mind. His final word was this:

– I see, someone has thrown you off course. You want it, fine, go and buy. Still, I repeat, I have my doubts about it. I hope, it will not end up like the bicycle story. Because, if it was something useful, there are people in this village, who have more money and wits than you do, they would have bought it a long time ago...

I set off to Gorus early in the morning. Gulam muallim, who was originally from the Balasoltanli village and my friend since student years, did not let me go alone. He joined me. When we were almost in the city, he said, let's visit Vagho first. We are Muslim godfathers from ancestral lines. He is very close with my father Seyfali. Everybody in Gorus knows him. He has connections everywhere. If we have a difficulty in finding a radio-receiver, he might help. Let's drink a cup of tea in their house in the morning, take a rest and then go to check shops together with him.

My friend's words increased my hopes of finding a radio-receiver.

Gorus streets on the foot of Uchtepe Mountains were filled with snow. Icicles were hanging on water cranes at turns. Frost pierced us to bones. There were a few people moving hastily around in the city. A big truck was stuck in the middle of the city. The driver was unable to move it however hard he was trying. We passed the city center and turned right on stony and narrow road. Gulam muallim pointed at the wooden gates of a two-storey, average-looking building with a large yard stretching up till the Gorus River and said:

– That is the Vagho kirva's house.

Gulam muallim rang the gate's bell and called the owner of the house aloud and confidently: Vagho kirva! Vagho kirva!

A middle-aged, stout and short-sized man climbed down the stairs slowly and opened the gates. Gulam muallim acquainted

me with Vagho... He shook my hand reluctantly and greeted Gulam muallim as a stranger, too. As if, it was not the same Vagho kirva Gulam muallim was talking about proudly all the way. Vagho kirva with eyes colder than the rigid frost of a Gorus winter dragged Gulam muallim aside and said:

– I am ashamed that I cannot invite you inside, it is embarrassment for me. You must forgive me. That guy is here. Now a car should come soon and take him to Iravan. I will be waiting for you in an hour's time. If Seypali kirva knows about it, I would rather die...

From the conversation, I understood there is some guest in Vagho's house and he doesn't want us to meet him. So...

We had a quick walk through the city shops and returned to Vagho's house in an hour and a half. This time, he met us properly. His wife Akshen also welcomed her guests like a close person. His son Seryoja was also glad to see Gulam muallim. Vagho invited us to the dining-room. A table was quickly laid. Tea and bread arrived. Vagho lit a cigarette and took a deep breath. Then he said ashamed:

– Gulam, this teacher has come to me for the first time, – he pointed at me, – you should really excuse me. You don't know, our Gurgen arrived from Iravan a week ago. Even if he is my elder brother, he speaks stupid things. He is a professor but he hates Turks. He says, he prefers a dog or a wolf to a Turk. You shouldn't let a Turk be here. Turk is our enemy. They've slaughtered Armenians and committed genocide. If he would see you, he would go mad. He would shout at me why if you are friends with a Turk, you are not my brother anymore...

Vagho was saying these words with a sore heart. He smoked the cigarette fuming between his fingers to its tip and continued:

– How many times we have had arguments. I say, Gurgenjan, you have studied and become a scholar, while I am a worker in the wood plant. I grow potatoes and beans and try to survive somehow. Turks are our neighbours and we have to be friendly

with them, otherwise we cannot pull anything out. When you had a wedding, Seypali brought ram and fish as a gift... I have also set potatoes and beans to Seypali. Our father Ambarsum and Seypali's father Rustam have been friends for many years. Now I am like a brother with Seypali. Tomorrow Gulam muallim and our Seryoja will be visiting each other's houses. Hey, Gurgen, isn't such friendship better than being enemy of Turks?!

Vagho finished his words and became even more excited:

– Our Gurgen never differentiated between a Turk and an Armenian. After he went to Iravan, studied and became a scholar, visited the USA, France a couple of times, they spoiled his head. He says, Turks have slaughtered Armenians, I say, hey, Gurgenjan, it is an old story and is long gone. Armenians slaughtered Turks and Turks slaughtered Armenians. Hey, didn't two cousins in our Gorus, who were door-to-door neighbours murder each other?! Now their children are friends.

Vagho pointed at Gurgen's picture hanging on the wall and said:

– I am telling him all of these things, but it is useless. Gurgen does not change his mind. He keeps saying that Turks have slaughtered us. We should take our revenge.

We were silent. Vagho wouldn't stop his discontented talk about his brother:

– Hey, don't think Vagho does not love his brother, or he ignores his own nation. As soon as our Armenians study and become intellectuals, they lose their heads. Professors like Gurgen are exactly those, who cause mess all around...

WHILE EMBEDDING THESE WORDS OF AN ARMENIAN FROM GORUS IN MY LINES, I REMEMBERED SOMETHING I WITNESSED A MONTH AGO. I had visited a friend of mine. His seven-year-old child was ill. They said, it was angina and the child also had fever. The old granny hugged her grandchild and said:

– Look! I wish your sickness away to cows.

– No, granny, I feel pity for cows.

– Fine, to hens!

- No, granny, I feel pity for hens, too.
- Fine, then to sparrows!
- No, granny, I feel pity for sparrows, too.
- Fine, then to Armenians!
- Yes, granny, to Armenians.

A granny's and a grandchild's conversation made me think. I wondered if there was a bigger treachery than creating hatred against one's own nation in a child's heart. This is the result of Armenian nationalists such as Gurgun Ambarsumyans and Zori Balayans service to their nation. Russians call this a disservice, a very appropriate saying. We have a saying: Blessed is the builder, cursed is the destroyer. Armenian nationalists Zoris, Gurgens, Silvas, Roberts... consider themselves proud of the Khojali tragedy they have committed against Azerbaijanis. Yet, they forget they'll be remembered eternally with hatred for their deeds embedded in the cursed page of human history. Probably, the worker Vagho was worried that his scholar brother would be cursed in the bloody and black pages of history. Shaking his big body he was probably flattering us, too:

– Hey! Asdos, – he said, – I don't know where these things will lead us! – Vagho sighed sadly and lit another cigarette...

Neither some sincere confessions in his words, nor the hatred against Turkish nation wandering in the cunning eyes of the man in pictures all over the walls evaded me. Gulam muallim looked at his watch as if sick of his godfather's unpleasant conversation, stood up and said:

– Let's go, the day is short, and see if we can find a radio. Otherwise, there is no meaning in delaying...

...After a long walk, we found a radio-receiver with the guidance of Vagho kirva. Four batteries and a huge radio-receiver hardly fitting in arms and weighing altogether at least thirty kilograms... How are we supposed to carry it?! We were engrossed in thoughts. Nearby, a middle-aged woman towing a mule was walking toward us ripping the snow of the street. Her

clothing was typical of our village. Gulam muallim came up to her and greeted. Then he asked her where she was coming from and where she was heading. She said she was from the neighbouring Gurjulu village. She sold a mule-load of woods and is now returning home. We introduced ourselves. The woman was encouraged knowing who we were. Her sorrow was touched. She began complaining of her destiny:

– May God put an end to such a life! Go to the forest, collect wood with torment, load it onto the mule, ride many hours, knock on doors on such a frosty day and finally all your labour is left to yourself. They don't pay anything more than ten manats to you for a load of wood on the mule. Tell me how I am supposed to maintain my children with this.

... Hearing the words of this tall woman seeming to be poor as hell, towing a mule, dressed in an old male jacket and a thick shawl spoilt our mood even more. She looked at the radio-receiver on the ground and at us and asked gently:

– Why are you standing in front of this shop?

We explained the situation to her... The woman said open-heartedly:

– If it is something that a donkey can carry, my mule is going empty, you can load it on it. I will walk. Anyway, I am used to walk on these roads.

We had no other way of carrying the radio-receiver. So, we were happy at this invitation. We managed to somehow attach the radio-receiver and the heavy batteries onto the mule with a long rope. The poor woman was proud of helping us, while we were embarrassed at causing her trouble.

We left the snowy and frosty city. We began talking about different things to cut the journey short. As the mule's shoes were falling off, it would slip every now and then and immediately rebalance itself. We were more worried of the possibility that the radio-receiver might fall down and break than if the mule would slip and fall. The woman said with embarrassment:

– Damn this world. My husband went to the war and didn't come back. I didn't even receive notification of his death. Even now it is unknown if he is dead or alive. I am left alone with four children. I don't know anything else than kolkhoz farming. Kolkhoz is a dry tree, does not give us anything. Some raincrop is planted between forests and it never even brings out seeds. We are ploughmen in spring and beggars in winter. This mule is the only thing helping me. From time to time I bring a load of woods and sell it here. I can only buy dresses and books with the pittance I earn this way.

The mule stopped slipping after we reached the sandy road. We had attached the radio-receiver to the mule so strongly that it didn't even move.

We descended to the bank of the familiar Bargushad River. Our paths separated when we reached the Lalazar Bridge over the river. The road to the right side of the bridge was leading to the Gurjulu village, while we had to turn leftward. There were still two kilometers of road until the village.

As the darkness fell, the air was also foggy. Occasional snow drops were falling here and there. The river's frost pierced us to the bone. We unloaded the mule and put the radio-receiver carefully on the ground. We paid the woman the same amount of money she earned from selling wood. Despite of her poverty, the woman took the money after difficult persuasions. Then she quickly climbed onto the mule and said goodbye to us:

– For God's sake, please, forgive me. There is nobody else at home, who would cook a meal for my children. They are now waiting for me. Therefore I am in a hurry to get home. I have got a couple of sheep, I have to take care of them, too. Otherwise, I wouldn't let you here at such a late and time and leave. I would take you to your village. I am a woman, and it is late...

We apologized to the woman and thanked her many times. She spurred the mule, crossed the joint Taghbendli Bridge, instantly passed over the steep hill in front and disappeared.

We were standing on the roadside and thinking what to do. It has already grown dark. A thin smoke was rising from the foot of a white rock a few hundred meters below us, middle of the riverside reeds. – It must be fishermen, – I thought. I left the Gulam muallim with the radio-receiver and set off towards the smoke. I was not wrong. They were our village's fishermen. They had caught a lot of fish. They had made a bonfire to warm up and dry their wet clothes. They were glad to see me and also surprised. There were five of them. The oldest among them, the tall Gambaroghlu Hussein stepped forward and asked boldly:

– Teacher, are you lost, or what? What are you doing here at such a cold weather?

I told him the situation... The fishermen hastily packed their things up and came to our help. Each took a battery. Gambaroghlu Hussein took the radio-receiver under his arm and asked hardly breathing:

– Teacher, what a heavy thing it? What are these things?!

– It is a radio-receiver, – I replied. – It speaks, plays and sings just like the radios hanging on the columns in the streets in regional center. Its superiority is that it can also catch foreign countries' radio-waves.

– Teacher, you have done very well that you have bought it, may God bring its use to you. Yet, it has no wires. How does it speak then?! – Khosu holding a battery in his arm and a fishnet in his hand joined the conversation.

– Uncle Khosu, it has a special antenna. Therefore, it doesn't need a radio-line. – I replied.

Khosu wouldn't believe me:

– Teacher, it is true that I see such a thing for the first time. However, maybe it can catch the waves from Gubadli, Zangilan, Lachin and neighbouring cities. Yet, do not believe it will catch the waves of Baku, Moscow or other countries. Teacher, this must be the trick of Gorus Armenians, they must have deceived you.

The teacher of mathematics, Gulam also provided a detailed explanation about the radio-receiver in scientific language. Nevertheless, none of them would believe us.

One of them said:

– Hey man, this must be something like the gramophone of those teachers or the chairman. However, this one is bigger. Armenians have tricked the teacher. – He secretly whispered something into a nearby man’s ear.

Gambaroghlu Hussein passed the heavy radio-receiver from his right arm to his left arm and said:

– Teacher, I gather from what you are saying that if you put it in an Aliguluushaghi valley, it can transmit the voice of the people speaking or singing in Baku, Moscow or abroad?!

– Certainly, – Gulam muallim answered to him.

– Teacher, if you wouldn’t scold me, I would say, in that case, it is a devil’s device. Man, you can’t hear me at the other end of village if I shout from here. How come this small chest-like thing can drag the voice of people on the other end of the world? One cannot reach Baku from here in two days even, by train or car. – A young fisherman at the end of our line holding a heavy battery under his arm said this.

Gambaroghlu Hussein said:

– If I were you, teacher, I would buy a gramophone like that of the chairman’s. It really does play and sing. Besides, it is twice smaller and lighter than this. I don’t trust a thing as heavy as this one. It seems like a trick.

– Hey, our chairman doesn’t know where to put his money. If this thing was so good, our chairman would have bought it, – Khosu said.

Gulam muallim spoke about the scientific-technical progress this time:

– This is still nothing, soon TV sets will appear. Those people, who play, sing and speak will be clearly visible on its screen.

– Teacher, this is too much, – Khosu made fun of Gulam muallim’s words, – one can hear of such things, but never believe a word. Hey, if it is written on a paper, it doesn’t mean that it is true! I wouldn’t believe it even if I saw it with my own eyes. What a bluff! Someone in Baku or Moscow will play zurna like our Izzat, and Khosu and Gambaroghlu Hussein will watch him! Hah, I will never believe it!

The fishermen supported not the Gulam muallim’s, but Khosu’s words unanimously...

The people in the village were talking different things about the radio-receiver that appeared in a frosty winter evening...

These discussions and arguments continued until we reached the village... We reached home exhausted. My father had a peak at the radio-receiver and the heavy batteries, but didn’t say anything for now.

After resting for a while, I and Gulam muallim working with me at the same school began installing the radio-receiver hastily. It started working. As we shifted the waves, the rustle and messy voices in different languages filled the room. Suddenly, we heard harmonicon. I think it was Teyyub Damirov playing. Then we heard Hagigat Rzayeva’s and Sara Gadimova’s melodic voices. My father’s spirits rose. He smiled slightly and said:

– It seems like a good thing, son. It is worth the money you have paid.

My father’s approval of my action lightened me up a lot. The glow spreading on his tired and restrained face made me forget my pain, suffering since yesterday and the frost of winter. Besides, this was my first visible contribution at home. It appears that the parental joy of child’s pleasant deeds is a divine happiness that doesn’t befall on everybody or always. Have I not spoiled my father’s mood often with my stupid actions?! I still cannot delete those moments like a black stain from the memories of my soul. This feeling won’t leave me like some grief I still repent...

After the radio-receiver was installed, our house reminded me of a concert hall every evening. As soon as the sun set, the house would be full of guests listening to the radio. We were never getting sick of it, as we have never been without a guest in our house since the times of our ancestors. Even the walls of our house were glad to see a guest.

Once we had two cameleers staying with us as a guest. They had arrived at the village to sell oil. As soon as the guests were busy with food in the evening, the girls and brides from neighbouring houses would find a chance and enter our yard secretly, hastily bend their knees down and touch the small ear of camels chewing quietly loaded with oil barrels and immediately escape. We did not take these actions of theirs as a fault. What would the camel or the cameleer miss?! My granny Fatma would say that a girl or bride touching a camel's ear will bring abundance to their homes. The yield of their churns and labour would double.

The first question of strangers entering the village to the children playing aside would be the following:

– Hey, kid, who will accept us as a guest at such a late time?!

The children would say in chorus:

– Go to uncle Ildirim.

I have never seen a guest knocking at our door to be rejected. We were glad of this. My granny Fatma would say that even God does not recognize a door that doesn't recognize a guest. God provides the food of a guest.

In one of the regions where I served, whenever an enterprise director raking in money would have some request from the ruling party, he would generously pay a fifty or hundred manats. And then say proudly among people how much bribe he paid to somebody. Yet, he was suffocating when spending a few kopecks for his friends and relatives, or when someone would accidentally visit his home and eat a piece of bread.

I have heard and seen many times the cases, when people would shut the door on a guest's face. The unsuccessful fate of those persons has been embedded in my book of memories.

– A man, who doesn't like a guest, doesn't like God, – this phrase was said very wisely.

I remember from childhood that guests would say – Bismillah, – when starting to eat at our table and – Let your table be in abundance, – after having finished eating. Maybe our bread has found abundance through those blessings of guests we never missed from our doors.

After the radio-receiver was installed in our home, the number of our guests also increased just like the number of people, who gave us their blessings considering this a rightful action. The familiar voice of the singers from our land, ashigs with saz and full of words, tar, kaman, zurna and balaban had enchanted our relatives and neighbours so strongly that they couldn't take their eyes off the radio-receiver they were seeing for the first time up until midnight. Most of them considered this a miracle. Some wouldn't believe that a thing of the size of a chest can deliver information from all over the world. They were saying secretly that probably it has some sort of disc inside just like gramophone. Otherwise...

Eh! As if these tales happened just yesterday. It appears that half a century has passed since. Yes, half a century! Who is dying for a radio-receiver nowadays?! Radios, tape-recorders, TVs have climbed on gardens, parks, streets and squares, cars, pockets, walls and offices like ants. All of them have "made in" on them... Yet, nobody understands the words or the music. The strange and messy words and voices appearing have even caused arguments in families. Those, who opened their eyes and listened to Izzat's zurna, Khan's trills, Shamshir's saz are shouting, hey, kid, turn off that TV or switch off that tape-recorder. Our heads are exploding from this thwack. Those hatched just yesterday and addicted to "made in..." let their parents' words float past

their ears. They won't make a step aside from TV. They stick to TV and tape-recorder from early morning till late at night and are captivated by foreign musicians. Books and pens... are left aside. Besides, we have suffered and achieved independence, we are living in an environment of human freedom and have taken the path of democracy. Whoever that is capable of holding a pen opens a new newspaper. One doesn't know how to free himself from these newspapermen. Tens of, hundreds of party leaders are burning themselves out on the presidential race and promising the nation happy days. Therefore, my dear, why would you study painfully or concentrate on education as in the old times being surrounded by such anarchy and hustle?! The only thing you need is the health of your mother and father, and their full pockets! Then you can get not only "5" from the teacher, but even "8", "9", "10", "20", "30" or even "50"! The times, when the beekeeper Izzat was blowing his black zurna, are long gone... We were studying, reading and writing from morning till evening and spoiling our vision. When we didn't go to school for a day or received a bad mark from teacher, our parents were upset and there were even scandals at home...

Hey, pen! Why would you speak about these past things? Don't you know that this is the transition period?! Yes, transition period! There are such houses built in Patamdar (a town in Baku – **trans.**), you have to see it! One's cap falls down looking at them. Who are the owners?! Officials, ministers, executive leaders, newly-emerging ignorant beys... Most of the houses have been registered to the names of their close and distant relatives in poverty and need of a piece of bread... Besides, who cares about anyone in a transition period? The skilful and brisk are the right... Whoever is tramped by them deserves it.

LXII

Here I remembered a story. I was walking in the boulevard with a friend of mine, Ahmad Mammadov from Aghstafa, who used to work for security organisations once. In the middle of the conversation, my companion stopped. He pointed at the lonely old man sitting on a nearby bench and asked:

– Do you know who that is?

– No. I don't recognize him, – I replied.

– It is Yemelyanov, – he said. – Stepan Fyodorovich. He used to be People's Commissar of the Republic's Internal Affairs and Chairman of the State Security Committee for many years. He has been relieved after spending many years in jail. I think, he is working as a section master in some Internal Ministry division. Anyway, he has been my elder, helped me a couple of times, we worked in the same office. If you don't mind, I would just greet him and ask how he is doing. He is a man who fell from the peak. Nowadays, everybody avoids him. It wouldn't be bad if we met. God would also approve of this.

I didn't mind. They met respectfully. I simply extended my hand to Stepan Fyodorovich as a person, whom I met for the first time, just for the sake of politeness. Ahmad sat down near the old commissar. I also had a look at him. They were talking about some events that happened in the collective they used to work in. I was quietly listening to Stepan Fyodorovich and Ahmad Mammadov with curiosity of a journalist. Suddenly, Yemelyanov frowned inadvertently and turned to Ahmad Mammadov with his old attitude:

– Ahmad, – he said – what kind of rules are around?! I have heard such things that I am speechless! Bribery has passed all the borders! I have even heard that a head of some region was caught inside the Central Committee itself, while presenting a bribe to a Central Committee Secretary. This is a horrible event!! Such shameful things could have never happened in our times! Baghirov would skin them!

– Stepan Fyodorovich, let's talk openly. There was enough injustice also in your time, – Ahmad Mammadov said this very softly, with the slight tone of a close person.

– True, we have had many mistakes. I am not denying it at all. – Stepan Fyodorovich agreed with his interlocutor's critic. – In fact, at that time, many took the rap for others. Both Baghirov and I understood this during the court process. Many people were wasted unjustly. We suffered for that... However, there was no bribery or trophy-seeking at that time. It was the righteous time, people were afraid of the law. We were not pursuing any other income than our salary. Not a single high-ranking official would dare to take a wrong step. – Stepan Fyodorovich said all of these, smiled and was engrossed in thoughts as if remembering something. Then he turned toward Ahmad Mammadov sitting near him on the bench:

– I used to work as the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, – he said. – Both the security authorities and police were under my command. Baghirov believed in me and trusted me. I enjoyed his respect. My wife hinted a few times that it was time for our daughter to marry. She even had someone in sight. We have to arrange a dowry for her. If we could find just twenty kilograms of wool, it would be great. We could prepare some bedding for the girl. The rest is easier, we can buy from shops, the only thing is the wool...

Yemelyanov shook his head and laughed with repent:

– My wife was talking about it all the time, – he said. – Finally, after another republican conference of administrative authority officials, I stopped the head of the NKVD of one region and invited him to my office. I knew him as a good cadre and a honest person. I began interrogating him. I asked the price of meat, oil, cheese, also wool in bazaar. In fact, I only wanted to know the price of wool. So, I learned it through such a secret method. I opened my iron cashier-desk and paid him the cost of 20 kilograms of wool. I told him it was for a wedding. Nobody should know about this except for us two.

Yemelyanov looked around himself with suspicious eyes as if someone was pursuing him and continued:

– After the man left, I began thinking of scary things. What if Baghirov hears about this... If he knows that I have asked my employee to buy wool, how will I approve myself?! Even if I am close to him, he will finish me just because of this. – The dark suspicions began deepening in me. I couldn't sleep for two-three days. I was wide-awake. I poured my whole anger to my wife. I reproached her for putting me into trouble. I had never before told such things to my wife. In a few days, I was called from Central Committee and invited to the Bureau. I arrived in the Central Committee at the mentioned time. The Bureau meeting was already starting. At such times, Baghirov would see me half an hour before the meeting and ask a few things. This time, it did not happen. I entered straight into the hall. – Yes, the wool issue has reached him. Otherwise, he would meet me as always before the Bureau meeting. – Besides, usually, during the Bureau meetings, Baghirov would often turn to me while speaking. This time, he didn't have a look at my side. I was already assured that they've delivered him the wool news through some channels. In fact, I was terrified. The issues discussed in the meeting were reaching my ears, but not my mind. I was thinking about my own problems. I almost didn't hear who was saying what. I was deeply grieved. I was imagining Baghirov's angry attack at me and a way out of this situation. My head was whirling. I bent down to take a tablet from my pocket and drank it. – Damn that twenty kilogram of wool! The girl couldn't find a better time to marry. My wife put me into this trouble. – Now, try to find an answer to Baghirov. – I was thinking only about this to myself.

Stepan Fyodorovich took two cigarettes from his chest pocket and lit one of them:

– I do not smoke, – he said – but just in case, I carry a cigarette or two in my pocket. When I am upset or nervous, I smoke my patience out. – He said jokingly and added: – The Bureau meeting

was over. I don't know how I left the Central Committee building and how I sat in the car. I went straight to the office. I didn't receive anybody that day. I didn't do anything the whole day. I was only thinking about my fate. I was expecting Baghirov's phone call any minute. I knew that he would call and teach a lesson to me. Only God knows what would happen after that. – You have grown too big for your own boots! You are misusing your position! You order free wool from regions! You are trading! And who is doing all of these?! Who?! – The head of an important authority fighting pickpockets, thieves, money-seekers and bribe-takers!! Pity to the party bread you have been eating! You have betrayed the system that has made a man out of you! – I was expecting exactly these words from Baghirov. These angry words I would hear from him were exhausting my nerves.

Yemelyanov stretched himself. He signed as if still living through those moments. And continued:

– I had no doubt that Baghirov would tell me such words, maybe even worse things. True, he trusted me a great deal and respected me. Yet, he could destroy me for a small mistake. I knew it very well. Therefore, I couldn't calm down for many days. I was taking a handful of nerve and sleeping pills every night. Can you believe that I lost a lot of weight within ten-fifteen days?! Even my face had changed. One of my assistants even asked, Stepan Fyodorovich, what's wrong with you?! You look weird recently? Are you ill?! I replied to my assistant, go, mind your own business, I don't have any problem. Simply, I have caught some cold, it will pass.

Suddenly the old general's eyes lightened:

– Yes, – he said, – one evening there was a banquet with Baghirov's participation for the high-ranking guests having arrived from Moscow. I was also at the party. The feast continued until midnight. Everybody was eating, drinking, talking, laughing, while I was engrossed in my anguish. Only God knew what I was going through. I had spasms all over my stomach. Baghirov was

quite happy. After the banquet, Baghirov went for a walk to the boulevard. I joined him. It couldn't be any other way. I was supposed to escort the boss. He was in a good mood. So, he was talking openly to me. He was addressing me as Stepan. This was the right time for speaking up. I took the chance, pulled myself together and said:

– Mirjafar Abbasovich, even if it is not the right time, I would like to tell you something, if you let me. I strongly apologize to you in advance.

– Please, please, go ahead.

– Mirjafar Abbasovich, you have brought me up to this stage, – I said. – I will never forget your benefaction. You can be sure that I'll remain loyal to you till the end. Yet, I am very concerned recently, because I have committed many rough mistakes. Probably, you know about this. If you don't, I cannot hide this mistake from you. So, let me tell you everything and punish me as you will.

– I am listening, Stepan, – he replied. – What mistake is that?

I retold him everything as it was... Baghirov grew slightly serious and said:

– I have no information about this. Nobody told me anything about it. Besides, what is the big deal here! You haven't done anything bad. You should send your daughter to her new family respectfully. Your worrying is in vain.

Stepan Fyodorovich took out his handkerchief and rubbed the sweat on his wrinkled and imposing face:

– These words of Baghirov took a load of burden from me. As if, I was newly-born. He was that kind of a man, – he said, – he wouldn't spare his own father for a mistake. His sister Seyid Fatma living in Guba had a car of free grass delivered from some kolkhoz. Also, I think she delayed the electricity payment for a year. He wanted to punish his own sister for that! And what kind of a punishment he was planning?! He was insisting on exiling Seyid Fatma! Bureau members managed to change his mind with a great difficulty...

The old general said all of these and stopped. He was not looking at us anymore. He was in his own world. His daunting eyes were stuck in the blue of the Caspian Sea. We were silent. I was filtering his words for myself. Stepan Fyodorovich suddenly revived. He stood up and turned to Ahmad Mammadov, who once used to open his doors with a great care:

– I am sorry, I put you off with my talking, – he said. – You must have your own business. Goodbye!

We wished him goodbye and left. The old general was still sitting there alone, silent and thinking about something. The Caspian Sea kept hitting its own shores. As if, it was accusing the old general of the things he once did.

LXIII

Sudden opinionating of a man about another man... What can you tell to those considering it easy?! People in our village say, do not utter a word unless you have filtered it out. Or do not speak unless you are sure what you are talking about. Sometimes you see that a scholar, philosopher, poet, or a speaker daydreaming about power close their eyes, open their mouth and opionate about someone on a TV screen, press, or a crowded meeting, either something is good, or something bad. Either someone riding the horse of position is praised to the skies, or someone who is already down is beaten up with a sharp hammer. Yet, they forget that one day, when the sieve and grate of history starts operating, they will become an object of scold.

I was new in Nakhchivan at that time. I was working there for only two years. I didn't know people very well. We were talking about different things, creative issues with employees of the Radio Programs Committee. The door opened. Seeing the able-bodied man entering the room, everyone stood up, greeted him with both hands and showed him their respect. Chairman of the Radio Programs Committee acquainted me with him and said:

– He is the chairman of that office. He is a very good employee. In addition, he is a very good man. He behaves properly with children and elders. He has a deep respect to press as well...

The man with a gentle tone, clear eyes, simple behavior and polite gestures left a good impression on me right at our first meeting.

His name was mentioned everywhere with respect. They said, he had never done anything bad to anyone so far. He helps everybody, doesn't miss anyone's wedding or funeral and he doesn't grudge anyone his bread. He wouldn't borrow money from his friends, even if he has only one manat. Nobody can be compared to him in organizational skills.

Yet, the First Secretary of District Party Committee Khurshud Mammadov held him in contempt. What kind of words he was talking about the man in every meeting! – A man with no morality cannot head a department! – How villainous a man can be?! We don't need such chairmen involved in dirty affairs! He cannot remain in the party! We have to clean the society up from such hypocritical leaders...

People did not like the insulting words the district leader was saying about the chairman. Many people were objecting this secretly:

– Khurshud Mammadov is a very deceitful person. His behavior towards such a good chairman is simply an act of dishonesty ...

– This secretary is still working in the environment of Baghirov's time. It is in his blood and veins to stain honest cadres.

– Is there such a clever and polite man like this chairman?! Yet, you see, the district leader every time disgraces him unfairly in front of people...

Such objections and offended talks were affecting me, too. Then they organized a big committee and began checking the chairman's work...

When meeting the district leader, I said among other things:

– I think, this chairman is not such a wicked man or bad employee as you describe him, why do you keep attacking him?!

Khurshud Mammadov, who has big respect for me, lifted his silver hair combed aside with his hand and smiled softly:

– Why, are you friends with him?! – He said and expressed his surprise of my words.

– No! We are not close friends, I just respect him as an honorable man, as people think of him, – I replied.

I was not talking to Khurshud Mammadov officially, but like a close person. He blinked, looked at me attentively and asked:

– Do you have any idea what kind of a bird he is?!

I kept silent. The secretary had opened up to me as a trusted and reliable journalist and explain the roots of the conflict:

– I don't blame you, – he said. – I also knew him as a good man and a skilled employee. Yet, it appears... What a hypocrite he is!! Recently there are anonymous letters full of slander about me sent to the leadership. There is no end of them. The signatures are various. From Baku, Moscow, even the Mausoleum of Lenin, to all addresses... What is he writing about? Sister Khurshud did that, sister Khurshud is corrupt... Can you imagine?! He uses different insulting words... Dirty phrases a man cannot pronounce...

The secretary answered the government phone ringing in the left and put down the receiver calmly. Then he turned towards me and continued his conversation:

– We consulted with the Central Committee... The state security authorities were given instructions... Authors of the anonymous letters were identified via certain channels. It appeared that one of the inside people... is passing some facts to that chairman, whom you consider a good man. In turn, the chairman asks his daughter working in a factory to write a letter using different signatures and sends them to various places. Now look at it, what is a father pushing his daughter to do?! The chairman

is also involved in other affairs... To hell with him, he is spoiling the life of his yet unmarried daughter. Therefore, we are not unveiling this issue yet. We are keeping it secret. Both the chairman and his assistants in this will receive a severe reproof under a different reason... Neither the secretaries, nor the Bureau members know about it. I am telling it only to you. The Central Committee is aware of this, too.

As the secretary was speaking, I was embarrassed of my wrong opinion about the chairman...

My father would say: Do not cast a stone into a well with invisible bottom.

Eh! So many shallow people have emerged that are throwing huge stones heavier than themselves into endless wells... Particularly those in “made in...” guises, who have emerged recently...

Hey, pen! I see, your ink is nearly finished. You are getting tired. You are protesting and want to tell me, stop shooting the breeze. It doesn't matter, whatever you are writing, this world's problems will not finish. It is enough fidgeting with papers since last autumn. Stop it. Spring is finishing and summer will start soon. Do not go too far, put a dot to these stories.

What can I say, I am stuck myself. Still, let's finish the book with the words of a religious man. My aunt's husband Mashadi Ibrahim would say:

– Do not set off with a child, because he will laugh when you fall, and cry when he himself falls.

He would also say: I am not as important as a hound's bark, which can wake up a hundred other dogs.

We would ask, Mashadi, what do you mean?! He would explain that he walks around villages and sells mulberry jam. When he passes through an unfamiliar village, a hound starts barking. It wouldn't approach or attack. Yet, a hundred other dogs wake up from his noise and attack me.

Mashadi would also tell such a story: I bought a horse for a thousand manats in the Gorus Bazaar. I mounted it and said, kids! I made this trade whether it was a right thing or a wrong thing to do. The people on horseback seeing me will say, Mashadi, you did right, the horse is also a well-bred. – God rest such men’s father in peace! An idiot, who never had a horse or a dog, will find a fault in me and say, Mashadi, this horse has that problem here, another problem there, and the price was too high, you have been deceived... – Damned be the grave of such men’s fathers... Doesn’t he know that I’m not going to return the horse?! Why then he speaks evil and puts a suspicion into my heart.

Mashadi finishes his words and sets off. Leaving the city, he meets Yadigar from Eyvaz, who spent his entire life on horseback:

– Hi.

– Hello.

– Mashadi, it seems like you have bought a new horse?

– Yes, I have.

– For how much?

– For a thousand manats.

– Mashadi, it is a good price, may you see the yield of it. It is worth the money you have paid. Also, the horse has all the proper marks on it.

Mashadi says:

– Thank you, Yadigar. May God rest your father’s soul in peace, – and expresses his gratitude.

Passing the next village, he meets an old communist Garash Babayev, who never had a four-legged anything at his door. Garash is special Garash. He has quite a reputation. Once he gets angry and beats his wife black and blue. Party Committee of the kolkhoz immediately delivers the news to secretaries of the regional committee...

When Garash’s act inappropriate of a communist is discussed at the regional committee, he swears and insists that he was not a communist while beating up his wife.

– What do you mean you weren't a communist?! What are you talking about?! – The secretaries attack him...

– Comrades, Bureau members, don't you believe me?! I swear by Lenin's grave, I wasn't a communist at that moment. When I was beating my wife, I took the party membership card from my chest pocket, folded it in a piece of fabric and put it to the hen shed.

Bureau members burst into laughter. However, Garash Babayev leaves the place very disturbed, as he was given a party label.

When Garash sees Mashadi Ibrahim, he asks Mashadi with a loud and strict voice:

– Mashadi, I think you have bought a new nag?!

– Yes, I have.

– Mashadi, for how much?!

– For a thousand manats. – Mashadi replies calmly.

Garash shakes his head and says:

– Heh! Mashadi, you have been tricked! The price is too high! And it doesn't look like an appropriate horse, either.

Mashadi gets upset and says:

– Garash, I have also said whatever you deserve, – then he whips the horse and lets it loose...

My tetchy horse of inspiration galloping on the bumpy tracks with remnants of my traces and words has finally reached the end right here.

LXIV

Again...Again, the alien and native place called Shuvalan. The old and crusty mulberry-tree, an elderly penman, one-storey house facing the sea and the incessant and ruthless winds breaching the peace of trees...

*5 June 1999,
Shuvalan*

Əli İldırımoğlu
KÖZƏRƏN SƏTİRLƏR

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