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A Translation of Two Stories of Khakim Nazir

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A TRANSLATION OF TWO STORIES OF KHAKIM NAZIR

MIRAZIZ KHIDOYATOV

A DEPARTMENT HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE AT TRINITY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION WITH
DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. BIOGRAPHY OF KHAKIM NAZIR	2
3. LIFE OF (UN)ORDINARY FAMILIES	4
a. KHIDOYATOV FAMILY	4
b. SHARAFUTDINOV	7
4. STORIES.....	10
a. AFTER THE RAIN	10
b. WHY WAS THE WEDDING POSTPONED.....	19
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY	31

INTRODUCTION

My work will be structured as follows. First, I will give a biography of my great-grandfather and the author of two stories I will be translating – Khakim Nazir. Next, I will present the stories of two families and what they went through. This is intended to serve as an introduction to the historical context of my translations. Even though I conducted extensive research on the history of Uzbekistan, when I started writing this thesis, I felt that it is too long for the scope of this work. Finally, I will give a translation of two stories of my great-grandfather – “After the rain” and “Why was the Wedding Postponed”.

I want to say great thanks to all who helped me throughout my research – to all the people whom I contacted and met with, with whom I corresponded and discussed history. First and foremost, I want to thank Dr. Bruce Holl, Dr. Maria Holl and Dr. Alan Astro for helping me on this path. Without you, I do not know if I would have ever done this. I want to also thank my family – my grandparents, my parents who were always there if I needed to find something in my home library, and our family friend Timur Muratov, whose family’s amazing and sad story you will read. I thank Dr. John Hermann, associate professor of Political Science and my first academic advisor at Trinity University, and Dr. Sheryl Tynes, Vice-President for Student Affairs, for being the primary reason why I did not transfer from this University at first, when I had huge culture shock. I thank them for helping me find a good path, for caring about me in times of need. Lastly, I want to thank the whole Trinity community for being great. I hope this thesis would inspire at least someone of you!

BIOGRAPHY OF KHAKIM NAZIR¹

Khakim Nazir was born on October 15, 1915 into the family of a shoemaker. He was the eldest of three brothers. He studied in an old (prerevolutionary) school where instruction was in Arabic. His mother opened a school at home and taught the Qur'an to girls. In 1926, Nazir transferred to a Soviet Uzbek school. There he developed his interest in literature. His overall interest in learning came from his mother, who loved the classical writings of Omar Khayyam, Alisher Navoi, and Bobur. He started to study their works in Uzbek and Arabic. He also started to learn by himself how to write stories and poems. He began by writing poems and small articles.

At the age of fifteen, the newspaper editor for "Lenin's Spark" noticed little Khakim Nazir and offered him job at the newspaper. At that time he studied at a night school for children workers and during the day he worked at a shoe factory. Then he was admitted to a Pedagogical Institute named after Nizami, again for taking night classes. The editors from various publications started to pay close attention at him and his talent. He continued writing articles. At the same time he started to write books for kids and feature articles for adults. Also, from that time, that is starting 1933 and for 50 years thereafter he worked for children's publishing houses, for the State Broadcasting Committee, for publishing houses specializing in fiction, and for the Writers Union. There he served as a literature officer, department head, executive secretary, editor-in-chief, and literary agent.

He wrote and published more than 50 books for children and adults. His stories were full of morals, humanity, friendship, love, care, and discussions about patriotism. His works are rich in youthfulness, clear and mysterious world of work, family, love, expressed in the relations of life.

¹ The biography of my great grandfather, Khakim Nazir, was told to me by his daughter, my grandmother, Mubarak Muminova. She was with him until his very last day.

Nazir was inspired by Chekhov, Turgenev, and Gorkiy. Abdullah Qahhor and Gafur Gulom were his teachers and friends. His first book was published in 1948 (“Kishloqdagi jiyanlarim²”). In the mid 1950s he started his education at Lomonosov Moscow State University. According to reformed Uzbek traditions, he was married by the age 25, so at the time of his studies in Moscow he already had children and family. They all visited him often in Moscow. After 2 years of studying at Moscow State University, he returned to Tashkent. Later on, he began visiting different regions of Uzbekistan, the cotton fields, and the gas fields, and he wrote feature articles on the things he saw for the newspapers. He wrote a children's novel – “Lochin Qanotlari.”³ He also wrote plays in 1960s, which were performed in the Young Spectator’s Theatre and played there for several years. In 1984 he received the Order of the People’s Writer. During the period of independent Uzbekistan, he receives the Order of the Country’s Respect (El-Yurt Hurmati). He also received an Honorary Diploma of Hans Christian Andersen. There are no languages in the former Soviet Union into which his books have not been translated.

² My village nephews

³ The Wings of the Hawk

LIFE OF (UN)ORDINARY PEOPLE

Khidoyatov family⁴

In this part I will talk about my paternal ancestors. All of them come from Tashkent.

First, I will talk about the paternal side of my grandfather's family.

My great-great-great grandfather was Mirmakhmud-hodji Boyvotcha, born in Tashkent. He was a large landowner and a very wealthy man⁵. He was going on pilgrimages⁶ and travelling a lot. Simply looking at his name one could already recognize the prefix mir-, which is a title prefix for Emirs, i.e., princes. After the Russian conquest of Kokand Khanate and Tashkent city, the aristocracy either fled to the bordering Eastern Turkestan (in China), Iran or Afghanistan, or they became large landowners without the claim for political control.

It is also known by the people⁷ that mir's-, during the reign of Tamerlane, were generals who were awarded noble titles for their military merits and accomplishments as generals. However, close to the time of Russian conquest of Central Asia, the prefix could be held solely by pure aristocratic families, relating to princes. People who would break the laws of title ownership, i.e., take a name title by their own wit, could be punished by death.

Mirmakhmud-hodji's son, my great-great grandfather, Mirkhidoyat Boyvotcha inherited his extensive properties. These were fields, fruit gardens and vineyards. The remainders of the vineyards could still be found in Yakkasaroy district of Tashkent.

⁴ These stories were told to me by my father, Mirabrar Khidoyatov, and my grandfather, Mirkhaidar Khidoyatov.

⁵ People of wealth were given a suffix –bay to their names. The very fact that he had a hereditary title Boyvotcha (wealthy man) given to him as a second name shows the grandeur of his status in the society.

⁶ For his pilgrimages he was given a title –hodji.

⁷ During Soviet times, the communication of such knowledge was risky and, therefore, such information was primarily communicated using the oral medium.

His son, my great grandfather, Mirokil took the last name – Khidoyatov, in honor of his father⁸. Mirokil graduated from a specialized secondary institution majoring in Taxation. However, he did not work in this field too long, for he, as a devout Muslim, did not believe in taxation. Due to his interest in working with technology, he started to work for a textile factory as a master mechanch and continued working there until the end of the WWII.

Now, I want to talk about the maternal side of my grandfather. My great grandmother came from a family of very wealthy merchants. Her family owned real estate, enterprises and lands in Tashkent. It was trading silk and was exporting it to Russia, Kazakh lands and other states bordering Kokand Khanate and then Turkestan. Unfortunately, like all other wealthy families, the parents of my great grandmother were subject to purges and dekulakization. Their property was nationalized and the family was forced to leave their large estate in the old-city.

In 1970's in the district of Tashkent where they lived a teahouse "Samarkand" was being built. When a house that belonged to her grandfather, my great-great-great grandfather, was being demolished, they found his cache of gold under it. Of course the gold was taken by the State.

Her other grandfather, Muhiddin-kori, was a very educated man, an entrepreneur, who had a confectionary (candy) factory and was selling the candy in Tashkent. He also travelled a lot. In the beginning of 1930's when the purges of the Bolsheviks were approaching him, he was forced to look for a refuge. He planned to go to Saudi Arabia. At that time, the way there lay through Afghanistan. He decided to go to a scouting exhibition to Afghanistan but hid the gold on the Uzbek side, on the bank of Amur-Darya river, as a precaution. While in Afghanistan, he became determined that this country was much more backward than Uzbekistan, so he decided to

⁸ For security reasons, many people of nobility took away the title prefixes and/or suffixes from the last names they chose, or did not give them to their children (but nevertheless called them by their real full names).

return back to Tashkent empty-handed. Having incredible will power, Muhiddin-kori did not lose self-confidence and so he went to work for the government. His son got higher education and was one of the leading chemists of the Republic.

The father of my paternal grandmother also was a wealthy merchant who was travelling abroad often too. His name was Mirgulom-hodji Mirsaiddin Ug'li. He was also a descendant of mirs-. However, additionally he was Said and Hodji, which means that he was a descendant of the prophet and also going on pilgrimages. He was going to Russia, and was visiting China often. He traded silk and gold embroidery, imported fur and accessories for garments from China and Russia.

My paternal grandfather, Khidoyatov Mirkhaidar, having graduated from Tashkent Polytechnic University Faculty of Energy as a specialist in relay equipment, was accepted to work for Ministry of Energy and electrification. He showed the character of a strong leader, and so he was elected to be the secretary of Ministry's Komsomol Organization. Later, despite his young age of 25, he was appointed the head engineer in the largest, at that time, Hydro Power Plant (HPP) in the Central Asia – Farkhad HPP. After that he directed many large manufacturing and construction companies in the Republic's system of energy. In particular, he was director of Cascade Lower-Bozsuv HPP (1970-1980).

Sharafutdinov family⁹

The second story is of Saidmuratkhan Saidalikhovich Sharafutdinov (1910-1973) and his family. He was a very enlightened person who spoke four languages – Persian, Arabic, Russian and Uzbek. He could write in Arabic, Cyrillic and Latin. Until 1937 he was teaching Uzbek language and literature in schools of Bukhara and, later, Tashkent. His elder brother, Saidalimkhan Sharifutdinov (1903-1943), was a leading scholar on Alisher Navoi, who also studied and then taught Arabic and Persian, and was the first member of the Academy of Science of the Uzbek SSR. His brother died on a battlefield in WWII in Belorussia, where he served as a volunteer, leading his troops in battle.

Saidmuratkhan was convicted as an “enemy of the people” in December 1937 and sentenced to hard labor in Magadan and then Kolyma. It is also important to note that before trial and sentencing, he spent his time in Tashkent prison. There, in one cell with him, were leading Jadids (enlightened reformists) like Fayzulla Hodjaev, Fitrat and Abdullah Qodiriy. Nevertheless, it is unknown whether Saidmuratkhan was a Jadid himself. However, looking at his background and people who were in his entourage, one could make such an assumption. Also, it is highly unlikely, his grandson Saidtimurkhan Muratov purports, that a simple teacher of language and brother of a prominent, and respected, scholar would not be branded as an “enemy of the people” because of a simple slander. Thankfully though, he was rehabilitated and returned to Tashkent, after 19 years, in 1956. He came when his son was in the army, so he saw his son only in 1958, which means 21 years after he was arrested.

When Saidmuratkhan was arrested in 1937, his wife Fazilat and two children, a boy and a girl, were exiled 101 kilometers away from Tashkent as the family of an “enemy of the people.”

⁹ These stories were given to me through an email interview with our family friend – Timur (Saidtimurkhan) Muratov.

After that the family tried to erase their connection to the “enemy.” Saidalimkhan tried to help his nephew by changing his birth certificate name into Tom Muratov, though he was born as Saidpulatkhan. As Saidpulatkhan, or Tom, was growing up, people were starting to call him Pulat, or *pulya* (bullet). The nickname was given to him for his accomplishments in boxing, for he was taught by the legendary coach Sydney Jackson,¹⁰ was incredibly fast, easy movement around the ring, and a stinging blow – in other words he was like a bullet. Sometime later and until his passing, people started to respectfully call him Pulat Muratovich¹¹ though he still lacked a paternal name on his birth certificate.

It is also important to note that each male I mentioned in here, if you noticed, had the prefix Said- and suffix –khan. These parts signified the line of Said names, which come from the descendants of Hussein, son of Ali and Fatima,¹² and grandson of Prophet Muhammad. For safety reasons, during the Soviet Union the male kids were not given the title suffixes and prefixes. Only recently, since the end of Soviet rule, was the tradition of giving titles to male descendants restored. Sharafutdin, the last name of the family of interest here, means “Greatness of Religion.” This was the title given as the second name to the grandfather of Saidmuratkhan, Saidkodikhan-ishan, for his services to Islam. He also founded a suburban town “Kodirya Kishlog’i” close to Tashkent. Today this little town is the place where Tashkent Thermal Power Station is based. This town also has railway station “Kadirya”, home of the Kadirya Hydro Power Plant and water treatment plant for Tashkent city.

¹⁰ He was an American professional boxer, born in New York City, who then came to Russia at the beginning of WWI and stayed there, receiving a Soviet education, moving to Tashkent and starting to coach.

¹¹ The Soviets brought with them the Russian tradition of naming, where each child had to have a patronymic name as a part of their full name. Boys were given the suffix –ovich and girls were given –ovna. So, quite literally, Muratovich means son of Murat.

¹² Ali was a cousin of the prophet Muhammad and the 4th Caliph, He also is the central figure for the creation of Shia Islam.

Today, the male bloodline¹³ of the Sharafutdinov. They occupy important and respected positions in business and in the scholarly world. For example, Saidtimurkhan (or just Timur) is a prominent businessman in Tashkent city. Grandson of Saidalimkhan, though, Elyor Karimov holds a PhD in Persian Studies. He is also a member of Academy of Science of Uzbekistan and he is being invited to give lectures and speeches in places like Tashkent, Moscow, Paris and Boston.

¹³ In Central Asia, Uzbekistan in particular, the bloodline is continued only through male offspring and only male offspring can give their male kids the title prefixes and/or suffixes.

AFTER THE RAIN

It was late fall. I was headed toward one of the distant sovkhos¹⁴ in the north of Golodnaya Steppe. The weather was delightful in Tashkent.¹⁵ However, as soon as our bus had crossed the Syr Darya river,¹⁶ a cold wind rose, filling the sky with a blanket of clouds. The rain followed shortly.

When we reached Gulistan¹⁷ regional center, it was already pouring. I got off the bus and went straight to the intersection leading to the sovkhos where I was headed. I hid under the awning of a cigarette shop and started to wait for a car that could give me a lift. Two or three trucks went by without even noticing me. Finally, a van stopped at the corner. The driver unhurriedly got out of the car. He was a tall, pale man, with a bit of a limp, who slowly walked to the shop to buy a cigarette. As he went back to his car, I asked where he was headed. His destination turned out to be located even further than the sovkhos I was going to. Instantly, he agreed to give me a ride. The front seat was occupied by some kind of a parcel, so I sat in the back. The driver lit the cigarette and started the car.

The rain was so heavy that it felt as if the drops were mulberries hitting the car tarpaulin. As soon as I wanted to ask the driver where he was going in such bad weather, the car fell into a pothole and jumped back on the pave. The parcel fell off the front seat. From some openings in the cloth that covered the parcel I could see a picture of a baby in a cradle and the inscription, “Present for the newborn.” The driver took the parcel and put it back on the seat. I thought it was the right moment to start a conversation. The pale man said his name was Akramjan.

¹⁴ Sovkhos (or sovkhozy) – is a State enterprise unit where the State is the entity that hires farmers (could be from all around the State) to work on State farms.

¹⁵ Tashkent has been the capital of the Uzbekistan Republic (the Republic of Uzbekistein) since 1933.

¹⁶ The Syr Darya River originates in the Tyan-Shyan Mountains in Kyrgyzstan and Eastern Uzbekistan, crosses Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and then flows into the Aral Sea.

¹⁷ A city in Uzbekistan, close to Tashkent.

“So Akramjan, you are bringing some presents to a new guest to our world? Am I right?”

“Yes,” he replied abruptly and looked at me for an instant. In the eyes that were now looking at the road, I noticed some spark.

“Then I wish your family the very best,” I said, to keep up the conversation. “That means that you’re going home?”

“Something like that,” he replied somewhat mysteriously. To change the topic, he said, “I think the radiator needs some water...”

Indeed, the radiator was making somewhat disturbing noises, howling and wheezing. Yet, there was not the slightest possibility of stopping and getting out of the car. It was raining profusely. All the same, we had to pull over to the bank of a small and rather narrow lake. After seeing that the driver wanted to get out, I stopped him:

“Don’t worry about it!”

After putting on my coat and turning up my collar, I got out myself, filled the bucket that Akramjan had given me and poured water into the radiator.

“Thank you, Mullah-aka,” he said, calling me by the name that people from the countryside used for “intellectuals.” “Thank you!”

It seems that after this he started to like me. He put his parcel on the back seat and suggested I sit next to him in the front. After I had changed places, we stared at the front window that was showered with rain. Now we could talk freely, without any trouble. He said:

“What treacherous weather is it on the steppe! Look how many times it’s changed in just a day... With this weather it is surely better not to drive. But it seems that if there is a need, people don’t care about anything.”

The car started shaking again and the conversation was interrupted. However, noticing his words had interested me, Akramjan continued telling his story after we got back onto a smooth road.

* * *

At the same time in the fall, just two years ago, Akramjan would drive this road several times a day. He worked as a truck driver for one of the regional center's agencies. He was sent to the kolkhoz¹⁸ under the agency's patronage to transport the cotton. The very first time he came to the reception center, he met an acquaintance – she was an accounting clerk from the city who had been appointed here. She was the daughter of one of the workers at the cotton factory who had moved here from Kazakhstan¹⁹. Akramjan and she had gone to school together. She was a pretty girl, with a slightly upturned nose and plump rosy cheeks on a face like a freshly baked flatbread, round and tanned, with slightly slanting eyes. Bibigul was her name. She was everyone's favorite at the reception center. Her miniature and mobile figure appeared and disappeared. Or she would fly up like a bird onto the top of the truck loaded to the limit. It seemed as if the work would have ceased here without her.

“Hey Bibigul!” – people would shout at her from all sides. ‘Gul²⁰, where are you? Get over here fast.’”

As soon as she made her way, they would ask her to perform calculations just for them.

¹⁸ Kolkhoz, or collective farm, is a Soviet economic unit in agriculture. When the Soviet Union nationalized the lands, it ordered to collectivize them, i.e. give them to farmers to collectively harvest. Basically it is a farm, which the farmers harvest together. It has its own kind of government and the prospective members should apply to its government, while the farmer-members would collectively decide whether to take on in or not. Usually the people hired should be from the village or town close to the farms. All people had salaries. It operated like a collective enterprise where all profits were directed towards development of the farm.

¹⁹ A country in Central Asia populated by Kazakh people, who before the delimitation were considered Mongol-Turkic nomadic tribesmen.

²⁰ Gul, in Turkic languages, is a flower. It is also being used as a short version of names that have Gul- in them. For example, Bibigul, Gulnoza, Gulchekhra. In this context it is referring to the name

The girl was working extremely hard, but she found time to say hello and exchange couple of words with Akramjan. As soon as she saw his truck, she would show him the site for unloading and make all the necessary calculations at once so that he could avoid wasting time. Thanks to Bibigul, Akramjan was always ahead of others and became the foremost in his convoy. Business on the kolkhoz went very well, but it was not easy for Akramjan to return home. He liked the air of the steppe and, most importantly, he enjoyed seeing Bibigul.... As soon as the industrial sounds of the cotton reception center died down and people started to leave, he would take Bibigul into his car to drive her home. And on the rare occasions when they both had days off, especially when it was sunny outside, they went to walk in the fields or in the orchards that were already bereft of leaves; they would remember happy, carefree times of study in school, they would share dreams and hopes for the future....

The car again came onto an uneven stretch of the road, started to shake and jump. Akramjan slowed down.

“My mother heard about my relationship with Bibigul,” he sighed. “She immediately called me to come see her. She sat me down and began to lecture. ‘You little urchin, whom did you think to fall in love with? Couldn’t you find anyone here? Just what I needed. Don’t you know—everyone looks for an equal. I’m telling you to break off with her immediately! Otherwise, you’re no longer my son. Lay off!’ It was the first time I heard such things from my mother.”

My father was killed in action the year I was born.^{21,22} My mother raised me. She would do without food just so I could eat. She wore nothing new in order to clothe me. Thus I was raised without knowing any hardships, without noticing that I was without a father. It was my mother who advised me to take college correspondence courses. She said, “As long as I am alive, you

²¹ The war the author refers to is the World War II, also known as Great Patriotic War for the people of the former Soviet Union.

²² From here, we see a sudden change of narrators. Now it is Akramjan speaking.

will have an education.” And now her biggest wish was to see a bride at home, and to that end she placed into the bridal chest anything of value that came into her hands.²³ Most of the time, my mother was ready to compromise with me, but when it came to marriage, she was determined to set everything up herself.

My mother’s criticism confused me. For several days I was walking around as if I were lost. I couldn’t do anything right at work. On my mind and in my heart was only Bibigul. I saw her there before my eyes, asking, “What about your promises? Why did you leave me?” I felt that if I didn’t come see her, she would turn away from me for good. No, no, there should not be even a grain of resentment in her heart!

I began to visit Bibigul every ten days to two weeks. After the cotton was harvested and delivered, she would go back to work in the factory. The road had been shortened, which allowed us to see each other more often.

As for my mother, well... she continued to prepare my wedding in her own way. She would find one girl after another.²⁴ Whether or not the prospect wanted to marry me was of no concern to my mother. She would bring a picture and start to praise the girl. ‘Just look, her eyes and eyebrows alone are stunning – one can’t stop looking at them! And the braids – they go down to her knees. And she herself is modest and restrained. Tell me: wouldn’t she be a good bride for you?’ My mother was trying to compel me to agree on one, so that she could go court her. At first, I delayed things by asking her to let me finish my education, and then there would be a completely different type of conversation.... But when she made my life unbearable, I became

²³ According to Uzbek traditions, sons (at least the youngest) stay with their parents. Therefore, after marrying, the brides would often move in.. The mother of the groom gives a chest filled with presents for the bride.

²⁴ Uzbeks still arrange marriages. However, these are not stereotypical arranged marriages as in India or some parts of the Middle East. In Uzbekistan, mothers find “candidates” for their children. Today, sons and daughters agree to meet prospects only after consulting photographs. If after three dates, at most, either is not pleased with the match, it is called off and the boy’s mother goes on looking. Typically, on the other hand, the girl’s family does no active searches;, they just wait for a “candidate” better suited to their daughter.

angry. ‘Let it be, mother, don’t interfere in things you shouldn’t!’ Her eyes opened wide in amazement. ‘So that’s it,’ she shouted. ‘So you are on your own? Was it the dirty girl you gave your heart to? If you’ve decided to dishonor me and bring her home, know that you won’t have my blessing! In that case, just consider that you don’t have a mother – that’s it!’

I kept quiet. The time had come to go to take my exams in Tashkent. I said goodbye to my mother, got away from the house and sought out Bibigul right away. At the factory I was told she had gone off for good. I was shocked since Bibigul knew I was leaving; it turned out that she deliberately avoided seeing me. Only later was I told that my mother, after making inquiries, came to the factory herself, found Bibigul, and gave her a piece of her mind, face to face. She told her not even to dare see me because she wouldn’t allow the marriage to take place.

I was completely demoralized and decided to stop at the factory entrance to wait for Bibigul. I stood there for hours. I wanted only to lift a weight from her shoulders and apologize for my mother’s rudeness. But she never showed up. And my heart started to fill with suspicions. Everything darkened before my eyes. And I was burning from the inside out. I felt so hot that I could have drunk ice water by the bucket. So I started to walk down the street, away from the factory. A market and eatery stood there. Never before in my life had I drunk, but now I decided to buy myself a beer. I drank and I felt drawn to have a conversation, and out of the blue, my friends appeared. What happened later, I don’t remember.

...I opened my eyes. It appeared that I was in a hospital. My whole body was in pain. I couldn’t move. And there was Bibigul, sitting next to my pillow in a white robe. As always, she looked as if nothing unusual had happened. I just stretched toward her. I wanted to stand up from bed, only to discover that I couldn’t because my leg was in a cast.

‘Don’t stand up,’ she said, touching my shoulder ever so gently. At this point, with some difficulty, I started to remember what had happened. They say that if you’re drunk, taking one step is like walking the whole world over.

That night I could barely stand on my feet. At all costs I decided to go Bibigul’s home to talk to her. I somehow reached her house, but a car pulled around the corner...and now I was at the hospital. However, I didn’t remember who had taken me and how Bibigul had gotten there.

She would not let me out of her sight until I got just a little better and could walk on crutches. And my mother never came. That was understandable; she probably cried her eyes out expecting that her son would return, that night or the next, from the exams he had gone off to take in Tashkent.

Finally, following Bibigul’s advice, I sent a letter to my mother, telling her I was in the hospital. Not a day had passed when she rushed into the hospital in tears. I told her everything—but not a word about the fact Bibigul had been visiting me. Besides, I knew that the nurses had already told her, and the other patients in my ward had added something too.

‘I don’t know what your relationship is with the cute Kazakh girl who visits your son,’ said an old sick man lying in the corner bed, ‘But she is a fine girl! So caring, gentle... Believe me, she does a lot to relieve your son’s suffering!’

My mother listened quietly. She didn’t say a word.

Bibigul obviously wanted to avoid my mother. She no longer came every day, but only showed up when my mother was not there. She once arrived when my mother was in my ward. She wanted to disappear quietly but couldn’t. My mother saw her, went out, and brought her back to the ward.

After that accident, I couldn't drive for a long time. You probably noticed that I am limping a bit – a consequence of that event. I forgot about everything. I just studied and worked. I never talked about Bibigul with my mother. She just knew that I often went to see Bibigul, but she didn't try to prevent me. And once she said to me directly, 'If part of you is here, at home, and the other is on the street, let her move to the city and find a job here.'

I passed on these words to Bibigul but she refused – she didn't want to change jobs. So I myself moved to where she was, and we married there with her relatives at her side. My mother sat at the head of the table – perhaps just for the sake of appearance. Still, even after a year has passed, she has never come to our house. And if Bibigul goes to visit her, she greets her coldly.

We have recently had a baby. I drove to the city to tell my mother the good news. And finally, it seems, love for her grandson has melted the ice in my mother's heart and her sullenness had ceased. This parcel I am carrying is a gift from her. She gave it to me as a kind of apology.

'Go on, my son,' she said, 'take this gift to the new guest to our world. And if I pick up anything else, I will come myself.'

In a couple of days she is planning to take a vacation from work and visit us.

* * *

We were approaching my destination. At the crossroads, Akramjan stopped the car.

Thanking him, I got out. In the time of this short trip we definitely became close and thus couldn't just say goodbye. We stood looking at each other. I shook his hand for a long time, asking him to congratulate Bibigul and his mother on the new member of their family.

I headed towards the sovkhos village. The clouds hadn't yet gone away, the fog was covering the ground, but the fields of green bushes had started to blossom with not very colorful

autumn flowers. And I felt relieved, calmed, and happy in my heart. Without a doubt this was because I had heard a tale about the pure, passionate and sincere love of these two simple and in no way remarkable people.

WHY WAS THE WEDDING POSTPONED

The only thing left was to appoint the date for the wedding. To that end, Tadjibay-sarkar²⁵ and the future matchmaker Saryimsak-chopan ought to have met once again. Tadjibay's wife, aunty Aisha, kept on bombarding her husband with one and only one question, "So did you consult with them? Did you appoint the date?" But he constantly put off this task. He said he just couldn't get around to it.

"Excuse me, but how can you postpone performing a good deed?," Aisha-khola²⁶ just could not refrain from saying. "Please go and talk to him finally, don't procrastinate."

So Tadjibay set out for Sayimsak-chopan. Aisha's eyes grew so tired looking out for his arrival that she did not notice the time slipping by. Till the second crow of the rooster, she was repeatedly came to the door. She did not even take out the hot plov²⁷ from the pot. Her husband, however, had still not returned.

"It must be the neighbor who didn't let the old man go," said aunty Aisha, comforting herself. "After all, our neighbor is a wretch and always has people around the house. It is rightly said that if similar people meet, they can hardly say goodbye."

She woke up early, lit the fire under the samovar. Then she took her new patterned khan-atlas dress, custom-made for a wedding, donned it along with her lacquered ichagi with galoshes, She tied her silk scarf tight on her head, and on top threw her wool shawl, decorated with apple designs. On the veranda, she covered the table with a dastarkhan.²⁸ Just as she was preparing for

²⁵ Sarkar – senior, head.

²⁶ Khola – maternal aunt

²⁷ Plov – a national dish made of rice, meat, carrots and onions. It was founded in Uzbek parts of Central Asia and its history is not conclusive – there are many different legends surrounding it. Many other states have adopted this dish and made their own variations, including Pilaf by Turkish people. It is a key dish in all important occasions, like weddings, birthdays and death.

²⁸ Dastarkhan – tablecloth in Central Asia, also colloquially refers to a table decorated for a feast.

the Tea Party, she heard the sound of horses' hooves. Master Tadjibay-sarkar had come. Aisha-khola, not waiting for husband to tie the horse, hurried to him with questions:

“So what have you decided on, father? What day did you choose?”

However, Tadjibay-ata seemingly had come back somewhat disappointed. Aisha's questions, falling on his head like wood chips from a roof, troubled him. And when the old man saw how well his wife looked, he became completely perplexed:

“Yea, what a beauty! Are you the one planning to be the bride?”

Aunt Aisha tried her best not to show that she appreciated the compliment. She arched her blackened eyebrows, squinted her carefully made-up eyes, and confided:

“I wanted to notify our relatives so that they could order a car. So what's the date?”

“Hmmm...” Tadjibay was lost in thought for a moment. All of a sudden, he said sternly, “First of all, you need to say greet me properly and let me catch my breath. Help me take off my robe and pour some water on my hands. And you know, dear spouse, when Allah endowed people with insight, you women got less than men.”

His wife did not take this malicious joke seriously. She just responded with light irony:

“Yes, well, I was late thereat... Because of that you have even more hardship, you poor man. The plov never cooked right, the shirts were not washed properly. Neither order nor prosperity were in the house...”

So aunt Aisha, having fully studied all the whims of her husband and learned when and how to please him, nimbly pulled the robe from Tadjibay, shook off the dust and hung it on a peg driven into the wall. Promptly she poured warm water into a narrow-necked jug. Above the irrigation ditch she emptied some onto his hands and resumed what she was saying:

“Can it be that your heart is as calm as a river on level ground, father? You should have said so earlier.”

After washing up, Tadjibay-ata leisurely dried off with the towel his wife held out to him.

“So as they say, I am from the fram, you are from the hills... But if you were to ask how are the things on the summer pastures, are the sheep lambing successfully, are there many twins, then the conversation would go smoothly.”

Aisha, however, did not let her husband dodge the subject that interested her. From the large thermos she poured some plov onto a plate, brought some tea, lingered a bit and started to talk sharply and more insistently:

“So you have only sheep and lambs on your mind? And who, I wonder, is forcing you to go to the pastures? Thank God, they've given us a pension, our son is in the fields, Topiboldi is managing things splendidly... What more do you need? But what about your own child? You are, after all, a father. Are you really too lazy to help your son? Because all that's left to do is to serve him some already cooked plov on a plate. And your nickname is Sarkar—the ringleader. More than one time you've offered help and advice to others”

The old man Tadjibay was tucking into the plov with a hearty appetite. Finding nothing to say, He remained silent....

In Kishlak²⁹ Tadjibay-sakrar was one of the most reputable men. He was listened to by old and young. A wedding was not held unless Tadjibay-sarkar had been invited. Why, then, did this meticulous person, who cared about everything and everyone, treat his own son's wedding so strangely?

²⁹ Kishlak – a village in Central Asia

The future father-in-law was his closest friend. They had played together when they were boys in short pants and worked together their entire lives.. But this was not the only thing that governed Tadjibay's relations with his friend., Saryimask's daughter, Zukhra, also grew up in front of his eyes. Everyone appreciated her manners and character. According to Aunt Aisha, there was not a single girl as clever and beautiful as Zukhra. She was like a star in the sky. When Zukhra met her seventeenth spring and everyone saw her beauty, the matchmakers came frequently to Saryimsak's house. And when the matchmakers came, Saryimsak hurried to his friend for advice. And Tadjibay-sarkar would tell him the same thing: "Hey, friend, first look at what is in her heart. Don't pay too much attention to wealth and baubles. Otherwise, you are going to regret things. " Tadjibay-sakrar gave this advice with a pure heart, of course. However, he did not forget the benefit to be derived. In secret he hoped to bring Zukhra home as a bride to his son. "What if our Topiboldi's star were aligned with that of the beautiful Zukra, who banishes matchmakers from all over? Fortune will smile on our son if he forms a pair with a girl like that."

Aunt Aisha doted on her son. She was ready to praise him to the heavens. Wherever the women would gather, she would start saying, "I have an excellent son! Thank God he is just like his father, shrewd and agile. He gets better and better at his trade and is being promoted at work..."

In truth, Topiboldi distinguished himself through his industriousness and promptness. While still at school he had learned to drive a cotton picker. As soon as he had gotten his high-school diploma, he was admitted into a correspondence school. In the kolkhoz he was the first to be appointed section leader. He brought glory to the brigade and to himself, of course. In the Kishlak center, a large portrait of him hung on the Wall of Honor. They began electing him to

the presidium. Finally, the name of the young brigadier was mentioned in a speech by the kolkhoz chairman on the radio: he hailed Topiboldi as “the foundation and hope of the kolkhoz,” and announced that he, together with other “beacons,” would be sent as delegates to the Cotton Growers’ Congress.

His father took pleasure in such accolades, but was a bit worried: “I just hope everything will end well. I don’t want all this glory to go to his head.”

In the midst of negotiating the date for his son’s wedding, he heard some rumors. Topiboldi, people claimed, was going around with his nose in the air; he had become rude; he was interested only in himself; and he kept the members of his brigade under his heel...

So that is why Tadjibay-sarkar remained sheepishly silent. So that is why he knew not how to answer his wife, gazing hopefully at him. He made a joke to gain some time:

“The plov did not cook up properly....”

“Vay³⁰, really?” Aunt-Aisha exclaimed. “The plov that I made with my own hands did not cook up properly?”

Tadjibay chuckled and sipped some tea.

“My darling wife, I am remembering the plov you made for our son.”

“Father, how could you say such a thing?” Only then did she understand the joke. “Our Topiboldi and Zukhra belong together.. That’s obvious to everybody. I’ve agreed on everything with her mother. Hardly had I finished my sentence when she said yes. She said from the heart, ‘If such close friends of ours, respected people like you, want our families to join together, how can I refuse? Your Topiboldi is such a wonderful young man, and whomever he would propose to would say yes in a moment!’ I’m not the only one who has heard people sing the praises of our

³⁰ Vay, or voy (depending on dialect), is an Uzbek exclamation of surprise.

child. I have overheard others lauding him so sweetly that honey was dripping from their lips. And is it so bad that a star would converge with a star? Father, why are you so lost?"

Tadjibay-ata saw that his wife sincerely believed in what she was saying. He just could not bring himself to shake her faith.

"All right, have a little patience," he said, then finished his tea and stood up...

Having arrived near the kolkhoz, Tadjibay-ata did not find anyone besides a secretary. Every body had spread out into the fields. As he was about to leave, the secretary handed him an envelope,

"Here, please, take it, rayis³¹-aka ordered me to give this," he said, "to Tadjibay-askar himself."

The old man, not trusting what he was seeing, brought the paper right up to his eyes, read it once, read it again... It was a statement from the brigade working in the riverside forests about the unworthy acts of the brigadier Tadjibayev Toppiboldi! The old man broke out in a cold sweat. His hand quivered as he held the letter. His pointed beard shook. Not saying a word to the stunned secretary he ran out of the office, mounted a horse and rushed to the forest...

He ordered his son to gather the brigade together. He read the statement out loud. And when the brigade members started to talk he understood that the declaration was only, as they say, the tip of the iceberg. The worst was about to come out only now. For example, there was the story about Mannob, already an elderly man who worked as a mechanic. He had far more experience and expertise than Topiboldi. However here, in the forest, things for Mannob were going extremely badly. He was no longer fulfilling his quota of cotton picking or plowing. He felt ashamed in front of the people, his friends.... And the reason was simple. Topiboldi was

³¹ Rayis - chairman

constantly assigning him equipment that needed repair. And if that weren't bad enough, he was being stingy with spare parts.

“If your son didn't have any spare parts, it would be a completely different story,” the guys were saying. “But he does and he hoards them. Is it proper to stuff your face by the handful? Tell me, that, honorable Tadjibay-ata.”

The old man looked furiously at his son who was sitting right beside him, carelessly smoking his cigarette, swinging his legs and muttering under his breath something like “Don't believe them! They're just jealous...”

The mechanic Mannob sat quietly, drawing something with the tip of his boots on the soil, while the conversation about him went on. However, Topiboldi's impudence finally made him lose his temper:

“You, brother, better not get in the habit of despising people, with that intellect of yours that's the size of a fist! Show some shame at least in front of your honorable father!” Then he agitatedly turned to Tadjibay: “Thank you, uncle, for coming to talk with us. We wouldn't hide anything from you. Don't take it personally, honorable gentleman, but every one of us thinks the same thing. Previously your son was a well-mannered and modest lad. But now he has begun to brag. ‘I out-performed expectations of the plans,’ he says! All of a sudden he's begun to puff himself up. Honestly...”

“So Topiboldi out-performed the plan³² all by himself? And all the other poor guys were walking around idly?” another man suddenly shouted out. And then immediately he apologized to Tadjibay. “Please do not take offense, venerable, at my direct words...”

³² The Soviet economy was a planned economy, i.e. everything was built on quotas and plans. The economic strategy of the country was based on 5-year plan. The farms and enterprises also had their plans for every day, week, month and year.

“But it’s true. Think for yourself, uncle. This is all we hear: Topiboldi did this, achieved that,” Mannob continued mockingly. “The sun and moon rise and set around him... As if there were no one else here in the forest. That could swell anyone's head, even the most prudent man’s. As it is said, ‘Only to the lamb the fat is not a hindrance.’³³”

Old Tadjibay-sarkar—the pride and conscience of the whole kishlak, from whom everyone waited for words of wisdom, whose cat, as they say, no one could shout “scat” to—was now ready to sink into the ground. For the first time in his life he heard such criticism, and from whom? Youngsters the same age as his son. But he did not express anger or frustration over any of their words. He just rose suddenly, untied his horse, snatched the lead from the hands of his son standing there motionless behind his back, and threw him a glance filled with indignation and pain. He asked quietly:

“Is this what I was expecting from you?”

He mounted the horse, struck it with the whip and quickly rode away.

Topiboldi was standing stone-still, with crimson ears. It was as though the father’s whip had struck *his* back... Finally, like someone who had just awoken, he cried, “Father!” and rushed after him. The night fog, hanging over the forest like a blanket, seemed to have swallowed up the horseman. But Topiboldi was running through it.

“Father! Father! Please stop, let’s talk!”

But Tadjibay appeared not to hear his son’s repentance. He whipped his horse even harder...

³³ In Russian, when one wants too much or does something excessively, people say “is it not fatty for you?” Fat in these contexts means something excessive. The sheep in Central Asia are fatty by nature, which gives them an incredibly tender flavor when you cook their meat. So this proverb uses these two facts by saying that excessiveness is bad for people, while excessiveness (i.e. excessive fat) is good only to the sheep/ram).

Approaching the office he held back the reins, but near the office of rayis it was dark already. He was about to let the horse run off, but at this very moment his eyes fell on the wall of honor. By the light of a lantern, Tadjibay saw the portrait of Topiboldi. And suddenly the old man imagined a crowd of people gathering around. They were pointing at him, Tadjibay-sakrar, shouting angrily, “Does your son deserve such an honorable place?” A sharp pain cut through Tadjibay’s heart. “But frankly son, they put you on this wall with good intentions, I assume? So that people would follow your example? And what example are you showing? What good words have they not said in your honor! And how did you thank them? I was hoping that you would be a worthy replacement for me, that you would make your contribution to our common cause, honest and pure as mother’s milk... Answer me, wretch, did you justify our hopes?”

Losing control of himself, Tadjibay-ata walked up to the board, tore down the photograph and was ready to shred it into pieces and trample it on the ground. But his paternal feeling took over. He wiped the photograph with the cloth of his coat, dusted it off, and carefully put it in his bosom.

“Here is your groom,” thought Tadjibay sadly. “What if our friend already heard about Topiboldi’s temper? What if Zukhra were aware of it too? After all, father and daughter believe in Topiboldi as they do in themselves. So will they be disappointed and reject the match? But what if they don’t know anything about it? And if I don’t say anything? As though I could hide the moon under my coat tails. No! To deceive a friend who has not concealed even the smallest thing from you for his whole life is to injure him, humiliate him.... And here we are talking about uniting two young people for life. We cannot let even the slightest grain of discord be sown between them! No wonder it is said that a late confession is the worst enemy...”

And the old man, without wavering, decisively turned in the direction of Sayimsak-chapan's home...

Aunt Aisha's eyes showed amazement at the fact that her husband had returned exhausted but in a good mood. Truly, Tadjibay was feeling as if a heavy burden had fallen from his shoulders. Seeing how impatiently his wife was looking at him, he hurried to forestall any unpleasant inquiries and explanations:

“Well, I came upon a feast fit for a king. And our neighbor worked up such an appetite, we could have feasted till the morning. But I felt sorry for my wife, I am thinking, lest she give me another son like Topiboldi. To please one's wife all the time is not an easy task, say what you will.

Aunt Aisha, paying close attention to what she was hearing, suspected that something was wrong. She stared her husband in the face.

“Did you finally decide what to do? May God help you to handle it... What date did you decide on, father, please tell me!”

“On the soonest possible time,” Tadjibay-ata answered firmly, hiding his sly grin. He waited for his wife to calm down a bit, once again weighing everything he had been thinking about on the way home. Saryimsak-chopan was the first to turn to him with a request accompanied by a thousand apologies, “You know, my daughter has decided to wait a little for the wedding. So that is why I ask of you to leave matters as they stand for the time being.. And it is never too late to do a good deed.” For him to tell her this now would be like setting the unhappy old woman on fire. So Tadjibay chose to mention only the urgent work that needed to be done: one kolkhoz campaign after another, the sheep lambing, the preparations for the spring sowing. With all that at hand, there would be no possibility of organizing a large wedding. He

wanted to add that the chairman was going to the congress with the “beacons,” but shut his mouth in time. For if he were even to hint at this, Aisha-khola would exclaim right away, “So our little boy is going away?” What should he answer to that? Would he, himself, accept the fact that his son had been left on the list of delegates?

“So, mother, I think,” said Tadjibay with a trusting tone, as if promising to give her the *suyunchi*³⁴, I think that holding the wedding later would be the best choice. If we do it in the summer, when the fruits are ripe, our wedding *dastarkhan* will be more bountiful. Isn’t that true?”

Aunt Aisha seemed to lose all her strength, sat down on the carpet, leaning her back on the support post. Tadjibay felt sorry for her, but would it be possible to calm her with words, to comfort the heart of a mother, when it comes to her only son? The old man suffering too.

In the garden, through the leaves of the apple trees, blossoming amicably and dressed in the young abundant foliage, just like a bronze dish, the disk of a young and round moon was coming out. Like golden dust on soil it painted everything around with warm soft light. The father’s heart grew lighter and calmer. His gaze slid on the swallows’ nest. Previous summer’s fledglings had hatched there. The mother swallow touchingly looked after her children day after day, knowing no rest, flying over the gardens, bringing food in her beak, protecting the nest from dangers. When the wings of the birds strengthened, mother started to teach them to fly. One fledgling got so carried away, flying from one branch to another, that his wings weakened and he fell to the ground. “Perhaps, Topiboldi, you are like this fledgling,” the old man thought. “I raised you, and your wings are becoming stronger. But your first solo flight was not so

³⁴ A gift for good news

successful. Well now, my little boy, don't make any more such mistakes. Fly straight, on the right path!"

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