

**ЎЗБЕКИСТОН РЕСПУБЛИКАСИ
ОЛИЙ ВА ЎРТА МАХСУС ТАЪЛИМ ВАЗИРЛИГИ**

**МИРЗО УЛУФБЕК НОМИДАГИ
ЎЗБЕКИСТОН МИЛЛИЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТИ
ХОРИЖИЙ ФИЛОЛОГИЯ ФАКУЛЬТЕТИ**

**ДЕҲҚОННИНГ БИР
КУНИ**

***A DAY OF THE
PEASANT***

**Тошкент
«MUMTOZ SO'Z»
2009**

83(5Ў)

Д44

Дехқоннинг бир кун: ҳикоялар таржимаси / ЎзР олий ва ўрта махсус таълим вазирлиги, Мирзо Улуғбек номидаги Ўзбекистон Миллий ун-ти, Хорижий филология факультети; тўпловчи ва таржимон Ҳ. Алланазарова; масъул муҳаррир Ш. С. Имяминова. — Тошкент: MUMTOZ SO'Z, 2009. - 80 б.

Тит. в. ва матн парал. ўзб. ва ингл. тилларида.

И. Алланазарова, Ҳафиза., тўпловчи

ББК 83(5Ў)+81.2 Ўзб-7

Ушбу таржима китобидан Мирзо Улуғбек номидаги Ўзбекистон Миллий университети хорижий филология факультети инглиз филология бўлими бакалавр йўналиши бўйича таҳсил олаётган 4-курс талабаси Алланазарова Ҳафизанинг таниқли ўзбек адибларининг ўзбек тилидан инглиз тилига таржима қилган ҳикоялари ўрин олган.

In this book there are presented the stories of famous Uzbek writers translated from Uzbek into English by third year student of the Foreign Philology Faculty of the National University of Uzbekistan.

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Мирзо Улуғбек номидаги Ўзбекистон Миллий университети Хорижий филология факультети Илмий кенгаши томонидан нашрга тавсия этилган (2009 йил 29 июнь, 12-сонли баённома)

ISBN 978-9943-363-27-4

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ТАҚДИМ

Таржима – бу жуда машаққатли ва мароқли фаолият. Таржимон бўлишни эса ҳар бир чет тилини ўрганаётган талаба ёшларимиз орзу қиладилар. Аммо бу мураккаб фаолият асосида йиллаб тил устида ишлаш ва сўз бойлигини ошириш ҳамда тинмай фақат чет тилинигина эмас, балки ўз она тилини чуқур ўрганиш кераклигини тақозо этишини тушуниб бориши лозим. Зеро таржима бу тил машқи ҳамдир.

Бугунги кунда Ўзбекистон Миллий университетида яхши бир анъана амалга оширила бошландики, бунга бефарқ қараб туриб бўлмайди. Университет ректори профессор Гофуржон Исроилович Муҳамедов ташаббуслари билан ҳар бир факультетдан ва ҳар бир йўналишдан иқтидорли талабаларни танлаб олиб, уларнинг қизиқишларини ўрганиб уни ривожлантириш учун катта йўл очиб берилди. Ана шундай талабалардан бири бизнинг факультет 4-курс талабаси Алланазарова Ҳафиза бўлиб, у билан суҳбатлашнинг ўзи мароқли. У содда ва ақлли, аммо унинг кўнглига йўл топа олсангиз Ҳафизанинг ўта тиришқоқлиги ва тўғрисўзлигидан қувонасиз. Унинг орзулари дунёча бор, бу орзуларни амалга ошириш учун эса ўзини ўққа-чўққа уради. Ҳафизага бирор топшириқ берсангиз, албатта, уни тез ва соз бажаришга астойдил ҳаракат қилади.

Талабанинг таржимага иқтидорини сезганимизда, ҳали шунчаки таржима соҳасига эндигина қадам қўяётган эди. Ҳафизага илк талабалик йилларидан таржима бобида устозлик қилганлар ва унда таржимага меҳр ва қизиқиш уйғотган инглиз тили фонетика ва грамматикаси кафедрасининг катта ўқитувчиси Ирода Жўраевадир.

Ҳозирги кунда таржимашунослик амалиётида асосий муаммолардан бири она тилидан чет тилларга таржима қилиш масаласидир. Шунинг учун Ҳафиза таниқли ўзбек адибларидан Ўткир Ҳошимов, Шукур Ҳолмирзаев ва Қамчибек Кенжанинг ҳикояларини инглиз тилига таржима қилишга жазм қилган. Ҳафизанинг таржималари тушунарли ва қизиқарли.

Бугунги кунда Ҳафиза Алланазарова ўзбек адиблари асарларини дунёга танитиш мақсадида тинмай таржима билан шуғулланмоқда. Унинг бирдан-бир орзуси яхши таржимон ва педагог бўлиш билан бирга таржимашунослик муаммолари билан шуғулланиш ва бу

соҳада яхши олма бўлиб етишишдир. Биз унга оқ йўл ва ижодий муваффақиятлар тилаш билан бирга, унинг таржималаридан намуналарни Сиз азиз китобхонларга тавсия этамиз.

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PREFACE

Translation is an activity which is quite time-intensive but very interesting to be busy with. Obviously each of our students who are learning foreign languages would like to be a translator.

But there's no doubt for the fact that this ambition demands not only many years of working with a foreign language and enriching the vocabulary, but also to learn one's own mother language, because translation is an exercising process with the language.

Nowadays the National University of Uzbekistan acquired a very good tradition which couldn't retain us indifferent. On the initiative of the Rector of our University, professor Gafurjon Isroilovich Muhamedov put a great forward way for searching and supporting talented students from all university faculties according to their interest. In this respect a third-year student Allanazarova Hafiza is deemed to be one of those gifted students of our university. You really enjoy while talking to her. She is very modest and smart at the same time, but if you really find a close way to her heart, you make sure that she will really try her best so that all her dreams would come true, you feel glad to see the way that she is an honest and hardworking girl who doesn't know how to lie. Her ambitions are matchless and fathomless. If you ask her to accomplish any kind of task, she is always kind and ready for doing it quickly and with the utmost discretion. When we discerned her talent for translation she was just beginning to translate for fun. The most essential problem of translation is rendering from native language into a foreign language, Allanazarova Hafiza decided to translate literary works of Uzbek famous writers such as Utkir Hoshimov, Shukur Kholmirezayev, Tokhir Malik and many others. Her translations are apparently explicit and interesting to read. Iroda Ahmedovna Jurayeva, the senior teacher of the Department of English phonetics and grammar is one of those who prompted Hafiza to be fond of translating.

At the present time Hafiza Allanazarova is crusading for her pursuit of putting the Uzbek literature on the map. Apart from working as a good translator and a teacher, Hafiza is intending to be an experienced researcher who devotes her life for solving the problems concerning the comparative linguistics. We, her teachers wish her good luck and great success in her life.

Sh.S.Imyaminova
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ТАРНОВ

Эрта баҳор эди. Ҳордиқ куни эди. Кеч турдим. Ҳовлига тушсам, ҳавонинг авзойи бузуқ. Ювиниб чиқиб қарасам, тунука том пешадаги тарнов бир томонга қийшайиб ётибди. Қишда ёққан қор залворидан қийшайиб қолган шекилли... Қаттиқроқ шамол бўлса, тушиб кетадиган...

Йўлакда ётган нарвонни кўтариб келиб томга тирагунча тинкам қуриди: зах тортиб, зилдек бўп кетибди. Нарвон зинасига оёқ қўйишим билан айвондан онам тушиб келди.

— Нима қилмоқчисан? — деди кўзимга термулиб.

— Ҳозир, — дедим бепарво қўл силтаб. — Тарнов қийшайиб қопти.

— Шошма, болам, аввал чойингни ичиб ол...

— Ҳозир тушаман.

Шундай дедиму нарвонга тирмашдим. Томга чиқишим билан пастдан онамнинг ҳавотирли хитоби эшитилди:

— Эҳтиёт бўл, том лабига борма!

— Уйга кирсангиз-чи! — дедим оғриниб.

Тунука томни тарақ-туруқ босиб, қийшайган тарнов олдига келдим. Увалло уринаман, тарнов лаънати ўнганса қани! Занглаб кетганми, бўёғи ёпишиб қолганми...

Аксига олиб, ёмғир шивалай бошлади. Аввалига томчилаб турди-да, кейин шиддат билан ёғиб кетди. Том лабида ўтирганча, тарновни қўшқўллаб суришга уриндим. Қилт этмайди!

Пастдан яна онамнинг овози келди:

— Менга қара, болам! Нарвон олдига қайтиб келдим.

— Нима дейсиз?

— Жон болам, мана буни кийиб олгин...

Қарасам, онам бир қўли билан нарвонни чангаллаганча, иккинчи қўлида тўн ушлаб турибди. Юпқа рўмоли, нимчаси ҳўл бўлиб кетган...

Хунобим ошди.

— Ҳозир тушаман, дедим-ку! Мен ёш боламанми?

— Шамоллаб қоласан!

— Оббо! Сиз уйга кираверинг! Ҳозир тушаман. — Шундай деб, тагин тарнов олдига қайтдим. Жаҳл билан тарновни муштлай бошладим.

Бир маҳал пастдан яна овоз келди:

— Ада! Адажон!

— Ҳа! — дедим баттар хуноб бўлиб.

— Варрагим йиртилди!

Қарасам, етти яшар ўғлим ҳовли ўртасида турибди. Оёғи остида йиртилиб, қамишлари қовурғадек туртиб чиққан варрак лойга қоришиб ётибди. Ўзи кўйлақчан. Бошяланг. Ёмғир остида дийдираб турибди.

— Уйга кир, Фарруҳ! — дедим бақириб. — Уйга кир, шамоллаб қоласан!

Қулоқ солса қани! Гоҳ варрагига, гоҳ менга қарайди. Капалагим учиб кетди. Томда сирғалиб-сирғалиб, нарвон томон югурдим.

Уч-гўрт пиллапоя тушиб қарасам, онам ҳамон нарвон оёғини чангаллаб турибди. Рўмоли жикқа ҳўл бўлиб, сочларига ёпишиб қолган... Бир қўли нарвон оёғида. Бир қўлида тўн...

By Utkir HOSHIMOV

THE GUTTER

Early days of spring. It was my day-off. So I got up lately. When I went out to the yard, the weather was quite dull. I washed up and looked outside, a gutter on the verge of the iron-roof turned out to have got lop-sided. It sank to one side owing to plenty of snow in winter, I suppose. It was about to drop down if any strong wind blew...

I lifted the ladder that was on the path and felt exhausted until I propped it against the wall as it became too heavy and damp. No sooner I put my foot on its rung, than did my mother come running down the terrace.

«What are you going to do?» she said letting her gaze rest on mine.

«Just a minute» I said jerking my hand «The gutter went lop-sided.»

«Wait, my son, have your breakfast before...»

«I'll come down in a minute» said I and began to climb up the ladder.

As soon as I went up the roof I could hear my mother's worried voice.

«Be careful, my son, don't go to the edge of the roof.»

«Would you please get inside the house?» I begged.

Stamping on the roof I approached that lop-sided gutter. I made an effort somehow, yet couldn't mend that damn gutter. Either because it rusted or its stain stuck to...

As if out of spite it started to rain, at first it was drizzling but then it almost poured down. Sitting on the verge of the roof I tried to drift

the gutter with both of my hands. That didn't even budge! Again my mother's voice came:

«Look at me, my son.»

I came back to the ladder. «What do you want?»

«My dear child put on this, please.» She stood holding a robe with her one hand and clutching the ladder with another one, her sheer kerchief and sleeveless blouse were wet through. I lost my temper.

«I've said I'll get down, do you think I'm a little child?»

«You may catch a cold.»

«Oh, God, you can go in, I'll get down soon.» After this I went back up to the gutter and began to punch it. At that time, again a voice came up to me.

«Dad, daddy.»

«What?» I said feeling even more furious.

«My kite has torn off.»

I saw that my seven years old son was standing on the middle of the yard and at his feet there was a kite, torn off, caked with mud and its frames had juttred out. Wearing just a shirt and bare head he was quivering in the rain.

«Go inside, Farruh.» I shouted. «Go inside, you can catch a cold.» Had he had obeyed! Once he looked at me, then once at his kite. My heart leapt out of my mouth. Sliding on the roof I ran towards the ladder. Stepping down three or four rungs I looked down and saw that my mother was still there, clutching the handrails of the ladder. Her sheer kerchief was so soaked that her hair could be seen... She stood, holding the ladder with her one hand and the robe with another one.

ҲУРКИТИЛГАН ТУШ

Тишлари тўкилган кемшик бола эдим. Сой бўйидаги ўтлоқ биз — болаларнинг «катта еримиз» эди. Ҳар куни эрта билан ойим чий духоба шимимнинг чўнтагига яримта зогора, бир бўлак қайнаган лавлаги солиб берарди-да, шохсиз, ювош эчкимизни етаклаб «катта ер»га жўнардим. Овози дўриллаб қолган Меливой кўк кўзни айтмаса, ҳаммамиз ёш болалар эдик. Ўтлоқ ёнидаги икки тул азим тол бизнинг овунчоғимиз эди. Баҳор келиши билан болалар тол новдаларидан ҳуштак ясашар, қизлар бўлса баргак тақиб, дарахт соясида черта ўйнашарди.

Бир куни орамизга янги меҳмон — Ҳалима деган қизча кўшилди. Унинг қишлоғимизга келганини ҳаммадан аввал мен билдим. Кечкурун ойим дадамга айтган гапини эшитиб қолгандим.

— Ҳаким сассиқ шаҳарга бориб қизини топиб келибди. Хотинининг бошига итти кунини солибди. «Ўзинг-ку, шармандалиқ қилдинг... Майли, сен ўша толганинг билан бўлавер. Менга қизимни бер», дебди...

Ҳаким сассиқ бултур урушдан келган, полизда бригадир бўлиб ишларди. Мен уни жуда ёмон кўрардим: бир марта эчким полизига кириб кетганида мени икки тарсаки урган. Ойимнинг гапидан ҳеч нима тушунмаган бўлсам ҳам, Ҳаким сассиқнинг қизини кўргим келди. Эртасига кўрдим ҳам...

* * *

Ўша кун и эрталаб момақалди роқ бўлиб, жала куйгани эсимда бор. Ойим одатдагидай эчкининг елин қопини боғлаб (бўлмаса боласи эмиб кўярди) арқонни кўлимга тутқазди.

— Яхшилаб тўйғиз!

«Катта ер»га етиб келгунимча ҳаво чарақлаб очилиб кетди. Эчкининг арқонини ечиб, молларга кўшиб юбордим-да, тол тагида тўдалашиб турган болалар ёнига келдим.

Ўртада урушда ўлган дадасининг каттакон беқасам чопонини кийиб олган Меливой ёнбошлаб ётар, яланг оёқ болалар унинг атрофида ўтириб олиб нимагадир хохолаб кулишарди.

— Ҳаким сассиқнинг қизини кўрдингми, Анвар?

Меливой яқин келишим билан дўриллаб сўради. Кейин кўлидаги толёғоч билан имо қилиб кўрсатди. — Дадасига ўхшаган дароз экан.

Болалар тагин бараварига кулиб юборишди. Толнинг панасида турган новча қизалоқни энди кўрдим. Унинг катта-катта кўзлари маъюслик билан жавдирар, нима қилишни билмай, калишининг учи билан майсаларни эзғиларди.

Меливойдан ҳаммамиз кўрқардик, ҳеч кимни аямасди. Лекин ҳозир унинг қизни масхара қилиши алам қилди менга.

— Дароз бўлса сенга нима? — дедим аламимдан чийиллаб. Ҳалима ялт этиб менга қаради-ю, индамади. Меливой бирпас бақрайиб турди-да, таёғининг учи билан сой томонни кўрсатди.

— Бор, буқамни қайтариб кел! Сенинг галинг келди.

У ҳар доим молини бизларга қайтартирди. Нимагадир бу сафар ўжарлигим тутди.

— Ўзинг қайтар! — дедим.

— Шунақами? — Меливойнинг кўк кўзлари олайиб кетди.

Ирғиб ўрнидан турди-ю, қўлидаги таёқни баланд кўтарди. Ҳозир елкамга калтак тушишини билиб, қўрқувдан кўзларимни юмиб олдим. Аммо калтак тегмади. Бир маҳал кўзимни очиб қарасам, Ҳалима таёқни ингичка тиззасига тираб, синдирипти.

— Бузуқнинг боласи! — деди Меливой унга қараб. Ҳалиманинг лаби пирпираб, йиғлаб юборай дётганидан бу ёмон гап эканлигини тушундим.

— Ўзинг бузуқнинг боласи! — дедим бақриб. — Кўк кўз! Кўк қарға!

... Ўша куни «катта ер»нинг хўжайини — Меливойнинг буйруғи билан эчкимни сойнинг нариги бетида боқадиган бўлдим.

* * *

Болалар орасига қайтгим келардию, «кўк қарға»дан қўрқардим. Фақат бир нарсага хурсанд эдим: Ҳалима ҳам ола сигирини мен билан бирга боқарди. Кейин билсам, у мендан уч ёш катта экан. Кун бўйи иккаламиз чиллак ўйнардик. Ҳалима бу ўйинда ўғил болалардан қолишмасди.

Ёзда тагин бир одат чиқардик. Ҳар куни пешинда сой бўйида олов ёқиб, қўрига иккитадан картошка кўмиб ейдиган бўлдик. Бир гал у, бир гал мен уйдан картошка олиб келардик.

Чўғда қоп-қорайиб пишган картошкани шоша-пиша артиб, оғзимиз куйишига қарамай еб олишдан лаззатлироқ нарса йўқ эди бизга.

Ҳеч эсимдан чиқмайди. Бир куни ўша тотли тушликни еб бўлиб, майсалар устига чалқанча ётиб олдим. Тубсиз осмоннинг бир чеккасида кўпикдай оппоқ булутлар оқиста сузиб юрар, баланд-баландларда жажжигина бир тўрғай турган ерида типирчилаб, шодон сайрарди...

Ҳалима ёнимда ўтириб олиб, ўтлардан «ажина кавуш» тўқир, узун-узун бармоқларининг шунчалик чаққон ҳаракат қилишига ҳайрон қолардим. Бирпасдан кейин у ингичка, паст товущда ашула айта бошлади.

— «Очил-очил оқ тошлар-а... Мен онамни кўрайин-а... Дийдорига тўйин-а...».

Унинг секин хўрсинганини эшитдим. Зум ўтмай яна қайтарди.

— «Ойижонимни... кўрайин-а... Дийдорига...»

Кейин бирдан жим бўлиб қолди. Алланимадан кўрққандай, секин бошимни кўтариб қардим. Ҳалиманинг катта-катта, қоп-қора кўзлари жиққа ёш эди.

Нима қилишимни билмай, довдираб қолдим.

— Йиғлама, — дедим ялиниб, — йиғламаги-ин...

— Ҳалима қўлидаги «ажина кавуш»ни улоқтириб юборди-да, қизил чит кўйлагининг этагини қайириб, кўз ёшини артди.

* * *

Арпага ўроқ тушди. Энди бизнинг ҳам ишимиз кўпайиб қолганди, ҳар куни машоққа борардик. Ўша куни пешингача иккаламиз бир тўрвадан машоқ тердик. Ўроқчилар нариги адирга ўтиб кетишган, қизиб ётган арпазорларни қуёш ёндирарди.

— Юр, сойдан сув ичиб келамиз, — дедим тўрвачамни орқалаб.

— Полизга бориб қовун емаймизми?

— Даданг бермайди-да, — дедим ишонмай.

— Беради, беради, — Ҳалима қўлимдан ушлади. Чопиб кетдик. Соё бўйидан юриб, полиз ёнига етиб борганимизда тўхтаб қолдим.

— Қўрқма! — Ҳалима судрагудай бўлиб полиз ичига етаклаб кирди. Пушталар устида юмалаб ётган катта-катта қовун-тарвузларни кўриб кўзим ўйнарди. Лекин чайла ёнига яқин борганда кўрқа-писа яна тўхтадим. Чайла соёсида Ҳаким сассиқ билан табелчи Тўлаш ака чордана куриб ўтирганча коса қилинган босволдини ейишарди.

— Дада, бизгаям қовун берасизми? — Ҳалима аввал менга, кейин дадасига қараб қўйди.

Ҳаким сассиқ қизариб кетган кўзларини менга қадаган эди, ургани эсимга тушиб кетди. Ўшанда ҳам кўзлари шунақа қип-қизил эди.

Тўлаш ака оғзини катта очиб, хохолаб қула бошлади. Яккам-дуккам тишлари орасида ярим чайналган оппоқ босволди бўлаги кўринди.

— Сассиқ! — деди у оғзини тўлдириб. Тўйни бошлайверсанг ҳам бўларкан. Мана қуёв болаям тайёр. Кейин яна хохолаб қулди.

Ҳаким сассиқ лабининг бир чеккаси билан илжайиб қўйди. Ҳайрон бўлиб, Ҳалимага қарашим. У ҳам кўзлари жавдираб, атрофга аланглар, ҳов ўшанда — Меливойдан сўкиш эшитганда қандоқ қилган бўлса, ҳозир ҳам ўшандай калишининг учи билан ер чизарди. Тўсатдан миямга бир нима урилгандай бўлди. Улар мен билмайдиган, ёмон бир нарса тўғрисида гапиришаётганини тушуниб қолдим. Секин бурилдим, йиғлаганча чопиб кетдим. Катта-кичик қовунларини босиб, пушталар устидан сакраб-сакраб борарканман, елкамдан оғир бир нарса босиб тушаётганини анчадан кейин билдим: бошоқ тўла халтам экан. Уни ҳам улоқтирдиму соё бўйига югурдим.

...Ақлимни таниганимдан кейин билсам, мен ширин, жуда ширин, беғубор туш кўраётган эканману, Тўлаш бир оғиз гапи билан устимдан муздай совуқ сув қуйиб уйғотиб юборган экан. Мен бўлсам мана шу туш узоқ, жуда узоқ давом этишини хоҳлардим. Ўша-ўша Ҳалимани бошқа кўрмадим, нимагадир кўришни хоҳламадим ҳам. Кейин эшитсам, шаҳарга — ойисининг ёнига кетиб қолибди.

Кеча «Панорама» кинотеатри ёнида Ҳалимани кўриб қолдим. Агар ўзи чақирмаса, танимасдим. У йўлқадан болалар аравачасини етаклаб борарди. Қизиқ, Ҳалима мени қандай таниганига ҳайронман... Арғувон тагидаги скамейкада ўтириб гаплашдик. Ҳалима турмуш қурибди. Эри аспирант, ўзи врач экан.

— Бу — иккинчи ўғлим, — деди у аравачада уқлаб ётган ширингина чақалоқни кўрсатиб. Анчагача жим ўтирганимиздан кейин секин хўрсинди.

— Қандоқ яхши опа-ука эдик-а... Қаранг, ўн олти йил ўпиб кетибди. Мен уни сизлашни ҳам, сенлашни ҳам билолмай иккиланиб қолдим.

— Ҳалиям кўрга кўмилган картошкани яхши кўрасизми? — дедим анчадан кейин.

— Ҳалиям ёш боласиз-а, Анвар... — у кулди. Бу ўша — ўзимга таниш опаларча меҳрибон кулги эди.

Юрагимнинг бир бурчида соғинч туйғуси жўш уриб кетди. Рост-а, қандоқ опа-ука эдик-а!.. Тўлаш ака ўшанда нимагаям шунақа деди-я.

THE STARTLED DREAM

I was a boy with chipped teeth that were falling out. The meadow alongside the gully was our "big land". Every early morning my mother put half of a rye-bread and a piece of a boiled beetroot into the pocket of my velvet trousers and I used to start for "the big land" with our goat with no horn and no harm. We were all little children aside from that blue-eyed Melivoy whose voice was already breaking. The two big osier trees near the meadow were our pastime. As soon as spring came, boys always made whistles from new branches of the osier, and girls played chertal, and fastened bargak (2) on their temples under the shadow of the tree.

One day a newcomer joined us, a girl whose name was Halima. I got to know before anyone that she'd come to our village. Because I overheard what my mother said to my dad the night before:

"Hakim stinky (3) is said to have found and brought his daughter from

the city as she was living with his wife. "You put me to shame ... Well, you can do whatever you want with your newly found other half, but give my daughter back to me" he'd said to his wife and torn her to pieces."

Hakim stinky had returned from the war last year and worked as a brigadier at the gourd field. I used to hate the sight of him. Once when I suddenly let my goat in his field, he slapped me twice. Even though I didn't understand anything in what my mother said, I wanted to see Hakim stinky's daughter too much. And I saw the next day.

* * *

I still remember that the thunder boomed and it rained in buckets that morning. As usual, having bundled the goat's udders with a little bag, (or else its kid might suck its milk) my mother held its tether out to me.

"Feed it well."

The weather changed and the sun was shining until I got to the "big land." I set my calf free, let it walk among the cows and I came up to the boys who sat clustering under the shadow of the osier. Melivoy, dressed in the bekasam robe of his father who had died in the war, was lying in the middle and boys were sitting barefoot around him and cackling loudly for some reasons.

"Did you see Hakim stinky's daughter, Anvar?" he asked me in a breaking voice. "She turned out to be as a beanpole as his father is," he said again pointing to her with a stick of oozier. All the boys burst out laughing again with one accord. Then I saw the lean girl who was standing behind the osier. Her big eyes were wistful and she was grinding the grass under her feet with the toecap of her galosh.

We were all afraid of Melivoy, he didn't take pity on anyone, but it hurt me that he was teasing that girl. "What does it have to do with you if she is a beanpole?" I squeaked with a dreadful temper. Halima turned to look at me, but said nothing. Melivoy gulped for a moment and pointed in the direction of the gully with the tip of his stick: "Go and lead my bull back! Now it's your turn." He would always make us lead his bull back, but this time I felt like being stubborn somehow: "Go and do it yourself!" I said.

"Are you sure?" Melivoy's blue eyes glinted by a sudden. He leapt to his feet, and raised his stick up. I closed my eyes frighteningly, knowing that he would bash on my shoulders with that stick, but he didn't. When I opened my eyes I saw that Halima was breaking the stick propping it against her thin knee.

"Daughter of a bitch!" Melivoy said looking at her. I understood that it was an impolite word when Halima was about to cry, her lips were twitching.

“It’s you who is a child of a bitch!” I blustered, “Blue-eyed, blue crow!”

I had to look after my goat on the other side of the gully for Melivoy bade me to, that day.

* * *

I wanted to go back to the boys but I was afraid of “the blue crow”. Anyway I was glad only because Halima was also with me together to graze her pied cow. But then I got to know that she was three years older than me. All day long we were playing chillak5, and she could leave any boy standing at this game. In summer we acquired one more habit, every noon making a fire, we used to eat potatoes buried and cooked in brand. If one day she brought potatoes from her home, the next day I did. It was sorely pleasant for us to peel quickly and eat hot potatoes, charred in the brand although our mouths got burnt slightly.

I’ll never forget. One day having had that delicious meal for dinner, I flopped down flat on my back on the grass. Clouds, as white as snow, were sailing gently in one edge of the fathomless sky; somewhere a little lark was floundering and singing cheerfully... Halima sat by me, and she was knitting witch-made galosh6 from the weeds, I was astonished seeing the way that she moved her long fingers so nimbly. A while after she began singing a song in a low and croon voice:

“White stones, would you please open,

Let me see my mother, now,

And be sated with seeing her somehow.”

I heard how she heaved a sigh, in less than no time she repeated again:

“Let me see my dear mother,

Let me be sated with...”

By chance she became quiet. Afraid of something, I raised my head up to look. Halima’s big dark eyes were full of tears. I was taken aback and didn’t know what to do.

“Don’t cry,” I begged, “Please don’t cry.”

Halima hurled away the witch-made galosh, then she folded the hem of her print dress and dabbed her tears with that.

* * *

It was ripe time to reap the barley. Now we had much more work than usual, everyday we were busy with gleaning. That day we gleaned the barley into the same sack. Those who were reaping with sickles had already been working in the next hill. The sun was beating down on the barley fields.

“Let’s go and drink water from the gully.” I said and held my sack over my shoulder.

“What if we go to the gourd field and eat a melon?”

“Your father won’t give” I said and didn’t believe that he would.

“He will give, he will” she said holding my hand. We ran. But I stopped when we got to the gourd field, walking alongside the gully. “Don’t be afraid!” Halima said dragging me over into the gourd-field. My eyes lit up when I saw big, big, ball-shaped melons on the beds. Yet when we approached the hut, I stopped, frighteningly. Hakim stinky and Tulash accountant were sitting cross-legged and eating a melon that was cut in half.

“Daddy, give us a melon, will you?” Halima said at first looking at me, then at his father. Tulash began chortling with his mouth wide open. Half-chewed white morsel of melon could be seen through his gap-teeth. “Stinky,” he said, his mouth crammed with a piece of melon, “It’s high time you started a wedding, here’s the groom for you,” then he cackled again.

Hakim stinky gave a crooked smile. I boggled and looked at Halima. Her wistful eyes were darting around and she was again drawing on the ground with the toecap of her galosh as she did when Melivoy scolded her. Suddenly I felt as if something flashed through my mind. I grew to understand that they were talking about something bad which I didn’t know. I turned back slowly and ran away crying. While I was bouncing over the beds treading on big and little melons I barely noticed that something heavy was dropping down my shoulder. It was the sack full of barley. I chucked it away too, and scuttled off up to the gully.

When I started to know what’s what, I grew to realize that I was just sleeping, so all was like a pleasant and serene dream. But Tulash wake me up from that with a word or two that he said. Meanwhile I wanted this dream to last for a long, quite a long time. From that day forth I hadn’t seen Halima anymore, I didn’t even want to. However later I heard that she had gone to the town to live with her mother.

* * *

Yesterday I came across with Halima in front of the cinema-theatre “Panorama”. I wouldn’t have known that it was she if she hadn’t called me by herself. She was pushing a baby buggy along on the pavement. I wonder how come Halima could recognize me. We talked sitting on the bench under the Judas-tree. Halima said that she was already married. She was working as a doctor, and her husband was a researcher. “It’s my second son,” she said showing the sweetie baby that was sleeping in the baby buggy. After a long silence she heaved a sigh. “How good brother and sister we were! Look! Sixteen years have already passed.”

I didn't know how to address her. "Do you still love potatoes that have been charred in the brand?" I said after a long pause.

"Anvar, you're still like a little child, aren't you?" she said and laughed. It was a kind and quite familiar peal of my sister. Some kind of a feeling like yearning flashed in my heart. It's true, how good brother and sister we were! It's a pity that Tulash said like that at that time

Glossary

1. **Cherta.** A type of game in which, a person who loses, will be flicked on the forehead.
2. **Bargak.** A type of decoration which is fastened on the temple.
3. **Stinky.** In the past, people used to be called with variety of nick-names so that they could be distinguished from their namesakes.
4. **Bekasam.** A type of national cloth
5. **Chillak.** It's a kind of game that's played, using two sticks. One of them should be shorter, and the one much longer.
6. **Witch-made galosh.** (Ajina kavush) Little girls used to make it for fun and from the weeds.

ДЕҲҚОННИНГ БИР КУНИ

Муяссар тонг саҳарда уйғониб кетади-ю, Алижоннинг бир текис чуқур-чуқур нафас олишига қулоқ солиб, жимгина ётади. «Қачон қайтганини билмабман ҳам», деб ўйлади у сатин кўрпадан бошини чиқариб. Девордаги осма соат беш марта занг уради. Унинг титроқ садолари уйнинг шифтига, зардеворлар, кирпечлар осилган деворларга юмшоққина урилиб, сингиб кетади. Уй ичи яна жимжит бўлиб қолади. Соат капгири сукунат қўйнида гоҳ секин, гоҳ қаттиқроқ чиқиллаётгандай бўлади. Ой деразадан ўйчан мўралади.

Муяссар эрининг елкасидан қучгиси келади-ю, ўйлаб қолади. «Чарчаган, дам олсин...».

У ўрнидан оҳиста сирғалиб чиқади. Сандиқ устида ётган нимчасини кийиб олади-да, яна эрининг тепасига келади, узоқ қараб қолади. Алижоннинг кенг, таранг пешонасига майда тер тепчиб чиқибди. «Бечорагинам, — деб ўйлади Муяссар ундан кўз узмай, — бирам толиқибдики, дўпписини ҳам олиб қўймабди».

У эрининг пешонасини кафти билан авайлаб артади. Кейин айвонга чиқади.

Айвон лабига тегиб турган гултожихўрозлар бошида, ҳовли этагида уйиб қўйилган ғўзапоялар устида шабнам ялтирайди. Юм-юмалоқ тўлин ой кишлоқни ўзининг нурли йўрагига ўраб, уйқуга, ширин тонг уйқусига чорлайди, унда-мунда юлдузлар мудрайди. Аммо кишлоқ аллақачон уйғонган. Ҳар қайси ҳовлининг бурчагида туннинг бахмал пардасини парчалаб ўт ялтирайди: одамлар тандирларига олов ёқишган.

Муяссар ҳам айвондан чаққон сакраб тушади-ю, самоварга ўт ташлайди. Кейин ўчоқбошидан супрани олиб келиб, чўккалаб ўтирганча ҳамир қоради. Тоғорани дастурхон билан ўраб-чирмаб ҳовли бурчагидаги уйилиб ётган ғўзапоялар олдига боради. Бир кучоқ ғўзапоя олаётганида, қўлларини ҳавода муаллақ тутганча тўхтаб қолади. Дастак деворнинг орқасидаги, қўшни ҳовлидаги бир туп ўрикнинг дув тўкила бошлаган япроқдаги тонг шамолида оҳиста пирпирайди. Муяссарнинг яқингина ўтмишини, кечаги кунларини ёдига солгандай шивирлайди. Бир пайтлар мана шу ўрик шохига арқон илиб ариғчоқ учарди. Шу ўрикнинг ғўрасини биринчи бўлиб ўзи ерди.

Энди у шўх қизалоқ эмас, келин. Девор-дармиён қўшнисига тушган. Дадаси ҳам уларга — Муяссар билан Алижонга ўз қўли билан фотиҳа берган. «Алижон яхши йигит, ўзимизнинг синашга бола. Етим ўсган. Бир-бирига кўнгил қўйибди, бўлди-да!» деган.

Муяссар тўй куни дадаси канчалик узундан-узун дуо қилганини эслаб жилмайиб қўяди-ю, ғўзапояни олиб тез-тез юриб кетади. Куп-куруқ ғўзапоя гуп этиб ёнади, юзига олов тафти уради.

У энди уй томонга юрганида бузоқ маърайди. Сигир ҳам Муяссарнинг қадам товушларидан уйғонгандай аста мўъраб қўяди.

Муяссар айвон лабидаги каттакон сирли челақни кўтариб, ҳашак иси анқиб турган офилхонага киради. Нимқоронғи бурчакда ётган сигир пишиллаб ўрнидан туради.

«Таги ҳўл бўлибди, тозалаш керак», деб ўйлайди у. Кейин сигирнинг елинини ҳўлланган эски сочиқ билан тозалаб артади-да, чўққайиб ўтирганча соға бошлайди. Илиқ сут томчилари челаққа шовиллаб тушиб, кўпириб кетади, билакларига сачрайди.

Челақ тўлганидан кейин қозик атрофида айланиб, онасига талпинаётган бузоқчанинг арқонини ечиб юборади. Бузоқ шодон диконглаб сигир тагига кириб кетади.

Муяссар болаликдан одат бўлиб қолган чаққонлик билан нон ясайди. Бир сават қилиб тандир олдига кўтариб боради, битта-биттадан ёпа бошлайди. Охириги нонни ёпади-ю, енгил нафас олади.

— Муяс!..

Уэрининг овозини эшитиб, чаққон бурилиб қарайди. Беқасам тўни-ни елкасига ташлаб олган Алижон айвон лабида унга қараб турибди.

— Келинг! — дейди Муяссар обдастага сув қуя туриб.

— Алижон айвондан илдам тушиб, гулзор лабига келади. Муяссарга тикилиб жилмаяди.

— Пунктда навбат кутиш ёмон-да, Муяс... Ҳар кеча юзталаб машина қаторлашиб кетади. Қўйиб берса тонг отгунча тураверасан киши, — дейди секингина. Муяссар унинг кеча уйга барвақт қайтолмагани учун уэр сўраётганини тушунади.

Эрининг бақувват елкасидан ушлаб жилмаяди,...

— Энгашинг.

Алижон ҳам унинг аразламаганини пайқайди-ю, бошини куйи солади.

— Мана, бошим сизники, - дейди кулиб.

Муяссар сув қуя бошлайди. Алижон муздай сувдан сесканиб, пишқира-пишқира ювинади.

— Ювинаётганингизда ҳар доим отга ўхшаб пишқирасиз-а... Каранг, кўйлагимни жиққа сув қилиб юбордингиз, - дейди Муяссар ҳўл бўлган этакларини кўрсатиб.

Алижон бошини кўтариб астойдил ялинади:

— Ҳеч бўлмаса тойчоқ денг, Муяс.

Муяссар унинг ёш болалардай бошини бир ёнга ташлаб туришига қараб, кулиб юборади.

Шу ондаёқ тандирдаги нон эсига тушиб, югуради. Қўллари қуя-қуя бир сават нон узиб олади. Тонг ёришади, тун қуши қоп-қора қанотларини йиғиб, қишлоқ устидан олисларга учиб кетади-да, чор-атроф одатдаги қий-чувга тўлиб-тошади.

Икковлари шоша-пиша ширчой ичишади. Алижон тушлик овқатини белбоғига тугадию машинасининг ёнига кетади. Дарвозахона томондан моторнинг гулдираган овози эшитилади. Кабина эшиклари қарсиллаб ёпилади.

Муяссар уйни наридан-бери йиғиштиради-да, икки четида қатор-қатор тераклар шовиллаб турган тошлоқ йулдан далага томон юриб кетади. Узоқда, тоғ ортидан куёш бош кутаради. Қишлоқ сув қуйгандай жимиб қолади. Пахтазор катта-кичик ҳаммани, мактаб болаларигача домига тортган.

Муяссар этакни белига боғлаб олганча пайкалга шўнғийди. Пахталар ёноғига илинган қиров секин-секин шудрингга айланади.

У эсини таниганидан бери ўрганиб кетган ишhini тагин қайтадан бошлайди. Зум угмай этак тўлиб-тошади. Бора-бора бели зирқиллаб оғрий бошлайди. Зах юмшоқ эгат ичига этакни ағдаради-ю, яна қайта боғлайди. Кўз ўнгидан ўнлаб, юзлаб, минглаб чаноқлар бирма-бир ўтади. Гоҳо шундай боши айланиб кетадики, кўзини юмса, тасаввурда оппоқ чаноқлардан бошқа ҳеч нарса кўринмай қолади. Аммо у тўхтамайди. Энгашиб олдинга интилаверади.

Пешинга яқин кун қиздира бошлайди. Муяссар нимчасини ечиб ташлаб, тагин гўзалар орасига шўнғийди.

Шу пайт мулоийм куз куёшида эриган юмшоққина ҳавони титратиб, табелчи Шоқосим аканинг таниш овози янграйди.

— Ҳой, ҳо-ой, қизларов, овқатга-е-е!

Унинг товуши пахтазор устида анчагача элас-элас садо бериб туради. Муяссар терган пахталарини уйиб этакка босади, юкнинг оғирлигиданми, ўйга толибми, бошини қўйи солганча хирмонга чиқиб боради.

Шоқосим ака этакни темир тарозига қўйиб, тошни сураркан, салқи қовоқларини липиллатиб Муяссарга қараб қўяди. Бурушиқ юзи оқариб кетгандай бўлади:

— Қирқ саккиз кило... Мазангиз йўқ-ку, келин!

Муяссар унинг нимага шаъма қилаётганини билиб гижинди. «Ўйин — кулгудан бўшамай қолдинг», демоқчи-да!

У бир гап билан қайириб ташлагиси келади-ю, ёшини ҳурмат қилиб, ўзини тийиб қолади. «Майли, - деб ўйлайди пахтани хирмонга ағдара туриб. — Бу одамнинг одати шу. Юз йил асал билин боқсангиз ҳам оғзидан ширин гап чиқмайди».

Қизлар каттақон қайрағоч соясида, ҳовуз лабида ўтириб, тушлик қилишади. Қайрағоч шоҳларида — юз—юзлаб чумчуқлар чирқиллайди. Қаёқдандир шамол келиб, ҳовуз юзидаги майда—майда жилолар елкасига миниб олади.

Орқа томондан машина сигнали эшитилади.

— Раис бува келаяптилар! — дейди қайсидир қиз қўнғироқдай овози билан.

Баланд бўйли, қотма, аммо тетик раис очиқ чеҳра билан қайқиради:

Ҳорманлар, қизлар!

Қизлар кувноқ саломлашишади.

Баракалла, қизлар! Яшанлар. План тўлган кунни ҳаммангизни Тошкентга томошага олиб бораман.

— Нақ Тошкентнинг ўзигами? — дейди оркароқда ўтирган кизлардан бири ишонқирамай.

— Нақ Тошкентнинг ўзига!

— Кинога ҳам тушамизми?

Раис бегараз қаҳқаҳа уради:

— Театрга ҳам тушамиз-да!

Раис яхши одам. Чиндан ҳам ҳар йили кизларни бир-икки марта шаҳарга — театрға олиб боради.

— Қани, — дейди у ҳаммага бир-бир қараб. — Ким энг яхши ишласа, ўшани келин қиламан. Хоҳласа, механизаторлар курсига жўнатаман.

Ҳовузда қосасини юваётган қоп-қора киз — Эътибор елкаси оша ўгирилиб қараб, бижир-бижир қилиб гапириб ташлайди:

— Ўзи битта ўглингиз бор, қайси биримизни келин қиласиз. Уям бўлса шаҳарда ўқийди. Ким билсин, ҳали бола-чақасини бошлаб келадими. Ҳамма қаҳ-қаҳ уриб кулади, раис ҳам...

...Яна ўша пайкаллар, чаноқлар, пахталар... Муяссар яна ишга шўнғиб кетади... Қўллари яна чаноқлар устида ўйнайди.

Оқшом шафақи юзига кул тортганида пайкалдан чиқишади. Муяссар уйга қайтишдан олдин канал бўйига келади: сигирга ўт юлиш керак. Муяссарнинг ёнгинасида чигиртка нағмасини бошлайди. Оромли сукунатни чуқурлаштириб, узоқ тинимсиз чириллайди. Сув юзида балиқ сакрайди. Чўлп этган овоз эшитиладию, яна сукунат қуйилиб келади. Аллақаякдан учиб келган баликчи куш сувга шўнғийди. Шу ондаёқ қийқириб ҳавога кўтарилади. Муяссар қирғоқда ўсиб ётган барра майсаларни шарт-шурт юлишга тушади. Алланечук қадрдон, маст қилувчи кўкатлар исидан боши айланиб кетади. Сув юзи қоп-қорайиб қолади. Энг аввал уйғонган шошқалоқ бир юлдузча канал сувига шўнғийди. Гоҳ жилоларда кўмилиб кетади, гоҳ яна қайтиб чиқади.

Орқа томондан мотоциклнинг гуриллаган товуши эшитилади. Мотоцикл сукунатни тилка-пора килиб яқинлашади-да, унинг ёнгинасида таққа тўхтайди.

— Яна колхознинг ўтини юляпсанми?

Муяссар қайрилиб қарамасданоқ танийди.

Бошини кўтариб қарайди. Табелчи мотоциклнинг эгаридан тушгиси келмай, бир оёқда ерга тиралиб турган бўлади. Муяссар унинг юзини фира-шира қоронғида аниқ кўрмаса ҳам, ковоқлари пир-пир учиб турганини пайқайди.

Бу одам шундай ўзи: отдан тушса ҳам, эгардан тушгиси келмайди. Бир вақтлар раис бўлган эди. Унда Муяссар қизалоқ эди. Бир кунни сигири пахтазорга тушиб кетгани учун Қоровой тақачининг тўққиз яшар ўғлини ўлар ҳолатда дўппослаган.

Шоқосим ака ҳалиям ўша кунларини қўмсайди. Менга одамларнинг димоқ-фироғи эмас, пахта керак дейди. Муяссар бу сафар ҳам олишиб ўтирмай, қишлоққа қайтади.

У энди ўчоққа олов ёққанида эшиқдан ола сигир мўраб кириб келади. Муяссар гулларни пайҳон қилиб ташламасин, деб дарров арқонлайди. Каттакон сирли челақ яна илиқ, серкўпик сугга тўлади.

Муяссар бузоқчани ечиб юборади.

Таом пишгандан кейингина Муяссар қаттиқ толиққанини сезади. Уч-тўрт жазни оғзига солади-ю, товоқни беркитиб қўяди. «Ҳали Алижон акам келса, биргалашиб овқатланамиз».

Лекин Алижон ҳали-бери қайтмаслигини ўзи ҳам билади. Терим кунлари шофёрлар кеча-кундузнинг фарқига бормай қолишади.

Гузар томондан баланд музика овози янграйди. «Клубда кино бўляпти, — деб ўйлайди Муяссар жимгина кулоқ солиб. — Қанақа кино экан?»

У уйига кириб, электр ёқади. Бурчақдаги тошойнага ўзини солади. Қора қош, қора кўз, мўъжазгина қиз унга қараб жилмайиб туради. Бирдан унинг шўхлиги тутиб кетадию ўзининг аксини ўзи масхара қила бошлайди. Тилининг учини чиқариб, бошини ликиллатиб қўяди. Кейин майин жилмайиб, ойна тоқчасидаги упани олади. Упага ботирилган пахтаги юзига яқинлаштириши билан тўхтаб қолади.

«Яна қўлим ёрилибди», гўзапоя тирнаб ташлаган қўлларига қарайди. Тагин жилмайиб қуяди. Мана шу нозик чайир бармоқлари, тикмачокдай қўллари билан аллақачон ўзига ҳайкал битгулик ишлар қилиб қўйганлиги, бугун ҳам ўша ҳайкалга яна жило бергани унинг хаёлига ҳам келмайди.

Кейин ухлаб қолишдан чўчиб, ечинмасдан ўрнига чўзилади, кута бошлайди. Ана, кўчадан машина овози келди. Муяссар илдам қақдини ростлаб ўтириб олади. Мотор товуши кучая-кучая яқинлашади-да, яна секин-секин узоқлашиб кетади. «Йўқ, Алижон акам эмас, идора томонга ўтиб кетди-ку».

У шифтга тикилиб узоқ ётади. Лекин энди мотор овози келмайди. Итлар ақилламайди. Бедана ҳам сайрамайди.

Қишлоқни уйқунинг сукунат тўлқинлари ўз бағрига олади. Факат қаердадир — узоқда алла эшитилади. Қайсидир она ўз кичкинтойининг бошида қўшиқ айтапти.

Муяссар ширин жилмайиб қўяди. Мана, бир йилдан кейинми, икки йилдан кейинми ўзи ҳам она бўлади. Ўшанда ўзи ҳам шунақа сокин кечаларга жон киритиб алла айтади. Бир вақтлар аяси кенжа укасига алла айтаётганида қулоқ солиб ўрганиб олган.

Уйқу унинг ҳам киприкларини алдаб-алдаб қовуштириб кетади. Муяссар толиққан оёқ-қўлларини ёзган-ча, донг қотиб ухлаб қолади.

У туш куради. Тушида жажжигина қизалоқ эмиш. Ўрикнинг шохига арқон ташлаб арғимчоқ ўчаётганмиш. Ўрик қийғос гуллаганмиш. Арғимчоқ ҳар силкинганида унинг бошидан бир дунё гул сочилармиш.

Арғимчоқ борган сайин қаттиқроқ лопиллармиш. У борган сайин баландга, осмон-фалакка чиқиб тушармиш. Ер ҳам, осмон ҳам, арғимчоқнинг арқони ҳам — ҳаммаёқ гул эмиш. Оқиш пуштигул эмиш. У хандон уриб, қийқириб-қийқириб кулармиш. Кўзларидан ёш чиқиб кетармиш...

У туш кўради. Аммо ой фонусининг пилигини пасайтира бошлайди. Кунчиқартомонда осмон сутдай оқиш ранга киради. Янги кун бошланади.

A DAY OF THE PEASANT

At the crack of dawn Muyassar jerked awake and lying still, she listened how smoothly and deeply Alijon was breathing. «I couldn't even notice when he came back» she thought, sticking her head out of the satin quilt. The clock on the wall five times sounded the alarm. Its trembling sound echoed slightly drifting to the ceiling, to the carpet-fitted brick walls, and then died out again. Silence descended inside the house. The hour-hands of the clock seemed to be moving and ticking sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly. The moon was looking pensively through the window. Muyassar wanted to put her arms around her husband's shoulders, yet hesitated: «He's tired, let him have a rest...»

She got up gently sliding through the quilt, put on her sleeveless blouse that was on the chest and again approaching his husband, stared at him for a long time. Little beads of sweat dripped and cropped out on his wide and stretched forehead. «My poor» she thought without tearing her eyes away from him. «He got so tired that even forgot to take off his skull-cap.»

Carefully she wiped his forehead with her palm then went out to the terrace. Drops of dew were glimmering on the cockscombs growing down the doorstep of the terrace and on the cotton-stalks stacked up on an edge of the yard. The ball-shaped full-moon swaddled the village in its beaming diaper as if it was a baby wanting to sleep again, but although it was getting light, the stars were flickering at times. But the village had already awoken. Chasing off the darkness, sparks began to blaze up in every house of the village as people set fire under their earthen stoves.

Muyassar leapt off the terrace quickly, put some water on to boil in samovar. Then bringing the supra³ that was near the hearth-room, she squatted down and kneaded dough on it. She muffled it with a cloth and took it to the corner where cotton-stalks were stacked up. While lifting a bale of cotton-stalks she stood on her feet with her hands hovered up in the air. A nice morning breeze fluttered the leaves that were falling from an apricot tree in the neighbors' yard behind the low wall. Leaves rustled as if they wanted to remind Muyassar of her days in the recent past. Once she used to swing hanging a rope on that apricot tree and used to come first to eat its unripened fruits (2).

She wasn't that mischievous girl any more. She was a married woman who had become a bride to her own neighbor. Her father gave his blessings both to Muyassar and Alijon. He had said before: «Alijon's a good man our hardened fellow, and lived as an orphan. They fell in love with each other and that's enough.»

Muyassar gave a smile remembering how much her father prayed for her on her wedding day, then she took a bale of cotton-stalks and ran quickly. Dry cotton-stalks burnt easily, their heat making her face flush a bit.

When she walked towards the house, a calf lowed and so did a cow as if it had wakened up on hearing her treads.

Muyassar holding the big enamel bucket that was in the terrace went into the barn that smelled with hay. The cow lying in a dark corner puffed and rose on its feet.

«The floor's drenched and needs to be mucked out» she said to herself. Squatting down she mopped cow's udders with a soaked old napkin and started milking. Warm drops of milk were trickling down into the bucket rumbling, foaming and splashing at her wrists. When the bucket filled with milk she untied the rope of the calf that was trotting around a stake wanting to reach out to its mother. As soon as it was set free it dashed from joy and thrust itself to its mother.

Carrying a basket of bread that she made rolling out of the dough as nimbly as she took to since her childhood, she went up to the earthen stove, and baked them one by one. At last she finished and got her breath back.

«Muyas.» On hearing her husband's voice she turned back to look. Alijon was gazing at her from the doorstep of the terrace, his bekasam⁴ robe, thrown on his shoulders.

«Do come here» beckoned Muyassar, pouring water from a jug. Quickly stepping down the stairs, he came to the flower garden, kept looking at her with a smile

«It's so hard to wait for one's turn at the storage centre, Muyas.. Every evening it's crammed with hundreds of cars and carts row after row. One can even wait until dawn» he said in a low voice. Muyassar guessed that he was going to apologize for not coming home earlier the day before.

She cracked a smile grasping his strong shoulders...

«Bow down». Alijon hunched his head noticing that she wasn't sulking.

«Here you are, my head's at your disposal he said laughing. As soon as Muyassar began to pour water Alijon flinched for it was quite cold, then he washed up snuffling repeatedly.

«While washing up you always snuffle like a horse, don't you? Look you have soaked my dress» she said showing her drenched hem. Alijon pestered artlessly raising his head:

«Would you please say a little horse at least?» Muyassar burst out laughing, seeing the way that he sank his head to one side like a baby.

At that very moment she ran immediately remembering the breads in the earthen stove. She barely took them out, before getting her hands burnt slightly. The sun was rising, the bird of darkness which shaded the village with its black wings, had already fled away, so as usual it became noisy with hubbub of people.

Both Muyassar and Alijon hastily drank shirchoy⁵. Having wrapped his dinner in his waist-band⁶, Alijon went to his car. An engine of the car roared. And doors of the cab slammed. Muyassar tidied up the house on the spur of the moment, then started for the cotton-field walking over cobbled roads bordered with rows of rustling poplars on both sides. In the far distance the sun had risen behind the mountains. The village was almost absorbed in deathly hush; both young and old people were busy in the cotton-fields.

Muyassar, tying up the sack around her waist bowed down the furrow. Hoarfrost, appeared on the cotton-bolls, was turning into dew-drops in dribs and drabs. She started to do what was second nature to her since the time she began to know what's what. In no time at all, the sack overflowed with cotton. But the pain in her back was getting stronger and stronger. She unloaded the cotton on a damp and soft furrow and retied the sack around her waist. Thousands of cotton bolls were running through her head. She felt so dizzy as if she could see nothing but white bolls of cotton when she closed her eyes. Regardless

that she didn't stop, but curled up and went ahead. Towards the midday it became quite hot; Muyassar took off her sleeveless blouse then bowed down the furrow again.

By chance the accountant Shokosim's familiar voice came, and it seemed as if even the fresh air of celestial autumn trembled from his voice.

«Hey, you girls, let's have dinner» his voice echoed slightly across the cotton-field. Muyassar stacked all the cotton that she had picked, placing it into the sack, she walked towards the harvest store hunching her head either because the sack was heavy or she was lost in thought.

Shokosim put the basket on a scale and while adjusting the weight, stole a glance towards Muyassar. His feeble eyes were twitching and his wrinkled face seemed to grow pale.

«Forty-eight kilos... You're not your usual self.»

Muyassar felt annoyed realizing what he hinted at. He meant that she was messing around. She wanted to make him eat his words, but she bit back, «Well» she thought unloading the basket filled with cotton. It's his habit, no one ever heard him say something pleasant.

The girls had their dinner sitting alongside the pond under the shadow of an enormous elm-tree. Hundreds of sparrows were chirping on branches, and the wind blew spreading the ripples and stirring up the water of the pond.

The sound of an engine could be heard from behind. «The chief is coming» said one of the girls who had a nice voice.

Tall, chiseled and spry chief man yelled cordially: «Keep up this pace girls». The girls greeted him cheerfully.

«Well-done, girls, very well. The day when our plans are fulfilled I'll take all of you to Tashkent to see the sights.»

«Straight to Tashkent?» asked one of the girls who sat behind, seemingly to have a doubt.

«Straight to Tashkent.»

«Shall we go to cinema as well?»

The chief roared transparently with laughter. «We'll go to theatre as well.»

The chief was a good man, before he really used to take those or other girls to the city once or twice a year. «Well» he said looking at all of them one by one. «The one who will do her best to work well, she'll be my daughter-in-law, besides I'll take her to study a course of mechanics if she likes.

E'tibor, a dark faced girl who was washing her bowl in the water of the pond chattered back to him.

«You have the only son and which of us are you going to marry to him? Anyway he studies in the town. God knows whether he returns alone or with his kiddies.» Everyone cackled after this, so did the chief. Again those furrows, bolls, cottons... Muyassar was again up to her eyes in work. Quickly

and nimbly her hands moved over the bolls. People went out of the field when the sun went down the sky. Before going back to home she came to the stream. She had to pick some grass for her cow. A grasshopper began to chirp next to her, it chirped incessantly for a long time accompanying the restful silence of the evening. A fish flopped down over the water, and then disappeared. A tern dived into and out of the water at the same time and flew away taking to the air. At the bank of the stream Muyassar fell into picking grass briskly. Her head whirled from the heady and somehow, usual scent of the grass. The night shaded the surface of the water. The star which appeared first in the sky, was mirrored in water, sometimes it merged with other stars and could sometimes be visible.

A motorcycle approached her rattling and piercing the silence with its noisy movement, and came to rest behind her.

«Again are you picking the grass without asking?»

Muyassar recognized him even though she didn't turn to look. It was Shokosim. Then she looked up at him. The accountant didn't want to dismount his motorcycle, instead he propped himself up bracing his foot against the ground. She felt that his eyes were twitching repeatedly although she couldn't see him clearly in a dim darkness. He had been a chief man before. He was a man as stubborn as a mule. One day he almost thrashed to death Koravoy, a furrier's nine-year old son, as he had by chance let his cow into the cotton-field. Muyassar was a little girl at that time.

Shokosim still missed those days. He used to say that he needed only cotton not pride of people. As usual she didn't bother herself arguing with him and preferred going back to the village. No sooner she set fire to the hearth than did a pied cow come in through the gate lowing. She tethered it with a rope so that it wouldn't trample the flowers down. Again that big, enamel bucket filled with fresh, foaming milk and after that she set the calf free.

Only after she finished cooking the meal, did she feel that she was all in. She just tasted three or four morsels of the food and closed it with a lid and thought: «When Alijon comes we'll have supper together.»

However she knew that he wouldn't return soon. At the season of cotton picking all the drivers were rushed off their feet, no matter whether it was morning or night. It was audible that music was playing in the guzar (7). «A film's going on in the club» she thought listening to it quietly. «I wonder what film it is.»

She entered the house, turned on the lights then looked at the mirror in the corner. An alluring girl with dark eyes and brows stood there smiling. Suddenly she felt like playing and jeered at herself showing the tip of her tongue and wagging her head. A pretty smile crept across her mouth and she took a powder from the rack of the mirror. When she started using it, she stopped, holding the

cotton dipped in powder. «My hands got chapped» she said looking at her hands that were scratched from the cotton-stalks. She smiled again. She didn't even know that she was worth her weight in gold from what those delicate, sinewy fingers and plump hands had done and yet she didn't know that today she had become worthy even much more of that gold.

Muyassar, afraid of falling asleep merely lay on her bed, without changing her clothes. She was waiting. At last a car rattled outside and she sat up straight. The car seemed to approach at first but then moved away.

«No, that's not Alijon, this car's been driven away towards the community-office», she was fixing her eyes on the ceiling. No more could she hear sounds of the roaring engine. Neither dogs barked nor did a quail warble outside. The village was slumbering, clasped in the arms of silence. However from somewhere, the sound of a lullaby came. Muyassar gave a pretty smile. A mother was singing a lullaby for her baby. Obviously a year or two later she would also give birth to a child and would sing a lullaby, devoting some magic to the night. She had learnt it when her mother sang it for Muyassar's little brother.

Desire to sleep was a cue to close her eyes. Muyassar nodded off, her weakened hands and feet, stretched out.

She dreamt. She dreamt that she was a little girl. She dreamt that she was swinging hanging from a rope on the apricot tree. The apricot tree had bloomed a lot. The harder the swing shook, the more flowers showered over her head. The more she swung, the higher she got. Both the sky and the ground even the rope, everything was in blossom, in white and pink blossoms. She was chuckling until tears welled up from her eyes...

She was dreaming, but the moon began to ebb its beams. A morning was dawning, chasing off the darkness. So a new day broke.

Glossary

1. **Satin.** A shining type of silk-like cotton cloth.
2. **Earthen stove.** A clay stove that's set fire underneath in which Uzbek woman bake bread and which's called «Tandir».
3. **Supra.** It's a type of cloth that Uzbek woman use for kneading dough on.
4. **Bekasam.** Stripy type of silk cloth and its weft is usually made of cotton.
5. **Shirchoy.** Boiled milk which contains tea, salt, butter and pepper in little amount.
6. **Waist-band.** (Belbog) A type of a kerchief-like waist-band for men in the shape of triangle.
7. **Guzar.** A kind of street where many people live together friendly, this name stemmed from the tadj language.

ДЕҲҚОННИНГ БИР ТУНИ

— Ё - ё - тишибди... Ўнг томонда Алижон. Чап томонда Муяссар... Ёнбошида тўрт яшар Дониёр... Уй ичи салқин, чўян печканинг қопқоғидан тушаётган нур деворга қизғиш чизик тортган. Ташқари ойдин шекилли, дераза ёруғ. Эски тошойна хира йилтирайди. Тошойна бурчагига қистириб қўйилган расм оқариб кўринади. Лекин Муяссар уни равшан тасаввур қилади: Валижоннинг сурати. Уни Ҳалимаҳон чизган. Бўёқ қалам билан... Ўлмасидан ярим йил илгари... Тошойна тоқчасидаги соат шошилинич чиқиллайди (Валижон Новгород томонлардан олиб келган батареяли соат)... Алижон ёнбошига ағдарилиб «ним» деб қўяди.

«Тағин бели оғрияпти», деб уйлайди Муяссар юраги ачишиб. Аммо эридан ҳол сўрашга ботинмайди: «Уйғониб кетмасин».

Етти йил бўлди. Туппа-тузук машинасини ҳайдаб юрган одам айни киши чилласи «пичан обкелмасак бўлмайди», деб тоққа кетди-ю, бир ҳафтада шу дардни орттириб келди. Бормаса бўлмасдиям-да... Ферманинг моллари очликдан бўкириб ётган бўлса... Колхознинг ўзи беда сепмаса...

Алижон аввалига сездирмади. Ичидан Муяссарнинг жун рўмолини белига боғлаб юраверди. Кейин ётиб қолди. Қимир этса жони чиқиб кетаётгандек инграйди. Ўшанда «ёрилди». Ҳашак олиб қайтишаётганда қор кўчиб, икки кеча тоғда қолиб кетишибди...

Уй ичи салқин... Чўян печка эшигидан тушаётган чизик ожиз милтирайди. Валижоннинг соати шошқин чикиллайди. Муяссарни хаёл олиб қочади. Валижон соғмикин... У ёқларда совуқ қаттиқ бўлармиш. Бугун «Время»да айтди. Москвада 28—33 даража... Новгород Москвага яқин эмиш. Валижон айтган.

Дониёр қув-қув йўталади. Оёқ-қўлини типирлатиб, устидаги кўрпани очиб ташлайди.

— Ая-а-а! — дейди йиғламсираб.

Муяссар тирсагига таяниб боланинг устига кўрпа тортали. Пешонасига кафтини босиб кўради. Хайрият, иситмаси йўқ.

— Ухла, болам, ухла, — дейди секин.

— Бунинг яна йўталапти-ку, онаси...

— Сизниям уйғотиб юбордими? — Муяссар эрига ачиниб қарайди. — Шўх-да, боя Салимангиз айтди: печкада қор эритиб, пишилатибди... Ухланг.

Муяссар эрининг уйқусини ўчириб юборишдан қўрқиб, қимир этмай ётади. Соат чиқиллайди. У тагин Валижонини ўйлайди. Мўмин бола. Отасига тортган. Ўрни битириб институтга кирмоқчи эди. Йиғламокдан бери бўлиб қайтиб келди. Домла айтганмиш, «Экономист бўлишни орзу қиладиган одам аввал фамилиясини тўғри ёзишни ўрганади, йигитча! Қишлоғингизга бориб пахта тераверинг!»

Муяссар куйди. Отаси кулди: «Биз томонларда пахта теришдан бошқани ўргатмайди, демадингми, ўғлим... Майли, парво қилма, ҳамма олим бўлиб кетса, подани ким боқади». Валижон пода боқмади-ю, тагин пахта терди.

Кейин... Бошқа гап чиқиб қолди. Янги раис (аввалги Раис бува қамалиб кетди, уч йил бўлди: пахтани қўшиб ёзган экан) мажлис қилди. Хўп ақлли гаплар айтди (Айтадиям-да, ёш, ўқимишли). «Кўриб турибсизлар, биз томонларда туғилиш кўпайиб кетяпти, — деди, — ҳар битта оиллага ўн беш сўтихдан томорқани қаердан топамиз, пахтага ер етмаяпти-ку»: Хуллас, аён булдики, Россиянинг ноқоратупроқ ерлари «ўгюрак» дехқонларни, иложи бўлса, ёшларни кутиб ётган эмиш.

Валижон тушмагур шу гапни эшитди-ю, патагига курт тушиб қолди. Муяссар «кетма», деб увалло ялинса ҳам кўнмади. «Тушунсангиз-чи, ая, ўз ҳолимга қўйинг ёш бола эмасман», деди.

Дадаси ёнини олди (ҳар қалай эркак-да). «Болани ўз ҳолига қўй, онаси, раис бир нимани билмаса гапирмайди», деди.

Валижон бир йилчадан кейин кеч кузақда тўсатдан келиб қолди. Отпускага. Қаранг, Муяссар ўғлини танимай қолса денг... Соқол қўйган... Бошида телпак... ғалатироқ бўлиб қолган. Камгапми-ей, одамовими-ей...

Икки марта синглисининг мозорига бориб келди-да, тагин йўлга отланиб қолди. Ўша куни дадасига дилини ёрди: «Хўроз ҳамма ерда бир хил қичқираркан, ҳеч ким бизни кучоқ очиб кутиб олгани йўқ. Ўзларининг туриш-турмуши яхши бўлса, қишлоғини ташлаб қочармиди, жонимга тегди, баҳорда қайтиб келаман», деди. Отаси гапини маъқуллади: «Тентираб юрма бегона юртларда! Келавер, очингдан ўлсанг мен кафил».

— Уйингда ис борми, онаси?

Хаёл суриб ётган Муяссар эри томон илкис ўгирилади.

— Ухламадингизми?.. Ўлсин... кўмирхонага кирсам, яккаш кукун қопти. — У бир зум жим ётади-да, сўрайди. — Поезд билетини эртага оласизми?

— Оламан, — Алижон негадир хўрсинди.

— Буям бир қоп ғалва шекилли. Аввал Москвага бориларкан, ундан Тбилисига, ундан Кутаисига...

— Майли, дадаси. Кўрмаган жойларни кўриб келасиз.

Жимиб қолишади. Янги раис Алижоннинг белидаги бодини даволаш учун Кавказ томондаги аллақайси «курорт»га путёвка берибди.

— Жонингиздан айлансин, — дейди Муяссар осойишта оҳангда. — Қийналиб юрасизми?

Тағин жимлик чўқади. Аллақаерда ит акиллайди.

— Кўмир олиш керак — деди Алижон бўғиқ овозда. — Қишнинг кети кўринмаяпти.

— Ўлсин, анқонинг уруғи-ку. — Кечаги воқеа дафъатан Муяссарнинг эсига тушади. — Магазинга қанд келган экан. Тумонат одам... Қарасам, Турсуной холаям очиритда турибди. «Эримда гуноҳ йўқ, мажбур қилишган», дейди. Адойи тамом бўпти.

— Раис бува инсофли эди, — Алижон тағин хўрсинади. — Халққа қайишарди.

— Ўғлини қарғади, — дейди Муяссар куйиниб. — Тошкентда ўқиган ўғли бор эди-ку... ҳозир Кўқонда ишлаётган экан. Судмишми-ей, адвокатми... Турсуной хола «отангни қамокдан чиқариб бер, шу одамнинг пуштикамаридан бўлгансан-ку, болам», деб йиғласа, ўғли кўнмабди. «Приписка қилганларга чора йўқ, ая» дермиш.

— Унгаям осонмас, — дейди Алижон хомушлик билан. — Нима килсин, давлатнинг одами.

— Уларникидаям кўмир адо бўлган экан, — дейди Муяссар Турсуной холанинг гапини эслаб. — Шотурсунга бир машина кўмир обкеб беринг, барака топкур, раҳматли отангиз раис буванинг қадрдони эди, деса Шотурсун жеркиб берибди: «Икки юздан камига бўлмайди, мен етимхонанинг директори эмасман. Раис бува кўмиб кетган тиллаларни чиқаринг-да, мундоқ», депти.

— Отасига ўхшаган эррайим-да, бу бола! — Алижон жаҳд билан тўнғиллайди. — Шоқосим ака ҳам шунақа худобехабар одам эди.

Муяссар қовоғи муттасил учиб турадиган Шоқосим акани, ҳозир станциядаги кўмир складда ишлайдиган Шотурсунни эслаб, кўнгли орқага тортади, раис буванинг хотинигаки шундоқ деган бўлса, бошқаларга икки юз элликдан камига кўнмайди.

Турсуной холанинг йиғлаб айтган гаплари тағин хаёлига жонланади: «Сизга ёлғон, Худога чин, жон қизим, чолим бир

хил раисларга ўхшаб сандиқ-сандиқ пул йиғмади. Бошқалардан нимамиз ортиқ, мана, бир пақир кўмирга зор булиб ўтирибман...»

— Раис бува вақтида пенсияга чиқиб кетса, шу ишларга аралашмасмиди, — дейди Муяссар ўзига ўзи гапириб.

— А? — Алижон энди мудрай бошлаган шекилли, қайта сўрайди. — Ким дейсан?

— Раис бувани айтаман-да.

— Ундаям барибир қамаларди... Муяссар астойдил ажабланади:

— Нега энди? Ўзига тўғри бўлса. Бировга оғзи тегмаса, тили тегмаса...

— Планни бажармаса бўлмасди-да, онаси, — дейди Алижон ишонч билан. — У замонларда бажармаса қамаларди. Энди бажаргани учун қамаяпти.

«Ўзинг паноҳингда асра, Худо!» дейди Муяссар хаёлан. Дили ёришади. Яхшиям эри раисми, бригадирми бўлмагани... Ана, қанчаси қамокда ётибди.

Нариги хонадан ингроқ товуш келади.

— Қайси бири? — дейди Алижон хавотир билан.

— Салимангиз... — Муяссар нариги хонада ётган уч қизининг қайси бири тушида алаҳсирагани-ю, қайси бири интраганини аниқ билади.

— Яна баннисага ётқизсакмикан, — дейди Алижон. — Жигар ориғи кўзгади шекилли. Ҳалимага ўхшаб...

— Нафасингизни иссиқ қилинг! — дейди Муяссар беозор жеркиб.

Эрининг кўнглидан ўтаётганларни билади. Ўзининг ҳам кўз ўнгига лоп этиб Ҳалимахон келади. Валижондан кейин тукқан кизи. Ўзиям бу дунёга сизгадиган қиз эмасди-да. Сочи ер супурарди. Киприги юзига тушарди. Отаси ҳам ҳайрон: кимга тортган бу қиз? Чап қўллаб расм чизса (чапақай эди), одамнинг ақли шошарди. Шунақа меҳнаткаш, шунақа чаққон. Нон ёпади, сигир соғади, пиллага қарайди, далага чиқиб чопиқ килади, юз килолаб пахта теради. Яхши қиз маҳалладан чиқмайди, деган гап рост экан. Ўн олтига тўлиб-тўлмасдан турнақатор совчилар қатнаса денг... Бўлмаса тўққизинчига энди кўчган қиз...

Бир куни Муяссар ишдан келса, Ҳалимахон акасини айвон бурчагидаги курсига ўтқизиб қўйиб, альбомга расмини чизаяпти. Қўлида бўёққалам. «Э, бунингизга айтинг, ая, хит қилиб юборди-ку, одамни, — деди Валижон дўриллаб. — Нима, мен виставкага қўйилган эчкиманми? Икки соатдан бери қоққан қозикдек ўтирибман. Э, бор-е!» — Валижон қўлини пахса қилиб ўрнидан

туриб кетаётган эди, Ҳалимахон мулойим жилмайди. «Қирқига чидадингиз, қирқ биригаям чиданг-да, акажон! Беш минут қолди».

Муяссар қизи чизган расмга бундай қараса... Ё тавба! Ўғли шунақа катта йигит бўп қоптими? Мўйлови сабза урган... Кўзларида, қоп-қора кўзларида алла-нечук шўхлик... Ҳатто иягидаги ҳуснбузар ҳам ярашиб тушган.

... Муяссар ўша кунги гапи учун ҳануз ич-этини ейди. Нега бақирди қизига? «Сен аҳмоққа қачон ақл киради, қиз ўлгур! Овқатга уннаш ўрнига... Аканг бу йил ўнни битиради, аҳмоқ, нима қилсан вақтини олиб? Йиғишгир қалам-паламингни!» Билса эди, олти ой ўтмай гунчадек қизини тупроққа топширишини... Ҳалимахон дори сепилган далада ишлайверибди, жигари эзилиб адои-тамом бўпти-ю, их демабди. Ўзи-чи? «Аяжон, қорним оғрияпти, кўнглим беҳузур бўляпти», деса: «Ёқмасроқ нарса егандирсан-да, қатиқ ичсанг босилади», деб кўя қолибди... Баннисага олиб боришганида касали ўтиб кетган экан... Йўлакка, эшик тагига ётқизишди.

Муяссар эрини бунақа алпозда биринчи кўриши эди. Аввал дўхтирларга ялинди: «Жон акалар, қанча олсангиз олинг, қизимни тузатинг», деди. Биров кулоқ солса қани! Ҳаммаёқ оҳ-воҳ, ҳаммаёқда ранги заъфарон касаллар. Шунда Алижоннинг кўзи ғазабдан ёниб кетди. Қиёмат кўлди (Ювош одамнинг жаҳли чиқса ёмон бўларкан). «Каттанг ким? — деди ўдағайлаб. — Менинг қизим холасининг чорбоғида ишлаб сариқ бўлгани йуқ. Пахтада кетмон чопиб шу дардга йўлиқди! Тузатасан! Тузатмасанг, онангни Учқўрғондан кўрсатаман!»

Ранги заҳил, қилтириқ дўхтирнинг гапи Муяссарнинг эсидан чиқмайди: «Менга нима дейсиз, ака! Бола боғчасиниям касалхонага бўшагиб берган бўлсак кўриб турибсиз, коридоргача тўлиб кетди. Боринг, ўша катталарнинг олдига!»

Алижон “катталар”нинг олдига бормади. Борадиган аҳволда эмасди.

Бола бола экан-да. Валижон синглиси билан кўп фикиллашарди. Гоҳ ручка талашади, гоҳ дафтар... Аммо Ҳалимахоннинг ўлигини баннисадан олиб келишганида ерга мук тушиб шунақа йиғлади, шунақа йиғлади...

Муяссарнинг мижжаларига ёш қалқийди, Томоғига суяк тиқилиб, димоғи ачишади. Эрини безовта килишдан кўрқиб, лабини тишлайди.

— Ҳа, онаси? — дейди эри хавотирланиб.

— Үзим... — Муяссар — Ухланг... Чарчагансиз, ҳиқиллаб, бурнини тортади. — Кўй, онаси... — Алижон дағал кўли билан унинг бошини силайди.

— Баҳорда ўғлинг келади. Насиб этса тўй киламиз... Невара кўрасан...

Ажаб, бир вақтлар келинлик пайтида (қаранг, шунга яна йигирма икки йил бўпти) эрининг кўли бехосдан тегиб кетса, бадани жимирлашиб кетарди. Энди бўлса эри бошини силаса ёш боладек ором топади. Нима бу? Ҳазилми тушунмайди.

Нариги хонада тагин Салима инграйди. Муяссарнинг кўнглига гул-гула тушади. Балки яна баннисага ётқизиш керакдир. Йў-ўқ, биттасидан айрилгани етар, ўт тушсин, ўша пахталарига!

Сутдан оғзи куйган қатикниям пуфлаб ичаркан. Бултур кузда Салима «кўнглим айниятти, биқиним санчиб оғрийди» деганида эр-хотин югургилаб қолишди.

Ҳайрият, бу сафар вақтида олдини олишди. Ҳалиям асорати қолган шекилли, бу сариқ ўлгурнинг... Алижон инқиллаб ўрнидан кўзгалади.

— Ҳа? — дейди Муяссар ташвишланиб.

— Белингиз...

Алижон ух тортади. Ётган жойида чўзилиб тимирскиланади. Наъмат устидаги сигарет билан гугуртни олади.

— Шу олатингиз қолмади-да, дадаси, — дейди Муяссар дашном бериб. — Бола ётибди демайсиз.

Алижон индамай гугурт чизади. Чаккасидаги оқарган сочлари, ажин тушган пешонаси бир лаҳза ёришиб кетади.

«Умр ҳам ўтди, — деб ўйлайди Муяссар.

— Икковимиз ҳам ўтин бўлдик. Қизиқ, кўнглида на алам, на оғриқ, сезади. Бу гап шунчаки лип этиб хаёлидан кечади.

— «Дунёнинг ишлари шу экан».

... Ой ботган шекилли, деразадан тушаётган нур хиралашади. Ҳовли томонда кўй маърайди (Валижоннинг тўйига атаб боқилаётган кўй).

— Онаси, — дейди Алижон сигарет кулини ёнбошидаги пиёлага чертиб. — Ўғлинг келгунча уйни сал эпаккага келтириб қўйсамми...

Яхши ният билан ҳовли этагига бир уй, бир айвон солишган. Томини ёпишдию у ерига кўл қисқалик қилиб қолди. Валижон у ёқда бўлса, ҳали қанча иш бор. Эшик-дераза ўрнатиш, сомон сувоқ, оқ сувоқ, бўёқ... Эҳ-ҳе!

Ажаб, Алижон унинг дилидан ўтганини дарров сезади.

— Кўявер, онаси, — дейди юпатиб, — мусулмончилик — астачилик. Бахтимизга болалар соғ бўлсин.

— Шундай деб сигаретни пиёлага босиб учиради.

— Ухла, онаси, чарчагансан.

Тошойна янаям хирароқ ялтирайди. Соат аллаловчи оҳангда чиқиллаётганга ўхшайди. Бора-бора соат овози жимлик кўйнига сингиб кетади. Муяссарни уйку элитади. Шунда эри елкасига оҳиста туртганини сезиб норозилик билан кўзини очади.

— Нима дейсиз? — дейди озорланиб.

— Онаси... — Алижон йўталиб кўяди.

— Ўйлаб қарасам, ўшаёқ менга тўғри келмас экан.

Муяссар уйкусираб яхши тушунмайди:

— Қанака ўшаёқ?

— Ўша-да! Халгубами, Малгубами... Бориш юз сўм... Келиш юз сўм... Ундан кўра кўмир олайлик... Валижоннинг келгунча уйни сувоқдан чиқариб кўяйлик. Муяссарнинг уйкуси бир зумда ўчади.

— Эсингиз жойидами, дадаси! — дейди астойдил койиб.

— Етти йил кутиб, энди пугёвка олган бўлсангиз, яримжон бўлиб қолган бўлсангиз... Сиз ҳам умрингизда бир марта...

— Ке, кўй, онаси! — Алижон тагин унинг бошини силайди.

— Олтиариқ томонда иссиқ сув бормиш. Шунга уч марта тушсам, отдек бўлиб кетаман. Мана кўрасан.

Эри шу қадар ишонч билан гапирдики, Муяссар иккиланиб қолди.

— Қандоқ бўларкин, дадаси, — дейди бўшашиб. — Лабздан қайтсангиз...

— Ухла, — дейди Алижон алланечук хотиржамлик билан.

Муяссар тушунади. Бу — эрининг қатъий қарори. У бир лаҳза алағда бўлиб ётади. Кейин уйку унинг киприкларини алдаб-сулдаб қовуштиради. Қанча фурсат ўтганини билмайди-ю, айвонда чироқ ёнганини ҳис этади. «Салима турди, — деб ўйлайди уйку аралаш.

— Хўп меҳнаткаш чиқди-да, шу қизим. Умридан барака топсин». Пақир банди даранглаганини ҳам эшитади. «Туриш керак ҳамир кўпчиб кетгандир... Салима сигир соғгунча нон зувалалаб кўймасам бўлмас». Уйғонмоқчи бўлади-ю, кўзини очолмайди.

Туш кўради... Баҳор эмиш. Ўрик гуллаганмиш. Қизалоқ эмиш. Ўрик шохига илинган арғимчоқда учаётганмиш. Арғимчоқ силкинган сайин бошига дув-дув гул ёғилармиш. Оқ, пушти гуллар...

Шунда... Ҳалимаҳон пайдо бўпти. Сочлари ер супурадиган, киприги юзига тушадиган қизи Ҳалимаҳон...

«Кел, қизим, келақол! — дермиш у қўл чўзиб. Қизини кучоғлаб олибдию, учаверибди-учаверибди. Ҳалимаҳон унинг пинжига кириб, «аяжон, аяжон» дермиш. Арғимчоқ борган сайин баланд

ҳаволанармиш... Она—бола бир-бирини кучоқлаб осмон-фалакка
учиб кетишаётганмиш. Негадир Мужсарнинг йиғлагиси келармиш.

У туш куради. Ой фонуси аллақачон ўчган. Кунчиқар томонда
эса кўкимтир қор босган тоғлар ортида осмон ёришади. Ҳовли
этагида пастак бостирмада «пов-пов» деган овоз эшитилади.
Салима сигир соғаяпти. соғиб бўлиб, қозиқ атрофида бетоқат
айланаётган бузоқчани ечиб юборади, кейин тандирга ўт қалайди...
Нон ёпади... Ширчой қилади... Янги кун бошланади...

A NIGHT OF THE PEASANT

They were lying... on the right side Alijon, on the left one Muyassar, and
alongside her lay four-year-old Doniyor. The tarnished lid of the iron-cast
stove shed a reddish shaft of light on the wall. Probably it was the moonlight
that made the window look bright. The old mirror glittered faintly and the
picture fastened to its corner hove into sight fading out. But Muyassar
could imagine it clearly. It was a picture of Valijon that had been drawn by
Halimakhan, with colored pencils, half a year before her death. The clock
on the rack of the mirror was ticking hurriedly. The clock that Valijon had
brought from somewhere (Novgorod) Alijon moaned, rolling to one side.

"Again his back is aching," Muyassar thought feeling sorry for him,
but she didn't dare ask how he was lest he would wake up.. He was as right
as rain, as usual, and drove his car, but in the dead of winter he left for
the mountains insisting that they had to bring some fodder and within
just a week he came down with this illness. Seven years passed since then.
He had no way apart from going there anyway. Cows were bellowing from
hunger, even people of the collective farm didn't grow clover at all.

Alijon didn't betray his pains at first, just wrapping Muyassar's woolen
kerchief inside. Later he became bedridden, he would groan even if he
made a little move. At last he came clean that they'd had to stay in the
mountains because of the avalanche after the got some fodder.

It was less warm inside the house. The shaft of light shed by the lid of the
iron-cast stove, shimmered weakly. Valijon's clock ticked in a rush. Muyassar's
thoughts wandered if Alijon was safe and sound there. Today it was told on
Vremyal that those places where he was working were too cold, in Moscow,
28-33 degrees below zero and Valijon said that Novgorod wasn't far from it.

Doniyor hacked repeatedly, jerked the quilt open, wagging his feet.

"Mummy" he blubbered.

Muyassar, her elbow rested against the floor, drew the quilt back
over him and put her palm on his forehead; thank goodness that he
hadn't a fever.

"Sleep, my child, sleep," she whispered.

"He is coughing again, isn't he, dear?" said her husband.

"Has he woken up you too?" Muyassar looked at her husband pitifully. You know, he is impish, our daughter Salima said that he'd played melting snow on the stove a while ago Sleep."

Afraid of waking her husband up, she lay still. The clock was ticking, again Valijon popped into her mind. Docile boy he is, took after his father. He wanted to enter the university after finishing the tenth form, instead returned within an inch of crying. Because the teacher had said to him: My son, a man who wants to be an economist, first of all, should learn how to write his own surname correctly, you can airily go back to your village and pick cotton!"

This made Muyassar suffer, but made Alijon laugh:

"Didn't you tell him that we weren't taught here anything except picking cotton, my son? Ok, never mind, who will look after the herd if everyone's busy with science. Valijon didn't look after the herd but he picked cotton. Later another thing appeared to deal with. The new chief (The former and older one was arrested, as he was charged with accounting cotton harvest in much more amount than it really was) held a meeting, quite wise remarks he made, (obviously, he was young and well-educated) "As you see the birth rate is increasing" he said, "Where on earth can we get fifteen sutikhs (2) of land for each family when land wasn't enough even to grow cotton." It became clear that barren lands in Russia needed strong peasants, especially young ones, if possible. As soon as Valijon heard about it, he got ants in his pants even though Muyassar begged him not to leave, he kept insisting: "Mum, please, do understand me, I'm not a little child, let me do what I want."

"Boys will be boys" they say. His father was for him and said: "Let him do what he wants. The chief knows what he says."

In late autumn Valijon suddenly came back on his vacations. It was astonishing that his own mother didn't recognize him; he was bearded and had a woolen cap on his head. He became weird, either taciturn or oafish. Having gone to his sister's grave once or twice he wanted to set off again. That day he finally bared his soul to his father: "Every silver has a silver lining," they say. No one welcomed us with open arms. If they were living on the clover, they wouldn't be leaving their own lands like now. I've had enough of it; I'm going to be back in spring."

"Don't wander in those strange places, come back, you won't die of hunger with us," his father approved of what his son said.

"Is there any coal in our home, dear?"

Muyassar turned to look at him at once, as she was daydreaming.

"Haven't you slept yet? I saw over the coal-store. Blast it, there isn't any pinch of coal there. She lay quiet for some moments and asked again:

"Will you buy a ticket for a train tomorrow?"

"I will," he sighed, "We are likely to have a heavy burden with it. When we get to Moscow, we must go to Tbilisi then to Cutis"

"It's ok, dear, you will see the sights that you haven't seen."

They fell into silence. The new chief was helping him go to the health-resort of some kind near Caucasus.

"Your health is above anything. What's the use of suffering?" she said calmly. Silence fell again. A dog was barking somewhere outside.

"We must buy some coal," Alijon said in a croaky voice, "There seems to be no end to winter in sight."

"Blast it, it's few and far between." Suddenly Muyassar remembered what had happened the day before. "We were told that sugar-box was brought to the shop. I saw aunt Tursunoy standing in the queue, among the crowd of people. She was beside herself with grief. She said that her husband wasn't guilty and that he was forced to."

"The old chief was an honest man, and used to support people much more," he sighed again.

"She called down her son" Muyassar said disappointedly, "D'you remember that she has a son who studied in Tashkent, and works in Kokan, either as a judge or a lawyer. However aunt Tursunoy begged him to help the chief get out of the prison reminding that he was still his own father, he didn't yield saying that no one could help those who had been arrested under the blame of distorting the real amount of cotton."

It isn't easy for him either," he said sadly, "He does work for the government."

"They didn't have any coal left in their home," Muyassar remembered what aunt Tursunoy had said to her. "When she asked Shotursun to bring her a cart of coal reminding him that her husband once was an old pal of his father, he had sneered at her:

"I won't bring it for less than two hundred, I'm not the head of the orphanage, and you must spend the money that the old chief stored away somehow."

"He is as a sponger as his father was. His father, Shokosim was a type that doesn't have his god" Alijon mumbled angrily.

Muyassar felt anxious thinking about Shokosim whose eyes would always twitch and Shotursun who was working at the coal-store at that time. If he'd said two hundred to the old chief's wife, she might certainly expect him to bring them coal for no less than two hundred and fifty.

That entire aunt Tursunoy had said flashed across her mind: "Honest to God, my daughter, my husband didn't keep crocks of gold as others did. We are living just following the crowd. You see that I need even a bucket of coal right now.

"Had the old chief retired in time, he wouldn't have got saddled with these troubles," Muyassar murmured.

"What?" asked Alijon, perhaps he didn't grasp as he was drowsy, and "Who you said?" "I mean the old chief."

"Anyway he would've been arrested."

Muyassar felt astonished: "Why's that? He is honest to god, didn't cook anyone's goose, no one did his."

"He must've fulfilled the plan, before they used to arrest for not fulfilling the plan, but nowadays, they are arresting for fulfilling it," he said confidently.

"May God save us" thought Muyassar feeling calm. God's heaven that her husband wasn't a chief or a brigadier, because so many of them were in prison.

Someone whimpered in the next room.

"Who is there?" asked Alijon worriedly.

"It's Salima," Muyassar knew which of her three daughters in the next room, was delirious or groaned.

"Maybe we'd better take her to hospital again, she got pain in her liver, I guess, like Halimakhan..."

"Oh, watch your mouth, please," she brushed him off innocuously. But she felt in her bones what exactly he had on his mind. Halimakhan popped into hers as well, her daughter who was born after Valijon. She was matchless in this world, her hair coming to her heels, her eyelashes casting shadow over her face. Her father was also astounded who she might take after in fact. One could be fascinated seeing the pictures, she drew with her left hand (she was left-handed) She was so nimble, so hard-working, that she baked bread, milked the cows, looked after the cocoons, worked in the field, and picked over hundred kilos of cotton. It turned out to be true what Uzbek people say: All the neighbors will be in a rush to have the good girl as a daughter-in-law. No sooner she finished the eighth form at the age of sixteen than did row upon row of match-makers stand at their gate with this intention.

One day when Muyassar came from work, Halimakhan was drawing a picture of her brother on the album with coloured pencils, making him sit on the chair in the corner of the terrace. Her brother Valijon said in a broken voice: "Mum, say something to your daughter, I've had enough of her, I'm not a goat for an exhibition, I've been sitting here for two hours like a monument." "Away with you!" he said to

Halima and when he was going to raise to his feet, waving his hand, Halimakhan cracked a kind smile and said: "You've been enduring for such a long time, and so, wait a bit more. Five minutes at least."

Muyassar felt astonished seeing the picture which her daughter drew, couldn't believe that her son had really grown up, his moustache beginning to appear. There was, as it were mischief in his eyes, in his dark eyes, even the pimple on his chin became him so much. Muyassar would live to regret for she had shouted at her daughter that day: "When will you, stupid, come to your senses? Your brother's going to finish the tenth form this year. Why the blazes are you taking up his time instead of cooking something to eat? Take away all of your pencils!" Had she known that she would lay her demure daughter to rest? So much did Halimakhan work in the fields that her liver almost shriveled yet she said nothing of it, or rather when she said to her mum that she had a bellyache and she was vomiting Muyassar just said: "You may have eaten something unpleasant, it's going to leave you, if you drink sour milk." When they took her to hospital her illness turned out to be beyond treatment. She was laid in the corridor, at the door. The first time in her life Muyassar had seen her husband like that. At first he begged to doctors: "Dear brothers, I will give you as much as you want, but please treat my daughter. Had anyone listened to him? Everywhere one could hear whines of sallow-looking sick people. Alijon's eyes glinted with frustration, the hell was about to freeze, still waters run deep, they say. "Who is your head?" he threatened, "My daughter didn't get ill just playing in my garden, she came down with this illness working in the cotton-field, you will treat her, if you don't, I will send you to the great beyond!" Muyassar couldn't still forget what the yellow looking scraggy doctor told them: "What d'you want me to do then? Even the kinder garden was given to sick people, as you see, even the corridor's crowded with them. You can go to the fat cats if you like." Alijon didn't go to them, he didn't feel up to.

Valijon would often bicker with his sister, they were still children anyway, and sometimes they couldn't share a pen, sometimes a note-book. Muyassar remembered how he sobbed on and on, sinking to his knees when her dead body was brought to home, he sobbed on and on.

Tears pricked Muyassar's eyes. She felt as if she'd got a lump in her throat. She gnawed her lips so as not to bother her husband.

"What's up dear?" he asked dauntingly.

"Nothing, sleep, you must have been tired," she said sobbing and snuffing.

"Come off it, dear," he said stroking her head with his calloused hands, "Our son will come in spring; we'll marry him, and have grandchildren, hope to God."

Once, twenty years ago when she was a newly wed bride, she used to have a tingling sensation all over her body, if even his fingers brushed her by chance. She wondered but couldn't understand why now she felt like slumbering like a little baby when he was stroking her head. In the next room, Salima whimpered again. Muyassar shuddered to think about sending her to hospital again. No, she had enough when death bereaved her of her one child. May their cotton turn to dust? "Once bitten, twice shy." It made their flesh creep, when Salima complained about pain in her flank and vomiting. This time they couldn't nip the flower in the bud. Unfortunately still there seemed to be some traces of that rotten illness. Alijon budged and groaned.

"What? Again your back..." Muyassar said anxiously.

Alijon heaved a sigh and groped something on the floor and took the cigarette and the matches off the serge carpet.

"You haven't broken this habit of yours, have you? You don't even care that the child is sleeping here" she scolded him. Alijon didn't answer and struck the match, his grizzled hair on his temple, and wrinkles on his forehead caught light for a moment. "Life has flashed" Muyassar thought. She felt that they both grew old yet she didn't feel any grief or pain in her soul. "Such is life" only once this thought crossed her mind.

Perhaps the moon had set as the light it shed through the window began seeping away. The sheep bleat in the yard outside. (The sheep that was being kept for wedding of Valijon)

"Dear," said Alijon grinding the cigarette into the cup beside him, "Maybe we'd rather do something with the house until Valijon comes." With good grace they had built a house with a terrace, they finished with the roof but couldn't afford the rest. Valijon was afar. There was so much work to do ahead: setting doors, and windows, daubing, whitewashing, and painting and so on. Alijon knew what she was feeling inside, and soothed her.

"Hang it, dear, first of all, may our children be healthy for us. Moslems usually take their time," he ground his cigarette to put out into the cup, and said:

"Sleep, dear, you must be tired."

The mirror shimmered far more faintly, the clock seemed to be ticking like a lullaby. Inch by inch this sound merged with silence. Muyassar began to doze off but opened her eyes at once, reluctantly, when her husband carefully nudged her shoulder.

"What do you want?" she droned.

"Dear," he said and coughed, "I thought over, and decided that this place isn't for me." Muyassar couldn't catch what he said as she was drowsy: "What, which place?"

"That place, how to say, Khaltuba or Maltuba. We have to pay two

two hundred for both going and coming back. I think we'd better buy coal or finish with thatching the house until Valijon comes." She felt broad awake immediately:

"Have you taken leave of your senses?" she chided him earnestly, "You've been waiting for this chance for seven years, besides you've become so weak. Somehow once in your life you"

"Leave it out, dear, please," he stroked her head.

"They say that there's a hot spring somewhere in Altirik, I'll be my former self if I bathe in it only three times. Trust," he spoke so confidently that she hesitated:

"If you beg off your promise, how come can you?" she said less disappointedly.

"Sleep," he said with nonchalance of some kind. Muyassar did understand that it was his final decision. She lay drowsy for some instants, and restlessness seemed to be the cue to close her eyes. She didn't know how much time elapsed but she felt that the light of the terrace was switched on. "Salima's waken up," she thought, her eyes lidded, "So hard working she is, may her live in god's grace!" Having heard how the handle of the bucket clanked, she thought again, "I must get up, and mould the dough into rolls; it must've already become ready to bake. I must, until Salima milks the cow." She wanted to wake up, yet couldn't open her eyes. She dreamt. She dreamt that it was spring, the apricot tree was in blossom, and she dreamt that she was swinging on the rope attached to the branch of the tree. The more she swung, the more blossoms showered over her head, white and pink blossoms... By a sudden Halimakhan came into sight, Her daughter whose hair came down to her heels, and whose eyelashes used to cast shadow over her face. Muyassar was calling her, her hands stretched out: "Come here, my child, come." She swung on and on, clasping her daughter to her breast. She was uttering: "Mummy, mummy." The faster the swing shook, the higher they could get. Muyassar felt like crying for some reasons. But she dreamt. Beams of the moon had already ebbed. Darkness gave up and light glowed behind the bluish mountains capped with snow. Rumbling sound came from the yard, Halima was milking the cow, under the awning. On milking, she set the calf loose, that was romping impatiently around the stake, and then she set fire under the earthen stove, baked bread, and then prepared shirchoy (3)... So a new day broke. .

Glossary

1. A TV programm of Russia, producing news.
2. Measure of land and one sutikh land should be one meter wide and one hundred meters long.
3. Milk boiled with rather little amount of tea, salt and butter.

ХАЁТ АБАДИЙ

Совхознинг бош агрономи Нодир Рўзикулов мажлисдан қаттиқ танқид еб чиқди. Уйга келиб, ўзи ёқтирмайдиган қайнасаннинг «хемириси йўқ экспедитори ҳам янги участка куриб оляпти, ер бўлса сизни қўлингизда» деган гапини эшитиб: «Менинг бўлган турганим шу. Чидамасангиз қизингизни олиб кетаверинг!» — деди. Хотини ҳам шуни кутиб тургандай қизчасини кўтариб, онасига эргашиди.

Нодир кўчага чиқиб, ўзини қопмоқчи бўлган қўшнисининг итига кесак отган эди, итга қаттиқ тегди шекилли, у шундай вангиллаб қочдики, энди кўкнори ичиб, бошига чопонини тортаётган банги қўшницор кайфи учиб, дарров девордан қаради. Нодирни койиб нима гаплигини сўради. Нодир айбини бўйнига олган эди, у: «Ҳайф сизга-ей, хўжайин, кучингиз шу тилсиз махлуққа етдими! Кучингиз жуда ошиб, қўлингиз қичиётган бомса, секин менни чақирмайсизми!» деб, Нодирнинг таъбини тирриқ қилди, буям етмагандай, итини айвонга чақириб, унга шундай бақирдики...

Нодир хувиллаб ётган уйга кириб, қизчасининг тўшаб қўйилган койпачасига кўзи тушди, бориб унинг устига чўнқайган эди, боласининг она сутини эслатувчи иси димоғига урилди-да, кўнгли бузилиб кетди.

Чопиб ташқарига чиқди, юзига совуқ шамол тегиб, тўхтаб қолди. Бир нафас кўксини очиб, айвон панжарасига ўтирди ва тўсатдан шу қадар бўшашиб кетдики, ерга гуппа йиқилиб, оМиб қоладигандек бўлди. Ҳақиқатан ҳам гуппа йиқилди...

Шамол қаттиқ эсиб, бужмайган ток баргларини унинг устига опкелиб сочди. Тонгга яқин шивалаб ёмғир ёға бошлади. Бу илк куз ёмғири эди. Қовжироқ кўкатлару дарахтларнинг турфа ҳиди атрофга анқиб кетди. Сўнг ёмғир тиниб, ҳаво очилди, унда оппоқ юлдузлар ярқираб ёна бошлади. Атроф шу қадар сокин эдики, ҳатто япроқлардан томган томчиларнинг чакиллаши ҳам эшитиларди. Шабада эса бошлади. Атроф салқин, бирданига совуқ тушгандай бўлди. Бу ажойиб ўзгаришларни Нодиргина кўрмади, чунки у тиришиб, ўлиб ётибди. Оёқ-қўлини ёзиб, кўзларини юмиб, иягини кўтариб

боглаб қўядиган биронта одам бўлмаганидан тиришиб, кулала бўлиб қолади-да. Эсиз, ёмон ўлим топди-да, ит қавмида кетди, дейишадими буни? Васият ҳам қилмади, ёш кетди.

Қизчасини ҳам кўриб, дийдорига тўёлмади, хотинидан ҳам розилик ололмади. Совхоз ишчилари... Ҳар ҳолда уни ҳурматлайдиган кишилар кўп эди. Айниқса, Ча-Чанинг онасини айтмайсизми. «Ёғоч топиб беринг, директор йўқ дедилар. Қиш тушяпти, уйим босиб қолади» деганида участка куриш ниятида бир кунлик йўлдан олиб келиб, сим билан ўраб қўйган тахталарини унга бериб юборган эди. «Кам бўлманг, умрингиз узоқ бўлсин, ўлгунимча сизни дуо қиламан», деган эди кампир боёқши. У эшитса, албатта йигМайди, бўмасам-чи?! Тонг отди. Кўчадан ўтиб кетаётган бўлим мудирининг ўзининг ишга эрта кетаётганини билдириш учун девордан мўралаб қаради-ю, одатдагидек, Нодирни айвон олдидаги қосагуллар ёнида кўрмади. «Ухлаб қоптиларми?» деб ўйлаб, «Ўртоқ Рўзиқулов деб чақирди. Унга ҳеч кирн жавоб бермади. «Нима, булар қирилиб кетганми?» деб ичкарига кирган эди, айвонда гужанак боМиб ётган бош агрономни кўриб қолди. «Нима бало, мастми? Бу кўп ичса ҳам ҳеч маст бўлмасди-ку?» деб ўйлаб, уни чақирди. Бир вақт агрономнинг ўлиб қолганини кўриб, додлаб юборди.

Тумонат одам йиғилди... Албатта йиғилади-да, кимсан совхознинг бир раҳбари оламдан ўтади-ю, одам йиғилмайдими. Марҳум кўпларга яхшилик қилган эди... Ҳанифанинг йиғлашини кўрсангиз эди! «Во, тўрам! Мени кимларга ташлаб кетдингиз, о тўрам! Қизингиз:

«Менинг дадам қани?» деса, нима дейман? Энамникига кетмай ўлай! Бундай бўлишингизни қайдан билибман? Ёнингизда ўтирсам бўлмасмиди? Во, тўрам!»

Ҳа, шундай! Кишининг яхшилиги кейин билинади. Ҳали бу хотин кўп йиғлайди. Қайнанаси-чи? Э, танг, куёвингни шунчалик севар экансан, ҳаётлигида нега уни тергайвердинг, лўли! Ё бу самимий йиғляяптими? Балки йигМси самимийдир. Бир ҳисобда маддоҳ кампир ҳам ҳақ эди. Шулар бирон нарсага зор бўлмасин, дер экан-да. Тўғри, Нодир оиласига кўп бепарво эди. Холхўжа милисанинг: «Сен ғирт пролетарсан!» деганида жон бор. Ҳаммаси ўтди-кетди, эндиги пушаймон ўзингга душман. Директор ҳам йиғляяптими? Ҳа-а, йиғляяпти. Нодирбек, ҳалол бир агроном дунёдан ўтса-ю, у кўзига ёш олмайдими!..

Ахир, Нодир тузук ходим эди. Директор нима ўйлаётганикин? Нодирнинг фавқулудда оМими уни ҳайрон олдираётган бўлса керак-а? Эҳтимол кеча мажлисда танқид қилгани учун афсус қилаётгандир?

Чидолмаган, ноҳақ гапни кўтара олмаган, деб албатта. Шундай бўлади. Билиб танқид қилиш керак. Бу дам қобил, танқидга чидайди деб дўппослайверадими киши деганни.

Мана, кафанга оВалган бош агрономни тобутга солдилар, кўтар-кўтар қилиб, Қизилқоя қабристонига олиб кетдилар.

Ҳаммаси орқади қолди. Хотин, бола, уй. Араз, диққатпазлик, гийбат... Иш. Совхоз. Ишчилар...Қишлоқ ҳам орқада қолиб кетди.

Халқимизнинг яхши одати бор-да. Эшакда кетаётган бир одам шартта пастга тушиб, чопиб келиб, обут шотисини елкасига олди. Элик қадамча кўтариб борди-да, бошқага берди. Фотиҳа ўқиб, орқада олди. Ана бир шофёр ҳам машинасини тўхтатиб, кабинадан туша солиб, тобутга қараб чопди.

Қабристон. Негадир бу ернинг тупроғи қизил. Нодир динга ишонмас эди. Аммо шу қабристон олдидан ўтаётганда, кўнглига аллақандай ваҳима тушар эди. Кечаси ўтганда овозини чиқармас, у ердан эшитилаётган бойқушнинг сайраши Нодирни қишлоқ йўлига тушганча таъқиб этар эди: «Бу ерда ўликлар қўрқмасдан қандай ётишаркин-а? И-е, улар ахир, ҳеч нарсани сезмайди-ку? Ахир, ўлик ўлик- да. Кесак нима-ю, ўлган одам нима?...» Мана, марҳум қабргаям қўйилди. Меҳрибон ота гўрга биринчи бўлиб тупроқ ташлади. Одамларга ҳайронсан! Мунча шошишмаса? Бош агроном тезроқ кўздан йўқолсин дегандай гўрга тез-тез тупроқ ташлашади-я.

Жимжитлик. Ўлик сукунат. Мозор, қизғиш уй, манави қаққайган қари туг дарахти ҳеч нарсани сезмагандай турибди. Лининг ковагига чумчуқлар ҳар вақтдагидек шошиб кириб чиқяпи. Ана, намгина тупроқ уюми устига бир қарға кўнди. Инсон ҳаёти шу экан-да. Туғилди, ўсди, ўқиди, ишлади, одамлар билан уришди, ярашди. Рўзгорни ўйлади, ташвиш тортди. Севди... ниҳоят, ўлди.

Оилада бир неча кун йиғи-сиғи, расм-таомиллар. Кейин? Уни эслаб юриш... Бу орада совхозга бошқа киши, иккинчи бўлимнинг бошлиғи бош агроном бўлди. Ота ҳам, она ҳам аста-секин ғам буккан қадини тиклашди. Ёш келинга совчи келди. Совчи учинчи келишида қайнана кўнди. Кейин?.. Ёшгина

қизи, онасининг кейинги эрини отам дейишга ўргатади уни қайнана. Ё?... Нодир бўлса сезмас, эшитмас бўлиб қабрда ётибди.

Дарвоқе, у қандай бўлиб ўлди? Ўша кунни мажлисдан танқид еб келди, қайнанаси билан уй хусусида жанжаллашди, хотини кетиб қолди, кўчада итни уриб, эгасидан дакки эшитди... Кейин эшикка чикқанда кўкрагига совуқ шамол урилди. Бу куз шамоли шунчалик ёқимли, хузурбахш эдики, Нодирнинг хўрлиги келди. Кейин... бу адолатсизликларга чидолмай, ўзини аччиқ устида ўлдириб қўйди. Бу кимга фойда бўлди? Ким уни мақтади? Нима бўлди, кейин нима? Ўша кечаги серюлдуз осмон ҳам, оппоқ юлдузлар ҳам ўз ўрнида. Дарахтлар, ёмғир... Шабада.

Ҳаёт Нодирсиз ҳам давом этипти.

...Айвон панжарасида бўшашиб ўтириб қолган Нодир чўчиб бошини кўтарди ва чуқур хўрсиниб ўрнидан кўзгалди. Сигарета чекиб яна бир нафас турди-да, кўчага чикди. Кўшнининг кўнгли юмшаб, итга ачинганини айтди ва «машойихлар айтибдики, Каъбага ўт қўйиб, бутга чўқин, лекин мўрчани оғритмагил, ҳа, шунақа бўлади-да», деди. Нодир болаларини олиб келгани қайнанасиникига йўл олди. Йўл бўйи оқшом эшитган танқидини эслаб, таҳлил қилиб, хатоларни бартараф қилиш ёвлларини режалади.

Ҳали Нодир панжарада ҳаёл суриб ўтирганида, бўйнига бир неча томчи ёмғир томган эди, энди шивалаб ёға бошлади. Қовжироқ ўт-ўланлар, дарахтларнинг тахир ёзги ҳиди анқиб кетди.

By Shukur KHOLMIRYAZEV

LIFE IS ETERNAL

The head agronomist of the collective farm was seriously told off at the meeting. He came home. On hearing what his mother-in-law (whom he didn't like at all) said: "Even an expeditor who doesn't have a penny, is building a house on the plot of land, but you never, although the land's in your hands." He answered to her: "This is the way I am, if you can't stand, you can leave the house with your daughter." So did his wife; taking their daughter with her, following her mother as if she'd been bidding her time for it. Going out to the street Nodir threw a stone to the dog that was just going to bite him. It ducked out whining so loudly, that even his junkie neighbor felt sober and craned up the wall to look at him at once. Prior to that this junkie man was just going to be tucked up under his

robe, having had poppy heads which were boiled. He asked Nodir what was up. Nodir came clean about what he did, and his neighbor said: "Blast you, master, how come you could dare beat this speechless animal? If you've got ants in your pants or if you've got courage much more than usual, why didn't ask me over?" He made Nodir upset, besides he called out for his dog and bellowed at it so much. When Nodir went into his house all but like a desert his eyes fell on the quilt that her daughter lay on. He squatted down at it, and his heart sank when he caught a whiff of mother's milk. He ran out of the home, and stopped suddenly, as soon as the cold wind hit his face. For a moment he sat, his breast open in front of the banister in the terrace and by all of a sudden he felt so droop as if he was about to fall down and he really did. The keen wind gusted and bore tangle leaves of grapes and showered them over him. It was drizzling at the crack of dawn. It was the earliest rain falling in warm autumn. Diverse scents of withered grass and trees lingered everywhere around. Then it stopped raining, the clouds dispersed, and white stars hove into sight twinkling. Silence descended around so sorely that it was audible even how drops of rain were squelching. It was less warm and breezing outside. It seemed as if it became cold suddenly. Only Nodir didn't see these changes, he was lying dead, his body huddling up, it was no wonder that he lay that way. As there wasn't anyone who could close his eyes or stretches his limbs out, tying up his jawl. It was so a pity that he died this way. God knows how we call death of this kind, dog's death or... He was cut down in his prime even without uttering his last will. He couldn't see his daughter even for the last time, failed to bid good-bye to his wife, to the workers of the farm. There were rather many people who respected him anyway, let alone Cha-cha's mother. When she'd asked the head-master to find some woods for her roof as it was winter and her house was about to fall under snow, the head-master hadn't yielded. But Nodir gave her his own woods that he'd kept bailing with wires to build his own house. And it took him a day to bring them at that time. The poor old woman prayed for Nodir quite much: "Never go short for anything, let you live a long life. I will keep praying for you until I pass away." If she heard that Nodir died she would certainly be crying.

The day broke. The head of the section, passing along the street, took a peep over the wall so as to make Nodir know that he was going to work earlier. But he didn't see him as usual by the bowlsh flowers (2). Thinking he might've overslept, he called him: "Comrade Ruzikulov." There was no answer. He added as an afterthought: "I wonder whether all of them have gone to the great beyond." He went in, on seeing that Nodir lay huddling on the terrace he thought: "Is he drunk, my god? He used to keep sober even though he was." Realizing that he was dead, he let out a yell. Crowd of people crammed the house. Obviously, how couldn't they come when the

head of the farm died, as he did so much good to people? Had you seen how Khanifa sobbed: "Oh, my dear, who on earth are you leaving me to? What shall I answer when our daughter asks where her father is? I wish I would rather die than going to my mother's home. How come could I know that you... What would happen if I'd stayed with you, dear?"

That's it, you will realize that somebody's good only then when he is away. His wife will be crying for many years to come. How about his mother-in-law? Such a snappy woman, if she'd cared for him so much, why didn't she call her dogs off him when he was alive? Perhaps she wasn't crying genuinely at that time, maybe she was. On the other hand she was right as well. She scolded him so that they wouldn't go short for something. Because it was true that Nodir was often indifferent to his family. The police officer, Khalkhudja was fair mouth when he said that Nodir was a real proletarian.

Everything's gone, now there was no use of feeling sorry. Was the head-master also crying? Yes, he was. How come wouldn't tears scald his eyes when an honest agronomist like Nodir died? Nodir was a good specialist. What was the head-master thinking of? Maybe he was really astonished at this sudden loss. Perhaps he was feeling sorry that he'd chided him at the meeting the day before, supposing that he could stand such an unfair. So there! One should learn how to chide. One mustn't bite someone's head off on and on, if he doesn't say anything and if he keeps being biddable.

The head agronomist was shrouded, put in a coffin and taken to the cemetery in Kizilkoya (It means Redrock). All remained behind, his wife, his child, sulk, indifference, gossip, work, the collective farm and the workers. Our people have a good tradition. A man riding on a donkey, came up in less than no time, and caught hold of the coffin to help the men to carry it. Carrying it until he made about fifty steps, he held it out to another man, and he stayed behind reading fatiha (3). Over there a driver stopped his car and he also ran up to the coffin.

Cemetery. Sand is red here, for reasons best known to God. Nodir didn't use to believe in God. But his flesh creeped everytime he walked by this cemetery and used to walk quietly in the nights and the sound that an owl made by hooting, would chase him until he got to his way village. "How can the dead lie here and how aren't they frightened? By the way they don't feel anything. Because dead is dead. It has no difference with the sand" he used to think.

They laid him to rest. His kind father came first to throw sand on his grave. People are quite strange. They were trying to bury him in a hurry as if they wanted him to disappear out of sight as soon as possible.

Silence. Dead silence. Cemetery. Reddish house. That old mulberry tree as straight as a pillar seemed like it didn't feel anything. But

sparrows were playing with it, going in and out of its hollows in a rush as usual. A crow of some kind perched on the dome of wet sand. Is this the way that life of a human being goes? A man was born, studied, worked, quarreled with people, mended the fences, thought of earning his living, worried, loved and died at long last. Afterwards cries and tears in the family for some days, ceremonies, customs and then? Cherishing the memories of him...

At this time, another man, the head of the second section became the head agronomist. Both Nodir's father and mother gained their strength back after running to seed because of that anguish. Match-makers came asking their young daughter-in-law. When the third time they came, her mother-in-law yielded to give her away. Then Nodir's little daughter got used to calling her mother's new husband as "dad". Or? But Nodir was lying in his grave, didn't feel and hear anything. By the way how did he die? That day he'd been chided at the meeting, bickered about the house with his mother-in-law. His wife left him. And then he'd been scolded by the owner of the dog which he beat out in the street. Then the cold wind hit his face when he went outside. This wind of autumn was so pleasant, so delightful that his heart sank. Then he couldn't stand that unfair and killed himself. Who was it the use for? Who praised him? What happened then, what? That sky, studded with stars, those twinkling stars were as well as they were the day before. Trees, rain, breeze. Life was going on even without Nodir.

Nodir sitting droop in front of the banister of the terrace, cocked his head flinching and heaved a deep sigh. He stood for a moment smoking and went outside. His neighbor, likely to have calmed down, said that he'd felt sorry for the dog and added: "As wise forefathers say, you'd better set fire to Koran or cross yourself. But never hurt even a little ant." Nodir started for his mother-in-law's home to bring his child and wife. On the way he brooded over the ways to correct his mistakes, remembering and analyzing how he was told off that evening.

Not so long before while he was daydreaming in front of the banister, more than a drop of rain had dribbled on his neck, later it began drizzling. Bitter smell of withered grass and trees of summer lingered everywhere around.

Glossary

1. Moslims usually tie up the dead person's jaw, so that it wouldn't get droop.
2. A type of plant of which flowers are shaped like a bowl.
3. The first article of Koran, the sacred book of Moslims.

ЭРКИН

Қамоқхонанинг темир эшиги аввалига юракни эзадиган даражада гижирлади, сўнг шиддат билан шарақлаб ёпилди. Эркиннинг назарида, темир эшик шарақламади, балки моғор хиди анқиб турган бу зах бино тарс иккига ёрилиб-ажралиб, шу заҳотиёқ уни ютиб юборгандай бўлди. Узунаси уч қадам, эни икки қадам келадиган совуқ, нимқоронғи хонада ёлғиз қолгач Эркиннинг баданида титроқ турди. Титроқ совуқданми ё кўрқувданми — буни аввалига ўзи ҳам фаҳмлолмади.

Эшикнинг шарақлаб ёпилиши сўнги умид учқунлари устига кул тортди. Қамоқхонанинг узун дахлизидан қўлини орқасига қилиб юриб келаётганда ҳам ўша умид учқуни олисдаги юлдуз каби милтиллаб турган эди.

Энди... тамом! Демақ бу шунчаки пўписа эмас! Демак бу англашилмовчилик ҳам эмас!

Эркин остона хатлаб бир қадам кўйганича қотиб турарди. Кўз олдини қоронғи парда қошлаган, назарида оёқларидан ҳаам жон буткул чиқиб кетгандай эди. У ўзи билмаган ҳолда чўка бошлади. Аввалига чўнқайди, сўнг чўккалади. Тиззалари музлади. Титроқ кучайди. Бақирмоқчи бўлдию овози чиқмади.

Қоронғу хона бирдан ёришиб кетди. Шундай ёришдики, ҳатто кўзларига ҳеч нима кўринмай қолди. Назарида, қамоқхона томини икки ёнга суриб кўринган куёшга қараб, кўзи қамашгандай эди. Дам ўтмай хона аста кизара бошлади. Охири қондек тўқ-қизил тусга кириб, атроф чайқалиб кетди. Қамоқхона бино эмас, балки улкан қон денгизиде қалқиб турган кема эди унинг ҳаёлида. Мавжлар бора-бора пўртанага айланди. Тиз чўкканича қалтираётган Эркин ўроқ солинган бугдой поясидай шилқ этиб ёнга қулади. Чаккаси бетонга тегиб, кўз олдини қоплаб турган қип-қизил қон денгизи қоп-қора зимистон чохта айланди. У зимистон чохта гўё учиб тушди. Қалтироқлари ҳам қолган, бадандаги зирқироқ оғриқ ҳам кўтарилган эди. У ўзини енгил хис қилар, қушдай учарди...

Белига энли камар боғлаган соқчи йигитчанинг жимиб қолганидан ҳавотирланиб, эшик туйнугини очиб қаради.

— Ерга ётиб олибди, бирон нима бўляптимикин? — деди у шеригига қараб.

Рангпар шериги ҳам қаради-да:

— Ҳлмайди, ётаверсин, — деб нари кетди.

Эркин қанча ётганини билмайди. Ҳушига келди-ю, сукунат жарангидан дахшатга тушди. Жимжитликнинг бу қадар дахшат эканини у билмас эди. Шу сабабли ҳушига келган-келмаганини аввалига билмай ётди. Бир пайт онаси сукунатни парчалаб: «Тур, болам, шамоллаб қоласан», деб шивирлагандай бўлди. Эркин сесканиб бошини кўтарди. Қулоқ тутди — онаси бошқа гапирмади. У агрофга аланглади: тўғрида темир каравот қорайиб турибди. Тепада хира чироқ. Бир томонда темир панжарали дарча. Орқада темир эшик. Бошқа ҳеч нарса йўқ.

У қаддини ростлади-да, музлаб қолаётган ўнг қўлини, ўнг биқинини силади. Мажолсиз оёқларини бир-бир судраб босиб каравотга бориб ўтирди. Кўрпа бўлиб кўрпамас, жун чойшаб бўлиб жун чойшаб бўлмаган бир увадани олиб ўранди. Баданига сал иссиқлик югурди. Совуқ чекингач, очлик хуруж қилди.

Тун буйи мижжа қоқмаган йигитчани тонгда, нонушта қилишга ҳам қўймай олиб келишган эди. «ЭНКЕВЕДЕ» деса жони халак қўшнилар эшиклари тирқишидан мўралаб қолаверишган, нола қилаётган онасини юпатувчи зот топилмаган эди. Эркин кун бўйи тик турганича сўроқларга жавоб берди. Қош қорая бошлаганда келтириб бу хонага тиқишди.

Эркин нимқоронғи, зах хонага ҳам, сукунатга ҳам аста қўника бошлади. Бир йил ичида аввал акасидан, сўнг отасидан айрилган, отасининг дўстлари ҳам бирин-кетин қамалаётганини эшитиб довдираб қолган ўн етти ёшли йигитча учун ўтган кеча ва кундуз кутилмаган синов эди.

Уч кун аввал мактаб директори уни чақиртирди. Чўққи соқоли бу одам гоят сертакаллуф, ҳатто болаларни ҳам сизлаб гапирар, бировдан ранжиганини сира сиртига чиқармас эди. Ана шундай мулоийм одамни ранги оқарган ҳолда кўриб, Эркин ажабланди.

— Кечкурун Нозимхўжа акангизни ҳам олиб кетишибди, — деди у саросима билан. — Биттадан теришяпти. Сиз ҳозироқ уйингизга боринг. Дадангизнинг китобларини, кундалиklarини, мактубларини, хуллас, ёзилган юғоз зоти борки, беркитинг. Жулкунбой билан Чўлпоннинг китоблари зинҳор юзада қолмасин. Эхтиёт бўлинг, болам, бора қолинг.

— Нимага, муаллим, — деб эътироз билдирди Эркин, — дадам... йўқлар-ку? Шунда ҳам келишадими бизларникига?

— Келишлари мумкин...

Эркин муаллимнинг қўрқоқлигидан бир кулиб, бир ҳайрон бўлиб, уйига борди. Унинг гапларини онасига айтди. Онасининг ранги ўчиб, «Вой, ўлмасам...» деб икки юзига кафтларини босди, уч ойдан бери пенсия пули берилмай қўйилганининг боисини шу топда англади. Бир оз саросимада турди-да, кейин токчалардаги китобларни саралай бошлади. Унинг кўли ишда, лаблари эса: «Вой, худойим, энди нима қилдим, буларни қаерга яширдик?» — деб пичирлади.

— Эркинжон, болам, буларни қаерга яширамыз? Ёқмасак бўлмайди, шекилли? — деди онаси тўпланган китобларга қараб.

Эркин «Ҳазиллашяптиларми?» деб унга тикилди. Кейин онаси ҳозирнинг ўзида ўт қўйиб юбораётган-дек қўлларига ёпишди.

— Йўқ — деди у қатъий, — ёқ;майсиз! Бу дадамнинг китоблари!

Дадасининг қўллари теккан китобларни ёқишга йўл қўя олмас эди. Китоб ёнса, дадасининг хотираси ҳам куйиб кул бўларди. Оқибатда бу уйда табаррук ҳеч нарса қолмас эди. Эркин хотирасиз яшамок, туйғулардан маҳрум бўлмок ваҳшийлик эканини ҳали тушуниб етмасди. У ҳозир бир нарсани аниқ биларди — отасининг қўллари теккан буюм табаррук, муқаддас. Муқаддас нарсани эса ёқиб бўлмайди. Онасининг қўлларини ушлаб, кўзларига тикилди. Унинг бу қарашда «ўлсам ўламан, аммо ёқтирмайман» деган қарор зоҳир эди. Она ўғлининг қалбида портлаган, бироқ тилидан учмаган бу гапларни юраги билан эшитди.

— Нима қиламыз бўлмаса? — деди йиғламсираб.

— Кўмиб қўямиз.

Ошхонада одам бўйи келадиган катта хум бўларди. Эркин эсини таниганидан буён бу хумга дон-дун тўлатилганини билмайди. Ҳозир Эркиннинг ҳаёлига дафъатан шу бўш хум келди. Ташқарига чиқиб, ўра қазий бошлади, Онаси эса ҳамон йиғламсираб мактубларни, хужжатларни тўшларди.

Эркин хумнинг оғзини маҳкамлаб, устига тупроқ тортиб, сўнг итининг ёғоч уйини суриб қўйганида тун ярмидан оған эди.

Эрталаб мактабга борган Эркин директорнинг «халқ душмани» эканини билди. Директорнинг кечаги қиёфаси кўз ўнгидан кетмай, ўзининг ҳам саросимага банди бўлиб бораётганини сезмади.

Оқшомда эса булар келишди. Бошқаларга буйруқ бераётган чарм курткали кишини Эркин бир кўришдаёқ таниди. Жавлон исмли бу одам авваллари ҳам бир-икки келган, лекин дадаси

уни нимагадир хушламас эди. Меҳмон изига қайтгач, дадаси оила даврасида унинг фазилатларини шарафлаб ўтирар эди. Меҳмон кўнглига ўтирмайдиган, хуш кўрилмайдиган бўлса, индамай кўя оларди. Унинг бу одати Эркинга ҳам маълум, шу сабабли тилга олинмаган меҳмоннинг кимлигини сўраб-суриштирмас эди. Шу тугайли чарм курткали Жавлоннинг кимлигини билмас эди.

Дадаси қайтиш қилиб берганда ҳам бу одам келган, «Мираббосов большевик эди, большевикчасига кўмамиз», деб хархаша қилган. Эркиннинг бувиси чиқиб, «Болам большевик бўлган эди, тўғри, лекин ота-боболаридай ётаверсин. Большевик тахта кутида ётсин, деган қонунингни кўрсат», дегач, ён босган, аммо «Юзини очинглар, ҳайрлашайлик», деб тикилинч қилган. Одамлар: «Кафанлаб кўйилган, очиб бўлмайди», деб койиб беришгач, жанозани ҳам кутмай кетиб қолган.

Айнан шу одамнинг келиши Эркинга жумбоқ эди.

Жавлон ҳатто этигининг чангини ҳам қоқмай уйга кириб келди. Аввал наmatни, сўнг тўшалган кўрпачаларни босиб ўтиб, токчага яқинлашди.

— Ҳм, Маркс, Ленин... яхши... — деди у китобларни қараб, — ўртоқ Сталиннинг китоблари қани?

Эркиннинг онаси каловланиб, жавоб бера олмади.

— Қанақа большевик экан бу Мираббосов, уйда дохийнинг китоби бўлмаса... Мана бу ерда Қодирийнинг, нариги токчада Чўллоннинг китоблари турар эди. Қани у китоблар?

Онаси яна жавоб тополмай қолди. Саволларига жавоб бўлмагач, Жавлон овозини баландлатиб сўради:

— Китоблар қани деяпман?!

— Уларни... уларни ёқиб юборганмиз.

— Ёқиб юборганмиз? Нимага?

— Шу... нимади?..

Онасининг ўртанишига чидай олмаган Эркин жавоб қайтарди:

— Халқ душманларининг китобларига большевикнинг уйда жой йўқ!

Жавлон захарли жилмайиш билан Эркинга тикилди:

— Шунақами? Яхши... Аммо сендан сўраганим йўқ, тирранча, сен гапга аралашма... Хў-ўш, демак китобларни ёққансиз? Эрингиз қаерда, уни ёқмагандирсиз, а? Эркин ҳам, онаси ҳам хангу манг бўлиб қолишди. Бу одам ҳазиллашяптими ё чин гапиряптими — фарқлай олишмади.

— Бу нима деганингиз... — деди онаси йиғламсираб. — Ахир дадаси... ахир ўзингиз кўргансиз...

— Кўрмаганман! Кўрай деганимда мени юлиб ташагансиз, чунки кафан ичида бошқа одам бўлган. Миrabбосов халқ душмани, у адолат ҳукмидан қочиb юрибди.

— Ҳаққингиз йўқ бундай дейишга! Дадам чин большевик эдилар!

— Ўзингни бос, тирраңча! Далангни сендан кўра мен яхшироқ биламан. Миrabбосов Бухородаги тинтувда топилган бир хум тилланинг ярмини топширмаган. Архивни кўтардик. Далиллар бор. Хўш, қолган тиллани қаерга яширган? Ё уни ҳам ёкиб юбордингизми? Майли, Миrabбосов халқ душмани булмай кўя қолсин. Бундай дейишга арзимайди у. Миrabбосов оддий ўғри. Биз ўғрини излаб топишимиз керак.

Ўзинг ўтрисан! — Эркин ўзини туголмай шундай деб бақирди-да, Жавлонга ташланди. Онаси йўлини тўсмаганида унинг кекирдигига чанг солиши аниқ эди. Жавлон бир имлаган эди, остонада турган аскар Эркиннинг қўллариини қайириб, ховлига судраб олиб чикди.

Қош қорайди, кеч кирди. Атрофга сокинлик чўкди. Гуё бутун шаҳар, бутун ўлка оромга берилган эди. Эркин шу онда бошқа хонадонлар ҳам ташвиш ўгида қоврилаётганини, эшикларининг тақиллашини хавотир билан, юрак ховучлаб кутаётганини билар эди. «Балки уч-тўрт уйни тинтишаётгандир, — деб ўйлади у, — лекин ўлган одамни топиб берасан, деб тиқилинч қилишмаётгандир?..» Эркин ичкарида нима гап бўлаётганини билмасди. У одамнинг гўнғир-гўнғир товушини, онасининг йиғламсираган овозинигина эшитарди. «Кўмилган қоғозларни, китобларни кўрсатсам, қораси ўчармикин буларнинг», деб ҳам ўйлади. Кейин қоғозлардаги бирон-бир сатр отасининг «халқ душмани» деб қораланиши учун асос бўлиши мумкинлигини англаб, ўзини тийди. У дадасининг кундаликларини ўқиган, айрим сатрлар ёд ҳам бўлиб кетган эди.

*Маразинг бир тарафдан, бир тарафдан хорсан миллат,
Бадандин қон олдирувчи беморсан миллат...*

Отасининг бадном бўлиб кетишига шу байтнинг ўзигина кифоя. Унинг инқилобдан аввал ёзилганига қараб ўтиришмайди. Эркин отасининг қамоққа олинган дўстларини эслаб, «Тирик бўлганларида дадам ҳам...» деб ўйладию, юраги орқасига тортиб кетди. Отасининг бу чарм курткали одамга бош эгишига, унинг олдига тушиб қўлини орқасига қилиб уйдан чиқиб кетишига Эркин

чидай олмаган бўларди. Бошқалар қандай чидаяпти экан, нима учун уларнинг юраклари аламдан тарс ёрилиб кетмаяпти экан?

Эркин кечаси билан шундай ўйлар исканжасида тўлғанди. Тиз чўкиб ўтирган онасини кўриб Эркин унга талпинди. Чарм курткали одам йўлини тўсиб, билагини маҳкам сикди:

— Онанга ачинсанг, олтинлар билан қоғозларнинг қаердалигини айт.

— Бизда олтин бўлмаган. Қоғозларни ёқиб юборганмиз.

— Ҳа, яхши. Бу ерда бир гап чиқмайди, шекилли. Сен мен билан кетасан. Сухбатни идорада давом эттирамиз. «Энкеведе» нима эканини билмас экансизлар.

— Биз ўртоқ Сталинга шикоят қиламиз. Сиз ҳали жавоб берасиз!

Жавлон «Илоннинг боласи илон, чаённинг боласи чаён», деб ижирғанди-да, Эркинни силтаб итарди. Онаси уйда фарёд тортиб қолаверди.

Идорадаги сухбат эски эшикнинг бир метёрдаги ғижирлаши каби давом этиб, Эркиннинг асаб торларини бурдалаб ташлади. У одам уйдаги ўша саволларни эринмай, бир хил оҳангда такрорлайверди. Эркин ҳам бир хилда жавоб қайтараверди. Оқшомга бориб иккови ҳам улардай чарчади. Оқибат — Эркин қамоқхонага, Жавлон эса уйига йўл олди...

«Ойим нима қилишни билмай ўтиргандирлар, — деб ўйлади Эркин. — оғзим қурияпти, сув сўрасамми-кин? Нима деб сўрайман? Шулардан сўрайманми?..»

Эркин уводага ўраниб, очликдан силласи қуриб ўтирганида онаси қамоқхона атрофида зир қақшаб юрган эди. Кундузи ичкаридан тайинли бир гап чиқмагач, уйига қайтиб ош пишириб, тоғорачага сузиб келган, бир «инсофли одам» бу ошни Эркинга бериб қуяман, деб олганича дом-дараксиз кетган эди. Она бечора «ўғлим оч қолмайдиган бўлди», деб бир оз овулган, тоғорачадаги ошнинг шу девор ортида уч азамат томонидан иштаха билан ейилганидан беҳабар эди.

Қош қорайганда Жавлон чиқди. Онанинг: «Болам қани?» деган саволига «Сўроқ тугамади», деб тўнг жавоб қайтарди-ю, автомобилга ўтириб жўнаворди.

Эртасига эрталаб кўнғир бинонинг совуқ деворига суяниб, мудраб ўтирган онани кўриб уни чақирди.

— «Энкеведе» билан ўйнашманг, девдим-а? — деди у пўписи оҳангида. — Ўжарлик қилманг. Болангиз мени ҳақоратлади.

Илоннинг боласи илон, душманнинг боласи душман. Учликнинг хукми билан узоққа кетади. Ҳайлаб иш қилинг. Эсингизни йиғсангиз, қутқариб қола оласиз.

— «Ғлимни бир кўрай.

— Мумкин эмас. Қоғозларни қаерга яширгансиз, олтинни-чи?

— Ахир айтдим-ку?

— Ҳайланг, кечгача Ҳайланг.

Она яна икки ўт орасида қовурилиб қолаверди. Ахир у нимани Ҳайлайди? Эри қаро ерда ётган бўлса. Уни тирилтириб олиб кела олмаса... Тирилтира олганда ҳам бу бедавонинг қўлига топширармиди? Нима учун топширади, нима гуноҳи бор экан у шўрликнинг? Эски замонда неча ўлимдан қолган эди, бу замонда ўлиб ҳам қутулмаса... «Олтинни топиб бер» дейди. Олтиннинг номини эшитишган, ўзини кўришмаган бўлса... Ортиқча беш-ўн тангалари бўлганда тўнғичларини омон сақлаб қолишмасмиди? Ҳайгит ёшида бу дунёдан ҳеч нима кўрмай кетди бечора. Пахта теримига чиқиб, ўпкасини шамолга олдириб қўйди-ю, ўнганмади, қийналиб жон берди. Ота бояқиш юртим, халқим деб юраверган экан. Боладан ажралди-ю, юрти, халқи у ёқда қолиб, ўз жони ҳам кўзига кўринмай қолди. Устидаги мотам кийимини ечмай, боласи ортидан кетди.

«Эркинжон, болам, онанг мен билан турмуш қуриб рўшнолик кўрмади, сен уни ўқситма». Унинг кетар чоғида васияти шу бўлди. Ана энди онасини бошида кўтариб юриши, ноҳуш шамоллардан асраши бу муштипарга бахт нима эканини англатиш зарур булган фарзанд шу совуқ ғишгин бино ичида ўтирибди. Нима қилаяпти у ерда, уни қийнашяитимикин, ё... Шу фикрнинг ўзиданоқ она юраги потирлаб, ёрилиб кетай деди.

Кечгача Ҳайлаши керак... Кўмилган қоғозларни, китобларни бериб юборса қутулармикин? Ё нимага беркитгансанлар, бир айбларинг бор, деб яна баттар қилармикин?

Она нима қиларини билмай турганида, қатта эшик очилиб, бир аскар кўринди. У ёқ-бу ёққа аланглади-да, сўнг унга яқинлашди.

— Мираббосова сенмисан? — деди у дағдаға оҳангида.

— Менман.

— Ҳайингга жўна. Ҳали кечқурун боришади. Жилмай ўтир.

Буйруқ шунақа.

— Ҳайлим... Ҳайлим-Чи?

— Ҳайлингни билмайман. Бор, жўна.

Она унинг кўзларига умидвор нигоҳ билан боқиб, жиндек бўлса ҳам меҳр излади. Йўқ, меҳр топмади. Бу аскарнинг қарашлари совуқ, кўз косасига иккита муз парчаси солиб қўйилгандек эди.

Она ундан узоқлаша бошлади. Оёқлари тошдай зил, босишга мажол йўқ эди. У анча вақтгача орқадан овоз келиб: «Ҳой, она, тўхтанг, ҳазиллашувдим, ҳозир ўғлингиз чиқади, бирга кетасизлар», дейилишини кутди. Ун-ун беш қадам юргач, илинж билан орқасига ўтирилди. Муз кўзли аскар кўринмади... «Нимага боришади, нимага кечкурун боришади?» деган савол уни турли ҳаёл кўчасига етаклади. Уйига яқинлашгач. «Эркинжонимни қўйворишган бўлса уйда кутиб ўтирганмикин?» деган ҳаёл чақмоқдай ярқ этиб, зулмат кўнглига ёруғлик берди. Зил-замбил оёқлари хатто енгиллашгандай туюлди. Шошиб эшикни очди. Ҳовлидан Эркиннинг «Ойижон!» деган овози эшитилгандай бўлди. Онанинг юраги яна портлади. Нафаси қайтиб, кўзи тинди. Эркини, Эркинжони яна бир «Ойижон!» дермикин, деб кутди. Йўқ, ҳовли хувиллаб ётарди. Она уйига сигмай кўчага чикди. Ўзи билмаган ҳолда акасиникига қараб юрди. Акаси уйда экан. Уни сал чўчиброқ қарши олди.

— Нимага келдинг, бунақа пайтда уйда ўтириш керак. Орқангдан одам тушган булса... — у шундай деб кўча эшигини қия очиб, ташқарига мўралади.

— Ойимни олиб кетаман. Кечкурун келишаркан. Ёлғизман, — деди она синиқ овозда. Бу ерга у далда илинжида келган эди. Акасининг қўрқаётганидан билдики, далдага умид қилиш — чўкаётган одамнинг хасга ёпишишидай бир гап. Ўз аканг шундай қилаётгандан кейин...

Кампир қизини бағрига босиб, ҳўнг-ҳўнг йиғлади.

— Кеча оқшом эшитганимдан бери адои тамом бўлдим, борай десам, аканг қўймайди. Замон оғирлашиб кетганмиш, нима қилай, қон ютиб ўтиравердим.

— Кечкурун келишаркан, ёлғизман.

— Бораман, болам, бораман.

— Сен кетавер, бирга юрманглар. Ўзлари борадилар, — деди акаси.

Она қамоқхонадан узоқлашаётган дамда кўлларини орқасига қилиб олган Эркин Жавлоннинг хонасига кириб келган эди. Жавлон йигитчанинг кўзларидан ниманидир ўқимоқчи бўлгандай қаттиқ тикилди. Эркиннинг кўзларида уйқусизлик очлик азоби зоҳир эди. Жавлонга худди шу керак: азобга банди бўлганми,

йўқми — шуни билиш истагида тикилган эди. Излаганини топиб, юзига ғолиб одамнинг масрур кулгуси югурди.

— Ўтир, онанг овқат олиб келибди, еб ол, — деди у мулойимлашиб.

Эркин стол устидаги тунука коса, буғи кўтарилиб турган шўрва, бир бурда нонни кўриб, ютинди. Лекин сир бой бергиси, бу одамнинг марҳаматидан фойдалангиси келмади.

— Қорним тўқ, — деб юзини четга бурди. Жавлон унга яқинлашиб бўйнидан ушлади-да, стол томон итарди.

— Ўтир, еб ол, тирранча! Сенга ким қўйибди аразлашни. Қорнингни тўйғазиб, саволимга жавоб беру жўнаб қол, онанг кутиб турибди кўчада.

Эркин ўтириб, қўлига қошиқ олди. Шўрва томоғини куйдириб ўтди. Шўрва шўр эди. «Маيلي, бир-икки қошиқ ичай, яна сулайиб қолмай», деб ўйлади у. Шу пайт аскар йигит қайнаб турган самовар олиб кириб қўйди. «Чой ҳам бераркан», деб кўнглидан ўтказди Эркин. «Яна бир қошиқ, кейин ичмайман...» деб ўтириб косани бўшатди. Шундан кейин ичи ёна бошлади. «Бу одам чой дамлайдими?» деб кутди. Жавлон самоварга қараб ҳам қўймади.

— Қорнинг тўйдими? Энди айт: отангнинг қоғозлари кундаликлари қаерда?

— Ёқиб юборганмиз.

Кечаги савол-жавоб, кечаги томоша қайтадан бошланди. Йўқ, томоша кечагидай эмасди. Эркинни кечаги дадиллиги тарк этган, аксинча уйқусиз икки тун, очлик азобига қушилган ташналик хукмини ўтказа бошлаган эди. У ўзини аранг тутиб турарди.

— Дадангнинг кундаликларини ўқиганмисан?

— Йўқ.

— Унда нимага ёқдинг?

— Кераксиз қоғозлар деб ўйлабман.

— Бекор айтибсан, ўқигансан. Бу кундалик отангни халқ душмани сифатида фош қолишини билгансан.

— Отам душман эмас эди! — Эркин шарт ўрнидан турди. Лекин Жавлон уни елкасидан чангаллаб, жойига босиб ўтқазди.

— Мен ўқиганман, отангнинг кундалигини. Эсимда турибди. «Халқ ночор, халқ юпун, халқ ўлим тўшагидаги бемор. Бунга сабаб юмшоқ ўринда кекириб ўтирган ўртокларнинг думба чайнаб чандирни халққа отиши, қаймоқ ялаб, шилдир сувни халққа бериши, палов ошалаб, ювиндини халққа раво кўришидир...» деб

ёзган отанг. Ўқигансан, а? Ҳа, ўқигансан. Бунақа гапни фақат душман айтади. Қани ўша кундалик қаерга яширддинг? Ёқиб юборганингга ишонмайман, барибир топаман. Сенинг терингга сомон тикаман, онангни оёғидан осаман! Айт!

— Ёқиб юборганмиз...

«Ҳозир шундай сайратайки...» Жавлон самовар қопқоғини очиб томизғичга қайноқ сув тўлдирди-да, Эркиннинг орқа томонига ўтди. Йигитчанинг бошига бир томчи қайноқ сув томизди. Кутилмаган оғриқдан Эркин сакраб тушди. Қайноқ томчи миясидан кириб товонидан чиққандай бўлди. Жавлон уни елкасидан босиб жойига ўтқазди. Яна бир томчи томизди. Эркин бу сафар дод деб юборди. Дахлизда кутиб турган аскар ичкари кириб Эркиннинг қўлларини стулга боғлади. Жавлон бир оз фурсатдан кейин яна қайноқ сув томизди. Эркин бу азобларга узоқ дош бер олмади — хушидан кетди.

Эркинни икки аскар суяб олиб чиқди. Жавлон унинг орқасидан қараб захарханда билан «Тирранча!» деб қўйди-да, телефон дастагини кўтарди.

— Вадим Алексеевич, терговни тугатдим, Мираббосовнинг халқ душмани экани тасдиқланди. Ҳа, большевик ниқобида юрган. Ўн тўққизинчи йилда Бухоро амири билан шахсан учрашган. Шундан бери Совет ҳокимиятига қарши пинҳона курашиб келган. Сири фош бўлишини билиб ўзини ўзи ўлдирган. Ўзининг озодликда қолиши совет ҳокимияти учун гоят ҳавфли. Қарашлари аксилпиклюбий... ҳа, ашаддий миллатчи... Фикримми?.. Йигирма беш йилдан кам эмас... Ҳа, учликнинг ҳукмини тайёрлаб қуяман.

У трубкани қўйгач, чуқур тин олди. «Бир вақтлар менинг уруғимни қуритмоқчи эди. Сал вақтгироқ ўлди-да, уруғ қуритиш қанақа бўлишини кўрарди», деб ўзидан-ўзи қувонди-да, «Миллатчи унсур Эркин Мираббосовни йигирма беш йил озодликдан махрум қилиш» ҳақидаги уч кишидан иборат ҳайъатнинг қарорини ёза бошлади.

Эркин муздай хонада ўзига келди. Қаддини кўтариб бошини ушлаб кўрди. Чарм курткали одам, назарида бошига ўткир миҳлар қоққандек эди. Эркин бошида оғриқ сезмади. Аммо дам ўтмай ташналик азоби бурувга олди. Кўкрагини муздай тошга бериб ётди — ҳаловат топмади. Ўрнидан турди. Юзини деворга босди — ором ололмади. Соқчини чақириб, сув сўрамоқ-чи бўлди. Ярим йулда тўхтади. «Буларга ялинмайман!» деб орқасига қайтди. Кулоқлари остида сув жилдирагандай бўлди. Кўзига қизларнинг

қирққокилидай биланглаётган, шизгиш ўтларни ўйнатиб оқаётган ариқдаги зилол сув кўринди. Кўзларини чирт юмиб, кулоқларини кафти билан беркитди. Шу аҳволда узоқ ўтирди. Азобларни эсламасликка, бошқа воқеаларни ўйлашга ҳаракат қилди. Ҳилари айланиб келиб, сўроққа тақалаверди.

Шунча азоблар етмагандай кўнгли беҳузур бўлиб ўқчиди. Қорни бураб оғриб, букчайиб қолди. Кўз олдига яна қонли дарё келиб, қамоқхона шу дарёдаги пачоқ кемадай чайқала бошлади. Кейин зимистон бағрига отилди. Шунда ўзини сал енгил ҳис қилгандай булди. Аммо бу ҳол узоқ чўзилмади. Кўзини очиб яна совуқ девор, темир эшик темир панжарали дарчани кўрди. Ичакларини бир нима ёндиргандай бўлди. Томоғи, оғзи, қуриди. Кулоғи остида шилдираётган сув дам ўтмай шаршара каби шовуллади. Ариқ кенгайиб анҳорга айланди. Анҳорнинг зилол сувлари кўпириб, тошиб, қамоқхона томон оқа бошлади. Дарвозаларни бузиб кириб, темир панжарали дарчага етиб келди. Эркин беихтиёр равишда тепага қараб, оғзини очди. Кўзига кўринган сув анҳордан оқиб келган эмас, балки ҳаёлидан тошиб чиққан эди. Буни англаб сўкинди. Деворга алам билан мушт урди. Аввалига тиз чўкиб ўтирди. Кейин ичи куйгандан куйиб бир оз ором оларман деган мақсадда яланғоч кўкрагини совуқ тошга босди. Ичидаги олов алангаси пасайгандек туюлди. Энди юзини ҳам тошга қўйди. Назарида, тош нам эди. Тилини чиқариб, тошни ялади. Бу ҳам озгина муддатгина фойда берди. Ичидаги оташ тошдаги муздан ғолиб келди. Эркин энди соқчини чақириб сув сўрашни ўйламас эди. Чарм курткали одам билан бўлган суҳбатларини ҳам эсламасди. У азоб тўлғоғига буткул банди бўлган эди. У тош устида типирчилай-типирчилай ҳолдан кетди. Ташналик ҳам, ичакларининг бураб тортиши ҳам барҳам топгандай тинчиди. Маъносиз боқётган кўзларини темир панжарали дарчага қалади. Унинг оғзи емиш кутаётган полапон оғзидай очиқ эди. Оғир меҳнат килиб ҳориган одамдай калта-калта нафас олар эди.

У дарчага қараб нажот кутарди. Темир панжарага парво қилмай ёриб кираётган ёруғлик билан наҳот нажот ҳам кирмаса, наҳот бир томчигина сув тушмаса? Онаси кўчадамикин? Бақирса эшитармикин? У бақирмокчи эди — овози заифгина ҳирқиради. Боши айланиб, кўзларини юмди. Кўзини очиб, темир панжара ортида акасини кўрди. Қалдирғоч мўйлов ярашиб турган ўша меҳрибон чеҳра. Ўша беғубор жилмайиш...

«Укажоним, сенга нима бўлди?»

«Акажон, сув беринг, ёниб кетяпман».

«Бир ҳовучгина олибман сувни, ма, ич...»

Деразадан тушган сув тош устига тўкилди. Эркин, оғзини очганича қолаверди.

«Нимага келдингиз, ака? Ахир сиз...»

«Сени қийнашаётганини билиб келдим олдингга. Қийнашса ҳам айтма. Дадамни бадном қилишмоқчи бўлар. Кундаликдаги гапларни биласан-ку?»

«Биламан. Одамлар бекордан-бекорга кулоқ қилиняпти, одамлар бекордан-бекорга азобга тортиляпти, деганлар. Булар мени ўлдиришса ўлдиришсин, лекин сир олишолмайди».

«Ҳа, ўлсанг ўл, аммо айтма. Сен эркаксан. Улар сендан кўрқишади. Шунинг учун қийнашяпти. Сен чида, мен яна сув олиб келаман...»

Акаси кўринмай қолди. Эркин кўзларини юмди. Акасининг овозини яна эшитиб, кўзларини ялт этиб очди. Акаси ҳовучидаги сувни тўкди. Сув пастга етиб келмади, зарраларга бўлиниб, сочилиб кетди.

«Ака, сизларнинг олдингизга боргим келяпти, нима қилай?»

«Кела қол, укажоним. Дадам ҳам айтиб юбордилар. Сен билагингни тишла, томирингни уз. Шунда бизнинг олдимизга хур куш бўлиб учиб келасан. Бўла қол, кутяпмиз сени...»

Эркин кўзини юмиб очди, акаси кўринмади. Билагини аста тишлади. Жони оғриб, қўлини тортиб олди. Баданидаги оғриқлар кўзгалиб тош устида типирчилай бошлади. Шунда акасининг гапларини эслаб, жон аччиғида билагини тишлади — бу сафар оғриқ сезилмади. Тишини қаттиқроқ ботирди. Ақл-хушини йўқотган Эркин билагини шартта-шартта тишлаб ташлади. Томиридан отилган илиқ қон юзига тегиб кўнгли беҳузур бўлди. Кўз олдидаги дарёда қон мавж урди. Мавжлар устида қамоқхона, қамоқхона ичида Эркин чайқалди. Чайқала-чайқала хушидан кетди. У акаси айтгандай енгил учди. Уча-уча дадаси томон йул олди.

Бу онда Жавлон уларнинг ҳовлисида итнинг ёғоч уйини сурдириб, хумни кавлатиб олдирди. Қоғозлар ичидан кераклисини топиб кўнгли равшанлашди. «Жавлон Жабборов унсурлар тўдаси билан яширин тил борлаганини бўйнига олди. Айбини қон билан ювишга онт ичди. Ҳайъат унинг қасамини инобатга олиб, большевиклар сафида бир йиллик синов муддати билан қолдирди. Мажлис раиси Мираббосов... 1919 йил».

— «Ўғлим қачон келади? — деди она Жавлонга умидли нигоҳини қадаб.

— Кут, келади, — деди Жавлон эътиборсиз оҳангда. Кейин қоғозлар, китоблар боғламини кўтарган аскар йигитлар орқасидан юриб, кўчага чикди.

Эртасига ҳовли хувиллади. Тонгда онани ҳам олиб кетдилар.

By Tokhir MALIK

ERKIN

The iron-door of the prison squeaked heartbreakingly at first, and then it closed clanking in a trice. Nevertheless, in thoughts of Erkin it wasn't the door that clanked, it was the damp building reeking of mould and it seemed to him as if it was snapped in half and swallowed him. Erkin began to shudder after he stayed alone in cold and dark cell that was three meters wide and two meters long. At fist, he couldn't even realize why he was shuddering, either from cold or from fear. Clanking sound of the door cast blight on his last glimmers of hope. Those glimmers were still shimmering like a star in the far distance, even when he was walking along the passage of the prison with his hands on the back.

Now all was over! It didn't turn out to be just a threat or misunderstanding. He just stood stock-still as he made a step over the threshold of the cell. His eyes went black and his feet seemed to have lost all their feelings. Reluctantly his body started to fall, he crouched and then squatted. His knees froze, his quiver grew stronger. He wanted to bellow but he failed to utter a sound. The dark room caught light by a sudden; it became so lustrous that he couldn't see anything. He felt as if the cell's roof drifted apart hence his eyes dazzled looking at the sunlight. In less than no time, the cell began to redden, at last it changed into the hue that was as red as blood and all undulated. For him the cell was like a ship floating on the bloody river and its ripples were clotting more and more. Erkin flopped down limply to one side like a newly mowed wheat-crop. His temple hit against the concrete floor and the bloody river that he was in, turned into a pitch-dark trench and he felt as if he fell down into it and he lay nonchalantly because neither was he shuddering nor did he have a keen pain.

The prison-guard who had a wide belt fastened on his waist, worried about him as he became quiet and opened the hatch of the door to see:

“Look, he is lying on the ground, maybe something's wrong with him,” he said looking at his partner. His pasty looking partner also glanced at him:

"He isn't going to die, let him lie," he said and went away.

Erkin didn't know how long he'd been lying there. When he came round, he became stiff with fright finding him in dead silence. He didn't know that silence could be so gruesome. Therefore he was still lying, dithering if he was conscious or not. By chance, he heard how his mother whispered piercing the silence: "Get up, my child, you may catch a cold!" Erkin flinched, cocked his head, and listened, but he heard no squeak of his mother any more. He darted a glance around, opposite to him, there was an old tarnished iron-bed, a wan lamp on the ceiling, on the other side a skylight barred with iron-fence and behind him, and there was an iron-door and nothing more. He straightened himself up and stroked his frozen right hand and right flank, he walked dragging along his feeble feet and sat on the bed, took the tatters that was like neither a quilt nor a woolen sheet and tucked himself up under it. A bit of warmth ran through his body. When he finally got rid of cold now he came under attack of hunger. He hadn't blinked an eye all night long and was led away even without having breakfast.

On hearing just the name of the LNCIA (1), all the neighbours were just peeping with fear through the slits of their doors, but none of them tried to soothe his poor mother who kept moaning when her son was hauled off.

The whole day Erkin was answering to the given questions standing on his feet. When the dusk was falling, he was brought to that cell again. Erkin was getting inured to both damp cell and silence inch by inch. These nights and days were an unexpected trial for a boy of seventeen, bereaved of his both father and brother within a year and who got taken aback on hearing that all of his father's friends were being arrested one by one.

The head of his school had called him three days ago. That man with peaked beard was so courteous that even little children he used to treat with respect and didn't show his anger to anyone. On seeing that so polite person's face grew pale, Erkin felt surprised.

"Last night Nazimkhudja was arrested," he said anxiously, "They are arresting all one after the other, go to your home and hide all of your father's books, diaries, letters, every paper that's written on, especially the books by Julkunbay and Chulpan, hide them, don't let them catch someone's eye. Be careful. Go."

"But why do we need it, master? My father is no more... Will they come anyway?"

"They may come." Erkin wanted to laugh and at the same time was astounded seeing the way that his teacher was such a coward. He went to his home and told his mother about all what happened. Suddenly blood drained from her face, covering her face with her palms she said: "Oh, my god!" At that very moment, she grew to understand why they hadn't

been given any pension since three months. She stood disappointed for some moments and fell into picking up the books on the rack and looking at the books gathered, on and on she was saying: "Oh, my god what can I do now, where shall we hide them, god? Erkin, my son, where shall we hide them, I think we'd rather burn them."

Erkin gazed at her trying to know if she was joking or not, and clung to her hands as if she was going to burn them at once.

"No," he said earnestly, "You won't burn them; these books belong to my father!" He couldn't let her burn the books which once his father had used. If those books had burnt, his father's memory would have also burnt to ashes. Consequently, nothing holy would remain in his home. Erkin couldn't understand that it was savage to live without memories, but he knew one thing exactly that all the things that his father approached with his hands were sacred and holy. Holy and sacred things could never be burnt. He clutched his mother's hands staring into her eyes as if he meant to say: "I'll never let you burn them even to save my life," Even though these words flashed in his soul, His mother could hear them with her soul as well.

"What shall we do then?" she blubbered.

"We'll bury them." In their kitchen, there was an earthen pitcher as big as they come, and Erkin couldn't remember the time when it was ever filled with grain. It was always empty. This empty pitcher came to his mind all of a sudden and he started digging a hole outside. And his mother gathered all the letters and documents with tears in her eyes. It was mid-night when Erkin buried the pitcher, having closed it, bundling its rim tightly and lugged the wooden kennel upon there. A day after when he went to school Erkin heard that his headmaster had been declared as "an enemy of people." Unable to forget yesterday's appearance of that man Erkin was also feeling anxious for no reasons.

They came that evening. As soon as he saw the man who was dressed in leather jacket and ordering everyone around Erkin recognized him, that man whose name was Javlon had haunted their home once or twice, but his father didn't welcome him. Every time when guests left their home, his father used to praise how good they were, meanwhile if they weren't the type he liked, he would just keep silence about them. Erkin knew very well this habit of his father, that's why he didn't use to ask questions about those who his father didn't mention about, therefore he didn't know exactly who this man in leather jacket, Javlon was. When his father had died this man also had come and whined: "Mirabbosov was a Bolshevik and will be buried as a Bolshevik." He had given up only when his mother had said: "You're a fair mouth, my son was a Bolshevik, yet let him rest in peace where his forefathers do. Can you show me the law which says that Bolshevik must lie in a wooden box?" He insisted on

opening his face to take leave of him. He left without waiting for the janaza², when people scolded him: "He's been shrouded and the shroud can't be opened." Visit of this man was like a puzzle for Erkin.

Javlon barged in their home without dusting down his boots. Treading on the serge carpet, then the cushion, he came up to the rack:

"Hmm... Marx, Lenin, well..." he said looking at the books, "Where are the books of comrade Stalin?"

Erkin's mother couldn't answer stammering.

"What kind of a Bolshevik is Mirabbosov if he doesn't have the books by the leader? On this rack there were Kadiriy's books, and by Chulpan on that one. Where are they?"

His mother couldn't find an answer again. As there wasn't any answer to his questions Javlon asked much more loudly:

"Where are the books, I say?"

"We've burnt them."

"You've burnt them? Why?"

"So, why are you asking?"

Erkin couldn't stand the way that his mother fumbled for words and replied:

"There's no place in Bolshevik's home for books written by enemies."

Javlon stared at Erkin with bitter smile."

"So there? Well... But I haven't asked from you, rascal, don't put your foot in it. Well, you say that you've burnt the books? So, where is your husband? You haven't burnt him, I guess."

Both Erkin and his mother boggled, they could make no sense if that man was joking or telling the truth.

"What do you mean?" his mother blubbered, "My husband... You did see..."

"I didn't see! When I wanted to see, you launched an attack, because there was another man in the shroud. Mirabbosov is an enemy of people and he is trying to escape the edict of justice."

"You have no rights to say so! My father was a real Bolshevik."

Come down, rascal, I know your father better than you do. Mirabbosov didn't allocate half of a pitcher of gold that had been found during the rummage in Bukhara. We've searched the archive and there is a proof. Well, where did he hide the rest of the gold? Or have you burnt it too? Ok, if we let alone the fact that Mirabbosov is an enemy. He isn't worth saying so. Mirabbosov is just a thief, we must find the thief.

"It's you who is a thief!" Erkin bawled loosing his temper and flew at Javlon. If his mother hadn't stood on his way, he would have certainly grabbed him by the throat. As soon as Javlon ushered the soldier standing on the threshold, he folded Erkin's arms and dragged him over to the yard.

The day closed in. It was late evening. Silence descended around as if the whole city, the whole country was slumbering. Erkin knew very well that other families were also suffering from these troubles and that their blood was running cold with fear to wait for the time their doors would be knocked at. "Maybe they were root ling three or four houses but they wouldn't be insisting on raising the dead person, I guess," he thought. Erkin didn't know what was happening inside, he could only hear that a man was mumbling and heard blubbering sound of a woman. "If I show them the papers and books I buried, maybe I'll see their back." Nevertheless, realizing that any line on those papers could be a proof enabling his father to be declared as an "enemy", he stopped thinking of it. He'd read his father's diaries, even some verses he'd learnt by heart.

"You're so poor, withal vipers are eating you, my people,

"You're all like a creature that lets them suck its blood."

"At least this verse was enough to drag his father's name through the mud. No one would consider that it had been written before the revolution. Remembering of his father's friends who were arrested: "If my father had been alive he would have also...", he thought and his heart seemed to miss a beat. He couldn't have endured if his father had bowed his head in front of that man in leather jacket and if he'd gone out of the house ahead of him, his arms folded behind. How come could other people stand it? How come could they bear such a pain of chagrin? All night long Erkin writhed in agony of these thoughts. Seeing his mother sinking to her knees, Erkin reached out for her. The man in leather jacket stood on his way and squeezed his wrist with force:

"If you take pity on your mother, tell us where the gold and papers are?"

"We didn't have any gold and we have burnt all the papers."

"Well, likely we can't drag a word out of you, you will go with me and together we'll go on with our talk at the administration. You have no inking what the NCIA is like yet."

"We'll complain to the comrade Stalin about it, you will regret about everything."

"Snake bears a snake, and a scorpion bears a scorpion," sneered Javlon and shoved him. His mother stayed crying and yelling.

The conversation in the administration went on to the accompaniment of the old door's squeaking noise, and this actually struck Erkin's nerves. That man didn't deign to ask the very questions that he'd given in his home and he relished them over and over again in the same tone. Until the day closed in, both of them got tired to death, so Erkin started for the cell and Javlon for his home.

"I think my mother's brooding over what to do?" Erkin thought. "My mouth is parched, what if I ask for water? Howe come will I ask? Do I

have to ask from them? Whilst Erkin sat, tucked up under the tatters and exhausted from hunger, his mother strayed around the prison reeling in trouble. As she couldn't hear from her son during the daytime, she went back home, cooked pilaf, having brought it in a pan she held it out to "an honest man" who disappeared without a trace saying that he would certainly give it to Erkin. The poor mother at last laying her mind a mite at rest she thought: "Now my son won't be feeling hungry." Meanwhile she wasn't aware that three strong men were bolting it down with appetite inside the very building. When the dusk already fell Javlon went out. When the mother asked him where her son was, he gave a curt answer that the inquiry hadn't come to an end yet and left getting in a car.

The next day in the morning as soon as he saw the mother sitting drowsy and leaning against the cold wall of the brown building, he called out for her:

"I warned you not to tiptoe around the NCIA, he said in a threatening voice," Don't be so stubborn, your son has insulted me, snake bears a snake, and a child of an enemy will be an enemy. He will be sent down for a long time with the verdict of three judges. Think carefully before you do something. If you come back to your senses you will save your son."

"Let me see my son, once at least."

"No, it's impossible, where did you hide the papers and the gold?"

"But I did say..."

"Think carefully till the evening."

The mother was between the rock and a hard place. What else could she do? She could never raise her husband who was already in the grave. Ok, let's say, that she could raise him from death. Would she let that dimwit man take him away? What wrong did her poor husband do to have it coming? When he'd been alive, more than once, god had saved him from death, and then they weren't letting him alone even when he was dead. She was forced to find the gold although she only heard about it but had never seen. In fact had they had spare money they could have saved their eldest child. The poor boy was cut down in his prime. He got cold in his lungs having picked cotton in the fields but couldn't recover and at long last, breathed his last. At that time, his poor father was living and working for the sake of his motherland and people, when he was bereaved of his child let alone the motherland, he became oblivious even to himself. No sooner was the mourning for their son over than he had also gone away to that great beyond after him.

"Erkin, my son, your mother has led a very hard life since she married to me, so don't let anyone hurt her soul." This was his last will before he departed this world. Howsoever he was sitting in that cold and brick building instead of making a fuss of his mother and shielding her from

even a meager trouble and making the real happiness borne in on her.

Her heart was pounding and fluttering when she wondered what her son was doing inside, or whether they were torturing him. She had to ponder until the evening. Could she get rid of these troubles if she gave those papers and books buried? What if they would charge them with hiding the papers and saying that some blames lay with them anyhow? What if they would torture them far more? When the mother was standing and didn't know which way to turn, the large gate opened and the soldier came into sight. He looked around and came up to her.

"Is it you Mirabbosova?" he asked menacingly.

"Yes, I am."

"Go to your home! They will come tonight. You must be in, it's an order."

"How about my son?"

"I don't have anything to do with your son, go, go."

She gazed in his eyes looking for measly warmth in them. She couldn't find. The soldier's glance was so cold that there seemed to be two pieces of ice in his eye-sockets. She went ahead, her feet as heavy as stones, didn't feel up to walk. For a long time, she waited for that soldier to say: "I say, mother, I've been joking, your son is going to go out now. Wait and you will go together." Making ten or fifteen steps she turned back to look with a fond hope. The icy-eyed soldier wasn't there any more. Questions like, "Why will they come, why will they come tonight?" meandered up in her thoughts. When she got to her home, she thought, "What if they set my son free?" and this thought gained victory over the darkness in her soul. She broke into a trot forgetting about the heaviness in her legs. Erkin's voice floated across the yard: "Mummy!" She choked up, her heart pounded and mind went blank. She waited for Erkin to call her again, but there was no one at home. She loathed to stay in any longer and went out, her feet deliberately leading to her brother's home. He was in, welcomed her with fear:

"Why have you come, everyone should sit in at the time like this. What if someone has followed in your wake?" he said poking his head out, opening the door ajar.

"My mother will go with me. I was said that they would come tonight. I'm alone," she said in a brittle voice. She came here looking for a measly encouragement, yet she realized that hoping for encouragement was like expecting a flower to grow on the stone. If your own brother did so, let alone the others. Erkin's granny, the old woman sobbed much, clasping her daughter in her arms:

"I've felt beyond myself with grief since I heard about it yesterday. I was going to go, your brother didn't let. Life's getting hard, what else can we do? I could barely stand it."

"I was said that they would come tonight. I'm alone."

"I'll go with you, my dear child, I'll go."

"You can go. You mustn't walk together. She'll go later," said her brother.

* * *

At the time when the mother left the prison, Erkin was coming into Javlon's room, his hands on the back. Javlon bored into him, as if he wanted to read something in his eyes. One could see anguish of sleeplessness and hunger in them. That was what Javlon needed, because he bore into his eyes so as to see if he became captive to these pains or not. As he found what he looked for, a fiendish smile crept across his mouth like a man, gloating over his victory:

"Sit and eat the meal that your mother's brought," he said much politely.

Erkin choked up seeing the soup, steaming in the tin bowl and a piece of bread, he loathed to betray his hanger and to get use of the generosity of that man.

"I'm not hungry," he said and averted his face. Javlon approached him, and made him hunch over the table grasping by his neck.

"Sit and eat, I say! Why the blazes are you feeling sulky, little rascal? Go off after you eat it and answer my questions. Your mother has been waiting for you outside."

"He sat and took the spoon. The soup almost burnt his throat, while he ate. It was salty. "I need to drink a spoon or two so that I wouldn't feel rotten," he added as an afterthought. One of the soldiers brought some boiled water in the samovar. He thought that he'd be given a cup of tea as well. Making up his mind on and on saying: "one more spoon, then I won't any more," he downed it all. He started feeling thirsty, waited for that man to give him tea, but Javlon didn't even take a glimpse at samovar.

"Have you had your fill, now tell me, where are the papers and diaries of your father?"

"We've burnt them." Again the questions, given yesterday, and the scene, played yesterday started from the outset. The scene wasn't as well as it was yesterday. Because Erkin wasn't as vigorous as he was the day before. Two sleepless nights, pain of hunger and thirst was ruling over him, he could barely stand on his feet.

"Have you ever read diaries of your father?"

"No."

"Why have you burnt them, why?"

"I thought they were just needless papers."

"Nothing of the kind. You've read. You knew that they could enable him to be declared as an enemy."

"My father wasn't an enemy," Erkin leapt to his feet, Javlon made him sit back grasping by his shoulder.

"I've read your father's diaries, yes, I still remember, it's written that our people are poor and that they can't buy warm clothes and bundle up, when they need to, they are like sick men living in a borrowed time. They are weak because of those who eat and burp sitting on soft and warm seats, those who champ on the fleshy meat and throw its bones to people. They are weak because of those who lick cream leaving whey to people. Because of those who bolt down pilaf giving slops to people. Have you read? Yes, you have. Only an enemy can dare write like this. Where's the diary? Where did you hide it? I don't believe an inch that you burnt them. I'll find them if even I'll have to move heaven and the earth. I'll knock your head off and haul your mother over the coals. Tell me at once."

"We have burnt them"

"Now I'll make you sing like a bird." Javlon filled the pipette with boiled water in the samovar, and stood behind him. He dribbled a drop of water on his head. Erkin jumped up from a sudden pain. That sizzling drop of water seemed to have got to his heels. Javlon made him sit again grasping by his shoulder. He dribbled once more. Erkin let out a yell this time. The soldier, waiting in the corridor, came in and tied his hands up to the chair. Some minutes later, Javlon dribbled one more drop. Erkin could take these tortures so far and no further, he fainted. Two soldiers shouldered him to lead him out. Javlon sneered when he left: "Rascal!" and he picked up the phone:

"Vadim Alexeevich, I've finished the inquiry, Mirabbosov has been proved to be an enemy. Yes, he lived pretending to be a Bolshevik, and he met with emir of Bukhara face to face. Since then he'd been fighting against the Soviet government. Being afraid that it could be laid bare, he'd killed himself. It's perilous to let his son live in freedom, his outlook is antirevolutional... Yes, he is a real nationalist. What do I think of it? No less than twenty-five years. Yes, I will take care of the verdict of three judges." He took a deep breath hanging up the phone.

"Before he was going to root out my kith and kin. It's a pity he died a bit earlier or he would have seen what rooting out someone's kith and kin must be like," he thought and felt delighted for reasons best known to himself. And he fell into writing the verdict, to be signed up by three judges which was on: "Sentencing the nationalist type of person, Erkin Mirabbosov to twenty five years of prison. Erkin came round in the damp cell where it was freezing cold. He straightened up and held his head. It seemed to him as if the man in leather jacket, drove sharp nails into his head. He didn't feel any pain in his head, but in less than no time, thirst launched an attack against him. He laid, his face downwards, resting his breast on the freezing stone. As he couldn't get repose, he rose to his feet, putting his face on the wall, couldn't feel asleep. He wanted to ask for water calling the guard, but immediately changed his mind: "I shan't beg them," and he stepped back.

He heard babbling sound of water. Pure water in the pond that was glittering like a glass in the sun, and some reddish grass hove into his sight. He screwed up his eyes and closed his ears with his palms. He sat like that for a long time. He tried to avoid remembering about these tortures and other events, however he tried, his thoughts wandered and the inquiry popped into his mind, withal he vomited and burped. He scooped down from a dull pain in his belly. Again that bloody river appeared and the cell was undulating on this river like a flattened ship. By a sudden, Erkin was hurled out to the darkness, he got his breath back but it didn't last long. When he opened his eyes, again he saw those cold walls, that iron-door and skylight, barred with iron-fence. Something ran and burnt through his kidneys. His throat was dry and lips were parched. Babbling water began to splash like a waterfall. The pond widened and turned into a brook. Pure waters of the brook heaved, frothed and were flowing towards the cell. It got to the skylight with iron-fence, breaking through the door. Erkin looked up and opened his mouth unintentionally. He cursed realizing that the water, which came into his sight, wasn't flowing from the brook, but it just gushed out of his mind. He punched fiercely on the wall. At first he sank to his knees, he was burning up inside with the intention to have a nap a trifle. He lay, resting his bare breast against the cold stone. A flame inside him seemed to be falling off, He put his face on the stone, it was wet, he licked it, sticking out his tongue, and it helped him for a short time. A flame inside him clinched a victory over the ices on the stone. Erkin wasn't thinking about calling the guard and asking him for water, he wasn't recalling the conversation with the man in leather jacket any more. He'd already become a captive to agony of tortures. He lost his strength after he'd been writhing in agony so much. He became quiet as if both thirst and pain in his kidneys came to an end. He fixed his motionless eyes to the skylight, barred with iron-fence. He stood, his mouth wide open, like a little bird waiting for something to eat and he took shallow breaths like a hoary man, tired of working hardy. He was waiting for help looking at the skylight. Was that light spilling through the iron-fence unable to help him? Was it unable to pass him a drop of water? He wondered whether his mother was out in the street, whether she could hear him if he yelled. He was going to, but his voice sounded croaky. Being dizzy, he closed his eyes. When he opened them, he saw his brother behind the iron-fence, that kind face that black moustache, became him so much, that aglow smile:

“What happened to you, my dear brother?”

“Brother, give me some water, I'm burning up inside.”

“I've brought just a bare handful of water, here it's, drink.” Water dropped from the skylight and spilt on the stone and left his mouth open.

“Why are you here brother? But you did...”

"I've come here because I know that they are torturing you. Don't tell them anything although they torture you, will you? They want to besmirch our father. You know what's written in the diary."

"I know. It's written that people are being tricked and suffering to no purpose. They can kill me but never drag these secrets out of me."

"Yes, don't tell them even though you have to die. You're a man and they are afraid of you. Therefore, they are torturing you. Wait, I'll bring some water again." His brother disappeared, Erkin closed his eyes. And he opened on hearing his brother's voice. His brother spilt the water that he brought in his hand, it didn't get to him, and it spluttered and tore into pieces.

"Brother, I want to go with you. What shall I do for that?"

"You may come, my dear. Listen! That's what our father said. You must bite you wrist and tear your vessel out. Then you will fly to us like a free bird. Hurry up; we'll be waiting for you." Erkin blinked his eye, his brother disappeared. He bit his wrist carefully. But he pulled his hand back from the pain. All the pains in his body relapsed and he began to quiver again, lying on the stone. Then remembering what his brother had said, he gnawed his wrist in death-agony, this time he didn't feel any pain. He sank his teeth much deeper. Erkin, taken leave of his senses, bit his wrist more than once. He vomited when warm blood spurted and spluttered on his face. The river lingering in his mind was abundant with bloody waves. On the river the cell, and in the cell Erkin was undulating and he fainted. He flew as freely as his brother had told him. Flying and flying, he set forth to see his father. At that time Javlon had the pitcher dug out, dragging the kennel aside. He felt relieved having found what he needed among the papers:

"Javlon Jabborov admitted that he had colluded with a group of illegal type. He swore an oath to correct his mistake. Having taken it into consideration the judges decided to let him stay among the Bolsheviks for a year and as a trial.

The leader of the meeting: Mirabbosov. 1919.

"When will my son come?" Erkin's mother asked glancing hopefully at Javlon.

"Wait, he will come," Javlon said carelessly. Then he went out to the street, walking behind the soldiers, who lifted bales of papers and books.

The next day, their home turned into all but a desert. In the morning they hauled the mother off.

Glossary

1. The National Commission of Internal Affairs
2. A religious ceremony like a funeral in which a dead person is prayed for, before he or she is buried.

БАЛИҚ ОВИ

Мен биринчи синфга қатнардим. Акам еттида ўқирди. Отам хўжалик мудирди эди. Уйимизга тез-тез меҳмон келиб турарди. Ҳар сафар ҳар хил кишилар: ориқ, семиз, новча, пакана, мўйловли, мўйловсиз... Уларнинг кўпини танимасам-да, ўзимда йўқ севишиб кетардим. Чунки меҳмон келса, акам иккимиз, албатта, балиқ овига жўнардик. Қишлоғимизнинг кунботар томонида тўқай бўлиб, ҳали зовурлар қазилмаган, захоб сувлар қуритилмаганди. Катта-кичик булоқларда, айниқса, Димарикда (димланиб окқани учун шундай дейиларди) балиқ мўл бўлар эди. Сув кўпайганда ҳатто тўқай ичидаги шолিপояларга ҳам балиқ чиқиб кетарди. Шанба-якшанбада бу ерга болалар тўлиб кетарди, ким қармоқ кўтарган, ким тўр судраган...

Мен акамнинг балиқ тутишини кўришга ишқибоз эдим. У балиқ овлашга уста эди. Тўрдаям, санчикдаям бир зумда бир пақирини илинтирарди. Ҳатто кўлдаям. Сув остига шўнғиб, балиқларни ўз камаридан тутиб чиқарди. Ҳеч нарсадан, илондан ҳам кўрқмасди. Илон кўрдими, тамом, уни думидан ушлаб айлантириб-айлантириб отиб юбормагунча кўнгли жойига тушмасди. Қирғоқда кулча бўлиб, мудраётган илонлар шарпамизни сездди дегунча жилиб қолишар ё ўзларини сувга уришарди.

Уртокларимнинг ҳаваси келар, мен керилиб, «акам қарағайнинг акаси шунақа», деб кўкрагимга урардим. Болалар чувиллашиб акамнинг изидан эргашиб юришар, ундан илон ушлаб кўрсатишни сўраб, ялиниб-ёлворишарди. Акам кўпинча уларга йўқ демасди. Бундай вақтда болалар акамнинг кўлидаги илоннинг хавода доира, ясаб, чириллаб айланишини узоқдан, бир-бирининг пинжиги киришганича, кўрка-писа томоша қилишарди. Илон ўттиз-қирқ қадам нарига шалошлаб тушгач, ўшаёққа чопишар, сулайиб ётган газанданинг ўлганига ишонч ҳосил қилишгандан сўнггина унга яқинлашибарди. Биронта юраклиси (у ҳам иложи борича ўзини орқароққа олиб) илоннинг думига ҳадиксираб кўл узатарди. Шундан кейин бошқалар, мен бир айлантирай, мен бир ушлаб кўрай, деб таллашиб кетишар, сўнгра муросага келишиб, тўқай ўртасидаги кенг чимзор майдонда навбатма-навбат, ким узоққа отар ўйнардилар.

Акам уларга қўшилишимга рухсат бермасди. Бирпас ўксиниб турардим-у, акам саёз жойга, қуруқликка иргитган зоғора балиқнинг жон ҳолатда сапчиб-сапчиб тушишини, сувнинг чуқурроқ ерига интилишини, тангаларининг офтобда ялт-юлт килишини кўриб, аразни эсдан чиқарардим. Кейин акам тол ё юлғиндан кесиб берган илмокли чивикқа балиқларни тизиб, шопипояларнинг энсиз полида лангарсиз дорбозлардай лапанглаб, акам қаёққа борса, орқасидан кўтариб юрардим. Кўп ўтмай болалар сувни шалолатиб югуриб келишар ва яна хархашасини бошлашарди. Акам тагин илон қидириб кетар, лекин энди уни ушлаб, болаларни қувиб коларди. Уларнинг ҳар ёққа тирақайлаб қочишини кўриб, қотиб-қотиб кулардим.

Ўшанақа пайтларда мен жуда яйраб кетардим. Шунинг учун ҳам меҳмоннинг қорасини кўришим билан ирғишлаб, похол ёядиган каттакон айри ёғочга ипдан тўқилган кичкинагина, бир кишилик тўр турадиган баланд сўрига чопардим. Акам бўлса, менга хўмрайиб, биқинимга секингина бир мушт туширар, такага ўхшаб ирғишлама, деб жеркиб берарди. Попугим пасайиб, кўзимни енгим билан ишқалаганча индамай уйнинг орқасига ўтиб, ўтириб олардим. Бирпасдан кейин акамнинг ўзи чақирарди: “Комб, тўрни ол! Кетдик.” Тўрни елкамга ташлаб, акамнинг олдига тушардим.

Биламан, балиқ овлаш акамнинг жонига тегиб кетган. Шунинг учун эшикдан бегона товушни эшитса пешонаси тиришарди. Аммо, тўқайгача суст борарди-ю, сувга тушди дегунча хамма нарсани унутиб, ишга жон-жахди билан киришиб кетарди. У балиқни меҳмонларнинг сонига қараб тутар, чамасига етмагунча сувдан чиқмасди.

Меҳмонлар одатда учта-тўртта бўлиб келишарди. Кўпинча уларни отам ўзи бошлаб кирар, бироқ отамнинг йўғида ҳам келишаверарди. Фақат бир киши хамиша отам билан келарди. Фақат шу одамгина менга ёқмасди. Гавдаси бесўнақай, ранги совуқ, чақчайган кўзларига қарашга юрагим дов бермасди. Мўйлови ҳам бошқаларникига ўхшамас: лабининг икки четида осилиб турарди. У менга доим хиссиз, дағал овозда: «Ҳа, Қоравой, юрипсанми!» деб қўяр, пешанамга тушган калта, тартибсиз пат-сочимни кўйнинг жунини чамалаб кўргандай фикимлаб, эркалаган бўларди. Бошим зирқираб, кўзларимдан ёш чикиб кетай дерди. Лекин сир бой бермас, гапига ҳам жавоб қайтармай, ерга қараб тураверардим.

Кейин у қизларнинг майда сочидай ингичка ўрилган ва учи боғичли килиб тузилган, юлгин сопи йилтиллаб кетган қамчинини: «Ма!» деб узатарди. Мен уни айвон устунидаги миҳга илиб қўярдим. Балиқдан кейин палов ҳам ейилиб бўлгач, у мени чақирарди: «Қоровой, қани, қамчинни опке-чи». У панжалари орасидан сизиб тушаётган ёғни қамчин даста-сига суртиб-суртиб, яна менга қайтариб бергач, кафтини чарм этигининг қўнжига ишқалай бошларди. Сўнг товоққа чой қўярди-да, айлангириб-айлангириб бир кўтарарди ва хўрда ичгандай хўриллатиб, симириб юборарди. Ҳаммасидан ҳам унинг балиқ ейиши томоша қиладиган эди. У балиқни кўп ва жуда тез ер, бироқ кам нушхурт чиқарарди. Нима бало, қилганогини ҳам ютиб юборармикин, деб ҳайрон бўлардим.

Мен отамнинг ёнида ўтириб, унинг балиқни ошалаб ейишини ҳайрат билан кузатар, айрим хатти-ҳаракатларини кўрганимда бошимни отамнинг панасига эгиб, секин кулиб олардим. Кекирганида хиқилдоғи ўйнаб чиқар, учи ингичка ва узун мўйловлари балиқ қилганогига илашиб ҳадеб оғзига кириб кетар, у чайнашдан тўхтамаган ҳолда бош бармоғи билан чиқариб қўярди.

Дастурхонга фотиҳа ўқишгач, отам: «Қани, Комронбек!» дерди. Меҳмоннинг орқамдан: «Шу ўелингиз эпчил, чаққон, улоққа тушадиган йигит бўлади-да», деганини эшитиб, қадамимни тезлатардим. Балиқхўр кишининг оти дарвозахонамизда турарди. Эгар қошига илинган қора, йилтироқ корзинкани бир сакрашда олиб, зум ўтмай отамга етказардим. Отам пиширилмасдан олиб қўйилган балиқларни қоғозга ўраб унга жойлашгирди. Мен эса қамчинни олиб, физиллаганимча отни дарвозахонадан кўчага етаклаб чиқиб, ушлаб турардим.

Акамнингку уни кўришга кўзи йўқ эдия, ҳатто опам ҳам “Яна кепти балиқхўр киши”, деб қўярди. Учоқ бошидан жилмайган онам хурсандми ё хафами - буни билолмасдим, тўғриси энди эсласам, қизиқмаган эканман. Фақат бир марта опам тандирга ўт қўяётганида унинг: “Қовоғингни оч, Саломат, отанг сезиб қолса ҳаммамизни қақшатади, у отангнинг хўжайинларидан”, дегани қулоғимга чалинган.

Балиқхўр бизникига охириги сафар келганида тахминан эрта баҳор эди. Қаттиқ келган қишнинг ҳали захри кетмаганди. Балиқхўр киши биринчи марта кўпчилик билан келди. Шериклари ҳам ўзига ўхшаган қориндор — қориндор-у, фақат мўйловлари йўқ эди, холос.

Отам меҳмонларни катта уйга жойлаштирибб тезда ҳаммамиз тиқилиб ўтирган даҳлизга қайтиб чиқди-да, паст овозда иш тақсимлай кетди:

— Онаси, дарров суюқ ошга уринб қўй ёғидан кўпроқ тўғрамчилаб жазлаю Саломат, баланд сўридаги узум, анордан олиб туш, қовундан ҳамб эски чакмонга ўраб қўйганман. Кейин кўшнилардан қатиқ топ, кўпроқ, ҳа, сарёхам. Бўла қол, оёғингни қўлга ол. Комил, укангни бошла тўқайга. Мўлроқ тутиб келинглар. Судралмай илдамроқ қимирла.

Акам анграйиб отамга, кейин кўзларини мўлтиллайтиб онамга қаради.

— Шундай совуқда-я?.. — онам акамдан кўз узмай, юрак ютиб, аммо журъатсизгина шундай деди.

— Ҳеч нарса қилмайди, тўрда овлашади. Атайлаб балиқхўрликка келишган. Қани, нонни опке, чойни тезлаштир! Отам онамнинг олдига борди-да, унинг қулоғига бир нималар деб шивирлади. Бу гап онамга ёқмади шекилли, пешанасини тириштирдию Акам ҳамон жойидан қимир этмас, кўзларини ўчоқда гувиллаб ёнаётган оловга қадаганча киприк қоқмай турарди. Ўша пайтда унинг ҳаёлидан нималар кечгани менга ҳозиргача қоронғу. Катта уйга кириб кетаётган отам қўлини эшик тутқичига узатганича тўхтаб қолди, кифти оша акамга қақрди ва анча силлиқлашган товушда: “Иссиқроқ кийиниб ол, ўғлим” ... дедию, нигоҳини тезда қайириб, шахд билан тутқичга ёпишди. Лекин ичкаридан эшкни охисста ва зич ёпди. Назаримда, у эшикка суяниб бир оз туриб қолгандай туюлди.

Човгумдан чойнакка қайноқ сув куяётган онам: «Шу пайтда зарилаканми?.. Кимга нима қайғи... Сал кун илиганда келишсаям бўларди. тўқайга ўт тушиб, балиқ қирилиб кетмасди...» деб гудранди. Кейин у бизга зўрлаб икки пиёладан иссиқ чой ичирди, қалин кийинтирди.

Тўғриси, шу пайтда балиқ овига менинг ҳам ҳеч боргим йўқ эди. Акам оёғига илашган тош-кесақларни жаҳд билан тепиб кетар, ўзича минғирлар, мен қунишганча унинг орқасидан индамай тўр судраб борардим.

Ариқларнинг бўйларида, марзаларда кўклам нишонаси — ялпизлар бодроқ-бодроқ бўлиб чиқа бошлаган, бақаларнинг «вақ-вақа»си авжида, чимзорлардаги кузда ўт қўйиб куйдирилган ажриқларнинг томирларидан чиққан янги, кўм-

кўк гиёхлар ер бағридаги ҳаётнинг қайтадан жонланганидан далолат берарди. Сўппайган қовжироқ қамишлар изғиринли кўклам шамолида бир-бирига урилиб, нохуш овоз таратарди. Икки лаби кўкариб қолган Димариқ ҳали ҳеч ким ва ҳеч нима лойқалатиб улгурмагани учун тип-тиник, билинар-билинемас, майин чайқалиб ётарди. Сув остида онда-сонда майда-чуйда балиқлар кўзга ташланиб қоларди.

Акам Димариқнинг торроқ жойига тўр солди. Мен ариқнинг тепароғига бориб, узун калтак билан балиқларни ҳайдай бошладим. Сув бир зумда қоп-қора бўтанага айланди. Акам тўрни кўтарди. Ҳавода бир неча майда чавақ ялт-юлт этдию, чўлп-чўлп килиб сувга тушиб кетди. Қайтадан тўр солдик. Бу сафар иримигаям биронта илинмади.

— Ҳали балиқлар камаридан чиқмапти, — деди акам тўнғиллаб.

— Энди нима бўлади?

— Нима бўларди, камарга тушаман-да.

— Совуғ-у ака, совқотмайсизми?

— Нима қиламан? Балиқ топиб бориш керак. Акам отамнинг гапини икки қилмас, бошлаган ишини, албатта, охирига етказарди. «Фалон нарса битмай қолди» ё «йўқ экан» деганини билмайман. Бундай бўлишига отам йўл кўймасди ҳам.

Яна бир марта уришиб кўрганимиздан кейин акам тўрни кўриққа отиб юбориб, ечина бошлади. Акамга Димариқдаги, умуман, тўқайнинг ҳамма булоқ ва ариқлардаги балиқ камарлари беш қўлдай маълум эди. У ариқнинг чуқурроқ жойини, балиқнинг камарини мўлжаллаб шунғиди. Сув тиник бўлгани учун унинг ҳаракатлари аниқ кўринарди. Тўғри бориб пўсти қолмаган, сув ялаб ўтаётган япаски тол тўнкаси остига қўл суқди. Амфибия одамдай сув остида ҳар замонда оёқларини силтаб, муаллақ ҳолда анча туриб қолди. Кейин орқасига тисарилиб, сув бетига отилиб чикди. Унинг икки қўлида бир ярим-икки қарич келаётган иккита зогора балиқ типирчиларди. Акам балиқларни қирғоққа ирғитиб яна шўнғиди. Кейин яна... Афтидан, улгуржи балиқ топиб олганидан у ҳам ўзида йўқ хурсанд, совуқни ҳам унутган эди. У ҳар гал балиқни менга ташлаётиб «нечта бўлди» деб сўрарди-ю, лекин жавоб кутмай шўнғиб кетарди. Ун бештага борганда акам сувдан чикди. Бадани қорда ишқалангандай қип-кизариб кетган, дағ-дағ қалтирар, тишлари бир-бирига тегиб такилларди.

Уйга етгунча югургилаб келдик. Акам дахлизга кирдию ўзини сандалга урди. Онам: «Бечора болам-эй», деб унинг юзларини, кўкракларини, қўлларини ишқалади, иссиқ чой ичирди, устига якандозлардан ташлади, сандалга яна икки хокандоз чўғ солди. Акам совқотиб кетяпман, жунжикиб кетяпман, деб бир оз ётдию, ухлаб қолди.

Балиқни опам иккаламиз айвонда тозалаб бериб турдик, онам қовуришга тушди. Отам тайёр булганини пешма-пеш ичкарига олиб кириб кетарди. Меҳмонлар жуда ҳурсанд: хохолашар, айниқса, «балиқхўр киши»нинг кулгиси момагулдиракдай уйнинг деразаларини зириллатиб юборарди.

— Бўронбекнинг ўгли қишда муз тешиб бўлсаям балиқ тутиб беради, демадимми сизларга!

— Отасининг ўгли-да! Мард, улфат одамнинг фарзандиям мард, улфат бўлиши керак-да!

— Ҳа, ҳамма гап отасида.

Қизиқ гап бўлмаса ҳам қийқирик, кулги кўтарилиди.

— Мана энди бундан бу ёғи балиқ сайли, — Яна «балиқхўр киши»нинг овози эшитилди. — Қачон десанглар келаверамиз. Хўжалик мудиримизнинг эшиги ҳамиша очик.

Меҳмонлар коронғи тушганда кўзғалишди.

Эшик тарақлаб очилиб, остонада «балиқхўр» кўринди. У чайқалиб кетишдан ўзини аранг тутиб турар, кулочини кериб, икки қўли билан эшик кесакиларидан махкам ушлаб олганди. Унинг пашша қўнса сирғалиб кетадиган силлиқ бошида тер ялтирар, гўштдор, қора юзлари чўғдай қизариб, кўзларининг оқи жигарранг тусга кира бошлаган.

— Келин! Раҳмат... Аммо балиқни зўр қовурибсиз. Бу... биззи қаҳрамон кўринмайди?.. Ие, ухлаб қоптида, ҳа, майли, дамани олсин...

У эҳтиёткорлик билан қадам ташлаб сандал ёнига келди. Энгашмоқчи бўлганди, азбаройи тўйиб кетганидан эгиллолмади. Амаллаб қўлини акамнинг жағига етказиб, эркалаган бўлди.

— Шоввоз йигит, ботир йигит... Ўғилдан хўп берганда сизларга... Мана шу Комилбек бор деб келамиз-да биз... Яшаворсин, азамат. Балиқни зўридан тутибди. Маза қилдик...

Меҳмонлардан бири уни қўлтиғидан суяб ташқарига бошлади.

Бу пайтда онам ўчоқ олдида бошини ҳам қилганича юзини ярим яшириб турар, отам эса пиширмай олиб қўйилган балиқларни қора корзинкага жойлаш билан банд эди.

Меҳмонлар телва-тескари босишиб кўча томон юришди. Пичан еяётган отларини тимирскиланиб аранг ечишди-да, сувлигини ҳам солмай эгарга ёпишишди.

От туёқларининг «тақа-туқ»и анчагача эшитилиб турди.

Қайтиб кирганимда уйнинг деразалари ланг очик, онам оғзини дока рўмол билан тўсиб олиб, дастурхонни йиғиштирарди.

—Комрон, манави савил қоғур шишаларни йўқот кўзимдан нарироққа! — деб қичқириб қолди у менга.

Хона димиқиб, папирос тутунлари шифтнинг тўсинлари орасида сийрак булутга ўхшаб сузиб юрар, тахир, ачимгир, қўланса таъмлар, балиқ хиди, нос иси аралаш-қуралаш бўлиб кетганди.

Уйни тозалаб бўлиб печкани қайтадан ёқдик-да, унинг, яқинига жой килиб, акамни уйғотдик. Онам:

«Тур, тур ўелим, ичкарига жой солиб қўйдим, иссиққина, кириб ёт», деб эланар, акам бўлса унинг гапларини эшитмагандай нуқул: «А, а, нима?»... дерди. Хуллас, уни бир амаллаб тургаздик. Лекин у карахт одамдай жойидан жилмас, қовокларини зўр билан кериб очган кўзлари юмилиб кетарди. Онам унинг тирсагидан тутиб ичкарига бошлади. Акам ўринга кирдию устига кўрпани тортди. Онамнинг: «Чой ичиб олмайсанми, овқат есанг-чи», деган илтижолари жавобсиз қолди.

Отам меҳмонларни кузатиб кайтганида биз хаммамиз акамнинг бошида ўтирардик. Онам уни кўрдию тутоқиб кетди:

—Қайси гўрда қолдингиз? Йўқ ердан балиқ топиб сийлаганингизам етарди-ю, уйларигача обориб куйдингизми?! Бола кийналиб кетди! Дўхтир топиб келиш керак!

Қамчинни этигига уриб келаётган отам такқа тўхтаб, онамга ғазаб билан тикилди, лекин кўзлари нурсизланиб ранги оқариб кетган эди. Кейин шитоб билан келиб акамнинг ёнига чўнқайиб, кафтини унинг манглайига қўйди.

—Комил! Комилжон!

Акам жавоб бермади. У қисқа, аммо тез-тез нафас оларди. Отам онамга юзланди:

— Овқат-повқат едимиз?!

— Туз тотгани йўқ, болам шўрлик — дея жавоб берди онам йиғламсираб.

Отам чиқиб кетди. Кўчада от туёқларининг тасир-тусири эшитилди.

Отам акамнинг оёқларини уқалаб, пикқиллаб йиғлар, онам эса унинг пешонасига оқ дуррачани қайта-қайта хўллаб босар, мен

нима қилишимни билмай бир чеккада уларнинг хатти-ҳаракатини, онамнинг ҳолатини кузатиб утирардим. Онам ҳар замонда: «Вой, онагинанг ўргилсин-эй, вой томоғингга қилтанок тиқилгурлар-эй, бирор сафар балиқ емай кетишса нима қиларди-я, бадани ёняпти буни, қўлни куйдиради-я», дея уф тортар, акам бўлса ўзи билан ўзи овора бўлиб, иситма билан олишар, алахларди. У ҳаёлида нукул менга гапирарди: «Комиш, топдим! Балиқнинг конини топдим! Икки қаричли сазан... Ол! Ушла, сувга тушиб кетмасин!.. Нечта бўлди?.. Ҳозир, ҳозир чиқаман...» Қачон, қандай ухлаб қолганимни билмайман. Эрталаб турсам, акам энди тинчиб ором олаётган экан. Кечаси доктор келиб укол қилибди, хавфли эмас, сал совуқ ўтибди холос, деб кетибди. Чиндан ҳам акамнинг иситмаси пасайди. Озроқ овқат еган ҳам бўлди. Лекин барибир алаҳсирайверди. Хаммамиз унинг атрофида парвона эдик. Айниқса отам олдидан бир кадам ҳам жилмади, десам бўлади. Ўзи мажбурлаб озгина шолгом шўрва, иссиқ чой ичирди. Устини бирдай ўраб турди. Бир-икки марта киприкларида нимадир йилгиллаганини кўриб қолдим. Ҳаммасидан ҳам опам иккимизни «сиз»лагани галати туюларди. ўайрати терисига сиғмайдиган, чапдаст ва жангари одам бир кеча-кундузда чўкиб, хаста, синиқ қарияга айланиб қолди. Назаримда, бир соатда бир энлик эгидан тушаётгандай эди.

Онам бўлса, кун бўйи қовоғини очмади. Ҳар замонда ўзича гудраниб қўярди.

Акам кундузи тез-тез безовталаниб ётдию, кечга бориб иситмаси яна кўтарилиб кетди. У ўқтин-ўқтин қалтираб-титраб кетар, лаблари пирпираб учиб-учиб қўяр, тилини чапиллатиб тамшанарди. Алахсираши кучайди. Узуқ-юлуқ гапларидан худди ниманидир қувалаётгандай, кимдандир нажот кутиб, мадад сўраётгандай бўларди. Ярим кечага борганда тинчиб ухлаб қолди. Шундан кейин биз ҳам ётдик.

Қаттиқ дод-войдан уйғониб кетдим. Онам билан опам акамнинг устига ётиб олишганича хўнграб йиғлашар, отам бир қўлида акамнинг жағини ушлаб, иккинчи қўли билан ҳадеб унинг қовоқларини ишқалар, «хиқ-хиқ» қилганида елкалари титрар, икки кўзидан шовуллаб ёш қуюларди. Мен аввалига ҳеч нарсага тушунмай анграйиб қараб қолдим. Кейин юрагим совуқ бир нарсани сезиб, акамнинг устига ўзимни ташладим. Мук тушганча, тушунибми-тушунмайми, узоқ йиғладим. Ўзимни тутолмас, нимадир мени йиғлашга мажбур қиларди. Лекин барибир бола

эдим-да. Бир оздан сўнг акам эсимдан чиқди. Ҳовлимизга кираётган одамларнинг кўплигини кўриб оғзим очиларди. Ҳатто тўйимда ҳам бунча одам келганмас, деб ўйлардим ўзимча.

Отам гангиб қолгандай, ким гапирса ўшанинг оғзига қарарди. У нукул мени бағрига босар, ёнидан жилдирмасди.

Биз отам билан дарвозахонамизда турардик. Баъзилар отамни қучоқлаб йиғлашар, биров сўрашиб, бошқаси бош қимирлатганча индамай ҳовлига ўтиб кетарди.

Бир маҳал келаётганлар орасида «балиқхўр киши» кўриниб қолди. Мен ҳозир сочимдан тортқилайди, деб ўзимни отамнинг орқасига яширдим. Агар қўл чўзадиган бўлса шартта қочиб кетаман деб мўлжаллаб турдим. Лекин у менга эътибор ҳам бермади. Ҳатто бошини ҳам кўтармасди. Отамнинг олдига келиб тўхтади-да, бир нималар деб пичирлади. Мен фақат «бандачиликда, бандачилик...» деганини эшитдим. Отам тескари ўтирилди...

Ўшандан бери балиқни кўрсам сесканиб кетаман.

By Kamchibek KENJA

FISHING

I was attending the first form and my brother the seventh of school. My dad was the head of the collective-farm. There were often guests in our home. Every time different people: thin, stout, lean, short, with moustache or without... When the guests came, me and brother would always set off to fishing, so that's why, my joy knew no bounds when they came, even though I didn't know who most of them were. There was a thicket in our village, there where you could watch the sunset. There bog down waters didn't still run dry there, besides you could find no ditches. Fish was abundant in both little and big springs, especially in Dimarik (Steaming spring, we called it like this, as it flew producing steam). If the tide rose up, fish could be jumping out even through the rice paddies, besides on week-ends this place was crowded with children who held a fishing rod or whoever nets... I was fond of watching the way my brother caught fish. He could do this with his eyes closed. Diving into water, he could catch a bucket of fish, with a net, fork or even with bare hands by just diving into water. He was afraid of nothing, even of the snakes. If he saw them he would of course, catch it, then swirl round and round. As soon as drowsy snakes, which rolling themselves into a ball, noticed that we were coming, they immedi

ately ducked out or scuttled off to water. My friends used to feel envious of me, and I plumed myself on, saying "It's your brother's brother." Children scurried after my brother and begged him to let them touch the snake. Every now and often he refused them. Clinging to each other they used to watch the way that my brother swirled the snake round and round, and they ran wherever the snake flopped down, thirty or forty steps afar, and they didn't dare approach it unless made sure that the poor stinger died. At least one of them, who were a bit brave, would barely stretch his hand out to it, crouching backwards. After that, the rest of the children would quarrel, asking to touch or swirl it, and having made up their mind, they would go to the turf on the middle of the thicket and play turn by turn, a game so called "Who can throw it farther?" Brother didn't let me play with them. I would keep feeling sulky at first, then immediately forget that I was, seeing how the carp was bouncing up and down, fluttering and wanting to reach to a deeper patch of water, withal how its scales glittered under the sun. Having strung all the fish along the twig crooked at the tip, that my brother made from a willow branch, I would carry it walking behind him with unsteady steps like a newly born duck on the narrow furrows of the paddy-field. In less than no time, the children would come back running and splashing the water, and would begin whining again. Brother would leave to find a snake and this time he would chase them away frightening them with it. I used to laugh my head off seeing the way the children took to their heels; I would be on the seventh heaven, at the time like this. No sooner I got to know that the guests came than would I jump out of joy and went up running to the high suril, where we used to dry straw and where, there was a big forked log on which we hang our little fish-net, knitted from thread. Brother punched on my flank carefully, frowned and sneered at me: «Stop jumping like a frog!» I would calm down, and sat quietly behind the house, rubbing my eyes with my sleeves. Some minute's later brother would call me himself: "Come, take the net, and let's go!" I would go with my brother, carrying the net on my shoulder. I knew that he'd already got fed-up with fishing, that's why he used to knit his eyebrows on hearing any strange voice at home. He would walk apathetically until we got to the thicket, but on diving into water, he would fell into work with all of his strength. He wasn't interested in how many guests there were, he caught as much fish as he thought that was enough. We often had three or four guests at home. They often blew in with my dad, but they would come even when he wasn't in. The only man who haunted our home every time with my father wasn't the type I liked. I didn't dare look at that man who had a beefy body, unpleasant appearance and bulging eyes. His moustache wasn't like that others had, coming down to both corners of his mouth. He used to ask me in a rude voice devoid of any sense: "Are you OK,

black poppet?" He used to ruffle my short and shaggy hair, flicked down my forehead pretending to caress me. Getting a keen pain on my head I would be within an inch of crying, but I would keep silence, hunching my head and didn't want to answer to what he said. Then he handed to me his whim with sparkling butt made of tamarisk and that had a plaited and knotted tip, I would hang it up on the nail driven onto the porch. When the pilaf was eaten after the fish, he used to call me: "Black poppet, bring me my whim." On it he wiped, his fingers that oil was oozing through, gave it back to me, and rubbed his hand on the top of his leather boots. Then pouring some tea into the pan, rinsing it over and over, he used to sip it like a soup. Most of all it was amazing to watch the way he ate fish, he ate it much, yet had very few fish bones thrown out. I would feel astonished dithering whether he swallowed them all. Sitting beside my father and looking at how he ate handful and handful of fish and his other manners, I would chuckle hiding my head behind my dad. His Adam's apple would bulge when he burped. He would happen to chew his arched and long moustache with the fish together as it caught on the fish bones and he would stick them out, still going on with chewing. When they finished praying and thanking to God, my dad used to say: "Now Kamronbek, you know what to do." I would break into a trot on hearing how the guests praised me saying that I was capable, nimble and nippy. The horse of the fishaholic used to stand at our gate inside. I would bring the black glossy basket, hung upon the saddle, the basket which my father used to muffle the rest of uncooked fish wrapping with the paper in. I would run as fast as my legs could carry me so as to lead the horse out and hold it. Both my brother and sister loathed that fishaholic man and when he came, sister used to whine: "Again that fishaholic man's come." I am not still aware if my mother was glad or not, looking with a smile at him in front of the hearth, if I do my best to remember, I grow to understand that I wasn't even interested in it. Once I overheard something. When my sister was going to set fire under the earthen stove, my mother scolded her: "Don't frown, Salomat, your father will haul us over the coals if he sees that. He is one of the heads of your dad!"

From what I can gather it was early days of spring when the last time that fishaholic haunted our home, and it was the first time that he came with some other people. There were still some traces of sorely cold winter although it was spring. All of his friends were potbellied as he was, but none of them had moustache as he did. Having invited the guests into the hall, my dad came in the anteroom where all of us sat huddling and thrusting, and he bade us to do what was needed.

"Dear, cook a soup of some kind at once, Cut and sizzle it with much more suet. Salomat, bring the grapes and pomegranates from the big suri,

and the melon too, I'd muffled it with the old caftan. Then borrow sour milk and some butter from the neighbors. Be quick, hurry up. Komil, go to the thicket with your brother. Try to catch much more, look sharp at once. My brother goggled at him and shifted his gaze to my mum.

"But it's so cold," my mum scarcely dared say without tearing her eyes away from my brother.

"It won't do any harm, they'll catch fish with a net. They did come on purpose of eating fish. Bring bread and tea." Going up to my mum, my dad whispered something in her ear. Seemingly she didn't like what he said, as she glowered at him. Brother still stood stock-still, his eyes fixed on the hearth burning. I'm still in the dark about whatever crossed his mind at that time. My dad, about to enter the hall, suddenly stopped his hand stretched out towards the door-handle, looked at my brother over his shoulder and in a tone, softened a trifle, this time: "Bundle up, my son," then curtly averting his eyes, grasped at the handle and closed it slowly and firmly. I felt as if he stood there for some moments leaning against the door. Mother grumbled pouring water from the kettle into the pot:

"I can't understand why we have to... They might've come when it was a bit warm, the thicket wouldn't have got burnt or fish wouldn't have turned to dust." She made us bundle up and made us drink two cups of hot tea. Tell the truth my heart wasn't also in going there. My brother was kicking the stones, caught on his feet and I was shuffling after him carrying a net and shivering with cold. On the furrows, on the banks of the stream, the heralds of spring, mints were shooting up, frogs were croaking, moreover new and green herbs were growing on the fields, where all the turfs had been burnt last year. They were preamble to survival of life. While the bitter wind of the cold spring was blowing, withered reeds hit against each other and created queer sound. As no one could stir up water of Dimarik, it was clean and pure, and it swashed slowly. Some little, little fish caught glimpse in the water. Brother cast the net into a deeper part of Dimarik, and standing on an upper place like a dome, I chased the fish away with a long stick. Water became muddy at once. When he lifted the net we could see scales of some roaches glitter, but they flopped down back to water. We cast the net back, this time even for the sake of a good omen; we could catch hold of no fish.

"Fish hasn't come up out of the bottom," he murmured.

"What'll happen now?"

"What did you think? I'll dive into the bottom of the steam."

"But its cold, brother, won't you feel cold?"

"What should I do? We must get fish somehow."

He would always do our dad's bidding and wouldn't give up until he finished what he began. I can't remember that he'd ever said that something couldn't be done, or he couldn't do, because dad didn't let him.

Chuckling the net he took off his clothes. He knew exactly which part of water was abundant with fish. As water was pure, his actions were easy to see; he groped beneath the thick stump of willow with no bark, he waggled his feet sometimes like an amphibious man, and his body hovered up in water for some instants, he hurdled himself backwards and came out of water. Two carps were fluttering on his palms, throwing them to the bank, he dived again. He was upon cloud number nine, as if he'd found a host of fish. Every time when he threw them, he asked how much I got, and dived back before I could answer him. When I got about fifteen of it, he came out of water, his teeth chattering, and his body quivering, reddened and sore as if he lay on the snow. Running quickly we got to our home at long last. On entering the anti-room, he went up to the sandal. "My poor son," my mum said and stroked his face, breast and hands, gave him hot tea to drink and tucked him up under the long quilt, put two more dust-pans of coal into the sandal. Brother flinched saying that it was cold for him and he fell asleep. Sister and I cleaned the fish, my mum fried it, and when it became ready, one after another father took them inside. The guests were glad and chortling. Peal of the fishaholic juddered the windows like an earthquake:

"You see, I said it, Buranbek's son will catch fish even in winter although he has to break the ice."

"He is a son of his father; brave, friendly man's son should also be brave."

"Right, everything's up to his father."

Despite nothing funny happened, peals of laughter floated around the house.

"From now on it's the season of fish," said the fishaholic man, "We can come whenever you ask us over. Our friend's door is always open for us. The guests set off, when the dusk fell. The door squeaked open. On the doorstep the fishaholic stood, about to stammer, clutching the door-frames with his palms wide open. Drops of sweat were glistening on his bare head that was so sleek that a mosquito could slide down if it lights on it. His fleshy face and eyes grew as red as an ember.

"Daughter, thanks, the fish turned out to be dead delicious. So where's our hero? Oh, he fell asleep. Ok, let him have a rest." Stepping carefully, he came up to the sandal, wanted to crouch but couldn't as he was full to the top. He feigned to be caressing him, hardly pawing his hand at his jaw: "Nippy, brave boy he is, such a good son you have. He caught the best fish. We come here for we have him. We've been enjoying dead much." One of the guests shouldered him, helping to go out. While my dad was busy with placing the fish in the black basket, mother sat bowing her head, and face half-hidden. The guests shambled out to the street, they could barely set their horses free, eating fodder, and

they mounted on the horse, without taking the bit fast. Clip-clops could be heard for a long time. When I came back, the gate was wide open; mother was tidying the table, closing her mouth with gauze.

"Kamron, take these heck bottles off the table," she bawled at me. The room, reeked with bitter, fetid, sour odour, besides smell of nas (3) or fish had mingled together, smokes of cigarettes coiled beneath the ceiling like sparse clouds. Having cleaned the house, we set fire in the stove again and making bed to sleep in that room, we woke my brother up. My mother begged him on and on: "Get up, my son, it's much warmer inside, let's go, get up, then you may sleep as long as you want," and my brother went on replying: "What, what?" as if he wasn't hearing her. We could hardly make him get up somehow. He was stock-still like a man with no senses, however he tried to open his lidded eyes, and he failed. My mother led him in, grasping by his elbow, and he lay, tucking himself up under the quilt. She could get no answer when she asked if he would eat or drink something. All of us were fussing over him. When my dad saw the guests off and came, on seeing him, my mother flew into a rage:

"Where on earth have you gone? You did your bit treating them to fish on such a cold day, maybe you've accompanied them to their home, I guess. My child's suffering here, someone must run for doctor."

Hitting his boots with the whip, my dad stopped and glared at her, his eyes with no motion. Blood drained from his face. Then in a trace he squatted down in front of my brother and put his palms on his forehead: "Kamil, my son, Kamil."

He didn't answer. He was taking shallow and quick breaths. My dad turned to look at my mother and asked: "Did he eat anything?"

"No. He didn't eat anything, my poor child," she blubbered.

He went out, it was audible how his horse clip-clopped. My sister sobbed, rubbing his feet, and my mother was drenching the white neckerchief and put it on his forehead over and over again. And I dithered about what to do, just watching what they were doing. Sometimes my mother sighed and said: "Oh my poor child let a fishbone get stuck in their throat! Would the hell have frozen over if at least once they hadn't eaten fish? Because of them my son is burning with fever."

My brother, on fire with high fever, was delirious and talking to me when he slept: "Kornish, I've found! I've found dead much fish. Catch hold of it, here, it's a carp. Catch it lest it would jump into water back. Now, see how much? I'm going to be back in a minute."

I didn't know how it came about that I fell asleep. When I woke up in the morning, brother was sleeping calmly. The doctor turned to have come in the mid-night and having given some injections he'd said that nothing serious had happened to him and that he'd caught a cold a mite. By the way

his fever really began falling down, he ate a bit as well, but he kept being delirious. Everyone made a fuss over him, let alone my dad, he didn't leave him even for a moment, made him drink a cup of hot tea and soup, boiled with turnip, and cared for keeping him warm. Once or twice I saw that something glittered through his eyelashes. Especially it was sorely amazing to see that he treated me and my sister as if we were older than him. Such a strong, hale and chiselled man seemed to be running to seed day by day, and loosing a part of his weight every within each past hour. As for my mother she kept frowning all day long and mumbling to herself sometimes. When the dusk fell brother had a fever again. He quivered more and more, smacked his mouth, his lips twitched. He became delirious again. As he stuttered he was like, chasing something or afraid and waiting for someone to help him. In the midnight he fell asleep, so did we. I woke up on hearing loud outcries and wails. Sister and mother clung to him and sobbed, dad grasped his jaw with one of his hands and rubbed his eyelids with another one and each time brother hiccupped, dad flinched and tears welled up from his eyes. I boggled at them at first and didn't understand what was up. Then something cold seared through my body and I also clung to him and cried sinking to my knees, although I didn't know why something made me cry on and on. I was child anyway, not long after brother slipped from my mind. I was taken aback seeing that so many people came to our home and I thought there hadn't been so many people even on my party (4). Dad was looking gloomily at those who came up and talked to him as if he'd gone dumb. He often clasped me in his arms and didn't let me go even a step farther. We were standing at the gate, some of people gave him a hug, some of them just greeted, and some just bobbed their heads and they went inside the house. And by chance the fishaholic appeared among the people. I hid myself behind my dad, afraid that he would ruffle my hair as usual. And I was intending to duck out in case he would stretch his hand. But he paid no attention to me. His head, lowered, he approached my dad and whispered something. I could only hear that he said: "Everyone is mortal, friend, and mortal." My dad averted his face.

Since then, I flinch every time I see fish.

Glossary

1. **Supa.** A wide bed that Uzbek people sit on, so as to eat out.
2. **Sandal.** A hole, dug in the house and there's a low chair in front of it which a quilt is wrapped on and Uzbek people used to warm their feet in it.
3. **Nas.** A type of a substance, put under one's tongue for pleasure.
4. **Party.** (Sunnat party) A special ceremony, celebrated for Uzbek boys.

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Босишга рухсат этилди 10.09.2009. Қороз ўлчами 60x84, 1/32.
Шартли босма тобоғи 5.0. Нашриёт-ҳисоб тобоғи 5.05.
Адади 200. Буюртма № 11-09. Баҳоси келишилган нарҳда

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