

PUBLICATIONS OF THE MONGOLIA SOCIETY
Edited by John R. Krueger

OCCASIONAL PAPERS
Number Fourteen

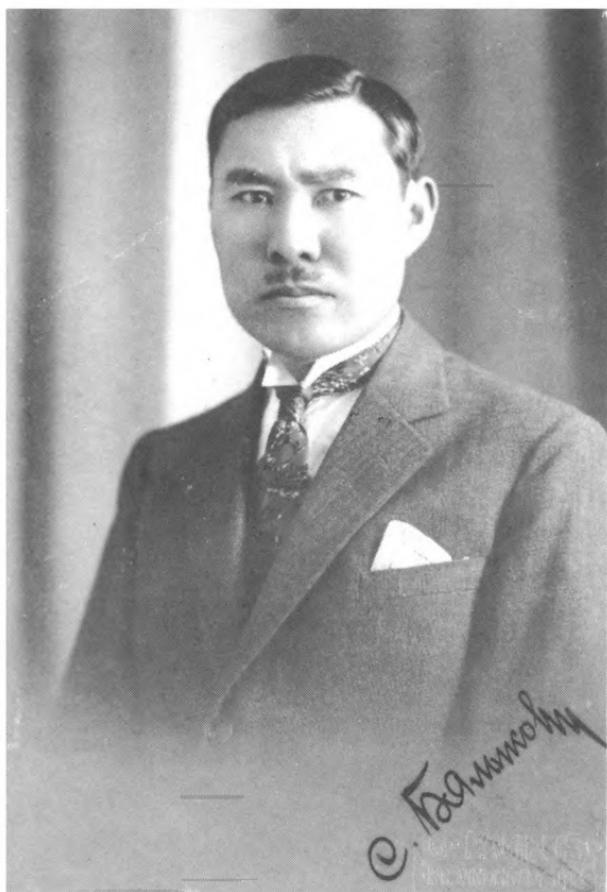
STRONGER THAN POWER

A Collection of Stories

By
Sandji B. Balykov

Translated from the Russian
by David Chavchavadze

1989
The Mongolia Society, Inc.
321-322 Goodbody Hall
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47405-2401



STRONGER THAN POWER

BALYKOV: SHORT STORIES

PUBLICATIONS OF THE MONGOLIA SOCIETY
Edited by John R. Krueger

OCCASIONAL PAPERS
Number Fourteen

STRONGER THAN POWER

A Collection of Stories

By
Sandji B. Balykov

Translated from the Russian
by David Chavchavadze

1989
The Mongolia Society, Inc.
321-322 Goodbody Hall
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47405-2401

Copyright © 1989 by The Mongolia Society, Inc.

This issue edited and prepared for the press by John R. Krueger

ISBN# 910980-54-3

PRICE: US \$12.00

Typography and Layout: Rhoads Typography (Bloomington IN)
Printing and Binding: BookCrafters (Chelsea MI)

CONTENTS

Sandji Balykov: A Brief Sketch of His Life and Literary Work by Arash Bormanshinov	1
Stronger Than Power (legend)	11
Mother (legend)	16
The Dream of Assarai	21
The Rustling Feather-Grass (legend)	28
Victory	35
The Fathers	39
From My Mother	42
Four Meetings	46
At The Invisible Wall	56
The Trampled Tulip	59
The Bends of Life	71
Love in Bonds	89
Basanka's Breakthrough	98
A Kalmyk Woman's Story	107
The Duel	112
The Stingy Khan	117
In the Valley of Snow Leopards: A Legend	119
Glossary of Foreign Terms	137

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many persons contributed to the production of this volume, and I endeavor herewith to thank them all.

It was first the author's widow, Mme Dordjima Bembetow (Philadelphia, Penna.) who sponsored the issuance of her late husband's stories in their Russian original, as *Silnee vlasti*, published in 1976 in Munich (West Germany), 141 pages. This was followed in 1983 by his novel, *Devit'ya čest'* (A Maiden's Honour), 237 pages. Her faithful helper in these two ventures was Elena Schlueter (Dolma Remileva), who also broached to me the possibility of further publication in English.

The basic English translation of these two books is the work of Prince David Chavchavadze (Washington, DC) and shows a fine sensitivity for nuance and expression in the complexities of Russian-to-English rendition. He was aided in problems of the Mongolian nomadic and frontier vocabulary by Dr. Arash Bormanshinov, who also read and touched up details and transcriptions. At the same time, Dr. Bormanshinov prepared the introductory essay about the author Balykov, the headings to individual stories, and the concluding Glossary of Foreign Terms, as well as all explanatory notes (the original stories had no comments or notes). The final story, *In the Valley of the Snow Leopards*, appeared earlier in the *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher*, vol. 6NF, pp. 137-152, 1986, and is here reprinted by permission of the editor, Dr. Klaus Sagaster. A few minor corrections have been made for this edition.

The foregoing version next came to me in my capacity as editor for publications of The Mongolia Society, and I gave it a further reading against the Russian, with additional editing and polishing. I have to thank for assistance my helpers: Catherine A. Krueger, Bruce Bundy and Alexandra Service. Additionally I have then overseen the typesetting, proofreading and publication. Consequently, none of the persons mentioned is responsible for shortcomings and errors; I gave final approval to all details of production.

All of us working on these two volumes (the second volume will begin production presently, and I hope it may appear in 1990) feel strongly that they will convey in a real fashion the cultural and ethnic heritage of all Mongol-Americans, in particular to the young people of Kalmyk descent living in the Philadelphia and New Jersey concentrations. Hence it is earnestly hoped the books will achieve wide circulation among them; further, they can likewise introduce American readers with interest in Asia to aspects of the recent Mongolian past.

Finally, our renewed thanks to Mme Bembetow for her strong financial support enabling this work, and contributing to the ongoing memory of Sandji Balykov, a truly capable spokesman for his people.

—John R. Krueger.
General Editor

SANDJI BALYKOV: A BRIEF SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND LITERARY WORK

Arash Bormanshinov

As the fates decreed, Sandji Balykov found himself at the age of 26 an émigré outside his native land. For long he was the only Kalmyk writer beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. Since he was an outstanding personality, it will be appropriate to say a few words concerning his life and literary work.¹

S. Balykov was born on March 2, 1894 in the Year of the Horse. The event did not take place in his native Bogla (Potapovskii²) *khutor*³ of the Bokshurgankna *aimak*⁴ (Denisovskaia *stanitsa*⁵), but in the Trans-Don steppes of the Salsk district (*okrug*) in the Don Cossack region (*oblast'*). He was one of nine children of Basan and Nime Balykov. His father had been a herdsman since his youth at the horse-breeding works of the Don Cossack general Mitrofanov. After the latter sold his stud farm to the Don peasant Suprunov, Balykov's father stayed on at his old job until the height of the Civil War. He died during his flight from the Bolsheviks in 1919. Thus, Balykov was born and raised far from his native Bogla *khutor* in a mixed Don Cossack-Russian-Kalmyk environment.

It should be noted here that several hundred Don Kalmyk (*Buzāva*) families have lived in the Trans-Don steppes since days of yore. The adult male members of these families worked as horsemen and trainers of racehorses in the *Donskoe chastnoe konnozavodstvo* (Don Cossack private horse-breeding farm). They were exempt from military conscription. Balykov lived there until the age of 13, which is why he depicts these Trans-Don steppes with such tender love. According to him, the Trans-Don Kalmyks "differ somewhat in regard to the everyday life, morals and manners from the Kalmyks living in their native *stanitsas*, due to conditions of the new and settled way of life and the influence of an intensive process of Russification. Therefore, the Trans-Don Kalmyks, being from different *stanitsas*, have common character traits in the sense of a greater simplicity, moral purity, and, as opposed to the Kalmyks in *stanitsas*, are noted for their stronger moral principles in daily life, industriousness and honesty. It is sufficient to note that among the Trans-Don Kalmyks there are hardly any horse thieves . . .⁶

From childhood Balykov was noted for his keen memory and inquisitiveness. He easily learned by heart countless Kalmyk folk-songs, legends and popular folktales, and knew how to paraphrase the latter in his own way. He would join one folktale with another to lengthen them, in such a way that his listeners did not notice. Not infrequently, deep into the night, he entertained the adult Kalmyks with his folktales. No wonder that he served in his family as a guide to all kinds of yearly events.

At the age of 13, in 1907, Balykov was brought back to his uncle⁷ in Bogla to enroll him in the two-year parochial Kalmyk school there. He moved up with distinction, and in 1909 he graduated at the top of his class. In August of the same year, he entered the Velikoknyazhesk four-year municipal school (*Velikoknyazheskoe chetyrekhklassnoe gorodskoe uchilishche*).⁸ In the ensuing four years, Balykov took a great interest in reading Russian and European (in Russian translation) authors such as Leo Tolstoy, I.A. Bunin, K.M. Staniukovich, A.S. Serafimovich, E.N. Chirikov, N.S. Leskov, I.I. Lazhechnikov, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Thomas Mayne Reid, James Fenimore Cooper, Fridtjof Nansen, etc. By the time of his graduation in 1913, he was a well-read young man. With his elder brother Balykov subscribed to three Russian magazines, a rather rare occurrence in the Kalmyk environment at that time and even in the years to come. At the same time he began to purchase books for his private library, only to abandon them during the Civil War in 1919-1920 and buy more books all over again at the first opportunity. He really can be characterized as a bibliophile and "bookworm."

Balykov graduated from the Velikoknyazhesk four-year municipal school in 1913. In the autumn of 1913, he successfully took an examination at the Novocherkassk *real'noe uchilishche*⁹ which enabled him to become a public school teacher. In April of 1914, he was married to a girl one year his junior, who had been proposed as his wife at the age of two according to the old Kalmyk custom. From the fall of that year and until the spring of 1916, Balykov taught at the Kalmyk parochial school in Atamanskii *khutor* of his native Denisovskaia *stanitsa*. In August of 1916, he enrolled in the Novocherkassk *voennoe uchilishche* (military academy) as a cadet. As it turned out, Balykov was the only Kalmyk who fought the Bolsheviks in the ranks of the third squadron of his military academy in Nakhichevan in the environs of Rostov-on-Don the following year. In 1918, he took part

in numerous battles against the Bolsheviks in the ranks of the 76th Don Cossack Cavalry Regiment. For heroism he was awarded the St. George cross.¹⁰ It was followed by his promotion to the first officer's rank of *cornet*.¹¹

In the Civil War of 1917-1920, virtually the entire Don (*Buzāva*) Kalmyk population sided with anti-Bolshevik forces. Two Don Kalmyk cavalry regiments, viz., the 70th Dzungar and the 3rd regiments, fought against the Bolshevik armies. From January 1919 and until the final days of the Civil War in the Crimea at the end of 1920, Balykov took part in all the combat operations of the Dzungar regiment. And in the fall of 1919, he became the field aide-de-camp of his regiment. After the defeat in the Crimea, he was evacuated to Turkey together with his Dzungar regiment.¹² He spent the winter of 1920-1921 in a war refugee camp in Kabakça, a Turkish town to the west and northwest of Istanbul and about 20 kilometers north of the shore of the Sea of Marmara. In spring of 1921, Balykov went to work for a supply unit of the British occupation troops in Turkey. The next two and a half years, he worked there as a foreman and learned English with a British accent.¹³

Balykov's genuine émigré life began, however, after his departure from Turkey to Bulgaria and points beyond. After a brief stay in Bulgaria, during which he was on the board of the "*Union of the Kalmyks in Bulgaria*," he moved to France. He worked there as a factory worker. On October 4, 1924 he married Dordjima Shavel'kina, daughter of Badma Aduchovich Shavel'kin, formerly an owner of a horse-breeding farm before the October revolution of 1917. As elsewhere, Balykov was active in the local Kalmyk community affairs and was on the board of the "*L'Union des Kalmouks de Paris*." In 1926, at the request of Badma Ulanov of Prague, Czechoslovakia, chairman of the Kalmyk cultural society (*Kalmytskaia komissiiia kul'turnykh rabotnikov*), he established his new residence in Prague. And it was here that he graduated from the School of Political Sciences and Journalism.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Balykov was one of the most active and productive members of the Kalmyk cultural society in Prague. Later on, in 1930-1937/1938, he became, with Sh. Balinov, a co-editor of a Kalmyk émigré journal, *Kovyl'nye volny* (Feathergrass Waves), which was published in Paris in Russian and Kalmyk. In 1934-1939, he served as a secretary-general of the journal of a separatist Cossack movement.¹⁴ At about the same period of time, he

was very much involved in the activities of the Kalmyk émigré social and political organization “*Khal'mak Tangachin Tuk*” (Banner of the Kalmyk Nation). As a matter of fact, Balykov was secretary of that organization for many years.

Most, if not all, of his activities ceased with the beginning of World War II, the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, and the creation of a puppet state in Slovakia. Due to an asthmatic condition his health began to deteriorate soon thereafter. He died in Bratislava, capital of Slovakia, on January 9, 1943 at the age of 49.

The Prague period of Balykov's exile life turned out to be his most productive in terms of his literary, journalistic and cultural activities. He was, undoubtedly, one of the most active and dedicated members of the then existing Kalmyk émigré cultural society. He contributed, among other things, valuable essays and translations to and from Kalmyk¹⁵ for its various serial and nonserial publications (*Ulan zalāt* and *Qongqo* respectively). Later on, in 1930-1937/1938, he became a frequent contributor to the Kalmyk émigré journal, *Kovyl'nye volny* (Feathergrass Waves),¹⁶ of which he was co-editor. He contributed many short stories, essays, articles, etc. Some of his stories and essays were also published in a number of émigré Cossack journals which appeared in various European countries before the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

Many but by no means all of his writings in Russian and Kalmyk, both prose and poetry, were brought out in his lifetime. One should mention here that Balykov had begun to write during his school days. It is to be regretted that numerous manuscripts of his perished during the 1919-1920 flights and subsequent evacuation from the Crimea to Turkey at the end of 1920.

A collection of short stories, *Sil'nee vlasti* (Stronger than Power), was put out posthumously in 1976 thanks to the tireless efforts of the author's widow, Madame Dordjima Bembetow, and the editor in Munich, West Germany, Elena (Dolma) Remilev-Schlueter. Balykov's *magnum opus*, *Devich'ia chest'* (A Maiden's Honor), a rather long narrative tale, was published in 1983. It remained in manuscript until it was finally published that year. Another, third, volume of his writings containing more of his short stories, in addition to some of his most important essays and related writings, is under consideration for publication in the foreseeable future.

It is interesting to note that Balykov wrote both prose and poetry in Kalmyk. Being bilingual, he wrote in Russian and Kalmyk with ease. One is involuntarily tempted to refer to him as a Kalmyk Nabokov. He was indeed a very gifted person and a prolific writer. None of his writings in Russian represents a translation from the Kalmyk language into the Russian language. By way of comparison, students of Soviet Kalmyk literature know well that all the collections of prose and poetry (and plays) that appear in print in the Russian language in the USSR are the fruit of the labor of Russian translators. For example, David Kugul'tinov (born in 1922), by far the best-known Kalmyk poet in the Soviet Union, owes his widespread fame to a large extent to Yulia Neiman and Semen Lipkin, outstanding Russian poets and translators, who translated most of his collections of poetry in the 1960s and 1970s.

The volume of stories, *Stronger than Power*, consists of 15 short stories, a historical legend and a popular tale. They were written by Balykov in the 1920s and 1930s. Some of them have been published previously. Only two short stories are dated, viz., *At the Invisible Wall* (February 1920) and *Love in Bonds* (1936). The remaining 15 stories are, unfortunately, undated.

From the thematic point of view, *Stronger than Power* depicts (1) Historical subjects (18th century) with the following titles: 1. Stronger than Power; 2. The Dream of Assarai; 3. The Stingy Khan,¹⁷ and 4. In the Valley of the Snow Leopards; (2) Civil War in Russia in 1917-1920: 1. Victory; 2. The Fathers; 3. Four Meetings; 4. At the Invisible Wall; 5. The Bends of Life; 6. Love in bonds, and 7. A Kalmyk Woman's Story; (3) Everyday and family life: 1. The Mother; 2. The Rustling Feather Grass; 3. From My Mother; 4. The Trampled Tulip; 5. Basanka's Breakthrough, and 6. The Duel.

It is interesting to note that the only short story depicting the initial period of the Kalmyks' émigré life in the early 1920s (in Bulgaria) is *Four Meetings*.¹⁸ Even though Balykov spent 22 years as an émigré in various European countries, *Stronger than Power* does not contain short stories exclusively devoted to the life of Kalmyk émigrés in the 1920s and 1930s.

In his stories Balykov employs basically two literary devices, viz., the third-person narrative, i.e., the author assumes the voice of another person or persons not his own, and *persona*, i.e., the first-

person narrative, the "person" (the 'I' of an 'alter ego'). The latter device, the furthest removed from the omniscient point of view, was employed by the author in only three stories in which the narrators are all males: 1. *From My Mother*; 2. *The Trampled Tulip*, and 3. *The Duel*.

Balykov is noted for his keenness of observation, inquisitive mind and purposeful curiosity. His gift of first-hand observation and retentive memory stood him in good stead in the ensuing years of his émigré life, when he became a writer in exile. He was well acquainted with the everyday life of the Don (or *Buzāva*) Kalmyks. Later on he would eloquently and persuasively depict the following themes: (1) *mores* and manners and all kinds of customs and ceremonies, such as the degree of backwardness and extreme naïveté in the bygone era (*The Mother*), (2) the institution of prearranged marriages as far back as in the childhood of the children (*The Trampled Tulip*), (3) the imposition of a ban on marriages between two persons of opposite sex who belong to the same *yasun* (clan or stock, literally "bone") (*At the Invisible Wall* and *The Trampled Tulip*), (4) the centuries-old Kalmyk approach to smallpox, when people ran away in panic and deserted the sick (*Basanka's Breakthrough*), (5) the reflection of the Buddhist teaching that there should be no harm to man and beast, as told by a five-year-old boy in *From My Mother*, (6) the ceremonial dedication of a new *khurul* (Buddhist Lamaist temple)¹⁹ (*Four Meetings*), (7) weddings (*The Trampled Tulip* and *The Bends of Life*), (8) unhappy love (*Four Meetings*, *The Trampled Tulip*, *The Bends of Life*, and *Love in Bonds*), etc.

The chronological framework of his works is limited to the years immediately prior to World War I and succeeding years, i.e., the end of the Civil War in Russia and the flight of the Kalmyks to Turkey and points beyond.

Balykov's descriptions of all aspects of the way of life of his fellow Kalmyks during that turbulent period, fraught with serious consequences, are vivid, colorful, and of considerable historic and ethnographic interest and significance. He was without doubt a highly successful annalist, a portrayer of the *mores* and manners then prevailing among the Don (*Buzāva*) Kalmyks. In this connection it should be noted that everything in his stories and narratives, depicting the life of the Kalmyks in the Salsk district of the Don Cossack region, was always characterized by verisimilitude, reflecting the real life of the *stanitsa*; nothing was invented, exaggerated or belittled. Balykov always adhered to the truth in depicting the inner

workings of the mind, in analysing thought and feeling, and in presenting the nature of personality and character. He will occupy a fitting place in Kalmyk literature as a representative of psychological realism.

In conclusion, we must convey our thanks to Madame Bembetow for her dedication to the memory of her late husband, her selflessness, perseverance, and considerable financial sacrifice. This book, and the second one to follow soon, owe their appearance in English translation to her, who rescued the archives of her husband from oblivion. We all owe her our profound gratitude.

NOTES

- 1
Biographical data are based on the following sources: 1. Author's autobiography, rather incomplete, entitled "*Kratkie biograficheskie svedeniia o S.B. Balykove*" (Brief Biographical Facts about S.B. Balykov). The undersigned possesses this autobiography which has never been published. It is a typescript of five single-spaced pages of large size. S. Balykov authenticated his autobiography by signing his name at the very end of page five. Unfortunately, he forgot to date it. According to his widow, Madame Dordjima Bembetow of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, this autobiography was written by her late husband when he was already seriously ill (her letter to the present author dated October 4, 1988). Therefore, there is every reason to believe that Balykov wrote his autobiography in 1942 (he died on January 9, 1943). The author of these lines is indebted to his friend, Elena (Dolma) Remilev-Schlueter of Munich, for graciously sending him the aforementioned typescript: 2. Sh. Balinov, "Predislovie" (Preface), in *Sil'nee vlasti. Sbornik rasskazov* (Stronger than Power): A Collection of Stories). Munich, pp. 5-9; Arash Bormanshinov. "Sandji Balykov: A short sketch of his life and work," *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher*, Neue Folge, Band 6 (1986), 137-139; 4. Personal correspondence with Balykov's widow, Madame D. Bembetow, spanning the last several years.

2
According to Russian and Don Cossack nomenclature.

3
Khutor (Kalmyk *khoton*) was a basic social unit, a small Cossack

village, hamlet, a sub-unit of *stanitsa* (*aimak*), consisting of an indeterminate number of households, not necessarily related agnatically. Rendered as village throughout the text.

4

A large Don (Buzāva) Kalmyk village post encompassing a number of sub-divisions, *khutors* (*khotons*).

5

See n. 2.

6

Translated from Balykov's autobiography by the present author.

7

Probably his paternal uncle, although his maternal uncle is not excluded.

8

Because of the high standard of curriculum in those four-year municipal schools, they should be regarded as counterparts of American junior high schools or even above.

9

This non-classical high school was opened only in 1912.

10

The highest military order for combat valor in Russia before 1920.

11

A junior commissioned rank in the Cossack cavalry.

12

It should be noted here that the other Don Kalmyk regiment, the Third, was left to the mercy of fate in the seaport of Novorossiisk on the shore of the Black Sea. After capture by the Bolsheviks, every second Kalmyk cavalryman was killed with a saber.

13

It may be assumed that S. Balykov was a foreman of an all-Kalmyk crew for it is known that quite a few Kalmyk war refugees worked in the supply depot of the British occupation troops. Their service was terminated in 1923 when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk became the first elected president of Turkey and the British troops were withdrawn.

14

"*Vol'noe kazachestvo.*"

15

S. Balykov had a complete mastery of the old Kalmyk vertical, or *todo*, script.

16

Both *Ulan zalāt* and *Kovyl'nye volny*, thanks to the foresight of S. Balykov, have been kept at the library of the Hoover Institution of War, Peace and Revolution in Stanford, California. *Kovyl'nye volny*, thanks to S. Balykov or Sh. Balinov, is available in Paris.

17

A folktale, therefore characteristically timeless, placeless, and anonymous.

18

Of the four meetings between the two principal characters that took place in various places and even countries between 1913 and 1923, only the last meeting, in Bulgaria, relates to the émigré life of the Kalmyk war refugees.

19

It took place in July of 1913.

STRONGER THAN POWER

This legend has a historical foundation. It reflects sad and tragic events which took place in 1701. Ayuki Khan, who had four wives in addition to Darma-Bala, a cousin of the Dzungar khan, Tsewan-Rabdan (1697-1727), was known to be a sensual person even when he was getting on in years. And it was in his advanced age when he became not indifferent to his daughter-in-law, wife of his eldest son, Chakdor-Djab (d. 1722), who caught his father unawares in his wife's *yurt* (Chakdor-Djab had nine wives and from them 12 or 13 sons, according to Paul Pelliot). This unprecedented scandal soon turned into a great discord, some brothers siding with their elder brother while others supported their father.

It was taboo for a daughter-in-law to appear before her in-laws with her head uncovered and to comb her hair in their presence.

When night has furtively covered the sleeping ground with a thick layer of dry snow and the sun rises in the bright, quiet, frosty morning, with what majestic beauty the steppe sparkles! It stretches out before you like an infinite white brocade, burning in the sun with a myriad of sparkling snowflakes, meeting the gray-blue sky in the distance. The cold, rigid spaces are silent, shining with silent loveliness.

On such a morning old *noyon* Bambur likes to saddle his chestnut Aranzal and ride out onto the steppe alone, without his dogs, falcons, and servants. He has a bow at his side and a quiver full of arrows over his shoulder. He holds a heavy whip in his hand. He likes to track an animal himself, catch up to it with a whirlwind run of his horse, and bring it down with a skillful stroke of his whip, or shoot a high-flying bird out of the sky with an arrow.

In a rainbow of white steam, frost curls around the horse's muzzle and pricks Prince Bambur's sparse whiskers with its icy needles, but his wolfskin coat keeps him warm like a mother's womb. On this morning the old prince threw open his tight coat, feeling the fresh breath of the steppe through his thin pink buttoned caftan. There was not a soul around as far as his eyes could see.

Prince Bambur filled his lungs with air and glanced at the sky: high up in the heavens a steppe hawk circled over him like a tiny black boat.

"I can't get it! Too high!" the old Prince thought, as he dismounted. He removed his bow from his belt, pulled out a long-range arrow, and went down on one knee. Bending backwards and pulling back the bowstring, woven from young girls' hair, the old man began to aim. The invisible lightning of his narrowed eyes immobilized the bird for an instant. His bared yellow-white teeth crunched, and the arrow whistled gently for a moment as it was released.

Without getting up, Prince Bambur followed the bird with his eyes. "One, two, three, four," was the old man's mental count when suddenly the bird trembled, turned over once, tilted, and went down. The eyes of the old hunter sparkled with pleasure. But soon the bird recovered, leveled its wings, and began to gain altitude as if nothing had happened, losing itself in the gray-blue murky distance.

"I barely grazed it — that means I'm getting old. I no longer have any accuracy in my eyes or strength in my arms," the old man thought sadly, mounting his horse again.

The dry, virgin snow, covering the ground to the depth of a foot, billowed under the horse's hoofs in light clouds, creating little rainbows in the sunlight. It is wonderful on such a steppe to let your horse pace out and ride into the distance, while you hum a song about the freedom of the steppes.

But Prince Bambur had not ridden 75 feet before he saw a drop of red blood on the snow, like a ruby dropped from the heavens by the gods to decorate the snowy velvet cover of the land. The combination of sparkling whiteness and fresh red blood was so pleasing to the old man that he reined in his horse and sat admiring it for a long time. At last, he murmured softly:

"Oh how beautiful it is! If only I could see a woman with skin as white as this snow and cheeks as red as this drop of blood!"

*

Here and there, in the calm of the reedy growths of the Volga's estuary, the prince's large village lay concealed. Smoke came from the felt-covered tents, white under the snow. In spite of the severe frost, children in white sheepskin coats and fur hats with ear-flaps

ran along the freshly trampled paths between the tents; dogs barked and rolled in the snow.

The prince's *yurt* was the largest in the *khoton*, constructed of twelve struts, covered with a double layer of felts, strewn with wolfskins on the inside. Dry reeds crackled under the tripod, on which a pot stood boiling.

After his roam on horseback, Prince Bambur was returning to his headquarters. Riding toward his tent, the old man of the steppes could sense from afar the appetizing aroma of boiling mutton. Turning his horse over to a groom, he approached his tent with cheerful steps.

Just as he was about to fold back the felt which covered the door from the outside, his daughter-in-law stepped out, opening the inner door. She was the wife of his youngest son Danzan, the eighteen-year-old Syakhindya. Mechanically the old man cast an indifferent glance at his daughter-in-law and suddenly, exclaiming inwardly, froze in quiet rapture: her face glowed with snowy whiteness, her plump cheeks burned with tender red blood, her eyes, like an unfrozen spring in the snow, shone with black fire, and an even row of small white teeth flashed an embarrassed smile between thin, rosy lips. Syakhindya was short in stature, but thin and shapely like a young mountain antelope.

"It will soon be a year since we took Syakhindya into the house, and not until this moment did I notice her beauty. The snow with the hawk's blood on it is nothing compared to this live, fiery beauty," he thought in the tent, throwing the wolfskin off his shoulders. The spark of rapt admiration for a woman's beauty unexpectedly rekindled in the old man's cooling heart. Thus sometimes, under a pile of cooling ashes in the hearth, a hidden flame begins to smoke.

Less than a week after that day, Syakhindya noticed with fear and amazement that the old prince was obviously singling her out from the rest of the family. When he addressed her, her father-in-law's eyes burned with greater tenderness than was proper. The young woman was afraid of this unusual love, but, sometimes, in the hidden recesses of her heart, she got a pleasant feeling from the fact that a force of irrepressible love attracted the patriarchal steppe lord to her. But with all the strength of first-year love, she adored her husband, the dashing rider, the strong and handsome Danzan, and was faithful to him.

Syakhindya tried to come under the eyes of her father-in-law as little as possible. It was also obvious that the 50-year-old man was struggling with himself to conceal his feelings toward his daughter-in-law. But love is like a steppe-grass fire in a dry summer. Once it catches fire, its all-consuming flames spread until they burn everything or reach a non-flammable barrier. Mighty is the power of the father-in-law in a Kalmyk family. Against his own will, the old prince called on his youngest daughter-in-law to perform various minor services more and more often.

Prince Bambur's courtship of Syakhindya became increasingly persistent.

*

After the long winter the steppe burst into bloom. It became covered with a many-hued, strong-smelling carpet. The steppe filled up with herds of Kalmyk horses and cattle, flocks of thousands of sheep and camels, returning from the reed growths and grassy pastures of the Volga, Kuma, Kuban, and Manych.

The spring *raka* and strong *kumys* began to flow. In the spring everything in the steppe smiles and flowers in bright colors. Bathing in the sun's rays, the lark pours out an incessant song. It rings out and strokes the soul of the young woman by the water. In the distance a young horse-rider in the steppe harmonizes with the song.

The love of Prince Bambur for the beautiful Syakhindya flowed like an irrepressible stream. The old man forgot everything, cared for nothing else. His paternal responsibilities toward his daughter-in-law and his son, ancient national traditions, firm customs of the steppes — all this was overcome by his late-blooming love. Closing his ears to creeping rumors, shutting his eyes against critical looks, only one thing consumed the old man — to obtain the love of Syakhindya.

In his white silken robe, Prince Bambur lay on a carpet spread outside his tent, warming himself in the sun, when Syakhindya passed by him, light and shapely like a steppe antelope, her narrow waist, gliding her way to her tent. Sighing deeply in her wake and puffing harder on his pipe of black wood, the old prince waited a while and then got up and followed her.

Her beauty radiant like the eastern star, the top of her breasts

and her naked arms reflected in a mirror, dressed in a light, green sleeveless *tsegdek* over a white camisole, she was about to comb her hair, letting it down in two long, wavy, shining black plaits, when her father-in-law suddenly entered the tent.

Syakhindya paled at such a breach in the rules of decency and hastened to cover her head with a velvet *dzhatak* embroidered in gold.

"Father, I am doing my hair. You must not come in here!" she said.

"Syakhindya, lovely child, you don't have to cover your head," Bambur interrupted her.

"What are you saying? What law says that a daughter-in-law can show her father-in-law her uncovered head and comb her hair in his presence?" Syakhindya replied.

"My child, laws and customs are created by khans and princes, and they can break them and change them."

"You are wrong, Father. Khans and princes change and die, but the laws and customs of people are eternal. They are stronger than power. The customs of the people die only with the people," the young woman said, turning red.

"My child, you are lovely. You should rule the world! I have lost my peace, I am being tortured. Love me and I will bring the whole steppe to your feet. I will get rid of all barriers!" Choking on his words, Prince Bambur came closer to his daughter-in-law.

"Don't talk like that, Father! It is a sin for me to answer you roughly, but you, the first keeper of our laws, have gotten some crazy ideas into your head. Don't shame your clan! Take your heart in hand! You, the first man of the steppe, are giving in to the mischief of a heart as small as a gray sparrow's! Remember that when the chief of a people breaks customs of centuries, the people stop honoring him. Where do you get such sinful thoughts? What happened to your great mind?"

Suddenly the door opened with a creak. Danzan dashed into the tent, his eyes burning like those of a trapped wolf. A heavy silence settled over the tent.

Casting his eyes down, his father left the tent with an old man's gait, withering under his son's piercing look.

Great strife was coming to the steppe.

A MOTHER

This story was written as a first-person narrative. The narrator remembers when he was a boy of about five years of age. It vividly reflects the extent of backwardness and naivete of the Kalmyks in the bygone era.

Baldzhir the horse herdsman was an inveterate hunter, never resting, never quitting. In winter, in summer, at all times of the year, he was always tracking something, chasing after something, shooting, trapping, catching. Whether he had night guard duty over his herd in the steppes, or was coming home from the herd on a steaming day, his little squinty eyes invariably examined every bush on the steppe, every growth of reeds and *chakan* in a pond. He was rarely seen without his old muzzle-loader over his shoulder and two thin-legged black dogs at his side.

It was the end of a hot, dry summer. Our *khoton* of about twenty tents stood not far from the Manych. The time of bird migration was beginning. Whole clouds of them made a short-term passage over our steppe, and the water birds like black dots covered the surface of the flooded meadows near the Manych.

Baldzhir disappeared for days and always came back with game.

Once he shot some sort of remarkable bird. It was a big white bird with thick, soft, and sparkling plumage. Its small legs were short and black, its feet webbed, and it had a very long bill which ended in a circle the size of a copper five-kopek coin.

There was a lot of interest in the bird. The old men got together. All sorts of guesses and arguments began about what species it belonged to. Finally, old man Tsebek, a great story-teller and dreamer, clapped himself on the forehead and loudly exclaimed:

“Look, men! This is the ‘duck of immortality’! Yes, yes, it is! This is exactly the way it is described in all the stories and legends! Our thanks to the many gods, this is great luck for all of us — whoever eats even a piece of this duck’s flesh will live forever!”

Nobody contradicted the “much-knowing elder,” as Tsebek was called in our village, and everybody fell silent, overcome by the majesty of the moment.

Baldzhir, the owner of the miraculous duck, actually paled. He quickly picked up his game and, having ordered his wife to start a

fire and boil water, began to pluck the duck himself with some speed.

After plucking the duck and singeing it down on the flame, he spoke morosely:

“Of course, there is not enough for everybody. I have a large family — my wife and I, three children, and five people in my brother’s family in the *stanitsa*.”

“What are you thinking, Baldzhir? Could it be that you and your family will eat the whole duck, while looking at the rest of us? In this case it is not important to eat a lot. Just a little piece, the size of a forest nut, is enough to become immortal. As you will, but I, at least, have the right to a piece because I guessed what it was,” said old man Tsebek.

And here the other neighbors joined in. The news that Baldzhir had caught the duck of immortality immediately reached all of them. Soon the whole village crowded into Baldzhir’s *yurt*. The crush of neighbors wanting to become immortal was so great and each one tried so convincingly to prove his good relations with Baldzhir’s family that he and his wife had already given up the idea of sending any of the miraculous duck meat to Baldzhir’s brother’s family and agreed themselves to take a nut-sized piece each, so that as many people as possible could be made immortal.

But even this spirit of self-sacrifice on the part of the couple did not save the situation. There still was not enough meat for everyone. Willy-nilly, some could be blessed with “eternal life” and others had to be hurt and condemned to inescapable death.

That was an unforgettable incident in our village. There was really something for us to make noise about and get excited.

*

On that miserable day, as luck would have it, our mother was not home. In the morning she had ridden over to a neighboring village to visit her first cousin. Our father was a horse-herder and therefore was in the village rarely, and then only to spend the night. There were three of us children at home: my older sister, a young girl already engaged to be married, myself, a boy of five, and Dordzhi, a child just beginning to talk. Our elder brother, a rider, was somewhere in town racing the master’s horses.

When the “duck of immortality” was divided, there was obviously

nothing left for us. My sister, being a girl, could not boldly force herself into a large crowd of people. Dordzhi was still indifferent to questions of eternal life. In vain I hung around the hostess, Baldzhir's wife, coughing loudly and occasionally putting in a word to attract attention to myself, but it all led to nothing. I was not noticed. The tent was full of excited people, literally faced with the question of whether to remain ordinary mortals or become immortal. Obviously nobody bothered about us, other people's children.

Sad and hurt, we returned home. In the evening, when the sun was low over the horizon, our mother returned. Of course we fell all over each other telling her about the great event in the village. Our news struck her like thunder. I remember how her face changed and she softly whispered:

"O ye gods, ye gods... they ate the meat of the "duck of immortality" and there was nothing left for my children, not a one. The devil must have prompted me to ride away!"

I must say that my mother was an influential woman in the village. It seems to me that she was an intelligent and energetic woman when I remember that not only did all the village women come to her for advice, but sometimes even men in difficult cases did. And our father always did only what mother told him to.

Tidying herself up, my mother took me by the hand and went to Baldzhir's tent.

"I came to thank you, Baldzhir, and you Kalyash (Baldzhir's wife) for distributing immortality to the whole village and not forgetting my children," she began in a sarcastic tone as she entered Baldzhir's tent.

"Please forgive us, Nimé (that was my mother's name), there were so many people, all of them so insistent that we scarcely got pieces for ourselves," Baldzhir began to justify himself.

"Don't try to justify yourself! When your children were without milk the summer before last, which of your neighbors brought two cows over for the whole milking season, from spring to fall? From whom do you always borrow a horse for a journey, who lends you money, who but me supports you when you are in need? And when you had your only chance to make me happy, you forgot about my children!"

My mother's voice broke and she was silent, wiping the tears

rolling down her cheeks.

"Well, let it be so! Even on the day of the Holy Festival my foot will not cross the threshold of your tent!" said my mother in a hurt voice, heading toward the door.

"No, wait, Nimé. It's true that you have always treated us like one of your own. We cannot hurt you," Baldzhir said, and, turning to his wife, gave a decisive order: "You, open the trunk, and give Nimé that piece of meat which you saved for our future child! Three immortal children are enough for us."

With obvious displeasure, Baldzhir's wife opened the trunk and silently handed my mother a little piece of meat the size of a nut.

At this point my mother was moved by the couple's sacrifice and thanked them very warmly. My mother and I went home feeling happy.

"Well, children, come here! May the blessings of the higher beings be upon us! Long live Baldzhir and his children! I managed to get a piece of immortal duck meat after all!" Mama exclaimed happily, about to divide the already minute piece of meat.

"What are you doing! That piece is only enough for one. If you divide it into smaller portions it will lose its power," my sister pointed out.

"What are you saying, stupid girl? Who told you that?" Mother was frightened.

"I heard old man Tsebek say today that each person needs a piece the size of a nut. That means anything less doesn't work!" my sister answered.

"Go and call old man Tsebek. Tell him that Mama invites him for a cup of *raka*, which she got during her visit today."

Old man Tsebek did not make us wait.

Pouring him a whole cup of *raka*, my mother turned the conversation to the eternal duck meat and asked him straight out whether a nut-size portion of meat could be divided into four or five parts.

Having thought for a while, old man Tsebek replied that in all stories and legends portions of less than nut-size are not mentioned, and so, in order not to destroy the effect of the precious meat, it was better not to divide it into smaller pieces.

I remember the change that came over our mother's face and what sadness and torture were pictured on it.

After the old man had gone, she sat for a long time in deep

thought. We children must have understood the importance of the struggle going on in her soul, because all three of us waited in silence.

She probably wanted to become immortal herself. But before her stood three of her children. I guess she was thinking: "What shall I do? Which one shall I pick?"

She was crazy with love for all of us. And her oldest son, her first-born, was his mother's pride. With our inoffensive father she had lived for many, many years in quiet harmony also. But the piece bringing immortality was alone and only for one!

It was a difficult moment for our mother, who undoubtedly believed in the miraculous powers of this little piece of meat. It was a long time ago. People then were simple, credulous, superstitious, afraid of God and the devil.

For a long time she sat in agonizing doubt, but finally she spoke: "You come here — you are in the very middle of my heart." and she handed me the already dry piece of duck meat.

Now, of course, I laugh at the "duck of immortality." The population of our village at that time has long since died. It seems that I am the only one left alive. But when I remember how my superstitious and naive mother, in her agonizing choice of which of her family should be given eternal life, picked me, even now my soul grows warm from that great maternal love, the equal of which does not exist in this world.

THE DREAM OF ASSARAI

Ayuki Khan died on February 19, 1724 at the age of 77 after having ruled 55 long years as an autocrat. See V.M. Bakunin, "Opisanie istorii kalmytskogo naroda" (A Description of the History of the Kalmyk People), *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1939), 210 (Bakunin's seminal work was written as far back as 1761). But according to P. Pelliot, Ayuki Khan died at the age of 85. See *Notes critiques d'histoire Kalmouke*. Tome I: Texte (Oeuvres posthumes de Paul Pelliot, VI). Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1960, p. 81. Donduk-Dashi, the eldest son of Chakdor-Djab and grandson of Ayuki Khan, was vicekhan of the Kalmyk Khanate in 1741-1758 and the khan in 1758-1761. Donduk-Ombo ruled as khan in 1735-1741. He was another grandson of Ayuki Khan. Darma-Bala, the first cousin of Tsewan-Rabdan (1697-1727), the khan of Dzungaria, became wife of Ayuki Khan in 1697. See Bakunin, p. 198. Bestyzy (i.e., shameless)-Urumin is a corrupted pronunciation of Bestuzhev-Ryumin. In Mongolian languages /r/ is not found in an initial position with the exception of foreign words (Tibetan, Sanskrit, etc.). Peter the Great met Ayuki Khan near Saratov in 1722. See Bakunin, p. 205. Assarai was seven years old. Contrary to the author, he was not the only son of Donduk-Dashi. His successor to the throne was Ubashi Khan (1744-1774), who was confirmed as vicekhan by the Russian government in 1762 but actually ascended the throne in 1761 after the death of his father, Donduk-Dashi (1741-1761). But according to Pelliot, Ubashi Khan died in 1775. See *Notes critiques d'histoire Kalmouke*. Tome I. Paris 1960, p. 37. The city of Tsarytsin on the Volga became Stalingrad and after Stalin's death Volgograd.

"... and in the Kalmyk horde there is great disorder, because after the death of Ayuka the old Khan, the princes and *taishas* do not know which of them should occupy the Khan's throne. And each one who wants to become Khan is ready to ask for our aid, and I, in the

name of Your Imperial Majesty, can put at the head of these unruly nomads the one that Your Imperial Majesty may deign to appoint. Of all the quarreling princes the softest one, the one who trusts us most and who has a liking for strong drink, is Donduk-Dashi, and it is he who, in the interests of the Russian Empire, should be made Khan of the Kalmyks. And since this Dashi has less chance than the others, he will remain faithful to Your Imperial Majesty out of gratitude. Also, if we take his young son as a hostage, he will be a loyal subject of Your Imperial Majesty and obedient, and he will carry out all my orders. His son I will take hostage by guile, because in our national interest it will not be sinful to fool a non-Christian. And having obtained his son, I will not give him back, because the Kalmyk horde has lost its former power through internecine fighting, and now it is possible to pass through the whole steppe with the Astrakhan garrison. Whatever Your Imperial Majesty deigns to order on this matter I will carry out. Your Imperial Majesty's loyal subject, Major-General BESTUZHEV-RYUMIN. Fort Astrakhan."

*

"To the glorious prince of the Kalmyk clans, Donduk-Dashi, I have the honor to transmit best wishes from His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of all the Russias. It would be very pleasing for His Imperial Majesty to know that at the head of all the Kalmyk clans, princes, and *taishas*, on the throne of the glorious Khan Ayuka, a friend of Russia, there now sat the worthy prince and our friend, Donduk-Dashi. As a sign of his gracious favorable disposition toward you, His Imperial Majesty has augustly commanded that you be sent a barrel of old mead, a pail (*vedro*) of vodka, three *poods* of sugar, and ten bushels of wheat flour, which royal gifts at this writing I am sending to your seat via Major Koltsov and a squadron of soldiers. With the gracious wish that not only you, but your heir will worthily occupy the Khan's throne over your people.

"His Imperial Majesty presents you with another royal favor, namely: in the Astrakhan fort entrusted to me it has been commanded to set apart the best house with the best furniture, so that in this house your son and heir may live in happiness and plenty, learning sciences from various of the Tsar's people. A detailed conversation about how you may become Khan, about further royal favors to you, and about how your heir will be delivered to

Astrakhan with great care and honors, I desire to hold with you personally, and, if it please you, communicate to this Major Koltsov the time when I may come to your seat. Ready to serve you, Commandant of Fort Astrakhan, Major-General BESTUZHEV-RYUMIN."

II

In his huge, white princely tent, Donduk-Dashi sat in front of a bed, at the left of the hearth. A broad, black, silk *besmet* with gold braid at the collar was carelessly draped about his shoulders, and he was plucking hairs from his sparse beard with silver tweezers, his black eyes shining from the wine he had consumed. He sat on a horse-hair pillow covered with soft, black goat-skin, his legs crossed Kalmyk-style beneath him.

Opposite him, in front of the bed to the right of the hearth, on a snow-white quilted *shirdeg* sat the prince's wife, a worried expression on her face. She was a woman of middle years, wearing an ornate blue robe. She was darkly good-looking, her black hair precisely parted on her head.

Next to her, pressing against her shoulder, stood a round-faced boy of six or seven. In his bright, childish face his big black eyes were unchildishly observant. His soft black hair was carefully combed back and fell over his shoulders. He wore a white satin *besmet*, belted with a green sash.

At the place of greatest honor, opposite the hearth, on a large Bukhara rug, sat a gray-haired, elderly woman, her elbows resting on a pile of cushions covered with satin of many colors. She was a tall woman with an energetic look in her still lively eyes, a face with prominent features, dressed in a white silk robe. In an excited voice, barely holding back her anger, she was saying:

"What can be more shameful than a man aspiring to go further than his intelligence and worthiness? What can be sadder than a people having an unworthy and unpopular ruler? My husband, the Khan Ayuka, was a great man. Is it for you, a faint-hearted man without a sharp or deep mind, and your weakness for drink, to occupy his throne? No! Only Donduk-Ombo has inherited his grandfather's qualities, only he has eagle's wings, a lion's heart, and the head of a wise man. And it is only him that I bless! And I, the Khan's widow, Darma-Bala, forbid you, Donduk-Dashi, to seek the

throne with the help of the Russians. Don't call for their help, don't believe them, they are treacherous, there is no truth in their eyes, set so deeply in their heads. If they offer you help and shower you with presents, it means they have an ulterior motive. Now they want to take your only son hostage to make you into a puppet in their hands. This is unheard of! Kalmyk khans have never yet given hostages to anyone. This was done [only] by the khans, *mirzas*, and *bey*s of minor and weak peoples. Woe to the Khan who will be the first Kalmyk Khan to do such a shameful thing! This I, Queen Darma-Bala, say to you. Even the great Ayuka took me into account. Do not think that the people have forgotten their old Khan's widow. Without my approval they will never respect you. I tell you to your face: the great Khan Ayuka considered you the least suitable of all the ruling princes!"

Listening to her rough and whiplike words, Donduk-Dashi alternately paled and reddened, fidgeted nervously on his goatskin cushion, and, ceasing to pluck his beard, twisted his long narrow whiskers nervously. When Darma-Bala was through speaking and, calling the boy to her, began silently to caress him, Donduk-Dashi coughed and answered her in a dull voice:

"I have the rights to the throne by birth. Am I a man unworthy to rule the people? Is my *ulus* poorer than the others? Your favorite Donduk-Ombo does not prop the sky up with his hands either. But I have a mighty patron—the White Khan of Moscow. Bestyzy-Urumin is my friend. They want to see me on the Kalmyk Khan's throne. They will support me. And you, Grandmother, live in full happiness, pray to God, live for a long time, but don't mix up in the affairs of the khanate now. It will be better that way. If you are an intelligent woman, you must remember the ancient saying: 'A goat's head is not for ceremonies, and a woman is not for ruling.' In a month the White Khan of the Russians will send me the Khan's cap, sword, and costly fur coat with ambassadors of honor. And Bestyzy-Urumin will bring an army of cavalry, infantry, and cannon. There will be lots of vodka and meat. I will feed the whole people and get them drunk at my coronation. I will arrange races and wrestling with big prizes. The Russians will shoot their cannon off many times when I mount the throne. It will be a great triumph. If you recognize me, I will seat you at the place of honor, above the lamas, next to myself, and then I will ask the White Tsar for a

pension for you.”

“Not even my shadow will be present at your drunken brawl with the Russians. And I have seen better guests than your Bestyzyh-Urumin in my tent. I received the godlike White Tsar Peter and ate at the same table with him! And you are pawning your own son and leading the people into servitude by calling for the Russians to decide the affairs of our khanate. Well, we’ll see if you get away with it. Surely I will see the mighty hero Donduk-Ombo pull you drunk off the throne by your leg, step over you and take the place of his great-grandfather. As for you, I don’t consider you a khan, or even a good man. May your name be despised for centuries!” shouted the formidable old woman in great anger, and, stamping her foot, left the tent with firm steps.

Great disorder was beginning in the Kalymyk steppe. The princes hopped from one pretender to another, intrigues started, coalitions were formed and fell apart, and the common people of the steppe muttered darkly.

The ceremonious elevation of Donduk-Dashi to the Khan’s throne by Russian power did not bring calm. The decisive and sensible Donduk-Ombo, encouraged by the advice of influential old Darma-Bala, the Khan’s widow, crossed the Russian border with 20,000 families and took up a position beyond the Kuban River, where, together with the Tatars and Circassians, he began to threaten the Russians with raids. The Russian government abandoned Donduk-Dashi and began respectful talks with Donduk-Ombo. Donduk-Dashi started to drink himself into a permanent stupor.

III

In a richly furnished house, in material plenty and good care, lived the hostage of the Kalmyk Khan Donduk-Dashi, his only son the seven-year-old Assarai. Tasty and filling food, many strange and wondrous toys—all this Assarai had. But the boy had been quiet and melancholy for many months. Although he turned out to be an able boy (he quickly learned to speak Russian) he studied reading and writing most unwillingly. He got used to nobody and shunned the people around him, except for the bearded soldier who dressed him every day and put him to bed in the evening—he was the only person with whom Assarai held conversations. In the low-voiced grumble and rough hands of the old soldier he felt kindness and tenderness of soul.

Assarai's favorite pastime was to climb to the roof of the house and gaze for hours at the bit of steppe visible in the west over the walls of the fortress, propping up his cheeks with his hands. Even more, he liked to sleep. As soon as dusk came he asked to go to bed, and in the morning he lay awake for a long time, his eyes screwed shut, and then a smile trembled on his lips.

"Why do you like to sleep so much, Assarai—you're wasting away! You have so many toys, a whole house, a yard, the grub is so good, and all you do is sit on the roof or lie in bed," the bearded soldier reproached him good-naturedly when he dressed him for breakfast.

"It's good to sleep. When I'm asleep, I'm there, not here. A big herd of horses drinks water in the river. . . . makes noise, and a colt runs by the water with his tail in the air. . . . beyond the river the land is broad and even, the sky blue, so blue, here there a white cloud. And there's a big, big village, and our tent is close. . . . my mama calls me. . . . I run-run, but my feet don't move."

"Do you see that whenever you sleep?"

"Many-many times. It comes as soon as I shut my eyes."

"So that's it—homesickness—it's bad, I know the feeling myself," the old soldier murmured under his whiskers, taking Assarai by the hand to wash him and comb his hair.

Another month or two went by, winter arrived, and the emaciated Assarai took to his bed. He complained about nothing, was silent all the time with his eyes shut, hardly touching his food. The German doctor sent for from Tsaritsyn looked him over, could diagnose nothing, and went away shaking his head.

One morning Assarai did not wake up. His little light face was like wax. Under his sharp nose his thin lips were frozen in a smile, showing a row of little snow-white teeth. His motionless black eyes were half open. The old soldier felt his armpits and with a quiet sigh covered him with a blanket. Then he crossed himself over the small body of the body and left the room.

IV

In the big village which was the seat of the Khan there was great unrest. A platoon of mounted soldiers had delivered from Astrakhan the body of the Khan's son Assarai, "poisoned" by the Russians. With the speed of a summer steppe fire, hatred for the Russians who had "poisoned" the innocent boy spread through the

Kalmyk steppe. His death, like warning thunder, struck the steppe and better than any call from princes, it united the Kalmyks. The whole steppe aristocracy and its famed heroes flocked to the seat of Donduk-Dashi to see with their own eyes the unbelievable crime of the Russians.

With drunken sobs and wails Khan Donduk-Dashi lay around in helpless fury, dissipated and not recognized by the people. Among the aristocracy of the steppe no man was more despised than he. His Russian protectors had also turned away from him, because he lacked the support of his people.

The great tent of the Khan was filled with an uneven hum of voices. Then, suddenly, all was silence. Darma-Bala came into the tent. Greeting no one, she approached the little coffin and spoke, as if in a hurry:

“Princes, heroes, and Kalmyk men! Here before you is the body of an innocent being, your youngest clan brother, tortured to death by the heartless Russians. What are you thinking about? What direction do your thoughts take? You must fix it firmly in your minds that the fate of this boy awaits all of you, glorious princes and leading men, if you settle your differences with the help of Russian power. His father entrusted his only son to them, and look what the Russians did! Men! The fate of the people is the business of their leading men. Donduk-Dashi laid the groundwork for great evil. Now the Russians will never leave us alone. The Russians bring us great woe! We must save ourselves, we must save the people, because, we, the leaders, brought the people to this, and we must lead them out. Prepare to return to Dzungaria!”

“We will obey you, Senior-Princess-Mother!” said the prince of the Merket clan loudly and firmly.

Silence again reigned in the tent. The princes and steppe riders, gritting their teeth, tightened their fists over the hilts of their curved sabres. . . .

THE RUSTLING FEATHER-GRASS

Krasnyi Yar is a small town in the delta of the Volga, north-east of the city of Astrakhan, unless there was also a place bearing the same name in the Sal'sk steppe of the Don Cossack region.

The rustling of feather grass is supposedly a distress signal for approaching calamity, viz., fratricidal civil war. The latter indeed occurred and lasted more than three years (1917-1920). The Civil War was especially bitter, destructive and lethal in the Don Cossack region, including the Sal'sk district which was largely populated by the Buzava, i.e., the Don Kalmyks. See A. Borman-shinov, "Who Were the Buzava?" *Mongolian Studies* 10 (1986-1987), 59-87.

The last paragraph refers to the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

Azman, a ten-year-old boy with a large head, crooked legs, long unkempt hair turned reddish from the sun just as his face had grown dark from it, walked barefoot in the steppe toward Krasnyi Yar, barely visible in the distance, where on the shore of a steppe pond he expected to find his grandfather Dzhada, doing his turn as the herdsman of the village cattle.

A *dyaling*, a soft, yellow sheepskin bag, hung over his shoulder, containing half a loaf of pan-baked Kalmyk bread, four big pieces of boiled horsemeat, and a big bottle of cold *raka*. Azman was taking lunch to his grandfather.

The June day was hot and without wind. From the village to Krasnyi Yar was far, about five *versts*. But Azman was no lazybones. He was an obedient boy who loved his old grandfather.

As Azman walked he hummed a street song and knocked the heads off flowers with a thin stick, as if it were a sword.

Grandfather Dzhada really was at the pond. His grandson spotted him from afar. He had stuck a stick into a molehill, hung his *besmet* on it, and having thus captured from the sun a little bit of shade for his head, lay stretched out on the ground to his full six-foot length.

The many-colored herd of cows lay right by the water. Many of them stood chest-deep in the water, lazily brushing insects aside with their tails. Nature slept in noonday torpor. The motionless pond shone like hot glass in the sun.

"*Āva!* I brought you lunch!" yelled Azman, quietly approaching the old man.

"*Ad!* What a good boy! Bring it here, let's have it!" replied the grandfather, getting up and shielding his eyes from the sun.

Azman handed the old man his lunch, wiping sweat from his face with a sleeve.

"It was a long way. I was afraid!" he said gayly.

"Well! Aren't you a man? Who's afraid in the daytime? Let's go take a dip and then we'll eat lunch," his grandfather said affectionately, heading for the pond.

Before going into the water, Dzhada buried the *raka* bottle deep in the mud. Azman, tired from his walk in the heat, and his grandfather, heavy from his nap in the sun, bathed for a long time with pleasure, diving, swimming, and splashing water.

Dressing after his swim, the old man retrieved the bottle from the mud, washed it carefully, and took a swig from it with evident pleasure. Then grandfather and grandson began to have lunch. Even though Azman had already eaten at home, he did not lag behind his grandfather at this meal. After eating his fill, the grandfather lay down to rest.

"And you, Azman, go on home," he said.

"I'm going to stay with you, Grandfather. In the evening we'll drive the herd together."

"All right, then lie down here. We'll rest for a while and then we'll get the cattle up and put them out to graze—the heat will soon diminish," said the grandfather, making room for the boy's head in the shade.

Azman soon began to doze. Dzhada got up once in a while and drank from the bottle.

In spite of his 75 years, Dzhada was still a strong man. The hair on his head was still thick and half of it still black, almost all his teeth were whole, his vision was good, his hearing acute. Of his strength, once famous throughout the area, enough was left so that when his son, a healthy man of 40, took it into his head to cut up on the *Tsagan* holiday and beat his wife, Dzhada grabbed him by the

scruff of the neck with one hand, pressed his head into the ground and held it there until the son begged for mercy. But in his old age, Dzhada had become very garrulous. He found something to relate to anybody, old, young, a child, a woman, a man—it made no difference, especially when he had had a few drinks. Many were the legends, stories, and youthful reminiscences that Azman had heard from his grandfather.

“You, Azman, be like your grandfather, like me, not like your father. A weak man, your father. He got it from his late mother. At his age, was I anything like him?” And the grandfather began to tell the boy what he had been like in his youth.

This time, too, the bottle of strong *raka* loosened his tongue. Not an hour had gone by before the old man, waking the boy up, herded the cattle into the steppe.

*

Thoroughly sated, the cows wandered lazily on the steppe, treating themselves to only the tastiest grass, or lay around chewing their cuds. It was still early to herd them to the village. The sun was still high, but the heat had lessened. A warm late-afternoon breeze disturbed the sea of gray feather-grass with light ripples.

The grandfather sat with his face toward the breeze and, lifting his arm high with the index finger extended, talked to his grandson.

“You don’t know, Azman, what a good, gallant thief I used to be. I never took any horses closer than a hundred *versts* from here. I got them only from across the Don, from the Volga and the Kuma. And I didn’t take just any old horse, but only those known throughout the region for their friskiness.

“I avoided taking them from herds in the steppe. Any old fool or coward can steal a horse from a herd on the steppe, I thought. I like to take them right out of the stable, from behind strong locks. There were times I used to ride up at night to the estate of some rich horse breeder, leave my horse with a horseman friend of mine, take off my boots, roll up my pants, throw my *besmet* off, grab a whip with one hand and a king-pin from a cart with the other, and then sneak under the barn walls like a wolf. I’d get to the stable I wanted, insert the king-pin into the lock, force it, and off comes the lock! Then I’d take a bridle from the stable, put it on the best stallion, if there was a

saddle there I'd saddle him, lead him out, mount him, give a whoop on purpose, and dash off. Behind me shouts, pandemonium, shots. . . ."

"But why did you yell, Grandfather?"

"So that they would chase after me, so that they would shoot at me, it was more fun that way!"

"And they never caught you?"

"No. I was impossible to catch. Yes, there was a time. . . . Once I heard that the Tauridan Germans bred good horses, foreign ones, and I thought 'I've got to take one.' I took a reliable horseman with me, my friend Nimba, who was practically the only one who spoke good Russian then, and one dark spring evening we took off. We rode all night and half another day, until we reached one of the German villages. The Germans were out in the fields at the time, plowing. I dismounted, got ready, and leaving Nimba with our horses, began to wander around the *khosh*. It took me a long time to choose. I kept coming across some kind of heavy ones. Finally I found a pair of good ones, with healthy, smooth necks like a swan's. They had chains around their necks, attached to rings on a small carriage and with locks. It would have been simple if I had had a king-pin, but as luck would have it, we had lost ours on the way. What to do? I thought and thought. Then I took out a kerchief, wrapped it around the chain in one place, took the chain in my hands at that place and twisted—one link broke. I fed the horses and led them out. The owners, they looked like father and son, were asleep not far from the carriage. They had weapons at their heads: pitchforks. Under them was a good white rug.

"I led the horses to Nimba and told him that the owners were asleep and not waking up—no adventure here. It was boring to steal horses this way. I took my lasso, approached the sleeping Germans again, cut a small hole in a corner of the rug, put the lasso through it, tying it Kalmyk-style, then brought up my horse, secured the lasso to a stirrup and spurred my horse. My horse tore off. The sleepers awoke, rolled on the ground, and to their horror saw their rug fly off like a white bird into the darkness. A shout went up, they began to shoot, I don't know where or at whom, and we disappeared. Only these horses turned out to be heavy and lazy. I didn't steal any more German horses. They're no good for Kalmyks."

"But why did you steal, Grandfather? Were you poor?"

“Hoo! Poor! I had up to a hundred head of cattle. It was your father who managed to become so poor that only 40 head are left. And I had a whole herd of horses. I stole out of boredom! There was no other way to test my boldness of spirit. What was I to do except amuse myself by stealing? I was an honorable thief. I never took anything from those close to me; I spared the poor and even helped them. And I enjoyed esteem and respect from everyone.”

“Grandfather, do people steal nowadays?”

“Now, rarely. It’s become tight. But what are thieves these days? Scoundrels, that’s all they are. Nowadays they steal some lousy cow, oxen, they hurt their neighbors, try to steal from some poor fellow who has nothing to ride on to get his things back, from widows, from childless old men, and they try to sell all their booty to play cards. They are betrayed to the police and put in jail, which is what they deserve, because they are not fine fellows but just plain thieves.”

“Yes,” began the grandfather after a lengthy silence, calmly and sadly, “everything is going down to destruction, to degeneration. The end of everything will come soon. Every year, people’s souls and bodies diminish, and the livestock grows smaller, the grass becomes sparser and shorter, even the land seems to be dryer and more shrunken. Wherever you look, whatever you listen to, you hear ‘the end . . . the end.’”

“Listen to the whisper of the feather-grass, listen to it!”

Attentively, his ear to the ground, Azman tried to hear the feather-grass.

“I can’t hear anything, Grandfather. Nothing is saying anything.”

“Ah, you are still young! You don’t know the secret. You think that the grass just rustles emptily in the steppe. No. Everything that lives and grows in nature speaks, has its language. Grasses, trees, animals. ‘The end is coming to the Russian tsardom, to the Russian land,’ says the feather-grass. ‘There will be a bloody war. There will be great troubles. Brother will kill brother. People will slaughter each other. Everything will be burnt by fire, dried by the sun. The villages will be empty. There will be a great hunger.’ That’s what the gray feather-grass is whispering to us.”

“Grandfather, recently you said that all this is written in the prophecies of the Lama Jebtsun-Damba, and now you say that the feather-grass is whispering it to you.”

Dzhada grew a bit confused, but, getting hold of himself,

growled:

"Yes, it's there too, but I also hear it now. It is because the time for the infidels has come. Their prophet asked God for two thousand years of life for his people, and this period is coming to an end."

"So how will we, the Kalmyks, live?"

"We are different, Azman. There is a long time yet in our period. Our Buddha got five thousand years of life for us from God. But since we have become so intertwined with the Russians, it's possible that their calamity will affect us too. But Buddha foresaw this too, and established a distinctive mark for the Kalmyks. Do you know what it is?"

"No."

"Well, look here."

With these words the old man took off his faded Cossack cap and poked his finger at the small red tassel on it.

"Why do you think I wear this? So that when the gods begin to fly over the earth and send calamities to foreigners whose time has come, they will spare us Kalmyks. Our Buddha will also fly along with these gods and as soon as he sees a red tassel on somebody's head, he will say: 'Let that one go, he must still live.'"

"And what if a Kalmyk has forgotten his cap at home when this happens?"

"Then it's the end for him!"

"And what if all the infidels put on caps with red tassles?"

"Shut up, you fool, you want to know too much!" the grandfather barked angrily at Azman.

So much agitated talk had tired the old man, and his grandson's impertinent questions were getting to him.

By this time the sun had reached the western part of the sky and was beginning to sink imperceptibly. Nature was enlivened by the evening coolness. The herd was on its feet, grazing slowly and heading toward the village.

The old man and the boy got up and went off to catch up to the herd. Dzhada, leaning on his stick with one hand, walked briskly along the steppe path. Azman kept running up to clumps of gray *katran*, decapitating them with his stick.

"Here," thought the old man looking at his grandson's movements, "the boy is frolicking, doing it completely unconsciously, but even he and his actions are an omen that war will come soon."

The herd was already approaching the village and the old man and boy were traversing the dusty road approaching it, when little bells sounded in the distance and a troika at full speed came into view, flying a flapping red flag. In an instant the troika passed the herdsman, disappearing in a thick cloud of dust on its way to the village.

Taking off his cap, the grandfather stood for a long time with wide-open mouth staring after the troika with the red flag, which was carrying the news of the onset of war.

“It has begun,” he whispered to himself and hastily strode off toward the village.

VICTORY

The two Kalmyk regiments mentioned here were the 80th Dzungar and the Third Kalmyk cavalry regiments. They were formed in 1918 and consisted exclusively of Buzava Kalmyks.

The lama referred to here was Uüdzüng Lubsan-Arash Bormanzhinov (1855-1919) who was elected Lama of the Buzava in 1903. See A. Bormanshinov, *Lama Arkad Chubanov, His Predecessors and Successors: A Study of the History of the Kalmyk Lamaist Church in the Don Cossack Region of Russia*. College Park, MD: Birchbark Press, 1980, pp. 14-15.

The Don settlement (*sloboda*) of Martynovka was located not far from the Bokshurgan (or Denisovskaya) *stanitsa*. During the Russian Civil War of 1917-1920 it was known as a Bolshevik stronghold.

From his mother, the leading evil-tongued scandalmonger in the *aimak*, and from his father, a resourceful horse-thief, Radni Balkhakov had inherited a troubled spirit, impudent thoughts, and a sharp tongue. Constant poverty at home had early bred into him envy and malice toward those who were well off. And when in the fall of 1917 Radni, then eighteen and the holder of the *stanitsa's* scholarship, was expelled from the fifth grade of secondary school for bad behavior, the revolutionary hero of the Bokshurgan *stanitsa* was all set to go.

His envious, greedy, and aggrieved soul was irrepressibly attracted to that dark and malevolent mass of people which was bursting to correct its God-given bitter fate by plundering the property of others, by fire and blood. Radni became a fiendish Bolshevik, abandoned the society of his own people, and joined the Russian muzhiks.

When the Kalmyk district was overrun by Bolshevik gangs, which spread out in bandit groups throughout the farms, Radni Balkhakov sucked into his wealthy native village like an insatiable vampire.

The rich men of the village bought themselves out from the terror imposed by Commissar Balkhakov with rustling paper money of

high denomination, with grain and bread, sheep and steers. After many years of poverty, insufficient food on the table, and torn clothes, his family was flooded with food and prosperity from other people's yards and trunks. For a whole winter Balkhakov's family lived in festive plenty. Radni undid all links. Having trampled the people's traditions and morals, he replaced them with his Communist slogans of plunder. This insolent youngster even reached the point of insulting the people's holy places and denying God.

*

Gritting its teeth to the point of pain, the *stanitsa* of Bokshurgan bided its time in silence. In tough, indigestible lumps it gathered its feelings of revenge in order to pluck out the thorny growth of the Balkhakovs from its honest midst by the roots, at the first change in the wind.

And the long-awaited wind finally came. On a dark, warm night in May the people of Bokshurgan began to whisper quietly. From yard to yard human figures started to run like silent black silhouettes. In the adobe cottages, their windows tightly sealed and barred, the lamps burning very low, men began to put together again the saddles they had taken apart. Conversing with their wives in low whispers, they oiled the swords and rifle bolts that had rusted in the manure.

The moment the east showed red and the early lark sounded his waking trill, the whole *stanitsa* arose in revolt. The Red Army platoon, guardian of the Revolutionary Committee, was disarmed in its sleep, arrested, and locked into a barn. The commissars were seized in their warm beds, tied up, and taken to the *stanitsa's* government. At a high trot a patrol rode out of the *stanitsa* toward the Don, looking for the Cossacks who had revolted against Bolshevism. Kalmyk pickets appeared on hills and grave mounds in the neighborhood.

Thus in the spring of 1918 fell the bloody, insatiable, and parasitic power of the muzhiks over the Kalmyks. Swiftly and silently the *stanitsa* took care of incorrigible Bolshevik sympathizers. But the local leader of the Bolsheviks, Radni Balkhakov, was not caught. A religious and soft-hearted old neighbor woman saved his young life, having warned him of impending danger the night before. When a dozen people with revolvers and rifles surrounded

the Balkhakov adobe hut, Radni was already far from the *stanitsa* and vanished into a *muzhik* village and his Bolsheviks. The trembling Balkhakov couple paid for the sins of their son with their innocent heads.

*

Like cooling lava from the bowels of the earth, the armed *muzhik* detachments evacuated Cossack land where they had spent such a sated, rich, and free winter, often bristling and defending their plunder.

For many months, with heavy fighting, the Cossacks chased Bolsheviks to the borders of their land, watering their ancestral places with their warm blood. Two Kalmyk regiments, bright with military glory in the ranks of the Don, also stung the Red villains.

But black days came again. The *muzhik* front stretched out like an elastic hawser, filling up with millions of cheap manpower from Russia and suddenly rolled onto the Cossack forces in a bloody flood. The Kalmyk villages on the Don sadly emptied in the spring of 1919 before the Red death approaching them.

Like an enraged animal, Radni Balkhakov galloped into his *stanitsa*. Black gaps of windows and open doors looked at him everywhere with the mute eyes of death. The rich and populous *stanitsa* spread out so broadly, looked to him like a series of empty cages from which the birds had flown. On the site of his hut he found only a pile of cinders, clay, chips, and rotten old grass.

In boiling fury, doggedly entering every house, he finally found one sick old man, ruined and left alone by the Bolshevik revolution and unable to leave the *stanitsa*. Gnashing his teeth he fell upon the defenseless old man, driving him naked and trembling on his thin legs at the point of a Mauser to the edge of the *stanitsa*, where he ordered him to dig his own grave.

"Son, why are you making me dig a hole? I don't need a hole. Shoot me and leave me lying here. Let the dogs and birds eat my flesh," the old man pleaded with his executioner.

"Dig, dig, you old bourgeois, at least do a little work before you die! Too bad that the *stanitsa* is empty or I would have shown them what it means to kill my parents! I would strangle your lama with my own hands, the one who fooled the people with his gods!" Radni shouted in reply.

"Don't sin, sonny! Quarrel with people, but don't touch God," the

old man muttered, working on his hole.

"Shut up, you old fool! What God? I have conquered all your gods. There's your temple over there. I'll go there, I'll go and do there what people do in outhouses!"

"Don't boast while you are in a temper. The heavenly powers won't allow that. You'll pay for it. . . . Well, son, the hole is ready, you can shoot now," the old man said calmly, lying down in the shallow hole with his head toward the east, softly whispering a prayer.

The sun slowly set on the far steppe horizon. Having shot the old man, so resigned to his fate, Radni galloped to the *khurul*. He tied up his horse at the door, and ran into the ancient temple. It was already dark in the silent building. Only with an effort could the gilded statues of Buddha and *Maidari* be made out.

No matter how bravely Radni entered there or how much his heart burned with daring, a feeling of awe filled him when he approached the main statue of Buddha, intending to desecrate it. Unwillingly memories came to him, how often in childhood his little hands, had timidly touched the base of the statue with his head. The huge, dark temple, full of unseen sacred statues, overcame him with its mysterious power. The dead silence of the empty village and the old man he had just killed pressed on his nerves.

His spirit unwillingly dying down, he directed his gaze at the point where the brow of the statue must be and froze on the spot. The eyes of the statue were shining with a greenish light and blinking. Starting from sudden fear, Radni wanted to turn around to leave without committing sacrilege, when the temple was filled with a terrifying roar, perhaps human, perhaps animal.

"Ggg-a-a-rrr!" sounded in his ears.

"A-a-a-yay-ay-ay!" Radni screamed like a child and ran out of the temple in wild horror. Frightened by his scream, a little owl flew silently out of the temple almost at the same instant. Continuing to yell insanely, Radni jumped on his horse and dashed off toward the Martynovka settlement, where a Bolshevik cavalry detachment was spending the night.

After two days of riotous drinking, Radni Balkhakov, personal adjutant to the commander of the Red Army cavalry detachment, died from delirium tremens, never regaining his right mind. Until the very moment of death, amidst bestial screams, he shouted, "There is a God! He exists! Green eyes, voice of a beast!"

THE FATHERS

This story is based on the tragic events that took place in the course of the Civil War in the Don Cossack region. According to elderly Buzava Kalmyks, there were several incidents when fathers, in order to save the lives of their sons, sacrificed their own lives by begging the Bolsheviks to be executed instead of their sons.

It is not a legend of old but fact, witnesses to which are still alive, that I wish to relate to my brothers. The Kalmyks were forced to experience much that was bloody and unforgettable in the hideous events of the Russian Revolution. Among the hundreds of familiar faces who fell as innocent victims of these events, two faces come to my memory more often than the others.

It was early in the spring of 1918.

It was early April, when the horse herds, grown thin over the winter, go greedily for the fragrant, tasty and tender vegetation, while the herders after their winter drudgery enjoy their rest, roaming out onto the steppe with their whole families.

But this spring was special, unusual. The owner of the herd had fled, and there was no head herdsman either. They were in hiding. The herd was not divided into smaller groups. Gangs of mounted marauders roamed the steppes.

Incredible rumors circulated about these gangs. Our little *khoton*, situated at the end of a deep gully and in a hollow far from the main roads, was blessedly left alone for a long time.

But once, actually "one fine day," our turn came. A Red Guard patrol, about ten men, descended on us, mounted on magnificent stabled horses, most with brands familiar to us, and festooned with weapons.

For eight tents, lost in the open spaces of the steppe and lacking any firearms, with all adult males absent at this hour watering the herd far from the village, this force was an irresistible one.

Confirming all the rumors about them, the Red Guards began to commit excesses. Trunks cracked under the blows of rifle butts, as did closets and iron cases. Everything valuable and cherished was taken. The more or less good-looking Kalmyk women were raped in full view of everyone.

The blood of the adolescent Kalmyk boys boiled, their heads swam from fury. They gritted their teeth to the point of pain in order not to cry out. But not all of them managed to keep quiet.

The fifteen-year-old Bembik was led out to be shot "for holding conversations."

His mother, trying to go to his aid, was thrown back with a rifle butt blow in the chest and fell down unconscious. Just at that time Bembik's father rode up, Baklan Shalninov, a tall, round-shouldered, quiet and peaceful Kalmyk of 37 or 38.

Seeing his son facing the barrels of rifles, Baklan took off his cap and fell on his knees before the Red Guards, begging mercy for his son.

"Aha! So you are his father? Do you want us to forgive him? Do you love him?"

"More than anything in the world, Comrade, Brother!" Baklan muttered in answer.

"Will you take his place yourself? If you do, I'll shoot you and let your son go. Agreed?" asked a soldier, half seriously, half jokingly.

Baklan thought for only a moment, then, throwing back a mat of black hair from his forehead and looking pleadingly at the Red soldier, he asked:

"You won't fool me, brother?"

"No, I won't fool you!"

"May I pray to God?"

"Go ahead and pray, the hell with you and your idols!"

Slowly Baklan took a large, many-colored kerchief out of his pocket, put it around his waist, walked into his tent, splashed water on his mouth and hands, and approached the altar. Three times he bowed to the ground, put his head to the copper statue of Buddha, and turning around to face the waiting soldier, said with an apologetic smile,

"I am ready."

"Come out!"

Baklan sighed deeply, took a farewell look at the inside of the tent, looked at his unconscious wife, and went out, taking his time. He came up to his trembling son and kissed him on both cheeks. In a breaking, quiet voice he said: "Go to Mother." He turned to face the Red Army men.

Two shots, sounding simultaneously, laid him out flat.

He did not die in battle beneath the emboldening “Hurrahs” of many comrades-in-arms, in blood-warming competition with them and the approval and example of a commander. Baklan performed his heroic deed completely alone, surrounded by merciless enemies, quietly and unhesitatingly buying life for his son with his death.

From another tent seventeen-year-old Khani was led out to be shot for being “already grown.”

His father, Baldzhi Menginov, short and as bow-legged as could be, with large protruding rabbit-like eyes, a hooked nose and a tuft of gray hair on his head, an old man of more than fifty, lay ill in the tent.

Seeing his son led out to his death, Baldzhi ran after the Red Army men in his underwear and offered himself in his son’s place.

One of the soldiers became interested in the trade, but another forced Baldzhi to open his mouth and after looking at his teeth decided:

“You are old, my friend. You’ll die soon anyway. You’re not worth your son!”

The sacrifice was refused. His son was shot.

Thus in the wilds of the trans-Don steppes occurred some of the inhuman crimes of the Bolsheviks against our innocent people, as well as rare sacrifices of parental love.

FROM MY MOTHER

This story was written as a first person narrative. The narrator is a male. His father is absent in the story. He seems to have been busy with his herd that night.

It is interesting to note the five-year-old boy's remark that no living creature should be killed. It reflects the Buddhist teaching that there should be no harm to man and beast.

I guess a mosquito must have bitten me. Half-asleep I slapped myself on the nose and woke up. I opened my eyes. It was already dark and quiet in the tent. Through the roof opening I could see many stars twinkling in the dark sky. Flickering weakly and spreading a smell of burnt oil, the little lamp in front of the shrine was going out. On our wide wooden bed my mother was sleeping with her back to me. Behind me and above my head slept my still-diapered sister on two pillows, snuffling quietly. All was quiet in nature except for the occasional cough of a cow and a dog's lazy bark somewhere.

"When did I go to bed. . . . How did I get to sleep. . . . What did I eat before bed?" I began to think lazily, rubbing my nose.

"Hey! It was still light when I went to bed, dusk, when Mother was still milking the cows, which means I had no tea with hot *bortsyks*, and that means I'm still hungry. They didn't wake me up to feed me." This flashed through my mind and made me angry. It was all right. I could still have a *bortsyk* and Mama could warm the tea.

"Mama, hey Mama! Wake up. Give me a *bortsyk* and some tea, I want to eat," I began tearfully, nudging my mother.

"What are you talking about? Who drinks tea at night? You won't die before morning. In the evening I tried to wake you, but you refused and said you weren't hungry, you wanted to sleep, and now it is after midnight, now you must sleep, child. Sleep, little son, and in your dreams a kind white mouse will bring you tea on a silver dish. Sleep, don't whine," my mother said, covering me with a blanket.

"I don't want to sleep. I won't get to sleep. Give me some tea!

A-a-a!" my cries filled the tent.

"Keep quiet, foolish one, you'll wake your sister. And what a nasty boy you are. There isn't a boy in the village worse than you are. Now keep quiet and I'll tell you something."

"Give me some tea."

"Listen, Sarmush, when you were little like your sister, you were such a crybaby as I never saw. And now you are already a big boy, you'll soon be five, and aren't you ashamed of yourself for making a fuss, waking Mama at night, crying?" Mama reproached me half-seriously.

The reproaches worked on me, but I couldn't stop crying right away and I said, still sobbing, "It's not true! You are not telling the truth. I was not a crybaby when I was little!"

"What do you mean not true? Listen, because of your fussing and crying a mad dog almost tore me apart," my mother said, evidently happy with the chance to distract me from my thoughts of tea and rolls.

"Tell me," I murmured, sighing deeply.

"You were about a year old and such a crybaby as I cannot describe. Sometimes I felt like throwing you out the door to the dogs. Once on a summer day about lunchtime, when there were no men in the village and the women were almost all asleep in the shade of the tents, an unfamiliar black dog ran up with tail lowered and burning red eyes, foaming at the mouth, and begin to bite the calves and chase the dogs. All the big dogs in the village immediately made themselves scarce. Only the stupid puppies got in its way, and these it caught, strangled, and tore to pieces. Everybody in the village understood that the dog was mad and moved quickly, disappearing into their tents and closed their doors with both bolts."

"And you, Mama?"

"Well I did too. You, son, had just been bathed in cold water and well fed, and you were asleep on the left bed. I began to watch the dog through a crack in the tent. After chasing one of our chickens, it found your little puppy, which I had not had time to call into the tent, and began to choke it right by the tent, right opposite your bed. The puppy squealed and you woke up from its cries and as usual you started to sob at the top of your lungs. I tried to rock you quiet, gave you my breast, but you cried all the more loudly and strongly. The

mad dog first listened to your voice and then began to tear its way into the tent.”

Quietly, trying not to breathe, I listened to my mother. A sleepy summer's day, a mad dog in the little village lost in the steppe, my mother with a crying child — all this went through my mind so vividly that I quietly snuggled up to my mother. And she continued.

“In one minute the dog tore up the outside felt and stuck its snout through an opening in the tent lattice, trying to get inside so it could attack you and me. I didn't know what to do. I ran around the tent calling on God for help and repeating the sacred words 'Därke, därke.' Suddenly I got an idea: to hide you under the big cauldron. I quickly put you on the ground, dragged over the big cauldron for fermented mare's milk and put it over you, putting a piece of kindling under the edge so you would not suffocate. You continued to yell even under the cauldron.

“By this time the dog had broken two pieces of the lattice and, sticking its whole head in, tried to break into the tent. It was as if the whole village had died. They all locked themselves in and sat in fright. There were still no men. They were working with the herd out on the steppe. No help could be expected from anywhere.

“Seeing that in a minute the dog would start tearing me up, I threw myself on my knees beside the shrine and prayed loudly. All the dog needed was to tear through another piece of the lattice and it would be in the tent.

“Praying and crying I started to touch my head to the statue of Buddha and suddenly on the trunk next to the shrine I saw the large scissors for shearing sheep. An idea struck me. Why am I crying like a fool? I will arm myself with these shears and stab the dog in the eyes before it gets free to throw itself on me. God is showing this to me.

“I took the shears and without ceasing to whisper prayers I started for the dog. It was using all its strength and had already inserted one paw. Any moment it would tear its way into the tent. It was wheezing, growling, baring its teeth, spattering saliva.

“I gritted my teeth and with trembling hand I poked the sharp end of the shears into one of the dog's eyes. It screeched hoarsely, blood spurting from its eye, but it continued to try to tear its way in. I circled the dog, approaching it from the other side, and stabbed its other eye. Now it began to try to retreat but could not free itself. For

some reason its head was stuck. Then I ran out of the tent screaming for help from the neighbors. Two or three of the women answered my call and all together we killed the dog with bucket yokes, a stake and an axe.

"When I lifted the cauldron and took you out you were all blue and hardly breathing. That's how hard you were crying."

All during the story I lay without stirring, clenching my fists and gritting my teeth. When my mother had finished, I whispered in a stifled voice,

"Mama! I won't cry any more."

"You see, you shouldn't cry at night. Mad dogs always go for crying children," she said, hugging me and stroking my head.

"But Mama, you always tell me that I mustn't kill mice, or porcupines, or little birds, nothing alive may be killed, but you yourself killed a dog."

"No, my son. This dog was mad. It wanted to tear you and me apart. How could we avoid killing it?"

"A mad dog may be killed?"

"Yes."

"And a poisonous snake?"

"That is permitted."

"And a person who wants to beat you?"

"A human being? Go to sleep, child, that's enough."

"Tell me, what about a human being?"

"If a person wants to beat you, you should run to Mama."

"And if he catches up to me and grabs me?"

"Then defend yourself!"

"Aha, I must defend myself. . . ."

"Chrik, chrik, chrik!" a night cricket sounded somewhere.

"You can never find him in the daytime," I thought, but my eyelids were growing heavy and a cloud came over my thoughts.

FOUR MEETINGS

The ceremonial dedication of the new *khurul* of the Baghude (Batlayevskaya) *stanitsa* took place in July of 1913. It was led by the Lama of the Don Kalmyks, Men'ko (Uüzüing Lubsan-Arash) Bormanzhinov (1855-1919). He was elected Lama in 1903

The *ataman* of the Batlayevskaya *stanitsa* in question was Ochir Ignatov who died in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1943. More about his *aimak (stanitsa)* in A. Bormanzhinov, "Who Were the Buzava?" *Mongolian Studies* 10 (1986-1987), 67, 69-70, 72.

The commander of the Dzungar Regiment was Colonel Gavril E. Tepkin (1891-1920).

The entire Third Kalmyk Regiment was left to the mercy of fate by the White Russian Army in Novorossiysk at the seaside in 1920.

I

A new *some* was being consecrated in Batlayevskaya *stanitsa*. This temple became the best of all the Kalmyk *stanitsa* temples. Made entirely of brick, high, spacious, and beautiful, it proudly towered over the small *stanitsa*.

The ceremony of consecration attracted Kalmyks from all thirteen *stanitsa*. The clergy, under the leadership of the Lama of the Don Kalmyks himself, conducted an solemn prayer service.

The *gelungs* chanted in monotonous bass voices, the *mandzhiks* harmonized thinly and harshly, their shaven heads gleaming in the sun. Powerfully, distinctively, and to the Kalmyk ear, beautifully sang the *bürä-bishküür*, the *dung* flute poured out its sound and the *tsang* copper plates rang out.

Packed in around the clergy sat thousands of brightly dressed lay folk, filling up the temple courtyard. Hands were pressed together in prayer. Lips whispered "*Om mani badme hum.*"

The July sun scorched the bare heads of the faithful unmercifully.

But now the service was over. First the priests and then the congregation began to approach the Lama for blessings. Everyone stood up. It became crowded and stifling.

Holding his cap high in his hand and looking at the people surrounding him, Dzhisan moved toward the Lama, pressed in on all sides by hot and sweating bodies. At his age, twenty, the crush was not hard to take.

Dzhisan's gaze stopped on the tall and broad-shouldered figure of a girl in a white, silk, well-sewn *beshmet*. The unknown young woman was not far from him, also moving toward the Lama and perspiring profusely. Dzhisan studied her. Her broad nose, almost disappearing at its bridge, and her high cheekbones and meaty lips did not make her beautiful. But the fair, non-Kalmyk color of her face and the bright rosiness of her cheeks made her stand out among the dark faces surrounding her. And her big, black, attentive eyes, black eyebrows, and pleasant smile which showed large, even, and wonderfully white teeth, canceled his first impression of her looks. Studying her more attentively, he decided that she looked sweet and attractive. Suddenly her eyes met his. In a few instants she had examined his tall figure intently.

Slowly but stubbornly Dzhisan pressed to the side and soon was right next to her. A scarcely noticeable smile flitted across her lips.

After waiting a moment and wiping the sweat from his face with a handkerchief, he asked her in a whisper, directing the words right into her ear: "What *stanitsa* are you from, sister?"

"Burulskaya. You don't recognize me, but I know you from Cheprak."

"I don't remember you. I have almost never been to our girls' boarding school."

"But you would walk by the windows every day," she remarked with a smile.

"Well, that means we are acquainted. What's your name?" asked Dzhisan.

"Chovlan," she whispered softly, moving the fingers of her lowered hands.

Dzhisan understood and was able to shake the ends of her fingers.

Pushed by the crowd, they had not noticed that they had reached the Lama. Cutting off their conversation, they approached for his blessing and lost sight of each other.

At that time, off to the side of the temple, the *stanitsa ataman*, a tall, dark Kalmyk with hair wavy as a Gypsy's, was lining up the thirty horses taking part in the race for the temple prize of a

hundred rubles. At a moment when the spirited horses were more or less in line, the *ataman* loudly shouted "Go!" Whips cracked, stirrups jingled, and the horses took off in a bunch into the steppe, raising a cloud of dust and soon out of sight.

The race course was fifteen *versts* in length.

Before the racers returned, wrestlers from the various *stanitsas* were called out. The Denisovskaya *stanitsa* put forward as its wrestler Dorzha Ashlanov, young but already popular there. He was matched against the local strong man, the clumsy Burché.

The wrestlers were stripped to the waist, their nankeen underpants rolled up to the knees, black shawls over their shoulders. They were led out to the center of a large ring. After being led up to each other, the wrestlers seized one another.

Dorzha grabbed Burché by the belt over his should and bent him to the ground. They tumbled and rolled.

Suddenly an "Ah" sound came from the spectators. Burché's legs flashed high in the air and, describing a circle, hit the ground hard. In the same second Dorzha was on top of him, pinning his chest with an elbow. Burché lay motionless.

A quiet whisper sounded among spectators. The locals grumbled and their tempers flared. The Denisovskaya villagers rejoiced.

Dorzha got up, leaving Burché on the ground, still unconscious.

The winner approached the Lama and bowed to the ground three times. The Lama blessed him, presenting him with a five-ruble gold coin and a white kerchief.

Shouts from the crowd: "Here they come!" Everybody ran toward the temple gates. The horse racers were returning.

The tall chestnut beauty belonging to Ochir Sokunev of Denisovskaya had left all the others far behind and easily came in first. Of the thirty participants of the race only about ten returned. Three horses had fallen. The rest, giving it up as hopeless, had returned after going half the distance.

The Denisovskaya people were triumphant. The glory of Dorzha Ashlanov and Ochir Sokunev's horse spread throughout all thirteen *stanitsas*.

II

It was 1920.

The January days of that year had strong winds and cold rains. Along a muddy black-earth road in the Kuban went small units of

the White Army, soaked and frowning.

Along the same road, interspersed among the troops, went numerous cartloads of refugee Kalmyks of the Don, who at the approach of the Reds had abandoned the land they had inhabited for centuries and undertaken a wandering journey into the unknown, from old to young, with all their household goods and cattle. The goods and chattels were long gone, and the Kalmyks were now total paupers.

Senior Lieutenant Dzhisan Shulakov, in the ranks of the Kalmyk Dzungar Regiment, watched with heavy heart the sufferings and downfall of his people, so recently carefree and rich.

Some in wagons with canvas covers and hay carts, others in light carriages or dray carts, many on foot, a few on horseback, his fellow countrymen struggled along hungry and exhausted, sinking into the sticky mud. Their whole way was marked with signs of recent death and inhuman suffering. Day and night, without a roof over their heads, dirty and crawling with lice, they plodded on, trying to keep up with the troop units.

With inscrutably indifferent faces, without complaints to God, meekly bearing the disaster that had befallen them, they moved forward stubbornly, not knowing where.

Typhus raged among them.

The path of this much-suffering people was marked by horses, oxen, and camels fallen from exhaustion, abandoned carts with Kalmyk household goods, bodies of people abandoned without burial, and finally, here and there, people half-alive, left by the side of the road, impossible to transport further.

Here a little girl, deep in the mud, led by the reins a skeleton-like horse on which her mother, sick with typhus, could hardly hold her seat. There a little boy drove a pair of horses hitched to a light carriage.

The boy was happy that his father, who had never ceased groaning and raving in delirium, was now asleep and for a whole day now had not made a sound or a movement.

Usually noisy and merry, the men of the Dzungar Regiment were quiet and depressed, seeing the sufferings and misery of their people. Many of the Kalmyk Cossacks left the regiment to join their helpless families; others brought family members into the regiment.

Tears were visible on the faces of many battle-hardened veterans of the regiment. To get the regiment past this nightmare more quickly, the commander led the men at a trot.

The refugee column was already thinning out when Dzhisan noticed a tall girl in a black caftan and tall boots, stepping along, whip in hand, next to oxen hardly able to pull their load. He immediately knew that it was Chovlan, whom he had met four years before under different circumstances.

Dzhisan rode out from the ranks, straight to her. She recognized him, her lovely eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"Hello, Chovlan, how are you?"

"Bad. The oxen are tired; my mother is sick. I am alone.

"Listen, Chovlan, I have no time now, but we will probably halt for the night in the *stanitsa* not far ahead of us, and I'll meet you on the road. In the evening we will decide how you are going to go on. I still have a fresh stud horse left in the regiment. Well, do you agree to accept my offer?"

"All right. Meet me."

"Well, good-bye for now."

They shook hands, their eyes full of tears.

The Dzungar Regiment did not stop, riding on during the night. Chovlan and Dzhisan did not see each other.

Since that time troubled thoughts about Chovlan often weighed on Dzhisan's heart.

III

The White Army, pursued by the Reds, reached the Black Sea and began to embark on ships in various ports in a disorderly manner.

Most of the Kalmyk refugees did not get this far. The old, the sick, and those without horses lagged behind and at various times were seized by the Bolsheviks, who subjected them to new agonies of insult and rapine. But there was not much joy even for those who escaped this fate.

The White Army command was busy saving its own skin and those of its reliable units. Nobody bothered to think of refugees, particularly Kalmyks.

Having gone through this journey of suffering and reaching the desired goal only through doggedness and staying power, they

had to stay there only to fall into the hands of the bestial enemy, not being able to swim across the sea. Only a few Kalmyks managed by chance to get on the ships. Others there were who preferred to drown themselves to avoid the horror of captivity.

The Kalmyk Dzungar Regiment embarked at Novy Gorodok, near Adler. Here there were only Don Cossack units, and the embarkation was quiet and orderly. The few Kalmyk refugees who had reached this point were also taken aboard.

Dzhisan's platoon was among the first to be loaded. The boat, run by British sailors, had quickly left the shore, heading for a distant big steamship, when a woman's voice screaming "Dzhisa-a-n!" from the shore reached his ears.

Dzhisan looked back and in the crowded group of refugees on the shore his sharp eye picked out the light face of Chovlan. She was standing at the water's edge, obviously trying to shout something to him.

Dzhisan spread his arms helplessly and pointed at the ship.

Until darkness came, until the end of the embarkation, Dzhisan stood aboard the ship, hoping that Chovlan would be brought aboard. But the British had their own system of loading the ships, and Chovlan did not get on this one.

In the Crimean ports the ships disembarked people at various times and even in different ports, and Chovlan and Dzhisan did not see each other when they were put ashore. After resting a while in a Crimean village, the Dzungar Regiment went to the front.

Four months went by in frequent and bloody battles. The casualties of the Kalmyk regiment grew by another hundred of its killed and crippled sons. The Kalmyk regiment did its duty to its country until the very end.

Dzhisan received word that Chovlan had reached the Crimea and was with orphan children in Yevpatoria. Several times he attempted to get leave to visit her, but each time the regimental commander gave him promises for the future, and asked him to wait.

The Reds first chased the Whites into the Crimea, and then invaded this "White nest" too. The White Army dashed to the ports and once again began to embark in haste. More than three thousand Kalmyks went abroad with Wrangel's army on various ships. A like number stayed in the Crimea, unable to reach the ships in time.

The Kalmyk regiment spent the winter of 1920-1921 in Camp

Kabadzha, in Turkey. In holes dug in the damp ground and covered with earth as well, the Kalmyks wintered there, putting up with cold and hunger.

Dzhisan had no news of Chovlan. Finally, toward spring, he got a message that she was in Bulgaria and was already married. Dzhisan's vague hopes were extinguished. He immediately left the regiment, and, with a group of other Dzungar veterans, joined the supply trains of the British Army in Turkey.

IV

Two years later Dzhisan went to Bulgaria.

In the first large town, seeing people from his *stanitsa* at the railroad station, Dzhisan got off the train and stayed there. The delighted fellow-villagers brought him to their quarters.

Dzhisan was washing the soot of the journey from his face at the pump, when a tall woman in a knitted woolen sweater passed him. Their eyes met.

Chovlan blushed and, barely answering his greeting, quickened her pace.

Going into the hut, Dzhisan learned from his host's wife that Chovlan had a two-year-old child and was expecting another.

"Nothing can be said. She is right. There was never a definite talk between us. May God grant her happiness. I am going on," Dzhisan thought as he wiped his wet face.

Three or four days went by. After roaming around the town, Dzhisan was returning to the hut where he was staying. It was a long walk. In the town park he sat down on a bench in the shade of a tree, to rest. It was a hot day in early autumn, but still pleasant to sit in the shade.

Footsteps sounded and a soft feminine voice spoke: "Why are you lost in gloomy thoughts? Don't you like Bulgaria?" Chovlan had approached, with some sort of parcel in her hand.

"Oh, it's you! Well, you see, I just sat down to rest and began to think," Dzhisan replied, moving over on the bench.

"No, get up and let's walk slowly. It's easier for me to talk while walking."

"Do you have a lot to say?" remarked Dzhisan jokingly, standing up.

"You think we have nothing to talk about? No, why not talk? We

have been acquainted for a long time. Tell me how you went abroad, how you have been living and are living now. Actually the last is clear: you are happy."

"I left under nightmarish circumstances. It was a terrible life. I starved, I was sick, I was alone. And you are wrong that I am happy now," she said and became silent. Dzhisan said nothing.

"You assumed that I was happy," she began after a lengthy stillness, "having seen that I have a husband, a child, that I am clothed and shod, isn't that true?"

"Yes," Dzhisan answered.

"No, I am unhappy. I not only don't love my husband, I can't even respect him. He married me thanks to my absolutely desperate situation. Judge me as you like, but I did not want to die at the age of 23. Do you really think that a piece of bread, a new dress, and some sort of husband and child are enough for the happiness of a young, intelligent woman?" Chovlan asked him.

"I don't think anything, and I don't know what makes women happy. You know more about that. I can say one thing: your unhappiness makes me sad. I would be glad if you were happy. It's a pity. I guess such was your fate. You'll get used to it."

"So that's what you say," she drawled out, switching to the familiar form. "And I thought something else. I thought you came for me."

"Hmm. Why?" Dzhisan muttered.

"I don't know. Maybe I'm mistaken, but it always seemed to me that we . . . I often thought of you since we first met."

Her eyes became moist and she stopped talking.

"Chovlan," Dzhisan began in a quavering voice, "you are not mistaken. I have never had anybody but you in my thoughts, but now it's too late to talk about that. You are already taken. I have decided to drag out my life alone."

"I knew that you would not start to talk to me, a married woman, and that you would leave silently, and therefore, shameful as it is, I decided to begin it myself. I will leave my husband. My child is not long for this world. He has rickets. And I don't have long to live myself. That refugee trek cost me a lot. I have tuberculosis, and I think it's fast-acting. I know that I won't live long. And that's why I want to live with a beloved husband—you—even if just for a year, a half year, a month."

Not expecting such a conversation, Dzhisan was embarrassed and perplexed.

They walked for a long time in silence. Finally, Dzhisan began bluntly:

“I am happy if you as a woman are ready for such a sacrifice. I have no fears for my happiness. I am ready. But it has to be arranged with as little noise as possible.”

“Don’t be afraid. I will go to a relative of mine who has wanted me to leave my husband for some time. In a month I will give birth to the other child, give it to them, and I am free. In order not to raise suspicions, you go to Sofia tomorrow. Well, enough now, here we are at home, and so our fourth meeting will be the last.”

“Why?” asked Dzhisan.

“Because we will never part now,” she said, turning off toward her apartment. Dzhisan took the first train to Sofia the next morning.

In less than a week the rumor had spread that Chovlan was leaving her husband. The cat was out of the bag. Soon it was being whispered about by many that the reason for this sudden divorce was Dzhisan, and they were not mistaken.

In spite of the tears and pleading of her husband, in spite of his threats, Chovlan left him. In three or four weeks she gave birth to a sick child, and after this went straight to the hospital.

“I am in the hospital. I don’t know if I will get well. If I get out of here by spring, you and I will live together, but I feel that the disease is consuming me. My children have died, but I think of them less than I think of you, my beloved, although I know that they are part of my body and soul. Don’t be sad. Maybe God will bless our love. Because everything comes from God. If it were not for His will, we would not have fallen in love with each other when we first met, and so deeply.

“Don’t send any more money. What you have sent is enough for now. Take care of yourself at work, for me. I have become so thin that the ring you put on my finger does not even stay on my thumb.

“Whatever happens, know that I sincerely loved you and will die with your name on my lips, and will thank you for your love until the end. Chovlan.”

Dzhisan read this letter walking down a street in Sofia, the tears rolling down his cheeks.

Two months later Dzhisan went to the hospital where Chovlan had been. A quiet day in May was coming to an end. Dzhisan sat by Chovlan's grave and stuck camomile flowers into the still fresh earth and scattered mint over it. Dusk fell. It was already almost dark when Dzhisan left that Bulgarian cemetery.

AT THE INVISIBLE WALL

This short story was written as far back as February 1920 (The only other story bearing a date is *Love in Bonds*. It was written in 1936).

The Buzava (Don) Kalmyks have an elaborate *yasun* structure comprising at least 60 different *yasun* (lit. 'bone'). See A. Bormanshinov, "Who Were the Buzava?" *Mongolian Studies* 10 (1986-1987), 73.

It is known that an entire pile of Balykov's unpublished manuscripts perished during the evacuation to Turkey at the end of 1920.

Those chaotic days were wrecking the whole old world. People on their way to extinction could be glimpsed like grains of wheat in a steaming pot. But people could take only so much woe and pain in their hearts. Life grew much simpler. What had been unthinkable before became ordinary now. Man is the most tenacious of creatures. No matter what is done to him, he manages to find a little joy, a little life.

Death danced on all sides. Hunger reigned. It was cold. But when Ayush and Ovadzha bumped into each other, they looked at each other attentively and bowed politely, even though they were not acquainted. And when the Kalmyk carts, fleeing from the Reds, were held up for several hours by a bottleneck on a bridge, Ayush brought his wagon over to Ovadzha's cart, put them side by side as if they were old friends, and went over to her.

Ovadzha had not washed for three days. From morning till night she had moved with the file of vehicles, spending the nights in the booth on her cart with her little sister and brother, to whom she had recently become a parent. But under her father's white fur coat a shapely feminine form could be sensed. Lively, attentive black eyes looked out from beneath her black, lambskin *dzhatak* and shined like coals in her energetic broad, dark face. Ayush liked Ovadzha the moment he saw her.

They were of the same age. Death's scythe had left him the head of his family at eighteen, leaving him with two little sisters. Even though Kalmyk girls are shy and timorous, Ovadzha willingly

conversed with Ayush. During those few hours that the caravan was stuck at the bridge they became friends.

*

The road through the valley was soaked through. Huge clumps of clay stuck to the cartwheels. The oxen and horses, panting with outstretched tongues, were barely able to move.

“This isn’t mud, it’s glue that melts and hardens. The road is going to suck a lot of people into the underworld! You know what, Ovadzha? One of my oxen is also on its last legs. Let’s pair up our two best ones and lead the weak ones behind the cart, let them have a rest, and then drive all four of them. We can leave one wagon behind and combine our loads. You have two little ones and so do I. The five of you can spend the night under your cover and I’ll find a place for the night with somebody else. All right? ... Then it’s a deal! We combine forces! ... Sorry, I won’t do it again, but I couldn’t help joking a bit at a time like this!”

*

Two days of sun and the road improved. The oxen perked up pulling their uphill load. The children, already used to each other, sang off-key inside. Ahead there was a *stanitsa* already in sight where bread and milk could be bought. Ayush and Ovadzha walked beside the wagon.

“Why even ask? It’s obvious. I like you. I have no parents, I am the head of the house. I can marry anyone I want. Well, of course, in these times it’s impossible to do everything legally. But we can do it simply. Just tell me what “bone”* you are from. Oh yes? Well that means we are from the same “bone” — like brother and sister. What an unfortunate fate! Well, who knows, maybe it is better that we turned out to be related. Now we can ride inside the wagon together. A brother and sister may do this. How old are you? Aha! I am a year older, which means I am your elder sister and I can talk to

* The Kalmyks have a word *yasn* (bone) which established a person’s distant descent. In the distant past the Kalmyks were divided into many tribes and clans. Each had its own name. In time the tribes and clans combined into one people, but the names remained as an indicator of which tribe the ancestors of a given Kalmyk had belonged to. In meeting someone a Kalmyk’s first words are “Which ‘bone’ do you belong to?” All people from the same “bone” are considered blood relatives, and marriage between people of the same “bone” is strictly forbidden to avoid consanguinity.

you in the familiar. Now you can spend the night under the same cover. But forget about anything else. You know yourself what it means to be of the same "bone." I'm happy to have found a brother. What? You're a fool, Ayush. Get it firmly in your head: between us there is an unbreakable, invisible wall, and no feelings of the heart can hop over it. I am your sister and you are my brother. It's not for nothing that God joined us on this journey, in the middle of all this mud and countless troubles. I am an orphan with children on my hands. So are you. God brought us together to give each other support, because we are brother and sister. As for those words, I forgive you. You didn't know we were from the same "bone." But don't open your mouth to say anything like that. Well, all right. That was a while back. And now you, Ayush, when we reach that village run and buy some hay for the oxen, and a little barley. And I'll buy something for us to eat and try to wash up, and change the kids' diapers. . . ."

Tsob-tsobe!

THE TRAMPLED TULIP

This is another first-person narrative story. It revolves around centuries-old notions, viz.: the institution of prearranged marriage whereby, if a son and a daughter were born to two couples — friends or neighbors — the children would become fiancé and fiancée, and the imposing of a ban on marriage between two partners of opposite sex who belong to the same *yasun*. This taboo was strictly enforced. This restriction severely limited marital opportunities on the local (*khoton*, *aimak*) and district (Sal'sk) levels.

The Creator arranged for me to be born on the day of the Lion, the month of the Dragon, in the year of the Horse. And that's the way it was. In the Book of Fates it was written: "This person of the male sex, born on the day of the Lion, the month of the Dragon, and the year of the Horse will be happy. His wishes will slowly but surely come true; he won't be rich, but if he is not lazy he will be lucky. Call him Arslan."

In the year of the Monkey, on the day of the Cow, in the month of the Mouse, the Creator sent Zandana to the world, through the married couple who were our neighbors. Everything comes from above and ends up down below.

As soon as Zandana and I met, crawling around our hearth, our Creators in heaven smiled and blessed us for mutual love.

The years went by. Zandana and I were friends. When I was four, and Zandana three, Grandmother Nogalya, a real joker, asked me: "Arslan, whom do you want to take as wife?" "Zandana," I replied. "What a good boy you are! And you, Zandana, will you go to Arslan?" "I will," said Zandana, and came to sit next to me.

We could not understand the laughter of our mothers and Grandmother Nogalya. From this time they called us bride and groom. We spent our whole childhood together in unbroken friendship. It seemed that we really understood the words "bride and groom."

*

Nine years later, when Zandana was twelve and I thirteen, we learned later the groom really takes his bride to himself, and after

that they live in a nice white tent with a new bed under a red cotton canopy. And we also saw that when the groom took his bride the whole village celebrated, the grown-ups drank *raka*, and the children got their fill of spice cake and fruit drops.

"Listen, Arslan, when you marry me, bring me fruit drops in a pretty package with fringes," Zandana said to me the day after a wedding in our village.

That autumn a great misfortune dropped on my head. My older brother, who knew how and liked to stare at a piece of paper with a lot of marks on it and mumble incomprehensible words, got it into his head to take me to a school in our distant *stanitsa*, which was a whole day's ride from us on a good horse. My brother was not joking. Whatever he got into his head he carried out.

It was a bright, quiet fall day when my brother sat me behind him on the saddle and took me away from our village. The thick lump which had been in my throat since morning did not permit me to speak, and my eyes kept getting wet, but I tried to be strong.

When we crossed the middle path of our village, we passed by my friends, who were playing the game of *chush* in a noisy gang, and there I saw Zandana, who looked at me with sad eyes.

"Hey, you little animals, you can play games here, but Arslan is going off to study, and later he will be a teacher!" my brother told them, pointing at me.

"Stay well, Arslan! But where did you put your white stick — I want to take it," Zandana exclaimed.

I could not answer. Burying my face in my brother's back, I dissolved into sobs, and he spurred the horse into a gallop so that my crying would not be heard.

That is how I first left my dear native village on the shores of the little river Ayula, which flows into the Manych and which like a silver snake quietly passes through the grassy growths of the endless Kalmyk steppe.

*

Days and nights go by. Time passes quickly. A month hardly starts before it ends. A baby is hardly born before he is grown. My nineteenth spring was coming to me, and Zandana's eighteenth; when meeting her on the bank of the Ayula, I presented Zandana with a thick bouquet of early tulips.

That was a wonderful day! The larks sang in the blue sky. The sun warmed us generously. A green carpet like an ocean surrounded us. With her big black eyes, her short little upturned nose between dark, rosy cheeks, a matchless beauty was Zandana then to me, and her luxurious black hair smelled so pleasantly, warmed by the spring sun.

“Sing something, Zandana! I love to hear you singing when you milk the cows in the morning.”

“If it is our fate, willed by the Creator, we can become sweethearts,” her voice poured out in unison with her soul, as she hoisted a yoke with two pails of water onto her shoulders. This was the first day in our lives that we pronounced the words “I love you.”

“When are you going to finish school? You have been at it for seven years now,” she inquired curiously.

“I’ll be through in three months.”

“All my contemporaries are soldiers,

“All my friends are already married,”

she sang in a low voice, keeping time by shaking her two buckets of water, and as if she had not heard my answer, half-accusingly “They say that all educated people are not good people. They don’t know their national customs. They like the Russians and their laws. You’re probably like that too. Don’t you know that it is indecent for a boy to hang around a girl where everybody can see? Here we are going up the hill already, and you are still with me,” she said strictly.

I sat down in the grass and followed her with my eyes. But how I wanted to go on and on with her!

*

The Easter vacation was over. The village youth threw a farewell party in my honor. It is good on a moonlit night to play “throwing ankle bones,” in a noisy crowd, divided into two teams. You take this play “bone” in your hand and hurl it with all your strength into the silvery darkness, while the whole team freezes in expectation of the command “Go!” in order to throw themselves forward like a herd of young animals. Each one searches feverishly for the “bone” to find it and yell “Here, catch me!” dashing off to his base at full speed.

If the same team finds the “bone” three times in a row and brings

it to its base without getting caught, it wins one person from the opposing side.

Shoulder to shoulder Zandana and I searched for the "bone" but never found it once. Sharpness of vision, speed, and agility are necessary for this game, but we only had eyes for each other.

"Why are you always together like a couple of orphan lambs, never finding anything? Our side is losing," the team captain grumbled.

The first lark had flown up and begun his song before we had had enough of playing every game there was, dancing, and singing around the wagon. We went off to our tents to get some sleep before dawn. I took Zandana home. Our tents stood next to each other.

"And so I am leaving in three days; I'll be finished in three months and then I'll never go away anywhere," I said.

"Come and visit us every day. Mama and Papa love you like a son."

"Yesterday I asked my brother's wife to get the family to go to the temple so that the *zurkhāchi* can look in the Book of Fates and say if you and I can officially become engaged," I told her, not having been able to say it all evening.

"Be quiet, shameless one! You're like a Russian, without shame or conscience! Since when are we allowed to talk about such things?" she interrupted me in mock anger, and we parted.

My father returned from the temple in deep gloom, and the whole family guessed at once that it was not fated for us to bring our bright Zandana into our house. The *zurkhāchi* had said: "In the Book of Fates it is written that a boy born in the year of the Horse may not become the husband of a girl born in the year of the Monkey. Misfortune will come to both houses if they become engaged."

A storm arose within me against this writ, but everyone around me accepted it as unbreakable law, as a command from above, as the fate willed by God.

"But no! I won't live without Zandana," I decided inwardly as I entered their tent the next day.

The news that according to the holy writ Zandana's years were not suitable to Arslan quickly spread through the village and everyone expressed his condolences, because everybody knew of our pure love and had delighted in us as a future happy couple.

Zandana was alone in her tent. Her eyes were red and her eyelids

swollen from a great many tears. She was sewing something and did not lift her head. A sigh escaped me involuntarily.

"Zandana, what are we going to do?" was all I could say.

"Nothing. It is the fate willed to us from above," she whispered softly, bowing her head still lower, waves of her pitch-black hair covering her shoulders.

"There is no such fate from above, it's all nonsense! I will take you away. There will be no life for me if I let you marry another. At the age of three our parents began to call us bride and groom!" I was furious.

"Don't babble a lot of foolishness, I don't want to hear it! That I, running away with you, should shame my father and mother and break the law decreed by the gods! Whom do you take me for? I am no Russian. We may not combine our fate and that's all! What to do? You can't go against the command of God." That was her answer to me.

There was such firm assurance in her voice that my heart sank.

*

The atmosphere changed immediately. Zandana's mother no longer treated me so affectionately and cheerfully. Zandana herself began to avoid meeting me, and I left for school in a terrible state. A week later I heard that Ochir, who had had the luck to be born in the year of the Dog, and for whom there turned out to be a favorable prophecy in the Book of Fates, had become engaged to my Zandana.

When I returned to the village having finished school, Zandana was distant and estranged when she met me. However, I continued to drop in on them every day. Zandana did not converse with me, but every time, without her mother's permission, she got up and prepared something for me from our modest steppe food, and she never forgot to pour tea into my favorite cup and give me my spoon. But she was Ochir's bride. The wedding was to take place in a year's time.

Such a word as "to marry a son off" does not exist in the Kalmyk language. They say "to make a son into a man," and this means to get him married, because he is not a man until he is married.

My parents also wanted to "make a man out of me" as soon as I had finished school and received a teacher's certificate. But here I was adamant. I categorically refused to marry. Thank God there was

nothing in the Book of Fates that said a man had to get married.

By having opposed my parents' wishes and talked to them openly about marriage, I had broken the ancient law, committed an indecency, and my mother made a pronouncement:

"They educated my son in the accursed Russian sciences. The boy is lost. He will remain a solitary bachelor or will convert to an alien religion. I always said that he should not be educated for such a long time!"

My father remained gloomily silent. My brother also pouted at me. Burdensome days came to our family.

"He will get a teacher's job in his *stanitsa*, and he will find a bride there himself," said my brother to his wife and advised that I be left alone. "He'll see many other girls there and he will forget Zandana." That's what they thought. But this did not happen. I came home at vacation time without a word about marriage.

*

The wedding of Ochir and Zandana was a month away. Not only the two families, but our entire small village was preparing for this event. Three times I caught Zandana and begged her to go away with me and get married against the law. But her answer was the same as always, her words meeting me like a wall of granite and throwing me back: "The fate willed from above, the ancient laws, the will and honor of the parents."

Half-dead with grief, helpless to scale the cliff of the traditions of the society surrounding me, and forced to give up my beloved girl whom I had always considered my life's partner, I lay in the shade of a blackthorn at Chebanov gully, thinking grim thoughts. The big, ripe berries did not attract me. They reminded me how much Zandana and I had loved to pick them, and how we used to bring entire cap-loads of them home and eat them with sour cream.

Suddenly a clear childish voice rang out, and, turning around, I saw Zandana leading her little sister by the hand and going down into the gully holding a cup.

I kept lying there, invisible under the thick berry bush and in the tall wild flowers around me. The little sister immediately began to pick blackberries, occasionally calling out to Zandana to come and see the large berries. Zandana sat down without going into the thicket, and, taking off her *dzhatak*, she loosened her tightly belted

sash and turned her face into the gentle west wind.

Her face was thoughtful. Lowering her head in her hands, she sat that way for a long time without movement, only occasionally answering her sister's calls. Suddenly I heard the soft melody of a song. At first it was impossible to make out the words. Only the gentle tune came to me. But then she strengthened her voice and sang a song that I knew, now clearly enunciating the words. "What is too white is easily soiled. What is too tender is fragile. What can you do with decreed fate? What can you do in parting with your beloved?"

The song was so apt and cut my wounded heart so sharply, that it was all I could do to prevent myself from crying and falling on my knees before her.

Suddenly she stopped and, covering her face with the palms of her hands, broke into bitter and helpless sobs. I wanted to jump up and run up to her, but the tears that had started flowing from my own eyes forced me to remain in my place of refuge.

Her startled little sister ran up to Zandana, threw her small arms around her neck, and also began to cry. Zandana caressed her and calmed down a bit herself. Then she got up, arranged her clothes, and went home, leading her sister by the hand.

That evening I caught her again by the well and asked for her last word on my proposal to run off together.

"Don't even open your mouth about that. I gave you my last word long ago. The paths of our lives have separated. You forget about me and look for the one fated for you from on high."

It seemed that her secret suffering and tears had strengthened her even more in her decision to bow to fate.

*

A wedding in a Kalmyk village is an occasion of great festivity. From dozens of miles around come relatives, friends, or just people who want to drink, eat, have a party, ride horses and compete in whip fights, all of them wanted guests of the families of the two young people getting married.

But I, two days before Zandana's wedding, left for a whole week so as not to see Ochir, so lucky as to be born in the year of the Dog, take my Zandana away. The whole village understood and did not reproach me.

Ochir came from the same village, and so when I returned a week later I saw Zandana as a young lady in her role as a wife. Her first request, when we were alone for a minute, was not to visit them. I did not promise, and I did go to see them.

Her husband and I were friends and he, having no basis to doubt Zandana's faithfulness, was not jealous. And Zandana gave him no cause for jealousy. She avoided me and tried not to be left alone with me. But I kept going, sighing, suffering, swearing whenever I had the chance that I could not live without her. I knew that Zandana did not love her husband.

Three years passed. Zandana's husband was away in the regiment. I was not engaged to anybody. My family had long ago given up on me, having decided that I would remain an eternal bachelor.

By rights as a close neighbor, who, in addition could read the parents' letters from their son and write the answers for them, I visited Zandana's home every day and courted her deliberately and stubbornly. But there were no signs of success. Zandana was frank and friendly with me, nothing more. We often reminisced about our childhood and adolescence, full of pleasant memories in common, but every time that I brought our love into the conversation she would cut me off, saying: "What is there to do? It was not our fate!"

When Zandana's husband was expected home in a year, and his parents were counting the days impatiently, the Great War broke out. Ochir went to the front.

That year our *Tsagan* holiday coincided with good weather. It was dry and not frosty. Having started the holiday at dawn in my family circle, I dressed in festive clothes and went out to visit my uncle and then other relatives and neighbors. But then I thought, "Let the relatives wait. I will go first to Zandana, so she will know that nobody in the world is dearer to me than she is." And I stepped off decisively to their home.

"May the *Tsagan* holiday bring happiness to this house! Did you spend the winter in health?" I spoke the traditional greeting as I went in.

"Ah! Our dear neighbor! I thought in the back of my mind that you would come here first. Thank you, and let the holiday bring you happiness too!" Thus, joyfully, the old man who was Zandana's father-in-law greeted me and embraced me.

The holiday tradition obliges all Kalmyks to embrace on this day.

Today I had the right to hug Zandana on a legal basis.

When I entered, for some reason Zandana blushed and turned away when she saw me, busying herself with something or other. In her black silk robe with a green velvet front embroidered with gold, wearing a black velvet round hat and tightly belted with a golden sash, she was shapely, fresh, and captivating. Her big, quiet, black eyes with their thick lashes, her round little cheeks with their dark rosininess, her slightly prominent lips set together in a strict line—everything about her was enchanting.

Obviously, our traditional holiday embrace turned out to be a little bit tighter and longer than customary. In addition, I skillfully managed to lick the back of her ear with the end of my tongue. Zandana's strict and reproachful glance and slight blush told that she was angry and pained by my boldness.

"You, Zandana, present a drink to Arslan with a song. He may have studied with the Russians, but he loves our Kalmyk songs," ordered the old man, so that he could have an extra drink with the song.

Filling the large glasses with vodka and standing in front of me, Zandana began to sing the traditional song for this holiday: "A white-hoofed bay prances in the white snow. We greet the first day of White Month in health and gaiety." The old man's poor dugout filled with warmth, coziness, and light from the song of this magnificent woman.

When I was leaving them to start my visits to relatives, Zandana met me in the store-room and asked, feigning indifference, "Are you going to ride to the neighboring villages today?"

"Yes, I'll go with the boys. Why?"

"Well, nothing really, but all the boys will ride out, and our girls will be bored without them at the party."

"If you want, I'll come to the party, but not for the girls, for you."

"I don't need you for anything. Please go, and stay there a month if you like. They say that there is a pretty girl in the Korolkov village." With these words, she went back into the dugout.

Prepared to be used by the regiment, my horse turned out to be a very good one. He easily won the races from village to village, taking the ditches and barriers with grace and ease all day. My heart was gay, because a dashing horse always means happiness and pride for a young man.

It was late in the evening. Our company had already visited its fourth village, some 25 *versts* from ours, and I took part in a very merry party with lots of people present, competing with the other fellows in dances and songs.

Suddenly, when a couple got up to dance, I noticed that in the turns the young woman bent her elbow at a right angle exactly the way Zandana always did it. And it was only then that I remembered our morning talk and my promise to come back for the party in our village.

Not saying a word to anyone, I went out, mounted my horse, and started back alone. The Kalmyks call such a stretch a "three-pipe distance." But to a young man on a spirited horse, riding toward the woman he loves, it was shorter than that. Besides, I had no need to smoke those three pipes. I don't smoke.

It was till two hours before midnight. I figured I would suddenly appear at the party at midnight, when it would be at full swing. Our steppe is even like a table top. The darkness of the night does not prevent galloping over it at full speed. Ony three times did I slow my horse to a walk to let him catch his breath. Three times I trotted, to rest myself, and after the third trot I let him run, heading for the end of the "Seven Gods," the Big Dipper, and I heard the barking of our village dogs.

After unsaddling the horse, I went to look for the party, without stopping at home. Everybody was sound asleep, a heavy, drunken slumber. Only at the edge of the village, in the adobe hut of the old Gashunovs, I noticed a weak light flickering through the edges of the windows. The party had to be there. Coming closer, I caught the twang of balalaikas and an explosion of gay laughter.

My arrival was unexpected, and I was met by a hum of happy exclamations. Zandana was there. I sat down next to her.

"Where are the other fellows? Did they all come back?" she asked me.

"No, I am all by myself."

"Which village did you come from?"

"From Andronnikov."

"My God! Such a distance on such a dark night!" she added in a displeased tone of voice, but, giving me a tender look, she sighed quietly.

When the cocks began to crow the party started to break up. The

young people, thoroughly partied out, went off in groups. I escorted Zandana by my rights as her nearest neighbor. I stopped her at the gate to their courtyard and made my proposition for at least the tenth time.

“Zandana, you must see that I can never marry anyone but you. You don’t love your husband. You haven’t seen him for four years. You have no children. Throw him over and let’s get married. Do you remember how happy and joyful you were when I gave you that bouquet of tulips on the banks of the river? Your Ochir, when you leave him, will remarry, but without you I’ll be a bachelor forever. Don’t destroy me, Zandana!”

“What is it with you, anyway? What kind of a person are you?” she began in a sorrowful voice. “I have never loved and will never love anybody in the world but you, but I am already married! This was our fate, don’t you understand? My husband is away at war. I should pray for him and conduct myself faultlessly, so that the gods will keep him alive, and you want to push me into such a great transgression! If I do something bad and my sin brings misfortune to my husband at war, I will consider myself a murderer. And I will hate myself and you too, if you lead me into this sin. Oh my God, my God! I’m tired of fighting with myself, and you have no pity on me, pursuing me for years, not understanding my soul or my heart.”

Here her voice began to tremble, and she broke out crying, her head on my shoulder.

It was only then that some sort of illumination struck me. And it was actually only at that moment that I began to pity her and feel shame for my long and stubborn courtship. I understood how differently she and I perceived the world. And right then I gave her my word that I would leave her in peace forever and try to suppress my love for her.

“I believe you, Arslan. Since you gave your word you will keep it. Let our love, which the gods did not bless, dry up in our hearts. And now, let me kiss you hard,” she said, and, taking my cheek between her hands, she kissed me for a long time tenderly, wetting my face with warm drops. Our tears mingled.

When I, feeling as if I were drunk, left her and started home, she suddenly called out my name, came closer, and said, “Give me the right to find a bride for you and give me your word that you will do as I say.”

“Now it makes no difference to me,” was my reply.

Thus we parted, breaking the thread of deep love that had stretched between us for so many years.

I ran into Zandana two months later. It was already spring. As always the steppe was in bloom with a thick covering of colorful blossoms. Zandana was driving some cows into her yard as I passed by on horseback.

“Ride over here, Arslan, I want to tell you something!”

“Well?”

“I have decided to marry you to Zelmya. Allow me to talk to your people about it.”

“To Zelmya? To that poor little orphan? Has she even reached sixteen yet?”

“Yes, sixteen is coming up. She is an intelligent girl, and a strict one. I love her like a sister. If you don’t marry her, my soul will ache. I am giving you to her.”

“Well, I don’t care. I gave you my word. Do as you like, tell my family, let them make the arrangements,” I replied indifferently.

“Once more, I thank you.”

“You know, Zanda, when the warm spring rains come down and the land is soft, and a cow steps on a young tulip which has come out to enjoy the warmth and light of the sun, its stem bends and it grows crooked and deformed.”

“Why are you saying that?” she asked, not understanding my allegory.

“Well, because that’s what happened to you and me. The cows walked all over our tulip.”

THE BENDS OF LIFE

It was the *khutor* Bogla where the author, Sandji Balykov, lived before the outbreak of the Civil War. Bogla was the largest *khutor* in the Bokshurgan *aimak* (Denisovskaya *stanitsa*).

The main character of this story, Zamba Dzhalganov, graduated from a non-classical secondary school in Rostov-on-Don before 1914. Thus, he was one of the pioneers of emerging European-educated Don Kalmyks.

Twice in the course of the Civil War in Russia, in 1918 and 1919, virtually the entire Buzava population escaped from the Bolsheviks, abandoning moveable and real property, livestock, etc. The ensuing retreat in 1919-1920 toward the Black Sea ports was fraught with tragic consequences in terms of human, property and cattle losses, to say nothing of the unprecedented suffering the Kalmyks had to endure.

Zamba Dzhalganov's squadron belonged to the 80th, Dzungar Regiment. It was commanded by Colonel Gavril E. Tepkin (1891-1920), a native of the Bokshurgan *aimak*. He was the first Buzava regular army officer, having graduated from the Novocherkassk *real'noye uchilishche* (non-classical secondary school) in 1911 and the Novocherkassk Military Academy in 1914.

Our village covered the banks of the swampy and meandering little river called the Bogla thickly and broadly, for a distance of about five *versts*. It bore the river's name. The village began at the place where the river, having escaped from a steep-banked ravine, flowed through flat land and ended where the Bogla was again impeded by steep banks and crossed by a deep ravine.

At the sides of broad and straight streets, the yards were spread out along the southern, low bank of the river, ending at the water's edge. On the other side, at the foot of a hill on which stood a huge dark burial mound, there was a thin and disconnected single row of homesteads. In the winter that whole side was covered with dunelike accumulations of snow, and the yards disappeared under huge drifts. For this reason the people of Bogla avoided settling on

the northern bank.

Snaking through the uninhabited ravines and steep banks for a verst, the little river again flowed through lowland and, making a horseshoe-like turn, had created a large, even peninsula with a narrow exit to the steppe. It was this peninsula which was occupied by the household of the prosperous proprietor Bembe Dzhalganov.

His Cossack-type wooden house with a green tin roof, a long adobe kitchen, a barn and stable under red plank roofs, the boarded *baz* and prone pyramid of the sheep barn, all these formed a tight row, cutting off access to the peninsula. The huge circle of land surrounding the buildings, around which the river flowed and which was protected by the height of the opposite bank, was used for an orchard, a vegetable garden, and a place for haystacks, straw, and chaff.

Bembe Dzhalganov's property occupied the best site, but nobody envied him. There was also a great inconvenience. Life there was secluded, apart from the village, without neighbors. Only a good and diligent proprietor like Bembe could have decided to settle a *verst* from the village. He could not pass up such a convenient place.

Although it was dull there, the Dzhalganov couple had grown used to it over the years and had the reputation in the village of being unsociable. It was rare that someone from the village would visit them on business and even rarer when members of the Dzhalganov family came. Five huge and furious wolf-hounds instilled panicky fear in the village children, and they gave this lone household in the river bend a wide berth.

Dzhalganov's family was not large — husband and wife, daughter and son. Also two workers lived in the adobe part. Bembe's property was large and well-run: fifty select cattle with a dozen teams of good oxen, six fine horses, good for both saddle and harness, three hundred white sheep, hundreds of acres harvested every year, plus various household appendages and details, such as pigs, fowl, orchard, and garden. All this was not bad even in the area of our rich Bokshurgan *stanitsa*, which could count no more than half a hundred such households.

*

"In his last life he was a sinless creature, and that is why he was born so lucky in this one," is what the villagers said about Zamba,

Bembe Dzhalganov's son. Quiet and good looking, from childhood Zamba had been liked by everyone who saw him. When he began to attend the village school, diligent, neat, capable, and well-behaved, he soon acquired the love of the teachers. He went through all his classes with first prizes.

Only Zermyash, the daughter of Saladzha from the upper part of the village, could compete with his successes. But Zermyash was a cut-up and mischief-maker of the first order, and thus always received the second award after Zamba. All three years Zamba and Zermyash sat on the same bench, always rivals, and Zamba had to put up with many of the mischief-maker's vexing tricks. He was ashamed to complain about a girl, and he didn't like to fight. Only once, when Zermyash had slipped a mass of chewed brown paper under him and, holding her nose, asked him to get up, and then made the whole class roar with laughter by pointing to the seat under him, did he give her a ringing slap in the face. Zermyash attacked him like a cat, trying to claw his eyes out, but a teacher who came in at that moment dragged her off him and put her in the corner.

Quiet by nature, and in addition brought up far from the village and its gangs of small boys, Zamba held himself aloof in school, rarely taking part in the games and mischievous tricks of his comrades. Not only that, but almost every day he was brought to school on the pommel of a horse ridden by one of Dzhalganov's workers. The other children had to come to school or go home on foot, through impassable mud, through rain, snow, or blizzards. This also singled Zamba out and added to his seclusion. Already in the first year, everybody in school knew that Zamba, after leaving the village school, would go to study in a large Russian town, which was a whole day's ride away by wagon and another by train, and that he would learn all the sciences there and become a "big *noyon*." So Zamba's village contemporaries had from childhood been used to regarding him as a separate entity.

Zamba himself had also grown accustomed to this. He was passionately attached to his household, loved to roam around alone in his little island, finding ever more mysterious nooks, made friends with the huge dogs, got on well with his sister, who was four years older than he was, but most of all he loved to follow his father around the property, where he had his favorite colt and his favorite

orphan lambs.

At thirteen, as soon as he had completed the village school, his father took Zamba to Rostov and turned him over to a teacher to prepare for secondary school. The large and noisy city at first overwhelmed the boy from the village of Bogla. Many nights Zamba spent hours in tears, missing his parents, his home, and all his friends there. In the daytime he felt crushed by the huge stone buildings which narrowed the sky. The stone bridges hurt his feet. His ears rang from the city's din. But he did well at his studies there too. Getting used to the city and the large school full of people, he developed a passion for reading, starting with "*Robinson Crusoe*," and he began to develop.

The first bend had taken place in the life of the boy from Bogla.

*

Much in Zamba's view changed during the next few years. The village of Bogla spread out in all directions, so that its edge was only a half *verst* away from the Dzhalganov property. The many-colored roofs of wooden houses and barns could be seen more often in the village. Plantations sprang up at all the bends in the river. The gardens had grown more thickly green. With each passing year the village of Bogla grew richer. Dzhalganov's property had become sounder and more solid. A second barn had appeared. Mountains of golden grain and barley began to pile up in the granaries for years. Bembe Dzhalganov gave his first-born, his beloved daughter, in marriage with suitable pomp — a *troika* of gray horses and a wagon.

But the most important and unexpected thing happened to Zamba the winter before he was to graduate from school and in the fall start attending the University of St. Petersburg. Falling from his horse at full gallop onto the frozen ground, his father died quickly. Suddenly the whole weight of an elderly mother and large property fell on Zamba's shoulders. The mother did not want her son to return to Rostov after his Christmas vacation, but to give up school, and spend his whole time managing the estate. With difficulty Zamba was able to persuade his mother to bear up a few more months and let him graduate.

On the eve of his departure, his mother and his sister, who had come to visit from another village, laid down the law:

“Your father, may he be in the kingdom of the best, died an unhappy man, not having seen you married and having caressed a grandchild. Don’t bring such misfortune on your mother as well. It’s time for you to get married. Go ahead and finish school, and we will match-make here. If you have anybody in mind, tell us. And you are a catch! You are educated, handsome, and an independent, rich proprietor.”

Zamba found himself in a big quandary. It really was time to get married. All the villagers his age had already married some time ago. And then, with his father’s death, a young mistress for the house was necessary, as a support for his mother. But Zamba had nobody in mind. He did not socialize with the village youth. In Rostov he was the only Kalmyk student. In Cheprak, where there were Kalmyk girl students, he had only stopped in passing.

Life on the estate, his love of seclusion, his lack of friends among the young people revealed their inconvenient aspect. A twenty-year-old young man, and he didn’t even have a girl in mind! But to tell his mother and sister what was customary in such cases, “You know best; I’ll agree to anything,” was not something he wanted to do.

And at this point the mischievous Zermyash popped into his memory. And the memory was a pleasant one. Her bright little face, her big, black and mocking eyes with thick lashes and black eyebrows came to his mind’s eye. “I wonder what she’s like now. She is already eighteen and I’ve heard nothing of a wedding. she must have become a pretty young woman. She was a sharp-tongued little girl and an able one,” he thought and then said, with unexpected decisiveness:

“If that’s the way it is, take *raka* to the house of Saladzhi, who lives in the upper part of the village. You know him?”

“Oh yes, we know him! Good! His girl is all right!” the mother and daughter answered him happily, in unison.

A young man’s conversation with his parents on family matters is not customary among the Kalmyks. If Zamba’s mother talked to him and even gave him a choice, it was only an exception, exclusively due to the fact of his “education.” So Zamba’s conversation with his mother about the engagement was short and without details. His mother had wanted to find out the main thing; the rest she knew herself.

When Zamba came home for Easter vacation, he found himself already engaged to Saladzhi's daughter. His mother had already started preparations for the wedding. In a hurry to see her son married, she accelerated the procedures and in a few months had fulfilled all the formalities which usually take a year, or even two.

The property had been in female hands for only a few months, but already deficiencies and negligence could be noticed. That spring the ewes had produced a great many lambs, but there had been no strict supervision. There was hardly enough hay. For the first time in Zamba's memory the oxen were fed with chaff instead of hay while plowing. The garden had not been trimmed in time. The orchard was not completely seeded. Accustomed since childhood to feel the whole pulse of the property's economy, Zamba saw that without him the estate would go downhill, and it was dear and important to him. It came to a choice between the university and the estate. Too much love and sweaty labor had been expended on this place by his father; his mother was too proud and happy with it, and Zamba himself was bound to it by bonds too great to consider trading it for something else. And Zamba decided not to go to college.

The life of young Dzhalganov had taken another sharp bend.

*

Zamba diligently concerned himself with bringing order to the property and was not able to see his bride during those three weeks. Nor was there any. By Kalmyk custom the groom and bride may not simply meet. Only during the three yearly festivals, when the bridegroom is obliged to pay a visit to the bride's home, are they allowed to see each other at a party. Meetings by chance are also possible, but in order for this to happen, Zamba would have to attend all the village parties for young people, and he had never gone to them.

It so happened that Zamba was unable to see his bride until the wedding itself, arranged for early June when he would finish school. But this did not bother him especially. A meeting was not obligatory. His mother and sister and all his relatives were pleased with his bride. They praised her good upbringing and strictness in observing the good old customs, spoke about her modesty and diligence. It is true that nobody mentioned her looks, but Zamba

himself knew that Zermyash had to be a good-looking girl.

For centuries among the Kalmyks, the parents had settled the fate of young men and women. Although Zamba was an intellectual and Russified young man, the strict customs of his people dominated him too.

It was that happy season in the village when the hay was in, the grain was not yet ripe, and the horses and people were free. All the distant and close relatives from both his father's and his mother's side came to Zamba's wedding. The marriage of a son or daughter is a matter for the whole clan. Everyone is obliged to participate and help out somehow. Zamba was loved by all his relatives. So recently and unexpectedly orphaned, their good feelings flowed to him even more. Even though the widow Dzhalganov had enough money, each relative tried to lighten her wedding expenses.

On the grassy lawn between the apple and cherry trees of the island garden, a large, snow-white tent had been built of the best canvas for the newlyweds. All three woven woolen belts around the tent were decorated thickly with colored fringe. A blue silk canopy already hung over the place where the young couple's bed was to stand. An expensive Bukhara carpet lay where the trunks with the bride's dowry were to be placed.

Zamba prepared for his wedding with fuss and excitement. The general agitation had infected him too. The black, piebald, white-legged, handsome five-year-old half-breed horse, bought a year before for a good price by Zamba's late father for Zamba to ride, was specially groomed for the wedding and fed on oats.

When the black was saddled with a new officer's saddle with elegant silver caparisons, black tail and chest straps decorated with silver, and one of the workers had brought him up to the house, all the men admired Zamba's magnificent steed. The horse had been exhibited even in the Sal district, the kingdom of horses. When Zamba, attired in well-fitting *besmet*, tightly girdled with a black Caucasian belt, all gilded and covered with silver ornaments, and wearing an elegant Cossack cap of the finest beaver, left the house and deftly mounted the prancing handsome steed, taking a little trot in the courtyard, all his relatives greeted him with delight.

"Oh, what a horse! What a young hero is our Zamba! Glory to the late Bembe for having brought up such a son and prepared such a horse!"

Zamba really was a handsome young Kalmyk, tall, broad-shouldered, with manfully clean-cut dark features and expressive and intelligent eyes under regular, thick brows. Not for nothing had he been popular among the Rostov high school girls.

At the head of two dozen wagons pulled by light and specially selected teams and *troikas*, a dozen mounted young men at the sides, Zamba rode out toward the house of Saladzhi, the bride's father.

The first thing Zamba noticed in his father-in-law's yard was the tall, shapely figure of a girl in a blue *beshmet*, with a wasp waist pulled tight by a gold-braided belt, and wearing a round little hat of black velvet embroidered with gold leaves. She was coming from the barn or the cooling dugout across the yard to the house, but she stopped in order not to block the way for the wedding cortege.

Zamba's heart beat very quickly. Although he had not seen her for a long time, he immediately guessed that this was Zermyash. She stood before him, not a mischievous schoolgirl but a beautiful young lady. Here were the same affectionately mocking big, black eyes, framed with thick and soft lashes. Her yellowish-white face the color of ivory harmonized perfectly with the black eyes under even eyebrows like the miniature spread wings of a swallow. Her luxuriant black braid shone like a snake on her back.

Meeting Zamba's eyes, the girl gave him an almost imperceptible welcoming smile, her lips whispering words of greeting.

Goose-pimples tickled Zamba's body. An inner tremble of pleasure brought a warm flood of blood to his face. He bowed to her politely and at that moment felt surprised. How was it that his bride had not yet hidden herself, according to custom, and how could she dare show herself to him in the yard and even greet him? He remembered that Zermyash had been a brave little girl, but such a blunt violation of custom he had not expected.

"Your sister-in-law is pretty, Zamba, don't you think?" said one of the fellows riding next to him.

"What sister-in-law? Whom are you talking about?" Zamba asked, astonished.

"The one standing over there, Zermyash, didn't you recognize her? You bowed to her, didn't you?"

"Zermyash! But Zermyash is my bride!" Zamba exclaimed, feeling something akin to nausea creeping over him.

“You are crazy, Zamba! Your bride is Kharlash, Zermyash’s older sister. Zermyash is your sister-in-law. Would a bride show herself to us like that? This isn’t Rostov!” his friend exclaimed with astonishment.

A white light cut off Zamba’s vision. The joy he had just felt in seeing Zermyash was suddenly transformed to desperation, the realization that something wild and irreparable had happened in his life. Zamba was so stupified that he lost his power of speech. He tore open his collar and noisily let all the air out of his chest. His face pale, he remained sitting on his horse after the others had already dismounted and tied their horses to Saladzhi’s long hitching rail.

“Bridegroom, what are you sitting on your horse for? Get down, don’t be afraid. All looks are upon you today. Act like a man,” the elder of the wedding loudly reprimanded him. He was one of Zamba’s oldest and most honored relations.

“Uncle, call my sister and mother and my brother-in-law, and come here yourself. I have something important to say,” Zamba answered him, dismounting.

Zamba announced to his closest relatives gathered about him that they had mixed things up and engaged him to the wrong girl. Zermyash, whom he had in mind, had turned out to be his sister-in-law, and he had never even heard of or seen the older sister to whom they had betrothed him.

This discovery saddened everyone. They all expressed their sympathy, but it appeared to everyone impossible to change things. And it also came out that recently Zermyash had likewise become engaged to a man from another village. To cheer Zamba up, they all said that Kharlash was a worthy girl too and he would like her. It was Zamba’s mother who put an end to the parley.

“It means that this is his fate decreed from above. Let Kharlash be ours in happiness. Conversations now are harmful. Let nobody say a further word about this incident. I betrothed Kharlash to my son. I have become used to the idea of her as my daughter-in-law, I love her, and that’s all I know. The boy himself is at fault in this muddle. He should have named the girl, but he said, ‘take *raka* to Saladzhi’s house.’ He should have known that until the elder sister is engaged, you don’t match-make with the younger, unless the elder sister has remained unengaged for more than the normal period. Who could have guessed that a twenty-year-old boy does not

even know the girls in his village? Now the knot has been tied so tight that it cannot be untied or cut through. Elder, order everyone to prepare for the food to be carried into the house of the in-laws."

Everything in Zamba boiled with indignation, but he realized his inability to change the course of events. His wishes were no longer being considered. Even if he were to remount his horse and ride home, the bride would be brought to him anyway. His soul blazed with grief. The image of the girl with the shapely figure, ivory face, and bottomless warm eyes flashed in his mind, but he had to marry some unknown Kharlash.

The Kalmyks often give names which correspond to the appearance of the child. A person with a light face could not bear the name of Kharlash, but only someone with an exceptionally dark complexion, just as a girl with narrow, expressionless eyes could never be given the name Zermyash. Therefore Zamba was able to some extent to judge the appearance of his bride in advance. Kharlash could only be a dark and rather coarse girl.

All this wedding fuss and all the efforts of the last few days now seemed useless and tedious to him. Seeing the grieving face of the bridegroom, the main star of the festivities, his comrades also became sorrowful. Chatter, jokes, and laughter died away. The male side of the wedding, usually triumphant, was seized by indifference, silence, and sluggishness, which seemed strange to the others.

As if in a dream, Zamba mechanically carried out the traditional rules demanded of him. He attended the reception of the match-maker on the groom's side, bending his legs Kalmyk-style and respectfully presenting his portion of *raka* to the oldest man in the house, and listed to his ritual wishes of happiness and long life to the young couple. During the dinners, when presents were exchanged, he received from the hand of his mother-in-law and put on a black silk *besmet* and belted it with a blue woolen sash, ate the traditional piece of lamb and drank broth. Having done everything required of him, Zamba left the house when the wedding guests began to party, drink, and eat freely. He was not needed until the "evening noon," about four o'clock.

The wedding celebration was being held in Saladzhi's large clay wing, leaving the new wooden house of modest size quiet and free of people. As soon as Zamba left the wing, Zermyash came out of the

house, smiling pleasantly, and approached Zamba, speaking first:

"Hello, Brother-in-Law, I hope you'll be happy with your presents. I sewed the *besmet* myself and I was afraid it would be too large, but I see it fits you well. Let us go into the house for a cup of tea. This wedding of yours was arranged so quickly that we haven't had the chance to become better acquainted. But you remember me, don't you? Remember the tricks I played on you in school and how once you smacked me? What a nasty little girl I was!"

Happily listening to her, Zamba followed her into the house. In a little room a table had been set. It was evidently the sisters' room, furnished with rugs, icons, and a mountain of pillows with embroidered cases on a broad bed of lacquered iron decorated with little metal balls and sticks. A nicked *samovar* bubbled on the white table cloth, there were glasses and glass holders, a plate of cakes and candy, and a bottle of sparkling Don red wine.

"I didn't want to serve you tea in the hall, where the adults drop in. This room is mine and Kharlash's. It's cooler here," said Zermyash, catching Zamba's glance in the direction of the closed door to the hall.

Chattering away freely and laughing gayly, Zermyash poured Zamba's tea, pushed the cakes over to him, and poured two glasses of wine.

"In your wedding present one thing is still lacking, haven't you noticed?"

"No, what can that be? I don't know our customs," Zamba spoke for the first time.

"There must be a handkerchief behind the belt! But don't think that our mother forgot. It was I that asked her if I could be the one to make up this deficiency. Mama knew that I would invite you." With these words, Zermyash opened a gaily colored box and took out a silk handkerchief, embroidered with yellow silk threads. The corners of the handkerchief contained his initials and the bride's, and the date of the wedding.

"I wish my dear sister and new brother much happiness!" she said seriously, tucking her present behind his belt.

"I thank my sweet sister-in-law for such an agreeable present. This minute is the most unforgettable one in my wedding," he said sincerely, shaking her hand.

At tea, listening to Zermyash's chatter (and she was never quiet,

passing from one subject to another), Zamba forgot about his grief and the fact that his senseless wedding was being celebrated in the building next door. Not only did Zermyash capture his imagination, she charmed him with her sweet simplicity, her lively conversation, and her good looks. He became animated despite himself.

"Well, when is your wedding, Zermyash?" he asked, remembering that she was already betrothed. "Now that we are close and friendly relatives, let us be frank with each other."

"Not until a year goes by. My father cannot put on two weddings in one year."

"And what about your fiancé? Do you like him?"

"What can I say? Nobody asked me. I saw him only once at the spring ceremony in the temple. An ordinary fellow. No visible defects. Short, but a handsome face. That's all I know. He's stranger. That's the fate of us girls. After all, Kharlash doesn't know you either. I told her about you, but only about our school years. And where did you see Kharlash, or didn't they ask you either?"

Everything that had happened to him was on the tip of Zamba's tongue to be blurted out, but after a moment's thought he restrained himself. The truth would be too much here, and he said quietly,

"I have never seen your sister, and I don't know what she is like."

"Really? That I never thought. So, you are going in blind too! Well, actually, it serves you right. You never leave your island! How can you not be bored by such a life? We village youth have such a good time! Lots of parties, we sing, dance, play games, all of us know each other, and you never even showed up in the village before your wedding. I often used to think of you. How I wanted to go with you to Rostov to study! But my parents decided there was no sense spending money on a girl, because strangers will take her away anyhow, and she is good enough as she is. Tell me, is that right? Aren't there parents who send their daughters to big schools too?"

For three whole hours Zamba sat conversing with Zermyash and failed to notice the yard gradually filling up with drunken people, the songs sounding incessantly through the open window and the whooping of the dancers.

"Zermyash, tell me the truth, though it's late to ask," Zamba finally determined to ask the question on his mind, "is your sister

the same as you?"

"Kharlash? No, she is a different person. My mother often scolds me for my tongue and for liking to dress up. But our Kharlash is a very kind, silent, shy person with a tender heart. She has no sharp words for anyone and she knows how to run a household well. Come on, Kharlash is much better than I am. And her face and looks? Well, as we say, 'a husband is not made happy by looks, but by brains.' And even in looks our Kharlash is not homely, but she doesn't look like me," Zermyash replied evasively, stressing the best qualities of her sister.

At that moment the clatter of horses' hoofs and the swish of wheels sounded under the window. Zermyash looked out and went pale. The tender little wings of her nose trembled and turned pink. Her sloe eyes sparkled with tears, and she began to cry, putting her head on the table.

"Why are you crying? What is it?" Zamba worried.

"Time for you to go. They have gone after my sister. Soon they will take her away from home. It's so sad," she said, continuing to cry.

Zamba heard his friends, loudly calling his name amid the general din, searching for him in the yard, leading his horse. He thanked Zermyash for the hospitality, for the present, and for her kind attitude toward him, begged her to visit them as often as possible, and ran out the door.

Zamba was unable to catch a glimpse of his bride even as she was taken away. She was covered with yellow silk and screaming at the top of her girlish voice as she was forced onto the horse. Only when he came home and rode up to his tent did he see Kharlash for the first time. The girl was dark to the point of blackness, round-faced, and full-bodied. In spite of the special corset narrowing her waist and pressing her breasts, they were obvious beneath her black silk *beshmet*. With a sorrowful expression on a face devoid of prettiness, with a blunt nose and small eyes still tearful, she stood at the right side of the doorsill, waiting to be ceremoniously brought into the tent. Girls and young married women crowded about her, and not a single one of them was more ugly than she was.

A debilitating unpleasantness ran through Zamba's body at the sight of his bride. Nothing in her even remotely reminded him of Zermyash, who had conquered his thoughts after the three hours he had spent with her.

Handing his horse over to a worker, Zamba ran into the house, locked himself in his room, and fell flat on the bed sobbing bitterly.

Happy voices sounded in the yard, as well as a song here and there. He could hear the matchmakers arriving and leaving at night, and the voices of the young married women looking for him, but he remained lying there with his grim thoughts. It was already midnight when they found him, forced him to open the door, and then the women took him to his bride in the tent. She was already dressed as a married lady.

Zamba's life had taken another bend. A boring, monotonous family life without love was beginning. The description Zermyash had given of her sister was exact. Knowing that Kharlash was in no way to blame, that she was trying to please him in everything, Zamba learned to bear his wife in silence, without hurting her.

The only happiness came when Zermyash visited them, bringing laughter, chatter, and life into their house. Seeing this, Kharlash in this too tried to please her husband, calling for her sister more and more often, under various excuses.

Zamba never told Zermyash about his mother's mistake and his love for her. They were already relatives, and such talk between them would have been unseemly. Zermyash, too, was silent. But the fatal mix-up that had happened at the match-making and the mutual feelings of Zamba and Zermyash toward each other were no secret, neither for them or for others. Everybody knew that an unalterable situation had been created. The accidental snarl could neither be untangled or cut through.

A year later, as one of the respected relatives of the bride, Zamba partied at Zermyash's wedding and gave her the best and most expensive present — a pair of black Don horses and a new carriage. Such a present was not surprising from a close and rich relative. But the bitter tears shed by Zamba in marrying off his sister-in-law were somewhat strange. The villagers, though, knew what was going on in Zamba's heart.

In that year the Great War started. It brought a new, unexpected bend to Zamba's life.

*

The peoples of Russia were drinking from the full cup of revolution.

The great Kalmyk refugee camp, where the people from all *stanitsas* and villages had been mixed together like migrating birds, occupied the large Russian farmer village of Lopanka in the winter of 1920, not far behind the moving Cossack front.

The Kalmyk cavalry regiment of the Don Army Corps was quickly nearing Lopanka to spend the night, after the catastrophically unsuccessful expedition of the Don cavalry to Torgovaya, when Budënný's Red corps suddenly fell upon Lopanka and busied itself in cutting down the Kalmyks in the refugee camp, mostly old men, women, children, and invalids.

In the morning, after Budënný's men had left, the Kalmyk regiment found mounds of bloody corpses. Out of the many thousands in the camp, only half of the survivors had avoided capture, only those who managed to flee at the last minute before the Bolshevik raid, or the ones who had successfully hidden themselves while the Reds were there. The rest of the captured mass was butchered.

Captain Zamba Dzhalganov, a troop commander in the Kalmyk regiment, and two Cossacks tirelessly turned over the piles of bodies in the peasant yards and barns, looking for his wife and son.

Zermyash was with him. Among the dead she had found her husband, who had been convalescing among the refugees after being wounded. Zermyash had saved herself by giving five gold coins to the landlady and promising her five more if she would hide her well and save her from the Bolsheviks. The landlady put her under a feather mattress and lay on top of her, pretending to be sick with typhus.

Zamba found very many bodies of fellow-villagers, those from other villages, or just acquaintances, but he could not find Kharlash and their son. It began to seem to him that they had escaped death and fled with the surviving refugees. But Zermyash was certain that her sister could not have had time to escape, because she was living on the edge of the village through which the Reds had suddenly come.

Finally, in the next-to-last group of bodies lying around a peasant's yard, by the wall of his house, Zamba spotted a very familiar green fur coat. Two leaps, and Zamba recognized Kharlash. She was lying on her right side. Her left hand, fingers turned green, was braced against the snow. Her right hand was under her

head, palm on cheek. The blood from her left temple had frozen into an icicle, covering her eyes and the bridge of her nose.

"My poor, excellent Kharlash," Zamba whispered, and lifting her upper arm, opened the coat. Something between a groan and a bellow of unbearable pain escaped from Zamba's chest. He straightened up sharply, staggered back, and covered his eyes with the palm of his right hand in a mechanical motion. He was an old combat veteran and a brave officer. He had seen death many times and himself had been wounded three times in two wars. In every battle he had exposed himself to danger, but still his heart had shuddered from what he had seen: under Kharlash's arm and the skirts of the fur coat, huddled directly on to his mother's naked stomach, lay his little son, dressed only in a shirt, his head smashed.

Squatting over the bodies of his wife and son, Zamba wept loudly, helplessly shaking his head and scraping his teeth together. A little distance away Zermyash sobbed, lacking the strength to look at the bodies of her sister and the boy.

It seemed as though Zamba would not get up, would not leave the bodies of his wife and son, but the service habits of many years and a feeling of responsibility took hold of him. The sergeant-major of his troop came up saluting him and asked:

"Sir, do you want a separate grave dug, or will you permit their burial with the rest?"

"With the rest. What is the squadron doing, Ursyakov?"

"We are burying the dead. We are filling the fourth hole already."

Zamba slowly kissed his wife on her bloody and frozen forehead, kissed his son on his blue face, took him in his arms and left the yard, staggering a bit. Behind him the two Cossacks carried Kharlash. Zermyash too went with them, holding the skirt of her sister's coat. Her husband had already been buried.

When the hole had been filled with bodies and the peasants collected to do the work were beginning to cover it with earth, Zamba, who had been standing motionless by the mass grave, turned sharply and went to his horse.

Zermyash followed him. When Zamba, receiving his horse from his orderly, was about to mount, Zermyash asked him:

"And what shall I do, Zamba? My husband is dead. You are alone. There's nobody..."

Zermyash stopped short and was silent. Zamba was looking at her with wildly protruding eyes. His look expressed either fear or extreme surprise. He was silent for a long time in thought.

Looking up at him perhaps in fear or in supplication from under

their thick lashes were the big, black eyes of Zermyash, whom he had secretly continued loving all these years until this day. But at this moment, when through no fault of their own misfortune had swept away all the barriers between them, and they, loving each other, were free, she seemed distant and alien to him. The silent, modest, and doggedly devoted Kharlash, who had died hugging their son, had immediately crowded out everybody and everything in the world from Zamba's soul. And he felt it a blasphemy to think of life, or love, after the way she had perished.

The life of Zamba Dzhalganov had undergone one more unexpected bend.

"What kind of a life is there now, Zermyash? I want only revenge with my own hands. For my Kharlash and our son I'll take off a lot of heads, before I lay down my own. If you want to put your life in order again, go back to the refugee camp. Forget me. I am doomed."

"The squadron is ready, Sir!" the sergeant-major reported as he rode up. Zamba mounted his horse and rode off to his squadron.

*

The whole day with varying success a battle raged between the Cossack and Red cavalry at the Yegorlytskaya *stanitsa*. Huge masses of horsemen charged each other, only to separate, leaving here and there the black dots of dead men and horses. From the rear, artillery made gaps in the charges.

The Kalmyk regiment had been on the left flank since morning and, with the support of an armored train, readied itself to meet a significant column of cavalry which obviously intended to attack this Cossack flank. When this group of Red cavalry had backed off, and the Red attacks on the right flank became more frequent, the Kalmyk regiment had been transferred to this point, west of Yegorlytskaya.

When a heavy Red charge following on the tail of Barbovich's horsemen swept down from a mound, the Kalmyk regiment mounted a charge to meet it.

Zamba Dzhalganov's squadron was the best in the regiment. Its energetic attacks and the line of its charges could be distinguished from a distance from the other five squadrons by the regimental commander, Colonel Tepkin. Intelligent, calm, and brave, and possessing great authority in his squadron, Captain Dzhalganov was the best officer in the regiment.

This time too, Dzhalganov's troop quickly tore forward in a compact charge. While the Reds stopped, turned, and began to run

away, Dzhalganov's squadron was on their tails in close pursuit.

Colonel Tepkin, galloping with his staff in front of the center of the regiment, noticed that the solid and conspicuous figure of Dzhalganov, in a black weather-beaten great coat and gray Cossack fur hat, mounted on a healthy dark gray horse, was the first to reach the rearmost Red horsemen. "Now," thought the colonel, "Dzhalga will soothe his soul on the Reds after Lopanka, for his wife and son."

When Budënný's Reds, leaving sabred men here and there, tore itself away from the Kalmyk regiment's charge and Dzhalganov's troop had halted, its commander was missing. A patrol sent in the wake of the Reds found Zamba Dzhalganov a half *verst* away from the place his troop had halted. On the way they saw the bodies of four Red Army troopers showing the characteristic traces of Dzhalganov's saber. Zamba did not like to slash from top to bottom, pulling the saber back toward himself like most people do, but horizontally, the way one chops the top off a melon. A lightning-like blow from right to left and an accurate stab on the left, into the throat directly, that was the way Dzhalganov loved to do it.

A few paces from the Red troopers' bodies, with three bullet wounds in the stomach and a saber wound in his head, lay the body of Captain Zamba Dzhalganov, already becoming cold.

The earthly life of Dzhalganov had taken its last bend.

LOVE IN BONDS

*I dedicate this story to my wife,
Dorzhiima Badminovna.*

Dordji Odbinov, a native of the Baghuda (Batlayevskaya) *stanitsa*, was another young Buzava who belonged to the emerging European-educated Kalmyks in embryo. In the ensuing Civil War he took part as a junior officer in the recently founded Third Kalmyk Regiment. The latter was left to the mercy of fate by the fleeing Don Cossack and White Russian military authorities on the Black Sea shore at Novorossiysk in 1920. In consequence of this tragic peripeteia, according to a few survivors, their comrades-in-arms were sabered unmercifully.

Dolma turned out to be the only girl in the *stanitsa* school. In the noisy crowd of pugnacious boys she felt like an orphan lamb surrounded by angry wolf cubs.

Dordzhi Odbinov was the only boy who did not take part in the fights and pranks of the the others. Clean and quiet, his hands in the pockets of his black caftan and the puffy little cheeks on his well-washed face pink from the cold, he would steadily walk home, keeping apart from the warring other boys.

Hence the timid, dark little Dolma silently drew near to Dordzhi and walked next to him in her green quilted caftan and her little round black sealskin hat sitting on a shock of pitch-black hair, cut at the sides. She often rubbed her nose.

Dordzhi did not chase her away, did not push her or trip her up the way the others would have done. Occasionally giving her tender and kind glances, he silently walked with her the whole way from the school to his courtyard.

When he turned off the street toward his house, Dolma smiled at him gratefully and affectionately, and ran the block remaining to her own house. From that time on they had a wordless agreement: to walk home from school together.

They were children. A second-grader, Dordzhi Odbinov, the son

of poor parents, was twelve years old. First-grader, Dolma Avelkin was ten, the daughter of a rich horse-breeder. They became friends. The whole way home from school was spent in childish conversations, until they reached the Odbinov yard.

Thus they spent two winters. On the third one they did not see each other. Dordzhi had finished school. As the best student, the *stanitsa* had selected him for further education at community expense, and his father took him far, far away to a Russian city, a day's horseback ride, followed by 24 whole hours on the train.

And in the same year Dolma's parents moved to their ranch, a hundred *versts* away, and hired a woman to teach Dolma at home.

The two friends, Dolma and Dordzhi, were separated for a long time. But whenever Dolma thought about her faraway *stanitsa*, she always remembered the red-cheeked boy with the friendly eyes and the clean little face. And Dordzhi, finding himself in the large, noisy Russian city, missing his quiet *stanitsa* on the Sal, often imagined himself next to Dolma, dark like a little jackdaw and talkative, with her narrow, black, radiant eyes.

They were children, but in their childish hearts there grew an attachment to each other.

*

Ten years went by. Much had changed during that period in the little Batlayevskaya *stanitsa* on the Sal. The pretty, many-colored wooden houses had multiplied, fences sprang up almost everywhere, the *stanitsa* had turned green with gardens. The grass in the yards and granaries was thicker. On the site of the rickety little house where Dolma and Dordzhi had gone to school, there was a beautiful stone building with large windows, a garden and a vegetable plot, swings and a tall ladder in the yard. In the *khurul*, surrounded by the light little wooden houses of the *gelungs*, there now stood a large, stone, gold-capped temple. The *stanitsa* grew richer and larger not by the year, but by the month.

The people had changed too. From a thin little jackdaw, Dolma had been transformed into a shapely, good-looking young lady. She was well-lettered and had a lively tongue, but she had been brought up in a strictly old-fashioned way by her kind mother in the wilds of the steppes on the Sal. And Dordzhi had graduated from high school and was already a senior military cadet. He was tall, rough-

featured, and dark to the point of blackness.

That was the year of the great demolitions, as the Batlayevskaya people said. "In the spring the Tsar left the throne and gave the empire to his brother, who got scared and left the throne to a whole bunch of lawyers, chatterboxes, and crooks. At the end of the summer thousands of convicts got out of jail. They raided the arms depots, took cannon from the factories, and driving the lawyers out of the palace, took over the throne. And they began to roam the country as bandits. Pillage and fire came to the little places on the steppe, to the villages and farms". . . .

That fall Dolma returned to the *stanitsa* from the ranch and became the most desirable bride in the *stanitsa*. After fighting in Rostov, Cadet Dordzhi Odbinov also came back to the *stanitsa*. For a year he had been engaged to a neighbor's daughter. His wedding was a month away.

But it was not this that interested Dordzhi. They had betrothed him to a bride without his knowing about it, in the old-fashioned way. He did not love this girl. She was simple, timid, and silent. According to Kalmyk custom she hid from her fiancé. And she didn't look like much. Her face was ugly.

He found out that Dolma had returned from the steppe as a beautiful young woman. He was curious to take a look at his childhood friend. Passing by their yard, he caught a glimpse of her through a crack in the fence and heard her voice. From that moment he was even more attracted to her.

Walking in her large yard or in the thick old garden, Dolma cast involuntary glances in the direction of the Odbinov yard. From her friend and maternal first cousin Bona Tsaganov, she knew that Dordzhi was the best young gallant in the *stanitsa*, a tall cadet, courteous to girls.

Once at dusk on a winter's day, Dolma's little ten-year-old sister, looking around her mysteriously, handed her a letter in a blue envelope. It was a note from Dordzhi.

"I have learned that you are here. I very much want to see you and how you have turned out. Many years have passed, much water has flowed into the Sal since we used to run to school together, but I have never forgotten you. I want to see you again, get acquainted, have a chat. If you are a kind person, let me know when I can see you without older people being present, so we can talk freely. They say

that you do not attend the parties of the *stanitsa* youth, out of pride. But I think differently. Of all the school children, remember, you were the one who came up to me then and walked next to me. Make me an exception again now. Forgive my boldness, but I beg you very, very much not to refuse my request. With esteemed respect, Yours, Cadet Dordzhi Odbinov."

This note affected Doma's heart like the breath of a light, gentle breeze. She was in a quandary and did not know what one did in such situations. Her mother was no longer alive to give her advice. Her first thought was to run with the note to see Bona Tsaganov, who had grown up in the village and was more experienced, but after some thought she changed her mind. She had decided not to answer, but she wanted so badly to see that pleasant, red-cheeked boy again. For nine years he had stayed in her memory. She tore out a sheet of paper from a black notebook and quickly wrote in pencil:

"In the evenings I don't leave the house. Tomorrow, after lunch, climb over the barrier to our garden and wait behind the summer house. After lunch the older people will take a nap, and I will come and see you for a minute. Dolma Avelkin."

The nimble and obliging little sister ran off with the note toward the Odbinov house with a happy and mysterious air about her.

*

With bated breath, Dolma tried to approach the summer house calmly and indifferently, but her disobedient heart beat wildly, flooding her cheeks with color. When she had skirted the summer house, a healthy, somewhat rough-looking, dark young man called out in a rich, deep voice: "Hello, Dolma!" An involuntary "Ah" escaped her, and looking at this unfamiliar man in bewilderment, asked: "Are you Dordzhi?" "It's me! Don't you recognize me? Have you forgotten?" Dordzhi answered happily, holding out his hand.

"Oh my God, how you've changed! And as I walked, I was thinking of that boy with whom I walked to school, and you are as healthy as a *muzhik*!" Dolma replied in disappointment.

"Yes, times change and people with them. You've changed also, Dolma. Who would have recognized in you that thin little girl who ran next to me to school, scared of the naughty boys. You have become a beautiful bride, but whose? Who is the lucky man?"

"Me? Oh, I'm not engaged yet. You are the one, they say, who is

having a wedding soon," answered Dolma with a smile.

"That's true, but it is nothing. I don't like my bride. My parents engaged her to me according to the old custom, without asking either of us. They forgot that I am an educated man and I need a wife I can love, a friend, and all my parents want is another pair of hands to work. These old people are impossible!"

"Well, it's too late for you to talk about that now. Since the presents have been given and the wedding will be a month from now, your song is over," Dolma teased him.

"No, it is not over yet. I will prove that it's my business, and only I must decide this question. If only you will allow me, I will break this engagement!" Dordzhi exclaimed.

"Me? What have I got to do with it?"

Dordzhi became flustered, blushed, and began to speak, taking off and replacing a glove several times.

"You see, Dolma, I always imagined, that is, I thought of you as my bride. It is not my fault that my parents, being poor people, did not dare to approach yours with an offer. Yours are rich horse-breeders. I have thought of you the whole time, and now that I have seen you, I am ready for anything. Just say the word and I will break the whole thing."

"What are you saying? My God! How is it possible to talk this way just before a wedding? Speaking truthfully, I didn't forget you either. Every time I used to think of our *stanitsa* I remembered you immediately. But now it's too late for us to talk about it. Who looks for another bride a month before his wedding? When was this ever done? It would be an unheard-of-scandal! What talk there will be! They will even compose songs about it! I would never go for such a scandal; I would not shame my father!"

"Wait, Dolma! You speak of your father, about people, but what about you? Is it possible that we can't even think of ourselves?" Dordzhi interrupted Dolma.

"Well, it means that was our fate. You can't step over your fate, as they say," Dolma answered, breaking a dry twig in her hands.

Dordzhi lowered his head.

"But you Dolma, in spite of all that, think it over. And then we'll meet again. Everything you say is superstition, backwardness. Our grandmothers lived by these customs. Already our *stanitsa* girls don't think the way you do. You grew up in the sticks under the

influence of an elderly mother. These are new times, new people. For the sake of our happiness we must know how to tear through the rotten tangle of old customs! Tell me, why should we ruin our lives? I love you. I see that you are well-disposed toward me, so why should we make the path of our lives crooked, afraid of some sort of gossip and street songs? Let them sing!" Dordzhi hotly continued to insist.

"It cannot be, Dordzhi. Think of that totally blameless girl who is already accustomed to thinking of you as her husband, and now, suddenly, I steal you from her! No, I can't agree to that. I won't think of you any more, and you marry your fiancée and stop rebelling in vain. Good-bye, be happy, and you and I will remain good friends." With these words, Dolma stretched out her hand.

Then she turned sharply on her heel, leaving a deep imprint in the soft earth, and walked quickly to her house with lowered head.

With eyes full of tears, Dordzhi remained standing where he was.

*

Short winter days. They flash by quickly, one after another. The time flew by and only a week remained before Dordzhi's wedding. Three more times Dordzhi asked Dolma for a meeting, but his notes were not answered. The little sister bothered Dolma in vain: "Write an answer, or he won't give me any candy!"

Dolma experienced sad days. She had loved Dordzhi since her childhood years. Her love for the rosy-cheeked little boy had been transformed into love for the tall, long-coated cadet in his gray fur hat at their first meeting. Learning that Dordzhi loved her too, her whole heart went out to him. But she pinched herself painfully, bit her lips until they bled, submerging her feelings by stubborn will power.

She decided not to see Dordzhi before his wedding. She was afraid to. But when the wedding was only three days away, she lost her peace of mind totally, unable to stay home quietly with her glum thoughts. Then she went to her friend Bona Tsaganov, hoping that her gaiety and stories would distract her.

From the Avelkin house to Tsaganov's it was possible to go two ways: openly, through the street, or concealed, along the banks of the Gon-Gol. Late for lunch after chatting with her friend, Dolma hurried home on the banks of the stream. Suddenly she heard energetic footsteps and the weak ringing of spurs catching up to

her. Looking back in spite of herself, her eyes met Dordzhi's.

"Dolma! Just for a minute!" she heard his supplicating voice.

Dolma's head began to swim. Dimly realizing that if she did not bolt now, her strength and sense would leave her, she painfully bit her lip and tore her whole body loose as if taking off from the sticky ground, running forward like an antelope.

Dordzhi groaned and remained standing there, looking at the thick, muddy water of the stream with revulsion. He saw that the happiness of his life had run away from him headlong and that there was nothing left for him but to bow to the will of his parents and the laws and customs of the society into which he had been born.

A few days later the Batlayevskaya *stanitsa* celebrated the wedding of Cadet Odbinov. It was a dark, dry, and cold winter evening with a black sky covered with greenish stars. From the direction of the Odbinov household came a vague murmur of voices, sometimes snatches of song. Lights shone in the windows of the adobe house.

Having thrown on her father's warm racoon coat, Dolma stood on the porch of her house. She was looking at the lights in the Odbinovs' windows. Sighing so deeply that her chest hurt, she wept quiet, hot, girlish tears and envied the one who had entered that poor adobe hut with songs and words of greeting.

A week later, match-makers came to the Avelkin house and Dolma's family toasted her with the *raka* brought by the match-makers of a middle-aged, but brave combat officer.

*

It was spring. The steppe bloomed with its usual luxuriance. The grain rippled in the fields. But that spring they were furrowed by detachments of men, trampled by horses. Alien people rode over them mercilessly, dug trenches in the grain. With heavy fighting the Cossacks and Kalmyks were liberating the Don steppes from their seizure by the Reds.

Lieutenant Dordzhi Odbinov was in the recently-formed 3rd Kalmyk Regiment in camp at Persiyanovka. His wife was with him. He lived with her without love, but peacefully. If he could not have Dolma, it didn't seem to matter to him with whom he lived.

Dolma's fiancé, as the commander of its best troop, fought in the ranks of the Dzungar Kalmyk Regiment and stories of his glory

were told throughout the villages. Their wedding was to take place in the summer.

After Dordzhi's marriage, Dolma soon took herself in hand. She felt no love for her fiancé, but she heard everywhere what a good and worthy man he was. Even though he was twelve years older than she, he was still a young-looking and skillful officer, and Dolma had reconciled herself to the idea of becoming his wife.

Summer came quickly as well. About ten days remained before Dolma's wedding. Her relatives sewed feverishly, bought things, and got ready for the celebration. One day a man from the *stanitsa* administration brought Dolma a letter in a torn and soiled envelope.

It was an unexpected letter from Dordzhi. It was a long letter, written on six large pages. It was saturated with the grief of unsatisfied love and complaining about fate. One part made a special impression on Dolma, and she read it several times:

"You and I have spoiled a good, clean love which our hearts carried from our young years until the present. Great, explosive happiness, joy, and exultation were ahead of us because of our mutual harmony of feelings, but both of us, bound by prejudices, tied up by the bonds of old-time living and customs, gripped by the fear of everyday gossip, have distorted and ruined our lives. As a result, I am married to a woman whom I still cannot love. Her touching care of me and her attempts to attract me are irritating. Only in the dark, when I can't see her face, do I caress her, imagining that it is you, Dolma. Soon you will be married. Your betrothed adores you. It could not be otherwise. But you too (as I am deeply convinced) will live with him the same way that I live with my wife, but more tightly bound by prejudice. You won't let him know. And who is to blame? You, who grabbed the belt of decency so tightly, and I who was unable to entice you enough to make you take a bold step, or my parents, so afraid of their poverty that they could not bring themselves to match-make with a horse-breeder? Or does the blame fall on our tangle of outmoded customs, which in recent times have more and more often become the reason for the unhappiness of young hearts?"

Having read this part three times, Dolma sighed deeply. She wiped away a tear, and read more: "Soon you will be married. As your first friend, whom you remember as a red-cheeked little boy in

a black caftan, from my soul I send you my best wishes. Let the Lord send you calmness of soul, peace, and happiness. And in this life I will never forget you in the form of that little black jackdaw who then timidly came up to me and walked next to me. Even when I die, I will pray to God that in my next life, in our new cycle of lives, He will bring us together. Dordzhi.”

From the ending of the letter Dolma felt a certain tranquility, as if some complicated and agonizing question had been settled for her. Hiding the letter in her little girl’s box, she went into the prayer room and, lighting fragrant incense in front of Buddha, knelt before the shrine.

“Gods, the many saints in heaven, the spirit of my mother, give me happiness. Mama, I did not do what my heart wanted, but which could have angered you. So bless me, your favorite daughter. Help me grow to love my husband and be a good wife to him, because he is a good man.”

So Dolma prayed, feeling more and more calmed as she did so.

1936

BASANKA'S BREAKTHROUGH

The Buzava and other Kalmyks lacked medical personnel and facilities before the Civil War in Russia. As if this was not enough, they, as rule, were terribly afraid of vaccination and physicians. Even though the Kalmyks were terrified by the occasional outbreak of smallpox and its ultimate fatal outcome, they nevertheless avoided vaccination in every way possible.

S. Balykov vividly depicts in this story the centuries-old Kalmyk way of facing the smallpox disease, viz., to flee to a man to a safe distance until the 49th day or after the convalescence or the death of the last-stricken family member.

The Ayul village was old. Lost in the vastness of the steppe far from populous *stanitsas*, it lived in its own little world. Firm in their ways and petrified in their customs were the people there. About thirty families, one generation after another, had for ages reared the owner's herd of many thousands of horses. All the village families were criss-crossed with blood and marriage relationships or tied to kind neighbors with ancient knotted bonds. A young boy would appear, grow, and mature as the old people watched, just as the children watched their fathers growing old and their grandfathers decrepit.

It was a long-established practice among the Ayul people not to look far away for brides for their marriageable sons, as long as there were girls in their own village. It was more reliable that way: every girl was known seven generations back, as was every colt that appeared in the herd. But wherever there is water there are storms whose sudden winds make waves in the motionless smoothness and blow noisily through the grasses.

Great grief had overtaken the young herdsman Basanka. It was already a whole year since his father had visited his neighbor Tseren with an offer of marriage and had received a firm refusal, and Basanka thought that there was no girl in the world better than the rosy-cheeked, red-lipped, dark Nime with her luxuriant braids and her wasp waist. All it took was for Nime to play the balalaika at

parties or start a song with her girlfriends and Basanka's mind would cloud over, his heart would almost stop with a scratching pain, shivers would pass through his body, and a lump would get stuck in his throat.

Basanka could not think of life without Nime and the black flame that came from under her thick eyelashes. But Basanka was an unenviable young man. He was too shy, silent, crude of feature, too large for his age, and generally a bumpkin, long the butt of his contemporaries' jokes. So it was no surprise that neither Nime nor her parents thought well of Basanka, although nothing really bad could be said of him.

But where is there a love that comes to terms with a barrier? And Basanka's heart did not do so. He undertook the arrangement of his own fate. Drawing an advance on a whole half year's pay, he dressed himself richly. His boots crackled with their shine. His clothes were of the best material, his belt was of blackened silver. He trained a good mare and to her bit rings attached light rings of twisted steel, which tinkled softly as the elegant mare stepped out.

Alas! No smiles came from Nime, never a tender glance. Basanka had splurged in vain, merely causing people to laugh.

It is not a good thing to call forth a girl's love artificially, by force of sorcery. Such a love is false, unhealthy, and short-lived, bringing no happiness to the couple. It is the same thing as getting somebody drunk and robbing him while he sleeps. But Basanka went in for this too.

He paid a silver ruble to old woman Kozyrikha from the Sysoyev-Krucheny village for a bottle of enchanted well-water so he could give it to Nime and attract her to himself. It did not help. For three rubles, the *Cheprak* Cossack Loktionov put a spell on a pinch of coarse-grained lake salt for him. With great hopes, Basanka secretly slipped this salt in the tea boiling on Tseren's tripod. Nime was severely reprimanded by her mother for oversalting the tea, but the magic did not work in Basanka's favor. As far as he was concerned, Nime's heart was buttoned up to the top as before.

And time went by. There were already rumors that another neighbor, the head herdsman himself, was preparing to approach Tseren's house with an offer. His son Napur, a lad of Basanka's age, had a glorious reputation in the village as a dashing horseman, accurate with the lasso, a dancer, and a gay blade with a handsome

face. In addition he was literate and was preparing to replace his father as head herdsman in time.

At the village parties for young people Basanka often noticed with heavy heart the scarcely perceptible signs of liking between Napur and Nime. When they played "hide the ring," and Napur was the one to do the hiding, the ring most often turned up in Nime's clenched little fist. When it was Napur's turn to dance, Nime would with care and animation play the best tune for him, not repeating it for anybody else. More often than the others they exchanged dances in the course of an evening, and Basanka also noticed that Nime passed the dance on to Napur not any old way, but always with her left shoulder, the one that covered her heart!

Nobody knows how often Basanka cried from sorrow as he sang mournful songs of unrequited love while on night duty with the herd.

When the talk that Nime would become Napur's bride became general throughout the village, Basanka began to thrash about like a ferret in a trap. He heard that in the Russian peasant village of Vorontsovka there was an old Gypsy sorceress who knew all sorts of mysteries. Putting a gold coin in his pocket, Basanka rode there. It was disgusting to look at this Gypsy. With her deeply sunken cat's eyes, her long nose hooked like a beak in her dark, bony face under dirty gray braids, her filthy rags, she seemed a real live she-devil to Basanka, as she sat in her evil-smelling dark little room. But for Nime he was ready to deal with devils. Overcoming his fear and revulsion, he took off his cap, bowed to her, and handed her the gold piece.

"I love Nime and want to marry her, but the girl doesn't want me. Teach me, Grandmother."

"I can do it — it can be done, but ooh how scary it is. Aren't you afraid of dying?"

"I am not afraid. Teach me."

"Go on home, take a leather bag, use a hot awl to make a hole, many many holes, put a live toad in the bag, mount the liveliest horse, find an ant hill in a field, throw the bag with the toad on the ant hill and ride away. If you hear a scream from the toad, you will die on the spot. If you ride away without hearing it, you will live. In fourteen days go back to the ant hill. The bag will contain only the dry bones of the toad. Wrap the left jawbone only in a white

handkerchief and secretly scratch the girl on the left shoulder with it. And the girl will be yours."

In great secrecy and fear, Basanka carried out everything the Gypsy said to do, and finally had the miraculous bone in his pocket. At the next village party, when all the girls sat in a decorous row in front of the bed and Nime was playing the balalaika, Basanka quietly climbed onto the bed. Amid the noise and chatter of the young people, he scratched Nime's left shoulder blade with the toad's jaw. At that moment the girl tossed the balalaika aside, turned sharply, and suddenly snatched the bewitched bone out of Basanka's hand, spat on it three times, and threw it in the fire. It turned out that Nime knew of his intentions and had learned this countermove in advance. And it was true. The sorcery did not work, and Basanka had made a fool of himself in vain.

After that evening Basanka's hope for Nime's love disappeared entirely. He was ashamed even to be seen by her. A few days later she was betrothed to the best bridegroom in the village, Napur, the head herdsman's son.

*

It was stiflingly hot at noon on a summer's day. The Ayul village was in summer quarters. There was not a soul amidst the white and gray truncated cones of the tents. Even the irrepressible gangs of little children had hidden themselves in the shade. The motley cattle and the dark circles of parts of the horse herd were motionless as groups of statues by the mirror-like pond. The steppe butterflies moved in waves on the horizon and the distant burial mounds. Along the dusty roads which girdle the plain, the hills, and valleys of the trans-Don steppe like curving ribbons, brown columns of dust appear suddenly and, taken up by the whirlwind force of stray winds, spiral toward the sky, where they circle lazily. Formless masses of snow-white cotton hang motionless in the blue heavens.

The space, quiet, and calmness of an enchanted, sleepy kingdom!

But signs of life appeared. From one of the tents at the edge of the village there emerged a figure in a long-skirted white garment, wearing a little black round hat, the top of which was bright yellow and diamond-shaped, turned up in front at a sharp angle. The woman walked briskly, swinging her arms, paying no attention to the fact that the skirts of her robe had parted, blowing in the wind

and exposing her broad, black, nankeen drawers. She was in great alarm and could not be bothered by decency.

As soon as she strongly thrust aside the two halves of the red wooden door and entered her tent, a barefoot boy jumped out and ran at full speed toward the pond, his black hair flying. The woman bounded after him and began hurriedly to undo the strings of the tent's canvas.

In a few minutes the alarm had seized the whole village, which until this moment had been resting sleepily. *Tsetsek*, smallpox, had come to the people of Ayul like an evil, uninvited guest. The herdsman Tseren, in search of a three-year-old mare which had run from the herd, had visited many Russian villages and settlements. Somewhere he had caught smallpox, come home, and gone to bed. His wife, according to Kalmyk law, had immediately called for an old woman who had survived the disease, through her informing the whole village of the danger. All the neighbors had to move immediately to a new place far from the infected home, so as not to see the dung-fire smoke, not to hear the dogs barking, and not to drink water from the same spring.

While the panicky adult population of the village was quickly taking down and folding tents, wrapping and packing belongings, bright and fleet-footed little boys, delighted with the sudden turmoil, had already brought in the oxen, hitched them to the low, square-shaped carts, and brought them up to be loaded.

Less than an hour after the alarm had been sounded, the large and wealthy Ayul village was already disappearing over the low hill, amid the yelping of crazed dogs and the roar of worried cattle, the cart wheels squeaking in a cloud of dust from the road. The immune old woman frequently lagged behind the caravan, laying fires as barriers to the "evil disease." Picking bunches of dry grass, she placed them on the road, sprinkled them with pinches of coarse-grained salt, and set fire to them. The little bonfires smoked, bursting into crackling flames to "scare off the *tsetsek* infection," should it think of following the retreating village.

At the old location, amid the village's ashes, only the orphan tent of the miserable, doomed family of Tseren remained. As soon as the village caravan had disappeared over the crest of the hill, Tseren's wife tied an old black robe to the top of a long pole and stuck the pole at the tent door, so that no traveler would visit them by chance.

Tseren himself, raving in delirium, with his face a dark purple, could remember nothing more from this world. He imagined that his spine had turned to lead and that a fire was slowly burning within him, a fire which would melt his lead backbone at any moment, causing his body to fall apart. Noisily he exhaled his fever; he drank water greedily and asked for it to be poured on the melting lead.

His wife and eighteen-year-old daughter Nime cried bitterly, helpless against the "evil disease" that had attacked. They were terrified in the deserted steppe amid the ashes of the large village, face to face with a merciless scourge. They knew that from now on, until 49 days had gone by after the recovery or death of the last member of the family to get sick, while the black flag flew at the tent door, not a living soul would come near them. Not a single traveler, no matter how thirsty, would come in after seeing the sinister flag. Only when smoke ceased to come from the roof opening of the tent in the morning would the neighbors who had moved realize that no healthy person was left in the family and would send a hired *muzhik* to take care of them.

The mother's soul suffered from pity at the fate of her children, especially that of her five-year-old son if both she and her husband should fall victim to the disease before he did. But she was not offended at the villagers. From ancient times, back to the days of Chingis Khan, this had been done in such cases. Their neighbors had followed the law. She only regretted her own fate, praying to God to have mercy not only on them but on the whole village, so that nobody else would suffer such a calamity.

Especially terrifying was the first night amid the ashes of the village. Tseren was going through his last mortal tortures. The orphaned dogs inspired fear with their sob-like barking. Uneasy at the sudden change in ambiance, the cows and calves moored in various tones. Every scream of a night bird over the pond seemed to portend death.

Real, deep love knows no malice or revenge. "If not me, then nobody" is not the voice of love but of insulted self-esteem. Basanka loved Nime truly and deeply, with dog-like devotion. Therefore, when he learned of the misfortune of Tseren's family, he was deeply grieved. When the village had moved off in alarm, he was out on the steppe, on day duty with the herd, and thus he was not able to give

Nime so much as a distant, farewell look. Now that the village had cut itself off from the infected home, one could not even draw close to Tseren's tent. This was not only a question of his own safety, but that of the whole village and his own family. Nobody would have allowed him to visit the place of infection, and if anybody found out that he had done so on his own, he would not be allowed within the sounds of a dog's bark of the village. And in those old times there was not a single Kalmyk who did not experience a mystical fear at the thought of the terrible "pockmarked *tsetsek*."

A son of his society, Basanka feared this death-dealing disease no less than the others. But his heart, drowning out all fear, groaned with pain and love and pulled him toward Nime in her misfortune. For three whole days and for many nocturnal hours, Basanka struggled with himself. His desire to see Nime once again and hear her voice, perhaps for the last time, was so strong that on the fourth morning, directly from night duty with the herd, he rode up to the hill which hid the orphaned tent of Tseren from view.

His first idea was merely to ride to the top and watch for smoke from the tent, in order to let the village know that there still was life in Tseren's family. But seeing the desired dot behind the pink line of the pond, Basanka, unexpectedly even for him, dug his heels into the horse's flanks and rushed off like one possessed, down the hill in the direction of the lone tent. His heart had overcome sense and will power, and he galloped forward to meet the mute and invisible mortal danger. He had no thoughts of what would come later. As if afraid to think, Basanka spurred his stupified horse into ever greater speed.

At a distance of half a *verst* from Tseren's tent, the horse under Basanka snorted and raised its ears. At the same moment the rider sharply pulled his mount up and jumped to the ground. In a small hollow, Nime was digging a hole, weakly throwing out clumps of earth with untrained hands.

Stopping his heavily panting horse, Basanka came up to Nime, greeted her with embarrassment, and silently taking the shovel from her hands, began to dig the hole she had started. Casting a surprised glance at Basanka, Nime walked off to the side and began to cry quietly.

When the boy's head was level with the top of the hole, the girl approached him, saying: "Isn't that enough? I will go to the cows,

get the oxen, and bring Papa here. And you ride away. Don't wait for me. I will cover the grave myself. Hurry up, so that people won't see you. You were very careless in coming here. I hope nothing bad will happen to you."

"No, not that way. I will go for the oxen and you go home," Basanka replied firmly, mounting his horse and riding off toward the cows.

It was only another half *verst* to the tent, but by the time that Nime got home there was a quiet storm in her head that turned over a page in her life. What Basanka had done was unheard of, and the girl understood what a great love had forced this boy, despised by her until now, to overcome his fears and disregard what people would say, and the danger itself. And the one whom she caressed in her soul, calling him the best and most worthy, the one who was so merry and talkative at parties, the horseman and dancer, the desired handsome one — he had not ridden to her aid when she was trying helplessly to dig her father's grave in icy horror and terrible grief, when the whole world had left them alone to await the hour of their death.

Nime's mother was still conscious when Basanka, having chased the oxen from the steppe, hitched them to the wagon, bravely entered the tent, and began to help Nime prepare the deceased for burial. For a person who died of the "evil disease," there is also a special funeral: he is sewn up in thick, smoked canvas and buried deeper than usual without the presence of priests. The general funeral service comes later, after the epidemic has passed.

"Poor Basanka. How did you decide to come? Do people know?"

"Nobody. I came right off night duty. I wanted to see her so badly," Basanka replied, embarrassed, fussing around the body unskillfully. His hands were shaking, sweat pouring from his brow. It was the first time he had touched a human body, and this one had died of the dreaded *tsetsek*.

"Don't even think of going back to the village. Go to the Russian village and come back in a week, when you are sure you have not caught it. Risking yourself is your business, but don't dare to put the village in danger," said the mother.

"I better stay here until the end, otherwise Nime will be in terror, her father dead and you sick. Since I am already here and exposed to the disease, what more is there to fear," Basanka answered,

completing his sewing up of the body.

"You could get sick," Nime put in.

"If that's where the road leads, I'll get sick. What of it?"

"But you are young, poor fellow," the mother said.

"Young but unlucky. Life means nothing to me."

When the deceased was ready to be carried out, the sick mother told Nime to bow in farewell to her father, and then, stifling sobs and breathing heavily, she said:

"Nime, if I die and you stay alive, Basanka is your husband. He is facing death for you. And return to the match-makers what they have spent."

They buried Tseren. Basanka took up residence away from the tent, under the wagon, willingly joined by the newly-orphaned little boy, Tsetsena. Basanka suspended canvas and basketwork from three sides of the wagon. During the day he helped Nime with all her work. It was obvious that they were trying to be together as much as possible and were forgetting about the danger of infection.

Basanka got through to Nime's heart.

Tseren's wife recovered. More importantly, nobody else got sick. After seven times seven days had passed since her recovery, they happily rejoined the village. The whole village rejoiced that the fearful scourge had not left more victims. But Basanka became the village hero. His comrades congratulated him on his victory. Napur did not utter a syllable about his rights as a bridegroom. Tseren's widow gave his family a pair of oxen as reimbursement for their expenses. And in the fall the village noisily celebrated the wedding of Basanka and Nime.

A KALMYK WOMAN'S STORY

The *stanitsa* of Velikoknyazheskaya (Proletarskaya at present) was the seat of the Sal'sk district which comprised 13 Buzava (Don) Kalmyk and two Don Cossack *stanitsas*.

This story depicts another senseless massacre of innocent civilian victims in Civil War.

So many of our people died that winter of 1919, you couldn't count them. I had just started to recover from typhoid, when my husband returned from the Dzungar Regiment and immediately fell ill with relapsing fever. In order to get a doctor's services, I took my husband to Velikoknyazheskaya, rented an apartment, and began to look after him. The doctor treated me at the same time.

The treatment went well. I thought: my husband will soon be out of bed, will take a month's leave, and we'll go home. It had only been half a year since we got married. We had not lived together even for a full month.

February went by. Once at night there was a loud knock on our window and an unfamiliar voice shouted: "Captain Sharmandzhinov! Doctor Rasskazov said to tell you to go to the station right away and get on the train. By morning the town will be in Bolshevik hands. Everybody is leaving!"

He shouted this and disappeared. I was stupified. It was night outside, one might as well have been blind; there was impassable mud in the streets, and not a single acquaintance in town.

I rushed to wake my husband, but he had just had an attack. His temperature was over 100°. He was completely indifferent to my news. He waved his hand and turned his face to the wall. What to do? I woke up the landlady (a good woman she was) gave her a hundred rubles and asked her to get a conveyance to take us to the station. "Charge what you like. The rest is for you."

Less than half an hour later she came back with a dray cart. I dressed my husband, hurriedly packed our baggage, loaded the cart with it. We got in and drove off. The station was overflowing with people! Fights, screams by the railroad car. One after another two trains left loaded with people, but there seemed to be just as

many people left. We hung around the platform until morning. Toward morning we managed to get into a car. "Well, thank God," I thought, "we are finally on our way." But we sat there for an hour, two hours, and our train kept standing there. It was light already. I noticed that there were less people in the car now. I began to worry. Suddenly I saw and heard a Cossack galloping along the train, yelling: "Save yourselves! The train won't leave. The Reds have cut it off! Gentlemen officers, take off your shoulder-straps and cockades!"

How do you like that? Everybody began to groan, fuss around, and hurry out of the cars. I got my husband out too, leaving all our things except a traveling bag with my valuables. We dragged our way through the mud back to the *stanitsa*. Why and where I didn't know. My husband could hardly move his feet. He staggered. I was also still weak but I dragged my husband by his arm. Suddenly I heard a voice from behind a fence: "Friend, take your husband's shoulder-straps off!" I looked, and the insignia were still on his shoulders. I had forgotten to take them off in all that turmoil. I quickly tore them off and trampled them into the mud. Less than twenty paces further I saw a horseman coming right at us. I saw that there was a red star in his cap. "Here is death," I thought.

"Halt! Give me some money!" he yelled, pointing his rifle right at my husband's chest.

"Here, there's some in here," I said and handed him the traveling bag.

He grabbed it and galloped on further. That's how all my valuables were lost. There was a diamond ring there, which my sister Dzhidzhma had given me when I was getting married, and coral earrings, three gold rings, two pairs of gold bracelets, a dozen old gold coins, a gold watch. But at that moment it never occurred to me to grieve over them. Only now I often think: "What if I had not given him the bag? Would he have killed me or not?"

We went on. A covered wagon caught up with us, a young Kalmyk woman of my age leading the oxen. "Sister," I said to her, let me put my sick husband in the wagon and we will retreat together." Not saying a word, she stopped the wagon and helped me put my husband inside. There were two children there, three to five years old. It became a little easier, not so fearful. Suddenly we saw two riders coming toward us.

"Where are you going, the devil take you? Go to the cathedral square. They'll show you how to run after the Cossacks!" They didn't beat us, but cursed us out thoroughly in Russian.

"*Tsob-tsobe!*" we shouted, two women, at the oxen, turning them toward the cathedral.

"Halt! You! Take off your boots!" one of them ordered me. I sat down right in the mud, pulled off my new boots, and gave them to them. They took them and went on. I remained barefoot, mud to my knees, and cold. After a while the Kalmyk woman climbed into the wagon and brought out some men's felt boots. I wiped my feet off and put them on.

A couple of blocks more and — crack! One of the axles had broken in half. We stopped, not knowing what to do now. The owner of the wagon for some reason began to tighten her belt and wrap the whip around the whip handle, with concentration. I climbed in to get my husband out and found him on all fours throwing their things around, searching for something.

"What are you looking for, Badma?"

"My revolver. I won't give myself up alive!"

Here I laughed in spite of myself. It's true what they say, that laughter leaves a person only when he is dead. Here he was looking for his revolver in somebody else's wagon, when it had been left at home.

I dragged him out of the wagon. I looked around. The owner was gone. She disappeared somewhere, but the children remained in the wagon. I still don't know whether they were her children or somebody else's. I grabbed my husband under the arms and took him aside. And the children were crying. I shouted at them that I would come back after I had taken my husband somewhere. We walked and walked, almost to the edge of the *stanitsa*. There was nowhere else to go. We went into the first yard and knocked at the door of the hut. An old man came out. "Grandfather, hide us, rescue us!" I said to him.

He stood there, looking us over, and said:

"I have three sons with the Bolsheviks, fighting you people. But I'm sorry for you. You are young. Follow me."

He led us across the yard and took us to a small, empty mud hut with a large stove in it. "Climb up there," he said, "onto the stove and sit there quietly. If my sons come I will ask them to spare you."

He locked the door and went away. We lay down on the stove, covering ourselves from the world with a dry cowhide which was there. We waited. Our lips mechanically whispered the words of prayer. Somewhere cannon began to boom and machine guns rattle. At last night was falling. All day nobody looked into our hut. Only just before evening somebody came in, took off his ammunition, threw his rifle on our cowhide and sat down right there to relieve himself. A surprising thing: I'm trembling with fear that he will discover us, and then the end. But when he got up, noisily letting out air, I was hardly able to keep from laughing. Finally he left without discovering us under the hide.

It was dusk when the old man came back, bringing a piece of black bread, an eighth of a pound of bacon, and said that the Reds had already occupied the *stanitsa*. It was a rout. His sons had not come and nobody had been billeted with him. "Lie here until morning, and then I will take you to the commander and ask him not to shoot you," he concluded and left.

A long, dark, horrible night. The shots in the *stanitsa* went on all night. Only toward morning did everything grow quiet. It was just dawning when the old man came and said: "The Reds have left. There are no troops in the *stanitsa*. Maybe yours will come back." Again he gave us bread and bacon. It was an astonishing thing: there had been times that neither chicken, nor sour milk, nor butter, nor soft-boiled eggs were digestible by our capricious stomachs, and here hard bread and raw lard went down better than anything.

After two or three hours, the old man returned and said: "You can come out now. Your people have come back." Not really believing him, we went outside. At that moment a mounted Cossack rode into the yard and said, with such sympathy:

"Well, how did you stay alive? Didn't those damned Reds do anything to you?"

I rushed at him, grabbed his horse by its mane, and screamed with sobs.

I had never experienced such joy in my life.

Leaving my husband with our savior, giving him my husband's fur coat and promising to bring him a cow with a calf, I went to look at our wagon of the day before. I found it quickly. The oxen were gone. Broken trunks lay around the wagon and here and there robes

and hats of the Kalmyk women. Suddenly I screamed with fear: under the wagon lay yesterday's children, naked as piglets, with heads smashed in and intestines exposed.

I rushed away from them, running off toward the side. I ran into a lone woman who said: "Go to the cathedral square. The damned Bolsheviks killed a lot of your people there and they haven't been taken away yet. Maybe somebody close to you is there." I went there, trembling. I came to the square: lots of carts stood without horses or oxen, Kalmyk trunks were all over the place as well as all kinds of clothes, and between the carts, either alone or in groups, lay the naked bodies of men, women, and children. One man's brains had drained out, another's insides had been let out, everywhere there was blood, blood, blood. Hungry dogs roamed about. I was nauseated, feverish. I ran away.

Suddenly I heard someone's voice. I turned around: in front of her covered wagon sat a young Kalmyk woman rocking a bloody, dead child in her arms. And she was all smeared with mud, bare-headed — no hat — and was smiling blissfully at the sky, softly singing a Kalmyk lullaby. She never even looked at me.

It was getting frosty. Powdery snow fell. The frozen ground began to grip the bodies of the dead.

I had many long nightmares of this scene later, and even now when I think of it I shiver.

THE DUEL

This is one of three short stories with the first person narrator, a teen-age boy not further identified.

With his shapely and strong legs, handsomely and powerfully built, with his motley hide and beautifully spread yellow-white lacquered-looking horns, our four-year-old bull, "Burul," was my favorite and my pride. Not only was he the most beautiful animal in our village herd, but he was the strongest of all of them, the champion of our herd two years running.

"It's dangerous to tangle with our Burul, he can knock any other one aside," I used to say proudly when one of the local bulls, at the height of springtime excitement, tried to get into a fight with him. And it was a fact that Burul, as if understanding my boasts, always accepted any challenge with elegant dignity. It was enough for any bull to sound a roar of combat for Burul to emit a calm, bass roar in reply, pawing the ground once or twice with his front hooves, sharpening his horns on the ground quickly and energetically and also mixing grass with earth to smear on his cheeks. Thus prepared he would boldly approach the mischief-maker. A few yards away he would snort thunderously to the point of whistling with his spreading nostrils and, coiling his muscular body like a spring and bending his head low, he would take a picturesque stance in front of his opponent, piercing him with the glare of his cruel eyes, barring his way in frozen anticipation, ready to meet blow for blow at any second.

The opponent, if he was from our village herd and had experienced the strength of my Burul, usually cooled off, immediately becoming silent, and began to wave his tail in an embarrassed manner and pass by after carefully sniffing the savage champion and shaking his head once or twice as if to say, "No point tangling with you."

If the enemy happened to be from another herd with no knowledge of Burul's strength and agility, this dare-devil would back off with the speed of a bullet after he had experienced one or two blows of my champion's iron brow and would run off home in panic, never again to show himself in our herd.

Burul was a knight. He was not cruel to the defeated. He never followed a beaten enemy. Having achieved one of his usual victories, he would let out a roar of triumph for the sake of form and calmly begin to graze, looking over his large herd with alert eyes, the herd in which he had grown up and occupied the leading place through his own worthiness.

But once "the scythe hit a rock." From the herd at the horse-breeding station a brave occupier, an insatiable lady-killer and tower of strength, invaded Burul's territory. His position and authority would have to undergo a severe test.

The interloper was a large animal, clumsy, dark red in color, with thick shining black horns which were somewhat short for his size but sharp. He was terrifying. He was a year or two older than our Burul and his whole posture expressed self-confidence and calmness.

The local bovine beauties, immediately assessing the worth and happy with the possibility of diversity, began to circle around him. The weak-willed males of the herd, many of whom had a grudge against Burul, began to ingratiate themselves obligingly with the newcomer, hoping to eat Burul's remains.

Burul, having sensed danger, at first pretended not to notice the uninvited guest. But when he started a flirtation with Burul's sweetheart of the moment, Burul could not stand it and issued a roar of challenge. The interloper replied. The rivals got themselves ready, and after the long ceremonies required by the etiquette of bulls, they collided bravely. The mighty horns made cracking sounds as they met; the fighters snorted with tension, their protruding eyes filling with blood; clumps of virgin soil flew from under the hooves of their tense legs.

For us witnesses of this duel, a dozen sun-burned barefoot village boys, it became clear that the red bull was a strong fighter and worthy opponent for our Burul. I became pale. My heart beat faster, and I mentally called on all our numerous gods to help my favorite.

In the first few seconds, the confident Burul, spoiled by his many victories, took the initiative and forced the newcomer to retreat by bracing his hind legs powerfully and smashing his opponent with blows of his hard forehead. But it looked like his enemy was not only strong but experienced in battle. Jumping backward for a short distance, he skillfully pulled himself together and aimed his left

horn at Burul's forehead. Not expecting such a maneuver and flushed with success, Burul hit the sharp horn with his forehead with full force, ripping the skin above his eye to the bone. The wound started to bleed. He made a slight sound, lost the rhythm of his attack, and for an instant let up on his pressure. Not losing a second, the red bull delivered two skillful blows at Burul, one after the other, and hooked his strong horns under his throat. Then, lifting his opponent a bit, he rolled him backwards. The situation became hopeless. My favorite took to his heels with a groan of suffering. The winner pursued him energetically. When he caught up to him he delivered a few contemptuous blows under his tail before letting him go with a shake of his hot head.

My despair had no limits. My comrades, although their village pride had been hurt, laughed at me, remembering my boastful statements, and mercilessly criticised my Burul's mistakes. In their hearts I guess they were maliciously delighted.

I guess Burul himself was no less shaken up than I was. He ran out into the steppe instead of returning to his herd, not knowing where he was going, as if he was emigrating beyond the borders of his country. The red bull, by right of conquest, took over Burul's whole household, becoming king of his herd and unceremoniously began to flirt with the best lady of the herd, the beautiful white-legged, whitish-red four-year-old "Avga."

That evening I went to bed without my supper, complaining of a headache. Burul spent the night in the steppe alone, somewhere among the distant ravines. In the morning he did not rejoin his herd. When I found him and made him get up, he went over to the far end of the pond, a sad expression on his wrinkled face, drank a little water, and lay down on the bare, dusty shore. He lay there the whole day, rolling in the dust, not eating so much as a single tuft of grass, only quenching his thirst with a few mouthfuls of water.

I understood that my Burul did not recognize his defeat as final and was preparing for revenge, for the liberation of his herd from the conqueror. Flies settled on his wounded forehead. He shook his head helplessly. I ran home immediately and brought back a mixture of stove soot and sour cream to dress his wound so no maggots would settle into it.

He lay there for two days and a night. On the evening of the second day, as his native herd was returning to the village under the

leadership of the red bull, he got up, issued a brave challenge to the impudent interloper, and started a fight. With the first embittered blows the red bull understood that his strong, roan rival had been in training and would be tireless. After five or six equally devastating blows from Burul, the red interloper sought safety in flight. This time my knight ignored his usual chivalry and was cruel. He chased his defeated enemy and, giving him no chance to recover, rained blows at him in the same place in which he himself had been attacked at the end of the first fight with the red bull.

My chest heaved and my heart was full of joy at the brilliant revenge achieved by my fighter. He returned to his herd after his involuntary absence as a harsh ruler. The perfidiously traitorous cows received their master meekly. Avga the beauty, who had tired of the rough newcomer, was the first to approach Burul, intending to give the winner's forehead a lick with her warm tongue, but he wearily butted her with the end of a horn and turned away from her with indifference.

But the red bull was not one to come to terms quickly with defeat. He felt the equal strength of his opponent and the tirelessness of his youth, but he apparently knew his own experience and the advantage of the way his horns grew. He also spent about three days in seclusion, taking no food and only slightly quenching his thirst as he prepared for a third encounter.

I awaited their next meeting with alarm. It occurred on the morning of the third day. This morning battle gave me some hope, because during the night my Burul had had the chance to rest from his daytime labors, and more importantly, he had been able to chew and digest the grass with which his gut was loaded. But alas! My Burul was beaten again and fled precipitously after receiving two light wounds in his neck and thigh. Again he lay down, preparing for the fourth battle.

The affair promised to drag out. This happens when bulls feel their strength to be equal and if they are not separated by several dozen *versts*, they get so tired from fighting that they cease to be useful in their natural function. Our rivals were matched just this way in strength and stubbornness. After some intense thought, I understood the reason for the defeat and even found a way to help my favorite. And that same night, unnoticed by anyone, a little human slyness was added to the strength and agility of Burul.

As if he understood the improvement in his chances, Burul got up a little earlier, and when the red conqueror was self-importantly returning from the pasture, his stomach stuffed with grass, Burul took him on some distance from the village.

The triumph was complete. Burul only needed to strike two blows at the red bull's forehead for the latter to take flight, bloodied and roaring wildly. My conqueror pursued again. This time, catching his enemy, he toppled him with a strong downward slash of his left horn to his stomach. Not giving him a chance to get up, Burul butted him twice in the belly, each time sinking his awl-sharp horns almost to their full length into his enemy's body.

The red interloper did not stand up. He remained prone, letting out deep, strained sighs. White, punctured intestines appeared out of his thrice-wounded belly. Burul's enemy was destroyed forever. His rebellious soul went off to seek a new incarnation. The winner gave off a triumphal roar as he made his ceremonial progress among his family, where he was respectfully sniffed by many of his fellow citizens in the herd and licked by the rough tongue of his aging mother.

The red bull's condition was hopeless. The men who ran up to him finished him off and ordered the village women to make preparations. The blood-red sun set behind the far steppe horizon and the cliff-like black clouds which promised bad weather, while the village women, surrounded by children and dogs, cut up the cooling body of the red invader.

It was a quiet, warm, moonlit spring evening. Thousands of pale stars could be seen through the upper opening of the tent. Lively voices sounded in neighboring tents, and the sobs and cries of children. Off to the side of the village the dogs were fighting bitterly. . . .

THE STINGY KHAN

A Kalmyk Folktale

This short story is actually a Kalmyk folktale having no reference to any specific time or place.

Once upon a time in olden days there lived a khan famous for his stinginess. Nobody called him by name. It was enough to say "the stingy khan," and everybody knew which khan was the subject of conversation. Nobody ever received a good present in his palace, because he had selected courtiers even more stingy than himself.

Once three smart men got together and decided to get a present out of the khan through intelligence and slyness. They came to the palace and sat in their appointed places, bowing low to the khan.

Since the guests did not dare speak first in the presence of the khan, he began the conversation. As is known, the khan may speak of anything he likes to his subjects.

"You there, sitting in the highest place, tell me why your hair is gray but your moustache is black."

"Your Majesty, my whiskers are exactly twenty years younger than my hair, and it is not yet time for them to turn gray," replied the guest.

"A witty answer, a good man," the khan thought with pleasure.

"You there, the next one. Why is your moustache gray when your hair is still black?"

"Your Majesty, I have a lazy horse, a negligent wife, and a blunt knife. Therefore I often get upset and I twirl my moustache in agitation. So the roots of my whiskers have weakened and they have become prematurely gray."

"Also a resourceful answer, not bad! It's good to have such intelligent subjects," thought the khan, now in a good mood.

"And you, the third one, why do you have neither moustache nor beard? Your face looks like it was scalded with boiling water. You are not young, after all, are you?"

"Your Majesty, I inherited my brain and character from my father, but, so as not to insult my mother, I got my face from her. That is why I have no moustache or beard," the third guest replied.

"Wonderful men, really intelligent!" the khan rejoiced and in a spasm of joy ordered a bag of gold to be poured for them. In vain did the stingy courtier wink and bite his lips at the khan. The order of a

khan, given publicly, must be obeyed without fail.

Burdened with a big and expensive present, the three smart men went home. But the stingy courtier was still upset. He decided to get the khan's present back somehow, and galloped after them.

Seeing the khan's treasurer following them, one of the smart men lagged back, sending the other two home with their burden.

Nearing the one in the rear, the courtier, without any long discussions, said rudely:

"The khan ordered me to ask you three questions, and if you don't answer them, I am ordered to take the present back. And so, tell me: how high is the sky?"

"One verst," said the smart man, without a moment's thought.

"Why?"

"Because the voice of heaven, thunder, is heard by us, and I think that our voices are heard in heaven too. This means that the distance does not exceed one verst."

The courtier could find nothing to say to this.

"Well tell me," he continued, "how great is the distance between the rising place of the sun and the place it sets?"

"A day's walk."

"Why?"

"Because the sun comes up in the morning, moves without hurrying, and reaches the place it sets exactly in time for evening."

Again the courtier could find no retort. He wrinkled his brow and asked decisively:

"Answer me, what are the vicissitudes of fate?"

"Oh, just before your appearance my friends and I were discussing this question. Let me have your horse, Sir. I will catch up to them, ask them what they have decided, and will tell you when I return."

The courtier dismounted and gave his horse to the smart man. He got on it, rode off a couple of dozen yards, and then asked the treasurer of the stingy khan:

"Tell me, a minute ago did you think that you would find yourself alone on the steppe without a horse, food, anything to drink?"

"No, and what of it?"

"So, now it is happening to you. That is exactly what the vicissitudes of fate are," said the smart man, digging his heels into the flanks of the horse and disappearing into the distance.

IN THE VALLEY OF SNOW LEOPARDS: A LEGEND

Translated from the Russian Language,
with an Introduction and Critical Notes,
by Arash Bormanshinov

In the eternal city of Khan-Balu,¹ the presence chamber of the Chinese Emperor glittered with sky-blue azure, the silver of stars and mother-of-pearl. The throne was carved from redwood, and the hand of a marvelous master had adorned it with gold, ivory and turquoise. Draped in purple silk, the aged sovereign of the Celestial Empire² sat solemnly on the throne's soft velvet pillow. On either side, two of his counsellors sat in stiff poses at little tables on soft fluffy carpets from Samarkand;³ they were old men grown wise from experience. In front of them there lay rolled-up leaves of parchment, India ink in a golden vial and goose quills. Clothed in brocade Oriental robes, snow-white, wide-brimmed felt hats, and with long and curved sabers on their shoulders, sentries froze in pairs, like lifeless statues at the door.

Today the Chinese Emperor was receiving the Torghut⁴ khan, Ovshi,⁵ with his most prominent *noyons*,⁶ who led their people into his patronage from the faraway West, from under the rule of the White Czar of Moscow.⁷

A tense silence reigned in the presence chamber. On an ebony etagere, filled with a great number of books in multicolor decorated leather bindings, golden sand ran into an hour glass trimmed with large pearls along its ruby edges. Casting a glance at the clock, the emperor picked up a small silver handbell with his idly stretched out hand. In response to the delicate jingle, a tinkle of a gong resounded somewhere. Sentries in pairs drew to attention, presenting their sabers. A tramping was heard, and then the guests came in sight.

Behind the sixteen-year-old Ovshi Khan⁸ arrived slender and tanned Torghut *noyons*, gently stepping with red blunt-nosed Morocco boots on high heels, all dressed in black silk *beshmets*⁹ with gold-trimmed collars, tightened with sky-blue wool sashes and with curved light sabers on one side. With their slender waists and

brilliantly black bobbed and combed back hair, the steppe horse-men formed a sharp contrast with their measured tread to the wax-faced long-haired Chinese, so clumsy in movement.

Immediately behind the young Ovshi Khan, almost at his side, entered a dark-browed, black-moustached middle-aged *noyon* with a daring and open look and energetic motion. At once the old emperor guessed that he was the real leader of the Torghuts, that very same skillful military leader and clever politician who, after the hundred-year stay¹⁰ of the Torghuts in Russian servitude, succeeded in stiffening the spirit of his people, enforcing the decision for an exodus, and led them through thousands of obstacles across all of Asia with some bold schemes in his head: "And so this is the very same Tsebek-Dordji,"¹¹ determined the emperor of China, once again taking in at a glance his well-proportioned figure with the dimmed but experienced gaze of his narrow eyes.

Having laid down his gifts before the emperor's throne as a token of respect, the young Ovshi Khan sat to the right of the throne, beneath him five venerable elderly *noyons*. Having also deposited his own presents, Tsebek-Kordji occupied a place to the left of the throne, and beneath him twelve *noyons*, young military leaders.

The emperor cast an inquiring glance at his advisers, rightly guessing something awry in this division of his guests. Tsebek-Dordji, the only Torghut *noyon* who had succeeded in learning Chinese, was the first to ask the emperor for permission to speak.

"We, the Torghuts, the lesser brothers of your people, have arrived in the kingdom of your imperial worship after having torn free of the strong claws of the Russian eagle, covered the depths of transient streams, broken through the files of numerous enemies, and traversed a far distance. The Torghut khan and the *noyons* respectfully bow their heads before you, and wish the Almighty of the Empire everlasting protection from the numerous gods. Being at the present happy moment in a fairy-tale presence chamber of your palace, in the eternal city of Khan-Balu, we consider ourselves as having reached that glittering star which beckoned us to it both in the darkness of the nights and amidst the roar of battles." Tsebek-Dordji spoke with clarity, bowing his head picturesquely and putting the palm of his right hand to his heart.

"I welcome you, khan of the Torghuts, and you, *noyons* and steppe heroes. Your feelings are pleasing to me. I have a great joy seeing

and hearing the renowned *noyon*, Tsebek-Dordji, the rumor of whose name long ago foreshadowed his arrival, touching upon my ears ... Tell me, glorious Tsebek-Dordji, about your amazing marches, how did you escape the Russian troops, how was your journey, was there much fighting with the enemies, how did you disperse their combat cavalry charges, how many of you have left, and how many have arrived in good health," the emperor of China inquired in a kindly voice.

Easily, coherently and eloquently, while all around strained to listen with total attention, Tsebek-Dordji recounted the legendary march of the Torghuts from the banks of the Volga river up to the Chinese border.¹² With animation he also recalled recent encounters with numerous enemies on their long and arduous journey. He told with tears in his eyes about the sufferings of his people from thirst and hunger, about their many deaths, about the crafty designs of enemies who had poisoned water along their way. ...

The Chinese Emperor listed attentively, his eyes screwed up and his head drooped to one side. The frozen counsellors listened, their narrow eyes fixed caustically on the face of Tsebek-Dordji, endeavoring not to miss a word. For a long time Tsebek-Dordji narrated, now hotly and loudly, now in a low voice and sorrowfully. He skillfully closed one of the most vivid pages in the history of the Mongolian people, graphically underscoring his humble but courageous people's irreconcilability to submission and vassalage.

"... But we have come exhausted in spirit and body and impoverished. Many of us have nothing to eat, and have no means to start a new life under your patronage. We need aid. We should rest for a decade at peace so that we may restore our former spirit, former economy, replace our human losses, and only then we can be useful to your empire. We have come, preferring to be your faithful subjects rather than those of an alien czar.¹³ We anticipate your gracious royal consideration and your regard for the khan and the *noyons* of the Torghuts as your younger brothers," Tsebek-Dordji concluded his narrative.

The Chinese Emperor plunged in a deep reverie, listening to the tale of the Torghut hero. He had known for a long time that this steppe wolf had led out his people with no such good resolutions. He was also aware of the belligerent schemes of Tsebek-Dordji, his longing to reconquer from the Chinese the old homeland of the

Torghuts, Dzungaria, which was devastated by them. He awaited them as dangerous enemies, his troops ready.

But today they were asking for protection. They had come with lowered heads.

“The heaven protects the everlasting empire. With a wave of my hand I could extirpate these people as a remainder of my sworn enemies, the Dzungars.¹⁴ But need that be? An exhausted Tsebek-Dordji requested help from his intended foe . . . He was doing right: as a true and clever politician, he correctly understood the situation and took a new decision, the only one possible in the present state of affairs. I shall take a no less sensible step; I will populate the uninhabited expanses with these nomads and cattlemen, fill the fields with their flocks of sheep and herds of horses, our market-places with meat, and they will be good cavalymen for the army. I will give them help. I will give them refuge, and they will be useful to my empire,” the old emperor pondered.

There was a great deal of truth in what Tsebek-Dordji said, and the emperor realized that the Torghuts had lost their strength for a long time and yearned for a peaceful life. They had lost much of their strength over the course of the past one hundred years in Russia’s wars, left behind part of their people, and carried out continuous clashes throughout the entire journey here during the last four years.¹⁵

At a signal of the emperor, unnoticeable to outsiders, one of the advisers ordered that the guests be served. The ceremonious Chinese meal with countless and dainty dishes, of which the unassumed Torghut aristocrats did not have any notion, lasted a long time. But the Chinese Emperor sat the whole time, deep in thought.

Tsebek-Dordji’s intent eyes noticed two prickly black pupils were sparkling at him through a slit in the two silk curtains of the canopy above the throne, from behind the shoulders of the emperor. The curious mocking gaze of the eyes told him that a young woman was looking at him. Encountering the gaze of Tsebek-Dordji, her eyes rushed about in fright, vanished from his sight but soon cropped up again . . .

Towards the end of the feast, interrupting the restrained conversation of the guests and the hosts who were entertaining them, the Chinese Emperor began to speak: “I grant out of my own herd each

impoverished Torghut family a milch cow, a pair of sheep, and riding horse. I shall order that every month the *noyons* be paid one hundred liang¹⁶ from the state treasury, and I bestow upon each of them a horse with a saddle and ten milch cows from my house-keeping. I exempt the Torghuts from taxes forever. I order that in the course of a month each soul be issued a sufficient ration of flour or rice. For the time being let your people cross the border and move into the empire and I and my counsellors will meanwhile choose a suitable space for them."

The Chinese Emperor lapsed into silence. Tsebek-Dordji stood up and thanked him for his generosity and tender heart. A silence fell in the presence chamber. Fearing that the Chinese Emperor might rise from his throne, Tsebek-Dordji asked permission to speak. Nodding his assent, the emperor began to listen. "A dispute has arisen among us which can be settled only by you: who will rule over the people? Five years ago,¹⁷ I led my people in their exodus from Russia. Under my leadership they have surmounted all obstacles en route. All the fighting was won by me. Since then I have been the soul and mind of my people. My people have become accustomed to my rule and are content with it. And they wish to see me further as their head ... But now, when we have freed ourselves from misfortunes and came to your emperor's blessed kingdom, Ovshi Khan wants to dismiss me and to govern the *uluses*¹⁸ himself. My people, after all, stand up for me and are disturbed. But I am of the same stock as Ovshi Khan.¹⁹ I could have forced him to relinquish his rights, but I am tired of our discord over the rule. We have also suffered much under the Russian czar because of this. Therefore, I resolved to submit this controversy for your judgement. Whatever you determine, let it be so forever," Tsebek-Dorkji finished in a visible agitation.

"... An eternal rivalry of the steppe aristocracy ... which only ruins the people's might, the very people. These arguments began as far back as Dzungaria a century ago,²⁰ and they did not cease even in the far West.²¹ The steppe aristocracy brought them back to Asia, but the people have already become impoverished and exhausted; they perished ingloriously, and are scattered all over the world ... By this time, there was almost nothing to contend for ... An unfortunate people, a kind and courageous people, while a many-headed ruling clique was unable to get life going, like a

many-headed serpent not able to get through a hole." The Chinese Emperor thought sadly, knitting his brow in displeasure with the Kalmyk aristocracy. After Tsebek-Dordji, he wished to hear out Ovshi Khan.

"I was too young²² to direct battles and lead the exodus of the Torghts from Europe to Asia, but without my order my people would not have followed the *noyon* Tsebek-Dordji. He acted in my name. He was given the authority by me, on the advice of my wise and old uncle, Danzan-Balvar.²³ Now Tsebek-Dordji has concluded his business, and I have forgiven him his twelve grave crimes²⁴ because of his merits and relieved him of his responsibilities. Now I can already govern my own khanate myself with the help of my experienced uncle, Danzan-Balvar. But Tsebek-Dordji has incited the people against me—all the *noyons* and commanders. The only ones who have remained loyal to me are these four advisers of my father and uncle. I beg you, gracious emperor, to protect my throne against an illegal seizure," Ovshi Khan declared with a firm voice through an interpreter.

A painful silence fell. The Chinese Emperor kept silent with a thoughtful air, examining his long rose-varnished nails. At last, he raised his head and said with a bored voice: "Let the *noyon* Tsebek-Dordji rule the Torghtut people as before until the Torghtut Khanate settles in a permanent place.²⁵ There might still be affairs in the future in which experience will be necessary. And afterwards I shall look into your problem." Giving all to understand that the audience was over, a senior counsellor directed that the guests be served with fragrant water for rinsing. In a taciturn throng the Torghtut *noyons* left the place of the Chinese Emperor, divided into two irreconcilable parties.

II

In the presence chamber of the Chinese Emperor sparkled hundreds of candle lights in golden and silver candelabra of the most whimsical form. All the advisers, courtiers and the supreme commander had been assembled. The issue was being resolved as to who of the two litigant parties was to rule over the new subjects, the Torghts.

The sovereign of the Celestial Empire did not need to raise his

voice. Every whisper of his lips must be heard by those surrounding him. He spoke in a low and measured voice, with a tone of complete indifference. But the old Chinese Emperor was obviously taking the side of the sensible and energetic Tsebek-Dordji, who expended so much trouble to move his people from under the power of the Moscovite czar. He enumerated the merits of Tsebek-Dordji at great length, and characterized him to the best advantage. He mentioned the forthcoming affairs, the impossibility of a peaceful coexistence between Ovshi Khan, without authority, and the popular Tsebek-Dordji, and the necessity of choosing one of them once and for all. The emperor could not categorically express his opinion at the council. He had to listen to the unhampered opinion of his counselors and must always be prepared to accept sensible advice, even if it conflicted with his own opinion.

At the official meeting, summoned by the Chinese Emperor himself, the advisers, according to a millennial tradition, expressed their opinions freely and boldly, without fear of the emperor's wrath.

After the proposal of the emperor to offer advice, the oldest and most venerable counsellor took the floor persuasively: "In such a crucial point of our national life, we cannot break our ancient lawful tradition. We cannot dethrone a legitimate khan in favor of a man of great ambition, even if he is the most clever and able. This will be a revolution, and it will transgress a normal current of people's psychology. For every dethroner there will be another dethroner, and the people will become profligate in an internecine struggle of ambitious men. The Torghut people have been suffering for a long time from the discords of their own aristocracy, and it is time for this people to find a peaceful life under the patronage of the Chinese Emperor. Ovshi Khan, although he is young, seems to be intelligent. He will be grateful for the support of his legitimate claim. Tsebek-Dordji is an ambitious man. When it is necessary he will remind the Torghuts that they were bellicose Mongols, of whom not long ago we had annihilated one million souls.²⁶ Such people as Tsebek-Dordji have always been dangerous for the state tranquility, if such an uneasy and warlike people as the Torghuts were in their hands. In my opinion, Tsebek-Dordji should be taken into our own hands here, given high ranks and awards, and a command of one of our armies. Let him with his talent enhance the glory of our

emperor. I pray to the gods that they inspire our emperor with a sound decision in this matter. To my thinking, there is a need for Ovshi Khan's and his descendants' confirmation in his khanate."

The opinion of the great council on the Torghut issue was equally divided. In such cases, the Chinese Emperor zealously prayed to the gods one evening and the next morning made a decision alone.

III

The pleasant smell of an incense-burner spread from the chapel of the Chinese Emperor. An icon-lamp twinkled in front of the gods. The sovereign of the Celestial Empire bowed zealously, begging for a sage solution of the problem. A pale dark-browed slender young lady in a yellow silk kimono came softly up to the door of the chapel, wearing tiny Morocco slippers. She peeped through a chink at the praying emperor and began to wait.

The daughter of the Chinese Emperor, a seventeen-year-old beauty, was the spoiled favorite of her father and a curious child. She interfered in everything and knew everything, unlike her brother, the successor to the throne, who was interested only in music and chess.²⁷ Therefore, she mixed with her father more frequently than anyone else.

Leaving the praying room and seeing his daughter, the old emperor smiled tenderly and patted her shining black hair, saying: "Why don't you sleep? Did you hear our debate today, eaves-dropper?"

"Yes, my father, I listened to and I was interested to learn what decision my father will take after his prayer."

"I held to original opinion: I shall give the khanate to Tsebek-Dordji. I liked him very much. Did you see him the day before yesterday? . . . That's the very same person who spoke our language. He is such a fine fellow, a genuine chief, a man with brains and a heart . . ."

"Oh father, your decision made me so glad. I could not tear my gaze from his face looking through the curtains . . . Make him a khan!"

"Go to bed, foolish little girl! Do not speak such words to your father! My daughter cannot become the wife of a destitute nomad, a barbarian. Keep these words well in your whimsical mind!" The

emperor gave an angry cry and shook his bony finger at her. He guessed what his daughter wanted to say and, therefore, responded sharply to her.

Covering her face with her palms, his daughter ran to her bedroom to shed maiden tears all night. It seldom happened that a young Chinese girl spoke for herself in a matter of marriage but if that happened, then a disaffirmation of her decision did not take place. But the daughter of the Chinese Emperor was not accustomed to contradiction. Her wishes had always been fulfilled. She caught sight of Tsebek-Dordji, and felt a pang in her heart from his covert glance.

"My father does not want me to marry a steppe hero with a slender build and an eagle eye, so he will lose his beloved daughter. Without Tsebek-Dordji the world is dark for me," she made up her mind, and from the next morning on she refused food and beverage, not getting up from her bed. Her father was informed. The Chinese Emperor knew the reason for her caprice, but he was not aware of his daughter's determination.

"Well, if that's the case, then let Tsebek-Dordji not even be a Torghut khan but a shabby nomad *noyon*, the overseer of a dozen felt nomad tents and a herd of horses. He won't see the khan's throne, and he will not set foot in my palace so that he won't disturb the peace of my daughter's heart," the Chinese Emperor resolved and summoned his senior adviser to announce to him his decision on the Torghut issue.

"The Torghuts should be settled in Qara Shahr. Their *uluses* are to be divided up in such a way that both mountains and rivers would be between them, and not less than seven day's journey on a horse.²⁸ The *ulus* of Tsebek-Dordji is to be settled in the valley of the snow leopards. Let them breed fur-bearing animals themselves. Let this Tsebek-Dordji go reconnoitering first, if he is a true hero, and bring to us the hides of snow leopards as a gift," the Chinese Emperor added with a smile.

IV

Many days passed. The daughter of the Chinese Emperor had been fasting persistently and was on the verge of death. From exhaustion she hardly moved her arms, her voice could scarcely be heard, and she did not touch any food or beverage. The Chinese

Emperor was in great emotional distress but it was already too late to yield to the capricious girl. The entire court knew about the controversy between the father and the daughter, and the question as to who would give in—the emperor or his daughter—was on everybody's mind.

Grieving from his failure and not comprehending the reason for his resentment, Tsebek-Dordji journeyed to the distant and unknown valley of the snow leopards, where his *ulus* was to be located. He already regretted that he had led his people away from Russia.²⁹ He realized that he had overturned the scale of his people's fate, scattered his people, and led them from yoke to noose ...

'It's a pity, it is a pity! I made such a mistake that it cannot be corrected ... The Cossack *ataman*³⁰ was right when he dissuaded me from my thought of leaving and offered a secret alliance for a common defense against enemies ... We should have stayed behind on the Volga river, maintained friendship with the Cossacks and the Nogai,³¹ and at an opportune moment recovered our freedom ... And let the wild beasts tear me to pieces in the valley of the snow leopards rather than I should resign myself alive and see the smiles of my enemies," Tsebek-Dordji thought with bitterness, flicking the lash in his hand ...

In the mountains of Qara Shahr lay the valley of the snow leopards, a desert abode of predatory animals forced out here from all the densely populated corners of China. Especially known were the local snow leopards, after whom this valley was named. Through a narrow and deep mountain gorge, the Torghut *noyon*, Tsebek-Dordji, entered the valley of the snow leopards after having decided to die with fortitude, if he had to.

All day long he shot tigers, piercing their hearts with his arrow, without miss, and opening their skulls with his sword made from black steel. He inspired fear among all the beasts, and hoisted two hides onto his horse and rode back. He brought the hides as a gift to the emperor and his counsellor. His rare present was accepted, but he was not invited to the palace, and the victor of the snow leopards was not even treated to a glass of rice drink *tete-a-tete* with the sovereign ...

Many times the family of the Chinese Emperor attempted to reconcile the daughter and her father but all was in vain.

“Let her reconcile her reckless idea. The daughter of the Chinese Emperor, the sovereign of the eternal empire, cannot be the wife of a shabby nomad.³² *Noyon* Tsebek-Dordji is suited to be my herdsman,” the father repeated over and over again.

“Let him give me in marriage to Tsebek-Dordji, the best of all men, to whom the thrones of the world are accessible. He is a fine man, and worthy of the best woman. My father had a high opinion of him but he has changed his attitude toward him, having learned about my love. Father is not right,” the daughter repeated over and over again.

On the seventeenth day, she felt the breath of death above her head. She directed that her father be called so that he would hear out her last request. The aged Chinese Emperor felt depressed when he saw his favorite, and he was sorry for her. He saw that his daughter was dying.

“Let Tsebek-Dordji ride by my window. I want to cast a glance at him for the last time,” the daughter whispered with a weak voice in her father’s ear as he bent forward to her. The father was plunged in a reverie over his dying daughter and began to cry . . . He thought for a while and then gave orders: “Call this Tsebek-Dordji and let him ride by the window of my daughter, one hundred cubits from my palace . . .”

And the Torghut hero replied to the messenger: “Tell your khan that an eagle, even with broken-off wings, is nevertheless an eagle, and it does not behoove a good man to mock him . . . Tell him that Tsebek-Dordji has never been a plaything for others . . .”

But having learned from the messenger that it was the wish of the beautiful daughter of the Chinese Emperor, dying of love for him, he turned his horse and fulfilled her wish.

“He is a fine man, like a new sandalwood tree,” murmured the daughter of the emperor, and her head fell lifelessly on the pillow . . .

NOTES

These notes follow a sequential order of narration, page by page. All Russian Cyrillic proper names, place-names, titles, etc. have been transliterated according to the Library of Congress system of transliteration with a slight modification, viz., the omission of diacritic signs and ligatures.

1 Khan-Balu, nicknamed the eternal city in this legend, is Khan-Balyq (Khan's City), Marco Polo's Cambaluc or Kanbalu, cf. PAUL PELLIOT, *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. 1 (Paris 1959), pp. 140-143. Khan-Balyq was the Turkic name for Peking. It is, however, known that the Torghut khan, Ubashi, and his principal *taiji* (princes and nobles), including Tsebek-Dordji, were invited by the emperor Ch'ien-lung to his summer palace Shan Chuang in the city of Jehol, where they were entertained at a banquet in July of 1771. See *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)*, ed. ARTHUR W. HUMMEL (Washington, D.C. 1943), p. 660; C.D. BARKMAN, The Return of the Torghuts from Russia to China, *Journal of Oriental Studies* 2, no. 1 (1955), 108 (henceforth: BARKMAN).

2 The Chinese Emperor referred to in this tale was Kao-tsung, the temple name of Hung-li (1711-1799), the fourth emperor of the Manchu or Ch'ing dynasty in China (1644-1912), better known under his reign-title Ch'ien-lung (1735-1796).

3 Samur-Khanda is most likely a Kalmyk pronunciation of the city of Samarkand in the Uzbek SSR.

4 The Torghuts (Toryud) represented the majority of the Kalmyk Khanate in Russia until the 1771 disastrous exodus to Dzungaria. The other component ethnic tribes were the Derbets (Dörbed) and the Khoshuts (Qošud).

5 Ovshi was a popular Kalmyk pronunciation of Ubashi, as it is spelled in the old Kalmyk, or Oirat, script. Ubashi Khan (1744-1774), who was confirmed as the *namestnik* (vice-khan or vice-regent) of the Kalmyks by the Russian government in 1762 but ascended his throne the year before, after the death of his father, Donduk-Dashi Khan (1741-1761), was a great-grandson of the famous Ayuki Khan. The later ruled in 1669-1724. For a brief biographical sketch of Ubashi see JEAN PIERRE ABEL-RÉMUSAT, Ouboucha, Prince des Torgouts, *Nouveaux Mélanges Asiatiques, ou recueil de morceaux de critique et de mémoires relatifs aux religions, aux sciences, aux coutumes, à l'histoire et à la géographie des nations orientales*. Tome II. Paris 1829, pp. 102-105.

6 *Noyon* was a hereditary high noble title, corresponding roughly to that of a prince or duke.

7 The white czar of Moscow was in reality the empress Catherine the Great (1762-1796).

8 Ubashi Khan was born in 1744. Therefore, he was not 16 years old in 1771 but 11 years senior, i.e., 27 years old. See BARKMANN, p. 94;

Ocherki istorii Kalmytskoi ASSR (Studies in the History of the Kalmyk ASSR). Vol. 1. Moscow 1967, p. 214.

9 *Beshmet* is a kind of quilted knee-length coat, close-fitting in the chest and waist, and worn by the Caucasian, Mongolian and Turkic peoples.

10 Actually, the Kalmyks had lived along the left and right banks of the lower Volga not 100 years, but almost 150 years.

11 Tsebek-Dordji, a son of Galdan-Norbo, a son of Donduk-Ombo Khan (1735-1741), was a disturbing and ambitious *taiji*. He had unsuccessfully disputed Ubashi Khan's vice-regency. Having failed in his endeavors to come to power, he later became a senior adviser to Ubashi Khan and in the ensuing years he constantly incited him to flee from Russia. Tsebek-Dordji and his henchmen, among the noblemen, argued that their rights have been curtailed considerably, that the Kalmyks would be made tillers, and sooner or later they would be pushed to an arid desert by the encroaching Cossack and Volga German settlements, where their horses, camels and sheep were destined to perish. Last but not least, the Russians were determined to convert the Kalmyks to Christianity. The latter argument was undoubtedly the most convincing.

12 On January 5, 1771, about four-fifths of the Kalmyks, approximately 169,000, fled the left bank of the lower Volga valley, and in July, 1771 reached their original homeland, Dzungaria (the northern part of the present-day Sinkiang, the westernmost province of China), after suffering tremendous losses in terms of human lives, cattle and other property. When they finally reached the borders of Ili in Sinkiang, they were so destitute that they had no other choice but to surrender to the mercy of the local authorities. For more details of the 1771 exodus and its ultimate tragic outcome see the following scholarly studies, of which the first one is a contemporary account: J.M. AMIOT, *Monument de la transmigration des Tourgouths, des bords de la mer Caspienne, dans l'Empire de la Chine, in Memoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les arts, les moeurs, les usages, etc.* Tome I. Paris 1776, pp. 401-427; P.S. PALLAS, *Flucht der wolgischen Kalmücken, in his Sammlungen historischer Nachrichten über die mongolischen Völkerschaften.* I. Theil. S.-Petersburg 1776; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1980, pp. 88-96; PÈRE J.-A.-M. DE M. DE MAILLA, *Histoire générale de la Chine, ou Annales de cet empire; traduites du Tong-kien-kang-mou.* Tōme XI. Vingt-deuxieme dynastie. Les

Tsing. Revues et publiées par M. LE ROUX DES HAUTESRAYES. Paris 1780, pp. 582-586; B. BERGMANN, Versuch zur Geschichte der Kalmükenflucht von der Wolga, in his *Nomadische Streifereien unter den Kalmüken in den Jahren 1802 und 1803*. 1. Theil. Riga 1804; repr. Oosterhout: Anthropological Publications, 1969, pp. 141-231 (French translation: *Essai sur la fuite des Kalmuks des bords du Volga, Voyage de Benjamin Bergmann chez les Kalmuks*. Traduit de l'Allemand par M. MORIS. Chatillon-sur-Seine 1825, pp. 259-346); H. CORDIER, Les Conquêtes de L'Empereur de la Chine, in *Mémoires concernant l'Asie Orientale, Inde, Asie Centrale, Extrême-Orient*. Tome I. Paris 1913, pp. 1-18; B.V. DOLBEZHEV, Sud'ba kalmykov, bezhavshikh s Volgi. Karasharskoe khanstvo (The fate of the Kalmyks who fled from the Volga region: The Qara Shahr khanate), *Sbornik geograficheskikh, topograficheskikh i statisticheskikh materialov po Azii*, 86 S.-Petersburg 1913, pp. 1-52; P. PELLIOT, Les "Conquêtes de l'Empereur de la Chine," *T'oung-pao* 20, no. 3-4 (1921), 183-274; S. HEDIN, *Jehol: City of Emperors*. Tr. from the Swedish by E.G. NASH. New York 1933. Chapter III: The Flight of the Torgot, pp. 29-68; W. EICHHORN, Kolonialkämpfe der Chinesen in Turkestan während der Periode Ch'ien-lung, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 96, Heft 1 (1942), 261-325; *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)*. ed. A.W. HUMMEL. Washington, D.C. 1943, p. 660; C.D. BARKMAN, The Return of the Torghuts from Russia to China, *Journal of Oriental Studies* 2, no. 1 (1955), 89-115; P. PELLIOT, *Notes critiques d'histoire Kalmouke*. Tome I: Texte. Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1960, pp. 33-38; J.L. MISH, The Return of the Torghut: A Manchu Inscription from Jehol, *Journal of Asian History* 4, no. 1 (1970), 80-82.

Those Kalmyks on the right bank of the Volga, however, who were unable to join their kinsmen and co-religionists on the left bank of the river in early January of 1771, were prevented from doing so because the Volga was not yet frozen, due to an unusually warm winter. For popular accounts of the whole spectrum of the 1771 exodus see Thomas de Quincey, *Revolt of the Tartars; or, Flight of the Kalmuck Khan and His People from the Russian Territories to the Frontiers of China*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 42, no. 261 (1837), 89-115; reissued with some verbal changes in his *Works*, vol. 4. Edinburg 1854, pp. 111-176 (there are numerous separate editions and reprints of this famous work); W.L. RIVER, *The Torghuts*. New York 1939. IX, 364 pp., which is rather a novel.

13 The alien czar mentioned here was in reality the czarina or empress Catherine II. See n. 7 *supra*.

14 The Dzungars (Djungars, Jungars), whose ethnic composition needs further elucidation, certainly included the Tsoros (Choros), constituted the main body of the *Dörben oyirad* (Oirats), a confederation of closely related—ethnically and linguistically—four Oirat tribes. The connotation of the ethnonym *Oirat* and the composition of the *Dörben oyirad* themselves, viz., who were those four Oirat tribes—still lead to considerable confusion and contradictory statements. Different scholars have held different views regarding the origin and the ethnic composition of the Oirats, e.g., the great French savant, PAUL PELLIOT, held that the ethnonym *Dzungar* should refer to all the *Durben* (*Dörben*) Oirats. See *Journal Asiatique* 2 (1914), 187. C.D. D'OHSSON considered Torghuts the Turks, not even Mongols. See *Histoire des Mongols depuis Tchinguiz khan jusqu'à Timour beg ou Tamerlan*. Tome I. La Haye-Amsterdam 1834, n. 2, pp. 423-427, etc. The ethnic composition of the four Oirat confederates also differed in the course of history. Thus, the Qoits (Khoits) had been absorbed by the more numerical and powerful Dzungars. This knotty topic certainly needs a further investigation for the last word has not yet been spoken in this important matter. For scholarly studies on the origin and history of the Oirats in the 18th century see H.H. HOWORTH, *History of the Mongols from the 9th to the 19th Century*. Part I: *The Mongols Proper and the Kalmuks*. London 1876; repr. New York, NY: Burt Franklin, 1965. 4 + XXVIII + 743 pp.; M. COURANT, *L'Asie centrale aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: Empire Kalmouk ou Empire Mantchou?* Lyon et Paris 1912. 151 pp.; Ch'i-yü Wu, Who Were the Oirats? *Yenching Journal of Social Studies* 3 (1941), 174-219; P. PELLIOT, *Notes critiques d'histoire Kalmouke*. I: Texte. II: Tableaux généalogiques. Paris 1960. VI, 237 + 6 fold. tables; A. Haneda, L'Histoire des Djourghar aux 16e et 17e siècles. Origine des Eleute, *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 42 (1970), 119-126; O.F. AKIMUSKIN, Le Turkestan oriental et des Oirates. Traduit par N. BASSANOFF, *Etudes mongoles* 5 (1974), 157-163; J.R. KRUEGER, New Materials on Oirat Law and History. Part 2: "The Origin of the Torgouts," *Central Asiatic Journal* 18, no. 1 (1974), 30-42.

15 The flight of the Kalmyks from Russia to Dzungaria could not possibly have lasted four years because they reached the Dzungarian border already in July, 1771.

16 *Liang* or tael was a Chinese silver ounce which weighed 37.301 grams.

17 Tsebek-Dordji could not have possibly led his people in their exodus from Russia five years earlier for the simple reason that the ceremonial banquet took place in Jehol in July of the same year of 1771.

18 *Ulus* was the largest Mongolian (and Kalmyk) administrative unit, corresponding roughly to a region.

19 Tsebek-Dordji, a grandson of the Kalmyk khan, Donduk-Ombo, was related to Ubashi Khan. Ubashi's grandfather, Chakdor-Djab (died in 1722), the eldest son of Ayuki Khan, was the older brother of Donduk-Ombo's father.

20 The alleged rivalry and arguments among the Oirat rulers in Dzungaria, if, indeed, they correspond to the historic facts, should have taken place at least a century and a half ago.

21 Far West is to be understood here as Russia.

22 In fact, Ubashi was not too young then because he was already 27 years old by the time of his arrival in Dzungaria in 1771.

23 Danzan-Balvar, Ubashi's uncle in this legend, cannot be identified with confidence with any real historic personality.

24 Twelve grave crimes defy explanation. Obviously, the crimes in question refer to grave offenses that contradict the teachings of Lamaism.

25 In reality, Ubashi was confirmed by the Manchu emperor as a khan and was made *dzoriktu* (brave)-khan, and Tsebek-Dordji was conferred the title of *buyantu* (meritorious) *ch'in-wang* (prince of the first rank). See BARKMAN, p. 108.

26 In the 1757-1758 rebellion of the Dzungars led by Amursana, *taiji* of the Qoits (Khoits), an Oirat tribe (see n. 14 supra), the punitive Manchu armies reconquered Dzungaria and annihilated almost an entire population. This tragic massacre put an end to the Dzungar Khanate. See the following studies, in addition to the ones mentioned in n. 14 supra: J. VON KLAPROTH, *Relation des troubles de la Dzoungarie et de la Petite Boukharie. Traduit du chinois, Magasin Asiatique 2* (1826), 187-208; *Description de la Chine occidentale par un voyageur. Traduit du chinois par A. GUELUY, missionnaire. Quatrième partie. Chapitre I: Aperçu sur la revolte et la chute du royaume des Dzoungars. Chapitre II: Revolte et mort d'Amoursana. Chapitre V: Soumission des Tourgoutes, Le Muséon 5, no. 1-2* (1886), 103-109, 109-113, 238-246; E.H. PARKER, *Campaigns of K'ang-hi, Yung-cheng, and K'ien-lung, The China Review 16* (1887-1888), 105-118; CH. DENBY,

The Chinese Conquest of Songaria, *Journal of the Peking Oriental Society* 3, no. 2 (1892), 159-181; E. HAENISCH, Der chinesische Feldzug in Ili im Jahre 1755, *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift* 7, no. 1-2 (1918-1919), 57-86; B.IA. VLADIMIRTSOV, Mongol'skie skazaniia ob Amursane (Mongolian tales of Amursana), *Vostochnye zapiski* 1 (1927), 271-282; repr. in *Uchenye zapiski Kalmytского nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta iazyka, literatury i istorii* 5, seriiia filologii (1967), 179-187; A. DUBOSQ et J. VAN DEN BRANDT, Un manuscrit inédit des "Conquêtes de K'ien-long." A propos des "Conquêtes de L'Empereur de la Chine," *Monumenta Serica* 4, no. 1 (1939), 85-115; R. GROUSSET, *L'Empire des steppes. Attila. Gengis-Khan. Tamerlan*. Paris 1939. 639 pp. (there are English and German translations of this famous work: *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970. XXX, 687 pp.; *Die Steppenvölker. Attila-Dschingis Khan-Tamerlan*. München: Kindler, 1970; Essen: Magnus Verlag, 1976. 906 pp.); E. HAENISCH, Zwei vier-sprachige Inschriften zum Dsungarenkrieg aus den Jahren 1755 und 1758, in *Miscellanea Academica Berolinensia*. Berlin 1950, pp. 224-247; I. IA. ZLATKIN, Russkie arkhivnye materialy ob Amursane (Russian archival materials relating to Amursana), *Filologiii i istoriia mongol'skikh narodov. Pamiati akademika Borisa Iakovlevicha Vladimirtsova* (Philology and history of the Mongol peoples: In commemoration of Academician Boris Iakovlevich Vladimirtsov), ed. G.D. SANZHEEV. Moscow 1958, pp. 289-313; E. HAENISCH, *Historische Mandschutexte*. Aus dem Nachlass mit Anmerkungen herausgegeben von MICHAEL WEIERS (Asiatische Forschungen, 29). Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970. 21 pp. + 114 facs. tables; V. VEIT, Die in Deutschland befindlichen Porträts der von Ch'ienlung 1754-55 unterworfenen Ölötenfürsten, *Zentralasiatische Studien* 4 (1970), 199-237; eadem, Die Regierungsperiode Ch'ienlung (1736-1796) in der Darstellung der mongolischen Chronik Bolur toli (1834-1837), *ibid.* 10 (1976), 169-223; V.S. KUZNETSOV, *Amursana*. Novosibirsk 1980. 176 pp. (in Russian); I. YA. ZLATKIN, *Istoriia Dzhungarskogo khanstva. 1635-1758. Izdanie 2-3* (A History of the Dzungar Khanate, 1635-1758. 2nd ed.). Moscow 1983. 332 pp.

27 Emperor Ch'ien-lung had 17 sons and ten daughters, of whom only ten sons and five daughters attained maturity. see *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644-1912)*, ed. A. W. HUMMEL. Washington, D.C. 1943, pp. 372-373.

28. The Torghuts were allotted pasture land at Urumchi (Tihwa), Qara Shahr (about 200 miles south and southwest of Urumchi), Ili,

Tarbagatai, and Kuldja, thus scattered over the vast depopulated areas of Skiniang.

29 Many Torghuts regretted their exodus from Russia to Dzungaria as is reflected in some folk songs and legends up to very recent times. Most of them glorify their former life on the banks of the Volga river, thus bearing clearly a nostalgic character. As is known, the remaining one-fifth of the Kalmyk people in Russia lived until the early 1920s in the neighboring Astrakhan and Stavropol provinces and in the Don Cossack region. Since then they made up the minority population of the Kalmyk Autonomous Republic.

30 *Ataman* was the highest military title in various Cossack territories until the end of the Russian Civil War, *locum tenens*, a supreme chieftain of a Cossack host, e.g., the Don Cossack Host.

31 The Nogai were a Turkic-speaking people who had been subdued by the Kalmyks in the 1620's and 1630's in the course of their resettlement in the lower Volga valley.

32 In fact, it was a common policy of the Manchu emperors to give some of their daughters and nieces in marriage to potentially influential Khalkha Mongol and Oirat princes. It was, of course, a sequel of a farsighted policy on the part of the emperors of the Ch'ing dynasty.

STRONGER THAN POWER

Glossary of Foreign Terms

<i>aava</i>	paternal grandfather
<i>ad</i>	an exclamation of approval
<i>aimak ayimaq</i>	(Russ. <i>stanitsa</i>) an administrative and territorial unit encompassing a number of hamlets (<i>khoton</i> , Russ. <i>khutor</i>). Prior to the 1918-1920 Civil War in Russia, there were 13 Buzava (Don) Kalmyk <i>aimaks</i> in the Don Host <i>oblast'</i> (region)
<i>akha noyon baava</i>	the Dowager Princess
Aranzal Arandzal	fast horse. Also the name of the legendary magic horse in the Kalmyk heroic epic, the <i>Dzhanggar</i>
<i>ataman</i>	<i>locum tenens</i> (lieutenant), an elected Cossack military commander, a supreme military and civilian chieftain of a Cossack host, an appointed <i>okrug</i> (district) and elected <i>aimak</i> and <i>khoton</i> chieftain
<i>baz</i>	paternal grandfather
<i>bek bey</i>	a Central Asian, Turkish chieftain or high official—often used as a title
<i>beshmet</i>	(Kalm. <i>büshmüd bishmüd</i>) a kind of quilted knee-length black coat, close-fitting in the chest and waist, and worn by the Caucasian, Mongolian and Turkic peoples. Also a dress worn by young women.

<i>boortsig</i>	a flat cake of various shapes, fried in oil
<i>büre bishkür bürä büshkür</i>	trumpet, bugle
<i>Buzava</i>	Don Kalmyks
<i>chakan</i>	a southern grass with odorous swordlike leaves, growing in marshland
<i>Cheprak Chaprak</i>	Velikoknyazheskaya <i>stanitsa</i> , seat of the Sal'sk district (present Proletarskaya)
<i>chush</i>	a sport game of getting a wooden ball in the hole
<i>därke</i>	(< <i>Tara</i>) my God!
<i>dung</i>	a flute made from shell
<i>dyaling</i>	a small bag of soft yellow sheepskin
<i>dzhatak</i>	Don Kalmyk young lady's head-dress
<i>Dzungar</i>	left wing. The Dzungars were the remote forbears of present-day Kalmyks
<i>gelung</i>	(Tibet. <i>dge-slon</i>) a senior rank of monk, the highest degree of monk rank
<i>kashara</i>	a nomad camp for livestock
<i>katran</i>	a plant with large leaves and numerous white flowers. It was eaten in southern Russia like cauliflower
<i>khosh</i>	a temporary stand, stopping place; camp

- khoton* (Mong. *qotan*, Russ. *khutor*) a Don Kalmyk hamlet, a subdivision of *aimak*, a basic social unit. It consisted of an indeterminate number of households, not necessarily related agnatically. Rendered as "village" throughout the text
- khurul* a moveable Kalmyk Lamaist monastery which became stationary after the transition to a sedentary way of life
- kumys kumiss* (Russ. *kumys* < Turk. *kimiz*, *kumyz*) a fermented mare's or camel's milk, used as a beverage by the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. A similar drink prepared from other milk, especially that of the cow, and used for dietetic and medicinal purposes
- lama* (Tibet. *bla ma*) the spiritual head of the Don Kalmyk clergy and people
- Maidari* (Sansk. *Maitreya*) the name of the coming Buddha who will descend to earth to preach anew the *dharma* (law) when the teachings of Gautama Buddha have completely decayed
- mandzhi (k)* (Mong. *bandi*) a novice of disciple, the lowest rank of Kalmyk lamahood
- Manych* a left tributary of the Don river
- Merket* appellation of one of the Kalmyk *yasun* (clan)
- mirza* a title of honor for Muslim men, prefixed to the name

<i>muzhik</i>	a Russian peasant
<i>noyon</i>	a hereditary high noble title, corresponding roughly to that of prince. It is rendered as "prince" throughout the text
<i>om ma-ni pad-me hum</i>	a sacred Lamaist six-syllable Sanskrit <i>mantra</i> of the <i>bodhisattva</i> Avalokiteśvara, a mystical formula of invocation in Tibetan Buddhism. The incessant recitation of this <i>mantra</i> has been a widespread practice among Tibetans, Mongols, Buriats, and Kalmyks
<i>ork örke</i>	a flue in a nomad tent
<i>orus</i>	a Russian
<i>pud pood</i>	an old Russian unit of weight, equal to about 36.11 pounds (16.38 kilograms)
<i>raka araka ärke</i>	arrack (also arrak, arak) a spiritous brandy distilled from fermented mare's milk, <i>kumys</i>
<i>samovar</i>	an urn with a spigot at its base, used in Russia to boil water for tea
<i>shirdeg shirdyk</i>	(Mong. <i>sirdeg</i>) a two-layer oblong piece of thick felt adorned with ornamental pattern, used to sit on
<i>some sume</i>	(Mong. <i>süme</i>) a Lamaist temple
<i>stanitsa</i>	(Kalm. <i>aimak</i>) a large Cossack administrative and territorial unit composed of one large village-post (<i>stanitsa</i>) and a number of lesser hamlets, <i>khutors</i> (Kalm. <i>khoton</i>)
<i>taisha</i>	Russian rendering of <i>tayiji</i> < Chin., minor prince, lower nobility

<i>terme terem</i>	a wall lattice of the nomad tent
<i>troika</i>	an old Russian vehicle drawn by three horses abreast
<i>Tsaghan</i>	the biggest religious holiday, i.e., the holiday of the coming spring, observed for a whole month (whence <i>Tsaghan sar</i> 'the month of <i>Tsaghan</i> '), usually in February and sometimes in March
<i>tsang</i>	(Tibet. <i>zangs</i>) a brass or copper cymbal
<i>tsegdek</i>	the long armless dress of a married female
<i>tsetseg</i>	smallpox
<i>tsob-tsobe !</i>	(Don Cossack interjection) cry of the drover of oxen and bulls
<i>ulus</i>	1. An old large-scale administrative and territorial nomadic unit ruled by a <i>noyon</i> (see <i>supra</i>). By the Buzava (Don) Kalmyks, it was retained in name only and had no administrative function; 2. Patrimony
<i>urus</i>	see <i>orus</i>
<i>vedro</i>	pail, an old Russian unit of liquid capacity, equal to 3.25 U.S. gallons
<i>verst</i>	(Russ. <i>verstá</i>) an old Russian unit of distance, equal to 0.6629 miles
<i>yurt</i>	(Russ. <i>yurta</i> < Turkic) a nomad tent-like dwelling of the Mongol and Turkic peoples of Central Asia and Russia, consisting of a cylindrical wall of poles in a lattice arrangement with a conical roof of poles,

both covered by felt or skins. It is rendered as "tent" throughout the text. Also all the lands, waterways and population belonging to a Cossack *stanitsa*

zaman

lamasery kitchen by the Buzava and the Torghuts, and *zam* by the Derbets

zurkhachi dzurqaci

(Mong. *jiruqaici*) a monk astrologer, diviner

THE MONGOLIA SOCIETY

The Mongolia Society was established in 1961 as a private, non-profit, non-political organization interested in promoting and furthering the study of Mongolia, its history, language and culture. The aims of the Society are exclusively scholarly, educational, and charitable.

Membership in the Mongolia Society is open to individuals, foundations, libraries, corporations, and other organizations interested in furthering its aims. Members receive *Mongolian Studies: Journal of the Mongolia Society* (which has now replaced the *Mongolia Society Bulletin*) and also publications in the Mongolia Society's *The Occasional Papers* series. Additionally, the Society publishes a series titled *Special Papers*, devoted to works entirely in Mongolian. These may only be purchased separately. The Mongolia Society sponsors many cultural events to which members are invited. These include the showing of Mongolian films as well as lectures, slides, and films dealing with Mongolia.

OFFICERS OF THE MONGOLIA SOCIETY

President:	Denis Sinor
Vice President:	Denys J. Voaden Robert Binnick
Treasurer:	Susan K. Drost
Secretary:	Ruth I. Meserve

The PUBLICATIONS OF THE MONGOLIA SOCIETY are governed by an Editorial Committee appointed by the Board of Directors of the Society.

MINOR CORRECTIONS TO
Balykov: Short Stories

- Acknowledgements page: Philadelphia (twice).
p. 26, up 6 lines: second 'body' should be 'boy',
p. 46, line 22: 'an' should be 'a'.
p. 48, line 14: 'should' should be 'shoulder'.
p. 59, line 7: 'tabboo' should be 'taboo'.
p. 63, line 17 from bottom: 'wek' should be 'week'.
p. 95, line 18: 'raccoon' should be 'raccoon'.
p. 108, line 5: 'less' should be 'fewer'.
p. 132, line 4 from bottom: 'Edinburg' should be 'Edinburgh'.
p. 139, mandzhi(k): first 'of' should be 'or'.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS OF THE MONGOLIA SOCIETY, INC.

321-322 Goodbody Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405-2401 USA
tel. number (812) 855-4078

THE MONGOLIA SOCIETY OCCASIONAL PAPERS

Number Nine (Summer, 1978). Gustav J. Ramstedt, *Seven Journeys Eastward, 1898-1912: Among the Cheremis, Kalmyks, Mongols and in Turkestan and to Afghanistan*, 52 photographs by the author. Translated from the Swedish and edited by John R. Krueger, 277 pages. \$15.00

Number Eleven (Fall, 1979), Nicholas Poppe, *The Heroic Epic of the Khalkha Mongols*, Second Edition. Revised by the Author. Translated from Russian. 192 pages. \$12.00

Number Thirteen (Fall, 1988). G.D. Sanzheyev, *The Old-Script Mongolian Language and its Development in Khalkha*. Translated from Russian: edited by John R. Krueger. \$12.00

Number Sixteen (in preparation). *Mongolian Folklore: a Representative Collection from the Oral Tradition*. Edited by J.G. Hangin and others. Ca. 240 pages.

THE MONGOLIA SOCIETY SPECIAL PAPERS (Text in Mongolian)

Issue Seven (Fall, 1978). *Thirteen Kalmyk-Oirat Tales from the Bewitched Corpse Cycle*. Text, Glossary, Translation compiled by John R. Krueger. 119 pages. \$10.00

Issue Ten (Spring, 1988). *Bible Selections for Reading Practice*. Presents familiar Bible Chapters in old-script Mongolian, modern Cyrillic and Oirat scripts, as easy reading practice for students. Includes alphabetical tables. 34 pages. \$5.00

DICTIONARIES

Ferdinand D. Lessing, et al., *Mongolian—English Dictionary*, the largest and most comprehensive work of its kind, in a corrected reprinting of 1,220 pages. Invaluable for students, a reference, Buddhist studies, and libraries. Second reprinting issued late 1982. Members \$50.00; Non-members \$70.00

Materials for an Oirat Mongolian to English Citation Dictionary
by John R. Krueger

Part One: The Vowels, 1978, 204 pages. \$15.00

Part Two: The Consonants n, x, γ, b, p, s, š, 1984, 259 pages. \$15.00

Part Three: The Consonants contains the remainder of the alphabet, corrigenda, and an analytical essay on the sources. 1984, 352 pages. \$20.00

The complete set may be purchased for \$45.00

NEW MONGOLIAN DICTIONARY

A Modern Mongolian-English Dictionary (1986). by Gombojab Hangin with John R. Krueger, Paul Buell, William Rozycki, and Robert Service (Uralic and Altaic Series Vol. 150). This dictionary is the largest Mongolian to English Dictionary (with 25,000 key words and 15,000 sub-entries) ever published. The script used in this dictionary is the Cyrillic alphabet which was adopted by the Mongols in the 1940's. \$50.00

ADDITIONAL ITEMS FOR SALE

Basic Course in Mongolian (1968), by John G. Hangin, edited by John R. Krueger (Uralic and Altaic Series Vol. 73). This book comprises an introduction to the Mongolian language, based on the Khalkha dialect which is the standard language spoken in the Mongolian People's Republic. While emphasis has been placed on giving the student spoken command of the language, fundamentals of modern writing system and the structure necessary for learning modern written Mongolian are included. \$22.00

Basic Course in Mongolian is also available on cassette tape. The tapes cover units one through 18 (the book covers units one through 24) and are reproduced on five cassette tapes. \$26.00