1974

Mongolian Short Stories

Henry G. Schwarz

*Western Washington University*, henry.schwarz@wwu.edu

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МОНГОЛЫН ӨГҮҮЛЛӨГИЙН ТҮҮВЭР

MONGOLIAN SHORT STORIES

Edited by

Henry G. Schwarz

1974
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This volume is the product of student discontent. In my undergraduate survey course, East Asian 310: Mongolia and the Mongols, my students and I have been annoyed by the extremely uneven quality of reading materials available in English. The historical sections of the course are adequately covered in works by Bawden, Grousset, and many others. Even art and architecture are not entirely without some available readings in English, but literature is poorly served.

There is at present only one book-length work on Mongolian literature available in English. Gerasimovich's *Literatura Mongol'skoi Narodnoi Respubliki, 1921-1964* (Leningrad, 1965) has been translated by the Mongolia Society, but it has its serious shortcomings. The book was published shortly after the author's death in 1964 and thus contains nothing about Mongolian literature during the past ten years when it has been particularly flourishing. Moreover, Gerasimovich's portrait of Mongolian literature follows closely the guidelines laid down by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Thus it shuns certain early literary figures who had not yet been rehabilitated by the time Gerasimovich wrote her book. It also discusses Mongolian literary works along Marxist-Leninist lines. While such a book is useful for an understanding of Communist literary policies and objectives, what is needed for perspective but does not exist is an equally comprehensive history of modern Mongolian literature that does not adhere to Communist literary criteria. Finally, Gerasimovich's book does not give its readers anything but the shortest excerpts from various types of literature.
My students rightfully complain that they need an anthology of unabridged and representative samples of Mongolian literature. There is at present only one source for such materials, the magazine *Mongolia*. Unfortunately, the magazine, like most other periodical publications of its kind, scatters its literary samples across scores of issues. Moreover, it is probably true that this useful magazine is still little known in the United States where I would guess fewer than ten university libraries have complete sets.

To meet my students' legitimate demands, I have selected some twenty-one short stories from the pages of this magazine, and have attempted to edit them into acceptable contemporary American English. I have endeavored as much as it is feasible to make the selection representative of different generations of writers and of different themes. Some, if not all, of these stories have been shortened by the editors of *Mongolia* magazine, as suggested by several dots at the end of paragraphs but omitted in this selection. So far as it can be determined, these omissions were made for brevity's sake rather than to tamper severely with content or style. A close comparison with titles listed in Gerasimovich also occasionally suggests minor title changes. Thus, D. Myagmar's *The Moth and the Lamp* seems to be his *White Moth* (Ügüllegüüd), published in 1962, Sh. Gaadamba's *A New Peel for Sevjidma* is probably identical to his *Ill-fitting Deel* (Elbeg deel), published in 1957, and the original title of S. Erdene's *Kulan* was *Khulan and I* (Khulan bid khoer).

The virtual absence of any Mongolian literary works in English translation is certainly puzzling when we remind ourselves that modern Mongolian literature has been in existence for some fifty years and, judging by Gerasimovich's account, that its many contributors have been extraordinarily prolific. Thus, a probing of the possible reasons for this regrettable lacuna is in order.
One possible reason is the relatively late start of modern Mongolian literature. Although writers produced works from the very beginning of the revolutionary period, by far most presently extant works were not written until the mid-fifties. Moreover, most Russian translations of the earlier works did not come out until that time.

In light of this information, it may be tempting to lay blame on the unavailability of materials, but this is not really the case. After all, a few Mongolian works, including short stories, were in fact available to Westerners, at least in Russian translation if not in the Mongolian original, as early as the thirties. The real reason probably lies elsewhere, and when we look at the large number of published (and often translated into Russian) literary works of more than fifty authors, that reason becomes clear: lack of interest.

Scholars have translated much of modern Mongolian literature into Russian but almost nothing into any other language. This lacuna is found not only in translation but even in the general treatment of contemporary Mongolian literature. There is to date not a single history or survey in any language except Russian, and there only two names stand out, those of G. I. Mikhailov and L. K. Gerasimovich.

Few Mongolists in North America and Western Europe concern themselves with today's Mongolia, and even fewer universities are offering as little as a single course on any aspect of Mongolia. In the United States where, as far as I know, no recent census has been taken, I would guess that perhaps twenty universities offer at least one course on Mongolia, but only half a dozen of them teach what may be described as a comprehensive set of area and language courses. Moreover, it is fair to say that the few Mongolists that there are in the West have so far restricted their writings to the period prior to the present century. A striking
example is the recently published opus magnum of one of the most prominent living Mongolists, Walther Heissig, whose massive two-volume Geschichte der mongolischen Literatur ends in the early years of this century.  

Closely linked to this apparent scholarly disinterest is a public ignorance of truly astounding magnitude. We could document this abysmal ignorance by a tediously long list of examples, but perhaps some personal experiences will do. When in the spring of 1973 my wife and I made preparations for our visit to Mongolia, we sought information on visas, vaccinations, and the like. We discovered that one of the standard reference works in the travel industry, a massive tome published by Pan American World Airways, which claims to contain all countries of the world, did not in fact have an entry on Mongolia. Perhaps the global experts at Pan American think that Mongolia is out of this world! Likewise, anyone who should have an occasion to mail to Mongolia anything other than a letter will discover, as I have, that the regulations of the United States Postal Service literally do not mention Mongolia but only "Outer Mongolia" which, of course, was never a country but had been a part of Ch'ing China until 1911. Another sample of American knowledge about Mongolia was offered in a television special, shown nationwide in 1974, about the capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo. As the North Korean gunboats were closing in on the American spy ship, the actor playing Captain Buecher was heard screaming: "Those Mongolian savages ..."

I trust that readers of this volume already know that Koreans and Mongolians are as related to each other as Spaniards and Bulgarians, that Mongolians are no more savage than Americans, and that Mongolia has been in existence since the early twenties and has now diplomatic relations with more than sixty other countries.

The history of Mongolian literature is conventionally thought to have begun around 1240 when the Secret History of the Mongols...
was written. Very little else has come down to us from the next two centuries, the period sometimes referred to as the post-classical period. We know a great deal more about Mongolian literature after Buddhism was reintroduced into Mongolia. From then until well into the eighteenth century, Mongolian literature was dominated by religious works and, consequently, the greatest influence was Indian and, more directly, Tibetan in origin.

By the end of that period, another foreign cultural influence made itself felt. As a consequence of political decisions, beginning with the compact of Dolonor in 1686 and ending with the Ch'ing court's policy of allowing Chinese colonization of Southern and Eastern Mongolia (roughly equivalent to the territory of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region prior to the first cultural revolution of 1966-1970), Chinese literature, especially the great novels, such as Shui Hu, Chin P'ing Mei, and Hsi Yu Chi, exerted a tremendous influence upon Mongolian literature. They inspired, inter alia, the creation of what Mongolians like to call their first historical novel, the Kōke Sudur (The Blue Chronicle) by Injannasi.7

That we have few extant works of the earlier period and a heavy preponderance of religious works from later centuries was, of course, largely determined by the nature of Mongolian society. A nomadic life style made it virtually impossible to maintain bulky paraphernalia, such as printing presses and libraries, that are necessary for creating and preserving a major written literature. It was not until large monasteries were built on Mongolian soil that an extensive body of literature was written and preserved, and it was naturally almost entirely religious in nature. Still later, many of the secular hereditary rulers, especially in Southern and Eastern Mongolia, having become sedentary, began to write works that drew heavily upon the secular Chinese masterpieces of the day.
We must add to the corpus of written literature a very large and extremely well developed oral literature of which only a fraction has survived to the present century. Researchers of several countries, particularly the Mongolian academician B. Rinchen, have recorded relatively small portions of this oral literature, but virtually nothing has been translated into English. It would, however, be wrong to conclude, as is frequently done, that the written literature was read by a small literate minority and that the oral literature was the exclusive preserve of the illiterate masses. In traditional Mongolia, as much as one-third of the total male population was at any given time resident in monasteries. Most of their inhabitants were literate even though some of them were literate only in Tibetan and not in Mongolian. Moreover, not only the secular aristocracy but many commoners were literate, and they shared the written word with the Buddhist monks. At the same time, the oral literature was the property of all Mongols, literate and illiterate alike.

Throughout most of the twenties, literature continued along traditional lines. Most themes were religious in nature or about the exploits of famous khans, most notably, of course, Chingis Khan. The Communists, or more specifically the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), did not immediately challenge the virtual monopoly of traditional forms and theories but instead concentrated on producing short theatrical plays, posters, and songs. While these new songs had new themes, such as the exploits of the partisans and the Revolutionary Army, they retained the form of traditional folk songs. They consisted of couplets or quatrains, usually three words per line and lines related by alliteration. Among the first Communist ventures into literature must be listed the journal Revolutionary Youth League, established in 1925. It published the first short stories. They were didactic and moralistic, condemning the religious establishment and large landowners, both still quite
strong in the twenties, and praising a new positive hero. These first short stories still used traditional styles; for example, "the heroes of A New Tale (Sonin üliger) were... a snow leopard, a hare, a wolf, and a frog. Their actions portrayed allegorically the overthrow of the feudalistic order."

After 1929, the MPRP greatly increased its attacks against the old order, especially Buddhism. In fact, it went so far as to "mechanically transplant... the socialist structure of the Soviet Union," a policy now officially denounced. As a result, all traditional culture was condemned as "feudal" and a demand went out to destroy it. Party zealots in many parts of the country obeyed the call literally and actually destroyed many monuments and artifacts. The period of tolerance in literature came to an abrupt end and the scope of permissible themes was sharply reduced. For about twenty years, from 1936 until at least 1955, nothing was taught about traditional Mongolian literature in middle schools. Several writers, among them S. Buyannemekh, who resisted this policy and demanded that literature not be shackled by political dogma were purged and later, in the trials of 1937, killed on trumped-up charges.

The emphasis throughout the thirties was on the final destruction of the Buddhist church and the perceived threat by Japan's aggression in China. More journals were published, among them New Mirror, Revolutionary Literature, and The Way of the National Mongolian Culture, for the dual purpose of combatting the still strong influence of traditional forms and themes and of providing guidance to and publicity of new, Party-approved literary works. Theatrical productions continued to receive strong encouragement. The State Theater was established in 1930. At first, most of its productions were one-act plays and pantomimes, but gradually more substantial works were performed. The titles of some of these, "Right-and Left-Deviation," "Dark Power," and "New Path," clearly
indicate the official line of that time.

Poetry and prose also developed during the thirties, but at uneven rates. Of those poets cited approvingly today, G. Ser-Od (1917-1940) and D. Tsevegmid (b. 1915) were among the major figures. What is remarkable about their poetry is that it was at times wholly devoid of political themes. While the theater and prose (see below) toed the official line extremely closely, themes such as the seasons and motherhood appeared to be quite common in the poetry of the thirties.

By all accounts, prose continued to be the weakest part of the new Mongolian literature. Not a single novel was produced during the entire decade. Shorter works, of which three samples are included in this volume, were almost always about the bad old days and the glorious present. Anti-clerical writing was at its height, of which Paradise, written much later, is an example. Still, traditional forms were permitted and the use of fairy tales to drive home a political point was fairly common.

According to contemporary literary historiography, the Mongolian literary world of the twenties and especially of the thirties was dominated by D. Natsagdorj who, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his birthday in 1956, was posthumously elevated to a position in literature comparable to that of Sükhbaatar in politics. In that same year, a large statue of him was erected in Ulaanbaatar's main park and, so far as I know, Natsagdorj remains the only literary figure so honored.

Although he met an untimely death in 1937 at the age of thirty-one, Natsagdorj accomplished much. At age nine, he began to be tutored in reading and writing, and only two years later he was given a job as clerk in his father's office in the war department in Urga. He declared himself for the revolution immediately upon the entry of Mongolian and Red Russian troops into Mongolia in
1921. His rise within Party and government was meteoric; within a few years, he was made chief secretary of the Revolutionary Military Council, chairman of the Young Pioneers, and a candidate of the MPRP presidium. In 1924, when he was only eighteen, he was entrusted with the important task of organizing the first Great Khural (national assembly).

The years 1925 to 1929 he spent abroad. He first went to Leningrad where he attended the military academy and learned enough Russian to begin translating major Russian works into Mongolian. In the following year, he joined about forty other young Mongolians on a journey to Germany. Once again, D. Natsagdorj displayed his genius for languages by learning German in very short time. He graduated from the School of Journalism in Leipzig, probably in 1929, when he and all other Mongolians were recalled to Mongolia.

This abrupt recall was occasioned by a sudden shift in Party policy in both Moscow and Ulaanbaatar toward isolation in international affairs and excessive dogmatism at home. Like so many others, Natsagdorj was arrested and detained for six months. He lost all of his Party and government posts and, upon his release, was assigned as a historian to the Science Committee, the forerunner to the present Academy of Sciences. He was extraordinarily prolific and versatile as a literary figure. So far, 104 poems, thirty-one short prose works, five plays, and several translations have been collected; most of these works were written in the six or seven years before his death in 1937.

Perhaps his most celebrated work is the poem "My homeland" ("Minii nutag"), a song in praise of Mongolia's natural beauty. Except for a brief reference to a red banner and people's power, the poem is devoid of political overtones. A similarly lyrical, and wholly non-political, poem of his is "The Four Seasons" in which he portrays quite expressively the entirety of Mongolian
pastoral life. Natsagdorj also produced many poems strongly supporting the Party on contemporary issues, be it by stridently attacking the lamas during the anti-Church campaigns or by lavishly praising the Soviet Union or by attempting to foster public acceptance of modern health measures.

D. Natsagdorj's contribution to modern Mongolian prose is the development of the short story. His short stories are extremely brief, as the three examples in this volume demonstrate. Some are prose poems, like *A Swift-Footed Horse*, in which Natsagdorj would sketch a landscape, a character, or some typical episode in the everyday life of rural Mongolia. Other short stories, like *Son of the Old World*, resemble political pamphlets in which the characters represent entire social classes or historical periods. Later, Natsagdorj's style changed and he began to write short stories with a plot. *Bitter Tears on New Year's Eve* is representative of this type of story which almost always dwells on conditions in prerevolutionary Mongolia.

Despite Natsagdorj's pioneering efforts, however, the short story and prose literature in general fell on hard times after his death. Not a single novel was produced during the forties and, as Gerasimovich observed, "short stories covered an extremely restricted sphere of subject matter." The situation became so bad that ten years after Natsagdorj's death, the Central Committee of the MPRP was moved to complain that "the slighting of prose, which provides every opportunity to portray all aspects of our times, is the main shortcoming in the development of our literature."

It was not until about another decade before prose, and particularly the short story, climbed out of its long slump and embarked on a remarkably vigorous course of development which still shows no sign of abating. There is no doubt that the periodic urgings of the MPRP deserve some credit for the eventual flourishing of the Mongolian short story, but three other factors were
probably of equal importance. By the mid-fifties, a whole new generation of writers had grown up who had no personal recollection of life in the thirties and whose attitudes were thus perhaps less encumbered by the excessive caution typical of many older writers. Moreover, the writers of this new generation were, on the whole better trained and were thus perhaps feeling more secure than their elders in the exploration of new themes and techniques. The thirteen biographical sketches included in this volume reveal substantial educational backgrounds. Whereas D. Natsagdorj, as the sole representative of the older generation in our collection, was somewhat unusual for his group in that he had some higher education, all but one of the remaining twelve writers went to college and most received specifically literary training. The third and probably closely related factor was the easing of the heavy hand of political controls, a trend influenced by the de-Stalinization drive in the Soviet Union. In combination, these factors largely account for the fact that of the eighty literary figures for whom relevant information is listed in Gerasimovich, only twenty-four began publishing in the more than three decades before 1955, but fifty-six, or exactly 70%, did so in the nine years between 1955 and 1964, the terminal year of Gerasimovich's survey.

If the MPRP allowed a certain degree of relaxation and posthumously rehabilitated some earlier purge victims, its official literary policy seemed to have changed little. The following resolution, passed by the Political Bureau of the Central Committee in 1953, i.e., before the thaw, was approvingly reprinted in 1959:

The central duty of our writers consists in writing, on the basis of socialist realism, of the tenacious and selfless labour of our herds-men and popular intelligentsia, who are building socialism in their own land, of the role of the Mongol People's Revolutionary Party in encouraging and organizing all the victories of our people in this great struggle, of the great and
truly inexhaustible significance of the friendship established between our people, the great Soviet people, and the peoples of the popular democracies, and of the struggle being waged by the whole of progressive mankind, headed by the USSR, for the establishment of peace throughout the whole world.21

Official policy seems to have changed little in the meantime, and as late as 1973, statements such as "present-day Mongolian literature is developed on the basis of the Mongolian people's progressive literary heritage and under the fruitful influence of the literature of socialist realism of the USSR" and "the new Mongolian literature is now ... loyally helping the MPRP to build up a socialist society in Mongolia" are commonplace.22

If the MPRP's literary policy sounds severe and restrictive, the short stories in this volume give the reader a rather different impression. Perhaps the most remarkable discovery is that no single theme predominates. Absent, for example, is the incessant invocation of Mao's name and sayings, so typical of what has passed for literature in China these past eight years. One might be tempted to dismiss this observation by pointing out that Mongolia has for an even longer period been closely allied with the Soviet Union against China and, therefore, not likely to copy the Chinese experience. But how, then, is one to explain the fact that present-day Mongolian literature glorifies the Soviet Union relatively little? There are, of course, such stories in Mongolia, and two of them, Mother and Off to Battle, are included here, but they are of an earlier time, and very little of this sort of thing is being written nowadays. In fact, the short stories in our collection have an amazingly low political content. No mention of Party and government leaders, no mention of national policies or economic plans. This is not to say, of course, that somehow Mongolian authors ignore the Party's guidelines and get away with it. Rather, it appears that the MPRP, unlike the Mao faction currently in

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China, allows writers considerable freedom in the choice of subject, form, and style, provided that they support, even if only subtly and indirectly, the Party's various objectives.

The little there is in these stories of the kind of explicitly political formulas one readily associates with Stalinist Russia and Maoist China is confined to praise of the Soviet Union and condemnation of all other foreigners as well as the Buddhist Church. The most heavy-handed example of praise for the Soviet Union is *Off to Battle*, a story about the second world war and perhaps written as much as twenty years ago. The hero, a Soviet pilot, is outmanned by the Japanese, but his plane is faster, and when his machine gun gives out, it is not because it had jammed but because he had run out of ammunition. Selfless heroism and faultless equipment are the two aspects of the Soviet Union that Lkhamsüren drives home relentlessly. 23

The other example of praising the Soviet Union is gentler and more convincing. Dr. Vera Poblovna who saves a young boy's life in *Mother* symbolizes another aspect of the Soviet Union the MPRP wishes Mongolians to remember. The story evidently takes place a long time ago, probably before the second world war, when Mongolia still had very few physicians of its own. 24

Aside from the Japanese who in a wartime story like *Off to Battle* are naturally cast in the villain's role, the only other foreigners portrayed in these short stories are the White Russians and the Chinese. Both form a major portion of *The Green Knoll* and, like the Japanese, they are cast in entirely negative roles. The story takes place around 1920 when the Chinese army of occupation under Hsü Shu-tseng, that had descended upon Mongolia the previous year, was forcibly replaced by the ragtag army of the "Mad Baron" von Ungern-Sternberg. Judging by various eyewitness accounts that are neither Communist nor Mongolian, the period was fraught with extreme cruelty and suffering. Incidents such as the Chinese
soldiers terrorizing Dansaran's family or Colonel Sipailo coldbloodedly killing Delger were sufficiently commonplace to give to Purev's story the ring of authenticity.

These are the only two stories in this volume that deal with foreigners and, so far as one can detect from the titles listed in Gerasimovich, very few stories appear to have been written in which foreigners play a substantial role. Only two stories, by L. Lkhamsuren and B. Baast, were written about China, both in the late fifties and presumably friendly. Since the cooling of relations between the two countries, no short stories about China have come to my attention.  

All in all, it may be said that foreigners, both good and bad, as a theme are no longer predominant in Mongolian short stories. This theme reached its peak of popularity during the war and the following decade and, unless the current hostility with China should get much worse, it is not likely to flourish again soon.

Another theme of the past is Buddhism in all of its aspects. Its high point coincided with the MPRP's all-out attack against the religious establishment in the thirties, and it has been almost abandoned by now. The official policy in Mongolia, as in the Soviet Union and in China, has been the destruction of a once powerful religious institution and a concerted campaign against religious beliefs and practices while at the same time it has promised freedom of religion for individual citizens. This is not the place to discuss the position of the Church before the thirties and the methods the Party used in smashing institutional Buddhism. Suffice it to say that the Party acted severely and often brutally but also that Buddhism had been a tremendous burden on Mongolian society and many of its clergy had been utterly corrupt. We begin to understand why as much as one-third of the entire male population ended up as lamas when we read in Sh. Natsagdorj's Paradise how Sanjid's father asked him point-blank "whether I preferred to
eat my fill and have all the boiled rice and meat I wanted or always go hungry." As to corruption, the monk Shagdar in Paradise had countless parallels in real life and the greedy lama in Mother who exploited his own sister's credulity was the norm rather than the exception in what passed for medical treatment as late as the 1920's.

Most stories in this collection deal neither with the past nor with explicitly political themes but with many different facets of the contemporary social milieu. It would be tedious to go over them here one by one; I am certain that the reader can do this equally well. Yet, in view of a certain degree of popularity in the United States, it might be instructive to see how the theme of woman's role is handled in Mongolian short stories, and especially in the last six of our collection.

First of all, not only the heroines but all female characters in these stories are portrayed positively. No malice, no cruelty, not even jealousy mars these noble creatures. The closest thing to human failing is a brush with infidelity (Dulma in Chulun), but it is ultimately blamed on the husband. Furthermore, all but one of the heroines are occupationally "liberated": Buma (in A Funny Woman) works as a mechanic, Sevjidma and Dolgorsuren (the latter in At the Pass) devote their lives to herding, and Dulma is a professional reporter. Even Tsetseg (in The Kerchief of Love), after moping around for a while, yearns to become a harvester combine operator. Only Kulan, lovely, flirtatious Kulan is not gainfully employed outside of her home, and S. Erdene, without ever saying so, leads the reader to believe that the root of her anomalous status rests with a cruel and possessive husband.

Up to this point, the characterization of woman's role - essentially, the good woman at the labor front - is entirely formulaic, and it should not be surprising because the Party has repeatedly urged all women to take on full-time jobs outside their
homes. We should keep in mind, however, that in so doing, the Party has been motivated not so much by notions of equality (although a long-established state policy) as by a severe and persistent labor shortage.

There are other major differences on this subject between Mongolia and the United States. Mongolians try to obscure or argue away neither the differences in physical strength between men and women nor the manifest social consequences deriving therefrom. In these stories, the Mongolians are saying that women should participate full-time in as many occupations as possible, and they poke fun at men like Chalkha (in *At the Pass*) who do not accept this trend. But they are also saying that there are nevertheless occupations in which either men or women ought to predominate. Even the cases of Buma and Sevjidma, who clearly perform the most arduous tasks, subscribe to this view. Buma got herself into the business of a truck mechanic only at a time of extreme national emergency, i.e., during the war, and so her case is quite comparable to the contemporary "Rosie the riveter" in the United States. Even during that crisis, however, Buma was assigned to heavy labor only because "I was young and strong." This crusty and domineering woman not only does not demand that in peacetime more women should follow her example but insists that her son who "lost his purpose" when he became a hospital nurse should be given a job as mechanic so as "to make a real man out of him." Likewise, Sevjidma works hard on the range not because she somehow believes that housework is inferior (which she also performs, naturally and devotedly) but because her husband Senge has become lazy.

This clear-cut preference for economic sex differentiation is complemented by social ideals which have come under attack in the United States. In *Chulun*, Dulma's husband Dorji does all the housework besides a full-time career at the hospital. He would be ideal from the standpoint of many American feminists, yet in our story
he is found wanting. Dulma yearns for and falls in love with a man like Chulun who wants "to escort a pretty girl," who pats girls on the head, playfully orders them not to yawn in his presence or to comb their hair, and who brings them gifts like lipstick from the big city. At every turn, Chulun takes the initiative, and Dulma and all the other women in the story, charmed by him, play passive roles. Likewise, in Before the Sun Goes Down, Dolgor, a middle-aged widow, feels youthful again in the presence of the ruggedly masculine Dendev who impresses her with his ability to split a tree trunk with one blow.

It is my hope that in spite of its imperfections and shortcomings, this collection of short stories will stimulate more interest in Mongolia and more translations in English of that country's literature.

Finally, it is my pleasure to thank my students for stimulating me into editing this volume and the State Committee for Information, Radio, and Television of the Mongolian Council of Ministers for granting permission to edit and publish these short stories.
NOTES


2. The magazine has been published bi-monthly by the State Committee for Information, Radio, and Television in Ulaanbaatar since June 1971. Its predecessor was Mongolia Today, published by the Information Section of the Mongolian Embassy in New Delhi.


Literacy statistics are virtually useless because it was the practice to record as literate only those who could read and write. Because literacy thus defined made a person liable for government service, many helped to push the official literacy figures still lower by pretending an inability to write. See B. Rinchen, Folklore Mongol (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1965), IV, viii.

The following summary remarks about literary activities in the post-revolutionary period are largely based on Gerasimovich.


14. Buyannemekh was posthumously rehabilitated in 1962.

15. The battle of Khalkhin Gol of 1939 in which Mongolian and Soviet troops cooperated in defeating Japanese forces is mentioned to this day.

16. The following description of D. Natsagdorj's life is mainly based on Gerasimovich and the recent study by Klaus Sagaster, "Der mongolische Dichter D. Nacagdorż (1906-1937)," *Zentralasiatische Studien*, VII (1973), 525-543.

17. Gerasimovich, 133.

18. Published in *Tsog*, 1947, Nos. 2-3, p. 3, as quoted in Gerasimovich, 133.

19. Six graduated from Mongolian State University and three from the Pedagogical Institute in Ulaanbaatar. Of these nine, three went on to the Gorkii Literary Institute in Moscow, and two others evidently had no higher education in Mongolia before entering the Gorkii Literary Institute directly.

20. Quite a few of them were older persons who had died before 1955.


23. The story also reveals an apparently widespread custom of not taking prisoners when the Japanese pilot gets killed the moment he parachutes to the ground.

24. D. Natsagdorj's poster-like sketch of "the marvelous man [who] had made a revolution in the north," in *Son of the Old World*, is rather incidental to the story which dwells mostly on the hopeless monotony that the writer saw in pre-revolutionary Mongolian society. Likewise, in *The Green Knoll*, Dansaran's and his daughter's refusal, at the risk of death, to reveal the whereabouts of the Red soldier is only a fleeting episode in that story.
While the official Mongolian attitude toward the present Chinese leadership is uncompromisingly hostile (see, e.g., the article, "The Peking chauvinists' words and deeds," originally published in the September 3, 1973 issue of Utga Zokhiol Urlag and translated in the supplement to Mongolla magazine, No. 2 (17), 1974), popular attitudes toward China seem to range from indifference to mild friendliness. In talks with Mongolians from many walks of life in the summer of 1973, I did not detect any trace of hostility toward either China or the Chinese people.
Life in the steppe is monotonous. The days drag on, one being very much like the next. In the tussocky, marshy steppe near a well, the smoke can sometimes be seen curling from a faded ger. The endless white mist all around saddens the heart. Scorching the felt ger, the sultry summer heat deadens the cattle-breeder's thoughts. The earth surrounding the nomad ger is spotted with the flat cakes of cow manure. Here and there some little calves frolic.

From their very childhood to old age people dwelt close to a single river and roamed up and down its banks. Their entire life centered around one well. Gavji Jambal squatted forever in a front corner, babbling about God and the scriptures. Zaisan Namjil would arrive and talk about all sorts of things concerning the laws. Listening to them the Mongols thought that there were no villages beyond the mountains and that the horizon was the end of the earth. They knew nothing of what was going on in the world. Living in their remote corner day after day, the Mongols prayed to God in the mornings and in the evenings bowed to the sky. They lived this way until they died.

The son of the old world drove up to the ger at a trot. Tied around his head was a white cotton kerchief, and a few hairs broken loose from his tousled black pigtail hung across his cheek. His torn, threadbare sleeves revealed two rough, gray elbows.

Jumping down lightly to the ground, the rider firmly tethered his horse, wiped the perspiration off his sunburned face with the flap of his deel and walked into the ger. He had hardly stepped inside when he began telling that the Baldans were fulling felt,
that the Tsendas were grazing sheep at the saltmarsh, that Damba had gone to look for his horses, and that Gombo had returned from his trip to Khangay. Then, having told other bits of news about people they all knew, he walked over to the hearth. He now cast a meek glance at the gavji and zaisan and gave them a low bow. Having been given a bowl of sour milk and a hunk of khusam, he squatted down near the open fire and began to eat.

After finishing his meal, he walked out of the ger and directed his steps to the house of the rich man Baljir where he would look after the foals while the mares were being milked. For this he got some mare's milk which he drank up on the spot. Half a day passed in this way. In the afternoon he helped shear somebody else's sheep and was fed some offal. And now the afternoon was drawing to a close.

By nature the son of the old world was not a dull-witted person; his life, however, passed within the confines of but three or four örtöö. He had never had occasion to go as far as the border of the eastern khoshuun nor had he been on the bank of the western river. How much could he therefore see or hear?

He was young and strong but, having remained a poor orphan in his childhood, he was compelled to hire himself out to his neighbors and so lost the road to a more worthwhile life.

In the cold winters he guarded horses at night, and in the hot summers he herded sheep. The life he led in the steppes day in and day out was a dull and monotonous existence without a glimmer of light. It was like living in an overturned cauldron and seeing no more of the world than the marmot who hibernates in the winter and crawls out of his burrow only in the spring. He could not imagine any other life than the roaming from one pasture to another spring, summer, fall and winter. He knew of no other truth except the words of his ancestors and his elders. What a blighted and ignorant life! How his young years had been wasted! Why then did he not seek a new world?
But how could the son of the old world by himself grasp the sad conditions of his existence, how could he see the injustice of the rule of the feudal lords and lamas? Living according to their ancient customs, mistaking suffering for happiness, gloom and ignorance for prosperity, a whole people most of whom, like the son of the old world, closing their eyes and ears, were unaware of the world and had nearly forever remained cut off in their desolated steppe.

However, ever since the day the marvelous man had made a revolution in the north, rays of light penetrated beneath the overturned cauldron. The Mongolian people were awakened from their slumber. Everybody now learned that there was more land beyond the horizon, that there were five oceans and five continents. The road to a new world was opened to the people, the road to development. The son of the old world became the son of the new world. Happiness and rejoicing were now the lot of the people!
A SWIFT-FOOTED HORSE

by

D. Natsagdorj

It is interesting to watch a mirage quivering and rippling in the distance, but it is hard to determine what the tiny dots are that shift in the haze. Only when you come closer do you see that they are horsemen racing across the plain. Racing is the favorite sport of plainsmen, and a fast horse fills every Mongol with admiration and delight.

Pulling hard on the bit, Surenhuu dashed to the winning post. He wiped the lather from his horse and lit a cigarette. The graceful dun horse, its sides heaving so that the ribs stood out, pawed the ground with its graceful legs and shook its beautiful head. From time to time it tossed its head high until it appeared to be ready to take off for the clouds. It moved its ears. Surenhuu's heart swelled with pride at having such a horse.

Other riders came racing up. They admired the horse and called it Shuvuu Saaral [Swift-footed Horse]. They begged Surenhuu to sell them the horse, offering him the price of several young horses. Surenhuu refused.

"I don't want to sell him," he said, running his hand over the horse's head.

All the men discussed the merits of the horse. Only toward the end of the day did they ride off into the rays of the setting sun in groups of two and three, heading for home. When they halted on the way they continued to discuss the horse.

The first rays of the morning sun lit up the sky, and the moon, a sliver arched like an eyebrow, vanished. Autumn hoarfrost glittered all around. The peaks of the mountains loomed in the
distance. Surenhuu stepped out of his ger, saddled his horse, and galloped off toward the west.

By the time the sun rose, Surenhuu had crossed several hills and rivers. Seated carelessly in the saddle, he was trying to cover a distance of two days' travel in one. He wanted to reach a distant aimag by night. Shuvuun Saaral was going at a fast trot, his bridle jangling.

Man and horse sped across the plain. It was a clear, sunny day, with a gentle breeze ruffling the grass by the roadside. Far ahead, a herd of antelopes swept like a wave across the road. In the far distance there was a glimpse of a nomad camp. That was where Sunjidma lived.

Surenhuu and his horse swept past the neighboring aimag. It was all so interesting — hills and rivers they had never seen before. Horses and cattle were grazing everywhere. They passed gers beside which milch mares were neighing. It was time for airag and feasting, but where was the time to stop by and make merry? Surenhuu was not interested. He was in a hurry, and so he galloped past without halting. Shuvuun Saaral was tearing along as swiftly as he had in the morning. His graceful legs raised clouds of dust. The nomad dwellers, young and old, gazed in surprise after the horseman flying ahead on his beautiful horse.

But Surenhuu had already vanished from view. The closer he came to the camp the more excited he grew. He rejoiced at the thought of seeing Sunjidma again. It was rapidly growing dark and the moon had not yet come up. In this unfamiliar locality he could only trust to his swift-footed horse. No matter how Surenhuu strained his eyes he could no longer make out the hills in the distance and could only depend for direction on the stars in the sky. He halted to get his bearings. At that moment a light flickered close by.

Again Surenhuu's heart leaped with joy as he drove his horse forward. Nothing interfered with his swift onrush. Sparks flew
from the hooves of his steed. Soon he came to two or three gers huddled at the foot of a hill. Sunjidma emerged from the first ger to quiet the dogs. Her sweet face shone in the gloom of the night.
Myadagma, the landlord's daughter, would allow Tserma to put on one of her old worn deels for the holidays. Having beaten the mattresses, she picked up the rubbish into a basket, placed it on her back and headed toward the gate. People were carrying gifts and foodstuff wrapped in white cloth. Tserma went past them with the basket on her back but did not make way for them. The merchants cried out angrily:

"What's the matter with you, are you blind or something? What are you shaking your dirt and trash on our gifts for? What a dumb girl!" Anybody who felt like it could order Tserma around.

After the girl carried out the trash and returned, Myadagma again called out to tell her to take out some more trash. Then in the afternoon firewood had to be sawn. It's very hard to saw alone. At that moment, Tsultem, a young man who was watering horses in the yard next door came up to the fence and looking through a crack, called Tserma.

Tsultem and Tserma, working for the owners of two neighboring ger were in love with one another, but their masters did not take their love seriously, convinced that "the common people don't know happiness, and the poor can't love." They made fun of the young couple and wouldn't even allow them to meet.

Suddenly a man came up to the gate. Seeing her boyfriend, Myadagma quickly came forward to meet him. Holding hands, talking cheerfully and laughing, they went toward the ger. That was when they caught sight of Tserma at the fence.
"Hey, what are you doing there?" Myadagma called, ridicule in her voice.

Hearing those words, Dagdan's wife threw open the felt ger door and came rushing out shouting, "What a rotten good-for-nothing! Now why aren't you sawing firewood, you dumbbell?"

This time Tserma screwed up her courage and replied, "Sawing alone takes too long and I'd have no time to do the other chores, so I asked Tsultem here to help me."

"Well, then don't waste any time and start sawing," Dagdan's wife retorted and went back into the ger.

Tserma was happy; Tsultem could now enter Dagdan's yard and saw together with her.

Dusk began to fall. The weather got worse and fluffy snowflakes started coming down, but Tserma and Tsultem kept on working, the rasp and whine of the saw merging with the strains of a shanz coming from the warm ger where Myadagma was enjoying herself with her boyfriend. This made the hired hands a bit sad, but they went on sawing, every once in a while blowing on their frozen fingers to keep them warm. They kept saying gentle and loving things to each other, trying to hide the depth of their suffering behind light remarks. It was all very touching. Tserma told him that her masters were getting special clothes and fine food ready for the holidays, and Tsultem told her about his master who had brought home a fine pacer from his herd. Suddenly Tsultem brought out a silk kerchief from under his shirt and handed it to Tserma. This little gift seemed to the girl a million times more precious than Myadagma's new silk deel.

She told him sadly that with the approaching New Year there had been much more work to do and that her masters were all the time berating her for trying to meet him more frequently. As they talked and worked, time flew by.

When they finished sawing, it was already late and Tserma
had to start doing her housework. Parting with Tsultem, she entered the ger. There, in good old tradition, plates with meat dumplings, cold meat and other delicacies were laid out around the hearth. All this had been prepared by Tserma.

The guests in new holiday dresses were cheerfully getting ready to sit down and to partake of all these delectable tidbits. But Tserma saw the New Year in at the cauldron over the fire.

Myadagma brought in her silk deel and ordered Tserma to put it on, but Tserma said in a hesitant tone: "I'll put it on tomorrow," and laid it aside. Then she took out Tsultem's gift, the kerchief, and every once in a while pressed it to her face. Suddenly
Dagdan's wife caught sight of the kerchief and cried out, "Where did you get that? That's probably from among our gifts."

It hurt Tserma to be so wrongly accused but neither could she readily admit that Tsultem had presented it to her. And so she said nothing.

Many guests gathered that evening to see in the New Year. The ger was resounding with merry laughter and voices. Only Tserma was sitting sadly at the stove and sighing bitterly. She didn't get any sleep that night again; she had to do the cooking for everybody for the next day. The next day her master and mistress were going out and she had to prepare everything they needed. At the same time she managed to meet respectfully and serve all those who called at the ger. She somehow managed to pull through the next day, but in the evening guests arrived again. They made merry, drank a lot, were noisy, played music, and Tserma cleaned up after them, making their beds, bringing in pillows for them, and so another night passed for her.

They were carousing at her master's ger for several days on end. Tserma was exhausted body and soul, but no one paid any attention to her, and she just had no choice. Only in moments when she was alone did she let her misery-laden tears flow. And only once in a while did she unburden herself by talking to Tsultem through a crack in the fence.

So two more years passed. Again New Year's was approaching. The Dagdans were planning to leave the city and move out to the steppe for some reason. The mistress wanted to take Tserma along with her. But Tsultem sneaked out one day, called her quietly and, when she came out of the ger, said to her, "Let's get out of here and live together."

Tserma was too excited to understand everything he said to her, but when she heard his last words she was overjoyed. She quickly gathered her few belongings and left with Tsultem.
Tsultem's ger was black and tattered, but Tserma felt a million times happier there than in Dagdan's white ger where she had to sleep by the threshold. Now she would be able to get up when she wanted and do her own work and rest when people are supposed to rest. Now she would be living with her beloved Tsultem.

Another New Year came around. Never since her arrival in the city had Tserma slept so peacefully on this festive night. In the morning she got up early and dressed. Her deel wasn't of silk and beaver but it was beautiful.
Seeking relief from the heat, the inhabitants of Ulaanbaatar usually climb to the top of Tasgan Hill, and then the air there rings with the voices of little children, the shouts of youngsters and the songs of young people. I had for some time noticed there a certain old man. He kept apart from the others and hours on end scanned the capital, sprawling below in the distance, through a pair of binoculars he took from a well-worn leather case.

It was a hot stifling evening. Ulaanbaatar's white buildings were glittering in the rays of the setting sun. The highways and roads, lined with dense greenery, looked like long light-colored ribbons. "It would be nice to have a look at the city through those binoculars," crossed my mind, and I approached the old man. "Good evening," I said and sat down next to him in the grass. His face was deeply furrowed by time, his neck was wrinkled and his chin drooped. But his eyes were amazingly alive and glittered like two ripe currants. He acknowledged my greeting and again raised the binoculars to his eyes.

"They've again begun building something over there, beyond the river," he remarked quietly, as if to himself.

"They're clearing the site for the industrial exhibition," I explained. "The papers wrote about it long ago. But you certainly know what and where is being built in our capital even without the papers."

"Of course," he confirmed readily. "Almost every day some construction project is started in Ulaanbaatar. You want to take a look?" and he handed the binoculars to me with a smile that
immediately erased fifteen years from his face.

"And what district of the city do you like most, Mr.--?"

"Dansaran," the old man introduced himself. "I like the whole city but," and a quiver entered his voice, "it's the Green Knoll that's closest to my heart. Much in my life is associated with it."

"Perhaps you would tell me, Dansaran, what has made the Green Knoll so dear to you? I assure you, I'm always very interested in anything new about Ulaanbaatar's history."

"History has nothing to do with it. It's my personal life," he retorted grumpily.

"Isn't the history of a people made up of the destinies of individuals?" I parried.

My argument obviously seemed convincing to him, and he looked at me closely.

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "if you're really serious..."

He put his binoculars into the case and began in an unhurried manner. Here is his story.

* * *

Back in Dansaran's distant youth, when it seemed to him he would be young forever and nothing was too hard for him — work from dawn to dusk for the wealthy arad and the great distances over which he drove his master's flocks of sheep, and even the nights without sleep — he fell in love with a young beautiful girl with a long thick braid — it's hard to imagine they come so beautiful! They got married, but their happiness was as short-lived as a spring shower. While saving their master's effects, his young wife was drowned during a flood. It seemed to him then that his life was finished. But there was still his little daughter, big-eyed and thin-legged like a mountain kiddy. Delger grew up, filled out and turned into a real beauty, like the dawn. And she was so kind and warm-hearted; if anybody was in trouble or in need, she'd give away everything, to the last kerchief from her head.

When the girl turned fifteen, Dansaran moved to Urga, now
Ulaanbaatar. It wasn't that he was looking for an easy life, but that winter a great many heads of cattle had been lost for lack of fodder. In Urga he hired himself out as a butcher at the marketplace.

Those were hard, one might say, cruel times. Many were the hordes that trampled Mongolia. The gamins who like locusts devoured everything on their way, von Ungern's gangs and his lieutenants, Sipailo and others. Yet life in the city could not be extinguished. Boys and girls would gather on moonlit nights on the banks of the Tuul and sing songs. Quietly, in low voices, but they sang, anyway. Some couples would go farther down the river to its warm waters and there, hiding among the willows, would kiss. Granny Tuul, who at night stole all the stars from the sky, would swash her waters noisily, drowning out the kisses. Delger wasn't in the habit of going to the Tuul, yet one day she invited a fine young man, Demberel by name, to their ger. He was a handsome young man of generous soul and bold heart, a fine match for Delger. Some time passed and they got married.

Came the winter of 1921. The frosts were fierce. But fiercer than the frosts and storms were the gamins. They prowled around everywhere in search of loot. Each new day brought more alarming news: now they had raided an ail, now raped some women. "Like savage dogs gone berserk," people said of them. Dansaran was now living in constant alarm. Fear for his beloved daughter, his beautiful Delger, had wasted his body, yellowed his face and dug the first deep furrows in it. Asserting his paternal rights, he forbade her to leave the ger.

In wintertime the arads go to bed early. But one evening Dansaran just couldn't fall asleep. Suddenly there was a loud knocking on the door. As if sensing some inevitable calamity, he became rooted to the spot, unable even to rise to his feet. Torn from its hinges, the door fell to the ground, and two gamins burst into the ger. One stopped at the entrance, holding his rifle at
the ready, the other came forward and, seeing Delger, opened his mouth in amazement.

"How did such a luxuriant flower come to be in such a poor ger," he muttered under his breath, coming to.

He stepped forward with spread arms, obviously intending to embrace Delger, but she recoiled and hid behind her father's back. The gamin pressed the muzzle of his rifle against Dansaran's chest: "Come on, beat it! Your daughter is a real peach. You don't expect me to give up a beauty like that!" and burst out laughing.

Never before had Dansaran thought a man's laughter could be so terrible. Ice-cold merciless eyes and that laughter! Suddenly it all became clear as daylight to him: they would show no mercy either to him or his children. His hand rose to his throat where a lump was strangling him. Delger began to cry softly behind her father's back, just as when she was a child. But when the gamin tried to push him aside to get to Delger, Dansaran suddenly tore the rifle out of the man's hand with a ferocity and strength he had never suspected he possessed. One shot and then a second cracked sharply. The gamin at the entrance had pulled his trigger. But the marauder's hand had trembled and the bullet passed over Dansaran's head and pierced the ger's felting. The first gamin whipped out a knife and jumped toward Dansaran, but the latter, swift as a cat, flung himself at his attacker's legs and the soldier with a wild cry fell face forward right onto the burning hearth and his head cracked against the iron trivet. What followed was like in a dream. Demberel flung himself at the second gamin, tore the rifle from him and killed him on the spot. Silence descended upon the ger. Badly frightened, Delger pressed against her father's chest, embracing him with her arms. Dansaran could even hear the beating of her heart. He released himself with difficulty from her hold and said quietly: "Follow me, both of you," and stepped out of the ger.

Dogs were barking in the distance, and orange-tongued flames
were rising to the sky on the western outskirts of Urga. The gamins had probably set something on fire. "That's all right, we'll make you pay," Dansaran muttered angrily under his breath, "Mongolians aren't sheep, they won't allow themselves to be slaughtered."

"Father, take a horse and leave together with Delger," Demberel said. "I'll have to remain and look after my old parents, they'll perish without me."

Delger was no longer crying but, pressing herself to her husband, was caressing his face. Father and daughter then mounted a horse, and Demberel, holding the bridle, led them silently through narrow and dark side streets.

Having safely passed the cordons posted on the city's outskirts, they rode into the dense willow groves along the Tuul. Here they were to part. Dansaran tried not to watch Delger bidding her husband farewell — his heart was bleeding, as it was.

At last they started out, and when he looked back after a while, he could still make out Demberel's figure in the distance.

"Be careful, my son," he quietly repeated his farewell words.

The whole next day the fugitives spent in the woods at the western slope of Mount Shire. Sitting on some pine branches, they pressed close to one another to keep warm, while their horse nibbled on last year's grass coming up from under the snow. It wasn't easy waiting for the evening purple twilight to fill the woods. Then they moved on, keeping to remote paths, careful not to approach inhabited ails.

"So where are we going?" Delger finally asked, as night tucked the earth under its tender wing.

"To the Sujigt monastery. I think an acquaintance of mine is living there."

The ger where the two finally found shelter was a poor one like the ger they had abandoned, but it seemed to them like paradise. A fire was burning brightly on the hearth and the water was boiling
miraculously in a kettle. The family that had taken them in was a small one and short-handed. So there was work for them immediately, for which both were thankful because there's nothing worse than sitting around idly and eating the bread one hasn't earned.

Those were happy days for Dansaran; his daughter, safe and unharmed, was with him. Nothing seemed to threaten her. What more could he wish for. But after a month had passed, longing began to gnaw at Delger's heart.

"Let's wait a little longer, my dear," Dansaran tried to prevail upon her. "Things may quiet down, and then we'll return to the city."

But he himself had little hope that that time would soon come. True, rumors reached the monastery settlement ever more frequently that the gamins had been driven out of Urga by a certain yellow-bearded stranger from Russia, Ungern by name.

"Have you heard, Baron von Ungern imprisoned a great many gamins?"

"Now we'll soon be able to return home," Delger kept repeating, and her eyes shone with such unrestrained joy that Dansaran hadn't the heart to upset her with additional delays.

"All right, let's go!" he finally said, unable to hold out against her any longer, and went off to look for horses.

Urga met them with an unusual winter animation in which one could, however, sense something showy and affected, as if a foreboding of fresh calamities was descending upon the city, as if people had the feeling that the liberal baron would soon show his true colors and Russian revolutionaries would swing from gallows and the jails would be filled with Mongolian patriots. In his joy, Dansaran at first failed to notice anything suspicious. Putting up with some friends, he immediately set out to look for his son-in-law. But hard as he tried to find him, no one seemed to know of Demberel's whereabouts. Even his parents threw up their arms in despair.

One day an old man, a neighbor, brought in the first piece of
terrible news: three Mongolian patriots had been hanged from a nearby gate on von Ungern's personal order. A feeling of repulsion swept Dansaran as if he had touched a snake. Doubt began to creep into his heart. So that's what he was like, the liberator!

But the baron's gangs were obviously running out of manpower and began recruiting by force all Mongolians indiscriminately, the young and old, the healthy and the sick. "With whom is von Ungern planning to wage a war?" Dansaran kept asking himself in puzzlement. "What will happen to Delger if I'm called up?"

"Let's call on Demberel's parents, my dear, maybe they can suggest some way for me to avoid being drafted."

Demberel's parents lived near Urga, not far from Songino. Dansaran and Delger had ridden a good way from the city when loud cries and shots reached them from the distance. Dansaran put the whip to the horses and turned into the thicket. Suddenly the horses shied. Poorly concealed by the bare branches, a man in felt boots and a Russian half-length sheepskin coat was lying under a bush.

"Who are you?" Dansaran challenged him.

"I'm a Red; the enemies are looking for me. Please don't tell anyone you saw me," the man replied.

Dansaran nodded and, turning to his daughter, said, "Quick, let's be off!"

"Look, father, someone is galloping after us," Delger suddenly cried, looking back by chance.

At that moment a bullet whistled over Dansaran's head.

"Halt! Why are you running away?" shouted one of the three horsemen who had ridden up to them, colorless little eyes looking out from under a karakul hat.

"We weren't running away," Dansaran replied, trying to keep his voice calm and natural.

"And who did you see in the willow grove?" the man insisted, waving his revolver under Dansaran's nose.
"We didn't see anybody," Dansaran replied gloomily, trying to move his horse so that the men would see less of his daughter. "Now, don't lie! You're talking to Captain Sipailo himself. Tell me the truth and you'll save your life."

Dansaran's eyes just flashed angrily. Not for anything in the world would he betray that Red! If the Reds were against scum like this, then he was for them. But Sipailo suddenly lost all interest in Dansaran. His eyes lit up and he fixed his oily gaze on Delger, seemingly feeling his way over her coral cheeks, thin-lined and amazingly beautiful eyebrows and the few locks of black hair that were showing from under her reddish fox hat.

"By God, you're a real Mongolian Madonna!" he exclaimed with a tender note in his voice. "You come with me, girlie, and I'll give you a taste of real life!"

Dansaran saw Delger's face turn stonelike.

"Tell them, father, to let us go," she begged.

"Oh, come on, don't play the fool," Sipailo said, getting angry, his whiskers over his short upper lip bristling and revealing his long harelike yellowish teeth. "You probably know, my beauty, the saying, 'The innocent stands, the guilty runs.' Your hubby is most likely fighting against us in Kyakhta?" and, becoming real sore, ordered: "Follow us."

On the Green Knoll Ungern's men stopped.

"Now this is your last chance, sweetie, are you coming with me?"

Delger just shook her head and covered her eyes.

"Well, if it's no, then you'll also be called to account. Who were you hiding in the woods? My men saw everything!"

"We weren't hiding anybody!" Dansaran cried out.

"Take him prisoner!"

As the men dragged Dansaran from his horse he managed to kick Delger's. "To the woods, my girl," he cried in a constrained voice and fell face downwards into the snow.
Delger's mount bolted. Lifting himself Dansaran saw Sipailo raising his revolver, taking careful aim and pressing the trigger. Everything went black before his eyes. Delger swayed in the saddle and, toppling over awkwardly, fell to the ground. Sipailo rode up to her, bent over and, looking closely into her face, said mockingly, "There, now you're being sensible, so let's talk it over."

But Delger lay motionless.

"Now what do you say to that, she's really dead! And I just wanted to wound her."

Those words whipped Dansaran back to life, and he lurched toward the murderer with such ferocity that the other two could hardly hold him back.

"To hell with him, fellows," Sipailo ordered. "We don't need him anymore. Let's go!"

A deep silence descended upon the steppe. Dansaran chewed himself free of his fetters and rushed up to Delger. Tearing her deel open, he pressed his ear to her chest. His whole life at that moment turned into hearing. But Delger's heart had ceased to beat, the bullet had gone right through it.

All joy and light went out of Dansaran's life. Every evening after that he would come to the Green Knoll where the ground had drunk up his daughter's life blood.

A turbulent spring, with all the trees suddenly abloom and the swollen Tuul in full flood, stole up unnoticed. Disturbances in Urga became more frequent. Almost every day thousands of tinkling silver bells in the temples informed the city's inhabitants of some solemn service. The lamas were praying feverishly, but no services could distract the common people from their expectations of great changes.

"The gamins have been driven out of Kakhta!"

"The People's Army is marching on Urga."

"What good will that do us? Either Ungern's followers will
return or some new conquerors will come."

"You're wrong! The People's Army is made up of common people, and many inhabitants of Urga have joined it. Those soldiers took a sacred oath to drive all the plunderers and foreign invaders from Mongolian soil!"

The day the People's Army entered Urga Dansaran was on his knoll. He saw the leading column appear from the west along the highway, blue and yellow banners fluttering in the breeze.

"Maybe marching among them was somebody who had shot Sipailo," crossed Dansaran's mind. He would have been supremely happy to embrace that hero. And suddenly he saw his son-in-law. Demberel was riding a tall piebald steed with a white forelock. A rifle was slung behind his back and a five-pointed red star shone on his hat. They embraced.

"So that's where you were, my son. And I thought I'd never see you again,"! Dansaran passed his fingers tenderly over the red star. "Tell me, do you know whether an enemy of ours by the name of Sipailo is still alive?"

"Of course not! Together with the Red Army men we captured him. He was executed. But why do you ask, Father?"

Dansaran sobbed out the sad story of his daughter's death.

From then on Dansaran and Demberel never parted. A few years later, on Dansaran's insistence, Demberel again married. She was a girl of a mild disposition, remarkably like Delger. Today Dansaran's grandchildren are already grown up; the eldest girl finished secondary school last year.

* * *

Dansaran fell silent. And I couldn't say a word, shaken by his story.

Evening lights were already going on in the distance, in snow-white Ulaanbaatar. Dusk was coming on. The noise of the running about and frolicking children near us had grown louder, they were in a hurry to finish their games. Old Dansaran looked at them with a kind smile. The bubbling life around him gladdened his heart.
I was spending my vacation this summer in Songino. There were few elderly people there, most of the vacationers being young, yet I managed to find two pleasant companions, Sanjid and Gonchik.

Sanjid was once visited by his son, a tall handsome youth of about twenty. Gonchik then remarked to Sanjid with envy in his voice, "You're a lucky fellow. I'm alone. But what's the use, you wouldn't understand anyway. You have a wife and children."

Gonchik sighed deeply and his face took on that sad expression which makes young people seem old, and old ones aged. Sanjid gave him a look of sincere sympathy, but though the latter's sadness evoked compassion, he couldn't restrain himself from saying proudly, "Yes, I'm blessed with children. My Gombo, the one who visited me, is the second in our family." And after a slight pause added haltingly, "But I'm his stepfather, as is the case with two other of our children."

"Tell us about yourself, Sanjid," I asked.

"Oh, what's there to tell..." Sanjid said shyly.

But Gonchik and I continued to press him and he finally gave in. We moved to an ivy-covered arbor, settled down comfortably, and got ready to listen to his story. The sun, filtering through the green foliage, had covered the earthen floor with yellow splotches. Sanjid's voice was coming softly, as if from afar, and there rose before our eyes a picture of long bygone years.

* * *

I was a lama before the Popular Revolution and considered a scholar in those days. I was only a little boy when my father once
placed me before him and, stroking my hair, asked whether I preferred to eat my fill and have all the boiled rice and meat I wanted or always go hungry. The former prospect naturally seemed much more tempting to me. "And when my last hour strikes," he added, "you'll pray that I be taken to paradise."

I agreed. I had hardly turned eight when Father took me to the nearest monastery and placed me under a lama by the name of Molom. This was on the eve of the revolution. The lama, a corpulent old man with a clean-shaven head, commenced my education with considerable zeal, and two years later I was already being sent with several other lay brothers, who had made particular progress in the ecclesiastical sciences, to Urga to continue my education at the famous Gandan Monastery. My good fortune so overjoyed my parents, they even tightened their belts to buy me a small four-walled ger so that I would have a dwelling of my own. My mentor in Gandan was a lama by the name of Shagdar whose nickname "Resembling No One" was considered flattering and suited him perfectly. He was then about forty and held to be very learned in the scriptures and ritual practices. Even his appearance was singular. The expression on his face was that of an innocent child, his arms and hands were thin and white like a woman's, and his voice was very quiet, though extremely distinct. He tutored many lay brothers, but I made friends with only one of them, a young man by the name of Namjil who had come from the western part of the country. He had a quick mind and phenomenal memory; he could memorize the most difficult prayer after only one reading.

After the revolution, schools and clubs began to be opened everywhere, automobiles appeared in the streets, and young people started to go to the movies in the evenings. This new life seemed amazing and held a growing attraction for us. Lay brothers gradually began leaving the monastery one by one. I also went to the city frequently, though my lamaist attire embarrassed me. Once, two young girls with bright ribbons in their tresses and bags full
of books came walking down the street toward me. One of them cast a curious glance in my direction and remarked out loud to her companion, "Look a real lama! Now, what will he do when he grows up to be a man? Surely not mutter prayers? Who needs them!" The girl chuckled scornfully, then both burst out laughing and continued on their way. I remember feeling how my face turned red, hot as if I had been scalded with boiling water.

The Gandan lay brothers were now constantly involved in rebellious talk. Instead of cramming prayers they spent long evenings exchanging bold dreams. Some dreamed of the army and an officer's career, others simply wanted to leave the monastery, set up a house, marry and start a family. I listened with interest and amazement to this talk, but my mentor Shagdar, noticing this, would immediately summon me to his ger and, placing some religious book in my hand, say, "Study and master Buddha's great wisdom. The time is near when our religion will again acquire its former power and strength. Don't become like those lay brothers who always hanker for the mundane. They'll know no happiness here or after death. But you, going in time to the next world, will find yourself in paradise."

Once my elder brother, who had just arrived from the eastern border where he was serving in the army, visited me. He was only two years my senior but much broader in the shoulders, and his self-confidence and buoyancy immediately won my heart.

"Don't you think you've been much too long in the monastery? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? A healthy guy like you steeped in idleness."

"Don't talk that way, it's a great sin!" I retorted in fright.

But he insisted.

"Don't stand in the way of my paradise!" I finally exclaimed in despair.

"Well, perhaps you could tell me where this paradise of yours is located?" he asked smiling.
I recalled everything Shagdar had told me and explained it all to my brother. This land lay somewhere down south. Silver trees with gold and coral leaves grew there, it was summer all year round, paradise birds sang songs, and only men lived there. The inhabitants of this paradise had nothing to worry about, no cattle to graze and no wheat to grow. All were equal, there were no masters and slaves.

When I had already tired elaborating on the bliss in paradise, my brother smiled ironically and asked:

"And how are you planning to get to that land where all are equal and live so happily?"

"I have to pray a lot and teach others to do the same," I replied confidently.

My brother burst out laughing. "That sure sounds great! So it's not at all hard to land in paradise. Say, have any of your lamas already been to that place? No? Then how come you're so well informed about life there?"

I got sore at him and refused to continue the argument. On leaving, he said there was no paradise, that the lamas had themselves invented it to fool such simpletons as me. There was no point in expecting happiness after one's death. One should achieve happiness in this life and not through prayer but creating it with one's own hands.

My brother stopped in Ulaanbaatar and called on me frequently. No matter how hard I tried to evade the subject of paradise, he kept reopening it again and again.

"They are building socialism in the Soviet Union, a country neighboring on ours. We are also building a new life, but you only want to peek through a crack at it," he once said to me.

He began to explain to me how fine life would be under communism, and that it would soon come if everyone worked hard and with a will. But I didn't understand the word communism then and said that communism probably was that very same paradise about
which I was dreaming. My brother agreed but the next day was again ridiculing my pronouncements about life in paradise and continued to tell me about communism.

"The main thing," he said, "is for you to leave this place as soon as possible. Just take a look around you and see how much has to be done!"

My brother did not stay long in the capital; he was again summoned to the border and left. Every new day brought fresh news about lamas leaving monasteries. And then a rebellion of counter-revolutionary lamas from among the upper clergy broke out, and that completely undermined the church's standing. The number of parishioners in our temples decreased steadily and so did the trickle of monetary donations. But religion still held Namjil and myself firmly in its snare.

After supper one day our mentor Shagdar, who had long been suffering some mysterious disease that had emaciated him so his skin had become thinner than parchment, suddenly fell flat on his back never to rise again. After his funeral, Namjil and I, being his most beloved pupils, began to go through his belongings and discovered hidden away under old manuscripts bound in wooden covers chests filled with worldly riches — ingots of silver and rolls of silk, velvet and brocade. The monastery's treasury took it all away, leaving us only some books. We decided to acquaint ourselves with their contents and found that instead of prayers and religious writings they contained accounts. Doubts began to assail me at this point. If Shagdar had counted on paradise after his death, what need had he to amass such wealth here in the vale of life? Soon Namjil and I were the only lay brothers in the monastery.

"All our fellow monks have found their road in life and only you and I are stuck in this monastery," Namjil once said to me.

"And what do you suggest?" I asked and was myself struck with amazement; not so long ago I would have considered asking a question
about action a terrible sin, let alone contemplating action itself.

"Have you heard about the local industrial combine? Well, I spoke to a certain man and he promised to help us get jobs in the mess hall there."

I was a pretty good cook and had long been preparing meat dumplings and pies for the lamas.

"Well, we could try. Do you think they'll hire me?" I asked.

So Namjil and I began working in the mess hall which was completely serviced by former lamas. Some of them continued to wear the lamaist robe, others had acquired lay garb, but on top of the latter all of us wore at work a snow-white smock. Our mess hall became famous for its pies and tasty aromatic tea.

In the meantime the old man on whose plot my ger stood decided to move to his daughter and sold his plot. I didn't know where to pitch my ger, and again Namjil saved the day.

"Look here," he said, "my kid sister owns a big plot. I'm sure she won't object for you to pitch your ger there. We'll call on her tomorrow."

His sister's name was Khanda. She had three little children: two boys, one five, the other four years old, and a baby girl a few months' old. Namjil introduced me to her and then went off somewhere, saying he would soon return. I felt very awkward; I had never had any female acquaintances and simply didn't know what to say and how to behave. She, too, was noticeably embarrassed, but her little boys, very sociable kids, started a game, and we soon became friends.

"It looks like rain," Khanda muttered. "I better go saw some firewood and bring it in before the rain wets it."

She took up a saw and went out. I naturally followed. The log we had to saw up was very gnarled and we just couldn't get the saw going smoothly. Each pulled in his own direction, but we seemed to be getting nowhere and finally burst out laughing. Then I suddenly jerked, my hand slipped, and I cut a finger. It began
to bleed. Khanda cried out in fright, rushed into the ger, and immediately reappeared with some cotton and a box of matches. She put a match to the cotton and the latter to the wound. A searing red-hot pain shot through the finger, but the blood stopped. And then she blew on the wound tenderly, cooling it.

"Well, how is it?" she asked. "Mother used to teach me that a wound always had to be seared."

The finger was burning terribly, but I replied with a smile, "Oh, it's nothing. It doesn't even hurt."

Then I began chopping wood, while she started fixing dinner. Her graceful little figure kept reappearing on the threshold every now and then, asking me to bring some water or light the fire.

It had got quite dark outside in the meantime, the sky had become overcast, bolts of fire were piercing the gray clouds every once in a while, and blue and orange summer lightning kept flaring up in the west. The first tender, warm drops wet my face, and I sought shelter in the ger. It soon started pouring, and the next thing we knew rain was coming through cracks and tears in the roof. Khanda quickly brought out all her utensils — pots, plates and cups — and we set them out to catch the dripping water. The little ones were breathing quietly in sweet slumber on a broad bed to the right of the door, behind a curtain. We settled down opposite them, I on the edge of Khanda's bed, and she squatting near the hearth. Having exchanged a few insignificant remarks we fell silent. It was probably already late for she inadvertently dozed off and nearly pitched her nose into the fire. I couldn't help feeling at fault. Here I had occupied her bed and so inconvenienced her. I tugged her warily by the sleeve, muttering something to the effect that she should lie down and I would sit at the hearth. She opened her eyes wide and, raising her hands to straighten her hair, laughed softly.

No longer sleepy, I rose and sat next to her. Little by little we started up a conversation. To the accompaniment of the
"You know, I just had no luck in life," she said, her eyes glued to the fire. "It so happened that misfortune entered my life together with inspector Gonchik who arrived in our parts. I was living with my parents and was engaged to a nice guy, a childhood friend. But I had hardly turned eighteen, when Gonchik turned up, and was inexperienced and foolish. Gonchik's sugary talk about love and the wonderful life we'd live in the city bewitched me. No matter how much my father and mother kept repeating it would be a mistake to marry such a flighty ladies' man, I refused to listen to reason. In addition he began ingratiating himself with my parents, assuring them with honeyed words that he meant to be the truest and tenderest of husbands. That's how it happened that I left with him for Ulaanbaatar. Gonchik lived with his parents who received me under their roof. During our first months we were indeed happy. One could hardly imagine a more loving couple. Speaking of us, people would say 'they're like fish and water.'

Then fall came. The wind began chasing yellow leaves down the streets, house and ger roofs were covered with hoarfrost in the morning, and I was feeling very blue — I was expecting, but my husband, my loving Gonchik, had suddenly grown cold to me. He was rarely at home, always saying he had been detained at work, and coming late for dinner. At times, saying he was very busy, he wouldn't come home at all. I believed him until once a neighbor told me that she had been seeing him with a young and attractive woman. I almost went mad with grief. If he hadn't loved me, why had he brought me here? But love for him was still alive in my heart, and I didn't once reproach him, fearing he'd desert me altogether.

In the meantime a baby was born to us. My mother-in-law was very happy, but Gonchik ignored the baby completely as if he were not his father. This hurt me deeply, and many were the tears I shed in those days. Fearing that grief would dry up my milk, my mother-in-law began reproving her son. The tears and reproaches
sort of got through to him and his attitude changed. He would even take the little one in his arms and rock him. Peace returned to our ger. But when I gave birth to our second child, he again turned cold and morose. There were rumors he was meeting another woman. But the husband of this new paramour of his proved to be a very resolute person. He went to Gonchik's place of work and complained about him to his superiors. I learned about this later, but in the meantime I was happy that he was again coming home on time. But when another year had passed, his parents died, and he said to me, "I first thought we'd live a long life together, but it doesn't seem to work out. I'm probably not cut out for married life."

You just can't imagine my feelings then — anger and resentment choked me. I was full of despair — two little ones on my hands and a third one coming. But Gonchik cared for nothing. He didn't even say good-bye. He just got up one morning, had breakfast and left for good. I was told he had finally managed to have his own way; he got his paramour to divorce her husband, and they left together for some distant place. All that remained for me was to cry my eyes out. And that I did most diligently, the front flap of my deel constantly wet with tears.

Learning of the misfortune that had befallen me, Father came to see me. He reminded me of how Mother and he had tried to stop me from making this mistake, and reproved me for my foolishness, but what was the use, it was now too late to change things and his daughter had been deserted with three little ones on her hands. He gave me all the money he had with him and left for home. I didn't go with him, ashamed to return home in such a condition. How I survived those days I just can't imagine. I couldn't get work, being tied down with the children, yet we had to live somehow. Luckily for me, Namjil, my elder brother, then left the monastery. He got a job and began helping us a little. Things now look a little more promising." And she gave a deep sigh.
"Today is exactly a year that Gonchik deserted us. When I saw you with my brother, I was amazed how much you resembled my husband. You're of the same height and there's something about your face that resembles him a little."

She touched me inadvertently and the next thing I knew her head was on my chest.

When I woke up, Khanda was still fast asleep, her arms around my neck as if afraid of losing me. I lay thinking: what did I get myself into last night, heaven or hell? I tried to free myself from her embrace, and she immediately woke up, sat up, rubbed her eyes open and, seeing me, laughed happily: "My, I've slept long!"

The sun filtered into the ger. It was probably a very nice day outside, and Khanda's face seemed to me very beautiful, as if freshly washed by the rain. Her dark brown eyes shone brightly and her smile revealed glittering white teeth. Strange that I hadn't noticed last night what a beautiful woman she was! She sat on the edge of the bed, carefully combing out her long black hair which descended to her knees. Finishing the combing, she coiled the hair into a big knot, pinned it high on her head and turned toward me.

"A haircut wouldn't hurt you," she declared. "Your hair's unruly, but it's nice and thick," and she passed her hand tenderly over my head. I couldn't say a word so full was my heart.

"You can stay in bed a little longer, while I make breakfast."

I lay there, revelling in this new yet unknown bliss. Then I rose, washed, had some hot tea straight from the fire and left for work.

Arriving at the mess hall, I put on my white smock and approached the stove. But my thoughts were all day with Khanda. I hadn't promised to come back nor had she asked me. But after work my feet took me in the direction of her place. So what, as if I couldn't walk past her place? The gate to her place happened to be open, and the next thing I knew I had entered her yard.
She was sitting on the threshold of her ger.

I hardly thought about my paradise that evening. I was with a wonderful woman, and I loved her. And so things continued. Going to work in the morning I would think about the great sin I was committing by living with Khanda, and in the evening I'd return to her. The bell would tinkle at the gates, Khanda would come hurrying to greet me and the little ones would stop playing and rush toward me. Looking into Khanda's eyes and caressing her soft arms, she seemed to me a being from paradise. I couldn't imagine anything sweeter and more beautiful. Not saying anything to anybody, I soon moved over for good to Khanda's place, and we began living together like man and wife. One of my friends, Basan, once started to make fun of me, saying I was incapable of having children of my own so I had picked up someone else's. Though we eventually made up, I was then very much hurt. Someone else's or my own, what difference did it make? And then Khanda once said to me, "You know what, Sanjid, I think I'm pregnant."

I was taken aback with surprise.

"What will happen to me now," I muttered in fright.

Looking into my eyes, Khanda burst out laughing:

"To you? Nothing, my dear. It's I who'll have to suffer some."

She kissed me tenderly, pressed even closer to me and soon fell asleep. But I was unable to sleep a wink all night. Not only had I found myself a wife, but I would soon have a child of my own. My dreams of life in paradise after death now seemed altogether unrealizable. And you know it's not easy to give up a dream you cherished all your life.

Twins were born to us. Two tiny boys. Instead of three we now had five children. Well, I thought to myself, now my friends will really start making fun of me. But it all turned out quite differently. Even evil-tongued Basan congratulated me:

"You're a real he-man, Sanjid," he said. "It's no easy job to bring up two at once. But I think you'll make it."
The boys grew fast and well, round-faced like their mother but with tough unruly hair like mine. They were so alike that at first only their mother could tell them apart. I learned to do it a little later. When the twins were a year old, I gave up my job at the mess hall and went to work with a carpenter's team, becoming in time quite skilled. Khanda got a job at a garment factory. We both worked hard and soon earned the title of shock workers. Our earnings began to increase, and the first thing we did was to purchase a new large pentagonal ger. Then more children were born. There were ten of them under our roof already. It wasn't easy at first, but then, as the children grew up, things eased up too. The older ones enrolled at institutes, and my stepdaughter married. We weren't after all alone. The state helped and is continuing to help us bring them up. I no longer dream of that paradise. My friend Namjil is also long a married man with grown-up children.
We meet every once in a while and can only regret that our childhood and youth had been wasted behind monastery walls. Had we been brought up like our children we would have been no less educated than they.

Sanjid fell silent. The sun had already risen high in the sky. Dinnertime was close, but none of us rose.

"Tell me, Sanjid, where exactly did your woman's ger stand when you first met her?" Gonchik asked.

"Why, near the Sunegov well."

"Are you sure?"

"I won't forget that spot to the end of my life," Sanjik replied with deep emotion.

"Perhaps, you remember, whether the gate was red?" Gonchik asked again.

"Of course, it was... Say, you aren't by chance that Gonchik who deserted Khanda?"

He didn't say a word but just rose and silently moved away. We followed his bent figure with our eyes but didn't call him back.
I saw my daughter running along the slope of the hill jumping from one large rock to another.

"Daddy!" she cried excitedly as she reached me and seized me by the sleeve, "I have found such an interesting rock! It is all covered with moss and half-hidden in the ground. On its face there are some strange inscriptions. Probably they are in Turkic. Come and see!" and she pointed in the direction of the hill that rose solemnly before us.

I hesitated; should I follow her or move on? Our car was parked alongside the road and the driver was busy beside it. He was pouring water from the Shuvutin into the radiator. The Shuvutin, a clear and narrow stream, kept rolling its waters over the pebbles close to the road.

The driver dropped the hood in its place and sat down on the grass to rest.

"It's a nice spot," he said, stroking the soft green grass with his black hands covered with oil as if it were the hair of a child. I turned to him and asked:

"Have we still far to go?"

"We are almost there. This is the enclosure where they keep the sheep. You are probably very tired."

He turned on his side, leaned on his arm and lay staring at the cloudless sky with wide-open eyes.

"It is so nice here in the sun!"

"Daddy!" my daughter cried impatiently again. She had taken the camera from the car and was opening it.
"These will turn out to be great pictures. I will show them to our teacher when I get back to school."

She ran away parting the thick grass with her hands. I watched her black head move far ahead and then saw her bend down over a large stone plate. Jumping over ditches I followed her.

A large yellow stone resembling the moon turned out to be a millstone. Time, rain and wind had left their mark upon it; the lines of the old pattern that covered it had cracked, and the cracks reminded me of ancient letters. If the stone could speak, it would have greeted me and told me an interesting story.

There had been only one mill in our village, and I remembered its millstone perfectly well. My heart started beating loudly as I recollected the wonderful days of my youth. I do not know why but my eyelids trembled and an unexpected sadness filled my heart.

How many pure, hot tears, helpless from a sense of injury had been shed upon this stone? I stroked its rough surface with the hard, calloused palms of my hands and noticed a tiny drop of water in one of the cracks. Could it be rain? Or maybe this was one of the tears I dropped at a time of sorrow? But there had been two stones, as alike as twins. I looked around me; the stone foundation that used to do the heaviest work had to be somewhere close by. But it was not there. Maybe the stone had been buried in the ground so that no greedy foreigner should notice it? Or maybe someone had taken it away with him to a faraway land? I lowered my head and turned away. My daughter who had been silent all this time asked in surprise:

"Can't you read the inscription, Daddy? Well, then at least take a picture of it," she asked. What could I tell her and would she understand me? Probably I looked perplexed and I muttered:

"You see, this is not a monument but just a common millstone."

"What? A millstone?" She looked me straight in the eyes. The child had probably guessed that something was going on in my heart, but I was not sure.
"Where is that large stone?" I kept wondering. I could not imagine who could have wanted it and for what purpose. And indeed a millstone could be quite easily mistaken by my daughter for a historical monument. My entire life was also something very remote and ancient for such a young person as my daughter, and hence I had never told her anything about my life or about what I had been through.

There were many things I could not tell her about. My daughter was like a gentle flower that has just burst into bloom, like a carefree butterfly. She did not know that once I had whispered gritting my teeth: "Let death take her if need be." Could there be other fathers on earth with such sinful thoughts? Could there?

Hardly anyone can answer this question. Neither the bright summer sun nor the bubbling stream nor the gloomy Delgerundur rocks. When misfortune had visited my house I begged them to help me, but they all looked at me distrustfully and kept silent as if lost in deep thought. I alone can answer this question. I shared my feeling of resentment only with this millstone, the eyewitness of those remote days. Poor thing; it had done its service, the same as I.

*   *   *

A lifeless white moon as if frozen to the heart stood in the dark blue sky upon a winter night. The mountains and valleys covered with snow had long lost their warmth and looked like glass in the unstable moonlight. Even the occasional barking of the dogs who had stayed to spend the winter in the valleys and gorges of the dark mountains instilled fear. It seemed that the whole world, the rivers and mountains were holding their breath and listening to the noise coming from afar. The silence of the night was broken only by the clatter of the hoofs of a horse moving a stone press.

It was beginning to dawn.

I came out of the house. The sharp wind cooled me and I stretched several times to chase away the traces of sleep. Then I stood outside for a long time looking at the objects surrounding
me. All around me there was the vast white steppe. Small mud huts half-buried in the snow stood close to me. In summer people used them for storing the ropes with which they fastened their gers, grain, and domestic utensils. In winter one could hardly ever see a cart track by them.

There was one single family living in this desolate place. It consisted of Dolgor, an old woman who watched over the huts and was the owner of a poor ger, and her daughter, seventeen-year-old Janja. There was also a young boy exhausted by hard work.

Grabbing a shovel I started hammering at the frozen lumps of horse manure that seemed as hard as stone. Then I unharnessed the bay horse and it slowly walked away along the narrow path. The door slammed. Janja came up to me, keeping to the wall of the mill, and looked at me as if she were seeing me for the first time:

"Haven't you ground the flour yet?" she asked.

"I am just finishing. Why have you got up so early this morning?"

"Why, I got up as usual. And you... How are you? Were you very cold at night? Come in, have a cup of hot tea. May I winnow?"

"Oh, no! What will the old folks say! I will finish soon and then we will go together."

While I worked I did not stop admiring Janja, her large black eyes and comely face. I did not want her to go away.

"You have stopped visiting us lately," she said and her voice had an offended note.

"You know that I have not got a place of my own."

"We are poor, but we'll be always glad to have you."

"But if Dondog saw me, I'd feel embarrassed. Men like me had better go their own way."

"Nonsense! I have nothing to do with him," and she dropped her eyes.

"How can you prove it?"

"How would you wish me to?"
"Then I'll kiss you," I said jokingly.

Janja looked at me from beneath her eyebrows and smiled shyly. "People will see."

She was silent for a moment, then took a handful of flour and said:

"What fine flour! Is it true that you take it to Dash? Poor man, he has so many children! Let them have good food for a few days at least," she said with pity.

I poured out the remaining chaff into the winnowing machine, distributed flour carefully and went in side-by-side with Janja.

It was very hot inside the ger from the fire and I felt dazed. I drank some hot tea and got drowsy. The old woman got up from her bed and cried to her daughter:

"Janja! Give Shagdar something to eat. There must be some scones left from yesterday."

I broke off a piece of scone and put it into my tea.

"I know you are short of flour. I'll bring you some tomorrow," I told the old woman.

Dolgor looked cheerful.

"Thank you, sonny," she said. "Dorj promised to lend us a measure of wheat."

"I have some grain, Granny, people pay me with it instead of money."

Janja cut into our conversation and said resolutely:

"Why are you in such a hurry, Shagdar? Let your horse rest awhile and you too. We'll mill the flour together the day after tomorrow, all right?"

The weather became warmer that evening, and soft white snow like flour let through a sieve started falling upon the ground. Together with Janja we finished all our chores and entered the ger when it was already dark. A small lamp stood on an old black trunk covered with dust. Old Dolgor was on her knees and saying a prayer.
Then she rose to her feet and said:

"Soon there will be peace and then we shall rest, children. This is a very hard war," she added with a sigh.

I could not go to sleep for a long time that night. In the moonlight coming through the half-closed window I could clearly see Janja's dark face. I looked at her with admiration for a long time and remembered how that evening when I was feeding the horse she had come up to me all of a sudden and kissed me. Her lips had been cold and soft; she did not know how to kiss and had been rather awkward. Probably this was the first time she had kissed a boy in her life.

"Tomorrow I'll spread out the wheat on the ice of the river and clear away all the dust..."

I did not finish my sentence when I heard a horse neighing on the other bank of the river. We raised our heads almost simultaneously and listed with bated breath. Old Dolgor was probably on the alert too. What could be the meaning of that? We were afraid of everything during those wartime years.

"Who could it be on such a dark night?"

"Maybe someone has been looking for a herd of horses and lost his way," whispered Janja rising on her elbow and listening.

"Someone is coming here," she said.

And indeed, the clatter of hoofs came nearer and nearer. We could now hear the horse snorting and the frozen bit tinkling.

"This must be Dondog, your boy friend. Who else would ride here at night?"

"Are you afraid of him?" asked Janja.

"I'm not, but what about you?"

"Here you are again saying silly things," she said angrily.

"He has no business here."

"Keep the dog away!" cried someone in a rough voice.

Janja got up, lit up the lamp and let the night visitor in.
That winter we settled beside the old mill, at the very foot of the mountain. Old Sambu pitched his two gers nearby. Life in the valley became more cheerful.

One day the director of the elementary school called on us. "There is nothing left to feed the children with," he said. "The food supply has run out. Shagdar, there is no one else to ask. If you refuse to give us a few sacks of flour, things will be bad with us. We'll pay you in full for the work."

I felt sorry for the hungry children. "Don't worry about paying. We'll settle accounts later. If I had another horse, it would be a great help. Mine is not able to manage the job alone. I'll get to work tomorrow."

All day long I turned the millstones and, absorbed in my work, I didn't notice the winter evening creeping up on me. Our neighbor, an old woman, came running to me. "Janja is in labor. Hurry!" she cried and hobbled off.

I unharnessed the horse and when I went into the ger to get the saddle, I heard Janja utter a loud, piercing cry.

Scattering the snow, I whirled away at full speed to the suman center.

What can I do? They are waiting for me... And if I do not find the doctor? I whipped the poor horse on mercilessly, and my heart was filled with anxiety. What's happening to Janja?

Only after I had climbed the pass, not far from the suman center, did I notice that I had forgotten to put on my deelei, and I quickly put it on.

At the suman hospital I didn't find a single soul. The watchman told me that the doctor had gone to the camp of the volunteers the previous day. The horse under me breathed heavily, wheezing as it drew in the air, and white lather fell from its mouth in lumps.

What was I to do? Return home? Look for the doctor? But the
detachment of volunteers is situated in the Ortsog valley, about two
örtöö away. No, I must go to Ortsog!

And again furious galloping. Halfway or a little earlier — I no longer knew where I was or what was the matter with me — the
horse under me stumbled, fell and did not rise again. I mounted the
reserve horse and continued further. I reached the camp at noon the
next day.

On the way home the doctor and I whipped our mounts into a gal­lop. Dusk was falling when the gers came into view. The animal
was winded after the long run, its coat was glossy with sweat. But
I was not concerned about it. Pulling the door open, I stepped in­to the ger.

As before, moans were heard from that part of the ger where
Janja lay. I went to get a lamp, but the doctor stopped me on the
threshold:

"Shagdar," he said, "your wife's condition is very serious.
Don't lose heart," he whispered.

I groped my way into the dark shed and muttered to myself:

"What do I need a child for? If only Janja would live." At
this moment, only the old millstone heard my words. Unexpectedly,
an infant's piercing shriek resounded. "She has given birth, my
darling."

Not knowing what was yet in store for me, I sighed with re­lief. The voice of the newborn child was still ringing in my ears.
It seemed to me that this loud, demanding scream was coming from
underground or falling from the sky.

The doctor was swaddling the infant, there was a deep frown on
his face, he kept looking at Janja with anxiety. Right then her
lips began to move, she was making an effort to say something.
Gripping the edge of the sheepskin coat thrown over her, she raised
herself a little, but suddenly fell back and her eyes closed. Old
Sambu and his wife were crying. After a long silence, the doctor
said quietly: 'We were too late.'

Those days I walked about as if in a fog. I had on my hands a human being just brought into the world to whom I was father, mother, and granny. Janja's dying look instilled faith in me that I'll be able to bring her up.

To begin with, I learned to milk the cows. This turned out to be very hard, but I had to feed the baby. My hands would be numb with cold, my shoulders become insensible, and I wondered how Janja managed, silently, without a complaint, to cope with the household chores.

Perhaps the most difficult time was at night when I had to grind flour. Sifting it hurriedly, I listened all the time to hear if my little one was crying and, sparing a minute, I would rush headlong to old Sambu's ger. When I heard her crying, I did not wake up the old couple, feeling sorry for them, but entered quietly, kindled a fire in the stove and warmed some milk for my little daughter. Satiated, she would quickly fall asleep again, and I ran back to the mill. I would return home at dawn, put some more firewood into the iron stove and when the ger had grown warm, I brought the baby from the old couple's ger.

Then I set to cleaning and drying pieces of sheepskin which served as diapers for her. Once, as I was feeding my little daughter, my neighbor dropped in.

"Your daughter is already a month old," she said. "It's time to give her a name."

Grief had unsettled me, and I had completely forgotten about that.

"What shall we name her?" I asked.

"Well, since she hasn't had a name until now, we'll call her Nergui." [Nergui means without name.] I agreed.

Life continued to grind along like the millstones of the old mill. Not getting enough food or sleep, I was bringing up my
little one as best I could. What I got from the mill wasn't enough to live on, and I decided to leave it. But how was I to go on living? I wanted to find work not far away from home. Of course, I could have found such work, but I had never learned another trade. After all, what's an invalid fit for?

Still, in a few days' time I found a new job, tanning hides. Now my bachelor dwelling was turned into a real workshop. I had a wooden scraper for currying, white clay in a tub and a knife with a crooked, sharply pointed blade. In the right half of the ger a mountain of skins had grown up — sheepskin, astrakhan, even wolf, fox and hare skins. With my one healthy hand I dressed the tightly twisted skins.

It was work suitable for me in my position.

The cold wind quickly blew out all the warmth out of the baby's cradle since it was covered with only one layer of felted cloth. Then I would light a big fire in the stove.

My work went on quite well. I separated the flesh from the hide, sprinkled white clay over it and crumpled the skin until it became soft and pliable. Sometimes I had to put in some hard work, especially when the skins happened to be damp. Kneading them for hours, my hand would become callous, so that I would have to hold it over the fire to remove the roughness.

When I heard the ringing voice of my little daughter, I put everything aside, stood up, and stretched myself in order to straighten my tired body. Day and night blue smoke curled upward through the toono.

I led a lonely life as before, devoting myself entirely to one task, the upbringing of my only child. I kept the home as best I could.

One morning a small miracle happened which brightened up my life. The ger was very hot, and that must have been the reason why
my little daughter could not fall asleep. So I spread out a piece of sheepskin before the bed and seated her on it. Let her stretch her little legs, I thought to myself, she lies on her back all the time.

After a while I happened to turn around, and what did I see? The little one had crawled up to me, clutching the fur with her little hands. I uttered a joyful cry, gave her a smacking kiss on her cheek and ran out to my neighbors, the old couple. I wanted them to share my joy.

The next day my daughter fell ill, her cheeks inflamed by high temperature. I didn't sleep the whole night, sitting at her bedside.

That day I knew that my little daughter had to have boots, dresses, different toys. Her first dress was made by my neighbor. Is it fair that a strange old woman should do the sewing for us? What if I should learn to make her clothes?

Life went on along its well-accustomed path; one day was just like the next. My daughter grew, stretching upwards like a flower toward the sun. At times I would get lost in thought and sigh loudly as I would turn a new skin in my hand. "It's not a man's work. I don't even have the time to clean up the dirt. I think I'd better return to the old mill."

When my little one turned two she learned to speak her first words. My neighbors would pat her head tenderly and ask, "Who is your father?" She pointed at me. "And who is your mother?" She again pointed at me. The old people laughed. I looked at her, listening to her prattle, and a lump rose in my throat.

*  *  *

The war ended. The Soviet Union routed Germany, and we Japan. We won a victory. Peace, peace, peace! I heard this wonderful news when I was about to go to the pasture for my horse. Of course I didn't go there, but with the halter in my hand I ran as fast as
I could to my neighbor's ger.

"Janja, you and I were not fated to live together in peacetime. Now you would have been taking our little one to the old mill, you would have been showing her the trees and the grass, teaching her her first words..."

With whom if not with my little daughter could I share this joyful news? I took her on my knees and said three times — on my behalf, on her mother's behalf, and on her grandmother's behalf, "The war has ended. Peace has come." Looking me in the face with surprise, she loudly repeated my words.

Life became easier with each passing day; sugar appeared and tea as well as other goods. One day, finding myself in the suman center, I went to the shop and bought several meters of bright colored material.

Seeing me cutting out a child's dress, my neighbor, the old woman, shook her head: "Whoever heard of making a dress for a little child out of such expensive material?" But I was determined to make a beautiful dress for my little daughter out of the sparkling silk.

Ever since I had married Janja I had never been able to buy material for a dress. Let this dress, made clumsily by a man's hand, be a present from her mother who could not make one during her lifetime. My daughter! You are my sunlight, you are my spring, my darling!

* * *

Our small car was speeding along the level road past endless fields of wheat. The wind carried the clouds of dust to one side.

Our driver was obviously in good spirits and talkative. "The chairman of the suman called me out last night and told me to get ready for a trip this morning. I was on time. Your vacation had ended and you were in a hurry to get home, so I was told. As luck would have it, the motor did not start and while I was putting
with the car, I lost time; besides, I got stuck on the way. We are sure to be home by nightfall."
"Daddy, look, how funny they are running," my daughter suddenly laughed, pointing at the running quails along the road.
"They come flying from the mountains when the wheat ripens," I said.
"Did you have lots of fun during your vacation, Nergui?" the driver asked her jokingly.
"Yes, I learned to milk sheep and goats, I also can ride a horse," she boasted.
"When I drove you the first time you found an old rock. What was written on it?"
"My father says it was a millstone. It turns out that there used to be horse-drawn mills."

The ripe tight ears of wheat swayed along the road. There was a smell of sour, fragrant corn and I became reminiscent. When we lived in the aimag center, I went to meet my daughter after school. On the way we dropped in at the flour mill. Here at the large gates many trucks were always lined up. One after another they were driven into the yard, and a sparkling stream poured into the open trucks filling them in an instant.

The trucks drove away, but the heady, thick smell of ripe grain remained in the air for a long time. The tall white building of the mill sparkled in the sun. It was pleasant to look at, it was all so new and clean.

I recalled with sadness the mill shed, grown dark and full of chinks which could stand no comparison with this modern structure. What huge grinding machines must be at work there if the flour ground by them is carried away by a whole fleet of trucks!

Every time I have gone along this road, some kind of power, unknown to me, has invariably drawn me to this place.

The driver's voice, talking incessantly, unexpectedly roused
me from my reverie:

"We seem to have enough gasoline and the road is good, no bumps. But to make sure I'll borrow a few gallons from the first driver we meet."

He stepped on the gas and drove out onto the highway. A car coming from the opposite direction had got stuck in the mud. The driver was digging up some dirt and throwing it under the wheels. Wiping the sweat from his forehead, he turned around.

"I'll be damned!" the words broke from my lips.

That was Dondog.

"Damn, it's been raining like hell! The whole world is flooded like the devil. Yesterday the rear wheel of the car skidded into a ditch. Well, I thought to myself, I am done for! I spent the night in the steppe and, what do you know, not a single car passed!"

he grumbled.

Our driver, having examined the rear wheel, suggested: "It would be good to place a couple of large rocks here." We went in different directions in search of rocks. I found a large flat boulder and, straining myself, tried to pick it up with my one hand.

Our driver came running up to me: "Drop it, sir," he said. "We'll manage without you."

Dondog glanced at me with surprise and again bent over with the air of a busy man. He must have felt awkward about meeting me because he looked at my crushed arm from time to time. I noticed that Dondog's face had grown pale.

Perhaps remembering his evil youth, he was repenting a thing or two. I didn't want to touch on old memories, and what could Dondog answer me, anyway?

At last we managed to pull the car out of the ditch. I don't know when the drivers warmed up to each other; I only saw Dondog climb into the car, drag out a small barrel, knock out the peg and
yell:

"Bring me some container. Take the gasoline, as much as you need. I have plenty of this junk."

We wished one another a happy journey and departed.
One day during lunch break, my friend and I were sitting in the shade of a large fragrant haystack and talking. Drawing on his cigarette my friend who was obviously in a fine mood, was smiling widely, while the soft breeze blowing from the mountains caressed his wide chest bronzed by the sun. Dry blades of grass got stuck to his dark sweaty face, his narrow brown eyes shone with happy excitement.

Then he turned to me feeling for something in his pocket. Finally he produced a pretty envelope which he held in his hand for a while and then asked me quite unexpectedly:

"I've got a letter from Mother. If you know Russian, please read it to me."

Before that he had told me that he was a mower, in fact one of the best in the association, and that he was from the same region as I. Why then does his mother write him in Russian, I wondered. I studied his face closely, but there was nothing Russian in it. And I thought that this man probably had an interesting life.

"You were brought up by a Russian mother, weren't you?"

"No," he said.

"Where are your parents, where do they work?"

"My father and my mother are cattle breeders. Both of them come from around here."

I was at a loss and kept pestering him with questions.

"But where is your Russian mother now?" His eyes sparkled with joy when he heard my question, as if he was just waiting for it.
"My mother lives in Leningrad. I love her no less than my own mother."

My friend lay down on the ground next to me, propped his head on his elbow, and started telling his story.

* * *

When it all happened I was driving cows from a distant pasture. I grew tired and was terribly thirsty. It was growing dark and the outlines of all the surrounding objects merged into a single dark spot when I finally saw our white ger in the distance.

We had a fine ger, not some shack lined up with the wind. My father built a new cow shed of good sturdy boards next to it.

My mother was standing in the door of the shed. She looked alarmed.

"What took you so long, you are barely able to lift your feet," she said.

At that moment an acute pain made me double up and moan.

"What is the matter with you? Are you ill?" she asked, terribly worried.

My father was not home. He had gone to attend a meeting in the morning and hadn't come back yet. Soon the whole neighborhood knew about my disease. Late in the evening our lama (my mother's elder brother) came, with a white face and a beaklike nose. My mother rushed to meet him and, swallowing tears, started telling him about me.

"When he left for the pasture he was perfectly all right and now, look at him! He is so terribly pale. It may be somebody's evil eye. Tell me, will he get well or not?"

She wiped her tears with her sleeve and started fussing, laying the table with sweets which she long saved for New Year's and a bottle of vodka.

The lama drank almost half of the vodka and pointing his
finger at the censer he said: "Put some coals in there, sister."

Mother hurried to the backyard and brought back with her a couple of lumps of dried herbs and lit the hearth. While the fire was burning the lama took a small iron box with dice, shook them several times and then put them back again.

"Everything is going to be all right," he started murmuring. "Your son will get well."

The bluish fragrant smoke from the burning herbs started spreading in the tent. The lama, with his eyes popped out, started singing a prayer. He sang quicker and then he swung the censer over my head several times. When he got up he quickly covered the bottle with the remaining vodka with his sleeve and said, looking disapprovingly at the ceiling:

"It's too bad you called me so late."

My mother put her hand under the pillow, took out her bag containing five tögrög and gave the money to the lama.

Far from getting better I felt even worse than before. Soon the pain in my stomach became unbearable.

Mother came up to me quietly and froze at my bedside. I was all covered with cold sweat and kept groaning loudly since I couldn't stand it any longer.

"Lama gave you a good medicine," Mother kept consoling me tenderly. "Tomorrow morning you'll be healthy again, my son."

By the time my father returned home I could no longer lie in bed. I sank to the floor and stood on all fours crying with pain. Father, his eyelashes still covered with hoarfrost, didn't even drink his tea. He looked at Mother and asked:

"What shall we do?"

"Let's go. Perhaps we will survive. It is better than sitting here and waiting for God's mercy." Mother dried her tears and Father silently took out his pipe but, without smoking, threw
it away and walked out of the ger. In a moment he was back with several mattresses and warm sheepskin deelei.

"I'll go and harness our brown ox. He seems to be faster than the others." My mother left my bedside.

"We'll take you to a doctor in Nalaikh. We'll get there by this time tomorrow," she said.

Father was walking in front of the cart while Mother kept circling around it fixing my warm deelei. The road was bad and the bumps shook the cart terribly, causing me such horrible suffering that I almost lost consciousness.

My poor parents seemed to share my pain and suffered even more than I. With trembling voices they kept imploring me, "Hang on a little longer, son."

The next morning we entered a long ravine filled with big snowdrifts. Sharp pain suddenly pierced my stomach, and it seemed that a hot wave ran over my head and feet and then swept over me so that I couldn't breathe. I threw off my deelei and heard my mother shout: "Stop!!"

Then I lost consciousness.

When I opened my eyes I saw the wide face of a blue-eyed woman, dressed in a white smock, leaning over me.

The sunbeam that penetrated through the frosty window gilded the woman's fair hair. I realized that it was morning.

I looked at the woman without trying to hide my surprise. Her tired face brightened up and her cheeks flushed a bit.

She sighed with relief and patted my forehead with her tender hand.

"Are you thirsty?" she asked.

Then she invited my mother and father to come in. They both cried with joy when they saw me sitting in my bed and drinking hot
"What a kind woman! She saved my son's life," my mother exclaimed. The doctor only smiled. "Now you may go and take a rest," she said. "The crisis is over. We have nothing to fear any longer."

My mother started to the door but then she suddenly stopped, turned to me and said the words which came straight from her heart: "Listen carefully, my son. Your father and mother already cried over you, thinking that you were doomed, but the Russian doctor saved you. From now on you should call her eej [Mom]."

The doctor overheard her, and said in good Mongolian: "That's how it is, my son."

The Russian doctor called a nurse and explained to her what medicine to give me. Then she came to my bed and tucked me in. She left the ward, and I burst into tears deeply touched by her loving care and attention.

* * *

My friend got up and looked at the ger from where the loud voices and laughter of the mowers were heard. Then he took a photograph out of the envelope showing a gray-haired Russian woman with deep wrinkles on her forehead, and showed it to me. "This is my Russian mother," he said. "Her name is Vera Povlovna. I had a brother, too, he was a tall boy with freckles on his nose. His name was Volodya. My brother was killed in the war."

We sat for a long time without saying a word. "You are her son, indeed," I said. My friend nodded and said: "Yes, I'm her only son. After we finish mowing I want to go to see her."
It happened in 1945.

The commanding officer of a Mongolian armor unit walked briskly from the headquarters of a Soviet contingent toward his dark green car. Two soldiers were talking next to it, a Russian air force lieutenant and the Mongol driver. They needed no interpreter. The Russian pointed to the dark, star-studded sky, trying to explain that his native Leningrad lay in the direction of the North Star. The Mongol nodded understandingly. He knew well the custom of seeking one's lucky star and smilingly explained to the flier the old Mongolian saying, "The son of a noble father is led through life by his lucky star, but the son of a commoner by his courageous heart." He looked admiringly at the campaign ribbons of his new buddy and cursed his young age which did not let him fight the fascists earlier.

"Let's fight them together now," he said. The flier understood and gave tankman Jamts a hearty handshake.

"See you later!"

* * *

The battle was at its height. Shells burst all around Jamts' tank, but it crawled on, drenching the enemy with deadly fire. Suddenly there was a deafening blast; the tank was being attacked from the air. A second bomb knocked it out. The stunned crew rushed to the driver whose body slumped to the side.

"Get the driver out!" the tank commander shouted to the gunner. He clambered out of the burning tank after all the rest and collapsed. The loader knelt over him. The officer was wounded in the
"Is the driver alive?" the commander inquired when he was helped to his feet.

"Killed," the gunner said quietly, glancing at his buddy's corpse lying on the ground. A dark stream of blood ran from his pierced chest and seeped into the sand.

The soldier's lifeless brown eyes stared up at the dark clouds from which the enemy planes appeared but a few minutes previously. The tankmen picked up the wounded commander and carried him away from the blazing tank.

"They'll pay for this," the commander whispered hotly. "I'll live to see their planes smashed to the ground!"

The roar of aircraft came from the sky again.

"They'll strafe us now, those skunks," the commander said, clenching his fists in impotent fury. "Scram or they'll make mincemeat out of you!"

The tankmen hid their commander in a gully and concealed themselves nearby. Two planes roared down, raining bullets on the tiny figures below. Hugging the ground, the gunner did not see the gravely wounded commander choke with impotent fury and the loader die under a hail of enemy machine gun bullets. The gunner fixed his gaze on the hateful red circles on the wings of the Samurai planes and thought, "Why don't I have wings? I'd fly up and blast those vultures out of the sky."

The wave of enemy planes began to move away. Fluffy clouds floated northward high up in the sky. The gunner wanted to get up and run to his commander but, noticing a dark dot on the horizon, ducked down again.

"Don't get up. They're coming back," he heard the weak whisper of the officer.

"He is alive," the soldier thought with relief.
The plane pierced the clouds. The pilot saw the ruins of a demolished enemy emplacement and a crippled, smoking tank nearby.

Suddenly he noticed a Japanese plane come from the west and dive, belching fire at something hidden among the sand hills. "I see, they've knocked out the tank and are now after the crew," the pilot thought, preparing for the attack. The Japanese plane almost touched the ground. "He won't have time to come up. I'll pin him down!" the Soviet pilot decided.

In the meantime the Japanese flier was getting ready for the second run, this time from the east. Carried away by the attack, he did not notice the Soviet plane coming after him. Diving at a terrific speed, the Soviet pilot chose the right moment and opened up. Smoking heavily, the enemy aircraft began to drop and suddenly burst into flames. The Soviet flier streaked across the ground which resembled a huge piece of quilt. The shrubs and trees seemed to rush up against him, but the pilot managed to straighten the plane out in the few split-seconds left at his disposal. The plane zoomed up to encounter another Japanese plane which was coming to the rescue. "Too late," the Soviet pilot muttered and looked around. The sky was clear. A dogfight began. The two pilots executed some wild twists and turns, fiercely drenching each other with machine gun fire.

Two men watched the dogfight from the ground, the bleeding tank commander and the gunner who perspired heavily from excitement.

Suddenly the Soviet machine gun fell silent; it had run out of ammunition. As though guessing this right away, the Japanese plane approached the adversary and pumped several rounds into it. The Soviet fighter's tailpiece burst into flames, and black suffocating smoke filled the pilot's cabin.

"You won't get away just the same, I'll ram you!"

The enemy seemed to guess the intention of the Soviet flier and swung away hastily. But the Soviet plane which had more speed
quickly overtook it. The Russian rammed into the adversary's tail at full speed. Both planes, which had demonstrated their power and prowess but a short while ago, streaked down like two huge torches and crashed near the burnt tank.

The gunner saw two parachutes open up in the sky. He ambushed the descending Japanese flier and stabbed him to death. When the Russian flier reached the ground, he thought: "You wanted to come down first and finish me off. It didn't work!"

He sat down on the hot sand and looked around. There was nothing but a boundless ocean of sand extending in all directions. "Just like the Sahara," he thought.

Then he saw a man running toward him. Despite his sooty face, the flier recognized Jamts the tankman.

"Comrade," was all that Jamts could say as he hugged and kissed the Russian flier.

"Where are the rest?" the lieutenant inquired.

"Only the commander and I have survived. He is gravely wounded."

"Let's go to him," the pilot said, rising to his feet.
I was sitting on the edge of a dried-up well near the site of an old monastery, bidding farewell to the waning summer sun. How everything had changed here before my eyes! There had been a monastery. It was no more. I wasn't really upset by this, though as a child I had often clambered up the steps of its porch, painted in bright blue, gripping my mother's hand. They used to pray in the temple, music played, a smell of camphor pervaded all, and icon lamps lighted up the images of gods. There were different gods: ferocious dogshid with bared fangs, the guardians of religion, and pacified, calm, and kindly burkhans. Mother would say, "Pray!" and I prayed. The monastery had disappeared as if swallowed up by the earth. Only a few foundation stones still lay scattered about with thistle and weeds growing between them.

I wasn't sorry about the past, what had perished should, after all, have perished. Even the former monastery well had dried up. My father, I was told, had dug it in his day. Father was also no more, like the monastery, the temple and many other things. But the old was being replaced by the new.

It was wartime. The war had taken all the strong and healthy men of our nomad camp. It had also taken my elder brother. No one knew whether he would return or not — people do get killed in war.

I would also be leaving the next day and, though school is not war, it's hard to tell what lies ahead. I picked up a small rock and dropped it into the well. The clay bottom swallowed it
up greedily. Tonight I'll sit here until dawn and leave with the sun of my native camp.

Evening milking had begun. Bonfires were being started to protect the cattle against swarms of midges. Smoke began spreading slowly over the green August steppe. A larch, with a little spring bubbling near it, was standing not far from the well. A flock of cranes had settled alongside it. They seemed red under the rays of the setting sun. Fledglings were running about, flapping their wings as if trying them out before flight. "Farewell, dear cranes of my camp," I whispered, though I knew of course that the cranes had come from afar and were staying here only for the summer.

The setting sun was also shedding its light on the young growth around the larch. I knew these saplings well, they had grown up together with me. The old larch was bending and withering, but its shoots were growing and storing up strength. As a child I used to come running here to catch the rainbow after the rain, and the saplings had never stood in my way — they were as small as myself.

Swinging their heads contentedly, milked cows were moving toward the pasture along a path beaten hard over the centuries. A huge brown bull was wandering at the western edge of the camp, pawing the ground and bellowing arrogantly, challenging anyone to fight him. Hillocks covered with sagebrush shimmered silvery in the sunlight, like the nap of an expensive fur. Children were noisily sorting out sheep. Waving his red hat, a drunkard was bawling some song near one of the gers. Sure enough, it was Tekhiin Balkhaikh. What a strange name! It would have made sense had they called him Tekh, mountain goat. But why Balkhaikh [fat, potbellied (HGS)]? Maybe he was nicknamed so as a child when it became clear that he would never amount to much. Balkhaikh was one of the few men who had stayed home during the war. He wasn't drafted because of a twisted arm. He knocked about the steppe, loafing, drinking, and living a dissolute life.
Frightened by the drunkard's shouts, the red cranes took wing, circled about over the long bonfires and descended again near the spring. The sun had almost set. I would be far from here the next day. Who knows when I would have another chance to see the sun setting over my native camp?

The brown bull continued his pawing, but no beast appeared to take up the challenge. With no outlet for his energy, he started chasing some cows, bellowing loudly and urgently. I burst out laughing; for just a split second, I had imagined Balkhaikh and the bull locking horns. Several milkmaids had gathered at a nearby ger. They were singing, and their voices, caught up by the soft rays of the setting sun, were floating over the evening steppe. Their song was pensive and sad, like a recollection of the men and loved ones who had not returned from the war.

You look up at the sky, and it's clear,
But the next thing you know, it's raining.
You reflect upon life, thinking it's long,
But the years go by ever so fast.

Tears rose to my eyes. I was also coming to realize what it meant to love and to long when leaving.

A nightingale from the Ganges River
Is singing its song near my ger...

Now where might that Ganges River be? Mother said it was in the holy land. Maybe our cranes had also come from there. How big this world of ours really was, this world in which I was born, live and will die. Will I ever have the good fortune to see that river? When Father was still alive, he liked to repeat, "Man is mortal but he possesses a mind and strength." My mind and strength will help me to see the Ganges River.

The sun had set while I was listening to the song, and the red cranes had turned an ordinary blue. Farewell, my native land's
sun. The cranes, as if also bidding the sun farewell, soared into the sky and swept over the bluish fires. Farewell, dear cranes! I'll be following you tomorrow!

It was a warm starry night. At Mother's bidding, I had spent the whole day saying my good-byes to the old men at the camp and presenting khadags to them. I knew myself that luck would not attend me unless I had their good wishes. Now I was waiting for one more person, a girl my age and a good friend of mine. I was sitting under the larch, but my heart was painfully reaching out to her. Just a girl my age, but my heart was hammering so hard that it seemed to burst.

Not only I but life all around me seemed to be holding its breath in expectation. A horse neighed somewhere in the steppe, a frog croaked, a dog barked. A little figure flashed suddenly in the light of the stars, and noiselessly approached me.

"I'm late. I had to make tea. Have I kept you waiting?" she asked, and sat down at some distance. We had grown up together, days on end playing, romping and hiding in the burdocks and empty barns. Now we dared not even touch one another, each one listening silently to the other's breathing.

It was very quiet. Only a hobbled horse munching grass could be heard from nearby. The sweet smell of boiled milk wafted across from my girl friend. It had soaked clear through the cotton cloth of her short terleg. I was wearing leather boots and a brand new deel straight from the shop. It was dark, but I kept casting glances every now and then at my new clothes, regretting very much that I couldn't show them off to the girl. I had always dreamed of owning leather boots. They were high ones and had cost a pretty penny.

"Our neighbors gave me a lot of money, and Mother sold some wool and gave me money for the trip, too. I'll buy you some leather for booties," I promised her.

"You can buy almost anything at the aimag shop," she remarked
assuredly.

We had grown up. Even our voices had changed. Mine had become manly, hers was soft and deep. It was dark, but I could make out her sad and tender gray eyes. I was, after all, leaving for school, while she had to remain and keep at her domestic chores. So naturally she was sad. Love and pity filled my heart to overflowing. The poor girl pulled her skirt over her bare legs, pressed her cheek down to her knees, and sat motionless, her eyes full of tears.

That day, the day we were parting, our naive and true friendship unexpectedly turned into quite another feeling. Silvery star dust lighted up the boundless sky. And under its canopy a boy and girl were for the first time coming to know the eternal oneness of sorrow and joy. We sat there, silently swallowing tears.

"I'll enroll at a military school after finishing secondary. I'll become a commander and send for you. Meanwhile we'll be seeing one another during vacation time."

"I'll wait for you. My brother may leave for the aimag with a caravan and I'll ask him to take me along. Will you write to me?"

"Of course."

"And how about your mother? She'll also be waiting for you, won't she?"

"Mother says I'm grown up now. I even have a deep voice like a real man."

The girl sighed and placed something soft in my hand.

"It's my braid. Remember you cut it off so that I should look like a MYRL member?"

Indeed, when I was smaller, I just couldn't help cutting off that braid — it kept sticking up — girls with bobbed hair looked very much like MYRL members.

Many years later that knot of hair, smelling of our childhood, would become my most precious possession. With some mysterious
inner sense the girl had then realized that, but I had hardly taken any notice of the gift.

Life is so much like and, at the same time, so different from a fairy tale. In childhood we believe those tales so profoundly and sincerely, but they disappear forever with our childhood. Sitting silently, we were caressing the sky with our eyes. My whole being was begging it for a fairy tale, and it finally presented me with one. A flock of red cranes appeared on the horizon; the sky was still powdered with silvery star dust, but the cranes were flying pierced by the rays of the rising sun of my native camp. They were flying and calling me to follow them to distant lands.

"Sunny cranes! Look! Sunny cranes!"

Life is not a fairy tale. The braid, smelling of childhood, is the only reminder of my first love. Where did you fly off to, sunny cranes of my native camp? Whither did you carry my childhood's tale, dear birds? Are you still calling me to distant lands?
SO WHEN WILL DADDY COME HOME?

by

L. Choijilsüren

The grain crop that year was unusually large. Fall had dragged out and the birds, seemingly unable to make up their minds about leaving their nesting grounds, kept flying over the boundless fields in arrowlike formations from morning to night as if on the lookout for something, perhaps hoping to meet those returning from the war.

The fact that the war was finally over had brought joy to people's faces, a double joy. After a disquieting five years service on the border and a short but fierce encounter with the enemy, men were returning home to their gers, to engage in peaceful labor.

The highway to the western aimags, passing through the center of the state farm, split the mouth of the broad and fertile valley in two. The rumble of tractors and harvester combines, and trucks scurrying back and forth moving out the bumper crop, continued day and night. The entire valley was filled with the drone of engines. A solid blanket of dust hung over the road, and truck headlights swung along it in the night like wandering stars from a fairy tale.

Other trucks, packed with young men in green sun-faded army shirts, were stopping near the mess hall at the state farm center. The young men, jumping from the trucks onto the road, would stretch their cramped arms and legs, look around happily, and broad smiles would light up their faces, tanned and coarsened by the hot winds. Overcome by marches across the sands of great deserts, thirsting for home, water, eye-gladdening landscapes and native skies, they strove toward people as if they saw in them a brother, a father or
a mother. Old men and women would shower them with impatient questions, "You don't happen to know our boy? You haven't met him? When will they let him come home?" It never crossed their minds that hundreds of other strangers had already asked these soldiers similarly naive questions many a time during their long and exhausting trek.

But among those who gathered around the trucks were frequently some who avidly and hopefully looked into the faces of the soldiers; ashamed to address them, ask them about what was ceaselessly torturing and burning their souls. Tserma did not approach the men either, but kept looking closely at them as if trying to remember their every little feature, miss nothing, and would then follow the departing trucks with a long and steady gaze.

"Of course," she thought to herself, "not everyone's term of service is the same. It's obviously not easy to get discharged after serving only a few months. And besides, he's a commander, and thus, they say, will stay in the army."

Gansukh was the only male in the family, but still a little one — only six. When his father was called up, he started washing his bowl himself of his own accord so as to help Mother. "So when will Daddy come home?" he frequently asked, and Tserma would always reply that news about him had probably gone astray but that he was sure to return. The main thing was for Gansukh to eat well and grow strong, and his father would show up as unexpectedly as the birds in spring.

An exciting bit of news like a spring whirlwind swept the state farm's camps that evening: "Old Damba's son has returned home!" People from almost all the neighboring camps gathered around old man Damba's ger. His youngest son was one of Tserma's pupils, and she decided to take advantage of this and also call on the boy's older brother and inquire about her husband. Coming up to the ger, she saw old Damba wiping the sweat from his face; he had probably been lighting the fire on the hearth.
"Oh, our son's teacher!" he exclaimed happily. "Do come to the khoimor, honored one. Sit down, please."

Others rose to make way for her.

The soldier was sitting in the khoimor too, with a North Star Order and two medals on his broad chest. One could immediately see he was a worldly-wise veteran who had experienced much in life, and all listened to him with bated breath.

"It's no joking matter, five years of army rations! Five years of service is like crossing a mountain pass it took five years to ascend to. We had our fill of summer heat and winter frost. But what could one do! Those were troublesome times, and it wasn't quiet on the border at all. But now the war is over, and those who have served their full five years and even those who have been in the army only five months are being discharged."

Those last words gave Tserma a warm feeling inside. She had so many questions to ask this experienced soldier but couldn't find the right words. What did she really know about army life! The host, quite aware of Tserma's thoughts, interrupted the young man:

"Hold it, son. You don't happen to know where Sanja is, do you? Perhaps you know when he's supposed to return?"

All the eyes turned towards the teacher. Holding her breath, she looked fixedly at the soldier, and it seemed to her that everybody in the ger could hear how madly her heart was beating. For but a fraction of a second it seemed to her that the young man's voice had faltered, that his recounting was not so smooth as before.

"Yes, war's war," the soldier in the meantime continued. "One sees nothing in the heat of the fighting but smoke and fire. There are no wars without bloodshed. I needn't tell you what a Mongol warrior is like. He forgets about himself completely on the battlefield, only hatred for the enemy and an urge to beat him at all cost predominate. When we crossed the border, I lost sight of all
my friends. Who knows where and in what units they are! I don't know what to say about Sanja, we never met. And sometimes you meet a familiar person in battle, but it seems like you've never seen him before."

A hum of assent rose and all nodded their heads, and the soldier went on with his account: "I remember we were once attacking... our sabers were drawn, and a 'hurrah' was rolling over the field..."

But Tserma was no longer listening. She hastened home. After her meeting with the soldier something kept troubling her, but she couldn't put her finger on it. There had been something strange about the soldier's behavior. She seemed to be hearing a whisper in her ear, "you expect no trouble, but trouble is inevitable, the wind carries it on its wings." These thoughts increased her melancholy. Not knowing what to apply herself to, Tserma opened her valise and got out her husband's letters and papers. Leafing through them always gave her pleasure. Here was evidence of his bravery during the fighting at Khalkhin Gol — the certificate of his Order. How many years had passed since then!

Suddenly something dropped to the floor with a ring. Tserma started and looked up in surprise. Little Gansukh, flushing a deep red, was standing at the sideboard, and at his feet, on the carpet, lay a cut-glass vase.

"You've broken Daddy's favorite vase!" Tserma cried out in bewilderment.

But no, the vase was fortunately still intact. "A good omen," flashed through her mind, and she sighed with relief.

"I wanted to put it lower," Gansukh explained apologetically. "I want to collect a lot of candy and fill it to the top for when Daddy comes home. May I, Mom?"

"Yes, yes, my son, that's a good idea!" Tserma replied, impetuously embracing and kissing the child.
"And when will Daddy come home?"
"Soon, my little one, just a little more patience."

When Tserma came to the kindergarten the next day to pick him up, Gansukh asked, giving her a searching look, "Has Daddy come?"
"The time will come, and he'll return, he'll return for sure, Gansukh."

She led the little boy past young, recently planted trees from which the wind was snatching dry and yellow leaves. Their bare branches, like praying arms, stretched toward the sky, and it seemed to Gansukh they were on the very verge of tears. He was walking, holding his mother's hand and, contrary to his habit, was asking no questions. Every once in a while he would kick some pebble that was lying in their way and continue on, strangely concentrated, moroselike, as if immersed in a very important and serious thought. When they came home, he took two candies from under his shirt and, holding them carefully in his tiny fingers, looked up at his mother: "May I put these candies aside for Daddy, Mom?"

Tserma gave her son a tender look. "What a dear child," crossed her mind, and she replied in a trembling voice, "Do as you think best, son!"

Gansukh came up to his mother, "And where can I put them?"
"Put them into Daddy's vase."

Gansukh opened the sideboard, pulled up a low stool, carefully climbed onto it and, reaching up to the cut-glass vase on the top shelf, put his candies into it, such big and tasty ones.

The next evening Gansukh noticed that some strange change had come over his mother. There was something different about her face, so sad and stiff, her eyes red and her eyelids swollen. The boy immediately realized something was wrong and showed her the new candies he had saved from the kindergarten.

"I'm going to add a candy to the vase every day now," he said, "so that when Daddy comes there'll be a whole lot of them."
The first thing he did after coming home was to place the new candies with those of the previous day and then to stand before the vase, gazing at his wealth a long time. After feasting his eyes on the treasure he again came up to his mother:

"So when will Daddy come home, Mom?" he asked looking up at her through those black eyes of his, so much like his father's.

"Daddy?" she repeated in a strange unfamiliar voice. "He'll... he'll come, son, when the vase... when his vase is full to the top with candies."

Knitting his brows, Gansukh remarked, "How long that will take!"

Tserma convulsively swallowed the lump in her throat: "Now why had she said that to him? Poor boy!" Her only consolation was that the vase was a big one, and it would take him a long time to fill it.

That same evening a tall broad-shouldered man in a military shirt came out of the big white ger from which could be heard the noise of many people. He called over the children that were flocking around the ger and began handing out candies to them. Gansukh got his share, too, and immediately raced home.

"Mom, Mom!" he started shouting from afar, "Zorig's dad has come back; now why hasn't ours?!"

He opened the sideboard and dropped two more candies into the vase.

"I'll fill the vase, and Daddy'll come back. I won't eat any of the candies they give us in kindergarten..."

Unable to listen any longer to her son's prattle, Tserma rushed out of the ger.

Now the vase with its candies was torturing Tserma, too. At first she had hoped that Gansukh would forget about the whole thing, but in vain. Every morning as he woke up and rubbed his eyes, he would go to the sideboard and look attentively into the vase.
Returning home one day after having taken Gansukh to kindergarten, Tserma went to the sideboard for something and flung up her arms in surprise: the vase was almost full. She got a sick feeling; what would she say when he came shouting "Mom, Mom! Look, it's full!" and started shouting happily and embracing her and jumping and running madly about the ger? What would she tell the boy who was waiting for his father so much?

Suddenly she hit upon an idea. Wiping the dust from the vase, she took one of the candies and hid it. Gansukh didn't notice anything. Coming home from kindergarten he immediately put another candy into the vase. Tserma hid that one too.

Several days passed when Gansukh finally began to notice that something was wrong. The vase had stopped getting full. His amazement and indignation knew no bounds, and he finally arrived at the conclusion that mice were to blame for it all. He had heard that when a child fell ill, mice would bring water in tiny pitchers, invisible to the human eye, to slake the patient's thirst. Well, if they could lug water, they surely were strong enough to make off with his candies. And Gansukh decided to cover the vase with a big wooden bowl. Now the mice wouldn't be able to fool him!

One day Zorig came to kindergarten with a real military badge on his shirt. Gansukh was almost struck dumb with envy.

"Did your father give it to you for good?"

"For good? Are you kidding? A fat chance I have getting it for good. But why don't you ever wear your father's? His is even nicer. I saw it myself when my father gave it to your mother. Didn't she show you?"

"He's lying," Gansukh thought to himself.

"You know what your mother said? She said she'd hide the badge and you would wear it when you grew up and went to school."

"Did she really say that?" Gansukh was beginning to believe him.

"Honest to God! I saw it with my own eyes, it's in a
beautiful little red box."

"And did he say when my father would come back?"

"No, but I heard them speak about something else. I made believe I was sleeping and heard everything. He said they had gone on a scouting mission together. And when I opened my eyes to take a look, I saw your mother was crying..."

The last words Zorig pronounced in a whisper, but Gansukh heard them very well. His heart almost stopped beating, and his hair seemed to stand on end. "If Mom cried, that means Daddy won't return home, won't ever return home!" he thought to himself. Tears welled up in his eyes, but he clenched his fists not to cry. "But Mom keeps saying Daddy will come home," his reflection continued. "She probably knows something but doesn't want to tell me." And without waiting for his mother to pick him up left the kindergarten in the evening for home.

Seeing his mother through a crack in the door, sitting at the table checking her pupils' notebooks, Gansukh lost heart. How could he ask her about this terrible thing he had learned, so terrible it was unbelievable?

Taking himself in hand, he crossed the threshold with a smile, flung his cap on the bed, and with a casual move produced two candies from under his shirt but then stopped in indecision. Should he put them in the vase or not? He stole a furtive glance at his mother.

Tserma became suddenly aware of her son's glance and started. She closed the notebook she was checking and rose. "Why aren't you undressing, son?"

She went out to get some firewood. Calming down, Gansukh looked into his vase and again discovered that candies were missing. There was no question about it, somebody had again been at his hoard!

"What's new in kindergarten today?" Tserma asked, returning
with the firewood.

Though she was smiling, Gansukh managed to detect signs of tears. So Zorig must have told the truth. But he didn't start to cry. He was now after all the only man in the ger! No, he mustn't cry, otherwise his mother will start crying too. Of course, it would be easier to bear all this if he had that badge Zorig had told him about. If it's true that Zorig's father brought his father's badge to his mother, then where could she have hidden it?

Gansukh's mind was completely taken up with the badge and he kept looking around all the time trying to guess where it might be. He couldn't ask his mother, for she would have told him herself had she wanted to.

In the evening Gansukh did not go out to play with his friends as usual. But as soon as his mother went off to school on some business, he got a little key out of a hiding place and opened the big valise. Rummaging through everything, he finally came upon a little red box at the very bottom of the valise. Holding his breath, he took it out, placed it on the table, wiped his suddenly sweating palms on his pants, and with a cough -- involuntarily copying his father -- opened the box. It was all true! There it was, a big nice badge the likes of which no one had ever seen. Depicted on the glittering enamel was a horseman with a rifle behind his back and a sabre at his side, looking through field glasses. And at that moment Gansukh made a terrific discovery; the horseman on the badge was the spitting image of his father!

Carefully wiping the enamel of the badge with the sleeve of his deel, he twirled off the knob from the bolt on the back side of the badge. By means of this bolt the badge could be attached to his shirt. This thought simply took his breath away and the badge slipped from his hand to the floor. He picked it up with trembling fingers and, calming down, remembered about the open valise. Taking a look at it, he even got scared. It turned out that, looking for the cherished little box, he had turned everything
upside down. What if Mom walked in right then?! The next moment he was back at the valise, pressing on the cover with all his might, but all his efforts were in vain. The valise would not shut.

Tserma came home and decided to have some tea. As soon as she opened the sideboard she saw that Gansukh had that day added no candies to those in the vase. She stood rooted to the spot. What could that mean? He hadn't gone out of the house today and hadn't played with his friends. When she returned he was already asleep in bed. Could it be that he had caught on? She went up to her son, straightened the blanket and, after standing for a while at the bedside, moved toward the table with a sigh. "My poor little boy! Your father will never again return to us," she said to herself, and suddenly turned about; it seemed to her he wasn't asleep. "And still how strange that he didn't put any candies in the vase today." She listened for a while to her son's regular breathing and again grew thoughtful. "War cares not whom it kills, but what about those who remain? The poor boy is already an orphan. God, how he will cry when he learns the truth!" and the sharp pain that pierced her heart tore a groan from her.

She recalled Zorig's father's account to the very last detail. They had both been together on a scouting mission near Dolonnor and were already returning to their unit. All around was enemy territory, alien and vicious. Suddenly they ran across an enemy force. Sanja ordered him to retreat with the information they had got and himself remained to cover the retreat. He was one against many and the bullets were coming at him like hail. How could he survive, how could he hide from the bullets if the enemy ground all around was so flat! Tserma kept repeating those words to herself again and again, swaying from side to side and looking at her sleeping son through half-closed pain-shot eyes. "One against many... a hail of bullets, those accursed bullets... if that had only not happened!"

Forcing the terrible vision from her mind, she remembered that
Zorig's father had given her something she would now keep as her most cherished treasure, the badge "For Excellent Frontier Service."

She wanted to have another look at it and opened the valise. The badge wasn't at the bottom where she had put it but lay prominently on the very top of all the neatly folded articles of clothing.

Meanwhile, Gansukh just couldn't get accustomed to the idea that his Daddy would never again come home, that he had become like his grandmother who left them for good last summer. The thought that his father was like granny was so absurd and strange he could find no peace of mind. He was now more frequently looking at the vase with quite different eyes.

One day when Tserma returned late, Gansukh wasn't home. She went up to the sideboard to remove one or two candies from the vase as she had lately been doing when something stopped her. "Enough, this must stop! Gansukh will eventually learn the truth anyway. Better that I tell him. A change has definitely come over him lately. He must have learned something from Zorig and that's why he rummaged around in the valise," she thought to herself, standing at the sideboard.

Suddenly Gansukh rushed in noisily, and Tserma, like a guilty child, shut the sideboard hastily. Without taking off his coat, he pulled up a stool, climbed up on it and taking two big candies from under his shirt made as if to put them in the vase, and suddenly discovered the latter was full to the top.

"Mom!" he shouted with all his might, "Mom! It's full, look! Will Daddy come today?"

Tserma stood in bewilderment. She couldn't and didn't want to lie. But something broke down in her, and instead of an honest "No, son, our father will not return" she forced a "Yes, son, he'll come..." from her constricted throat.

Her voice sounded so unusual, there was such soul-freezing despair in it that Gansukh immediately realized his father had...
really become like granny. Some invisible force unbalanced him, the stool swayed from under him and, falling, he brushed against the vase. The latter smashed to the floor, fragments of glass and candies in multicolored wrappers flying in all directions.

Gansukh broke into tears, but not because he had hurt himself. No, men don't cry because of pain. He was so terribly sorry about the cut-glass vase. Yes, certainly. He was crying only because such a beautiful vase — let Mom think that! — such a beautiful vase had broken. Tserma pressed her son to her breast, and tears she had never dared show in his presence fell unrestrained from her eyes mixing with her son's.

An orphan's bitter tears...How many of them have thou absorbed, our ancient and cherished Mongolian soil!
The elderly headman of the nomad camp told Dolgor she could stay at home although it was her turn to tend the flock.

Her hands busy with the colored rope that fastened the gates of the sheep enclosure, Dolgor heard the words and rejoiced.

"Stay with him. Don't worry. Let him have a day of rest."

"Yes. He's sleeping now," Dolgor said. Then she remembered that Dendev was leaving that evening, and her spirits fell.

"Go home now," said the headman. He untied the knot and opened the gates wide. As if waiting for this, the flock of sheep streamed out like water through a narrow channel.

Dolgor stood for a moment looking at the bleating sheep, then slowly made her way over to her felt ger covered with faded cotton print.

She was depressed. For the past few days she had been filled with a strange sadness and langour.

"I wonder what's the matter. I'm acting like a silly young girl," she thought. She had wanted to cry when the headman told her she could have the day off. "I wonder what fate has in store for me."

All around her the earth was coming back to life. The snow that had been lying all winter in a thick layer was beginning to melt. Brooks babbled gaily as they wound their way like snakes through the gullies and hollows.

Although banks of snow still glittered in the sunshine the sides of the hills showed a touch of green.
The breath of spring was everywhere. Behind the camp a kid had climbed onto a rock and stood swaying on its spindly legs. Through the waves of steaming spring air the silhouette of the horses grazing on the hillock wavered and quivered as if they were a mirage.

Dolgor did not hurry to enter the ger. She walked around to the back to make sure the animals had not pulled down Dendev's shirts which she had washed and hung out on a line. How quickly they dried in the warm rays of the spring sun! Dolgor picked up some sticks of firewood, glanced back at the flock grazing on the darkened eastern slope of the hill, and entered the ger.

Dendev was still asleep. It was hot from the fire in the stove. The blanket had slipped off, showing his strong chest.

"I'll let him sleep," she thought. "He hasn't had a decent night's rest since he came, working the way he does." She added a few sticks to the fire and listened with satisfaction to the crackling of the wood. Then she poured herself a cup of tea, picked up a tobacco pouch from the bed and smoothed it lovingly.

Dendev smoked a Russian pipe with a bowl the size of a fist and a plastic stem. When he and Dolgor had been gathering brushwood yesterday and Dendev had sat down to smoke, he discovered the pouch had a hole in it through which tobacco had spilled into the pocket of his padded green jacket. Dolgor had been very happy when he asked her to make him a new pouch. She got down to work that very evening. She wanted to decorate it with some special kind of embroidery. He sat on the bed puffing on his pipe and laughing at the energy she put into her sewing. She did not know whether Dendev understood how she felt about it.

As she embroidered some Mongolian designs on the pouch Dolgor recalled her youth. Twenty years ago, when she was still very young and shy, she had fallen in love with a boy from her village. She had also lovingly embroidered a tobacco pouch for him. One
evening in the fall when small, fleecy clouds floated in the sky she had said good-bye to her betrothed. Blushing, her eyes filled with tears she tried to hide, she had handed him the pouch with outstretched arms. He was a tall handsome lad, always ready to burst out laughing, but now his face was grave. He pressed her hand and whispered as he put away the gift, "I will always carry this pouch with me, Dolgor, to the day I die."

From that day on Dolgor considered herself his bride. She would often stand gazing to the east, to the hills over which he had gone. The hardest to bear were the times of blizzards. Then she would grow restless and keep running out of the ger to look to the east.

The happy days when he had been beside her were over. She came to know the deep despair of loneliness. After the war broke out there was no news for a long time, and then late in fall came the letter that put an end to her last hope.

Holding in her hand the tiny sheet of paper, no larger than the palm of her hand, that told in a few words of the death of her beloved, she stood silent, unable to weep or to cry out. Many years had passed since then, but she could not recall the moment without anguish.

Dolgor came back to the present when she felt a sharp pain in her finger. She had pricked herself with the needle.

The morning sun glanced into the ger through a haze. In the yard the neighbor's children were shouting at their game.

When Dendev awoke and, stretching himself, sat up, Dolgor laid aside her sewing and put the tea kettle on the stove.

"Boy, did I have a good sleep!" Dendev exclaimed, putting on his boots and going out into the yard in his undershirt. Dolgor was happy to see him relaxed and rested. She did not want him to do anything but rest. She did not want to hear him say he had to do this or that or to think of going out for wood. She quickly
prepared breakfast.

"I must get a supply of wood in for you," said Dendev as he came back into the ger. "What you have won't last long."

"You ought to rest for at least half a day."

"I've been having a holiday for a whole month," he said with a smile. "We don't consider chopping wood work; it's nothing compared with repairing machines."

Dendev drank up his tea and put on his jacket.

"Shall I come with you since you are not going to be long?" Dolgor asked questioningly.

"As you wish."

Happily Dolgor ran over to the neighbors to ask them to feed the lambs. Then, picking up a rope, she set out beside Dendev.

Dendev walked along with long, heavy strides. He carried an ax and a rope.

"What a wonderful day! Look, there's a mirage. And over there, ants crawling out of Danzan's stove. Now they will crawl around, black and shiny as if they had been smeared with grease."

"Do you remember how much snow there was when you came?" Dolgor asked.

"That was exactly one month ago. How the time has flown with all the work."

Dolgor rejoiced. That meant he was sorry the month had gone so fast.

They reached the forest where the snow still lay thick.

"You gather wood and I'll chop," said Dendev, driving his ax into a stump.

The sound of the ax rang through the forest. Leaning against the trunk of a birch tree, Dolgor marveled at the way Dendev split the trunk with one blow.

"Now that winter is over it's time to go. They're waiting impatiently for me," said Dendev.
Dolgor knew he meant his comrades, mechanics as strong and muscular as he, smelling of machine oil. He had come to help the cooperative to repair its machinery. Dolgor had grown attached to him, a man as alone in the world as she. When he arrived at the camp the headman had asked her to put him up not because there was no other place for him. He had talked to Dendev the whole evening, asking about his life, and then had assigned him to Dolgor's ger.

Dolgor had grown so used to living alone that the headman's request dismayed her. To refuse, however, would have been awkward. Since the death of her betrothed Dolgor had avoided people. She had lived alone like that until she was forty years old. "That's the way my life will be to the end," she thought. "Nothing will change. But at least I have kept faith with the dead. I'll tend the flocks of the cooperative."

But Dendev had come and brought back her youth. It was as though he had fanned smoldering coals.

They worked together through difficult days that sometimes merged into sleepless nights, their enemy always the bitter cold. When, worn out with weariness, they returned home to rest, each showing concern for the other.

It seemed to Dolgor that Dendev understood her without words, but he did not say anything about what he felt. Only once did he pause and say, eyes fixed on the ground:

"Sometimes the idea of marriage comes into my head." He turned to look at Dolgor, as if asking a question. Dolgor blushed. "It is not for me to speak of that. You speak!" was what her glance said.

Dolgor hoped that Dendev, to whom she was sure she meant something, would some day tell her so. Then she would be proud and happy to answer "yes." She truly loved this man whom she had met in middle age.

"Shall we go, Dolgor?" Dendev asked, his hand on her arm.
Dolgor started at the unexpected touch and absent-mindedly moved forward.

The sun was going down. The headman had returned after leaving the flock to graze on the eastern slope of the hill.

Dolgor let out Dendev's horse, stroked its neck, and went over to the headman.

Dendev sat in the place of honor, outwardly composed, drinking tea. Before him stood a bowl of boiled meat. The faces of the men were flushed and their eyes shone. They were talking animatedly.

"You've helped us a great deal during this month you spent with us, Dendev. We have grown fond of you. We regard you as one of us," said the headman.

"Thank you. And you have helped me a great deal. Especially Dolgor who did the sewing and washing for me. She always had a hot dinner for me and a tasty breakfast in the morning," Dendev replied as though speaking especially for Dolgor who had just entered. He drew out the pouch she had embroidered and lit his big pipe.

"Have you saddled the horse? It is time to leave."

"I'll see you off," Dolgor's face was pale and she had difficulty breathing. She turned away from the headman who knew exactly what she was feeling. The headman shook Dendev's hand and wished him a happy journey.

"Be sure to write to us. Come to see us in the fall. We will be glad to see you."

Dolgor and Dendev walked side by side, leading the horse.

Slowly the sun sank, painting the sky a beautiful pink. A light breeze carried with it the smell of earth recently released from its cover of snow.

"What am I to say to you, Dendev? From the very day — it's all so strange — " Dolgor decided to speak out but fell silent without finishing her thought. Could it be Dendev did not understand what her heart was saying?
They walked on in silence. Finally Dendev spoke.

"We have lived together like brother and sister. I shall not forget you. It does not pay for you to go any farther. Return now. It is time to feed the lambs. Do turn back." The words pierced her heart. Were these the words she had been waiting to hear? It was the end of her hopes and her happiness. The end of her dream.

Bitterness choked her. She felt empty and cold. But Dendev went on speaking. With typical practicality and lack of sensitivity he told Dolgor where she should go in the forest for wood to make it easier to bring it home and advised her to lay in a supply of pressed manure with which to keep the lambs warm in winter.

His words came to Dolgor from far away. It all seemed out of this world.

If he has no pity for me there is nothing to be done about it, Dolgor thought. Aloud she said,

"Is that all you wanted to tell me?"

"What else is there to say?"

"Farewell," whispered Dolgor, her teeth clenched.

"Good-bye," he said, pressing her hand, and leaped into the saddle. He looked back.

"Maybe I'll be back in summer, Dolgor, when I get my holiday. Then we'll discuss it."

Dolgor did not reply. Tears filled her eyes. She wanted to run after Dendev and fling herself against his broad chest.

Seeing the tears in Dolgor's eyes, Dendev choked. He looked toward the west where the sun had almost set, took a deep breath and shouted, "I'll be back!" He put the spurs to his horse.

Her hands pressed to her chest, Dolgor watched him ride away until he disappeared over the hill. The last pale ray of the setting sun warmed her heart, and she smiled happily.
Spring had set in, and even the milk in the bowl no longer froze over. Yet everyone knows how insidious are the habits of spring, that beautiful season. It can become so unexpectedly cold that the wind penetrates to the very marrow of your bones.

Although the Path of Lenin agricultural cooperative had stored enough hay and fodder to take care of any emergency and its livestock had not lost any weight during the winter, the coop members did not remain idle. They were ready to meet any challenge that spring might have in store for them.

In the past twenty years the number of camel mares belonging to this cooperative had increased continually and the young were raised successfully. I had occasion to meet and talk with an outstanding camel breeder of the cooperative by the name of Alima, who had not lost a single young camel and had successfully completed the artificial insemination of the camel mares.

The sun had set beyond the mountain ranges and a faint evening light came into the ger. Suddenly the sheep stamped their hoofs, as if alarmed by something, and dogs began to bark.

"Aren't the dogs around here rather vicious?" I asked.

"No, our dogs are gentle," the old woman replied. But then she suddenly stopped, her face turning gray as she apparently recalled some terrible incident.

"What are you thinking of?"

"Of the wolves," she replied barely audibly and closed her eyes.
The fire in the hearth was burning low. It was dark and cold in the ger. I threw several small logs into the stove. Again the fire burned brightly, lighting up the face of my hostess. It was still pale and pensive. A moment or two later she seemed to shake off that feeling of horror and she told me the story of one terrible day.

"Well, my son, just listen," she began. "Have you ever seen how wolves make short shrift of a whole flock of helpless animals? Believe me, they are our dreadful enemies. In early summer of 1945 we moved, as usual, to our summer camp. It is amazing how suddenly the weather can change in summer! After all, it was summer, our beautiful summer, but suddenly out of nowhere there came thunder and lightning and also hail, and then there was a real snowstorm.

"Just five steps away it was pitch dark. I rushed through that raging white mess to the baby camels which had been grazing not far away before the storm began.

"The steppe, which had just been covered with a green silky carpet and which had shone in all its splendor, became transformed into a white desert in just a few minutes. It was real winter!

"And then I saw something which I cannot forget to this day. At the bottom of a deep ravine a pack of wolves was torturing my baby camels. Yelling and not even hearing my own voice, I ran over to the edge of the ravine. Those beasts, drunk with the blood, did not even notice that I was there.

"The air rang out with the pitiful cries of the poor baby camels. I can still see the flow of those huge black eyes, their vain attempt to keep on their feet which were still very weak, when the fangs of the beasts sank into the necks of the camels. What beasts they are, wolves!"

Alima's eyes filled with tears.

"How many baby camels were there?" I asked.

"Over a hundred," Alima continued, sighing deeply. "The wolves gnawed over thirty to death, and many more were wounded and crippled."
"I ran home weeping and told them what I had seen. My oldest brother took his gun, silently saddled his horse and set off in the direction I showed him. Several other people from the neighboring ger rode off after him. I mounted an unsaddled horse and also followed them.

"The wolves scattered, and one large pack ran off to the eastern range. That pack was completely wiped out. Two wolves of another pack that rushed westward were able to save themselves, but not before they had got a bullet in them..."

The old woman frowned in anger and whispered: "Wolves are the enemies of us all..."

After a while she continued: "Camels are the wisest animals. You can't imagine how they love their little ones. All summer long they wailed pitifully and continually, those that had lost their foals. It was hard to look at their moist eyes. And how much weight they lost! They looked like living skeletons..."

Alima wiped off a tear that had run down her cheek. I did not feel any better.

"Our camels were always known for their fine condition," she said, renewing her story. "And that year their wool also shone on them. But they wouldn't move a step away from that terrible ravine. They guarded the dead bodies of their foals until they themselves became terribly skinny. Many of them did not live through the winter..."

"Are there still wolves here in this region?" I asked.

"Almost none. Sometimes one or two appear here, but our young people are always on the watch, and not a single wolf gets away alive. But we can't let up on our vigilance. Wolves are capable of anything, they are such terrible creatures!" she said, finishing her story, and she pressed her lips together grimly.
THE SWALLOWS
by
S. Erdene

Many years had passed since we abandoned our little summer country house which grew dark with time. We had knocked it together quickly out of larch logs; it had an earthen floor, one tiny window facing north and terribly creaky doors. The scorching sun, wind and rain greatly marred the outside of the house, while the walls inside were covered with soot from the fireplace. Yet the little house remained sturdy and reliable. I can still see my father's flintlock and the swallows' nest right under the roof.

I revisited my old home where we used to spend the summer and was greatly surprised to see how long the soil preserves traces of human habitation.

When I went there at the end of summer I saw the goosefoot and nettle sprawling around the house, a few rickety timeworn posts and the pit in which my mother used to fumigate hides.

I sat and thought of my childhood and recalled how I would sit for hours watching the swallows which used to live under our roof every summer. When I was about ten years old two small birds built a nest. They had probably had another nest somewhere else which was destroyed, because when they came to our house the other swallows already had grown fledglings.

I observed with great interest how the two birds hauled mud tirelessly from the two nearby streams, reinforcing the nest with grass and feathers. In a matter of a few days they had built a sturdy little nest, after which they disappeared for several days. I tried to spot them among the multitude of other swallows flying
around, but my efforts were fruitless.

One morning I noticed a swallow with a light-colored breast perching snugly in the nest with its eyes closed. Another little bird with a long reddish breast was fussing around the nest and chirping softly to its mate. The light-breasted one stayed at home several days, and I got the impression that it was both hungry and thirsty. Somewhat later I noticed the other one bring some insects in its beak and feed the little light-breasted bird. I also discovered that the bird supplied its mate with water in the same way and I was overjoyed with my discovery.

A few days later I heard a faint squeak coming from the nest and looked in to see five tiny yellow-beaked skinny nestlings. I scrutinized the helpless little fledglings and was overcome with worry; the little swallows in other bird families were already flying with their parents. Would these grow up and gain strength by the end of summer?

They grew very quickly, however. In a few days they were covered with fluff and sat with widely opened beaks which seemed incongruously large in proportion to their bodies. They made a terrible noise demanding food. The parent swallows worked tirelessly bringing them insects, while the greedy little things devoured everything immediately and clamored for more.

By mid-summer they were bustling about their nest and soon learned to perch on its edge. Once they even ventured forth with their parents. At first they returned in the evenings, but finally they abandoned the nest for good.

The following spring I awaited their return with great impatience. I felt very pleased that such a large family had found shelter under our roof. Only the old couple returned to the nest for four summers, and I became very attached to them.

The time came for me to "fly away" like the fledglings from my father's house and I left my native soil and home.
Many years went by before I returned to our summer house, and I meditated sadly that my childhood was gone forever.

Our little house has long disappeared as well as the swallows' nest, but the children and nestlings that grew up there have built themselves new homes and new nests. Life is eternal.
THE MOTH AND THE LAMP

by

D. Myagmar

It was a mild summer evening. A good many years have passed since but, recalling it today, I can even sense the smell of the freshly rainwashed earth of that evening.

The morning had been sunny, but black clouds suddenly overcast the sky in the afternoon, a clap of thunder and blinding lightning rent the air, and a driving rain came down with hail, like little balls, pelting the ground. Their heads swaying, the cows moved toward the pasture, but the sheep and goats, bunching together, humbly offered their backs to the rain and hail.

Fortunately, the downpour stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Having attended to all the chores, I removed my wet clothes in the ger and hung them over the trivet. Then I lighted a lamp, lay down and took up an old leatherbound book, intending to read some old legends before dropping off to sleep. But I became so engrossed I didn't even notice that midnight had passed. The lamp was flickering in the light breeze, and a moth was whirling tirelessly around it, its wings almost brushing the flame.

And while the snow-white moth was lovingly dancing its dance around the lamp as if nothing else existed in the world but the flickering flame, I read a legend.

* * *

"High to the sky rise the red cliffs of the Asgatkhan, with the waters of the Selenge washing its base..." Ah, I know those cliffs well. It was but yesterday that the goats had given me plenty of trouble. Having broken away from the herd, they had
climbed up into those cliffs and couldn't get down. Not a living soul had ever managed to mount the Asgatkhan's hoary summit. Even the Selenge, crashing its waves against the foot of the cliffs, would angrily retreat as if realizing the futility of its efforts.

"At sunset one day, people heard the strains of a morin khuur coming from the Asgatkhan's summit," the legend went on. "A melody of amazing beauty began to sound every evening, right up to sunset. Rumor of this miracle was passed from mouth to mouth until the whole region knew about it. As soon as the sun's disc began to descend toward the horizon, people would secretly make their way to the foot of the mountain to listen to the amazing music. Sharp-sighted youngsters from the other bank once happened to discern two silhouettes at the very summit, a figure sitting motionlessly and another whirling gracefully and waving its arms. The rumor reached a local rich man's son, Badai by name, a bold and handsome but arrogant young man. He took a pair of binoculars that had come down to him from his grandfather and set out for the Asgatkhan.

"As soon as the sun began to set, he saw a girl of astounding beauty appear at the summit. She was leading an old man with a morin khuur by the hand. Seating him at the edge of the high cliff, she disappeared. Badai realized that the old man, sitting motionless like a bronze statue, was blind. Stepping lightly, the girl soon reappeared. She was all in white. Badai could clearly make out how she took off her embroidered booties.

"And then the old man touched the strings with his bow, an enchanting melody poured forth, and the girl, light as a doe, began her graceful dance. Badai couldn't tear his eyes from the binoculars until night fell and there and then made the firm decision to get to the old man and the girl.

"The next day he got himself a little narrow boat and crossed the river. Then, like a lizard, he began to climb the vertical slope. A single careless movement, and he might have gone crashing into the Selenge's eternal embrace. His clothing torn by the sharp rocks and his arms and legs bleeding, Badai finally reached
the summit and hid behind a huge boulder. As soon as the mysterious old man and girl began their duet, Badai stepped from his hiding place. Catching sight of the stranger, the girl froze in her steps and the old man immediately broke off his playing.

"'Who are you?' Badai asked, approaching them.

"Not in the least frightened, the girl straightened her thick braid and retorted with a question of her own: 'And what are you doing here?'

"'Can't a person who can see come to this place just like a blind one does?' Badai asked in a challenging voice. He was fascinated by the girl's beauty, and passion and jealousy were beginning to rage in him. 'So why don't you continue?' he queried expectantly, his hands proudly on his hips.

"The old man, who had been listening suspiciously to their conversation, slowly resumed his playing.

"'Don't you dare!' the girl dashed toward him. The melody broke off suddenly as if the strings had snapped. But handsome Badai continued standing haughtily and unperturbed. 'Who are you,' he continued to press them, 'Father and daughter?'

"A faint smile crossed the blind man's lips. 'You're mistaken, stranger,' the old man said.

"'So this beautiful moth is not your daughter?'

"'You're right, she's a moth that is drawn to a lamp,' the old man said quietly. 'I am the lamp that fires her heart and inspires her dance.'

"'So that's it!' Badai burst out laughing. 'And do you know that there is no eternal lamp?'

"A shadow flashed across the old man's face and his bow touched the strings with a tremble, bringing forth a melody of rising wrath.

"'Noticing the old man's agitation, Badai continued insolently: 'And do you know where the moth disappears to when the lamp around which it flutters goes out?'
'And do you, stranger, know that the moth and the lamp have a single life?' the old man muttered, choking with emotion and trying to rise. Quickly putting on her booties, the girl seated him carefully in his place and, with emotion ringing in her voice, addressed Badai: 'Don't bother us! Who are you, anyway?'

'No reason to get excited,' Badai continued in that offhand tone of his. 'I'm simply talking with the blind old man. As to my identity, you'll find that out when you enter my home,' and he stepped toward the old man, intending to push him over the precipice. But the brave girl blocked his way: 'Why do you want to kill an innocent person?'

'You needn't worry, my beauty, no harm will come to you. And we still have a lot of time ahead of us to come to know each other better,' and Badai again moved resolutely toward the old man.

'So that's what you want!!' the girl exclaimed with a piercing laugh, and in a flash a dagger appeared in her hand and she advanced toward the insolent fellow. This was so unexpected that Badai started backing away in fright. The haughty young man had forgotten that but two steps were enough to go flying into the Selenge... and he took three...

'The girl again laughed loudly and her laughter echoed through the forests, gorges and mountains.

'The old man raised his bow and a merry song burst forth. Breaking off her laughter, the girl asked the old man: 'You know what has happened, don't you, my dear friend?'

'Oof course,' the old man replied with a smile. 'I even heard him crash down the precipice like a stone.'

'The girl took off her booties and, getting ready to dance, said: 'How well you brushed off that braggart, my dear friend. I am indeed a moth and you are my lamp. And remember, I'm not only a moth in love with her lamp but its defender!'

* * *

I finished reading and, steeped in thought, snapped the book shut. The sudden movement extinguished the lamp's flame. Day was
breaking, and the rising sun's first rays were gilding the mountain peaks. Coming to suddenly, I discovered that the moth, which had mindlessly whirled around the flickering flame, was no longer in the ger. It had disappeared together with the flame.
Old man Dorig was roaming the Shire Jargalant valley with his family. It happened on an ordinary day with its ordinary chores; they had milked mares, made airag and driven the colts off. Their team leader found them so occupied when he arrived to tell Dorig that he had to show up at the cattle breeding association's central estate in two days. Dorig naturally asked why he was being summoned so urgently.

"We've decided to send you to a sanatorium," the team leader said.

The news immediately spread all over the ail. Dorig's wife was chattering like a magpie everywhere she happened to be. Dorig himself was very pleased, though he wasn't very clear in his mind as to what a sanatorium really was. He counted up his savings and began pressing his neighbors for the money they owed him. Then he got out a bag that had been lying idle at the bottom of his trunk and put some tobacco, matches and an extra pair of underwear in it. On the day of departure he put on his red woolen holiday deel and embroidered boots and hung a knife and tinderbox to his belt. His old wife was also busy getting him ready for the journey.

One of the founding members of the association, Dorig had been pasturing horses these last thirteen years and was famous far beyond the association as senior herdsman of a thousand-head herd. According to tradition, one should set out on a long journey before noon, so Dorig was in a hurry and saddled the bay stallion with the long mane. The other herders suggested he take another horse,
but he said 'no.' His wife sprinkled milk on his left stirrup to remove all obstacles and hindrances from his way, and the neighbors gathered around his ger to wish him good luck.

The old man was even moved: "That'll do, enough of that. Look after the cattle carefully and beat the airag well, we have never delivered airag of poor quality. As soon as I get there, I'll let the stallion go, he'll come back home by himself. Another horse would have to be brought back, and that would be a sheer
waste of time."

At first the old man set out at a trot, but at some distance from the encampment, he turned around, cast a farewell look at his native camp, and galloped off. It took a whole day to get to the association's central estate. On his way, Dorig stopped at familiar ails to tell his acquaintances and friends that he was going to a sanatorium. No one really knew what a sanatorium was, but everyone envied the old herdsman's good fortune.

By evening Dorig finally reached the association's center. Dismounting, he removed his saddle and bridle and let the horse go. The foam-flecked horse first started rolling on the ground and then, neighing loudly, galloped off home along the familiar road.

Dorig stopped by to chat with watchman Dambia, a childhood friend of his, and the old men reminisced almost until dawn. Dambia had once vacationed at the Songino sanatorium and, according to him, it was great. Dorig kept tossing about, trying to imagine what it would be like at the sanatorium. He dozed off toward morning but awoke at the customary early hour. He couldn't fall asleep any more and lay there thinking of his unexpected good fortune. As soon as the sun rose he jumped up, had a quick cup of tea and, flinging his small bag over his shoulder, set off briskly for the association's center.

The center's inhabitants began getting up when the sun was already high in the sky, unhurriedly lighting their fires, pounding green tea in mortars, and preparing their meal. The old man watched them most disapprovingly, wondering why people became such sleepyheads as soon as they started living a settled life. Dorig was literally burning up to tell somebody about his good luck, he was just hoping someone would ask him where he was headed for, but no one cared about him or his forthcoming journey.

At about eleven in the morning a truck on its way to Khujirt drove up. Never before had Dorig ridden in a motorcar so far, and
that's why he felt so happy and proud sitting next to the driver. It seemed to him that even the hills and streams in the valley were respectfully seeing him off on his journey. Suddenly Dorig clapped his hands against his thighs and exclaimed loudly looking at the driver: "Darn it! I soaked some urga noose leather in whey and completely forgot about it. The old lady doesn't know anything about it, and now it will spoil."

The driver wasn't a talkative one and confined himself to "that's a pity." Not a trace of joy remained on the old man's face. Wrinkled as it was, it became even more so. On a steep grade the truck began to skid, and Dorig involuntarily raised himself a little from his seat, clapped his hands and cried out as if urging on a horse, "Chu, chu!", but then cast an embarrassed look at the driver and started filling his pipe. When the truck regained speed on a level stretch of road, he sat rocking in his seat feeling himself astride a good fast steed. Watching the old man, the driver smiled to himself but didn't say anything. Only once did he break his silence: "You're going to vacation in Khujirt, aren't you? You'll be able to find many good poles for your urga there in the woods."

The old man's eyes lit up like an image lamp into which oil had just been poured.

"Sonny, you gave me a brilliant idea!" he exclaimed joyfully.

At last the truck drove into Khujirt. After Dorig had started a family and become a herdsman he had never been to any big center and only in the summer would sometimes ride to the neighboring suman for some holiday. It was on the distant pastures, on the rolling steppes with their winds and slopes that he felt himself at home.

The driver took Dorig to the sanatorium management and, wishing him a nice rest, left. The newcomer was received very warmly and shown to his room. He was quite at a loss at first. Accustomed to the simplest of conditions and surroundings, he was embarrassed by the spic-and-span room and the attractively made bed.
There was a young fellow, a student, living in the same room. They became acquainted and together went to the mess hall for their meal. Later they took a walk to the Shunkhlai mountain. Dorig hardly noticed how the first day at the sanatorium slipped by. In the evening, actors from the city gave a concert. The old man particularly liked the song "A Colt From the Northern Woods" sung by a young girl, and he went to bed that night full of pleasant impressions.

"I never even imagined," he thought to himself, "that others would serve me my meals. Only khans and princes probably lived like that in the old days and maybe they didn't have it so good. One might easily get used to such soft living and then life would become really tough."

The next day Dorig again wanted to join his young roommate, but the latter somehow avoided him and went to play ball. Dorig went for a walk alone. After dinner he struck up a conversation with a young girl, but she found his company boring and ran off soon. Dorig knew no games but dice. The only other game he knew was knucklebones, and wrestling was something he had long given up.

But there was no one to play knucklebones with, nobody here even knew the game. And, in general, there didn't seem to be a person there he'd care to become acquainted with. The elderly urban patients seemed big shots to Dorig and he stayed away from them, and the younger people, involved in their own affairs and fun, just paid no attention to the old man.

Once, while Dorig was smoking his pipe outside after dinner, a sanatorium attendant came up to him and said severely:

"You should be sleeping after dinner. What are you doing here?"

Embarrassed and bewildered, the old man wandered off to his room, lay down and covered himself with the blanket. A fragrant smell was coming from the pillow. "Strange," Dorig thought, "but
the sanatorium people even spray perfume on the pillows," and he tried to fall asleep. But he wasn't sleepy and just lay there with a sheet over his head. Suddenly he heard steps and two girls entered the room. One of them, seeing Dorig in bed, started shouting at the top of her voice, "What's going on here? Somebody is lying in my bed!"

The old man stuck out his head cautiously and saw a made-up girl with wavy hair backing away from the bed, her eyes bulging with horror. It turned out he had mistaken this room for his own. During the supper everyone was staring at him and giggling.

As bad luck would have it Dorig soon went through another unpleasant mishap. He once woke up in the middle of the night and, forgetting where he was, took the moonlit window for the open door of his ger.

"Pagma, the goats will get in and lap up all the milk. You better get up and shut the door," he called to his wife. But there was no answer.

"You always make me get up," the old man muttered and stumbled toward the window.

Awakened by the old man's shuffling steps, his roommate switched on the light.

"Darn it! I goofed again," Dorig sighed and flopped down on his bed.

This awkward incident, of course, also became known to the younger set the next morning, and one of the fellows, having forgotten the original story, began spreading the version that the old man was missing his wife so much he couldn't even sleep.

After three days Dorig really began feeling ill at ease. The enforced idleness was getting on his nerves. He even lost his appetite and was all the while muttering something.

Out for a walk in the mountains one day he caught sight of a horse herd at the foothills. The herdsman was adroitly lassoing
one horse after another. The old man's eyes began to glitter. He rose on his toes and involuntarily began to copy the herdsman's movements.

Soon after this the doctor summoned Dorig to his office.

"Why are you eating so poorly? Perhaps you don't like our food?"

The old man passed his hand over his huge beard and with a smile replied, "I'm missing my herds, and my arms and legs are hurting from idleness."

In the sanatorium director's office he was even more frank.

"Sonny, I had a nice rest here, and now I'm going back home."

"But your vacation is not yet over. And your association transferred the money for your accommodation here. Nobody ever left us before their time was up. On the contrary, many ask that their stay be prolonged. If something doesn't please you here, just tell us," the surprised director insisted.

Dorig listened to him with distrust.

"How can one stand twenty-odd days of this kind of life," he muttered, but then an idea crossed his mind and he said, "They don't beat the airag here well. Where do your herdsmen live? I might give them a hand and stay a few more days."

"Right, you point out our shortcomings, and we'll try and correct our ways," the director said, thanking the discouraged old man.

One day Dorig visited the Orkhon waterfalls with some other sanatorium patients and returned in high spirits, like on the first day of his arrival. With a knife he had brought along from home, he had cut himself several willow switches and thin birch trunks a Gobi herdsman needed for a real good urga. He was so happy he could hardly restrain his enthusiasm.

"A tree in the Gobi, you know, is a rarity. But we herdsmen like a long urga. I just can't imagine why they don't make good
urgas here? They live almost right in the forest, after all. I've seen them carry around short little rods. A real urga and a saddled horse do a man credit," he kept saying to his fellow travelers.

Eventually Dorig found himself some work in the kitchen; he chopped wood, brought in water and made friends with the cook. So the days seemed to pass faster. He also liked to watch the bus that drove off vacationers to the airport: "Our state is very concerned about its people," he used to reflect.

One day the bus drove off his young roommate. A driller from Nalaikh, a fat short-winded man, took his place. He was taking a water cure. He would run around the building and lift heavy dumbbells every morning for exercise. Watching him, the old man couldn't help be amazed at the different habits people had.

One night Dorig woke up again. He put on his clothes and began feeling his way to the door. In the dark he accidentally brushed against his roommate's face, who woke up, seized him in an iron grip and half jokingly barked, "What are you up to? Rob your roommate?"

"Darn it! I thought last evening that it would be my turn tomorrow to gather in the herd. So I naturally awoke while it was still dark and couldn't find the nooses for the urga. I never took as much as a broken needle from anybody" the old man began excusing himself, bitterness in his voice.

"Pardon me, Dorig-guai, I was dreaming that I was drilling into the frozen ground. I probably nearly broke your hand, and my joke was a foolish one."

A few more days passed.

"No, this blissful existence is not for me," Dorig said to his roommate. "There's no law that can force me to stay here the full term. Two more weeks of this is more than I can stand." The other one just burst out laughing in reply.

The next day the thin old man in the red woolen deel
disappeared from the sanatorium sometime after noon. Somebody said he had asked for a lift on a truck headed for the Steppe Flower Association.
Tsetseg stepped out of the ger. She had been living in the Steppe Spring Agricultural Association for two months, ever since two new gers were pitched there. From afar they looked like two white shells that were somehow brought into the steppe.

Tsetseg shielded her eyes with her hand and looked across the steppe. The empty valley stretched to the horizon, there was only one dark spot in the middle of the valley, a tractor, and small figures moving around it. The wind grew stronger carrying light, reddish dust over the newly-ploughed field. Tsetseg went back to her ger and sat down on the loose end of the felt covering the frame of the ger. She raised her head and looked into the distance, but then her shoulders drooped again. Finally she got up quickly and went inside.

Her ger was spacious and sparsely furnished—only an iron bed, a table and a bench, a pile of suitcases, and a trunk with a transistor radio on it. There was also a pile of spare parts for the tractor and other agricultural machines. Tsetseg looked around, and when her eyes fell on the transistor radio she thought irritably, "Such a silly box! The batteries are no good; why couldn't Namjil go to the center and get new ones. He promised to do it two weeks ago but still has been too busy to find time for it." While the radio worked, she felt better, she could listen to some music or news from Ulaanbaatar, and there was always something to discuss in the evening.

Tsetseg loafed around the ger for some time and then went out again. She pulled her kerchief off her head and walked to the
field.

Nanjil was driving the tractor while Oyungerel operated the seeder. When Namjil saw Tsetseg, he switched off the motor. "Why have you come? Do you want to sow? But your back will hurt again and you'll have another sleepless night."

Tsetseg did not answer him and watched Oyungerel. Then the eyes of the two women met and it seemed to Tsetseg that there was challenge in Oyungerel's eyes. "You have come here to do research, haven't you? Instead you've become a tractor driver," Tsetseg said in a high-pitched voice. "Do you think to do research means only to write something?" Namjil said laughing. "All right, go ahead and work. I won't be in your way," she said and walked back.

In the afternoon the weather changed. It grew cold, and the wind raised clouds of dust over the fields and carried them to the slopes of the surrounding hills overgrown with trees. Soon the reddish veil obscured the hills from view. Tsetseg thought that the day was lost anyway and the ploughers would come home any minute. But they were not coming, only the dulled roar of the motor was to be heard in the dusty mist.

They came late in the evening. "Look, your ears are full of dust," Tsetseg said to Namjil who was washing himself. "What's the use to work out in the fields in such bad weather?"

"We must keep up with the schedule, each minute counts during sowing time."

"And what about me? Shall I spend all day alone like a bird that has fallen behind its flock?"

At night Tsetseg couldn't sleep. She was lying in the darkness listening to the howling wind and thinking what she could do in this godforsaken steppe.
Several days later Tsetseg heard the roar of a motor. She ran outside and saw a truck from Ulaanbaatar that delivered some cargo to the local association and was then sent to bring fuel to Steppe Spring on its way back. The young truck driver turned out to be a jovial fellow. Tsetseg chatted with him about the pleasures of life in the city and the difficult conditions in the countryside. Surprising herself, she suddenly asked him to take her to the city. They started on their way when she saw Namjil.

"Good-bye," she thought and waved her scarlet kerchief. The wind caught it and threw it against Namjil's chest. The truck roared and speeded along. Namjil kept standing there, pressing the scarlet kerchief with his hand.

It was fun to ride with the young driver. He was cracking jokes and saying pleasant things. Tsetseg's heart was at ease. She looked around the cab and found an illustrated magazine behind the sun-visor. She started leafing through it absentmindedly and found a picture of a new district in Ulaanbaatar. Their building had been exactly like those in the photo. Last fall Tsetseg thought that she would be happy at last. First, Namjil graduated from the institute, got a job in the city, and a fine job at the ministry at that. Second, they got an apartment. It was a stroke of good luck to get it so soon. Tsetseg, happy and contented, could often be seen standing on the porch of her apartment. But happiness is so fragile; a single remark ruined it.

"You know what? We are moving, say good-bye to the city," Namjil said to her one day.

Tsetseg started to back away from him when she heard the news.

"Don't be frightened. I have volunteered to go to the countryside. It will not be easy at first, but why should we shrink away from difficulties? I cannot and don't want to stay away from my real work. It's like roaming far from your beloved girl."

Tsetseg was completely at a loss, it was so unexpected that she did not even protest or scold Namjil. The only thing she
realized was that his decision was final, and she only asked him: "And what about the apartment?"

Now she was going to the city, and she would stay there for good.

Parting with the young driver in Ulaanbaatar Tsetseg invited him to visit her.
"I really don't know, will it be proper?" he said.

But in a week he came to see her.

Tsetseg opened the door, her eyes red from weeping.
"Will you go back to the steppe?" she asked him sobbing.
"What for?" The young man was surprised.
"I want to go back."

During that whole week she spent in Ulaanbaatar she kept sighing, recalling her departure and her stay in Steppe Spring.
"It was not bad there, after all," she thought. "The valley is so wide and soon it will be green. Wheat will grow in Namjil's field. How is he getting along there without me?"

She felt better only when she met her girl friends, but as soon as she was alone she felt sad. She even developed the habit of talking to herself. Once she caught herself saying out loud:
"And what about my kerchief? Has he kept it?"

Meanwhile Namjil spent every day working in the field. When Tsetseg returned, he took her to the field and tore off an ear of wheat.
"One, two, three...ten...fourteen...twenty-nine...thirty-one. Here you are! There are thirty-one grains in this ear. That's wonderful, and this is only the beginning. I'll grow high quality wheat." Namjil crushed the wheat ear in his hand and blew. The chaff flew away and the yellow grains remained on his palm.

Tsetseg was looking thoughtfully at the golden waves rolling across the wheat field.
"I would like to learn to operate a harvester combine," she
said.

"What for?"
"To reap wheat."
"But, darling, your back will hurt again and you won't sleep."
"It doesn't ache any longer, you'll see."

They returned home to the association center on a motorcycle. The scarlet kerchief was tied around Namjil's neck. Its ends were flapping in the wind caressing Tsetseg's face, as she clung to her husband's back.
If you, dear readers, have any friends who are well acquainted with the job of a newspaperman, they can probably tell you about the disappointment a luckless correspondent experiences when he fails to make a famous but too modest person "open up" and talk about himself. The notebook is almost empty, the editor's assignment has not been fulfilled, and it's high time to return. I once experienced just that after spending half a day on what seemed to me a flop interview with a well-known woman cattle-breeder at a conference of the country's foremost cattle-breeders.

An acquaintance of mine, a top Party functionary, praised the woman to me and asked me to write a story about her. I tried hard to find out about her life and work but learned almost nothing, apart from the words, "I work. I look after the cattle the way I was taught to." And somehow I didn't see anything striking about her in general. The only strange thing was her much too loose brown silk, sheepskin-lined deel with its terribly long sleeves. Very disappointed and on the point of leaving, I suddenly remembered I had a camera with me and decided to at least take her picture, especially since my acquaintance had also asked me to do that.

"My deel is too big and I probably won't look well in it," she said, touching up her braids and wrapping the robe closer around herself in embarrassment.

"Oh, that's perfectly all right," I said, putting her mind to rest, and then asked slightly in jest, "Why do girls from your region wear such loose deels? Is it the fashion there?"
"Oh no, fashion has nothing to do with it," she replied with a burst of laughter and then told me why she was wearing a deel that was several sizes too big for her.

Her story was a real coup for me, and I'm sharing it, dear readers, with you.

* * *

A passenger car was heading along the old örtöö road from Khatanbulag to the aimag center. A young round-faced girl was sitting alongside the driver, trying hard to look imposing—she was, after all, coming in from the capital.

The car climbed a hill, and there suddenly opened before their eyes the boundless Gobi steppe, here and there spotted with wormwood and saksaul. A flock of sheep could be seen in the distance; there was a well there most likely in the winding gully. Horses and camels were grazing closer by.

"That's probably the well I'm looking for," the girl said. "Let's drive up closer and ask."

"Righto," the driver said. "I'll give my old car a drink while we're at it."

Sheep were crowding around a trough at the well, and a hobbled horse was snorting and stamping nearby. A woman came up to meet the car. Picking up an urga from the ground, she stopped to look at the strangers. She was wearing a green sateen deel, flung over her shoulders, its sleeves tucked in behind a belt, crude boots and a multicolored kerchief. The short sleeves of her white blouse revealed strong tanned arms, obviously accustomed to physical work.

Greeting the visitors, the woman began watering the sheep. Her movements were deft and attractive.

"How do you manage to water so many sheep yourself?" the girl from the city asked.

"I just have no choice," the woman answered calmly.
"You must be tired. Let me help you," the driver proposed.

"Yes, a bit. But keep in mind, it's a deep well, and raising water from it is not easy!" the woman replied, handing him the pail and wiping the sweat from her brow with the palm of her hand.

Noon in the Gobi toward the end of August is a veritable inferno. The sun beats down mercilessly, and the sand feels like red-hot coals. The breeze, heavy with the pungent smell of steppe onions, not only carries no coolness but, on the contrary, constantly sweeps everything with its hot breath as if to burn it all up. "And in this broiling heat a woman manages to water so many sheep all by herself. The Gobi cattle-breeder's job is indeed not easy!" the girl from the city reflected, looking with sympathy at the woman. They finally struck up a conversation. It turned out that though this Gobi woman's family was not large, it was keeping her much too busy.

"Mother is old and ailing. So she stays at home, and I look after the cattle."

"Is there no one else in your family?" the driver asked.

"Why yes, I have a husband and a daughter."

"Then why are you working alone?"

"My daughter's at school and my husband's good for nothing. He's riding around all the time attending meetings and conferences and has no time for home."

The woman finished watering the sheep, took up the urga and, mounting the horse, tightened the reins.

"Aren't you afraid of breaking the urga?" the driver asked with a smile.

"Of course I am. Without an urga in this broiling heat I'd have to ride a camel. Before I part with my urga..."

"...You'd rather part with your man, eh!" the driver prompted.

"Right! It's sometimes very difficult to find yourself a good birch urga," she said, embarrassment suddenly stealing into her voice.
"A husband may come in handy too," the girl came to her assistance.

"So you can't get much profit out of husbands nowadays, you say," the driver pressed on, and all three started laughing.

"Do you really catch horses yourself?" the girl asked in surprise.

"Yes, and I happen to need a fresh one today." The woman raised her urga and touched the horse off.

"Wait there!" the girl suddenly shouted, remembering she had forgotten to ask the main thing. "Where is famous cattle-bredreer Senge's ail?"

"Senge, did you say?" the woman asked, halting her mount. "Over there, beyond the hillock," and pointing her whip to the northeast, she galloped off to the herd.

The car started for the ail. But the driver and his youthful passenger both kept an eye on the woman who was about to catch herself another horse. She tore right into the midst of the closely bunched herd, and a chestnut stallion shot out at the same moment. Leaving a cloud of dust in his wake, he galloped off. But the mounted woman went right after him, not letting him gain an inch. From afar it looked as if she was joined to the stallion's tail. When her hand holding the urga levelled with the stallion's rump, she shot the noose forward, and the next moment the urga, noose and woman's arm, as if by magic, turned into a single taut line, and the stallion was noosed. Resisting, he tried to get loose, but the woman kept drawing him closer. Then, quickly dismounting, she slipped a bridle on him, her actions so swift and neat a man might have envied her.

"She seems to love her urga more than her husband," the girl remarked almost to herself.

The car finally drove up to the famous cattleman's ger. Khuruud and steppe onions were drying on boards. Inside the ger were big painted trunks, a sewing machine and many other things.
Food was kept behind a clean little curtain, cups and crockery were covered with a piece of cheesecloth — everything bore an industrious woman's touch.

They asked the old woman in the ger where the master was. "Who knows!" she replied. "He's always attending meetings and making speeches. He's so busy, he's never home." She began treating her guests to strong tea, barley scones, sour cream and butter.

The girl, in the meantime, began questioning the old woman about her family. She learned that the household depended on her daughter-in-law, and though it was not an easy job, their ail had that year overfulfilled its livestock increment quota and could therefore send one of their people to the national cattle-breeder's conference.

"Where is your daughter-in-law now?"
"Where would you expect her to be? With the cattle, probably. Watering our sheep at the western well."
"Is she wearing a green sateen deel?" the driver asked. "Yes, did you meet her?"
"We did. She's sure clever with an urgal. I saw that with my own eyes."
"There you are, my friends. With a husband like that you have to learn everything ... My husband was also a bit of a loafer when I was young. He didn't like to work. And I used to hobble the horses and do all the chores ... in a word, do everything. In those days husbands made merry and feasted mostly while their wives did all the work ... There's no denying, many were the hardships we lived through. And now I'm completely broken down, can't get up, can't sit down, can hardly move," the old woman complained.

"But your son is a hard-working man, a cattle-breeder well-known throughout the suman."
"He's well-known all right, but a lot of good that does us! Now most of the time he's strutting about with the chairman at all kinds of meetings ... great talkers, little doers ... My daughter-
in-law hardly manages to get everything done. He'd have done better helping her than wasting his time at meetings."

After their talk with the old woman, the guests rose to leave. There wasn't much hope of the master showing up. The girl wrote something in her notebook and put a big question mark underneath it.

* * *

It had been a mild winter, with little snow, about a hoof deep. Three gers stood in a well-appointed winter camp within a rock enclosure. Sleek well-nourished sheep and camels lay about quietly, warming themselves in the winter sun's weak rays. It had obviously not been a bad wintering.

A tall rider of about thirty on a sinewy bay stallion neared the ail at a trot. A long black moustache adorned his full dark-skinned face. A Foremost Cattle-Breeder Badge and a Labor Merit Medal glittered on his chest. Riding up to the ger at the southwestern end of the ail, he dismounted, stuck the reins underneath the rope that encircled the ger, threw back the felt entrance flap, pressed it down with a rock and entered. This was famous Senge himself. Catching sight of his mother who was sitting at the hearth, unpicking his old silk deel, he said:

"Ah, that's good! Making me a deel! Just what I need."

"No, my son, I'm not making a deel, I'm unpicking an old one. It's worn out and torn in back. I'll try to let it out at the shoulders, maybe you'll still be able to wear it," the mother replied.

Senge sat down and lighted a pipe.

"I asked you for a new deel long ago, but you kept putting it off. And now I might as well take off naked for the cattle-breeder's conference. I can't really appear before the minister in a worn-out deel!"

The old woman was silent for a while.

"What conference now? Will a minister even attend it?"
"Didn't I tell you I was being sent to a conference of the country's top cattle breeders? Since summer I have been asking you to prepare everything for my departure. I have to leave the day after tomorrow and still haven't got a decent deel."

"Don't worry, the deel will be ready in time," and the old woman rolled up the unpicked deel.

"And where's Sevjidma?"

"She's out. She rose at sunrise and said she had to go and look for two stray camels."

"She's never at home! Of all the days she had to pick today. She doesn't like sitting at home," Senge reflected in irritation.

When Sevjidma finally arrived, he began urging her to hurry, arguing that he couldn't go to the conference in an old deel.

"All right, I'll start sewing your new deel now," she said, but you'll have to look after the cattle today."

"All right. I'll tend to the cattle. But you be careful not to spoil it in your haste, do your best. They wear attractive deels in Ulaanbaatar."

All day and all night she sat sewing the deel and finished the last buttonhole by morning. Senge tried it on, and it was perfect.

"Well, my son, the deel sure turned out neat. You should make a real hit in it," the old woman remarked.

"No objections, Mom! A lamb for one flap, a colt for the other. May the fabric wear out but the master never," Senge responded with a well-known flourish.

"Mother wished us seven children for the new deel I made her, but we have only one little girl so far," Sevjidma said laughing.

"Foolish woman," the old woman chided her. "You don't know yourself yet how many children you'll have. You may have more than seven."

"Maybe you'll wish him a medal on his new deel?" Sevjidma continued.

"Of course, why not?" Senge himself retorted as if that were
The sound of hoofbeats reached them from outside, a dog barked. The suman official had arrived.

"Hello, what's new?" Senge asked, adjusting the belt of his new deel.

"Nothing new, I was just told to pass on to those who will attend the cattle breeders' conference that they'll be leaving tomorrow with the mail car. They should be at the suman center at twelve sharp."

"Is that all? I knew that long ago and had made my women hurry up with the new deel. I was just trying it on."

The official burst out laughing.

"So you were sure you'd be elected, eh? You're a fast one, even had a new deel made. But you're not going this time. It's your wife who's going."

Senge stood dumbfounded.

"You're kidding!"

"I'm not kidding," and he produced an invitation card from inside his deel.

The card indeed bore Sevjidma's name.

"How come I wasn't elected?" Senge murmured in surprise.

"You used to be elected before, but the people now decided differently," the official replied.

"Absolutely right!" the old woman joined in. "Who tended and fed the cattle all winter and summer? Who sweated in the heat and froze in the cold? Sevjidma, of course!"

"Now, don't stick your nose into something you don't understand," Senge fumed. "How naive you are! Imposing and clever people are sent to such important state conferences. Speeches have to be made there, and from a rostrum at that. But she'll just sit there like a scarecrow!"

"So what! There's a limit to everything; you're all the time
away at conferences. At least I'll get a look at our beautiful Ulaanbaatar," Sevjidma said amiably.

"The deserving should go," the official concluded and, reminding Sevjadma not to be late the next day, bid them all farewell and left.

"But what will you travel in, my dear daughter-in-law? I've already sewed up his unpicked deel," the old woman said, nodding in her son's direction.

"It's all so ridiculous. What are we going to do? She'll have to put on my deel," Senge offered.

"But, Mother, what am I going to say at the conference? I'll really be sitting there like a scarecrow," the young woman said in a worried voice.

"You'll find something to say, my girl. You know your business. You're a real cattle breeder. But how will my son and I manage here in your absence? We'll probably disgrace ourselves. I'm after all an old woman."

This once Senge held his peace.

That was how Sevjadma found herself at the conference in her husband's deel.

After hearing this account, I decided to write a poem. Nothing, however, came of it but the following clumsy lines:

Though I've donned my husband's deel
Which is way too big for me,
There are medals on my chest
Glittering for all to see!

Well, the poem hasn't exactly worked out, I said to myself, and decided to write this story.
"Would you like to see our funny woman Buma?" my friend asked me when I came to the aimag.

Since nobody at the age of twenty would refuse to have fun, I readily agreed, and we ran to the garage like two schoolboys. There we saw a woman who was working in the yard, and my friend said: "Here she is. Look, how big and strong she is. And this young guy is her son. He recently came from the city."

The woman was working at a leisurely pace. She took off the rear wheel of a truck, lifted it over her head without any effort, and threw it on the grass like a rock.

You cannot judge a person's heart by his or her appearance. You cannot tell whether someone's happy or not. This woman aroused my curiosity, and I decided to learn more about her. In the evening the trade union organizer of the garage, a wise old man, told me her story.

Buma came here two years ago. In the city she left her only son whom she loved more than anything else in the world. She came here to work in the garage because experienced workers were badly needed. All the mechanics were young boys and Buma could teach them a lot. Besides, with old age creeping up she felt like leaving the city and settling down in the countryside to be close to the earth.

She came at the end of August. She took out her luggage from the car — a box with dishes and an old chest with her clothing. On the next day Buma put on her old green overalls and got down to
work. When she entered the shop, she immediately got angry.

"Oh, my God, how filthy! And you are smoking in the garage, aren't you?" she said indignantly when she saw a cigarette butt on the floor.

It was not easy to get along with her. She did not like many things here. She kept insisting that we should do everything according to the rules. In other words, she demanded discipline. Soon some of our boys started to call her "Khenkheg Buma" [Funny Woman Buma]. Frankly speaking, I also thought that she wanted too much from us. But Buma paid no attention to our jokes and kept working selflessly, better than any of us. It was good to watch this woman at work, she did a man's job and never got tired.

A month after her arrival we had a trade union meeting. Everybody was complaining that we did not have enough mechanics and that we must teach our people this trade. We decided to ask the aimag committee of the MYRL to send some good workers to us.

Buma kept listening attentively and then she took the floor. Everybody fell silent.

"What I am going to say will not be very pleasant for you to hear," she said. "You are all saying that we need more people because we don't have enough mechanics, but we should admit that it is our own fault. There are some pampered young people among us who simply don't want to get their hands dirty with oil. Perhaps we should teach them some mechanics."

Everybody was surprised and did not know what to say. Finally one of us asked her: "Whom do you have in mind?"

"Don't you know?" Buma retorted. "Look, here is our cashier Sembe. He is only twenty-two. If he stopped by our garage only once and took a look at me, a forty-year-old woman, he would be ashamed just to sit there and count money. And what about Galsan, our watchman? Look what a strong and healthy young fellow he is. People say he's an excellent wrestler and nobody at our county
fair can match him in strength. What does he actually do? Just think of it. I am not going to point my finger at anybody else. Use your own heads!"

After that meeting we all began to respect Buma. She and I became good friends and I would often visit her at home.

The better I got to know her the better I understood her. I realized that she was not funny at all but that she was a clever businesslike person and, besides, the best mother one could wish. Sometimes she would tell me about her son.

"I miss my son terribly," Buma once said to me. "I've been here for two years, and he's still in the city. I haven't had a letter from him for quite a while. You know, he wanted to enter a technical school and become a mechanic like myself. I've been working for twenty years, I started working when my husband went to the front. At that time practically only women remained in the garage. There were only few men who did the most strenuous jobs. I was young and strong and they appointed me to work with these men. I worked with them and we talked together. I learned the trade but began to look more like a man than a woman. My only son is everything I have in this world. My husband did not come back from the front."

"Go to the city and visit your son; we'll give you a leave of absence," I said.

"That's nice, of course, but you see, comrade trade union organizer, there is a lot of work to be done here and it must be done soon. Besides, my son will soon be twenty. He is a real man, but as soon as I see him I start crying just like some weak woman. I feel ashamed of it. Perhaps he will come here. Then it will be all right."

She did not go to the city. But I knew that she missed her son terribly and was waiting for him all the time, but he would not come.
On Sundays she would never leave home. She got a new bed for her son and kept some candies, apples and aaruul, but there was neither her son nor any news from him.

Sometimes I would drop in to see Buma, talk to her, and offer to take her to the movies but she would always refuse. "What if my son comes," she would say; "no, my dear, I can't go, he must be coming soon."

And finally it really happened. One afternoon the telephone in the office rang. The head mechanic said that Buma's son had come. I suggested that we should give Buma several days off, and the mechanic agreed.

In the evening I dropped by to see Buma. She gladly welcomed me, introduced me to her son and invited me to take the place of honor at her table. She was dressed in her Sunday finest, her cheeks were burning with excitement, her eyes sparkling. She was cooking some whey which smelled delicious. A frail young man was sitting at the table. He was the spitting image of his father whose photograph hung on the wall.

"Now my sun shines again," Buma said to me serving tea.

The next day I dropped in to see the manager of the garage at his office. Suddenly the door flew open and Buma, accompanied by her son, quickly entered the room. Buma was breathing heavily and looked gloomy.

"Good morning," the manager said to her, shaking hands with her and looking at her son.

"That's him. Two years ago I left him in the city so that he could study. I thought that he would finish a technical school and would come here as a mechanic. I was waiting for him. And he ..." Here Buma's voice betrayed her. "And he could not find a better job than a hospital nurse," she continued, forcing out the words.

"Let him work as a nurse," the manager said soothingly.

"Oh no, that won't do. I want you to give him a job at the
mechanic shop. I want to make a real man out of him. I was wait­ing for him so eagerly, hoping that ... When he said in his letters that he was getting along fine, I thought he was doing the right thing. But he lost his purpose. Oh, what an awful shame!" and Buma burst into tears. Then she obviously realized that it was not proper to cry in her son's presence, dried her tears and quickly got up from the chair.

"Well, boys, I hope you'll do me this favor and will give him a job at the shop." We both nodded.

"Come on, let's go," Buma said to her son and, taking him by the hand, dragged him out of the room.
Snorting and moaning laboriously like an old, old woman, the truck reached the crest of the pass and stopped.

"We'll wait here awhile," the driver said to the young man with a stylish beard sitting next to him. "We can't leave the others behind. They've lost sight of us."

The sun had just set. A light wind sprang up from somewhere in the surrounding spaces which were already dressed in their autumn garb.

"Could we have got lost?" the young man thought anxiously, looking around. In the meantime the driver had jumped down to the ground, lifted the hood and began tinkering with the engine, keeping an eye on his companion, a press photographer of one of the metropolitan newspapers.

The press photographer looked a little more than twenty. Slim and stooped like a question mark, he wore a baggy leather jacket.

"Looks like a scarecrow," thought the driver and nearly laughed out loud.

The rest of the press photographer's costume was made up of trousers with a multitude of shiny buttons.

Putting on a pair of glasses with thick rims — "Poor thing, he must be nearly blind" — the young man stretched out his neck and scanned the distance.

"Look at him, a regular eagle! Only he probably hasn't got the strength to raise a window," the driver laughed to himself, and half of him disappeared under the hood.
Incidentally, a wonderful view presented itself from the place where they had stopped. The road serpentined southward down from the pass. To the east there stretched a wide gorge at the end of which a waterfall cataracted down the steep slope of a high mountain.

The mountain peaks glowed orange, and one could not make out whether this came from the depths of the eternal snows or whether the sun, which had dipped below the horizon, was illuminating them with its last yellowish-red rays. For some time the press photographer admired the scene in silence. Then he raised the camera suspended from his neck, took a few shots and returned to the truck.

"What am I going to do with him?" the driver thought with displeasure, tearing himself away from his work. He straightened up, wiped his oily hands with a rag and began looking around attentively, hoping to find evidence of man's presence in this forsaken spot. And, indeed, at the top of a hill he soon noticed a herd of grazing animals. The driver pointed in their direction and asked the press photographer:

"Hey, look over there! Do you see up on that hill, isn't that a flock of sheep?"

"Looks like sheep."

"That's great! That means there's an ail not far away. Would you like to go and take a look, huh?"

"By myself?" There was an anxious note in the press photographer's voice.

"Of course by yourself. When you get to the ail they'll treat you to some tea. Who knows when the trucks will catch up. We might have to spend the night here."

The young man said nothing, took his bulging knapsack from the cab, turned up the collar of his jacket so as not to get chilled by the cold wind and strode off, followed by the gaze of the smiling driver.
When the young man, breathing intermittently, reached the top of the rocky hill, the sheep got excited as if they had sensed a wolf, and shied away. Immediately from somewhere up on the cliff resounded a loud: "Choo! Choo!" The voice was high-pitched and melodious, either that of a woman or a child. The young man stopped. Imagine his surprise when there on the top of the hill, between heaven and earth, on the edge of a barren cliff, he saw a slender silhouette and by the narrow shoulders and piebald kerchief realized that it was a young girl.

Having calmed the crowding, frightened animals, the girl nimbly descended from the cliff and approached the press photographer. "Hello," said the young man, looking into the slightly wind-blown but nevertheless youthful face of the girl.

In response she extended her hand and at once lowered her eyes, afraid to reveal her bewilderment at the sight of a stranger.

"Why don't you drive the sheep home?" asked the bearded young man. "It's already evening."

"What do you mean by home?" asked the girl with a smile. "Is that your truck stranded on the pass?" she continued.

"It is. Others are following, so we're waiting for them."

"Can you imagine," thought the press photographer. "Forsaken land, a remote mountain pass, a flock of sheep and a beautiful girl — just like in a dream."

"And where are the rest of your people?" he asked the girl.

"Far away."

"How far away?"

"About an urton from here, probably. Do you see that peak?"

"Way over there?"

"Yes. Far to the east of there is a little place called Nar-anbulag [Solar Spring]. That's where our team's fall camp is located."

"Well, and what are you doing here?"

"Me? Don't you see? I'm herding sheep. We do it according
to the drive-off method proposed by a leading sheep breeder. My brother Tsegmed and I," she said seriously. "By the way, let's go over to our tent and drink some tea. It's here, under the cliff."

As if desiring to confirm that he neither wanted to eat or drink, the press photographer sat down on a nearby stone.

"I'll wait here till the engine is repaired. I think the driver will give me a signal when everything's ready."

"Come along or the sheep won't calm down."

Leaning on her whip handle, the girl nimbly got up on the edge of the cliff where the young man had first seen her, and there was nothing for him to do but to follow suit. Clambering after her, he still wondered whether it was all true what he had just seen and heard.

Quickly the girl got to the cliff and descended to its foot. There, on a stone slab next to the tent lay all her modest possessions: a thermos bottle with tea, a paper bag with food, a mirror and a thick book, with a notebook and pencil between its pages.

"Sit down," she said and, as if showing him an example, squatted down. Then she lowered one knee to the ground for support, arranged herself more comfortably and began treating her guest, as if they were in a ger and not out in the open air. She handed him a bowl of tea and pushed closer a dish into which she poured dry cottage cheese and fried cakes from the paper bag.

The young man wanted to show that rural customs were not alien to him; he accepted the bowl and sat down with one leg under him. Only then did he begin sipping the delicious tea.

"You must be a press photographer."

"How did you guess?"

"It's hard to make a mistake in this case," she replied with light mockery.

In the meantime it was getting darker. Night shadows were
creeping up from the serrated cliffs to the mountain tops, the whitish clouds rose higher and higher and gradually melted in the sky where the stars were appearing one after another.

The silken deel with its light quilting and fine national embroidery became the girl exceedingly, and the piebald kerchief made her large eyes still more expressive. She was not as tall as the young man, but doubtlessly on high heels she would look slender and graceful. The girl had a tender and affable glance but it was devoid of any coquetry.

"Is it true that you herd sheep?" asked the young man.
"Of course it's true. Don't you believe me?"
"No, I don't."
"That's strange."

"What's strange about it? Such a beautiful girl herding sheep and spending the night outdoors. Do you expect me to believe that you have decided to spend your youth in these wild mountains herding sheep! Your appearance, your manners, your
speech do not agree with my idea of a rural shepherdess.

"I'm sure you live in Ulaanbaatar. Only I can't make out what you came here for. Perhaps on leave or on a tour? And you're herding sheep for the fun of it, to breathe the fresh air."

"Excuse me, dear guest," the girl interrupted the long-winded speech of the press photographer, "but do you really think that I am a city dweller?"

"Of course! You not only remind me of a city dweller but of an actress I know. I think I've seen you on stage. So better stop fooling me and tell me right now where you're from and who you are."

The girl could not help laughing out loud.

"That won't help. A mite of a girl is going to lead me around by the nose? Impossible!" the young man thought stubbornly to himself.

Dear reader, if you had ever been to the Tuul Restaurant in Ulaanbaatar, there at a table in the left-hand corner of the hall you could easily have noticed a tall young man in jeans and a loose leather jacket whose long unkempt hair fell down over his collar. As a rule he would be lounging with a bottle of beer in front of him, a cigarette held between the fingers of his outstretched hand, and blowing smoke rings. No, you would not be mistaken — that would be our hero, the press photographer Chalkha.

He was born and bred in the city. If you exclude the several trips of ten to fifteen days to a nearby suman to harvest hay, he knows practically nothing about country life. One could say that he spent all of his twenty-five years in the capital or at his family's country house or in his favorite Tuul Restaurant.

What is more, those trips to the country held no pleasant memories for him. Once when Chalkha was harvesting hay with a group of young men from Ulaanbaatar, they were all put up in an old ger where the press photographer had to suffer many inconveniences to which he had not been used. His self-esteem had also
suffered then. Believing that there were no girls in the khödöö that were worthy of him, his fairly coarse passes were spurned by an arad girl. That was enough. Since then Chalkha believed that all country girls were backward and primitive. However, this new chance acquaintance did not fit into his former conceptions. He was at a loss.

"So you don't believe me," she resumed the conversation. "That's a pity, our parts are full of such simple girls as I. Some herd sheep, like I do, others are milkmaids. Our teacher used to say that everyone must find his vocation. And that's right! For example, I couldn't think of anything better than roaming with the sheep across these wonderful pastures. I don't think I'd like it in the city. Since my birth I've been used to the khödöö, to a free life, to pure air — what more could one wish for?"

Suddenly the girl gave a deep sigh and fell silent.

"Don't you have any other desires? You're young, and the youth of today is reaching for the stars, wants to get a higher education, to learn how to operate machines unheard of before. Does all that mean nothing to you?"

"Why, of course it does. But everyone has his own calling. Some take space flights. Others become prominent engineers, and I like to herd sheep. Not everyone can fly in space or live in the city. Someone has to herd animals. Honest to God, it's an occupation no worse than others and maybe even better."

"Poor thing!" the press photographer could not help exclaiming. "Well, all right ..." He decided to attack from another angle. "Let us suppose that sheep raising is your vocation. But don't you ever want to dance? Don't you want to have fun with your friends, to go to the movies, to the theater? Don't you find it dull in this forsaken place with your sheep?"

"Evidently, there is a lot you don't know, most respected photographer," retorted the girl. "Do you think I roam the hills the year round? No, you're mistaken. I have a home and friends."
Every week we see a play or a film. Who doesn't like films or dancing! We know how to have fun. The city isn't the whole world!

Chalkha did not know what to say. It was hard to argue with this girl, just as it was hard to believe her.

Night fell. The column of trucks had not yet appeared, but this worried Chalkha little. He had no desire to sleep in spite of the weary day spent in the truck. He was plagued by thoughts:
"Everyone must have a calling ... And me? Just what is my calling? Photography?"

"Tell me, do you read the newspapers?" he suddenly asked the girl.

"Certainly! All that we receive. Only sometimes we get them a bit late."

"Have you paid attention to the photographs in the newspapers?"
"Of course."

"Have you noticed any by press correspondent Chalkha? Landscapes."

"I have. Only I don't like them very much. Maybe he hasn't got the gift for it. His photos are dull and monotonous — a single cliff here, a tree there. If he were to come to our parts, I'd show him some really beautiful places. What beautiful nature we have! Do you know him?"

"I do," Chalkha replied with a scowl.

"He seems to be a typical city dweller. You can see immediately that he's not used to being in the country and knows little about nature."

These words cut Chalkha especially deeply, but he kept his peace.

"In the morning, I'll certainly photograph her together with the sheep," thought the press photographer.

Chalkha was unaware of what it was in the girl that attracted him. However, despite the late hour, he had no desire to sleep.
It was so pleasant to sit next to her and talk. From time to time he got up, took a walk around the sleeping sheep, then sat down on the rock again and continued the conversation. Once he tripped in the dark and nearly fell, but the girl offered him her hand in time, and Chalkha regained his footing. The touch of her hand seemed to singe him.

"Perhaps you'll go to the tent and sleep a little," she suggested. "The nights are cold now, and you'll get chilled."

"No, no, thank you," Chalkha declined politely.

And so the night passed. And in the morning when it dawned, Chalkha saw the loaded trucks on the crest of the pass, and between them were the drivers shuffling from foot to foot. And although this meant that it was time to be off, Chalkha suddenly felt that he had no desire to go away from here.

At last he got up and took his knapsack. Now only his truck was left on the pass, and the driver was impatiently tooting for the press photographer.

"Well, good-bye. I forgot to ask your name."

"Dolgorsüren. And yours?"

"My name, my name's Chalkha. That's all right, don't let it bother you. Thanks a lot for your hospitality. It was a great pleasure meeting you. If I happen to be in this neighborhood again, we'll surely see each other, won't we?"

He stood rooted to the spot. No, he was in no hurry to leave. Everything seemed so wonderful now — the stark mountain pass and the flock of sheep and even the cold rock on which he had sat all night. Finally he came to, feverishly grasped the girl's hand and shouted:

"Good-bye, Dolgorsüren! We'll meet again!" Then he ran toward the truck, looking back every minute and shaking his clasped hands above his head. "Good luck, Dolgorsüren!"

The girl stood a long time watching him run toward the truck.
Then she saw him leap into the cab, and the truck quickly rolled downhill amid clouds of smoke and dust.

Chalkha returned home a different man. It was rumored in the editorial office that as soon as the chiefs mentioned sending someone on a business trip, Chalkha was the first to give his consent. He has already been several times to that very aimag where he met the shepherdess. Every time he stood long on the familiar pass, then climbed up to the edge of the cliff where he spent that memorable night with Dolgorsüren and sat there deep in thought.

Now he wears a deel, has shaved off his beard, and in general, all that is left of the former Chalkha are the thick-rimmed glasses.

Why these changes have taken place nobody knows, and Chalkha himself is hardly aware of them.

"Life must have a meaning," he loves to repeat to himself. "Possibly the meaning of life is a man's calling, as Dolgorsüren has said."
"Dulma," said my editor to me, "the Spark Agricultural Association is soon celebrating its tenth anniversary. How about writing a feature story about it. You can get to the aimag center by plane and go on by car."

I immediately went off to reserve a seat on the plane. It was five in the afternoon by the time I returned home. My husband was already in and had dinner waiting for me.

"I have to go to an aimag to do a feature story," I told him. "I'm leaving on the morning plane."

"Really? Eat your dinner, everything is ready." My husband set a plate with meat and vegetables in front of me. He packed my suitcase while I was eating.

My husband's name is Dorji. He is slim and has large, slightly bulging eyes, a straight thin nose and shiny wavy hair. A handsome man, my Dorji certainly is. We have been married for five years. He manages a department in the city hospital. Extremely reserved, he is very tidy both at work and at home and likes to do things by himself. He never lets me do any of the housework and even sews our little son's clothes. In his free time he studies books on diseases of the ear, throat and nose.

"A new play is on at the theater. Shall we go?" I used to suggest at times.

"You go alone," he would usually reply. "I'd rather stay at home."

Once I got him to go to a theater but he was already yawning.
during the second act and dozing during the third. After that I stopped inviting him to go to any performances. Jealousy is also not one of his traits. Once, two years after we had been married, I decided to tease him and told him that our neighbor, a young man, had seen me home.

"It was such a warm and moonlit night. We walked about for a long time...."

"Really? Have your tea and supper now. It's nice and hot."

"If you want to know," I persisted, exasperated by his indifference, "the other day one of our correspondents saw me home. We talked above love. No matter how strong and deep our emotions can be, I said, happiness is impossible if love is unrequited. Happiness is born of reciprocal affection only. Am I right?"

"I don't know. I've poured the tea into the thermos bottle," replied Dorji and began sewing a button onto our son's shirt.

Though I never have any house chores to do, before leaving I decided to give Dorji a few instructions. He listened to me in silence, smoking ponderously, and when I had finished, said:

"You have to get up early. Better go to bed now."

Saying that, he picked up a medical book and lay down to read. I wanted to snatch that book from him and bang his head with it. But I controlled myself. Why couldn't he show a little humor? In what way did I differ from the porcelain figurine standing on his desk? For him, I was just that—a doll. In the morning he dusted it carefully. "Does this man really love me?" I sometimes wondered. I know that Dorji does everything for me, that he adores me. But love is not merely a dinner served on time; it is not merely a handsome gift.

The next morning, Dorji got up and fixed breakfast. Then he saw me off and wished me a happy journey.

The silver-white plane climbed and flew over the ridge of Mount Bogd. Soon it landed at the aimag center's airport. Picking
up my small suitcase, I went to the Party committee to see some people. In the afternoon I felt hungry, and stopped by at a dining room.

The young waitress took my order, and soon a hot dinner was set before me. Just then the door opened and a young man of middle height, wearing a grey dustcoat but no cap, came in.

"Hello, girls!" he called to the waitresses. "I'm hungry enough to eat the lot of you!"

"Oh, when did you arrive? How are you?" the girls sang out gaily.

"That you, Chulun? How are you getting on? When did you get back?" came the voice of the young cook from the pantry window.

"I arrived last night. Everything's fine," he replied. "What will you have?"

"Anything you like to give me. Only let's have it quickly."

"Right away," said the cook.

"You have a pretty hairdo today. Didn't I tell you bobbed hair would suit you?" Chulun patted a curl on a waitress' head.

"As for you, better not frown or your beautiful forehead will be covered by wrinkles and look like a river bank after it's washed by a flood," he told another girl.

The girls laughed back. Within a few moments he had everybody beaming happily.

Then he approached my table.

"I hope your dinner is delicious! May I sit at your table?"

"I don't mind," I said.

Soon a plate of hot soup appeared before Chulun. It emitted a savory aroma. Chulun tasted it and cried:

"Doljin! If you persist in cooking so well, I shall never be able to leave this place!"

I studied him surreptitiously. He had a round sun-tanned face, shaggy black eyebrows, shiny curls and twinkling eyes.
"Are you from town?" he asked me with an engaging smile.
"I am."
"If it is no secret, could you tell me where you are headed for?"
"I'm going to the Spark Agricultural Association."
"So am I! When are you leaving?"
"I'm afraid it depends on when I can find a car going that way."
"Will you come with us?"
"Certainly, if you have place for me."
"That's easy."
"Thanks very much."
"Not at all. How could I miss this chance of escorting a pretty girl? If you really want to come with us, stop by at the agricultural board offices."

I liked the gay, sociable lad and ate at leisure so as to enjoy his company as long as possible. He also made no attempt to run off.

The autumn sun shone brightly as though wishing to warm the earth properly before the cold set in. The sky was azure and cloudless. I had no place to go and, to tell the truth, had no wish to go anywhere. Placing my suitcase by the entrance, I stood looking about me idly. Just then Chulun came out. He lit a cigarette and smiled at me. Before I knew it I was smiling back.

"It's almost three o'clock. Let's go to the office together. The truck will soon be leaving," he said, picking up my suitcase.

I followed him. Glancing over my shoulder, I saw the girls of the dining room looking out of the window and smiling. I increased my pace and, catching up with Chulun, asked: "Is it far to the Spark?"

"If all goes right, we'll get there tomorrow by noon. Better put a hat on, for though the sun is not too hot you might get a sun-stroke."

"I haven't got a hat with me."
"Put a kerchief on then."

I pulled a kerchief out of my bag and tied it around my head.

"With your hairdo, you ought to wear the kerchief this way."

Putting the suitcase down, Chulun adjusted my kerchief.

A truck was standing at the entrance to the agricultural board office. Three elderly men, a woman with a baby and a young couple were sitting on top. All the passengers greeted Chulun.

"Tserma, you'd better sit in the cab with your baby, and I'll ride up on top," Chulun said to the woman, helping her down. Then he climbed up onto the truck and sat down next to me. "Drop by my place first," he told the driver, "and I'll pick up my things. Do you have your shotgun with you? You can never tell what we come across on the road."

"I have it, don't you worry," said the driver, starting the engine.

Soon we pulled up by a brick building.

"Pardon me," said Chulun, smiling. "I'd invite you all in, but I don't dare let you see a place that has been abandoned for ten days."

He soon returned with his baggage, and we set off again. Chulun joked all the time and sang songs in a clear and pleasant voice. Toward evening it grew dark and cold. All I had on was a woolen blouse and a silk terleg. The cold wind chilled me to the very marrow of my bones.

"Are you frozen?" Chulun inquired with solicitude.

"I'm not frozen, but it is rather cold," I replied.

He opened a big brown suitcase and took from it a new black deel lined with sheepskin.

"Here, wrap this round yourself," he said, giving me the deel.

"Oh no," I replied, "I'm really not that frozen." Chulun put the deel on my shoulders without further ado. The other passengers also dressed more warmly and began to nod. Chulun alone was
dressed in a light dustcoat.

"You gave me your deel and now you're freezing yourself."

"It's all right. Your being warm makes me feel good." But neither his smile nor the expression of his eyes could hide the fact that he was chilled.

"Here, let us share your deel," I suggested.

"Are you sure you won't mind?"

"Not at all!"

"Oh, our zoo technician has found a snug spot for himself," one of the men joked.

Everybody broke out laughing. Chulun began recounting adventure stories, and told about the people he had met and the books he had read. He spoke cheerfully, interspersing his tales with jokes, and everybody listened to him with pleasure.

The wind grew stronger and it became still colder. We sat close to each other. Chulun wanted to put his arm about me, but I brushed it away.

Soon I began to doze.

"My shoulder doesn't bite. Rest your head on it," said Chulun, drawing me closer.

I woke from a bump. The truck had come to a stop. Finding myself lying in Chulun's arms, I jumped up in consternation.

"It's a good thing you woke up. We'll stop here for the night and go on in the morning," said Chulun. The truck was standing in front of the white one-story building of the suman hotel. The others were all gone. There was light in some of the hotel windows. On entering it, I was directed to the women's quarters by the hotel attendant.

She must have just awakened, for she kept stifling yawns all the time. But when she saw Chulun behind me, she immediately brightened.

"So you've come too, Chulun! How are things with you?"
"How many times have I told you not to yawn in my presence. And comb your hair while you're at it."

"How did I know you would be coming?"

"Oh, so you doll up for me and let others see you in disarray, is that it? Naturally I'm flattered, but I'm sure the other men are not."

Everybody laughed.

"You wanted me to bring you lipstick. Here it is," Chulun went on, producing a small packet from his pocket. "Only, if I ever catch you yawning again, I'll take it back!"

He smiled and patted the girl on the back. I don't know why, but I wanted to tear the lipstick out of that woman's hand and throw it away.

I went to the women's quarters, Chulun following me.

"You can get up at eight tomorrow. We'll be detained here a little. I'll bring your suitcase in."

"There's no need to. I have everything I want in my bag."

I did not want Chulun to leave, but he wished me a good night's rest and walked out of the room.

I washed, made my bed, and decided to question the woman with the baby about Chulun.

"Do you know this man?" I asked her.

"Zoo technician Chulun? Of course, I do. He's a graduate of the Agricultural Institute and working in these parts. Last year he became chief zoo technician. Chulun's a remarkable man. He was married, you know. Has a son. Last year a man from town turned his wife's head, and she went away with him. Chulun — he's a very decent fellow — did not say a word to her, but he's suffered badly. It's only lately that he's become his old self again. His son is living with his parents. Ah, but it's getting late. Good night."

I did not feel like sleeping. For some reason I was
wonderfully elated. I recalled everything Chulun had said, and his face loomed before me. I do not know when I fell asleep. When I awoke, it was only six. I got up, washed and went outdoors. The morning was warm and still. The white buildings standing in a row presented a cheerful sight. I crossed the street. On the southern slopes of the mountain in the distance the white gers were sprinkled about like mushrooms. Was Chulun sleeping in one of them? After breakfast, I strolled along the street again. From a rambling white building carrying the sign Board, a man of thirty came out, accompanied by Chulun.

"Good morning. Did you have a good sleep?" I asked Chulun as they drew near.

"I have, and how about yourself?"

"The zoo technician never went to bed, I think. He came to the board with me at five in the morning, and we've only just completed our business," said Chulun's companion.

"Why sleep and dream of things that can never come true?" said Chulun and introduced us. "Meet the chairman of the suman council of agricultural associations. This is a newspaper correspondent."

The chairman invited us to his home for tea. Though I had just eaten, I accepted the invitation with alacrity. We did not linger long at the chairman's house. He wanted to see us to the truck, but fortunately a man turned up and led him away. At last Chulun and I were alone.

"Any man looking at you ought to feel weak in the knees," joked Chulun.

"Oh, not any longer," I replied.

"That's what you think. But I feel weak in the knees..."

On arriving at the association, we found the place all agog with holiday preparations. Chulun was greeted as an old friend by everybody. He introduced me to the leading figures of the association and to the front rankers who had been invited to the
center for the celebrations. I interviewed the cattle breeders in my hotel room. Having filled several notebooks, I finished my work late in the afternoon and went in search of Chulun. But he had left for one of the camps. I wanted to join him, but there were no cars going that way. So I returned to the hotel and paced the room until midnight, when I finally dived under my blanket. But sleep would not come.

The next morning I interviewed a few more people.

Only in the evening, at the meeting, did Chulun reappear. He sat at the presiding table and I had eyes only for him. I realized that my feeling for him was no light one. It made me happy, and yet I was afraid. But I could do nothing to resist this surging love. Not that I had forgotten about Dorji. I tried to think of him, of the first radiant days of our matrimonial life. But Chulun had a far stronger attraction for me, one that I tried to stifle.

The meeting was followed by a concert given by amateur artists. Though I wanted to be with Chulun, I forced myself to leave so as not to encounter him. On returning to the hotel, I began humming a tune, and soon realized that it was the song Chulun had sung on the road.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door, and Chulun entered. I felt like a guilty girl expecting to be punished.

"Why didn't you stay for the concert?" he asked, taking a seat opposite me.

I said nothing.

Chulun sat in a brown chair, then got up and sat down by my side. I did not stir and gazed steadily at the floor.

Chulun embraced me. His cheek touched mine. I wanted to move away, but an irresistible force kept me pinned to the chair. With his other arm he turned me around to face him, and our eyes met. He bent over and kissed me. I whispered, "Don't," but the
timid protest stuck in my throat. Chulun had probably not heard it, for he kissed me again.

"Do you condemn me?"

"I... don't know."

"Thanks. Well, I'd better go," he said.

He lit a cigarette. Then, narrowing his eyes, he took a long draw on his cigarette, and suddenly asked in a quiet but clear voice:

"Are you married?"

I often heard men say that for a woman this was a most difficult question to answer to a man she liked. I could only nod. Chulun changed countenance and dropped his eyes. After a few moment's silence, he got up swiftly and strode toward the door.

"Chulun!" I cried.

With his hand on the knob of the door, he turned toward me. Instead of the jovial debonair Chulun, a stranger stared at me.

"It will be better if I do not make another suffer what I have suffered myself. Forgive me for everything," he said and walked out of the room.

I dropped upon my bed and broke into sobs.

That's how it is, my dear Dorji! If you would only regard me as a live being and not as the porcelain figurine on your desk, I would love you with all my soul...

"What if another man would have been in Chulun's place?" the thought crossed my mind.

I wanted to scream and rush from the little room where I felt stifled.

The next evening, returning to the aimag center, I looked back at the receding Spark Association with a lump in my throat and tears welling up in my eyes.
Seventeen years old. Green as grass. I already considered myself a man, but one day I was made to pay dearly for that delusion.

One July day, I set out with Chinghis Khan and his wife for a county fair. Chinghis Khan was planning to take part in the horse races. We started out early so as to cover the greater part of the distance before the midday heat.

Chinghis Khan was a nickname I had given to Tsamba, but I never mentioned it to anybody. Nobody rode a horse as fast as he. Horses were his passion. Some said that he was lucky, that good fortune attended him. Most of his fellow countrymen held red-headed Tsamba to be a boastful and vindictive person. As to me, I always thought he very much resembled Chinghis Khan.

Chinghis Khan had several excellent racers. I had helped him ready them for the races that summer. I didn't know much about training race horses in those days, so my help was naturally rather minimal. As soon as the heat subsided toward evening, I would lead his famous racers out to graze. They had unusual names, like Chestnut Wind and Lightning-Fast Bay. In the morning I'd walk them about and during the day take them to water.

Red-headed Tsamba didn't look more than thirty. He had a jutting cleft chin, was shortish and slightly bowlegged. But his step was firm and even heavy. He always kept his fists clenched as if ready to hit somebody. I never saw a tender look in his yellow eyes. His gaze alone kept the neighborhood boys trembling,
and they dared not budge in his presence.

Tsamba was rich. He had a lot of cattle, a lot of fine horses and was never short of money. He went in for horse dealing.

In the spring, as soon as the ground began to turn green, Tsamba would put a rich silver-decorated saddle on his horse, don a new deel and, taking along several racers, would be gone for several months. People said he managed to visit Bayanulaan on the Kerulen and Galshar and Darigang. He would return in the middle of summer, leading several horses with matching coats. There would be amblers among them and coursers and race horses.

As I already said, we left at the break of dawn and rode southward. The road passed through very rugged country. Tsamba ordered us to ride faster so as to cross the Jirem ridge before the sun got too hot.

The sun kept rising. "I'll drop by the ail for a drink, and you ride on," Chinghis Khan remarked and turned off the road.

A feeling of inexpressible exultation swept over me. I was seventeen, and my awakening manhood was probably making itself felt.

Red-headed Tsamba's wife's name was Kulan. Tsamba had brought her in from far away. She was as beautiful as the moon and as inconstant as the wind. I had lived two years at my brother's in the aimag and returned home only that spring. It was then that I discovered Tsamba had a new wife, and an attractive one to boot. The neighbors said he beat her a lot. Some even had heard her crying in the mornings, but I myself had never seen Tsamba beat his wife nor had I heard her cry.

Chinghis Khan soon disappeared behind a turn in the road. I continued riding alongside Kulan, leading four other horses.

I kept casting sidelong glances at Kulan, an unusual joy surging within me. I felt I could ride on with this beauty to the ends of the world. The sun was shining brightly in the
cloudless sky, and a fresh breeze was blowing in our faces. The mountains to the left of us were still cloaked in darkness and seemed quite black, those to the right were golden, gilded by the rays of the rising sun. Tall dewy grass glistened greenly along the edge of the road. Every now and then a frightened lark would shoot up into the air.

Kulan was riding her mount very gracefully, the toes of her yellow booties slightly bent and resting upon the stirrups. At times she would lift the edge of her blue deel, and I could catch a glimpse of her shapely silk-stockinged legs. A wide yellow silk sash was wound tightly around her narrow waist. She sat very straight in her saddle, and the sinewy ambler with a star on his forehead was trotting so smoothly that if one were to place a bowl of water on his croup not a drop would be spilled. The thin leather strap along his back curved ever so slightly. Horse and rider were amazingly suited to one another.

I was wearing an old deel of coarse cotton, so worn that the edges had become frayed. There were two patches on the knees of my coarse army breeches, and on my head was an old cap with a broken peak. I was riding the most rundown hack of Chinghis' herd, a skinny three year-old skewbald colt.

Kulan suddenly broke into a song, her gaze fixed on the mountains, but she soon stopped singing and slowed down her mount.

"You sing something, Sampil," she said, casting a roguish look at me.

I blushed crimson and was taken aback for a moment. It is commonly believed that someone who grew up as an orphan has a good voice. Well, my voice was really not too bad. For want of something better to do while grazing herds in the steppe, I used to sing for days on end, listening to the echo reverberating in the mountains. So now, after licking my lips like a calf that has licked its fill, I began to sing timidly. It seemed to me Kulan
was even a little surprised by my voice. She halted her mount, looked at me with her beautiful eyes and smiled. Her smile encouraged me, and I began singing a song about a mother who was longing for her only daughter who had been married away from home. I sang, putting all my skill and all my heart into the song. I saw tears gathering in Kulan's eyes. She took out a handkerchief and wiped them away. I broke off my song in embarrassment. How could I have known that the song would move her so?

"How nice you sing, Sampil," Kulan said in a barely audible whisper.

It seemed to me I had discerned a tremble in her voice and became even more perturbed.

We reached the top of a mountain. The sun was shining brightly. Little by little we got into a conversation. I learnt that Kulan was also an orphan, just like me.

We dismounted at an oboo. It was a hot day, and a light breeze brought the aroma of pine needles and leaves. The Onon, winding below us through a thick grove, was glittering silvery. Kulan removed a red silk kerchief from her head and passed her white plump little hand several times across her brow. She looked at me closely, the ghost of a smile crossing her lips. I didn't know what she was thinking about at that moment, but it seemed to me she was thinking about me and that it was something very nice. A feeling of strange excitement gripped me.

If only Chinghis Khan were detained, lashed through my mind.

"What are you looking at the road for, Sampil?" Kulan suddenly asked.

"Chinghis..." I suddenly blurted out, again casting an involuntary glance down the road.

"What?" she asked in surprise.

I was stumped. "Yes, Chinghis... that is, no, I meant to say..." and, babbling incoherently, began to laugh.
"What Chinghis are you talking about?" she asked with growing surprise.

"No, I mean... Uncle Tsamba will soon be back."

"But what has Chinghis Khan got to do with him?" Kulan continued probing me.

"Uncle Tsamba looks very much like Chinghis Khan," I finally admitted.

"What are you talking about!" she burst out laughing, and then added, "He's probably blind drunk by now and green in the face. With luck he might get to the suman only by night." She heaved a deep sigh and lay down in the grass. A pink knee flashed between the flaps of her deel, and she hastily covered it with the hem. She picked a blade of grass, slipped it between her lips and closed her eyes.

It seemed to me she was thinking about something. Suddenly she laughed and extended her hands toward me: "Help me up!"

I took her hands and helped her rise. How soft and warm they were!

She leaped into her saddle. "Let's gallop down to the river. It's nice there on the bank. Don't worry, Tsamba won't be back soon. Come on!" And bringing her whip down upon the mount she went galloping downhill.

I quickly climbed my hack and went after her.

"Sing, Sampil!"

With the wind filling my old deel behind my back like a sail and the flaps spreading like wings, I burst into an old folk song about a brave gray hawk.

We reached the river bank, our horses breathing heavily. Kulan headed toward an old ford and pulled up in a thicket of willows, bird cherries and hawthorns.

We tethered our horses to two aspens overlooking the grove,
sat down and began conversing in low voices.

I didn't fully realize what was happening to me.

"You know, Kulan, there isn't another woman around here as beautiful as you."

"Not only my face is beautiful."

"What else?"

"Guess."

"How happy you are!"

"No I'm not happy at all. I'm in the power of an evil man. I simply try to hide my grief from people's eyes, and so they think I'm happy."
"But you shouldn't live like that, Kulan. You're meant for a better life. Leave that Tsamba. He can't keep you by force. If you go away, he won't be able to do anything."

"Oh, Sampill! If only I had a friend like you. But you're so timid. Come, kiss me."

A little gray bird perching on a bush stretched its little neck and looked in our direction and then, as if in surprise, began blinking its tiny black bead-like eyes.

"When you'll leave in the fall for the aimag, I'll leave with you," Kulan said pensively, putting her arms under her head. "I could probably find work there. I know how to sow. And if worst came to worst I could get a job as a charwoman somewhere, don't you think so, Sampill?"

"Of course, you could. And I'll learn to drive a tractor or a truck. Look, Kulan, what a nice little bird..."

By the time we rode up to the new ford the sun had already begun sinking toward the horizon. It was so quiet all around us. We were sure Chinghis was still quenching his thirst in Tsagaantokho. We were so happy! Kulan was riding, leaning upon my shoulder and smiling peacefully. I was humming a song to her about the brave, strong gray hawk, and the setting sun was smiling on us from behind a mountain.

Suddenly we saw clouds of dust down the road. A horseman was galloping towards us. Kulan halted her mount.

"That's Tsamba," she said in a low voice, pointing her whip in the rider's direction.

"How does he come to be here?" I mumbled bewildered.

The ground seemed to be slipping from under my feet. My heart began to beat as if it were about to burst.

"That's him, that's him, Tsamba! While we were sitting in the grove he had already been to the suman."

"What should we do?"

"I don't know... We'll say we stopped at the river to feed
"the horses."

"So long?"

We hadn't yet decided on anything when Chinghis Khan, very grim-looking, was already quite near. He rode up close to us, looking angrily at me and Kulan with those cold yellow eyes of his. The collar of his deel was wide open and his eyes kept darting back and forth.

"Are you coming from the suman?" Kulan asked.

She wanted her voice to sound calm, but an involuntary tremble gave her away. Tsamba grit his teeth, his lips twisted.

"You are asking whether I have come from the suman? Yes, I was there already while you were playing around with this pup in the grove..."

"You're crazy!"

"A...a!" Tsamba cried, and before I could say knife, he grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and flung me from the saddle. Then he struck my horse with his whip so hard that the beast galloped off.

"I won't ride with you," Kulan shouted. "You hear me, I'm dismounting immediately!"

"Just try!" Tsamba retorted and, heading toward me, shouted: "I'll skin this snotnose!"

Grabbing his arms, Kulan begged: "Leave him alone, Tsamba, let him go!"

I stood rooted to the ground in complete confusion, not daring to move. Tsamba seized the reins of Kulan's mount and galloped off together with her. Clouds of yellow dust were rising in their wake, and poor Kulan's sobs were fading in the distance.

When I finally came to, I realized I was stranded without a horse and would have to walk all the way home.

"I'll get even with you!" I shouted, shaking my fist in Tsamba's direction. "You'll see, I'll get even with you somehow! And Kulan will throw you overboard! So help me God, she will, you'll see, you dirty dog!" I kept shouting, wiping my nose on my sleeve and sobbing.
SAMBUUGIIN BADRAA was born in Bulgan aimag in 1923. He graduated from the Pedagogical Institute in Ulaanbaatar in 1940. His literary work began in 1950. He is known as the author of many stories and as translator of books written by Russian writers.

CHOIJIJIN CHIMID, prose writer, poet, and playwright, was born in Amgalanbaatar in 1927. He is said to have started writing as early as 1938 when he was only eleven years old. His first collection of verses appeared in 1947. He graduated from Mongolian State University in 1950. He has been working in poetry, prose, dramaturgy, and in translating fiction, including world classics. His play, On the Threshold, won a state prize. Chimid is also a prominent public figure, serving as chairman of the Mongolian Peace Committee. In 1950, he sharply criticized Rinchen and others on several occasions for alleged ideological deviations.

LKHAMSURENGIIN CHOIJISUREN was born into an arad family in Tariat suman, Arkhangai aimag in 1932. In 1957 he graduated from the Pedagogical Institute in Ulaanbaatar and in 1961 from the advanced literature course at the Gorkii Literary Institute in Moscow. He began writing in 1953 and has since written the stories Negdiiin ödör (Unification Day) (1955), Uulyn suurini oddin dor (Under a Mountain Village's Stars) (1960), Khavrin ur' (Spring Warmth) (1961), and the novel Óvsnii shüüder (Dew on the Grass) (1963). Choijilsuren's works have been translated into many foreign languages. He is presently holding the office of managing editor of the newspaper Utgazokhiol urlag (Literature and Art).

J. DAMDINDORJ. No information available.

SORMUUNIRSHIIN DASHDOOROV was born in Delgerkhangai suman, Dundgobi aimag in 1935. In 1955 he graduated from the Pedagogical Institute in Ulaanbaatar and in 1965 completed the advanced literature course at the Gorkii Literary Institute in Moscow. He started writing in 1952 and is the author of many poems, stories, and tales. One of his poems was awarded the prize of the Mongolian Writers' Union.

SENGIIN ERDENE was in Khentei aimag in 1929. In 1955 he graduated from the medical faculty of Mongolian State University. In 1949, while still a student, he began writing poetry, and his first prose work - novelettes and stories - began appearing
in print in the fifties. Several collections of his writings have
been published, and he is the winner of a state prize. Erdene is
one of the most prominent literary figures, and more information
about his works is available in Gerasimovich, pp. 277-285.

MYATAVIN GAADAMBA is a poet, prose writer, and literary critic who
was born in Bulgan aimag in 1924. He graduated from Mongolian State
University in 1942 and became a candidate of philological sciences
in 1961. He has been writing since 1947.

DORJIIN GARMAA, poet, prose and scenario writer, was born into the
family of a cattlebreeder in Sukhbaatar aimag in 1932. In 1966 he
graduated from the Gorkii Literary Institute in Moscow. He first
appeared in print in 1955. Garmaa is the author of several collec­
tions of stories, narratives, and sketches. The predominant theme
in his works is the life of the youth.

CHOIJILJAVIN LKHAMSUREN was born in Bayankhongor aimag in 1917. He
is a poet, prose writer, and playwright who won a state prize. He
is a graduate of the advanced literature course at the Gorkii Lit­
erary Institute in Moscow and has been occupied with literary work
since 1938.

CHADRABALIN LODOIDAMBA was born in the family of a bard in the aus­
tere and beautiful land of Gobi-Altai aimag in 1917. After serving
as a lama's novice for a while, he fled the monastery. At age 14,
he finished a seven-year school. In 1954, he graduated from Mon­
golian State University, and he received his candidate's degree in
the history of art in 1958. Lodoidamba was the author of more than
thirty works of fiction and many literary essays. His first story,
Malgait chono (The Wolf in the Cap) was published in 1945. His
novel Altai (In the Altai) (1951) about a geological expedition
was said to be the first "correct" evaluation of Chingis Khan.
Popular with Mongolian readers are his historical novel Tungalag
Tamir (The Clear Tamir) (1962) and the long story Manai surguuilin-
khan (Our School Children (1952). He served as deputy minister of
culture for a while, and he died in 1970.

DEMBEEGIIN MYAGMAR was born in Selengin aimag in 1933 into a cattle
breeder's family. In 1955 he graduated from Mongolian State Uni­
versity. He began to write in 1950. His best known stories are
The History of a Certain House, The Miller, and The Land and I. He
is presently the managing editor of Tsog, a magazine published by
the Mongolian Writers' Union.

DASHDORJIIN NATSAGDORJ was born in Töv aimag in 1906. He worked
as secretary of the Revolutionary Military Council around 1921 and
later was active in the Sukhbaatar cultural club. He went to Ger­
many where he graduated from the School of Journalism in Leipzig.
He has been acclaimed as the founder of modern Mongolian litera­
ture and as a major poet, prose writer, dramatist, and translator.
He died in June of 1937 at the age of 31.
SHAGDARJAVIN NATSAGDORJ, scientist, academician, and the director of the Institute of History of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, was born in Amgalanbaatar in 1919. His first short story was published in 1944, and his first collection of stories came out in 1966. He is also the author of several plays and articles on literature. Along with several other literary figures, he was attacked for "failing to mention the outlook of Chingis" and his "aggressive activities" in his foreword to Damdinsüren's translation of the Secret History of the Mongols.

JAMBIN PUREV was born in Övörkhangai aimag in 1921. He graduated from Mongolian State University in 1952 and from the advanced literature course at the Gorkii Literary Institute in Moscow in 1963. He has been writing since 1947, and his works include Ner khund (Authority)(1959), Beelii (Mittens)(1962), and Arvan zakhidlin khariu (Reply to Ten Letters)(1964).

R. SAIJA. No information available.
NOTE ON SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION

I have transliterated Mongolian words into the Latin alphabet on the basis of the orthography current in the Mongolian People's Republic. It is thus at variance with that in the so-called Lessing dictionary, still the major Mongolian-English dictionary (which is based upon traditional Mongolian orthography), and, in one or two instances, with common usage. For example, the major Mongolian monetary unit is the төгрөг which is transliterated as tögrög in this volume, төгриг in Lessing, and tugrik in common usage.

Most letters of the Mongolian alphabet are also found in the Latin alphabet in slightly different forms, and they are pronounced much like their equivalents in major West European languages. It should be borne in mind, however, that this statement extremely oversimplifies the matter. The following table lists the Mongolian alphabet (leaving out the soft and hard signs) shows some but no means all differences in pronunciation between Mongolian and English.

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GLOSSARY

aaruuul  ааруул
dried aarts, a kind of sour cottage cheese made from milk left after distillation of milk liquor.

ail  айл
family, household, homestead; here: a small nomadic settlement.

aimag  аймаг
tribe, clan; here: an administrative unit, equivalent to the meng in China's Inner Mongolia and comparable to a province or state (U.S.). At present, Mongolia has eighteen aimags.

airag  айраг
fermented mare's milk; kumiss.

arad  арад
ordinary man, commoner; a subject or citizen of a state.

burkhan  бурхан
Buddha, god, deity; image of Buddha.

deel  дөөл
a long robe-like dress, worn by men and women alike on all occasions and in all seasons.

deelei  дөөлөй
a short fur garment, jacket.
dogshid  
plural form of dogshin: wild, ferocious, ruthless, violent, tempestuous, raging, terrible; severe, austere. [From Tibetan: drag gced "terrible executioners"].

gamin
name given to a soldier of the Chinese army of occupation in 1919. [Possibly a corrupted form of gamgui: merciless, ruthless].

gavji
a theologian's scholarly rank.

ger  
tent-like housing; still predominant in rural areas.

gol  
river.

khadag  
a strip of blue silk presented to a guest or one's elder as a token of respect. [From Tibetan: kha btags].

khödöö  
a rural locality; open steppe, countryside.

khoimor  
hind, behind, north; part of ger opposite entrance; here: a place of honor in the ger.

khoshuun  
snout, muzzle, cape, peak; here: an administrative unit in old Mongolia and in the autonomous period. Equivalent
to the ch'i in China's Inner Mongolia and comparable to a county (U.S.).

khuruud  хүрүүд
pressed cottage cheese.

khusam  хусам
the residue after boiling of milk in a pot.

morin khuur  морин хүүр
a stringed instrument played with a bow; "horse fiddle."

MYRL
Mongolian Young Revolutionary League.

noyon  ного
lord, prince, chief.

oooom  ообоо
heap, pile, mass; here: a high place, an altar for sacrificial offerings, usually on an elevation at a mountain pass.

örtöö  ортөө
relay system with stages about twenty miles apart; a postal relay station; here: a distance of about twenty miles.

shanz  шанз
a musical instrument with three strings, plucked with the fingers.

sum(an)  сүмэн
missile, arrow; here: an administrative unit, roughly comparable to county (U.S.). In old Mongolia, it denoted an
area containing 150 soldiers and their families.

taiji  
*a nobleman or prince.* [From Chinese: t'ai tzu 太子, usually written t'ai chi 子].

terleg  
a cotton padded gown.

tögrög  
circle, disk; here: the principal monetary unit.

toono  
frame of opening in top of a ger; the smoke hole in top of a ger.

urga  
a pole with a leather noose at its end, used to catch horses.

zaisan  
honorary title, mostly in Western Mongolia, for the head of a clan. In Khalkha, it was for the head of a clan under a khutukhtu administration. [From Chinese: ts'ai hsiang 宰相].
ABOUT THE EDITOR

Occasional Papers


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