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.