"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.