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.