

She is illiterate.
She cannot write her name – my mother.

But she taught me how to count.
She taught me the names of the months and years,
and most importantly,
She taught me language – my mother.

I tasted joy and
unhappiness
with this language.
And I created every poem
of mine
and every melody
with this language.

Without that
I am nobody.
I am a lie.
And the creator of my work,
in all its volumes and volumes, is my mother

BAKHTIYAR VAHABZADEH

The eclipse I love
It shall give birth to the sun,
The sun for sure!

Harsh winter I love
It shall give birth to hot summer,
Hot summer for sure!

Hatred's climax I love
It shall give birth to love,
Love for sure!

Tyranny's pain I love
It shall give birth to justice,
Justice for sure!



**HEYDAR ALIYEV
FOUNDATION**

"AZERBAIJANI CLASSICS"

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BAKHTIYAR VAHABZADEH

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BIOGRAPHY

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3. The third part of the biography discusses the subject's major achievements and contributions. The subject is known for [achievement] and [achievement]. The subject's work has had a significant impact on [field]. The subject has also received several awards and honors, including [award] and [award].

4. The fourth part of the biography discusses the subject's personal life and interests. The subject is married to [name] and has [number] children. The subject has a passion for [hobby] and [hobby]. The subject is also involved in [activities] and [activities].

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Every work by Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh is valuable and precious. His every work develops our culture, art and literature.

Heydar Aliyev

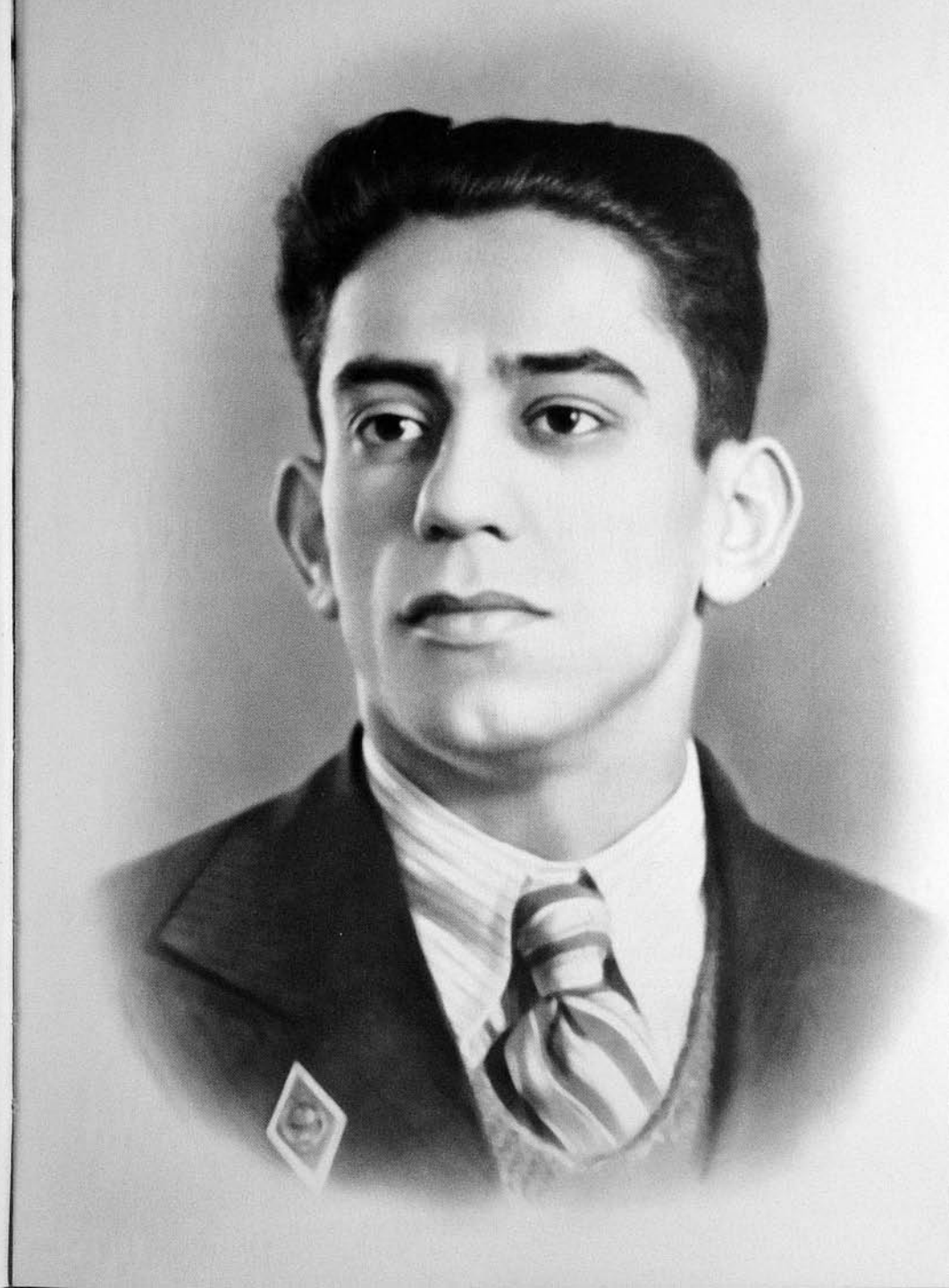
The outstanding Azerbaijani poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh was born on August 16, 1925 in Sheki – a historic mountainous town in Azerbaijan. He recalled the mountains of Sheki were lined with oak, elm, pistachio, and willow trees. Many of the inhabitants of this area made their living as woodcutters. They dug pits in their yards, where they burned logs – and sold the charcoal at the town market. His grandfather, father and uncles were all woodcutters. When Bakhtiyar was a child, he went with them to bring logs to the city. Each day they made several trips to the woods and brought back logs on the backs of their donkeys.

Bakhtiyar was fascinated by the woods and mountains, where he spent most of his childhood. These green mountains were the

setting for the fairy tales that his grandmother used to tell him. The heroes of these tales wore iron shoes, held iron canes in their hands, and set out for these same mountains in search of their loved ones. Every winter his father would point to the snow covered mountains seen from their yard and said: “All our dreams lie beyond those mountains.” In Bakhtiyar’s childhood dreams, he used to fly over the mountains. In those mountains, his dreams would come true.



With his parents and uncle.





His brother, Isfandiyar, was four years older than Bakhtiyar. When Bakhtiyar was seven, his brother would go along with him to school. In those days, children started school at the age of eight.

In 1934, the Vahabzadeh family moved to Baku. Since Bakhtiyar didn't know any Russian, he was not allowed start fourth grade – so he repeated the third grade.

It took him a long time to get accustomed to Baku and its very different nature. In Baku, his father worked in a silk factory for a long time. After becoming ill, he worked first as a waiter, and then as a cook at a restaurant.

His mother, Gulzar, was a housewife. She didn't know how to read or write, but she had a very good memory and a rich imagination. She would always tell Bakhtiyar her own versions of fairy tales. Sometimes, in order to give him advice, she would come up with her own stories.

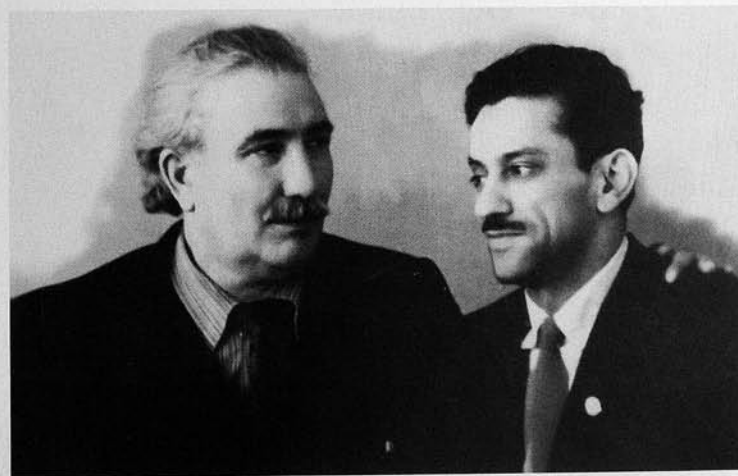
His grandfather, father, and all of his uncles were illiterate – except for one uncle named Alisharaf, who had studied a few years at a religious school, so he knew how to read and write. His elder brother was the first educated person in their family.

In 1942, Bakhtiyar finished high school and entered Azerbaijan State University to study Philology. He wrote his first poems when he was at high school. Of course, they were rather immature, and lacked literary value. At university he became a member of the literary society established by distinguished writer and professor Mir Jalal Pashayev. This was crucial in his literary career.

In those days, all that mattered in poetic style was the rhetoric. Emphasis was on the form of the literary work; the subject matter had no importance. However, the younger generation of poets such as A. Babayev, N. Ganjali, N. Khazri, Gabil and H. Huseynzadeh, were trying to distance themselves from this style, and give more attention to the content itself.

In this effort works such as, “Manam” (That’s Me) by N. Ganjali, “Gumush Sarv” (The Silver Cedar) by N. Khazri, “Chinar” (The Sycamore) by A. Babayev, “Gara Shani” (Black Grape) by Gabil, and my “Yeshil Chaman Agaj Altı” (Grass Under the Tree), were steps toward a new poetic style. These poems attracted the attention of Samad Vurghun and Mehdi Huseyn, who were prominent Azerbaijani poets.

In 1945, with the recommendation of Samad Vurghun, who was then the chairman of the writer’s union in Azerbaijan, Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh was accepted as a member of the Soviet Union Writer’s Union. In 1949, his first book, “Manim Dostlarım” (My Friend’s), and in 1950, his second book, “Bahar” (Spring) were published.



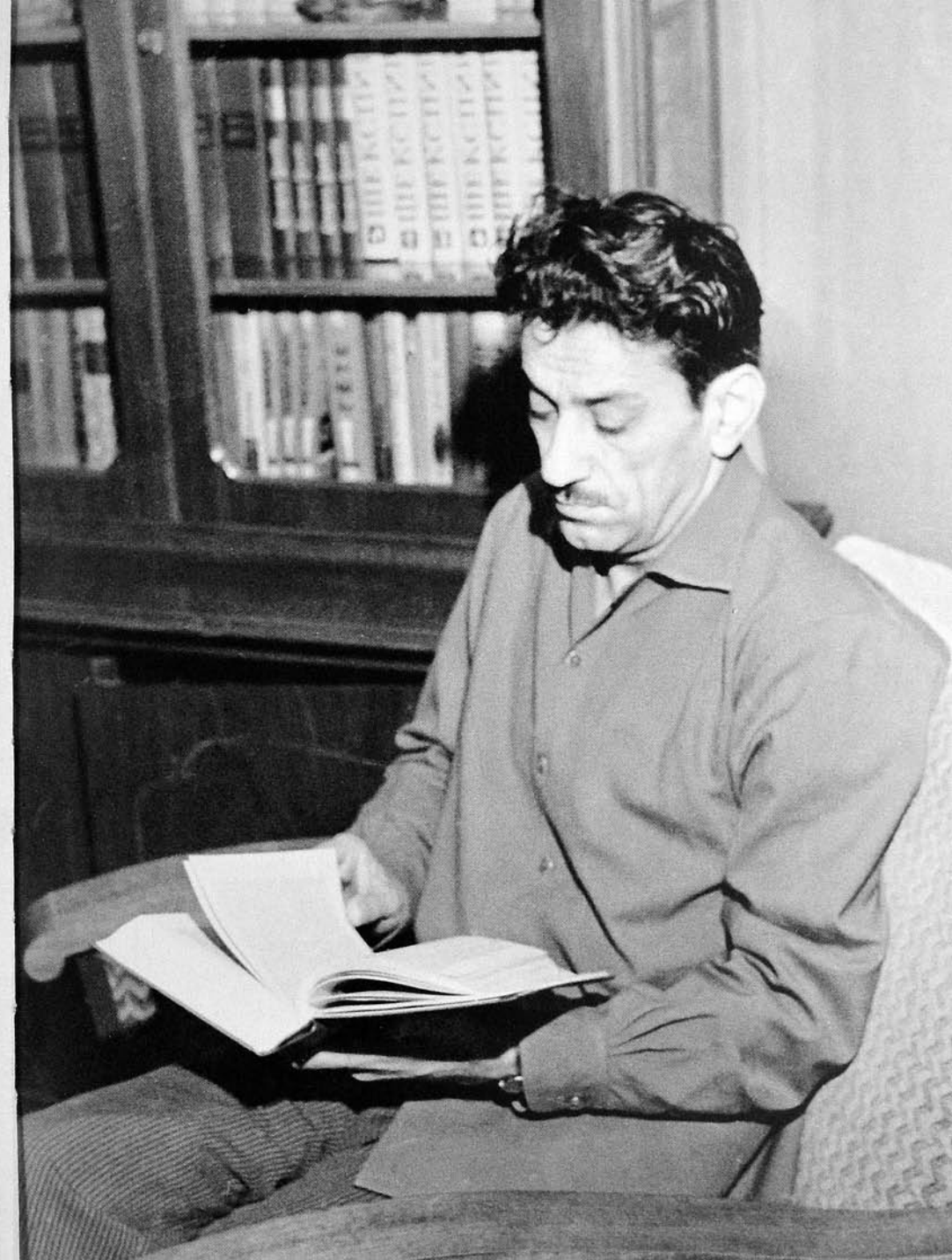
With Azerbaijani writer Suleyman Rahimov. 1960.

He have been an admirer of S. Vurghun ever since he was a young boy. He wrote his thesis, "Samad Vurghun's Lyrics" in 1951, and later in 1964, he defended his doctoral dissertation, "Samad Vurghun's Artistic Path." After finishing university, he remained active as a poet. He was employed, first as an assistant professor and then a professor, at the university. Did his career as a teacher interfere with his creative work? Not at all. First of all, being with young people and learning of their desires and feelings inspired him, and gave him a youthful spirit. Young life is inexhaustible, like a spring of imagination. Secondly just like writing, the objective of teaching is to awaken beautiful feelings in people and make them think. Thus, both careers shared a common objective. Anton Chekhov's saying, "Medicine is my wife, and writing my lover," applies to me as well. In the prologue of the poem, "Giymat" (Value), he refer to this issue:

*My days and hours are divided in half,
Time is my wealth,
Teaching my life,
Poetry, my passion.*



With his children. January, 1961.



*Heydar Aliyev awarded Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh with a State Prize.
Baku, November 3, 1976.*



In his essays Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh had addressed this issue, as well as other problems concerning our literature.

His critics considered him a poet with ties to tradition and custom. In a situation where people must conform like chickens in an incubator, customs and traditions become very valuable. Uniformity is the enemy of art. Constant search for new colors, art and literature demands vividness and diversity. To speak of tradition is to be faithful to one's roots. Art needs tradition like a tree requires roots to stay alive. Then what about modernism? Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh saw modernism as being connected to the root, but giving life to very different branches. One should keep up with the spirit of the time and changing thoughts. New thoughts and sensations create new forms. But one should not create forms just for the sake of forms. They will be like herbs dried in winter. They might seem fine, but isn't there a difference in the taste of a raisin dried in the heat of the natural sun?

*Heydar Aliyev with a group of awarded Art Workers.
Baku, December 10, 1981.*



With Russian writer Konstantin
Paustovski. Yalta, 1968.



A poet must wash his feelings, sensations and thoughts in the currents of the day. Only the poet who keeps up with the ideas of his time can communicate with readers. However, he doesn't believe in the kind of modernism that directs an artist to search for new ideas outside his own culture. These artists are only imitating others. He had written a short story about this very issue called, "My Grandmother's Carpet."

*"Every heart has a new voice
Be yourself, be new
you'll be old if you imitate."*

The aim is to live with the feelings of the time, and to animate them. Form by itself is not an aim: it is only a medium. In his creative life he had never been bound to form. What has moved him and set him going was his thoughts and feelings. Form doesn't limit thought. Form is created in one process with its subject. When you limit yourself to a preconceived form, you limit your expression. Take couplets, for example. The words in this case cannot be removed or else the whole structure will collapse.

To date, Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh's books have been published in Azerbaijani, Russian, Uzbek, Turkish and in German. Since 1965, his plays such as, "Vijdan" (Conscious), "Ikinji Sas" (The Second Voice), "Yagışdan Sonra" (After the Rain), "Yollara İz Dushur"

(Traces in The Paths), and "Faryad" (City), have been performed at the Azerbaijani State Theatre. Some of the plays have also been performed in the Turkmen and Uzbek languages.

As a tourist and government representative, he traveled to different counties such as Iraq, Morocco, Greece, Italy, Turkey, Germany, England, Portugal and Egypt. He wrote his impressions of these trips in the form of essays and poetry. He also translated some works by writers he admired. These translations have been published in a book called "Har Chichakdan Bir Lachak" (A Petal of Every Flower).

Reflecting upon his work, he said that those that came from the heart, and were passionately felt, have been more successful – whereas those that he wrote without feeling for their subjects, have

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With Maestro Niyazi Sheni, July, 1979



died in infancy. Works written out of intense feeling found a way into readers hearts. What is love? What is hate? The storm of one's heart and the rebellion of one's mind. Without loving, how can one write about love? Works are the voice of passions and concerns. Bakhtiyar is more himself in his Art – because it is there that he is sincerest.

Sincerity is the heart and the veins of literature. His poems reflect his love, a love that was his nature. Because of the need to love – he created. He felt this need throughout his life. From the



With Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aytmatov and artist Toghrlul Narimanbeyov. Baku, 1985.

beginning of his career as a poet, he drew energy and inspiration from this love.

Every writer's biography is really the history of his work. He was born in that year... went to school in this year... and wrote such



and such works, and received such and such prizes: these are just superficialities. In the works of a poet one must look for the voices of his people. A classical writer once said, "I have not created my works, my works have created me." This is true. A writer in creating his work, creates himself. A writer's name, which is given by his parents, later becomes a symbol. The name Alexander and the surname Pushkin, are very common in Russia, but the poet himself made this name a significant one. In some cases, poets adopt pen names, and history remembers them by these names. Fuzuli, one of Azerbaijan's most famous poets for example, was given the name Mahammad by his father. This is a very common name, where as, the pen name Fuzuli is very unique. Because of this poet's fame, parents



With singer Shovkat Alakbarova and kamancha-performer Habil. 1981.





With his wife Dilara-khanym. 1981.

*With his wife Dilara-khanym in
Sheki. May 22, 2005.*



now name their sons Fuzuli. In our legendary epic “Kitabi Dede Gorgud”, people don’t name their newborns. It isn’t given until the child grows up and adopts a profession, then he is addressed by that profession. In this epic, people create themselves through their work.

Life can be understood as a process of burning and melting. Living means burning for something, and melting one’s life for a purpose. Readers once asked Bakhtiyar “What is the driving force behind your works?” He hadn’t considered this question in any detail before, and then he recalled his poem “My Poems, My Belief.” He answered that question by reading the poem. This poem explains that poems are a poet’s belief, and his way of thinking. For this reason when we write the biography of a poet, we must search through the artist’s work, not a list of meaningless dates.

For an understanding of his own feelings about his work, we can do no better than to read his own words on this topic.

“To be a poet, one must feel the pain of others. My heart is open to pain and suffering around the world. I seek inspiration through this pain that my heart translates into poetry. Such poems as “Bash” (Head), “Dan Yeri” (Seed-bed), “Elm-Akhlagh” (Knowledge-Morality), “Tabbasum Ordeni” (Smile), “Gurbanlyg Guzu” (Sacrificial Lamb), “Sulh Mukafati” (Peace Prize), “Netron Bombasi” (Neutron Bomb), “Goz Ya Gulag” (Eyes or Ears), “Shairleri Oldururler” (They are Killing the Poets), “Tarikhin Ganunu” (Laws of History), “Tazadlar” (Contradictions), “American Gozali”



*With Heydar Aliyev after the play "Where This World Is Going?" by Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh.
Azerbaijan State Drama Theatre, Baku,
November 7, 1997.*

*With Heydar Aliyev and a group of actors after the play
"Where This World Is Going?" by Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh.
Azerbaijan State Drama Theatre, Baku,
November 7, 1997.*



With Pope John Paul II.



(*American Beauty*), “*Bagislayin Sahv Olub*” (*Sorry, There Has Been A Mistake*), and some others, have been disseminated in newspapers around the world. The point in publishing these poems was not just for their aesthetic value, but because they voiced issues to the world. In these poems, of course, lie the future and the fate of my country. My book, “*Bir Gamida Safardayik*” (*We Are All Traveling in One Boat*), addresses this issue particularly. A concerned citizen of one’s own country, is also a citizen of the world.

Contradictions exist both within nature and in the human mind. In my poems, as well as other forms of writing, I always show these contradictions. The characters in my plays have both *Othello* and *Iago* within them.

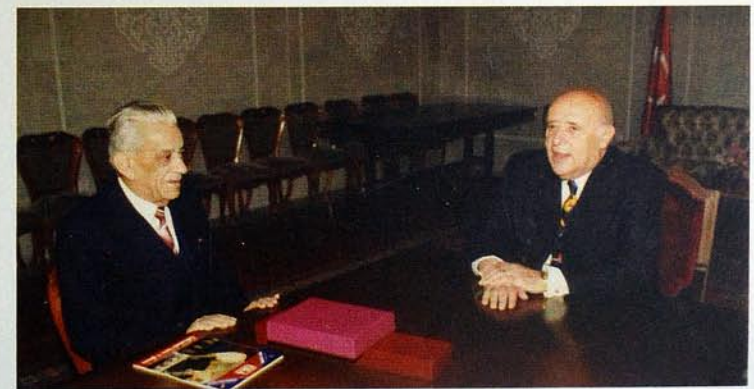
I am aware of contradiction within myself as well. I have been critical of myself ever since my childhood. In my poem, “*Who Is My Enemy*” I say that if I could read the mind of those who are critical of me, I could be a very good person. In my opinion, a person who

thinks too highly of himself is indeed very small. An old Azerbaijani proverb says, “The strongest champion is the one who knows how to beat himself.”

I work during the night. This is the time when I can achieve a dialogue with myself. I work for long hours and find relaxation in it. On days that I don’t work, I don’t feel good about myself.”

From 1985 onwards (when Azerbaijan was still a part of the USSR), Mikhail Gorbachev’s efforts to create an open society in the Soviet Union prompted Soviet authors, including Azerbaijani authors, to start writing in new and different ways. The Iron Curtain which fell between writers and their work has lifted and they have begun to express their suffering openly, which occurred under dictatorial regimes – especially the repressive Stalin era. Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh’s poem, “*Iki Gorkhu*” (*Two Fears*), written in 1988, is about the repression of writers, including himself, during that period. That year, he also published his own poem “*Gulustan*,” – written years before, but which had lain hidden and unpublished.

His protest against the dictatorial Soviet regime was not, however, limited to these two poems. During the repression, he always managed to voice his protest and criticism by masking it



With Suleyman Demirel. Baku.



Cargo ship named after Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh.



with a different time frame and geographical setting. In reality, he spoke of contemporary issues and his own society in historical allegories like, “Dar Agaci” (Gallows) 1972, “Yollar Ogullar” (The Ways the Boys) 1963, and his play “Faryad” (Cry) 1981-1984. The works that he attributed to different subjects include, “America Gozali” (American Beauty) 1982, “Marziya” 1983, and “Bagishlayin Sahv Olub” (Sorry There Has Been a Mistake) 1983.

Among the works in which Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh used other geographical locations are, “Latin Dili” (The Latin Language) 1967, “Shairleri Oldururler” (They Kill the Poets) 1978, “Hyde Park” 1978, and “Ehramların Onunda” (Before the Pyramids) 1959. We should add that when some officials found out about the real intent of his works, his name was put on a Black List. He expected to be arrested that day, but this never stopped him from continuing his work.

The newly established openness in the Soviet Union opened the mouths of people and writers – but other problems, were unfortunately created over questions of nationality. For this Azerbaijan paid a very high price. During the regional dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Soviet tanks – in violation of the constitution, – invaded Azerbaijan. As a result many people – including children and the elderly – lost their lives. This was one of the fruits of the reforms aimed toward so-called democracy. The most horrifying fact about that event was that the soldiers were not only shooting at people in the street, but at houses through the windows. What was the cause of this violence? The answer is clear. The Soviet government wanted to suppress nationalistic aspirations of the people and their demands for independence. This was an effort to maintain Soviet imperialist power over the people. How could one stay silent against these atrocities? In protest, along with tens of thousands of people, Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh renounced his membership in the Communist Party. Many questions about that invasion remain unanswered.

Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh passed away on February 13, 2009.

Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh was considered Azerbaijan’s people’s poet, and received recognition and many prizes for his works. Many people, drunk with fame and popularity, just doze off. This charge could never be leveled at Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh, whose creative fertility continued until his final years.

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POEMS

[Faint, illegible text from the reverse side of the page, appearing as bleed-through.]

I Love

The eclipse I love
It shall give birth to the sun,
The sun for sure!

Harsh winter I love
It shall give birth to hot summer,
Hot summer for sure!

Hatred's climax I love
It shall give birth to love,
Love for sure!

Tyranny's pain I love
It shall give birth to justice,
Justice for sure!

1979

Translated by Talat Sait Halman

Echoes

If you climb to the top of a towering hill,
And sigh and hear and answering sigh, then only
Will you know
That at the top of a towering hill,
You can never be lonely.

If you descend to the bottom of a deep ravine,
And sigh and hear an answering sigh, then only
Will you know
That at the bottom of a deep ravine,
You can never be lonely.

Echoes born of the heights
And echoes born of the deep
But lightly sleep.

At the top of a towering hill,
At the bottom of deep ravine,
Dead rock acquires a soul...
Call out,
And you will hear the echoes roll.

1967

Translated by Irina Zheleznova

Wind and Grass

*The ruler is the wind and his people the grass
which leans towards where the wind blows.*

Confucius

“The sovereign is a raging wind
And his people, standing before him,
Bow their heads like rustling grass,
Whichever way the wind blows,”
This truism by Confucius held sway
Over all rulers for centuries,
The axis around which spun
So many countries.
This powerful maxim
Fluttered through the ages
On national flags.
When the wind raged – the sand-storm -
Filling mouths with dust and stone,
Thoughts became petrified in brains
And hearts were scorched.
In the rulers’ hands
The metaphor turned into a torch,
In their mouths, into a shibboleth.
Beauty was branded ugly,
And ugly was made lovely.
The earth’s bosom became parched,
Rivers stopped flowing,
Not a drop of truth trickled any more.
The ship of state had a liar at the helm.
Listen to the wise words,

Then look at the distortion.
All this injustice
Rocked heaven and earth
For centuries.
What can one say about
“Greatness?”. Or “Power?”
The wind blew
Now from faith, then from doubt,
From this side or that side
And the grass, heads bowed,
Burned inside.
Whichever way
The wind blew.
The grass bowed...
The wind blew
Thinking
This obeisance is homage to its power.
Cruel wind,
Never think this genuflection is worship of tyranny.
It is because he is afraid
That the ruler causes this trembling
And this bending down,
Would you believe
That he who inspires fear
Is frightened himself?
Open your heart and ask:
Faced with fear
You too are just like the grass
You frighten.
You wouldn’t hide behind it
If you hadn’t known this terror

The way the grass does.
But you ought to know this:
Affection earns respect,
But terror commands hatred...
When hate oozes drop by drop
The mountain is bound to collapse;
Rocks are carved inside out.
Cruel wind,
Never forget that cloud
The roars
And rumbles
With its thunderbolts
Will end up as water.
If you blow from the right,
The grass will sway left,
And not right.
What is the secret of bending that way?
This reverence will not know.
Turning one's back at falsehood
Is bowing before truth.

1976

Translated by Talat Suit Halman

Knock the Fences Down

Everyone puts up a fence around his own field
Saying: "On this side of the fence, mine is the yield."
Come, tear the fences down, demolish the ramparts
So that our eyes can gaze at distant parts.
How can rooms contain the heart that must live free:
It should leap over hill and valley, on and on.
So long as my eyes possess the power to see
I shall keep scanning the widening horizon!
Never go the way of the flowers, of the rose,
Never put their hearts in death's throes.
Nature is free:
Never hold
It inside the fortresses, in captivity.
We must refuse to play a game of backgammon
Sequestered into squares inlaid with gold.
Out hearts should keep growing and soaring on and on
Like the ever-broadening, endless horizon.
Come, tear the fences down, demolish the ramparts!
So that our eyes can gaze at all the distant parts.

1965

Translated by Talat Sait Halman

The Bounds of the Earth

We daubed colors on the map at the outset
To divide the world into many countries.
The earth is one color everywhere – and so
Why did we break it into a hundred pieces?

Every kind declared: “The world belongs to me.”
Over and over again, we split the land;
But the earth never had a new boundary:
It never shrank nor did it ever expand.

1964

Translated by Talat Sait Halman

Speed

Time was, I'd sit in the fast train
Baku-Moscow
three days and three nights
counting the versts
for want of something better to do.

And now, three hours by plane
Baku-Moscow
and here I am again
bored stiff...

I want to fly
with the speed of light,
but when I do I'll seem to hang
in the firmament
motionless
suspended
on frozen wings.
Why can't I fly as swift
as my own thoughts?
I'm not trying to be clever;
I'm a son of the century,
and it's just that the age is a
striving and driving age.

I want to fly higher and faster
to get ahead of my thoughts
to get ahead of myself!

1963

Translated by Alex Miller

Observatory

I

You are a Small Building

Just a small place –
The observatory,
Yet you stand to outface
The Universe!
The end of your probing cannot be found.
You study the infinite.
The field of your search can have no bound.
Your feet on the earth you firmly place,
While your head you thrust though the sky.
And look from the heights of outer space
Down upon our planet.
There is no bigger window for man's eye
In all the universe than you...
“Wait for me,” calls Mother Earth,
“I shall follow through!”
Full of hope,
So proud of your worth!
For she has heard you called
The brains of our old world
Which, predestined,
Through space is hurled.
For you
The daylight
Is dark midnight!
For starlight you reach –
That's your ABC –

Its thread runs through your speech.
At nightfall you see
Curved horizons close –
The heaven's eyelids part,
Astronomers then know
Their days' work will start.
For many years
on far
They throw light
On some distant, glinting star.
Just a small place –
Yet each night
Your guests – new worlds –
Come face to face...
In your confines nigritude
In clarity dissolves.
The windows of your building.
Revolves upon new dawns...
Your edifice stretches out
its peaceful hand
To ages yet to come
On the mountain-top you stand
A monument to the morrow,
While out there is space,
Star-eyed, there glows
A bright tomorrow,
Confined within your space
The future is born and grows.

1967

Translated by Tom Botting

II

The Telescope

Mysteries in the sky,
Mysteries of our earth,
Mysteries through the universe –
How many wonders have you disclosed!
Your eye is fixed upon the heavens
It penetrates
Far beyond all reason!
Caught up by the love of man,
You led it out to interminable space –
To the very deepest,
The bottomless void.
You were the ship that first sailed!
You stand between Man and the Universe.
Logic and Hypothesis,
The Known and Unknown.
The Unfathomed is your course and port of call.
Boundlessness is your golden crown,
And infinity your nearest pole.
Immensity – your starting point.

1967

Translated by Tom Botting

III

Astronomer and Poet

An astronomer are you, another – I!
You have your telescope,
I my pen.
Both can scan the sky.
Both seek...
And we seek – two men.
You a new star born
And I a new world...
So we meet the dawn.
In seeking we rise to new heights,
Searching our confines
For new sights.
With success at times,
But new stars,
And new rhymes,
Willingly their secrets never revealed.
Man sought to know
For thousands of years
What they concealed.
Full of enigmas, the sky is a book
Where for the infinite and boundless
We must look.
Deep, deeper we must sound
The wide unfathomable depths,
Mysteries' bed profound...
Beginning with the cipher unity – one,
You rise, your flight from earth begun,
And glide along with dreams enjoyed,

Penetrating deeper probabilities' vast void.
When the heart soars – and halts there can be none –
A thousand problems rise that the mind must avoid,
Then, brother, you, like me and everyone,
Become a poet to write of dreams unclayed.
New is my dream! New is the sorrow that time has spun!
You work in the heavens. On earth I am employed,
Let your telescope scan and my pen run,
Probing deepness unalloyed.
Let the needless universe before us be deployed,
For, brother, when life's course is done
It is best to merge with the void.
The sky displays its ravels, still to be undone,
Infinity and boundlessness swim into view.
So down ever deeper! Deep down, undestroyed
Lies all that is new.

1967

Translated by Tom Botting

Tiny Window

[The house where the great Scottish poet Robert Burns was born and lived has a tiny window. In those days, the owner of a house paid annual taxes in proportion to the size of the windows.]

Hard to tell good and evil apart.
Taxes were levied on sunlight:
So people kept their windows small,
Huts and cottages were shorn of light.

In all ages, rights were usurped:
Justice was the name of dark oppression.
Sunlight was declared too cheap:
That, too, was owned by someone.

Ever since sunbeams fell on heads,
Humans suffered for the sake of laws.
The tax imposed on sunlight
Was squandered on darkest ignorance.

The fate of the port with a glittering heart
Turned dark like his home...
The poet always fell captive
When he yearned for freedom.

He looked at the world out of a tiny window:
Fullness vanished, things were torn asunder.
He gazed at the sky and the moon:
Earth and sky appeared inside the tiny frame.

His hopes and desires were gone –
Within the frame, his longings were undone.

All he had in his heart turned to gunpowder.
What is the measure of fire –
Rock or weight?
He feels,
Sees, hums
Just so
He can have a heart, not a stone, in his chest.

Time's hand dealt him such blows –
Yet, he didn't turn his face away from the world.
He turned his suffering into songs:
“Let my heart carry the burden of the world's woes.”

Desires always tear darkness apart,
Sending greetings to the days to come.
So long as the eyes see,
What difference does it make
If the window is big or tiny?

1978

Translated by Talat Sait Halman

Two Blind Men

There's a blind man I know: His eyes are sightless,
But he is not blind.
Though he sometimes gets scorched in the fire of sorrows,
He does not turn a cold shoulder to his passion and his mind.
He reads and writes day and night,
In his mind's eye he sees, feels, knows.

But... There is someone else... Although he is not blind,
He cannot see, nonetheless.
His closest friend might be killed before his very eyes,
“I saw nothing,” he says.
He claims whatever is good as his, but fails to see the bad;
Looks at the clock, but can't tell what time it is.
Nothing noble visits the thoughts and feelings of his;
Often he denies he saw something though he really had.

A man is hardly blind if his eyes have no sight;
Blind is he who does not want to see.
To such an ignorant troglodyte,
Life itself is a grave, if you ask me.

1968

Translated by Talat Sait Halman

Pauses

You spoke,
I listened.

So impressive:
The long silences
Were more expressive
between words, sentences...

Stop,
Pause:
So many ideas are contained in each pause.
You spoke so,
I saw at one point
Silence in the light, words on the shadow.
Into these end-of-sentence intervals could go
The entire lexicon of a language.

1979

Translated by Talat Sait Halman

Latin

Latin language carries in every word
Meanings as great as the world
The nation may be dead, but the language lives on
No one calls "mother", "Earth", and "homeland"
in that language anymore.
Despite that, the language lives on
In the morning from one end of the world
to the other
Latin language still runs
It may reach even to the constellations.

This language, like a soldier
who died after gaining victory
It owns no land or nation but
it still lives
The foundation of the sciences
The first and the last word in the universe
Who calls this language dead?

It is the language of doctors, the legendary
and scholars
By which months and the years are counted
By which scholars writes the names of flowers, insects
wind and the sky –
in this dead language.
Who calls this language dead?

It is not the language of the dead
but that of life.

On the shores of the Atlantic, a speaker ebullient and exulted
speaks in a foreign language
Orator, tell me, what are we going to believe?
The ears, the eyes, the actions or the words?

If you cannot say in your mother tongue
"I am free, I am independent."
Who would believe that you are?
What kind of freedom is that, which cannot say its name?
If your mother tongue is prisoner
in small huts
While in big meetings and conferences
your language does not have one single word
too weak to participate
Like an orphan, not knowing
his parent
or very poor so the big ideas of
The century cannot be expressed.

Look at the problem
a homeland, a nation, exist without
a language
Be aware that you have a shining piano, like a mirror
but it has no voice
Tell me now
which language should we call dead?
The language which is prisoner in cramped poor huts
which has a nation and a homeland
Or the language which has come through centuries -
its people dead but the language itself survives.

1967

Black and Grey Hair

My hair is turning swiftly gray.
My mother watches in dismay.
I beg you, mother, do not heave
A sigh for my sake! Do not grieve!

I burn the midnight oil. It's there
The flames within me singe my hair.
Think not that secretly I grieve.
I've cause for joy, I do believe.

Know life – and take death in your stride!
This grey hair, mother, is my pride.

My pitch-black locks were nature's gift.
What credit could I claim for this?
Its toil I prize above all else:
My grey hair I have earned myself.

1957

Translated by Peter Tempest

I Am Older Than My Grandfather

My granddad died when he was eighty.
My dad – when he was only sixty.
But I am older
In my forties
Than both my dad
And granddad.
Telephones
Telegraphs
Radio
Newspapers
They load the days and load the months
And every hour and every minute...
Condense the world, whose day is to the right.
And to the left – the night –
Into one tiny room,
With Spring in your head, and Winter – at your feet...
Continents, poles
Are united by my speed.
In the heat and the flame
Of this audacity.
My love
And my very nature
Have changed...
The greater the speed,
The shorter the distance.
Yesterday borrows minutes from today
And today –
From tomorrow.
The days are all mixed up,

And so are the months,
We have lost months, economizing years.
In a single month I live as much
As my granddad did in a single year.
I'm a river flowing down a mountain.
Skirting the mountain peak,
A stream muddy in the mountains

And a clear river in the valley –
A river with hundreds of different moods.
I'm older than my father,
I'm older than my grandfather.

1965

Translated by Louis Zelikoff

Aladdin's Lamp

Through groves of sun-kissed persimmons
The Tigris flows serene.
I come from a distant land
To watch its grace supreme.

Its waves seem to whisper
A melancholy song,
A thousand voices echoing
As they roll and roll along.

A thousand starry buttons
the river's shining breast.
Tales from a Thousand and One Nights
The Tigris tells its guest.

Listen to the Tigris,
Its whispered serenade.
Breezes sweep its surface,
Like the sighs of Sheherezade!

The city of a thousand legends
Smiling in its dreams.
While from the shore
Aladdin's lamp
Like a happy beacon gleams.

The light of Arab happiness
Is dawning on Baghdad.
On the shore of the mighty Tigris
Today all hearts are glad.

This lovely land attracted
For many hundred years.
The eyes of avid adventurers,
Who brought it grief and tears.

The merciless Magribli
Stole that lamp so bright;
For many generations
The Tigris saw no light.

Within their native country
The Arabs saw no peace.
The Arabs longed with all their hearts
That the reign of darkness cease.

They went to bed in darkness,
Their day in darkness started.
The lamp shone in a stranger's home,
With its age-old owner parted.

For long, long years the Arabs
Endured their heavy fate,
But even silty waters
Must settle, soon or late;

Awful is the river
Breaking through the dam.
The Arabs rose and drove out
John Bull and Uncle Sam.

They wrenched their priceless treasure
From vicious foreign hands.
Back in its native country
Aladdin's lamp now stands.
Happy are the people
On the Tigris shore.
No foreigner can steal the fruit
Of their labor any more.

With all my heart I join you
In your joy at being free.
O valiant Arab people,
Your land is dear to me.

May your children not feel a stranger
On the Tigris happy shore,
And may Aladdin's lamp
Stay there for ever more!

Translated by Dorian Rottenberg

My Mother

She is illiterate.
She cannot write her name – my mother.

But she taught me how to count.
She taught me the names of the months and years,
and most importantly,
She taught me language – my mother.

I tasted joy and
unhappiness
with this language.
And I created every poem
of mine
and every melody
with this language.

Without that
I am nobody.
I am a lie.
And the creator of my work,
in all its volumes and volumes, is my mother

1967

In One Building We Were Born

All are born without a name,
Names are given later on.
First there's one
And later on
A man gets dubbed with many names.

Ranks will come with time...
Offspring have one name,
However many there may be –
That one name is
Baby.

His eyes are closed.
For him its all the same –
Be it day or night.
He has only one desire
and one word alone...
Just suppose
he wants to eat
or that he wants to drink,
Or, maybe, wants to sleep –
All that he can do is cry...

Crying
Is his only means.
By their crying
Mothers know
What babies need,
And why they say.

Perhaps a cry was man's first word,
Primeval tongue,
And weeping first began
The alphabet of art, sophistry, and wisdom...

In one building we were born –
All the same in every way.
We were born, but of that
We had no idea.
None could tell the difference
Between us by our height,
By our figures, or our faces...
That means we were all the same
And our name was – baby.

Diapers were our only clothes.
Our only word – a cry.
Our only food was milk.
Things that came much later on,
I do not know who thought them up
Our names were changed,
Our clothes were changed,
Our faces were changed.
Yet are we not still the same?
Tell me, then, what are they –
All these later changes?

1965

Translated by Tom Botting

The Merry-Go-Round

The merry-go-round like a wheel is turning,
Like our planet through Space so endlessly whirling;
Behind one another, on elephant steed,
The children ride gaily, with gathering speed.

On the merry-go-round happy moments fly fast,
The little ones loudly clap hands in their mirth.
They think they're not turning around in the least,
Instead, that around them is spinning the East.

So children rejoice, laugh merrily, play –
With the merry-go-round,
Time changes too.
'Tis not you who are spinning round this world today,
But the world which is spinning round you.

Then children be merry, for life is but brief;
'Twill pet and caress you while you are still young.
While you are yet children, the world will forgive,
Though you be capricious and sharp be your tongue.

Oh, the merry-go-round!.. A bevy of cranes
Soaring, wheels into line high above in the skies;
And mothers and fathers look on and rejoice
In the happiness beaming from their children's eyes.

A lone urchin stares from afar on their fun,
His eyes are wide open, he's sucking his thumb.
Round and round ride the children...

He looks on in glee,
...But he will change,
Now can't keep his eyes from the huge wonder wheel.
And his head spins with visions of wishes come true.
The urchin looks on and he happily sighs.
"How lovely to ride round like this," say his eyes.
He's here on his own, though, and none can be found
To give him a ride on this merry-go-round.

But he-he is happy...
I cannot but wonder
At his big little heart...
O my soul,
Look and wonder!
For he can find pleasure just at the sight
Of somebody else's delight.

Translated by Louis Zelikoff

If You Expect Respect from the World

If you expect respect from the world and wish for joy,
Examine your own heart,
Suffocate the darkness there and kill the hatred,
If you desire laughter,
Give happiness to someone else,
If you make another smile surely the gift is yours as well.

Do you know why roses smile?
In order to bring other hearts joy.

1980

Fear

In my left hand there is an old wound – a gift from my childhood,
Unaware that wood burns,
I seared my hand in a brazier.
I was warned by the sound of singeing flesh, but I wasn't afraid,
I felt fear only when I burned my hand.

The real experience of life began with that fire.
Colorful flames from the embers caressed my childish eyes.
I don't know why everything I've touched since birth has
burned me.

I wasn't afraid until I was burned.

I didn't know fear until I left my childish ways.

Since I was burned, I am careful playing with fire, and so life
begins, so is the habit.

1966

Standing before the Pyramids

From morning until the evening standing before the pyramids,
“Five cents!” he calls,
An Arab boy begs,
In his own land, but using the language of foreigners.

I look at this strange time, with burning heart,
What a time, what a day, you are in.
Looking at the land of the Arabs,
Keeping my head as high as the pyramids.

But the Arab lives in fear in his own land, like an idiot boy.
O my brother, instead of begging, remember your past,

And feel shame for the pyramids, that your fathers built.

You take money from foreigners, like taking alms,
Standing before the pyramids that your fathers built,
Study your own shame.

1959

Quatrains

Those who do not honor their roots and ancestors,
Drink water from a dry fountain, not from the spring.
In this world, no animal but an ass
Walks in front of his grandfather on the road.

We became those who built walls from a distance,
We became those who never feel nor see the future,
We became those who worship the powerful,
We became those who revile the fallen.

You said morning is mine,
Today, if you realize morning is not just cash,
Yours eyes fixed upon the wealth of others,
If everything is for you, for whom are you?

When the seeds fall in a mother's womb,
A road is opened from nothingness to life,
When you are born,
Travel begins from life to nothingness.

You are my essence and I am yours,
Apparently there are no boundaries between us,
We did not understand difference, in this state of unity,
Between the mirror that reflects and the image reflected.

SHORT STORIES

THE
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THE
SECOND
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THE
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THE
FOURTH
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THE
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THE
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The Colorful Suitcase

I have a comic story for you, written in four parts. This story will make you laugh and cry at the same time.

The office president had been promoted to a higher position and the vice president was placed in charge of the former president's duties. In order to replace the president officially, the vice president knocked on every possible door, but to no avail. A new president was hired from outside. From the first instant, the vice president did not get along with this new president, Huseyn Khalidovich. In a matter of days, with a retirement notice in his hand, the vice president found himself playing dominoes with the old men on the boulevard.

Now, the second part of our story starts. The employees were aware of the power of the young new president and that they could not "fool around" with him. Accordingly, all the relationships in the office changed as our story continues.

From this point on, "cringing" becomes the hero of our story. Now, my dear readers might wonder how it is possible for "cringing" to be a hero. Is it a human being? No, of course, it is not, but it is a characteristic that some semi-humans have, especially when they are around people in authority. This trait is the main character of my story. Starting from that day, five times a day or maybe six to seven times, Huseyn Khalidovich, the appointed president and all his relatives were greeted warmly and their health politely inquired after by workers in the office. Their birthdays were remembered. The president's coat was held for him. In short, the game of subserviance was played for his benefit. The players of this game were basically three branch directors – for they all had

their eyes set on the vacant vice presidency. Huseyn Khalidovich, however, had not yet made a decision for this appointment and was reviewing the suitability of each of the three candidates. Suitability, of course, is not to be mistaken for ability and talent. Ability and talent were only of secondary consideration. The main issue was which one of the directors would be able to serve him better. To figure this out, Huseyn Khalidovich needed time. The three branch directors were also aware of this. A competition of loyalty and service to the president started. They were each trying hard to be the winner, and of course Huseyn Khalidovich himself was the one who benefitted most.

The three directors – Karim, Rahim and Salim – each had different ways of proving useful to the president. Karim, for instance, was good at locating any medicine difficult to find in the city, since his father-in-law had an important position in a pharmaceutical office. Rahim, on the other hand, was good at finding rare imported goods for his boss, since his brother was one of the big businessmen in town. As for Salim... his talent was different... Salim was expert in learning the latest jokes in town and making his boss light-hearted every morning. So that is why the president could not make up his mind as to which of the directors he should offer the position.

In fact, among the three, the smartest and most active was Salim, but this was a source of concern for the president. For Salim's smartness was giving his boss a sour stomach. He was thinking that if Salim became the vice president, later he would be greedy for the position of president. Karim was stubborn and pretentious, whereas Rahim was obedient, like a lamb, and could be taken advantage of easily. That's why the president was more inclined to offer Rahim the position.

One day the president called Rahim into his office. His brother-in law was ill. He took a prescription out of his pocket and gave it to Rahim.

"They have checked all the pharmacies and haven't been able to find this medicine, see what you can do..." Rahim took a look at the prescription.

"Who is this prescription for? Is it for Rufik's father? Rufik and our Alik are in the same class. He is a very smart kid, he knows "Little Red Riding Hood" by heart."

"You should get the medicine to him by 11 o'clock today. Do you have their address?"

"Yes of course I do... weren't we there at Rafig's birthday party?"

"Hurry up then!"

Rahim left and the president called Karim to his office. Karim entered with a bow.

"Good morning Huseyn Khalidovich. I hope you are not angry..."

"Why?"

"Nothing, you just look a bit upset... your new suit looks very nice on you."

"It is not new. Haven't you seen me wearing it many times?"

"It looks new to me... it is very nice."

"I had it made in Moscow."

"It shows... it can't be the work of our tailors. It fits you perfectly. By the way, I was there yesterday."

"Where?"

"There... at our relative's."

"Which relative?"

"I mean Chapgoz."

"That big shot?"

"Yes."

"Is he your relative?"

"Haven't I told you before?"

"This is the first time you have talked about him."

"You are right... I wanted to tell you before, but I was shy about it."

"Really? You are shy when you're not supposed to be. Now tell me, how are you related to him?"

"On my wife's side."

"Are you pulling my leg?"

"No, I am serious."

"Karim, you know he is a very useful connection."

"Of course... and I told him a lot of good things about you yesterday."

"Like what?"

"Whatever I was supposed to tell."

"You probably have told him that I am not offering you the position of vice presidency."

"No... not on my life! I told him that we have never had a person like you in our office."

"OK. We will talk about this some other time. Do you think you can find a couple of French perfumes for me?"

"Why not?"

"Go, get them then!"

As soon as Karim left, Huseyn Khalidovich started thinking, "What if he was right about his relative... that can ruin everything for me... but he could be lying? How can I find out about this?"

At this time, Naza Khanym entered bringing him tea coquettishly. She had been working at this office long enough to know everything about everybody. The boss asked her, "Naza Khanym, do you know this Karim well?"

"Karim, the branch director?"

“Yes.”

“I know him very well. You know him well too.”

“I don’t mean it that way... does he really have a relative among the authorities?”

Naza-khanym thought awhile and said, “I can’t tell you much about that. But I know he has a big mouth, if he had a connection up there, he would have let everyone know about it much earlier.”

“OK... go now but this should remain between us.”

About half an hour after the two branch directors had been called to the president’s office, Salim, who was very upset since he had not been called, took documents that had to be signed by the president and went to Huseyn Khalidovich’s office. At the door he said, “Hello to my favorite boss. Can I come in?”

“You are already in.”

“Well, how can I fly in the face of etiquette before such a good boss?”

“Yes, I see you always observing etiquette. Well, tell me what you want.”

Salim put the documents to be signed on the president’s desk. “Your honorable signature, please.”

Huseyn Khalidovich signed the papers and stood up, “I want to ask you something. If you tell me the truth, I will tell you something that will make you happy.” Salim’s heart started beating fast. He thought to himself that the director was making a reference to the vacant position.

“First of all, I have never lied about anything to you. There is only one liar in this office and he is...”

“Well, tell me if Karim is related to the big shot Chapgoz.” Salim burst out into laughter.

“This is his latest lie. How could he be connected to him? Chapgoz and Karim’s first wife are from the same town, that’s all.”

“Are you sure?”

“Quite sure.”

The president was silent for a while.

“Well, tell me, how is your work going?”

“I am holding on to you and will go wherever you take me.”

Huseyn Khalidovich of course knew what Salim was referring to, but disregarded this.

“Be clear, what do you mean?”

“How about a funny joke?”

The boss sat down and said:

“Let’s hear it.”

“One day a camel was lying down, basking in the sun. The fox thought the camel was dead, but just to make sure, kicked the camel, the camel didn’t move. Being sure the camel was dead, the fox thought to himself, this is great, I will take the camel to my den and eat him little by little all winter long. He then tied his tail to the camel’s tail and started dragging him. At this time the camel opened his eyes and stood up. The fox, who was tied up to the camel’s tail was hanging face down. As the camel moved, the fox kept banging into the camel’s sides. The crow who was watching the scene, asked the fox, “What is this miserable condition you are in?” Not to lose face, the fox answered. “He is a big guy, I am holding on to him and will go where ever he takes me.”

Huseyn Khalidovich laughed so hard that tears ran down his cheeks. “OK, go. That’s enough for today.”

“But, Huseyn Khalidovich, you promised to make me happy.”

“But you did make me happy with your joke. Isn’t that enough to make you happy?”

Salim did not have any answer to that.

A few days later, early in the morning, the secretary of the office called the branch directors and informed them that the night

before, the boss's brother-in-law had passed away and Huseyn Khalidovich was now expecting them for the mourning ceremony. Rahim looked at Karim, Karim looked at Salim, and they all wondered what they should do now. All of the sudden Karim covered his face with his hands, and crying, he left the room. Following him, Rahim took out his handkerchief and pretended to be wiping his tears, "He left four orphaned kids", said Rahim, and left the room.

The secretary was astonished by this scene and looked at Salim as if she wanted to tell him, "What about you? How come you are not crying on such a day?" Salim knew well that Naza-khanym was very close to Huseyn Khalidovich and that she reported whatever happened in the office to him. He was certain she would report the reaction of the branch directors to the boss as well. Salim knew that his rivals thought no matter how brilliant a show he put on, it would not be as effective as the other ones. "I will leave my performance for the boss himself," he thought, and looked at Naza-khanym. "He is dead now. I am more concerned about the boss who is now responsible for the family of the deceased."

The secretary went on, "The stupid guys! It is as if their father is dead," and started laughing at the behavior of the two branch directors.

In twenty minutes the branch directors were at the brother-in-law's house. As soon as they entered, Rahim and Karim embraced Huseyn Khalidovich without giving Salim any chance. "What is this catastrophe that has happened to us?" they said, while crying.

Salim thought, "They got ahead of me here too, I am left behind..." To out smart them, he had to put on a very impressive show. All of the sudden, he stepped backwards and banged his head on the door frame in such a way that the door shook. By this act he attracted everyone's attention. He was about to repeat this,

when the boss's wife Gula Khanym stopped him. "Salim, brother, don't."

Salim turned to Gula Khanym: "Your suffering is my suffering," and banged his head on the door again, this time so hard that a bump as large as a walnut came out on his forehead. Tears were flowing from his eyes. Gula Khanym wiped Salim's tears with her shawl; she was impressed by this friend's sincerity. Karim and Rahim, however, were cursing Salim in their hearts and were envious of his ability to put on such an act. They knew that they were losing the game. This brings us to the third act of our story and its climax.

Later on, the boss took his loyal servants, the branch directors, to the other room to consult with them.

"One should not kill himself for the death of someone else. Now, let's think what we should do regarding this tragedy. The problem is that my sister-in-law and Gula-khanym don't want to bury the dead in the new graveyard. That graveyard is shallow and near the sea. Tell me now, do you think we can find a grave in the old graveyard?"

The branch directors looked at each other.

"Which one of you has a connection at the burial office?"

After a while Rahim opened his mouth and said, "You are absolutely right Huseyn Khalidovich. Although the new graveyard is very close to the water, I can't find a grave there on the hill top. I buried my brother there last year."

"I told you we don't want to bury him in that graveyard." Now Karim opened his mouth, "Nowadays a lot of people bury their dead in nearby villages like Saray or even Mardakan." The boss responded angrily, "What are you talking about? There are ceremonies to be observed on the seventh day of death, and on the fortieth day, and the anniversary. Who is going to drive all the way to Mardakan on all these occasions?"

Salim, who had been silent until now, jumped into the conversation, "Huseyn Khalidovich, you don't need to worry, I will take care of this for you."

The boss responded in disbelief, "Salim, this is a serious matter, tell me how?"

"Don't ask me how, just tell me what time is it now?"

"Ten o'clock sharp."

"By 4 o'clock the grave will be ready at the new graveyard."

The boss embraced Salim and kissed him.

"Now we are talking, hurry up then!"

Karim and Rahim, who had been defeated, went into the yard to set up the tent for the mourning ceremonies.

Salim sat in his car and went straight to his house. He took five sets of fine imported tiles left from last year's renovation of his house and set them aside. His wife, who was watching him all this time, said, "I hope it is for a good cause. Where are you taking these?" She snapped at him.

Salim told his wife that the boss's brother-in-law was dead and he was taking the tiles to fence the grave.

His wife lost her temper, "Why didn't you ever use these to fence your father's grave?"

"You are talking too much, this is my business."

The woman understood from "my business" what her husband had in mind, and did not ask anything else.

"You think this will help?" And she continued, "But I don't believe it, your boss is a fox."

Salim knew she was right and he remembered the story he had told his boss a week ago about the fox and the camel and smiled. How could his wife know that the real fox was standing right in front of her and had already confessed to the camel that he was a fox? Salim, however, didn't say anything about that story to his

wife and bragged, "I am doing him a favor. Let's see how he will return it."

"Wishful thinking."

Although what the wife said worried Salim, he changed the subject, "I had this suitcase, the one I liked a lot... dated back to Nova's time, that colorful one..."

"The one you brought from the village?"

"Yes... where is it?"

"I wanted to throw it out several times, but you never let me do that. There, it is, in the basement."

"Will you bring it for me?"

Salim responded angrily, "I wouldn't have asked for it if I didn't need it."

The wife found the suitcase in storage and brought it. Salim opened the dusty suitcase. The musty smell filled his nose. He took the old letter his father had written to him, his school notes and other things out of the suitcase and put them aside. He was about to say, "Throw them out" to his wife, but changed his mind. "Put them somewhere in the basement," he said.

He then put the tiles in the suitcase and went straight to the graveyard. He found Gulam, the grave digger. Over the past three years, every time he came to visit his father's grave, Salim would say hello to this man who had buried his father.

He was a strange man this Gulam, in his late seventies, he was still very lively. He had experienced the up and downs of life. He didn't like to mingle with people so much, but instead spent his time with plants and flowers. One could always find him in the graveyard among the graves, planting flowers or watering the trees. He had turned the old graveyard into a garden.

He was known by a lot of people in the town. After all, death was a fact of life in every household. Gulam had spent much of his life in this borderland between life and death.

Coming back home from his work, Gulam would never say to this family, "Today I buried this many people," instead he would say, "Today the star of these people extinguished." Salim knew well that Gulam was not a greedy person. So he had to be very tactful in the way he was going to broach the subject with him. Two months ago, when one of Salim's relatives had died, he had come to Gulam to offer him a bribe for an empty grave. Gulam had scolded him in return. So, Salim knew he could not persuade Gulam with bribes.

Salim brought Gulam over to his father's grave and opened the subject, "Gulam, you know that before his death my father had asked me to bury him in the village next to his mother. I couldn't fulfil his wish then and buried him here." Gulam interrupted him, "You have been an undutiful son..." Salim continued, "You are right... but that is over now. Listen, it's been a month now that every night my father appears in my dream scolding me. He says to me, You have done what you shouldn't have. At least take my bones to the village and bury me there, or else I will never forgive you."

Gulam was moved by Salim's words.

"Open my father's grave," Salim continues, "and put my father's bones in the car trunk." He then opened the car trunk and took out the colorful suitcase.

"Put the bones in here. I will take them to the village tomorrow." Gulam listened to him carefully and shook his head, "Son, don't you know that you are not supposed to take the dead out of the grave. This is a sin. Good human beings do not disturb the dead. The dead soul will never rest in peace. Haven't you heard that?"

"Yes, I have, but this is a belief belonging to the past..."

"No, my son, a real human being knows what is good at any time."

"Don't say that to me, this is my father's own wish... please save me from these nightmares..."

Gulam appeared to be convinced, "It is your father. You know better. I hope I won't be held responsible for this sin before God." He lit a cigarette and continued, "But I will do this under two conditions, one is that you should have a complete burial ceremony for him again in the village according to customs. If you don't, may you be cursed."

"Of course I will, Gulam. What is the second condition?"

"I will tell you the second condition after I put the bones in this suitcase."

"That's fine."

Gulam started opening the grave. His pick-axe was at work, while Salim was deep in thought as to what he should do next. Was he really going to take the bones to the village? If he did that, as Gulam had asked, he had to go through the burial ceremony again. What else could he do? Burying his father in the new graveyard would not be so easy either, he needed a death certificate to do that. What was he supposed to do then? For now, he decided not to worry about this and to find a solution later. For the time being, he had to finish the job he started. He had to make sure everything went well. As for his father, he could always ask his cousin in the village to help him. His cousin, he thought, was very clever and would understand his position and take care of everything.

Salim noticed that the grave was open and that Gulam was putting the bones in a plastic bag while murmuring something. All of a sudden, he noticed his father's head and immediately turned his face away, he couldn't bear looking at his father. His father's image appeared right in front of his eyes. Salim tried hard to get rid of this image but he couldn't. He remembered his father's face whenever he was angry.

Salim was ten years old when he lost his mother. His father was the head of the village council. He, therefore, was so busy with his

work that he would not see his only son for days. Salim grew up on his own, doing whatever he wished.

He was taking his last exam of the last grade in school. He had plans to move to Baku and enter one of the universities. His math teacher Ashraf had not given him a better grade than "three". Ashraf was one of the most respected teachers in the village. He would work extra hours with those students who needed more help, making sure they learned the subject. He would always be of help to those students who wanted to go on to higher education. He would invite them to his house, give them advice, and guide them. Although from the beginning of the school year, Salim was among those who were invited to the teacher's house, he had ignored the invitations. The teacher had even talked to Salim's father about this, but to no avail. Once when the teacher had given him the grade three, Salim had been very rude to him. Hearing of this event, the father had gone to the teacher's house to apologize on his son's behalf and the next day, he had thrown his son out of the house. Salim had stayed in his uncle's house that summer and, at the end of July, his father had been informed about Salim's moving to Baku.

His father had come to see him at the bus station and had handed him the very suitcase. "There are things in this that you might need and they will last at least until you are done with the entrance exam. There is some money in it as well." And when the bus was ready to leave, he had said to him, "Now that you are leaving, go, but make sure you make a decent human being of yourself and come back." That is all the father had said to his son at his departure from the village.

Salim remembered his father's words... "make a human being of yourself." These words echoed in his ears once again. Salim finished all the do his father had put in the suitcase for him. He

took his entrance exam, passed it, finished the university and started working. It was in that very suitcase that he kept all the letter his father had sent to him from the village. And now he was putting father himself in that suitcase.

Lifting the suitcase, Salim was surprised to see that his heavily built father had now become so light as to fit the suitcase easily. That big man was in his hand in that colorful suitcase. He put his father in the car trunk and took a deep breath. "Be a human!"

This time the voice came from the car trunk. That gave Salim goose flesh and made him walk away from the car. He tried to calm himself by thinking, "I am the perfect human being for the time we live in. These days, whoever is able to find a way out of problems is the true human being..." As far as status was concerned, he considered himself someone who had accomplished a lot, and it seemed to him that he had listened to his father's advice. "It is not easy. At 38 I am the branch director of a big institution and I am about to become the vice president in a matter of days. What else do you want?"

From his school years he had learned how to use his intelligence, not in gaining knowledge, but in being able to pass without making any effort. For him, being a human being meant having a high position.

Salim was involved in his thoughts when he notice Gulam was getting ready to leave. Salim said, "Where are you going, wait, we are not finished yet."

Gulam thought, Salim wants to pay for his services. "Salim, I told you my first condition and you accepted it; now I want to tell you the second one. I am not going to accept any money from you for this job. If I do, I am afraid my grave will break open when I am dead. You see, I don't want to be sinful before God. Now give me a ride home..." "Salim was now caught in a very bad situation, he did

not have any other choice but to disclose the matter: "Gulam, may God bless you, you didn't accept money to close it again?"

Gulam did not understand what he meant at first, Salim further explained, "A very reasonable man is dead, Gulam, he was a very close friend of mine, may he rest in peace... we want to bury him here, you are a wise man. You understand... don't you?" It was as if Gulam was struck by lightning. "What? In your father's place?"

"Why not, may God bless his soul, that man was like a father to me too..."

"You take your natural father out of his grave, for a newly found father? What kind of a person are you?"

"Gulam, the deed is done," he said, and started putting the tiles around the grave.

"Please would you help me put these tiles around the grave... I will be obliged forever."

"I don't care about your sin, but why did you involve me in this sin, you bastard?"

"What is the difference between this body or that other one. What is so sinful about this, I don't understand."

Gulam was very angry. Not paying any attention to Salim's begging, he took his pickaxe and put it into his sack and left the grave site. Salim tried to stop him. "Please don't leave me alone like this, I beg you."

"Get out of my way," Gulam pushed Salim aside and continued on his way. After a few steps he turned to Salim and said. "I have lived all these years but have never seen such dishonesty as I saw today-may God save us from the worst."

Salim followed Gulam with his eyes for awhile and shook his head... "What should I do now? How do I finish this job?" he thought. He then remembered the stone carvers on the north side of the graveyard, and headed straight toward them.

Two hours later the grave was ready and decorated with the tiles.

Yes... and now we have reached the last part of our story. After thoughtful burial, Huseyn Khalidovich embraced Salim and thanked him.

One week after that, Salim was appointed vice president. Soon after this, Karim and Rahim, who now had a common enemy, became very close friends.

Everything was going according to Salim's plans. The only problem, however, was the colorful suitcase that was in his car trunk waiting for its fate. After the burial, Salim sent a message to his cousin in the village asking him to come to the city as soon as possible. He was told when he called, that his cousin was abroad and would not be back for a month. Salim's only problem now was to get rid of the suitcase. But how? He could not share his secret with anyone other than the cousin who was not available. Salim had not been able to enjoy his new position in comfort. The suitcase was turning into a source of fright for him. Now his father would appear in his dream every night reproaching him and saying to him, "Be a human." The night before he had dreamed of his father telling him to "be a human" and Salim had answered him, "What do you want from me? Why don't you leave me alone? You threw me out of your house, I came to the city and I went to the university on my own and became a human. You were head of a small village council. I am in this high position in this big city. Do you still see me as your inferior?" His father responded by laughing, "You have become this old and have not cared for a single person in your life but yourself."

Salim had said, "What do you mean? Do you mean I haven't been helpful to others? But, what about Huseyn Khalidovich, didn't I help him find a grave for his brother-in-law?"

His father had answered, "Well, that's the point, you couldn't have done it if it wasn't for me. You got this position through my grave... Do you still have more to say?"

This dream affected Salim tremendously, but he was still not ashamed. He kept trying to push the thought of the suitcase out of his mind. He moved on his seat and called the secretary, "Send the visitors in, one at a time."

Now, those who entered the room to ask the vice president for any favor would think he had reached this position through hard work. How would they know that he was standing on his father's bones in this position.

Our story is over, but one wonders whether to laugh or to cry.

February 1986

Flattery

He was the only person who could solve my problem. Not only me, but everyone around me was aware of this fact. My friends insisted that I find a way to see him at his office. This was, of course possible, but I wasn't sure he would actually agree to help me. People who knew him never spoke well of him. It was said that he was merciless. It was also said that he enjoyed being flattered. This was a big problem for me, since I was neither good at flattery, nor liked to receive any flattering compliments myself. I think giving compliments needs a special expertise, otherwise, they sound insipid.

Everyone agreed, however, that if I got a chance to meet him, I had to come up with smart and tasteful compliments for him.

I have been to many parties. I have never given a toast. I don't understand the reason for giving complimentary toasts. Doesn't the person who receives these compliments know what kind of a person he or she is? Why should we tell people things they already know about themselves? And if they don't deserve the compliments, then why should we tell lies? Why should we fool people? They just take these lies as truth and get carried away.

At parties, in order to give a toast, you see someone get up and compliment a person as small as a Jirdan, compare him to Napoleon and Julius Caesar and say, "All the valuable things like gold and pearl are also small," and conclude that being small means being valuable. At such occasions, I think Jirdan should get up and smash a bottle of champagne on the head of the person giving these compliments and say, "Who do you think you are fooling? How can you compare me to Napoleon? Do you think I don't understand you are lying?"

But this never happens. The compliments are poured on Jirtan and he looks around to see how these beautiful words are impressing the guests. At this point, I get angry and want the champagne bottle to be smashed on Jirtan's head instead.

This is the way I am, and I can't change myself. My friends say, "Be anyway you want, but be aware that to solve your problem, you should go to see Jirtan in all politeness and tell him that he is not a Jirtan, on the contrary, he is the Dev of all Devs." But he is Jirtan. How can I call Jirtan a Dev? My friends insist, "This is just loose talk, by calling black white, white will not turn into black."

I didn't want to yield to this logic. Then I remembered my little daughter. Everyone at home knew that, among my children, I liked my daughter the most. Anytime I returned home, she would open the door for me and give me a hug and ask me to kiss her. I would kiss her at the door, then go inside. I thought, what is my daughter's fault? I have brought her into this world and am responsible for providing her with a decent life. For the sake of this innocent girl, I must go and call Jirtan, not just a Dev, but the king of all Devs.

With this reasoning, I found myself in Jirtan's illuminating presence one day. He scrutinized me and gave me a sarcastic smile, as if he wanted to say, "So, what happened to your pride?" Not paying any attention to this. I started pouring out the flattering words that I had prepared and memorized, "You...your character... I am counting on your help..."

Jirtan, in return gave me a meaningful look, as if he wanted to say, "I know you, you are lying..., but let's hear it, I enjoy it..."

"I have come to see you hoping you will help me. I believe in your kindness..." Saying these, my voice sounded weird and artificial to me, as if my voice was coming out of a stinking well. I despised myself, I was losing my control. However I had to finish my sentence. "You have been so kind to help lots of people."

All of the sudden I heard a voice inside me saying, "Damn you liar." But then I thought I should finish my sentence and get it done with.

"Consider me as another person who needs your help," I said. I raised my head and looked at this face. Jirtan now seemed to me as big as a Dev. He sulked and looked at me with scorn, "Look," he said. "Stop these meaningless words and get to the point."

I was speechless. I understood what he meant. I realized that I had not been able to play my role. Flattery is an art in itself and needs a special talent. Anyway, my arrow had missed its mark. I had not been able to reach my objective. But I admire the man for his straightforwardness. He had gained my respect. We had noticed the artificiality of my words.

I remembered the champagne bottle that was supposed to burst on Jirtan's head. Now I was the one who truly deserved that bottle. Disappointed, I returned home. As usual, my daughter opened the door and hugged me, "Kiss me," she said. I couldn't. I remembered myself in Jirtan's office, the stinking and flattering words I had used. I was ashamed of myself and could not look in my daughter's eyes. I thought to myself, she thinks of me as the strongest person in the world. If she had only seen her wretched father an hour ago... My wife knew where I had been. She didn't ask any questions. From the way I looked, she could tell what the outcome of the meeting was.

Ever since that day, the things I said to Jirtan have echoed in my ears and made me hate myself.

"Goodness is in your nature. You have been kind to many people..." The memory of that event disturbed my peace for twenty years.

Life has now turned me into a Jirtan. The same flattering words are being poured on me, "You have been always kind to

lots of people. Goodness is in your nature..." I think, the flattering words have remained the same during these twenty years. I am aware of the artificiality of these words, but why do I enjoy hearing them? If I enjoy them, then why do I loathe flattery? Don't I say the same words to people above my rank? The truth is that I have now graduated from the school of flattery and have mastered the art!

I get goose bumps, and say to the man sitting in front of me "Look here, stop these meaningless words and get to the point."

The poor guy gets pale, his hands start shaking... he realizes that his request for help has been useless. He takes out his handkerchief and wipes the sweat off his forehead. I understand that he is now in the same situation that I was in twenty years ago. He can't play his part well, he has not mastered the art of flattery yet. He is an amateur, but will learn in time....

He leaves. I feel sorry for him and angry at myself. Later I think, now this poor guy will go home and be unable to look his daughter in the eyes. How many years is he going to hear the echo of the flattering words he wasted on me? How many years is he going to be disturbed by them?

Days and nights go by, and there is no end to this double-faced world....

My Grandmother's Carpet

I am a painter, an artist. Oops... it seems my first sentence came out a bit bombastic, but that is how everyone knows me. Or rather, that is how I have made myself known to others. All my life I have expressed my feelings through the magic of colors. It is now very difficult for me to express myself using words. Now let me see, maybe I shouldn't use the word 'difficult' here. The thing is, I have always been able to express myself in an indirect way through the medium of colors. I can't express myself like that through words. Painters know how to use colors to express meaning. Writers, however, use words to express their feelings. Well, any way, why have I now sought refuge in words? Why do I want to give voice to my feelings, not through the medium of colors, but words? What is making me do this? Have I fancied becoming a writer now? No, not at all!

After thirty years of speaking through the language of colors and shades, I have now come to the realization that, as a painter, I have not been able to fully open my heart. I have not been able to portray my feeling through a mixture of colors. The same colors that, in the hands of painters like Michelangelo, Rafael, and Goya have created masterpieces. To me they are insufficient. Can it be that I have had greater thoughts and feelings than they? But, isn't this also inflated and egocentric? Maybe it only shows my weakness and lack of talent.

Once, I thought myself a master of colors. I was a very popular artist. My work was presented at a number of exhibitions all over the world. I was known as an avant-garde artist. I wonder why?

Now I need to express the storm in my heart, things that I never said as a painter, through a different medium. Reflecting on my past, searching through my works, I can't find the expression for

my new feeling. What is this new feeling? I look at my paintings. One of them expresses remorse in the eyes of an old person, another one shows desire in the eyes of a young lover, the other portrays a worker's fatigue as he returns home from a nightshift, and another a young mother's worry. I think that these are not bad in their own right. What is it that I need to find in these works? What have I not said in the old works? This is what I am trying to find out. I compare the colors in the pictures with the colors in my heart. The colors in the pictures don't reflect my heart. The colors in my heart need to be voiced.

I've got it, a self portrait. I have to paint my own portrait to express my feelings.

For months I work on this project day and night. I try to express the storm in my heart through the details of my face and my puzzled eyes. I am not very good looking. In my portrait, I try to make myself look better and that makes things worse. Instead of expressing my inner feelings, I turn into a make-up artist to improve my physical appearance, this project is not successful.

Finally, I decide to throw the brush away and pick up the pen. I try to create a true and honest self-portrait with words not colors. I haven't achieved this with the language of colors. A mirror or a photograph can reflect appearances, but through what medium can I portray my inner feelings?

In this undertaking, I seek the help of my mother tongue through which our people have given voice to their joys and sorrows, love and desire, disappointments, and history. I set out to express myself through this silenced treasure.

My first inquiry is, who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going?

I opened my eyes to the world in a village called Ujgar. Rather, I should say, I opened my eyes to my "village" not to the "world". I opened my eyes and found myself in a very small village. Small? Well, I call it "small" now. Then it looked very big to me. To me that village was the whole world. I had not seen any other place comparable to the size of my village. I was born and raised in a mud hut. I considered our mud hut a very large building. There, I learned to walk. There, I listened to my mother's lullabies and my grandmother's stories.

The greatest lady in the world, my grandmother, was a first class carpet weaver in our village. While weaving the carpets with colorful threads, she sang folk songs. Before my eyes the colorful threads and songs were woven together. My understanding of this world started with my grandmother's songs and colors. The source of the colors in my grandmother's carpets were plants and flowers. She used to get up at the crack of dawn in search of them. Sometimes, she took me along with her. We climbed the mountains and cliffs together.

Our village was located in the valley between the Kahnzoba and Aynabulag mountains. The slopes of the mountains were covered with wild roses. These flowers would last from the month of May until October. When I was a child, I always thought the dye for my grandmother's carpet came from this slope. Later on, I learned that the source of her dyes came from far away, at the tops of the mountains.

I have drawn ever since I was a child. But I liked to draw the things that I imagined in Grandmother's stories, not the things I saw. I liked to draw the seven-headed demon, the treasure box discovered in the sea, the apple tree in the king's garden, and the girl snatcher giant. One day, I drew a picture of the Bubi bird. The

bird looked more like an owl than Bubi. My mother said it was an owl, I insisted it was a Bubi. "Have you seen a Bubi?"

"I have", I said.

My mother started laughing and I got angry.

"Why are you laughing?"

"My darling, no one has seen the Bubi bird."

"But I have seen it..."

In fact I had only seen it in my imagination, and I had pictured the bird like an owl because of its sorrowful chirping.

My teacher always encouraged me to draw. Mina was my mother's distant relative. Actually, in our village everyone was related. My teacher would always bring me colored pencils from town and would encourage me to draw beautiful scenes from our mountains.

I have special memories of the people in my village. My mother always sent me to buy tea and sugar from the village grocer. The grocer, Uncle Shiraslan, was a very humorous man. He would joke with everyone. One day as I was going to buy sugar, I came across some kids who were going raspberry picking. I decided to join them. "This bush mine, that bush yours." I ate lots of raspberries. With the raspberry juice all over my hands and face, I went to the grocer's shop. Seeing me like that, Uncle Shiraslan burst into laughter and said, "Hey man, you can feed three dogs with that juice on your face."

"I have been eating raspberries on my way here."

"Then why didn't you bring me some?" I didn't know what to say.

"Look son," he said, "I really need raspberries to make raspberry jam. Where can you find them? Tell me so that I can send the kids to get me some."

"The bushes are around the cliff, but they are hard to reach."

"Why didn't you cut your head off and put it under your feet to stand taller?"

Uncle Shiraslan would even joke with a young child like me. I really liked this. One could sense warmth and kindness in the way he talked to people.

One day, when I had gone to Khanyaylaghy with my grandmother, I slipped from the cliff. My grandmother used to tell me not to look down when climbing or else I would get dizzy. On that day, I heard something in the canyon and looked down. I fell and while I was rolling I got caught in a tree, otherwise I would have rolled down to the canyon...I grabbed the tree and got up, but I had injured my right foot. The kids in the canyon came to my rescue. Somehow, they managed to drag me home. The news of my fall spread all over the village. Everyone was talking about me. "Hajar's grandson has fallen down from the cliff." In an hour everybody in the village was in our house. Everybody recommended a remedy. They even sent for a bonesetter... the bonesetter, Karim Baba, came immediately. He massaged my foot and set my bone. This is how our village was...

Time passed, I grew up. While I was still at school my grandmother passed away. I was left alone with no one to take care of me. No, I am wrong. All of the young women in the village became a mother to me, the old women, grandmothers and the men, my father.

When I finished seventh grade, my teacher Mina brought me to Baku. I got accepted into the fine arts institute. After graduating, I went to Moscow and entered the academy of fine arts. There I was trained by famous painters, and realized that in order to be a successful artist, one has to destroy the old artistic forms and create new ones. I was a true avant-garde painter, to the point that I became critical of all the classical schools of painting.

One day, I came across a very interesting painting in one of the foreign journals. It was a painting by a newly discovered French painter. After seeing that painting, I kept following the works of this artist. There was a special originality in his art. How had he found this originality? I painted a few pictures under his influence. These paintings were very well received as originals. But, in my opinion, there was no expression of my feelings in them. I gave up and went back to my old style.

Years passed, I became a professional painter and went back to Baku. It didn't take long for me to become a well-known painter in our republic. I still wasn't satisfied. I was well-known, but not any different from the other painters. To be different, I needed to have originality in my work, but I had not been able to find that.

In those days of turmoil, I remembered the French painter and again painted a picture in his style. It was an illustration from a novel, "The Flying Sea Gulls". The flight of the sea gulls was depicted in such a way that the empty spots between their wings looked like another pair of wings. The whole surface of the canvas was used. My friends were impressed with this painting. I was so excited that I couldn't stand still. All the painters admired my work and congratulated me. A painter whom I had always admired shook my hand and said to me, "You have finally found your own style."

"My style..." sounded nice. But if he didn't know, I knew well that it was not really mine. It belonged to that French painter. The truth was that I had copied him. But how could I confess? I enjoyed the admiration of the public, but, I was torn inside. What could I do? I carried on this way for twenty-five years. Now, I had my own followers, and called them "imitators of the imitator." I was known in my country as an innovative artist, while I copied the works of the French painter. His work was my source of inspiration.

One day, one of my friends showed me a reproduction of one of the French painter's works and said, "Look at this, it looks just like your work, but a very weak imitation of it." I was quite familiar with this painting and had always considered it in a much higher level than my own work.

Conscience awakened, I said, "It looks like my work, but it's much better than mine." My friend insisted that it was an imitation of my work.

When we showed the reproduction to a famous painter who admired my work, he had the same opinion, "One can tell immediately that this is a shadow of your work." Although I enjoyed the trust of my friends and felt guilty about the French painter, I remained silent not daring to confess.

I showed the reproduction to some other friends and they all reacted the same way. Why? I wondered. Was it national pride that stopped my friends from looking down on my work? No, on the contrary, given the competitiveness of the art world, this could not be the case.

One day I decided to write a letter to the French painter. I sent the letter to an address that I had found in the journal of the painter's association to which he belonged. I wrote to him that I had followed his work for twenty five years. I admired him and considered him a true artist. I wanted to confess that I had imitated his work, but I couldn't. Then I thought, why was I writing the letter? I had to confess and get it off my chest. I included my confession and sent him the letter after translating it into French. I felt relieved.

I waited for the answer. I had sworn not to paint until I received it. I was not sure the kind of answer I would get in that letter. Finally, it came. I am now writing it, exactly for you.

"My dear colleague, thank you for your kind letter. I have always longed to come to your country to see the mountain villages like

Kahrizoba. This village is famous for its carpets all over the world. When I was younger, I saw a picture of one of these carpets. I was fascinated by the designs and colors. These carpets, woven by illiterate women, are valuable works of art. The designs in these carpets are the basis of my works. Using this opportunity I wanted to ask you, if possible, to send me more pictures of the carpets from your village.”

I was astonished, the French painter was an imitator of my grandmother and I of him. That’s why my colleagues considered my work original and his an imitation. I was looking for my own original style not within myself, but outside of me. It is said, “The grass is always greener on the other side.”

Doubt

Once upon a time, in a city called Andahat, there lived a strange and shrewd Shah. This Shah hated the truth - and liked lies. He didn’t know who his father was. All he knew about his father was that his father was not a Shah. Therefore, he had to lie and demanded lies from everyone else, for it was not beneficial to him if his subjects spoke the truth. Then his right to the throne might be questioned. Lies were spread all over the country from the palace to the villages and from the villages back to the palace. Everyone was aware of the fact that lying was an essential means of communication in that country. Colorful lies covered the rampant corruption.

Like all Shahs, this Shah had a Jester with a funny outfit and lots of knick-knacks around his neck. The Jester entertained the Shah with his dance and farfetched lies. The Jester always sang a famous song when he danced: “I am prosperous, prosperous, you are my Shah, My Shah, my protector.”

The Shah considered his Jester the wisest person in the kingdom and issued an order that everyone should learn the Jester’s Song. After this order, to prove their loyalty to the Shah, and out of fear, all the subjects began to sing the Jester’s Song: “I am prosperous, I am prosperous.” It delighted the Shah to see the homeless and the hungry singing this song.

It didn’t take long for everyone in the country to become a professional liar. Lying became part of the routine of life. Nobody was ashamed of telling lies. Why should a liar be shamed before another liar? Liars were rewarded with respect and status.

It was very difficult for people to communicate since words had lost their significance and gained contradictory meanings. For example, black meant white, good meant bad, and long meant

short. The older generation was left in astonishment and had difficulty understanding the new generation. They turned a blind eye to whatever was happening around them.

At school, children were taught different variations of lies and that it was honest to be corrupt and to cheat. Student learned to understand one way and speak another. Once a teacher asked the students,

“If our Shah says there is no sun in the sky, what does that mean?”

And the children responded, “It definitely means there is no sun in the sky.”

The teacher continued, “If you see a Shah’s agent beat a villager and claim that he is doing that for the villager’s own good, what would you say?”

To answer, a student stood up, “Then I would say the Shah’s agent is correct.”

Then the teacher went on, “The Shah’s agents are always right. We should believe not in what we see, but in what we hear.”

To directly contradict the Shah was officially prohibited. For example, if the Shah would point to Hassan’s house, and ask if it were Mohammad’s house, it was prohibited to say, “No, this is not Mohammad’s house.” The proper answer to this question was, “Yes, this is Hassan’s house.”

History had not seen a Shah like this before. The Shah knew well how to fool people with words and how to make his subjects dance to his tune. People in the neighboring countries heard about this theater and wondered when the time would come that they too would fall into the trap. They knew it was possible to wake up one day and find themselves under the dominance of this Shah. To pledge their obedience they would have to say, “Your highness, we are thankful to have you as our ruler and protector, without you, we could never manage our own riches and resources.”

Every once in a while, the Shah, accompanied by his ministers, paid a visit to the prisons. He enjoyed watching the punishment of those who dared to tell the truth. On one of these visits, the Shah demanded to see the oldest prisoners. The warden took the Shah aside and whispered to him, “Your majesty, some of these prisoners have been here since Nova’s time. The Shah ordered, I want them to be taught to sing the Jester’s Song.” The Jester was immediately called and informed of the Shah’s order. For seven days and nights the Jester taught his song to the prisoners. Once they teamed, the Shah was invited to visit the prison. The wretched prisoners who were mere skin and bones, started dancing and singing, “I am prosperous, I am prosperous.” The sight of these deprived dancing to the tune of prosperity looked extremely funny.

Now don’t take this Shah for a fool, he was well aware that the only way to control people and to cover the realities of hunger and misery in the country was through such games and shows. In short, everyone in the country was dancing with an empty stomach and the Shah enjoyed the show.

The Shah liked giving speeches. In these speeches, he talked about the welfare of his subjects and how he cared for them. The people listened to these speeches with enthusiasm and still demanded more. Why not? Without these speeches, how could the people know about ‘justice’ and ‘well-being’ in their country?

Let me tell you now of the Shah’s beautiful wife who had fallen in love with the minister’s son – and he with her in return. While the Shah was busy with his speeches, the two lovers were swimming in the sea of love... In no time, the Shah’s wife gave birth to a son. The Shah was delighted and the people were informed of the birth of the Crown Prince. But the Shah was disappointed once he saw the

son. He asked his wife, "Why is he blond?" The wife responded, "The son is yours and he has taken after your father."

Years passed by. The lies grew bigger and bigger and the old lies bred new ones. One day the Shah asked the town callers to announce a competition for lying in the country. Whoever came up with the biggest lie, would win a golden stick as a prize.

The professional liars all gathered in front of the palace. While the competition was going on, the Jester entertained everyone with his dancing and his famous song. One of the competitors came forward, bowed in front of the Shah and said, "Your majesty, my big lie is that, you are the only truth-loving person in the world." The Shah laughed at this and protested, "What you are saying is indeed a big lie. I like it. But my subjects have learned to say and understand everything in its opposite. Now, if they think about the opposite of what you just said, it will be like saying, I am the biggest lie in the whole world. And everyone is aware of this, and this cannot be accepted as a lie."

Another liar came forward, "Your majesty, my lie is that, your reign depends on the Jester's Song." The Shah started laughing at first, then he stormed at the liar, "What? What did you say? My reign depends on the Jester's Song?"

"Yes, Sir!"

The Shah went on, "Is that the truth or a lie to you?"

"I have come here before you to tell a lie."

"Then is what you are saying a lie?" The Shah turned to the Jester and asked,

"What do you say to this, Jester?" The Jester responded,

"Looks like he has a loose screw. Dear king, don't pay any attention to him."

The Shah then ordered the man put in an asylum. Thus none of

the liars won the competition. All of a sudden, a villager showed up and said,

"Your majesty, if I offend you with what I say, you can order your men to behead me, for my lie is really big..." The Shah ordered the man to proceed.

"My dear Shah, your wife had an affair with the minister's son, and there is proof..."

"What?"

"Yes, your majesty."

The Shah thought for awhile. How could he argue with the villager? If he said it could not be true, the man had come up with a lie and had to be awarded with the prize. If he did not accept what the villager said as a lie, it meant that his wife...

The Shah was torn inside. He, then, ordered the golden stick to be fetched. With hesitation, he gave the stick to the man and said, "My smart subject, I give you the golden stick, what are you going to give me in return?"

The villager responded, "I did what I was supposed to do. You wanted a lie from me and I gave it to you."

"That lie was for my ears, what do you have for my eyes? Give me something that I can see and hold, like the stick that I am giving you."

"I will do that, but on one condition."

"What is it?"

"I am going to weave a unique carpet for you."

"Very well, but tell me what is so special about this carpet?"

"The carpet will be special. Whoever looks at it will see his or her parent's image in it. But this carpet is not for illegitimate people, for they won't be able to see anything in the carpet."

The Shah was taken by surprise at first, then he seemed pleased with the idea, "Tell me, what do you need to weave this carpet?"

"Fifty thousand dinars and three years." The Shah agreed.

From that day on the Shah kept thinking about the carpet and couldn't wait until it was finished. This carpet would reveal many palace secrets to him. Three month before the date of completion, the Shah sent his men to the villager's house to find out how the work was progressing. Once the villager learned about this visit, he hung a white sheet from the loom and pretended to put the last touches on the carpet while singing a song. The Shah's messengers were surprised to find a white plain sheet on the loom instead of a carpet.

The villager went on, "Do you see these flowers on the carpet, these?.." One of the messengers came forward, examined the white sheet closely and said, "What? What are you talking about?" The villager shouted at him, "What do you mean, what? Can't you see all these red blossoms?" He, then, turned to the other messenger and said, "Looks like your friend has a secret and that secret is not allowing him to see anything in the carpet."

Realizing what the villager meant, the messenger tried to cover his mistake and said, "Oh, are you talking about these flowers on the carpet, yes they are indeed very beautiful." The villager went on, "Now look at the flowers on this side of the carpet." The messenger looked carefully, and remained silent. Not being able to see anything on the carpet, the messengers were doubting their legitimacy, So as not to lose face, they admired the buds and flower designs on the carpet. "Well done!"

"Beautiful! It looks just like a real flower."

"This carpet is very valuable."

When the messenger got back to the palace, they all started talking about the carpet to the Shah. Every week the Shah would send people to the villager's house and the same scene was repeated. The messengers were at first surprised, then doubting their own

legitimacy, they had no other choice but to admire the supposedly beautiful designs in the carpet.

Everyone praised the carpet in public. But at night in the privacy of their homes, they laughed at this masquerade. No one dared to speak the truth, since everyone's reputation was at stake....

The day of completion arrived. The villager, with the "carpet" under his arm, followed by noblemen, entered the palace, spread the white sheet in front of the throne and proceeded, "Your majesty, here is that magical carpet. With this you will be able to tell who is a bastard."

"But we don't have any bastards in this court," the noblemen exclaimed. To prove their legitimacy, however, each of them pretended to see the image of his parents in between the flower designs of the carpet. The Shah was silent. He could not see anything in the carpet and he knew why-All of the sudden, the Shah realized the everyone was looking at him. He knew what they were thinking. He got up, went closer to the white sheet and said to the villager, "Well done! Well done! Good job!" The villager got the point immediately.

The Shah was not praising the carpet, but the villager himself. Instead of "Well done," the Shah had wanted to say, "You outsmarted me for a second time." The villager asked the Shah, "Your majesty, who do you see in the carpet?" The Shah, with no hesitation, responded, "My father, may God bless his soul,"

"What do you see on his head?" The Shah got angry at this question, "Don't you see it yourself? Why are you asking me?"

"Your majesty, I see my father and on his head I see his hat. What about you? What do you see on your father's head?"

The Shah, who was very aggravated, said, "Stupid man, your father was a commoner and mine a Shah. What can you find on a Shah's head? Tell me now why my father is blond?"

The villager whispered quietly, "My Shah, I didn't know your father, I don't know how he got to be blond."

The Shah, who was now very disturbed, tried to find a way out of this annoying situation. He also noticed that the noblemen looked worried. They were undoubtedly thinking that the Shah might replace one of them with the villager. The Shah finally looked at the villager and asked,

"You are a very smart man. I have a question for you. If you answer this question, I will give you a high position in the palace." This made the noblemen even more worried. "Please ask your question, your majesty," the villager said. "Can you tell me what the people here are thinking right now?" The villager was well aware of what was going on in the noblemen's mind, but could not mention it, "Would you like me to tell you what each of them is thinking, or all of them?"

"Tell me what all of them are thinking."

"They all have one thought, they are all wishing for a long life for you. If you don't believe me, ask them."

At this time the Shah heard the Jester singing to himself, "Oh people, I am prosperous. I am prosperous..."

The Shah whispered to himself, "You big liar! Damn you, you big liar..."

Three apples fell from the sky, one of them for the people of Andahar, one for the villager, and one for those who are reading this story.

A PLAY

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The Lie

The setting.

A Moscow airport. The passenger terminal. People look anxious and restless, some of them carry luggage. Flights are being announced, everyone is listening carefully.

The announcer: Flight number 2981 to Almaty will be delayed until 2:00. (Sounds of protest) Flight number 861 to Baku will be delayed until 3:00... I repeat, Flight number 861 to Baku will be delayed until 3:00.

(People wait in line in front of the long distance telephone booths)

ACT 1

Imran: (At the phone booth) Galechka, my darling Galya! Yes, I'm calling from the airport... yes... I haven't left yet. It is hot. There has been a delay in all the flights since yesterday. You stay at home, I will call you from the airport as soon as I arrive. This is terrible... yes, I bought what you asked for. Okay! Kisses!

(Two people are waiting in front of the phone booth.)

Aydin: Teymur

Teymur: Aydin!

Aydin: All these years we lived in the same town, but...

Teymur: We couldn't see each other.

Aydin: Who is to blame?

Teymur: Neither of us.

Aydin: Then who?

Teymur: Lack of time I guess.

Aydin: What a surprise to see you here!

Teymur: Let me surprise you more. Look, next to that news stand, I just saw someone resembling Imran.

Aydin: Didn't you talk to him?

Teymur: He passed by me like a person who had just seen a snake...

Aydin: Are you sure it's him?

Teymur: It was him, I could tell from the way he behaved.

Aydin: I don't get it, why should he behave like this?

Teymur: It's a long story. Let's forget that. Tell me, how are you? Aren't you married yet? It is time for you to become a father.

Aydin: (Showing the container in his hand) These things don't leave me any time...

Teymur: What things?

Aydin: My insects... if I don't go to Baku today they will die, with the food I have for them they only last 7 hours. Tell me, what happened to you and Imran?

Teymur: It happened last year. Imran asked me to hire his son at the laboratory where I work. I told him there were no openings. Shortly after this, our director hired someone. When Imran heard about it, he called and trashed me with his curses. I couldn't convince him that I had no role in this.

Aydin: How come you never told me about this?

Teymur: Since then, we have seen each other once, at the symposium in Dushanbe. I didn't tell you about it then. I didn't want to talk about it.

Aydin: Of course, you are right, but you shouldn't make a big deal out of it. We have been good friends with Imran. We have spent so much time in his house. Do you remember his father?

Teymur: How can one forget Gudrat Ami?

Aydin: You are right, let's find him and you two may make up.

Teymur: Aydin, don't even think about it.

Aydin: Why?

Teymur: Some other time maybe.

Aydin: Teymur!

Teymur: Let's change the subject. First of all let me congratulate you on your scholarly accomplishments these past years. I read about them in the Academy's bulletin. You have done a great job.

Aydin: You yourself have been very active too... did you finish the book you were working on?

Teymur: It is submitted for publication.

Aydin: Have there been any books superior to the "Red Book" published lately?

Teymur: As many as you desire.

Aydin: Looks like the whole world is changing.

Teymur: You are right, my brother.

Aydin: This is all so terrible, the whole earth is changing. Looks like we have gone wrong somehow. We made a mistake somewhere. These past years the dangerous insects have increased destroying the beneficial insects. Actually, it looks like the conditions are being provided for the dangerous insects to increase... how is it going to end?

Teymur: I am worried about the time when everything gets out of control, then the "Red Books" become part of history.

Announcer: Flight number 861 to Baku is delayed until 4 o'clock.

Aydin: Damn it! There is no hope now.

Teymur: Ha! I've been here since yesterday evening. There hasn't been one flight to Baku. If it were a different time, I wouldn't mind. Today my son was supposed to come to Baku for one day on leave from his military duty. He is flying to the Far East tomorrow. There is a saying... "you do what you should do and wait to see how fate can change it all." (He looks at the telephone booth.)

Aydin: I didn't know that Murad is doing his military service. Time flies. He was a little child not long ago. I still think of Murad as a naughty three year old with his tricycle. Remember how we used to force him to eat his food... I used to pretend I was a goat, and you used to become a rooster just to encourage him to eat!

Teymur: As they grow up, we become old. (He looks at the telephone booth again.)

Aydin: Do you remember the time when, you, Imran and I went to Moscow to celebrate our graduation from the university?

Teymur: Yes there is a big difference between this trip to Moscow and that one. We were not in a rush to get back then. Now we are.

Aydin: You're right. Now I'm in a rush, you're in a rush, so are all these people. But nature doesn't rush at all. This terrible weather reminds me that it is useless to be on the run... It is as if it is telling us all "Don't try to go against me or else you will suffer the consequences."

Teymur: We see the consequences right now.

(Teymur's turn has come to use the phone.)

Aydin: I should at least talk to my son on the phone. I won't be able to see him.

(He gets into the phone booth.)

(Aydin lights a cigarette and walks around, Imran shows up.)

Imran: Hello, man.

Aydin: Hello Imran. Long time no see. I was looking for you.

Imran: Looks like you have been talking with Teymur about me.

Aydin: How did you know?

Imran: I know that selfish Teymur well? Let's go.

Aydin: Where?

Imran: Wherever I am going.

Aydin: I am waiting for Teymur.

Imran: What is so special about Teymur?

Aydin: Friendship.

Imran: Am I not a friend?

Aydin: Look Imran, we are old friends... these trivial issues should not ruin our friendship.

Imran: Why are you saying this to me? Say it to your good old friend. What have I done to him? It is all his fault.

Aydin: He is a very fair person.

Imran: Do you mean I am the one who is unfair?

Aydin: Stop it!

Imran: What are you carrying with you?

Aydin: A container.

imran: What is inside?

Aydin: Insects.

Imran: Do you think there aren't enough of them in Baku?
(Pause) You should have put Teymur in this container as well, to be with his own kind.

Aydin: Imran, you know I don't like tasteless jokes.

Imran: If you are looking for something tasty, let's go to the restaurant, we have a lot of time to kill.

Aydin: Only if we take Teymur too.

Imran: That's all we need.

Aydin: Don't be a kid Imran... you always blow things out of proportion.

Imran: Do you think you know everything in this world? It isn't so.

Aydin: How is it then?

Imran: You see the world from your own perspective. Of course each person has a perspective of his own. But the world goes on its own way.

Aydin: You are right.

Imran: This is not funny.

Aydin: No, I mean it. You find out about things once you measure the issues from your perspective.

Imran: Long live measuring. Let's go.

Aydin: I am one year older than both of you. I will force you to make up, that's the end of the argument. (He heads toward the telephone booth where Teymur is, but another person is in the booth) Where did he go?

Imran: You see now? He doesn't want to face me either.

Aydin: I will find him.

Imran: How are you going to find him in this crowd? Let's go.
(Aydin follows Imran while he looks around to find Teymur)

ACT 2

scene: an airport restaurant

Imran: You are a good friend.

Aydin: You say this only now.

Imran: Let's drink to your insects... because they know more about their responsibilities than many of us.

Aydin: Do you mean...?

Imran: Yes.

Aydin: Okay... these poor insects deserve a toast, especially right now since their food is about gone. If they die, all my work will go down the drain.

Imran: See what has become of us, sitting and toasting the insects.

Aydin: Do you know how much they cost?

Imran: I don't know.

Aydin: They are useful for you too.

Imran: Why?

Aydin: These are among the insects used in agriculture. We have brought them from California.

Imran: How interesting!

Aydin: With all the bad-insects around, good insects are worth a lot. We will now try to make them adapt to their new environment. Later, they will eliminate the bad insects for us.

Imran: Can you find an insect that can get rid of mean people?

Aydin: It is possible. That requires getting rid of the bacteria called selfishness. Right now bad insects kill the good ones. We are trying to change this. I mean we are trying to have the good insects kill the bad ones.

Imran: Good luck!

Aydin: In this world everyone thinks he is right.

Imran: I agree with you totally, someone who ruins thirty years of friendship thinks he is right too.

Aydin: He who saves friendships is also right.

Imran: Don't mind my jokes. You know I like to make jokes all the time. But as far as Teymur, I am right to be hurt. He lied to me.

Aydin: No, he did not.

Imran: He did not employ my son, saying he had no opening, but he hired someone else instead.

Aydin: His director hired that person.

Imran: That's a lie. He could be frank about it and tell me he did not want to hire my son. Then I would think, maybe he is not sure of my son's competence. I will never forgive him. Look Aydin, I can never forgive dishonesty.

Aydin: Who do you think would?

Imran: You think Teymur is right. That is like forgiving dishonesty. Teymur, with what he did, showed me that he prefers Dashdamir to me, his old friend.

Aydin: What does it have to do with him?

Imran: He hired him instead of my son.

Aydin: Is that right?

(He starts laughing)

Imran: Why are you laughing?

Aydin: Have some sense Imran, don't curse Teymur, curse me instead.

Imran: Why you?

Aydin: I was the one who called the director and ask him to hire Dashdamir.

Imran: Please, don't try to wash Teymur's sin.

Aydin: Imran, I am telling you the truth. He did not have any role in this. When Teymur told me about this problem I didn't think. Hiring Dashdamir was a favor I had asked for.

Imran: Well, so much for friendship.

Aydin: How could I know you were trying to have your son hired there? Anyhow, do you see now that Teymur did not have anything to do with this? You have been ignoring him for no reason.

Imran: He was the one who ignored me. I have always loved you both. I drink this to your health.

Aydin: Me and Teymur's health.

Imran: Whatever you say. You are both men of science. But you... you are madly in love with science. One has to fall in love with what he does. I drink to your dedication.

Aydin: Thank you.

(They drink.)

Imran: We have accomplished a little for our age. To me whatever we have done so far is just the beginning. We have to accomplish a lot more. There are lots of problems. We should pay our dues to our country before we die.

Aydin: Now you are talking. I now see in front of me the Imran I knew thirty years ago. Looks like you needed this drink to get back to your old self.

Imran: I am the same person. It is you guys who have kept your distance from me. You think...

Aydin: To be honest, your nasty talk a while ago made me very upset.

imran: But you know me better.

Aydin: Anyway... I am happy to see I have found my old friend back again.

imran: Kindness is like wings; it makes us fly.

Aydin: Well said Imran. You have beautiful feelings.

The announcer: Flight number 861 to Baku is boarding.

Aydin: Perfect

Imran: Good, let's drink this to the opened way before us. (They drink.) I will be back in five or ten minutes.

He leaves the restaurant. Aydin looks at the clock. About half an hour is past. He gets up, pays the bill and leaves the restaurant.

In the hallway, people carrying luggage pass. Imran appears. He is talking to the flight supervisor. Teymur is standing behind.

Imran: That is not right, you should help.

The supervisor: It is impossible, there are no empty seats.

Imran: If you try, you can find one.

The supervisor: Do you want to sit on top of someone?

Imran: I will go standing up. I told you, I am going to my father's funeral. Why can't you understand me?

The supervisor: I do understand your situation. I sympathize with you. But, what can I do? There is only one way, see if you can ask one of the passengers to give his seat to you. I would not object to that. (He looks at the passengers) Dear passengers, this man is

going to his father's funeral. Could anyone of you give his seat to him? (People look at each other and remain silent) Dear friends, this can happen to any one of us. Please do understand him, he is going to his father's funeral.

(Silence, one man among the passengers starts speaking)

A passenger: Think of it as three more hours of delay... If you are so concerned, give your own seat to him, why do you pass it to someone else?

Another passenger: Good idea.

The supervisor: So, there is not one person willing to do this? (to Imran) I don't think I can do more for you.

(He leaves. Aydin approached Imran. Astonished.)

Aydin: What is this brother? How come you didn't mention this to me?

Imran: I didn't want to upset you.

Aydin: You are a very patient man. God bless your father, Gudrat Ami's soul. He was a very nice person... was he ill?

Imran: Yes... he had been bedridden for a month.

Aydin: I saw him at the Boulevard about a month ago. We talked a lot. He looked very healthy then.

Imran: Yes, it all happened suddenly.

Aydin: My sympathies... what can we do? We all belong to the other world ultimately.

(The supervisor approaches Imran and gives him a ticket.)

The supervisor: Here, one of you compatriots gave you his seat.

Imran: Thank you... but... who was he?

(Aydin looks at the ticket.)

Aydin: This is Teymur's ticket. Here look at the last name on the ticket.

Imran: (disturbed) This is not good.

Aydin: Why? Only Teymur could do this.

The supervisor: Citizen, be assured, I will send him with the next available flight. Now hurry up. Your name?

Aydin: Sattarov, Imran!

(The supervisor writes on the ticket and puts his signature on it. Gives it to Imran.)

Imran: I feel embarrassed.

Aydin: Don't say that. I will tell him how thankful you were. Have a nice flight, hurry!

(Aydin starts walking around, Teymur approaches him.)

Aydin: Teymur, bravo to you! You look very happy. I understand you... people like you enjoy helping others. But Imran is an interesting person too. We were together for about an hour at the restaurant. He didn't mention his father's death. When I asked him why, he said he didn't want to upset me. Where did you go? I looked for you. We wanted to go to the restaurant together.

Teymur: I noticed he didn't want to speak with me. That's why, after my phone call to Baku, I disappeared.

Aydin: You shouldn't have. Was your son in Baku?

Teymur: He arrived this morning, and he is leaving tomorrow morning.

Aydin: We will go on the next flight.

Teymur: At least I heard his voice.

Aydin: You embarrassed Imran a great deal. He was looking for you to thank you.

Teymur: That's exactly why I didn't show myself.

Aydin: We will go together to pay him a visit.

Teymur: Definitely! Gudrat Ami was a very nice man. May God bless him.

(Baku airport. Arriving passengers come toward the hallway.

Aydin and Teymur are among the passenger. An old man approaches them.)

The man: Aydin? Teymur? Is that you? Hello my dears.

Aydin: (Astonished) You... but... you.

The old man: Didn't you recognize me? How soon you forgot Gudrat Ami.

Aydin: No...we did recognize you.

Teymur: We certainly did.

Gudrat Ami: I am waiting for Imran, didn't he come with you?

Aydin: He came on the previous flight. Hasn't he arrived yet?

Gudrat Ami: No, I have been waiting for hours. This is the first flight since yesterday. I heard the previous flight had not been able to land in Baku, it landed in Tbilisi.

Aydin: That's possible.

Gudrat Ami: How are you?

Teymur: We are fine.

Aydin: Thank you Gudrat Ami. And yourself?

Gudrat Ami: Thank God! I am well. One should always be thankful.

Aydin: You are right.

Gudrat Ami: I should check with the information... see you later.

(He leaves. Aydin and Teymur look at each other in surprise and shake their heads.)

Aydin: Teymur, do you see what he did?

Teymur: I know.

Aydin: He said he would forgive everything but dishonesty.

Teymur: But it is he who is dishonest.

Aydin: Looks like it is more difficult to understand two-legged insects, who take advantage of others.

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