Mir Jalal
(1908-1978)

Dried Up In Meetings

(Prose)

2012

YENI YAZARLAR VƏ SƏNƏTÇILƏR QURUMU. E-NƏŞR N 33 (86 - 2012)

www.kitabxana.net

Milli Virtual Kitabxananın təqdimatında

Bu elektron nəşr http://www.kitabxana.net - Milli Virtual Kitabxananın "Eurovision-2012" mahnı müsabiqəsinə gələn xarici qonaqlar, turistlət və soydaşlarımız üçün Azərbaycan kitablarını, eləcə də yazıçılarımızın əsərlərini müxtəlif dillərdə, rəqəmsal - e-kitab formatında hazırlamaq..." Kulturoloji-innovativ Layihə çərçivəsində nəşrə hazırlanıb və yayılır.

Elektron Kitab N 33

YYSQ - Milli Virtual Kitabxananın e-nəşri N 33 (86 - 2012)

Kulturoloji layihənin bu hissəsini maliyyələşdirən qurum:

Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidenti Yanında Qeyri-Hökumət Təşkilatlarına Dövlət Dəstəyi Şurası

Mir Jalal
(1908-1978)

Dried Up In Meetings

(Prose)

Görkəmli Azərbaycan xalq yazıçısı və ədəbiyyatşünas aliminin ingilis dilində hekayələr kitabı...

YYSQ - Milli Virtual Kitabxananın e-nəşri N 33 (86 - 2012)

Virtual redaktoru və e-nəşrə hazırlayanı: Aydın Xan (Əbilov), yazar-kulturoloq

YYSQ - Milli Virtual Kitabxana. Bakı – 2012

Mir Jalal
(1908-1978)

Dried Up In Meetings

(Prose)

From the book "Dried Up In Meetings"

Azerbaijan International 1998, USA

Mir Jalal
(1908-1978)

90th Jubilee

by his son, **Hafiz Pashayev**,
Azerbaijan's Ambassador to the U.S.

It's only natural for a child to endear himself to the memories of his father. Though my father died 20 years ago, I still feel his spirit with me. As time passes, the memories, the conversations and all those events we shared together tend to blur while taking on a rather divine characteristic of their own.

Mir Jalal, author of short stories that poked fun at Soviet bureaucracy. Here he is standing on the balcony of his apartment complex--the setting for "Scoldings."

Many details of my father's life are reflected in the stories he wrote. Whenever he encountered an interesting event or person, he would say, "Now, that would make a good story!" or "That's a story in itself!" And I could be sure that next morning a story would be waiting for me to run down to the Writers Union so that his secretaries could type it.

Many people have observed that Mir Jalal was able to combine authorship, scholarship and teaching into a single career. Though success in any one of these fields would have secured him a place in the cultural history of Azerbaijan, he succeeded in all three. Some people thought writing came easy to him, but there was more to it - untiring dedication, an active mind and talent.

During decades of teaching at Baku State University, Mir Jalal's students used to ask him about his scholarly and creative works, wondering which he regarded as his masterpiece. "My greatest achievement in life,"

he would tell them, "is my family." Mir Jalal had been separated from his own family in his youth when they returned to Iranian (Southern) Azerbaijan, and he continued high school in Northern Azerbaijan (at that time Soviet Azerbaijan and today, the Independent Republic of Azerbaijan).

My father had three sons and two daughters. His wife Pusteh Khanim (who is still with us) was his life-long partner. Mir Jalal always tried to set an example for his children and students.

He chose friends for their ideas and outlook on life, not because of their status or Party affiliation. His life as well as his stories are filled with simplicity and naturalness, unpretentiousness and modesty. He never wanted to bother anyone or have to depend on anyone - even his own children. He always used to walk to work. When questioned why he didn't drive, he would counter, "But I have the keys to all the cars in Baku," and would pull out a bill, the equivalent of a taxi fare.

After completing high school (1958), I often talked with my father about which university field to enter. Though I was inclined towards the sciences, I did have an inkling for writing as perhaps is only natural for someone growing up in a family of writers, but my father discouraged me. For him, the 20th century was the age of science and technology and thus I became a physicist.

Mir Jalal did his best to avoid any involvement with Soviet administrative offices. Whenever it was necessary to get involved, he would ask one of his students to go in his place. One of his students recalled Mir Jalal saying, while passing the Central Administration Office of Baku one day, "Thank God, I don't have anything to do with this place." Of course, his satires such as "Anket Anketov" or "Dried-Up in Meetings" clearly point out the destructive nature of the Soviet bureaucracy, especially under Stalin in the 1930s and 1940s.

I'll never forget in 1976, when I returned to Baku from studying advanced physics at the University of California (Irvine). I well remember the day when my father called me into his room and asked me to tell him my impressions of America. At first he listened to me quietly. Then after asking a few questions, he said, "I figured America would be just as you have described it." He cautioned me not to speak openly about my experiences. His generation had lived through the purges of Stalin and Bagirov [Stalin's representative in Azerbaijan]. It was difficult for him not to be fearful.

In the 1970s, the economic situation in the Soviet Union worsened and Mir Jalal posed the rhetorical question: "What will happen to the Soviet Union in the future?" I'm sorry that he did not live long enough to answer his own question. No doubt, he would have been proud that his pen so accurately pinpointed some of the incongruities and ironies that led to its disintegration.

The story that follows, "Used to Scoldings" is based on fact. It took place in the apartment building in which we lived. It reflects a mentality that the Soviet system fostered - to always expect a scolding, even when things were going fine. Unfortunately, this aspect of the Soviet legacy is still with us today.

The Life and Works of Mir Jalal

(1908 - 1978)

by **Hasan Javadi**

Mir Jalal Alioghlu Pashayev, known by his literary pen-name Mir Jalal, was born on April 26, 1908 in the village of Andabil , not far from Tabriz . It was an interesting and turbulent time in the history of both Iran and Azerbaijan. Mozaffar al-Din Shah granted the Iranian Constitution in August 1906, and soon after his death his despotic son Muhammad Ali Shah, revoked it and with the help of his Russian brigade bombarded the first Majlis in Tehran in 1907. Soon a fierce struggle for freedom ensued whose center was the capital of Iranian Azerbaijan Tabriz. For several months the royalists and constitutionalists battled on the streets of Tabriz as well as some other cities of Iran until the Shah was ousted and fled to Russia. In this period, after the 1905 uprising in Russia, the Caucasus was the hot bed of revolution and its revolutionaries had close ties with the activists of both Iran and Turkey. Even some militia groups from the north were fighting in Tabriz. The First World War increased the political tension of these turbulent times. After the demise of the Tsarist Russia in 1917, Baku was occupied first by the British then by the Ottomans just before the short-lived Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan from 1918 to 1920. Soon after the Bolsheviks took over, they effectively severed close ties which existed between two Azerbaijans.

During the First World War the family of Mir Jalal moved to Baku. His father was one of nearly half million people who in the search of work and better life left Iran to work in the oil fields of Baku in the early decades of the century. Some years later the family decided to return to Iran and at this time Mir Jalal was studying at a gymnasium in Ganjah. Being an extremely bright student, the school principal asked Mir Jalal's father

to leave him there to continue his studies. Thus Mir Jalal was separated from his family for decades to come. He graduated from a Teaching Training College at the age of twenty and soon after became the principal of a school in the remote region of Gadabey. Early in the Soviet period teachers were in demand and well-paid and Mir Jalal was very happy with his job at the school.

Mir Jalal, who had received his degree in education in 1928 in Ganjah, two years later went to Ghazan University in Tatarstan, where Lenin once had been a student. Later on Mir Jalal went to the Institute of Higher Education of Baku. While studying he was doing research and writing for various newspapers. Among them the most notable was Genj Ishchi (Young Worker) for which many outstanding literary men of Azerbaijan contributed early in their lives. In 1933 he was working as researcher of Azerbaijani literary history at the State University of Azerbaijan. After writing a book on the Poetry of Fuzuli, the famous fifteenth century Azeri poet, as his Masters thesis, in 1947 he completed his doctoral dissertation on Literary Schools in Azerbaijan with special emphasis on the famous satirical journal Mulla Nasereddin (1906-1932) and its writers. It was in the same year that he became a professor at the State University of Baku and devoted his life to teaching and writing. Mir Jalal died in Baku on September 28, 1978.

Drama and fiction were new literary genres in Azerbaijani literature. The outspoken and liberal reformer and writer Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadah (1812-1878) under the influence of Moliére, Shakespeare, Gogol and Griboedov, wrote six comedies and a short story between 1850 and 1856.

Akhundzadeh used satire as a means of combating superstition, hypocrisy, despotism and fanaticism. He regarded satire and humorous realism as the best means to awaken his people who had grown accustomed to wrongdoing, repression and corruption. It was the same tradition which was followed by Jalil Memedqulizadeh (1866-1932), Tahirzadeh Sabir (1862-1911) and many other outstanding writers and poets in the journal Mulla Nasreddin, which exercised a considerable influence not only in

Azerbaijan but also in Iran and Turkey. Jalil Memedqulizadeh in his beautiful short stories and novels further expanded the horizons of realistic prose in Azerbaijani and Sabir with his subtle sarcasm, humanism and delightful satire set examples formany future writers. Mir Jalal followed in their footsteps in creating hischaracters.

Mir Jalal's most famous novel is The Manifest of a Youth, which was published in 1938 and has been translated into many languages. Cast in the tradition of Soviet fiction about class struggle, it depicts the life of a mother and her two sons in early 1920s in Baku. The repressive measures of a local landowner forces the two brothers to flee their village: the older brother ends up amongst the early Bolshevik workers and becomes a heroic revolutionary, while the younger a boy of seven or eight years old, thrown out by his employer, freezes to death in a severe winter. The mother in search of her sons is some what involved in revolutionary activities. Apart from its ideological side, the novel is an imitation between Victor Hugo's Les Miserables and Gorki's Mother.

A second novel Achiq Kitab (The Open Book, 1941), which created a real sensation in Azerbaijan and was criticized by many party members, is a very different type of work. It is about people who look at the society from the narrow prospective of their personal interest and do not mind to sacrifice everything for their purpose. Karim Galdiyev's works at the office of wheat procurement in one of the regions. He steals and cheats and, in a word, he is corruption incarnate in Soviet officialdom. He is transferred to Baku, but he prospers even further in the corrupt circles of the capital.

Both in his novels and short stories the prose style of Mir Jalal is extremely lucid, simple and vividly descriptive. Mir Jalal has become one of the most admired prose writers of Azerbaijan. He was part of a distinguished literary coterie which included the writer of historical novels Muhammad Said Ordubadi, the playwright Husain Javid, the great lyrical poet M. Mushviq (both of these died in exile in Siberia) , the poet Samad Vurghun and the writer Husain Mehdi and with all of them he was closely associated.

In his short stories Mir Jalal does not indulge in party politics. In order to trace the background of Mir Jalal's fiction, especially his short stories, one has to look into the development of realistic fiction and satire in Azerbaijan.

Though Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh apart from his plays wrote a short historical fiction taken from an event in the sixteenth century Iranian history, it was Abdulrahim Haqverdiev (1870-1933) who introduced short story into Azeri literature. Mir Jalal knew him personally and admired him greatly. Also Jalil Memedqulizadeh, the editor of the journal Mulla Nasreddin, was greatly responsible for the development of short story in Azerbaijan. The Russian critic Belinsky has said that " realistic fiction in Russian literature has emerged from Gogol's Overcoat " and Mir Jalal has said that in a similar fashion "Azerbaijani realistic fiction came out of the "Post Box" of Jalil Mamadgulizade." "The Post Box" is one of many humorous stories written by Jalil Memedqulizadeh in Mulla Nasreddin. An Azeri villager comes to see his landlord in the city , where a letter is given to him to drop in the mail box. He does not know whether he has to stand by the mail box and guard his landlord's letter or to leave. At this time a Russian mailman appears to take away the letters.
A fight between them ensues and they are taken to the police station where the landlord explains how the mail system works.

With many humorous and satirical stories , articles, pungent satirical poems of Tahirzadeh Sabir, the great satirist poet of Azerbaijan, and excellent cartoons by Azim Azimzadeh and two German cartoonists Roemer and Schelling, Mulla Nasreddin became of the most influential periodicals not only in the Caucasus. It was under the influence of Sabir, Jalil Memedqulizadeh and Hagverdiyev that Mir Jalal's satirical fiction developed. And to these three he acknowledges his indebtedness.

In his works of fiction Mir Jalal has two fairly distinct types of stories. One is his novels where though he develops them artistically and masterfully, yet he is still influenced by the political atmosphere of his time. They are novels of ideas typical of the works of the Soviet era. In his short stories he does not deal so much with idealogy of his time but

rather human types that one encounters in every society and every time. He satirizes bureaucrats who are hopelessly out of touch with realities and they live in the world of officialdom and regulations. In the story "O, Ismail, make him Understand" the sister of a dictatorial ruler is satirized who buys whatever she wants without paying anything to anyone. It is said that the story is based on reality and the dictator in question is Baqirov who ruled Azerbaijan from 1928 to 1953 with an iron hand. In "Used to Scolding" the mentality of the people who are used to be bullied is analyzed. Such types not only tolerate being abused but also if someone does not bully them around, they think there must be something amiss. In "Talking of Peaches." excessive fascination with everything Western is criticized. This is the beginning of what in the Middle East became criticism of "Westomania" (or Gharabzadagi as the Iranian writer Jalal Alahmad called it in his book Gharabzadagi).

Sometimes the stories of Mir Jalal are mere sketches and what stands out in them are the depiction of characters. Very often they depict people that we know them in our own society with their idiosyncrasies, their aspirations and their shortcomings. At the same time , in these stories Mir Jalal gives a very interesting picture of Azerbaijani society under Soviet rule. As seen in the "Etiquettes for New Weddings" it is supposedly an atheistic society which has not lost all of its Islamic roots. In "Matishka" the Russian and Azerbaijani sides of the society are contrasted.

Apart from numerous works of literary criticism, Mir Jalal has written more than a dozen novels and nearly one thousand short stories, which are collected in volumes such as The Thief in the Garden (1937), Congradulations! (Gozun Ayden, 1939), Stories of My Country (1942), Life Stories (1945) and Simple Stories (1955). Mir Jalal in his short stories covers a wide variety of subjects and characters. More than complexity of the plot, he concentrates on the depiction of characters. He has an incredible wealth of imagination and the men and women of his stories can come from every walk of life. In this way he also gives a panoramic view of the society in which he lived. As an artist

Mir Jalal should be remembered for his originality, for the depth of his vision, humanity, for his pungent sense of humor and memorable characters that he created.

In this collection of short stories which is being published on the occasion of 90th anniversary of Mir Jalal's birthday, I have tried to give a fair sample of his shorter fiction. I hope that this first attempt to introduce Mir Jalal into English speaking world will serve as a prelude for further publications. Here I would especially like to thank Ambassador Hafiz Pashayev of the Republic of Azerbaijan who has helped me in many ways and has provided many valuable details about his father's life.

Dried Up In Meetings

(1954)

by **Mir Jalal**

Dried-up fig, dried-up apricot and dried-up wild berry- you often see these things, but a man dried up in meetings is rarely identified.

He's the one dried up and mummified from meetings who has lost his zest for life. You know the type even if you don't know his name. You know him well and often pass him in front of his office or on the stairs-He's the thin man, leaning forward taking long strides.

Where is he rushing off to? Another meeting. Under his arm, his gray worn-out attaché case is full of papers and notes untidily thrown together.

What are all those papers? Protocols! All his life, immersed in thought, frowning, head bent down, face clouded, unaware of the world-that's the way he goes about his business.

For him, there's no difference between day and night, spring and fall, hot and cold, heaven and earth. None of them have any significance. One is amazed to see this sullen-looking man who is so distant from the sounds of spring, the fragrance of flowers, the songs of birds, or of music and joy! He doesn't enjoy these things.

Do you think this man-the incarnation of bureaucracy itself-will be different in his private family life? Or that when he comes home and takes off his hat and meets his

wife and children, his personality changes? That a light brightens up on his face and a smile appears on his lips?

If so, you're mistaken. No, he is a man of principle, steadfastness and directness. His own family life is like a meeting. He emphatically believes that all of us have been created for meetings. Our heads were given to us for making appointments, our fingers for writing regulations, our voices for making speeches and our hands for applauding at meetings.
To him, the whole universe has been created as the result of an important meeting and everything functions according to a single decree.

If you don't believe it, look up at the sky. See how millions of stars are gathered around the moon, who is chairing the meeting. For thousands of years such a heated discussion has been going on in the sky, and occasionally, its thunder-like sound is heard on earth.

Catch a glimpse of Dried-Up conversing with his wife, Mayransa. "Comrade Mayransa, it has been suggested that you wash my socks and hang them up to dry."

When his wife does not answer, Dried-Up gets up and taps the blunt end of a pencil against a table, insisting, "Answer is requested, Comrade Mayransa."

His not-so-easy-life that was usually spent in meetings, appointments and in giving speeches was shaken several times by his own family affairs. Let me explain.
One evening 18 years ago when Dried-Up returned from a meeting, he was surprised at not finding his wife at home. He wondered what meeting she could be attending at such a time of night. A short while later, the neighbor's wife stopped by and congratulated him.

"Brother Dried-Up, Good news! You have a beautiful daughter. Mayransa Khanum is in

the hospital waiting for you."
Dried-Up didn't answer. His face only showed signs of anger and fear. It darkened even more when he asked, "Was this necessary? Who directed this order? What will they say at work?"

Then they brought the baby home all bundled up. Dried-Up did not leave his world of papers and notes to look at the child. Mayransa asked her husband to decide upon a good name. Dried-Up took the matter to the meeting of his club. Many names were suggested there, but he accepted none of them, insisting rather on his own ideas. He suggested, "Ma'aruzeh," which means "Written Report." People in the meeting roared with laughter and then they applauded. And that's how his daughter's name came to be "Ma'aruzeh."

Ma'aruzeh grew up. She began to read. And, eventually, that's what drew her father's attention. Whenever Ma'aruzeh needed books or writing pads, Dried-Up would observe all the formalities.

First, his daughter would be required to write her father a request. Then the request would have to be sent to school to be approved by her teacher. After that, Mayransa, his wife, would have to sign it. Eventually, Dried-Up would get around to buying the book or the pad from a shop.

After getting his daughter's signature as receipt, he would assign a date for it, "until the second week of the coming month."
He would then send a copy of this record to his office in order "to keep them informed," and he kept another copy in his own archives just in case anyone should ask him about it in the future.

The principal of the school spoke to Ma'aruzeh several times. "My child, ask your father

to come to school, I have something important to tell him."

Dried-Up would always send back the reply, "I have a meeting to attend."
When the girl grew up, Dried-Up's problems multiplied. He would give the same answer to all her would-be suitors. "Fill out a form. I'll look into it." The suitors, on hearing this, would disappear.

Eventually, Askar, a taxi driver who was very sincere in his intentions towards Ma'aruzeh, refused to give up his pursuit. And Mayransa was happy about the prospect of having Askar as her son-in-law so she tried to influence her husband.
"Dear, they're asking for the hand of Ma'aruzeh."
"Be more specific. Who wants her? And under what conditions?"
"The driver, Askar."
"Where is his letter of request?"
"There is no letter."
"Don't be ridiculous. If there is no request, no forms and no guarantee, why are you wasting my time?"
Mayransa pleaded. "Perhaps, whenever you don't have any meetings, you could meet this man-he could come and talk with you."
Dried-Up repeated the name of the man several times and then shook his head at Mayransa.
"His name is very old fashioned, very old fashioned. Whoever wants to marry Ma'aruzeh should have a name worthy of her."
"If you mention it to him, he'll change his name."
"I don't need him. If someone wants our daughter, he should send his description and photograph. I could get to know him, and then we could start to talk about it."

But Dried-Up only repeated his refusal. "I said he should send his job description, and then we could talk about it. There is no need for further discussion."

Mayransa said nothing further. Askar was told what Dried-Up had said. He replied, "If he wants my resume, let him go get it himself from my office, but I know an easier way than this so we won't have to bother him needlessly."
That evening Dried-Up was arranging his minutes and official reports. Mayransa opened the closet door and was putting on some new clothes. When her husband looked up, he saw his wife in a rather happy and festive mood, quickly getting dressed.

"Dear, where are you going?" he asked surprised.
"Nowhere. There is a small meeting."
"Where is Ma'aruzeh?"
"She is at her own meeting and has sent you a note."
Mayransa took a small envelope from under a book on the table and gave it to her husband. "It seems that the kids have an appointment. Read and find out."
When he read the letter, he became livid with anger.

Dear Father,
We have discussed this extensively. We have thought about it and talked it over. We didn't want to bother you so we've gone to the Notary. Tomorrow is our Wedding Day. It will be in the home of the bridegroom. If you have time after your meetings, please drop by. Your daughter, Ma'aruzeh.

Dried-Up dried up even more. He jumped up, saying, "What? What? They've issued a resolution without consulting me? Who has certified this?"

Mayransa, without losing her calm demeanor replied, "You must certify it!"
Dried-Up lost his temper. "But I haven't read his request nor investigated his job. Without having some discussion, how can I approve of such a decision? What kind of insanity is this?"

Mayransa put on her boots and uttered her final words. "Whether you approve or not is your problem. I will be at Askar's house for the wedding. Look after the house. Don't leave the doors and windows open!"

And with those words, she slammed the door and stormed out.

For Dried Up, it was as if the whole house had begun to spin around him and a millstone had been tied around his neck.

Anket Anketov

(1932)

From the day that Anketov was appointed as Chief of the United Bath Houses, people stood outside his office, waiting to make their appeals to him. Sometimes there was a long queue - someone complaining about his boss, another asking for a raise, another wanting to change positions, another wanting to study at the university while another wanted to take a vacation at a health resort.

Anketov was new on the job. It was an important position with lots of responsibilities but very few staff to assist him. Many believed that Anketov would not be able to handle the position and some had even opposed his appointment. But when Anketov heard such criticism he said, "Let them criticize me. Why should I care about such people - these dregs of capitalism? They want to continue their despicable work and are afraid that they're doomed to be wiped out. Just leave them to me. I'll get rid of them."

The first thing he did after getting the job was to summon all the managers of the bath houses, and asked them to bring their "personal files". "Yes, sir!" they replied, and tried to pull up chairs for a meeting. But Anketov would not allow them to sit. "Yes, sir!" is not the same as "Here they are, sir! I need you to get your personal files and bring them to me now."

"But Comrade Anketov, if we leave, there won't be a meeting," one of the men said.

Anketov was a bit puzzled by this statement. Opening his arms as if to embrace someone or something, he spoke with a calm voice, "Without a personal file, what's the use of a meeting, my son? Shouldn't I know with whom I'm meeting?"

So, the managers got up and left Anketov's office. They returned with their personal files, some from home and some from the office. And some hurriedly filled out application forms while others prepared resumes and work files. When all the personal files were on his desk, Anketov apologized to the managers and said, "Comrades, I want to get to know all of you. That's why I'm asking you to wait outside my office. I will have my secretary call you in shortly." Saying this, he shut his door and began to page through the personal files, reading them slowly and haltingly. "Mmmm...Mursal Hadiyev. Born 1911. Father, blacksmith." Anketov underlined this word in red and put a question mark in the margin. Then he examined the rest of Hadiyev's file.

The managers had waited about an hour in the hallway, when, from the adjacent room, Anketov's secretary appeared and announced, "Murad Ahmadov may go in now. Mursal Hadiyev must go home and return with his father's certificate. All others, please come in."

Ahmadov didn't understand, "Comrade, what are you telling me? Let me talk to him and see what he wants of me!" Hadiyev joined in and shouted, "What certificate? My father has been dead for more than thirty years. Even his bones have disintegrated by now!"

The secretary, making fun of him, said, "Why are you acting like such a simpleton? The chief doesn't want your father literally. He just wants to know his profession." Hadiyev pleaded, "My dear, let him look at my documents! He was a blacksmith. All the information is right there in my file."

In order to get away from the complaints, the secretary returned to her desk, but the managers would not leave her alone. Finally she cried in exasperation, Write a

letter!"

"What kind of letter?"

"Write a letter so that we can see what you want."

"We don't want anything! You tell us what you want from us!"

The secretary said, "You know very well that the chief is checking the records of his staff. He's been reading your personal files for an hour. Now he calls me and tells me that your records do not satisfy him."

Ahmedov left in protest. Hadiyev waited until the meeting was over so that he could talk to the chief.

Anketov did not keep the managers long. He gave them strict orders to prepare their staffs' personal files and to bring them to him in three days. After the managers had gone, Hadiyev came in. Anketov's head was down, buried in the files he had so nicely arranged on his desk. He raised his head and not seeing any certificate in Hadiyev's hand he asked, "What do you want?"

"I don't want anything. According to your secretary, you wanted to question me about something." The chief ran his fingers through his hair and asked Hadiyev, "What is your name?"

As soon as Hadiyev answered, the chief found his file. Uttering a meaningful "yes," he put his finger on the question he had written on Hadiyev's file.

"You have written this in a rather vague manner. I read your file. I read all of it very carefully, yet I still don't know you very well. For instance, in one place you say your father was a blacksmith. There are many types of blacksmiths."

Hadiyev interrupted him. "What type? He was a blacksmith. He shod horses and

oxen."

A sarcastic smile appeared on Anketov's lips. Shaking his head, he said, "The question is not about horses or oxen. The question is about their owners. Did your father shoe the animals of wealthy exploiters or those of the poor and helpless?"
Hadiyev began to laugh. "Whoever gave him moneyhe shod his animal!"

"But surely, during the bourgeoisie period, when your father lived and worked, the landowners had more money than the poor."
"Of course, the landowners were wealthy."
"So, as you say, most of your father's earnings came from the exploiters. Isn't this so?"
Hadiyev asked, "What difference does it make?"
Anketov, not raising his head from the papers, raised his hand and ordered Hadiyev to silence. He went on, "Just a moment, just a moment. Isn't it so?"
"Isn't what so?"
"Isn't it true that landowners had more horses shod?"
"It is true."
"That will do. You can go."
Hadiyev said, "I don't understand why are you so interested in my father's occupation as a blacksmith. Do you have an animal to be shod?"

Again, Anketov did not raise his head from the papers. He placed his left thumb on the family name "Hadiyev," shook his right index finger at the man standing before him, and taking his pen he wrote, "You are not allowed to have the job. Take ten days at your own expense and clarify your parent's social position."

Because the chief was so absorbed in the personal files, application forms, resumes, character recommendations, investigations, explanations and requests, he very likely

did not hear Hadiyev's last words as he left the office. Anketov could hardly wait until he could get the chance to organize his files. He really believed that everything depended on those folders. Some days he would sit in his office from morning until late at night reading personal files, one-by-one, like a delightful novel. He would arrange the folders according to the social positions of their owners. The folder of any person he disliked would go to the bottom of the pile, while the folder of the person he liked would be put on top. In the margin of request letters, he would pen, "I gave him another job. Fifty manats added to the salary. As you have worked hard, I am giving you a raise."

Anketov would have real conversations with the folders that he'd occasionally take from one shelf to the other. Someone overhearing him might have thought that Anketov was dealing with five or six kindergarten children. It was as if Anketov were taking the hand of these children, putting one child here, one child there, and still another child on a chair. Sometimes he talked to the folders as if they were real human beings, or in his own words, "workers." To Anketov, it seemed that these folders were actually the good and bad workers. The real people - the bath house managers, cashiers, boiler attendants, cleaners-were mere shadows of their files. The actual thing was these folders and there neatness and accuracy indicated the honesty and integrity of the owner. If "Fired" appeared in the margin, its owner would disappear like a phantom. On the contrary, the person who had "Accepted" written in his file would be called to work that very day.

If someone told the chief that one of his workers was ill and was in the hospital, Anketov often refused to believe the news. Immediately, he would go to the files to look up the personal folder. If there was no mention of illness there, he would say, "I beg your pardon, but he is safe and sound and is doing a fine job." Sometimes he was so familiar with a particular folder that he would not even open it. He would simply look at the shelves, and seeing the folder number in its right place, shake his head and say, "He's doing a fine job."

It was at such moments that his secretary would slap her hand on her knee and exclaim, "Oh my God, he doesn't believe me! Comrade Anketov, Gurbanali has been in the army for the last three months! He sent a letter from some far-off region, and I think he's presently working as a sanitation worker."

Anketov would get angry, but controlling his anger he would say, "Stupid, can't you understand? Don't you see his personal file in front of your eyes? How could he go anywhere without it? If he had gone, his personal file would have gone with him to the appropriate place!"

Frustrated by such explanations, the secretary would walk out, not wanting to continue arguing with him. It was useless to do otherwise because the files were, in fact, everything to him. It was as if whatever one did, whatever one believed or whatever one thought immediately penetrated the personal file and remained there - indelibly - until the end of time. In order to evaluate someone's work, it was enough to bring that person's file to the chiefalmost as if to the Day of Judgment.

One day, in one of the meetings, Anketov stood up and said, "Comrades, we have a tradition here in the bath houses which is really quite absurd. I'm referring to the Complaint Books. Every passerby stops and writes something in them. We don't know if he's a friend, an enemy or if he's neutral. I propose that the person who files a complaint should first fill out a request form and have it certified by us; otherwise, we should not allow his complaints. People write and write, and we don't know into which personal file you should place their complaints."

Upon hearing this, Anketov's boss, the Head of the Municipal Department, interrupted him. "Comrade Anketov, that's enough! Be sensible. It seems that you are having a hard time listening to the voices of the masses and learning their

opinions. You must understand that the Book of Complaints is the voice of the people - our customers' opinions. The complaints are a permanent record!"

Anketov blushed deeply and regretted what he had said. He asked for permission to speak and with quivering lips, said, "I have made a grave mistake. Now I understand my mistake and I fully accept it. But please, I beg you, don't write this incident in my personal file." Anketov guarded his own personal file fiercely.

Sometimes the managers approached and complained, "Comrade Anketov, the workers want you to come and see them, to see how they work."

Immediately, Anketov would pull out the workers' folder and ask, "Which worker requested that? Let me see. . ." Then he would point to the shelves and sigh, "Day and night, am I not with them? What more do they want?"

2

Then one day the manager of Bath House Number 10 needed some workers. He wanted a bath attendant for the women's section, a cashier and two cleaning women. Since he knew Anketov's style, he had already prepared the applicants' personal files, put them in a folder, and brought them to Anketov. He said, "The applicants are at the door. Do you want to see them?"
"What do I want to see them for? I'm not interested in what they look like!"
"I thought you might want to talk to them."

Anketov slapped his large hand on the folder and said, "Here are the files. I want to talk to these."
The manger left and Anketov began to examine the "future employees."

One of the personal files belonged to Nuru Nuruzade, a member of the Young Communist League (Komsomol), and the manger wanted to employ him as a cashier. He had some experience in accounting and in high school, he had received excellent marks in mathematics. Another file belonged to Nisa, daughter of Qanbar, who had six years experience in Bath House Number 11 in Tbilisi. She was very good and the manager wanted to take her as the bath attendant for the women's section. Sharabanu, an old woman, and her divorced daughter, Masma, both wanted to be cleaning women.

Anketov took his red pen and wrote his comments in the margins. He rejected Masma, asking her to bring an official document about her relations with her ex-husband, but he employed Sharabanu. He was really pleased with the personal file and the account of Nisa, daughter of Qanbar. He was becoming more impressed as he read, "She is the daughter of a blacksmith, none of her relatives include any suspicious characters, she is a housewife and is enrolled in the literacy classes. I need an employee with such a clean record." He made her a cashier. Instead of Nisa, he made Nuru the bath attendant of the women's section. He filed the files in different folders on the shelves and came back rubbing his hands together in satisfaction.

3

The manager called on the phone and complained that Nisa, daughter of Qanbar, did not want to accept the cashier's position, and that she had every right to do so because she was illiterate and could barely add and subtract numbers. Anketov was beside himself with anger. "Who is she not to accept? Let me talk to her!"

He put down the phone, quickly picked up her folder and began to scold her. "I really didn't expect this from you, not from you. I had absolute trust in you and that was why I appointed you to this position. Is this a joke? I call it nothing but a joke. Don't joke about such things! Now get to work!"

He put the papers back in the folder and returned it to the shelves. Suddenly, the door opened and a teenage boy came in.
"Hello, are you Comrade Anketov?"
Anketov walked around the desk as if busily looking for something. Then, raising his head, he asked, "And what if I am?"
The young boy replied, "I have come to thank you. You want to make me the attendant at the women's bath."
"What do you mean 'want?' It has been two days since I appointed you. You should be working there by now."
"No, excuse me, but in order to take this job, I'd have to be out of my mind, just like you."

Outraged, Anketov stared at Nuru, but he said nothing. He went to the shelves and removed Nuru's personal file. Angrily, he opened the file and wrote, "You're fired! Go wherever you want to go!"

Nuru grabbed the folder from Anketov's hand. Anketov was taken aback. "Be careful, the papers might fall out!" he cried.
"Let me see what you've written in my file."

Nuru opened the folder and read Anketov's note. He burst out laughing. "Look at this idiot and his claims! Who are you to fire me? You fool!"

Saying this, he tore the Chief's note into pieces, right in front of him. "Uff," a sigh escaped Anketovs' lips, as he fainted and collapsed on the floor in a heap.

Hey Ismayil, Make Him Understand

(1962)

They say that campaign against bribery is underway. That's quite true. But what I want to know is, how do you define bribery? Bribery is receiving a request from an official, which isn't legal. I give him some money and he ignores the law and does what I want. That's bribery!

Another example is one in which I might have a special relationship with a minister or a chief, such that whenever we are having a special dish with rice pilaf, I can't eat without inviting him. I ask him to join us and then I prepare a feast. Some scholars believe that this is a different sort of impropriety. But in this case no cash is involved; instead, goods are exchanged as bribes.

There are other situations, which can't be considered either as bribe-taking or as showing respect. I don't know what they should be called. When you ask, they say, "No, this is different". But what I'd like to know is, just how is it different?

About 15 years ago, I was a teacher in the town of Khachmaz [in the northern part of Azerbaijan near the Caspian coast and not far from the Russian border]. I used to teach math right in the middle of town, in middle school that faced the central square.

Now there was a certain woman in that town, or I should say, a certain lady with short hair who used to wear riding boots. Whatever this lady wanted, no one ever refused. Her name was Rutubat Khanim [Mrs. Rutubat]. You would see her point her finger toward a big piece of choice meat, and say to the butcher, "Cousin, what is that chunk of meat?"

"It's a prime piece of lamb!" he'd reply.

"Put it on the scale!"

"OK, as you wish!"

"Give me a hand!"

When the butcher wanted to weigh half of the piece, the lady would say, "There is no need to weigh it. Just wrap it up and I'll take it as it is."

"Yes, ma'am!" the butcher would reply. Then he'd take the meat, marbled with fat, wrap it nicely and give it to her. Rutubat Khanim would take the meat and leave.

I was shocked. Why didn't she pay? I'd think to myself, "Perhaps they know each other and she'll pay later." But I'd see this same lady in a restaurant, and after eating and wiping her mouth, she'd leave the restaurant without paying. Or, I'd see her entering the grocery shop, and after filling her basket with sugar, tea, rice and butter, she'd leave without paying, leaving the grocer bewildered.

It was amazing! Perhaps we had entered the era of true communism and money was no longer necessary. But if that were true than I was the only one who wasn't benefiting!

I should add that the lady with the short haircut, Rutubat Khanim, never went alone on these shopping excursions. She was always accompanied by a tall military man, who would carry her basket or her suitcase. As she made her rounds in the bazaar, the basket would get heavier, but never did she pay a penny. This was most amazing. Even the chief of the market couldn't do this. At least the tax collector gives a receipt. Even the food inspector doesn't behave in this way!

Once, I saw Rutubat Khanim in a newly opened fabric shop. She had ordered several rolls of fabric, and from each roll she took enough fabric to cut a dress. But this time, when she started to leave the shop, the shopkeeper called out, "Wait!"

"What is it?" she asked.

"But, my sister, you forgot the money," he replied.

"What money?"

"The money for the fabric!"

The woman turned to her tall companion and said, "Comrade Ismayil, please make him understand!"

Ismayil approached the shopkeeper and said, "Forget about it!"

"What?"

"I said, 'forget about it!'"

"So, what am I to do?"

"She is the sister of 'the man.' Put it on a special account!"

"On what?"

"On a special account!"

The fabric salesman was bewildered. The lady, as if trying to blind him, pointed her finger toward him. "Where has this stupid person come from? Don't you know who I am?"

"No, my sister. I don't know."

"You will know. Go and sit down."

"But, how?"

Again, she turned to her companion and said, "Hey Ismayil, make him understand! From what god-forsaken place have they brought this man? Couldn't they find anyone else in Guba, is that why they brought this guy?"

Ismayil called the store manager, who turned to the fabric salesman and shouted, "Forget about it! Put it on a special account!"

I witnessed this entire scene. I didn't understand. This was neither bribery nor respect for some minister. This was said out of fear. Out of fear, one gives his goods and his money to a robber, a thief or a highwayman, but this type of thing happens in the mountains or in other places not in the center of town in broad daylight in front of everyone! In the heyday of the Soviet government, why should a man give away his goods? This is unheard of!

I thought to myself, "I'll bet that this is a different type of fear. I'll bet that Rutubat Khanim is a different type of lady." It turned out that she was the sister of the most powerful man in the country. Nobody dared stand up to her. As soon as she appeared in the market, everyone tried to hide and stash their goods away from sight. But she was too quick and took keen for these people. Like an eagle, she would descend upon them, open their bags and fly away taking whatever she wanted. For many years, this lady rode her horse unchallenged in that town.

But in the summer of 1953, Rutubat Khanim stopped coming. No one knew what had happened to her. One said that she had died, but her military man, Ismayil, was still in the bazaar. Standing as though he had just retired, Ismayil would put his two hands behind his back and stand and watch the everyday affairs of the world.

"Hey, Ismayil, where is Rutubat Khanim?"

Ismayil would shift his weight from one foot to the other, look around, but not say a single word. Ismayil, who used to be the one who made everyone "understand," was now silent. He didn't want to speak.

"Ismayil, what happened to that woman?"
"What woman?"
"Rutubat Khanim."
Ismayil was silent. He scratched his neck.
"Where is Rutubat Khanim?"
"Let's talk about something else," he would reply.

Rutubat Khanim had disappeared without a trace. At one time, you could have seen her march through town in her riding boots, followed like a shadow by Ismayil who carried her basket and answered, "Yes, ma'am" to her orders. You might have thought that she was the town goddess. It's hard to imagine that someone with roots as deep as Rutubat Khanim's could vanish from this town so easily. But 1953 was a terrible year for her. Whatever happened in the summer of that year, the result was that the wield of Rutubat Khanim's power was broken. Then, she simply vanished. No one saw her; no one heard her ordering Ismayil around again. The townspeople laughed and were delighted to be free of the chief and his sister, the bully.

The only person still associated with Rutubat Khanim was Ismayil. Like an autumn leaf, he became yellow and dried-up. He even shrank in size. He didn't have anyone he could make "understand." He had no patience. Whenever anyone asked about Rutubat Khanim, he'd get embarrassed. His face would turn red and he'd say, "Let's talk about something else."

"Ismayil, may those days be gone and never return!" And he would just say, "Let's talk about something else."

On March 5, 1953, Joseph Stalin died. He had been the head of Communist Party and the State Leader of Soviet Union since Lenin's death in 1924. This story may refer to the powerful and dictatorial communist leader of Azerbaijan Mir Jafar Baghirov whose sister abused his power. Most leaders and their relatives did the same thing. Baghirov was a native of the town of Guba and a protégé of Stalin.

Used to Scoldings

A Short Story by Mir Jalal

(1962)

Translated by **Hasan Javadi**

Habits! Some say habits are a good thing; others say, no, they're bad. But who's right?

In the winter our apartments are heated with hot water pipes. In the basement, there are huge boilers that send hot steam up through the pipes.

The person who stokes the boilers and turns them off - the boiler room attendant - is always busy fussing around with them. His name is Ghulam. Everybody knows him. He's a very good guy. He knows everybody and everybody's profession.

Upstairs from us is an apartment which belongs to a government minister. I don't know why Ghulam always used to keep such a close watch on that apartment. He always tried to see that the minister was comfortable by making his apartment pleasantly warm. The minister also paid special attention to this matter.

Every morning you could see him standing down in front of the boiler room, addressing Uncle Ghulam in his husky voice, "Ghulam, the kids are freezing. Why don't you heat up this damn thing? What's the matter?" Or "Ghulam, why is it so hot? The house is almost on fire, man!"

For a period of several years, Ghulam put up with the minister's comments - sometimes raising the heat, sometimes lowering it. Every now and then, he would even go upstairs and check the temperature himself. Then he'd come back down and take appropriate action. He was so accustomed to these things that he took orders from the minister as if he were in the military, ready to fulfill every command.

The minister realized that Ghulam needed to be ordered around, and so he would say, "Ghulam, that's enough. Don't turn the apartment into a sauna. Lower the heat of the boilers." Or, "Ghulam, why is it so cold? There's no hot water. What's going on?"

Ghulam would raise his hand up to his forehead and say, "Upon my eyes." Then he would rush down to the boiler room.

One day the minister moved out of the apartment and another one took his place. This one was from another ministry. I'm not quite sure where he worked. But it was clear definitely that he was a minister because every morning a car would come and take him to his office. And every evening it would bring him back home. Of course, Ghulam wanted to keep his job, and accordingly, he was very attentive. Again, he would stand at the door waiting for orders. But strangely enough, no one ordered him around. This minister would simply reply to his greeting and drive away. Ghulam expected him to complain. But not a single word. One day, two days, five days passed the same way. Ghulam got bored and rather annoyed.

"How is this? The minister doesn't say anything? Why isn't he demanding anything of me? Is he annoyed? Doesn't he want to talk to me? Perhaps someone has told him something bad about me?"

A few times Uncle Ghulam even waited at the door for the minister and once after greeting him, dared to ask, "Comrade Minister, how is the heating system? Are you suffering from the cold?"

"We have no complaints! Don't worry. Thanks a lot."

Uncle Ghulam came back downstairs dejected and disappointed. He was puzzled, "What's going on? To be a minister and not order the boiler attendant around? No, this wasn't right. Definitely, someone has been gossiping behind my back. The minister doesn't even look me in the eyes."

The next morning Ghulam was at the door again. This time he inquired of the minister's wife, "Ma'am, how is the central heating working? Is the temperature of the rooms to your liking?"

Before she could answer, the minister's voice was heard, "It's fine. Thanks a lot, Uncle Ghulam. It's just fine!"

Ghulam was surprised. "My God! this good-for-nothing fellow doesn't understand anything about hot and cold. Last night all of the boilers were working, and it was blazing hot, but he didn't say a thing!"

The new minister, it turns out, was a quiet, patient and orderly person. Whenever it was necessary, he would turn the heating control on or off in the apartment and maintain the temperature at an appropriate level. He didn't demand anything from Uncle Ghulam.

But Ghulam was apprehensive and kept wondering, "What's going on? What has this man heard about me? Why isn't he saying anything? He has heard something bad about me. That's why he's avoiding me."

It was obvious that Uncle Ghulam was used to being scolded and didn't want to give up this habit. While most people who get bashed over the head do their best to avoid

such abuse and free themselves of it, there are others like Ghulam who start worrying if they aren't getting bullied around. Ghulam kept wondering what had happened and why the minister wasn't ordering him around.

"What has he heard? God help me!" Uncle Ghulam said to himself.

He didn't have to wait long. One day he was instructed to go to the manager's office. When he heard this, he became worried sick, "Ah, I wonder what's up? I wonder what the minister has said to the complex manager? Is he angry with me?"

When Ghulam arrived, the manager stood up, shook his hand and told him that he was going to be honored in an upcoming celebration.

"Uncle Ghulam, we're pleased with your work. You've been working here night and day. You try your best to make the people comfortable here. May you live long and always be healthy. I've consulted the Committee of the Workers' Union, and we've decided to reward you with an extra month's salary."

The complex manager smiled and shook Ghulam's hand again.

"Do you have any objections?"

Seeing that the boiler attendant was standing there very quietly, he motioned for him to sit down.

"Please, make yourself comfortable," he said.

Uncle Ghulam was so overwhelmed with joy he didn't know what to do. He was witnessing an unexpected situation and listening to words he wasn't used to hearing. Nobody was scolding him. Nobody was ordering him around. No one had come on the hour to check the boilers or to readjust the temperature. Raising his head, he looked around. He gazed out the window at the clear blue sky overhead. Instead of the

badgering and scolding that he was expecting from the manager, there was only bright sun shining overhead.

Smiling quietly, he looked at the manager, thinking, "Wonder of wonders, why couldn't things have always been this way!"

The Cotton Picker Who Knew Everything

(1964)

"Let the baker bake the bread, and give an extra one to him. (Old Azeri proverb).

You've heard it before: "So and so has lost the respect of people and now everyone makes fun of him." I wouldn't want that to happen to anyone. Being respected and influential and then having no one pay any attention to you is the most painful thing to have to endure. It's understandable if the person has committed a shameful act or loses respect by doing something bad. But the man I'm talking about is a friend that you know quite well. He has not done anything of the kind. His loss of respect came about in a very strange way.

I should say that my friend has not committed any shameful act or done anything evil. In his job, in his duties, as in his profession, he has tried to retain his position and status. But he has lost respect among the people in such a way that he himself has been amazed. Let me not hide my friend's name, Medad Ahmadov. Definitely, you all know him. In our district, everyone knows him as a skilled cotton picker, and his art has been demonstrated in the Kolkhos [collective farm] as the finest work on many occasions. Even now he is the best cotton-picker in the district and is the head of the Cotton-Pickers' Brigade.

Then you will ask, how is it that such a person is not respected?

He lost the respect of others simply by interfering in everything regardless of whether he knew anything about it or not. To tell you the truth, Medad Ahmadov himself was not so much to blame. The Executive Committee of our district was to blame. Because Medad's name was mentioned with respect everywhere, the committee started

consulting him about everything.

A draft was prepared for building a cultural center for the district. When it was being discussed the Committee would not listen to a single person. They only consulted Medad Ahmadov. He fingered each paragraph of the draft and made corrections. The Committee agreed with these so-called "suggestions," but the architects were shocked.

A statue of the poet Fuzuli was being erected in our district, but the Committee asked Medad Ahamadov about it first. "Comrade Medad, what do you say? Would it be better to have a hat on Fuzuli's head or not? Tell the artists what you think and let them do it.

" Medad Ahmadov looked around him and said, "It's very hot; it's better to be without a hat. Wearing a hat is old-fashioned."

Once again, the painters, poets, scholars and sculptors were ignored. The Committee stood by his suggestion, allowing the leader of the cotton pickers to determine the dress code of the poet. At first, the people involved respected the wishes of the Committee and the cotton picker and voiced their opinions, but later on, when they saw that the Committee slavishly followed the cotton picker, they became silent.

The Committee undertook other projects. A considerable amount of money was put aside for an electric station. Again, they asked the opinion of the cotton picker. But dear friends, whenever the name Medad was mentioned, nobody said anything. People came to think of him as not a very serious person and they turned away from him.

The head of our Committee has a very strange habit. He calls the local cook and asks his opinion about a newly proposed building project. He asks a singer about a dress fashion, a well-digger about a song, a carpenter about a legal case, and consults them on these matters. When you say, comrade chief, everybody has a profession. He waves his

hand in denial and raising his head says, "In the past it was like this. Now our people know about every profession. Don't you see me, I am the master of every profession, you name it!"

The Committee chief made the head of cotton pickers almost into a prophet, consulting him in every matter. Of course this gave him ideas, and made him think he was a great person. Nowadays when someone gets a boil on his neck, they say, "No need to go to a doctor, just consult the head of the cotton pickers!"

He has become a laughingstock. Nothing is left even of his mastery at the farm because he is busy with an easily won fame. We have an expression, "Not only did he not catch a fish, he even left his fishing rod at the river." Of course, being sorry later on has no effect. Once respect has been lost, you cannot go door to door searching for it.

Dissertation

(1944)

"Take one teaspoon of this medicine." "Take these pills." "Place a wet towel on your ear twice a day and come back in two days."

To do what the doctor says isn't difficult, but it isn't easy, eitherthere is neither the time nor the inclination. But, I'm a very patient person. Whatever a doctor has suggested, I've done. If I haven't benefited from a doctor's advice, at the very least I've been respectful.

But one recommendation was always very hard for me. When the doctor finishes your examination, writes you a prescription and gives you advice, he then says, "Come back to see me in two days." Of course, the physician always wants patients. Treating patients is his job. But heading to the doctor's office isn't my job. If I spent two hours every two days with the doctor, how could I take care of my family? Who'd earn a living for them?

What I'm saying is true! Doctors ask you to return to the clinic, but who's about to go back? When people leave the clinic, they go without even looking back. If someone returns, he doesn't return on his own; it's the sickness that brings him back.

As is customary, I said good-bye to the doctor and left. Again, he told me to come back in two days. I said, "I will." But I didn't take the prescription to the drugstore, and I don't remember how many times, if at all, I put a wet towel on my ear. I do know that my earache was decreasing, little by little. Sometimes it wasn't noticeable at all.

Two or three days later, it was about nine or ten o'clock at night, and I was reading a book when the phone rang. When I answered the phone, a young and sweet-voiced girl said my name.

"Wait a moment, please. The doctor wants to talk to you."

Suddenly, Dr. Qaraguzov, the ear, nose and throat doctor, was screaming at me over the phone, "Hey Mister, I've been waiting for you! Why didn't you come for your appointment? Please come; you cannot leave the treatment unfinished!"

I didn't know how to respond; I couldn't say a word. Hurriedly, I wrapped a kerchief around my head and went to the doctor. On the way I began to think, "Yes, the world is not without good people, and there are good doctors, such as this one. I shouldn't think that he's a doctor working only for self-interest. This isn't true at all. First of all, I'm being treated at the government's expense. Secondly, Qaraguzov gets his salary whether he treats fifty patients or none at all. The fact that Qaraguzov was seeking me out and was paying so much attention to my treatment can only be attributed to his devotion and work ethics."

Having these thoughts made me appreciate Qaraguzov even more. I felt ashamed that he had to force me to come to be treated when all he wanted was for me to be completely healthy. Instead, I felt lazy and didn't want to go to his office, which isn't even far from my house.

At any rate, I did go to see the doctor. This time, he looked into my ear even more attentively than he'd done before. When he learned that my putting a wet towel on my ear had considerably decreased the pain, he became exceedingly happy. He pulled his instrument closer and adjusted his reflecting mirror. He began to examine my ear with the utmost attention.

"Comrade doctor, it seem as if you're drawing a picture of my ear."

Absorbed in his work, Qaraguzov didn't answer me and continued probing. "Don't move, don't move!" he said, as he moved around me, readjusting his mirror and the light, sometimes kneeling in order to examine my ear. He handled my ear so

vehemently that I thought its skin was going to come off. I suffered patiently, waiting for the examination to be over. I promised myself, "If I get away this time, I'll never put myself in the hands of any doctor."

When Qaraguzov turned the light aside and put down his instruments, I was indescribably happy. As if passing an arduous and dangerous test, I heaved a sigh of relief, wiped the sweat from my forehead and got up to leave.

"Why are you getting up?" he asked, surprised.

"Haven't you finished?"

"I think I should examine your nose as well."

He examined my nose in the same manner as he had my ear. I gathered all my strength and waited for him to finish. Qaraguzov asked me some questions and wrote down the answersmy age, profession, address and my family situation.

"Comrade doctor, they ask you such questions when you are getting a job. How does one's family situation or profession affect one's earache?"

"Why are you so concerned?" he said. "These questions shouldn't scare you. We need these for scientific research. We want to know who our patients are, to which social class they belong. This knowledge will enable us to be useful to the people, and without such information the medical profession doesn't advance. If you were the only person with an earache, we'd have no problem, but this damn sickness is looking for ways to get into a thousand ears. It's our duty to fight it!"

I was in no mood to listen to what the doctor had to say. Sensing my impatience, he stood up, shook my hand and stated emphatically, "Come back in two days. I'll be waiting for you."

"But Comrade doctor, there's no pain left in my ear!"

"You can't feel it now. For five days there's no pain, but after five months it comes back and bothers you in such a way that you feel as if you want to die. I know your symptoms. I know them very well. You need treatment. You must come."

I went home disappointed and vowed to myself that I would not go back. That was it! Forgetting about my earache and about Dr. Qaraguzov, I went to work.

Rules of Etiquette for a Modern Wedding

(1934)

My half-brother worked in the Cooperative. His mother was employed as a salesperson in a store for many years. She was a busy woman, and I rarely saw her, until one evening when I ran into her.

"Where have you been? You've forgotten all about us," she reproached me for not visiting them. Then she told me that the following day was Bulbul's wedding, and that I had to attend. I excused myself, saying that I had something very important to do.

"Tomorrow is Sunday. Why are you lying? Don't tell me you have to work. You have to come. End of discussion!"

I used to call her Bibi--Aunty. "To be honest, Bibi, I haven't been to a wedding for a while, and I don't know the etiquette. I don't want to be embarrassed in front of the guests."

Closing my mouth with her finger, Bibi said, "What nonsense! You can learn everything in the world. Wasn't Bulbul himself a child of the village? He was just like you, shy and introverted. But he came and got out and mixed with people. Thank God, he's not like that now. The day will come for you, too. God willing, my child, tomorrow you will find a lovely girl and will want to marry her."

I dared not disobey Bibi so I got up in the morning and took my pants from under my mattress [where I kept them pressed] and put them on. I borrowed my school friend's

shirt and went looking for a silver pin to wear when my
friends found out about the wedding.

"You lucky devil!" they told me.

They helped me get dressed. Soon I looked just right for a wedding. I arrived at the house at 7 o'clock.

There was such a commotion! One person was putting wood under the pot, another was bringing water, a third brought
in his shopping from the bazaar, and a fourth was noisily cutting blocks of sugar into cubes. Bibi took me to her own room. The groom had returned from the public bath house and fresh tea was being brewed for him. Someone was slicing lemon for his tea.

Bibi didn't like my appearance. She put one of Bulbul's scarves around my neck so that its tassels covered my chest like a horse's mane. She took off my boots, and made me wear a pair of red silken socks. She added a belt with a bone-buckle and a pen for my pocket. She put a silken handkerchief into my upper-left breast pocket, folded in a triangle, so that only one
corner showed. She combed the tassels and arranged them on two sides. Looking in the mirror, I imagined that a beautiful lady had parted her hair and was leaning her head upon my chest. Seeing this, out of either bewilderment or embarrassment, I didn't do a thing. I'm supposed to be an educated person, but obviously Bibi knew more than I did.

And as if this were not enough, while everybody was out and we were leaning against brocade cushions, Bibi sat next to me and said, "My poor darling, what have you seen of the world? Books have robbed you of your taste. You're dried up
like a piece of wood. That's why I beg you to come to our house. You'll cheer up."

At the beginning of each sentence, Bibi nudged me with her elbow, and at the end she pressed my knee.

"Listen! What a wedding. You'll be seen among the people. This is a great new style wedding. Pay attention to what's going on!" She enumerated the etiquette rules of modern weddings to me one by one:

(1) Yawning, hiccuping, shouting, coughing, sneezing and stretching are forbidden.
(2) Sit politely.
(3) Don't slurp your tea.
(4) Don't let any grease from the food show around your lips.
(5) You can laugh, but not loudly.
(6) If you tell a joke, tell a polite one.
(7) Talk, don't shout. Whispering is often sufficient.
(8) Your comments should be relevant to everyone, all the time and on every occasion.
(9) Say hello to everyone and get to know them.
(10)You can kiss, not on the cheek, but on the mouth.
(11) Set your cup down gently on the saucer. Hold the handle with two fingers and stir the tea quietly with a spoon.
(12) Don't wipe your plate clean with a piece of bread.
(13)Don't dirty the tablecloth.
(14)Don't let your chair squeak.
(15)Don't pick your nose.
(16)Don't scratch yourself or squirm in your seat.
(17) Take off your hat and button up your shirt.

I didn't wait for Bibi to finish, but got up. I wanted to leave. "Goodbye for now."

"Wait, where are you going?" She held onto my arm.

"Bibi, on the soul of your dear son, on your conscience, let me go. I can't do all these things. I'm sleepy and I have class tomorrow. Don't keep me. I hope it's a happy wedding. I hope you see many such weddings."

Hearing my voice, several people emerged from the other side of the house.
Holding onto me, they made me sit down.

And so with fear and trepidation, I waited for the wedding to begin. I begged to be taken to the wedding hall before the people arrived so as not to be conspicuous.

"My dear, poverty is a sad affair--we've taken the hall of Khanimnenegelin for tonight! The men haven't prepared the tea yet. Wait awhile. I'll take you there myself."

The groom had returned from the public bath. His face was flushed and red. Frowning and upset, he looked like a person who was ready for a fight. His sad face lightened by a smile. He was silent. Looking into his eyes, the groomsmen seemed to understand what he wanted. The tea was brought and he poured some of the hot liquid into his saucer and slurped it down.
I whispered to Bibi, "It seems Bulbul doesn't know either!"

Then I added, "I mean the etiquette. Bulbul is making so much noise. Look at him."

"My child," she said, "among ourselves, it doesn't matter, the wedding hasn't started yet. He's making such a noise now so that he won't do it then."

I felt very shy and sat in a corner. Guests arrived. Hearing footsteps, my heart started to race, and I reminded myself of the etiquette rules of the wedding. It was as if Bibi were

sitting next to me or looking over my shoulder, whispering in my ear, "Do this, do that!"

The guests entered. I got ready to shake hands and greet the guests. The guests said "hello" to everyone and sat down. Like a child who's afraid to go to the barber, I was apprehensive. When they came towards me, I told myself, "Be careful not to break the rules of etiquette." But I didn't know whether to stand up or sit down when saying "hello." It was all Bibi's fault. She hadn't told me.

I saw some people get up, but others greeted the guests while sitting. At a glance, I compared the two--it seemed like those who got up to shake hands were the more important people. Following their example, I also stood up. Taking the white, soft hand of a lady, which was adorned with a ring, I squeezed her hand in mine. I wanted to kiss it, but was afraid of Bibi. "You're very welcome. May Nature smile upon you!" I said when I dropped her hand. It hit her leg like a mallet, and her crepe de Chine dress undulated like the sea.

The groom had arrived. There was a commotion, and a place for three people opened at the front of the hall. Bibi, waving her silken head scarf in the air, came in and told the groomsmen, "When I motion to you, bring him in."

The musicians were ready. The music began and what music it was! A man with a yellow Bukhara hat held his tar and played it so passionately, that he almost went into an ecstasy. There was no dulcimer.

A young man with big ears, bareheaded, with a scarf like mine and dressed in short pants, put a drum between his legs, and began beating it like mad. Another was playing a Zurna [wind instrument], and everyone was astounded how amazingly long he could play without taking a breath! But he somehow managed to breathe. The music was intoxicating.

A breeze came in from the windows and songs floated out. The drummer occasionally looked at the audience, which shouted to him, "Bravo, bravo!" and "That's my man!" He was beating the drum so hard that I felt sorry for it. People sat in rows on both sides of me, but I didn't know a single person. I sulked like a stranger in a corner. Afraid to break the rules of
etiquette, I dared not speak to the people sitting next to me. I suddenly saw the groom, taking long strides as he entered the hall. They made room for three people, he and two groomsmen. As soon as he sat down, he asked for "Khankishi."

Like a stealthy cat, wiping his mouth with his hand, a tall, bareheaded man entered. (He was bareheaded like me.)

The groom told him in a rather brusque tone, "Friends are counting on you. They want you to start."

"Yes, sir. Upon my eyes!" [Right away].

Khankishi, wiping his hands on his apron, looked around. "Friends, why are you so quiet? Is anyone up for a game of dominos? Who wants to play cards? Let's keep ourselves busy. When the musicians get tired, we'll play the gramophone [record player]."

Bibi shouted from the other room, "Everybody dance, Khankishi, make them dance!" People laughed. Khankishi joked, "What can I say? Whatever the mistress of the house says goes. Let's dance."

The groom banged on the table with his hand and complained to Khankishi, "What is this strange behavior? Why are the ladies sitting on one side and the men on the other?

They should mix immediately. 'Death to Mullah!'"

Everyone applauded. Khankishi began arranging the guests' seats so that the men and women would sit next to each other. Some men had come without their wives, and women had come without their husbands.

Taking all of this into consideration, he organized the guests' seats in such a way so that there were enough women for the men. He made one woman sit in the middle with a man on each side. Since I was one of the shy ones, I was the only man left without a woman. Khankishi looked at his arrangement and exclaimed, "Look, now this is civilized!"

His eyes were laughing. Pointing at me with his finger, he said, "Look, the poor boy is all alone!" Everyone laughed. I was embarrassed.

Bibi shouted from the other room, "I'll sit next to him myself."

The room was decorated like a store during a festival. The men looked like "bad bargains" that had come along free with the ladies! The mens' noses were shining and the womens' fingers were sparkling. The womens' faces and the mens' teeth looked white. The womens' eyes and the mens' hands looked black. The ladies' lips and mens' necks looked red.

The zurna player sucked the air from the room and blew it back out through his insturment, sending a waft of air against the colorful dresses in the varied crowd. Suddenly, a song was played that was full of drunken sadness: "The Song of the Cock"

My hen is speckled,
Her wings are speckled,

She is not a hen, but a nightingale.

May you burn in fire, stealer of my hen!

May you scorch in hell, stealer of my hen!

Khankishi dragged a stout woman to the middle of the hall. The people next to me whispered, "She's the cashier at Department Store 21." What a dancer! In her every movement, you could sense the fear of a person on a ship about
to sink. The floorboards under her feet were moaning, the glasses were trembling, and the sides of the chairs were quivering. When the music sped up, she got confused. She didn't know what to do--she was falling down and
getting up like a drunkard. Everything was contrary to a modern wedding. I expected Bibi to shout from the other room to stop her from dancing. But nothing happened. She behaved like an elephant that was being poked by an awl. People played it safe; they didn't clap.

Then--as if it had been calculated--a thin, frail-looking girl, exactly this woman's opposite, stood up to dance. Dressed in taffeta pants and red boots, her eyebrows and nose looked a parenthesis and a question mark. As soon as she got up, she began wiggling around. Her swift, varied movements reminded me of a person who is in the last throes of life. Like a fish on land, she was flipping from side to side. After galloping around for a while, she sat down and stayed glued to her seat for the rest of the evening. Her chest heaved, as if she was having difficulty breathing. She was the new cashier of the store. A broad-shouldered, chubby lady got up immediately after her; she was dressed in a black crepe de Chine, Charleston shirt. Khankishi raised his voice.

"Let's all dance! Comrades will dance with their wives!"

A man came from the upper side of the hall. His collar was awry, and he was smoking a cigarette in a cigarette holder. He began to dance in circles around his wife, like a hawk

hovering. His wife was stout and heavy - her lower lip hung down like the tongue of a cow. While the husband was whirling around, the lady stood her ground and swayed back and forth like
an accordion.

Most of the ladies who followed after these two went around flapping their wings like birds. Only one (and she was a relative of the bride) danced so beautifully that even the Zurna-player was astounded. Instead of taking in air, he wanted to take in the girl. In her red dress, she glowed like the setting sun and she amazed everyone with her drunken eyes. With her
harmonious movements, her beautiful hair kissed her breasts; and fell like silken tassels behind her back.

After tea, the food was served. Dishes of rice pilov! How wonderful they looked! Mounds of white rice, with turmeric-colored melted butter cascading, as if off the sides of a mountain. People dashed for the food. An incredible sound of gobbling food filled the house. Very soon it was obvious that neither the rice nor the stew would be enough. By way of encouragement, Khankishi said, "Don't worry, eat as much as you want. More food will be found."

But I got worried. As I watched the people eating with their greasy lips, and their dark hands descending on the dishes of white rice, I looked at Bibi who sat next to me.

"Bibi, it seems like the etiquette rules of the wedding are a little bit..."

Her mouth was full with soup and stew. She only spoke with her eyebrows, saying "No!"

Everyone was given tea glasses and Khankishi filled them with wine. From the other

end of the hall, the cashier slowly raised her head, "Comrades, please. We are very fortunate to have comrade bridegroom, Bulbul bey, as a worker of Department Store No. 21. I propose to drink this round to his health."

At this moment, Khankishi shouted out, "Just a moment!"

Everyone looked towards the door. An old lady with bad makeup and too much powder on her face entered. Khankishi introduced her as the mother of the bride.

"Long live our groom's mother-in-law! May the unseen forces of Nature bless us all! May Nature give everyone a mother-in-law!" The mother-in-law was taken over to the groom.

Bibi, expressing the respect of the people, said, "May Nature give you a wedding. May the unseen forces of Nature be happy with you." Glasses were filled and emptied to the health of this and that. Interesting talk went on. When the groom spoke, everyone listened. I was so attentive, I wanted to borrow an extra pair of ears to listen.

"They shouldn't say that Bulbul hasn't finished university or anything like that. You know that cashier, everyone here is my colleague. They understand . . . That cashier is such a son-of-a-bitch that even the university cannot cope with him. They've really ruined the university. Don't you see the students coming and timidly hanging around and learning from us? I say, let's drink to the health of that cashier who has made this possible. (He held his glass up almost as high as the light hanging overhead.) The world does not turn without this. I've never seen such a delicious thing in my life. Let's drink to the health of the cashier."

The sound of glasses clinking filled the hall. When the groom's glass touched that of his mother-in-law's, he looked surprised and said, "This can't be! Khankishi! Say something

to this lady!"

Someone said, "Why are you fighting?"

Khankishi filled the glass of the mother-in-law.

"Whoever refuses to drink, we'll empty the glass on their shirts. We propose that they should kiss each other. The bride and bridegroom should kiss each other. But since she's not here, for the time being, he should kiss her mother. We propose that they should kiss each other."

Kankishi put his arm around the mother-in-law and brought her to Bulbul. He kissed her noisily and drank up. The woman was embarrassed and sat down in her place. Her brother left the room in protest. As soon as Bulbul heard about it, he swore, "Whoever doesn't like me, a curse on him! Let him go!" Everyone returned to the food. Mouths were busy; spoons made noise.

Suddenly Khankishi shouted, "Who stole mine?"
"What?"
"Who took it?"
"What?"
"You took my meat!"

A glass shattered on the head of Khankishi. The wine glass struck the buffet and glasses broke. A half-filled jar of marmalade broke, spilling its contents. The mother-in-law became very irritated, and pulled her son-in-law aside, saying, "You've gotten yourself all dirty!"

The fight picked up. The gathering divided into two sides. Something tragic could have

happened, but Bibi threw herself into the middle of it, screaming and crying. I whispered in her ear, "It seems that the wedding rules of etiquette are a little bit..."

When things quieted down, I opened my scarf, and took off my boots and pin, got dressed back in my student's clothes and started to leave. At the expense of making my Bibi upset, I said, "I apologize that I yawned once and broke the etiquette of modern weddings."

Bibi held onto me and wouldn't let me leave. Everyone left and we went to the other room. She was bringing all sorts of things from the windowsills and other places: boxes of chocolate, sweets, dishes of marmalade. I thought that these had been saved for us to eat, so I started to take a chocolate from one box. Bibi took it from my hand and wouldn't let me eat it. There were all sort of things: socks, shawls, a bouquet of artificial flowers, silver spoons, a sugar bowl, a box of make-up, face powder, a handkerchief and a collar pin.

In short, Store No. 22 was there. I waited. Bibi took her time, and holding each item, announced, "This shawl was brought by Mammad's wife. How wonderful: six silver spoons. Mina Khanim brought them. A box of cosmetics--how nice. I should say worthy of the name of Mashdi Rahim!"

Bibi held up each gift, and after learning the groom's opinion of it, put it aside. The groom seemed pretty mild-mannered at first,

"Well, it's not bad - next."

Bibi said, "It isn't a joke! I have created a source of income for her husband. If it is it too much, leave it!"

Bibi showed him a bouquet of artificial flowers and said, "This is from the family of your friend Ayyub."

The groom whispered, "May I bury such a friend! How shameless!"

Bibi showed him a pair of socks. "These were brought by Hizmet."

"Who?"

"Mirsaad's wife, you know, Hizmet! She made a mistake to send such a gift, and you made a mistake to accept it! She has made a mockery of us. When I was still single, I spent 40 manats on the daughter. Now on the most precious day of my life, why is she so cheap? Damn her gift! Come on, take it back to her! I'm not so desperate. Trashy people! Socks! What socks!"

Seeing this, I realized why my half brother wouldn't talk to me. I was the one who had broken the rules of etiquette more than anyone else because I hadn't brought anything.

Afraid of being beaten up, I left on the pretext of getting some fresh air, and headed straight for the student dormitory in
Armenikendi. I vowed never again to go to a new-fashioned wedding, never again.

Matishga

(My Dear Lady)

(1931)

Mashdi Hanifeh lived in a village near town. In summer he worked as a farm hand, in winter as a well-digger, and in autumn as a worker in the brick kilns. After crossing the Araz river [into Soviet Azerbaijan] all his anxieties and worries vanished. No longer would he have to deal with khans and village headmen [of Iran] who would make him toil for months without pay and who would lash him if he dared to complain.

Rarely did he visit any city. He had never seen Baku except on one occasion during the "disturbances.

" Mashdi Hanifeh got off the bus and put his satchel over his shoulder. Inside his bag, which he occasionally used for shopping, were bread and meatballs.

Baku! What a wonderful place it was-teeming with life-where cars flew by like birds in the air and where shopkeepers didn't make fun of villagers. There were no crowds gathering around dervishes and no noisy caravans. Here, modern buildings reached to the sky and trams sped away like lightning. Mashdi Hanifeh could not recognize anything. He stood there in awe.

Just then a young woman waved at him, "Come here!" She was not wearing a veil [unlike women he was accustomed to seeing in Iran]. Mashdi Hanifeh was beside himself with joy. "Besides," he told himself, "it has been a long time since I've enjoyed myself. The breath of your wife can make you shrink away, but illicit sex is wonderfully

delicious."

Mashdi Hanifeh followed the lady. She was young and beautiful, and she didn't appear to be Russian. Her black hair and thick eyebrows suggested that she was Muslim. He looked at her once more, then at himself. He didn't have the appearance that would attract women, and he was wondering what had attracted this beautiful Matishga.

"Skorei!"

Mashdi Hanifeh did not know Russian, but he knew that "skorei" meant "hurry up" or "don't delay." The word entered into his heart like cool water quenching a deep thirst. "What a delectable thing is this unbeliever's daughter."

They walked past tram lines and crowds of people, without looking at anything. Mashdi Hanifeh felt in his pocket. He was thinking, "These women have no shame. God forbid, that they embarrass you in front of others." From the money he had in his pocket, he put ten manats into a side pocket and thought, "Matishga should not see the rest of my money. If she makes a scene, I'll only give this amount and tell her 'money-nyet.'"

He wanted to take hold of her arm, but realized that she was walking rather fast. Not many could have kept up with her.

"They're all the same," he thought. "They want to get there fast. But why hurry?"

Then the lady turned and said something to him. He didn't understand. Laughingly, he just managed to say, "parusqi niznaiem."

Matishga managed to convey by gestures and by speaking half Russian and half Azeri,

"Bed, blanket, sleep?"

Mashdi Hanifeh took his statement to mean-"There's a bed and blankets. Do you want to sleep?" He was beside himself with joy. He wanted to grab Matishga and kiss her.

"Da, my dear Matishga, skorei, skorei, I sacrifice my life for you. Kharasho lady. Malades Matishga."

The way seemed to get longer and longer. But Mashdi Hanifeh was walking with such vigor that the earth almost seemed to tremble under his feet. Finally, they reached a very tall building. The windows on the fourth floor were covered with colorful drapes. On the balconies were flower pots and lemon trees. The sound of tar music could be heard. Mashdi Hanifeh's heart was beating fast. He was in a hurry. "If I had the money, I'd never leave this lady."

They went upstairs and entered a well-decorated room. There, in the middle of the room was a pile of blankets and quilts, wrapped and ready for the road. There was also a suitcase. Matishga took one of the bundles and told Mashdi Hanifeh to bend over so that she could lift it onto his back. He was dumbfounded.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

Hearing the word "train," it finally dawned on him what was happening. Matishga had brought him to her apartment so he could carry her things. But this wasn't what he was expecting. He wasn't a porter.

"What do you mean, 'Go to the train?'" he said! "Your father is a porter, not me. Your grandfather is a porter."

He kicked the bundle of blankets and started to leave. Just then, a pot-bellied man in a white suit entered the room. He looked closely at Mashdi Hanifeh.

"Haven't I seen you before," he asked?
"You look familiar, too," Mashdi Hanifeh confessed.
"Are you from Ardebil9 ?"
The pot-bellied man opened his arms and embraced him. "Oh! Aren't you Mashdi Hanifeh? I can't believe my eyes! How did you get here?"
"My God, Agha Rahim, when I saw you in Iran, you didn't look like this. You've put on weight. You look like one of those governors. What are you doing here? What are you doing in a lady's house, you rogue?"

They embraced again. Agha Rahim pulled up a chair and Mashdi Hanifeh sat down.

"My dear Mashdi, this is my own house. The factory has given it to me. It has its own bath, kitchen and gym. In the evenings the wireless10 talks, giving reports from every corner of the world. Whenever I want, I can open the window, look out and see all of Baku lying here at my feet."

Changing the tone of his voice, he asked, "So, Mashdi, how did you happen to come here to Baku? Where are your wife and children?"

Matishga stood there bewildered. Everyone was feeling strangely embarrassed. Mashdi Hanifeh was ashamed in front of Agha Rahim since he had looked at Rahim's wife desirously. Mashdi Rahim was feeling embarrassed that he could not entertain Mashdi Hanifeh, as they were getting ready to leave the city. And Matishga didn't look up because she felt embarrassed in front of both of them.

Agha Rahim continued, "Please, let me introduce you, this is my partner-in-life, Sima

Khanum. She is going to the dacha today."

Then Mashdi Hanifeh realized that "partner-in-life" meant "wife."

He started wondering if he called his children's mother "my partner-in-life" whether it would be all right.

_____

(1) "Matishga" means "dear lady" in Russian; "Matishga" is a general term used by Azerbaijanis to refer to a Russian woman.
(2) The Araz River separates Northern and Southern Azerbaijan. At the time this story was written, Northern Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union, but in 1991 it became the Independent Republic of Azerbaijan. Southern Azerbaijan is still part of Iran. Azerbaijan was separated by a treaty signed between Russia and Persia in 1828.
(3) "Disturbances" probably refers to labor unrest and strikes in Baku in 1907.
(4) Unbeliever. refers to a non-Muslim.
(5) "Parusqi niznaem" is Russian for "I don't know how to speak Russian."
(6) "Da" - "Yes," in Russian.
(7) "I sacrifice my life for you" - A common Azeri expression that means "I'll do anything for you." An exaggerated promise in most cases, but used very often nevetheless.
(8) "Kharasho" - "Thank you," in Russian.
(9) "Malades" - "Fantastic," in Russian.
(10) "Your father is a porter, not me. Your grandfather is a poerter." A traditional pattern of swearing or insult.
(11) Ardebil - A major city in Southern Azerbaijan (Iran).
(12) Wireless - radio
(13) Dacha - the Russian word for a summer cottage or home outside of the city.

Peaches

(1962)

Some of our specialists have been struck with a strange disease. You ask one of them, "How is such and such a book?"

"Wonderful," he says.
You ask, "Why is it wonderful?"
"It was printed in Poland."
You ask, "How is such and such a song?"
He says, "Excellent."
"Why?" "It is sung in Austria and Bulgaria."
"What do you think of such and such a painting?"
"Excellent, because it's being exhibited in Marseille."

At first this disease only hit a few, but it is spreading slowly to many people. Yesterday I read an article by an agriculture specialist who had come to our office. He writes that the peach is a "sort" of nectarine which was discovered in America at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1897 it was brought to the Soviet Union, and from there it traveled by rail to the Caucasus and Azerbaijan. Then our agriculturalist friend writes about its color and taste, and tries to prove that the agriculturalists of the world, particularly those of Azerbaijan, are greatly indebted to the American scientist who "discovered" the peach.

At the end of his article, the specialist comes to this sad conclusion: "Unfortunately, our good people do not pay their dues to this great scientist of the world of fruits

and vegetables, and do not praise him in their books, newspapers, radios and meetings from morning until evening. We eat the peach, but never remember its genius inventor and the man who produced it. See how backward we are. How far we are from advanced nations!"

After reading the article written by our esteemed agriculturalist I gave it a great deal of thought. Of course, I have no doubt about his "scientific" competence or "originality" of his writing, but I still have a few questions for him.

I would just like to ask the esteemed specialist if different types of peaches are more in America or, say, in the gardens of Ordubad, Ganjah, Quba, Batum, Gori and other cities of the Caucasus? I also want to ask him if the color and taste of the peaches or nectarines described in the article that he wrote, or to be more exact, that he has translated, are different from ours?

I also want to suggest to our specialist friend that, rather than picking a peach from a tree, its real source, and learning about it, he has learned about it by reading slowly and haltingly through a foreign language article.

Furthermore, I want to say that the author, rather than making peaches popular among his countrymen and garden, wants to advertise its grafter.

He wrote this piece, it seems, not for the sake of fruit specialists, students, researchers, or simply to do a service for his readers. Rather, he has written it in order to get a good opinion from the members of the Central Agricultural Institute for his future articles. Fourth, fifth and etc.

This author doesn't know that many things come here from America, but not nectarines or peaches. Chewing gum, cocktail-drinks nylon panty hose, plastic and many other things come from there, but not nectarines, not figs, not grapes, not Shamkhor watermelons, not Jorat melons, not the seedless white berry, not the

apples of Quba, not the sweet pomegranates of Shirvan, not the tomatoes of Lankaran, not the onions of Hovsan.

If this agriculturalist had spent five or six years among the people, he would not have written such an article, or if he had, he would have written it differently. We've seen that such articles are published for the sake of workers and agricultural laborers. It is said that in ancient Greece, some writers would draw pictures and hang them in public places in order to see what the people would say. Now some authors write their articles and give them over for translation without bothering about what their own readers' reaction will be.

Another thing I don't understand is why some of our institutes get all of their advice from abroad. It's really strange that when they want to do research on figs they leave the orchards of Bilgah and go to California. A student who had gone to Mexico in order to learn about apiculture was asked about the characteristics of the honey of Qabagtapeh and the bees of Dastafur. The student had to return to these villages to get some honey and a few boxes of bees because he did not have any experience here-he had gone abroad with his eyes closed.

Perhaps our esteemed agriculturalist friend will have the time to read the writings of men of letters, and perhaps this one, too. If he reads, he shouldn't think that we don't want to look at the outside, at other horizons, or that we are against learning from neighbors, or even from strangers. We are only against those who look at their own things and their own existence from the balcony of the West, and for that matter, look at them negatively. We want agriculturalists, physicians, teachers, engineers, artists, all of them, first to learn about the bounties of their own city and their own homeland carefully and with love. After learning, they should talk about them without fear, and make them known to the world.

Foreign Illness

(1960)

When I refer to an external illness, I don't mean the physical symptoms of an illness. I use this term in its geographic sense; that is, meaning diseases that come from outside the country.

I think that in our city, no profession is always on duty as much as the medical profession. Being a doctor, more often than not, I'm on duty. I continuously have to keep an eye on my patients, noting their prognosis and watching for the results of their treatment. My duty never leaves me.

When I'm on duty, I'm not just concerned with my own patients. Suddenly, the door of the hospital swings open, and a Volga, Pobeda or Moskvich car or, for that matter, even a truck arrives with wailing and complaining patients.

It's true that our hospital is in the most distant corner of the city and doesn't have enough beds. We don't allow patients to be brought in every hour, but whoever does comes won't be turned away. One has a stomachache, another has been in a car accident, a third is an alcoholic. Another has been stabbed and yet another was bitten by a dog. In short, this is a big
city and therefore, many unfortunate things happen. You can't lecture patients on this or that principle, nor can you quote
municipal regulations. Besides, the law doesn't allow it! Here, neither doctor nor nurse can close the door on a patient. A good conscience won't allow you to say, "Look, comrade, we don't have room. Go somewhere else!"

The patient who arrived this evening didn't fit any of the above categories. She had not been bitten by a dog, nor was she drunk, nor had she been stabbed. She was very quiet, very well-behaved, and didn't moan or complain. It seemed as though she had received special permission to come to a sanitarium. She was lying on a coach in the reception room. I asked the driver who had brought her, "What is wrong with her?"

"I don't know, doctor."
I turned to the nurse. "What's wrong with her?"
"Nobody knows."
"Perhaps she's not sick at all, and they've brought her here by mistake."
"How could that be possible, doctor? She had fallen on the pavement and was lying there surrounded by people."

I went to the patient. As a matter of fact, she did look pale and sallow. I observed a weak, slender girl who had no strength left in her. If it weren't for her large, very sunken eyes under her black eyebrows, I would have taken her for corpse. Her face was sickly yellow, and she appeared to be at the end of her rope. She didn't speak or move; just painfully turned her large eyes to watch those who were passing by.

"My daughter, what has happened to you?" I asked her.
In order to take her pulse, I held her frail wrist. The pulse was weak.
"What's wrong with you, Miss?"
The patient turned her face toward me and said with difficulty, "Is there a cinema here?"
"A cinema?" I asked.
"Do you have a TV?"
"Are you sick or are you looking for entertainment?" I asked, confused.
"I'm not looking; I'm just asking."

I repeated my question once more. "What's wrong with you? Do you have any pain?"

"I don't know, myself."

"How long have you been like this?"

"Today, I fell down near the boulevard."

"Have you been wounded?"

"No, not at all."

"Perhaps something hit you?"

"No, nothing hit me. While walking, I just fell down." Immediately, I took the patient to a comfortable ward and ordered a preliminary medical examination.

Before long, the mother of the patient appeared. After thanking me and expressing her gratitude, she approached me, and as if seeking a personal request, whispered, "Doctor, please keep Ophelia here as long as you like. I beg you."

The mother's strange request surprised me. It surprised me because such a request is never made of us. On the contrary, as soon as treatment is finished, mothers and fathers want to take their child out of the hospital.

I asked her mother, "Has she been sick for a long time?"

"Yes, for a long time."

"How long?"

"It's been a few months."

I was surprised. It was amazing for such a weak body to bear such an illness, and not seek a doctor or go to the hospital for such a long time. I asked her mother, "Aunty, why didn't you bring this sick girl for treatment before now? She has no record with us. How negligent you can be?"

The mother shook her head, then looked up at me as if she wanted to open her heart to me. With sincerity she said, "Oh, doctor, today's youth, do they ever listen? Do they take advice? Do they confide in you? Would they take time from their movies and concerts to go for treatment? You know very well that all the girls want to stay thin!"

Now I understood why the mother was happy to have Ophelia hospitalized. Of her own accord, a child with wouldn't allow any kind of treatment, nor would she care to be subjected to the regulations of the hospital. Ophelia's admission to the hospital was a consolation for her mother. Obviously, in treating any patient or any sickness properly, the doctor
must first make a diagnosis, or to use the words of the poet Sabir, " find the pain," that is, find its source.

It's true that there may be some old people who are ill or who never seek treatment and thus further weaken their bodies and make their treatment more difficult and complex. However, with the help of modern medicine and pharmacology, even the most complex ailments can be analyzed. Nothing has to remain dreaded. Where is there an organ that x-rays cannot penetrate?

Discovering the malady of a young, 18-year-old girl didn't require a complicated and extraordinary process. The slender, almost semi-transparent body of this girl displayed all the outward signs of sickness. After examining Ophelia, apart from her weakness and lack of strength, I didn't discover anything. The young body had not been adequately nourished, and as a result it had weakened gradually, until it finally reached the state of collapse.

I criticized the girl's mother. "You're from a well-to-do family, why don't you pay attention to the eating habits of a young school girl. Why have you allowed her to become so weak?"

Ophelia's mother seemed fed up with this eternally-asked questioned, and slapping hands on her knees, she said, "Oh Doctor, if you could make Ophelia eat a second meal in a single day, I would be grateful to you my entire life. My dear sir, she doesn't eat, she doesn't touch anything!"

"What do you mean?"
"My dear, she doesn't eat!" she repeated.
"Her thirty-two teeth are absolutely healthy, there's nothing wrong with her digestive system and her stomach is working normally. Why doesn't she eat?" I asked.
"Doctor, in spite of all that, she doesn't eat!" she repeated again.
"If there are specially prepared, delicious foods, she will eat," I insisted.
"Whatever is the most delicious food in the world"chicken, very nice pastry, dolma, any well-prepared dish of whatever you can imagine, we give to her, but she won't eat it. She leaves the table, saying that she'll get fat."

I wanted to laugh. Someone with a twig-like body, afraid to become fat! That's funny! How could she get fat, when in all her body there couldn't even be five kilos of meat!

"She's afraid," her mother said. "Her world is magazines and movies."
"I will make her eat! You will see!" I said.

As a matter of fact, by boasting about what I would do, I reassured Ophelia's mother, but she wasn't satisfied with our hospital's food. Every morning and every evening she would cook all sorts of foods and place them on nice dishes and bring them to her daughter. I soon discovered that making Ophelia eat wasn't an easy matter.

"Ophelia, what's the purpose of starving yourself?"
"What are you saying doctor? Do you want to make me lose my shape and become the

laughing stock of everyone?"

"What is this, my girl? Whoever eats becomes a laughing stock?"

"Doctor, don't you see what incredibly huge ladies we have among us? Europeans are all thin and shapely. One has to have nice figure!"

"What have you seen in Europe? Have you been to Europe?"

"I subscribe to Screen."

"Screen is a magazine of stars. Do you want to become an actor?"

"No, not an actor, an actress."

"For acting, your body has to have strength."

"I don't want strength. I want a good figure."

"You want to be slender?"

"Yes, if I'm not slender, I'll kill myself."

I pointed to her weakened body and said, "Even weaker than this?"

"I want to be slender, Doctor. Instead of these dishes, give me a medicine to stay even thinner than I am now. And at the same time, I want to be able to fly like a birdlike a bird, you know!"

It was obvious that Ophelia was not sick. She was only a victim of the movies.

Ophelia didn't stay in the hospital longer than a week. She wasn't taking advice, nor taking any medicine, nor eating any of those nice foods her mother had prepared for her. She sat in front of the TV and watched foreign movies. If there weren't any foreign films on TV, she'd bring Screen from the library and look at it. Or, she'd fashion her body and clothes according to the magazine and look at herself in the mirror. When her mother came to see her, I said, "Don't let the driver leave."

The lady called the driver and asked him to stay. She must have thought that I needed

the car for some reason.

"Please, Doctor, it is your car."
"It's not for me. Ophelia wants to go for a ride."
"A ride?"
"She wants to go to the cinema."

Overhearing this, Ophelia hurried to the courtyard and called to her mother, "Mom, bring my clothes. Quickly! In the Nizami cinema, His Love is showing and I'll die if I don't see it!"

I sent Ophelia along with her mother and asked her not to bring Ophelia back to the hospital. "Her illness can only be cured in the Club."

"But, what's her illness, doctor?"
"This illness has come from abroad. We don't have it among us, Aunty!"
"I've heard of foreign goods, but this is the first time I've heard of a foreign sickness. How has this damn thing come and gotten hold of Ophelia?"

"Aunty, she's gotten it from the movie theaters. She'll be all right; don't worry. This is typical of foreign goods. It's a new arrival."

---

(1) Sabir (Ali Akbar Sabir Tahirzadah, 1862-1911) is the greatest satirical poet of Azerbaijan who published most of his poems in the journal Molla Nasereddin.
(2) Dolma - a traditional dish of the region made of grape leaves stuffed with rice and meat.
(3)"His Love" or "Yevo Liyobov" was the title of a well-known movie.

Mirza

(1930)

There are two Mirza Shafis. One is the famous poet and the other is someone I would like to make famous.

"Listen Child, I'm telling you to look up; lift up your head. Why are you frowning like a donkey? Recite your lesson."

Mirza almost wanted to eat this child up. His shriveled face was red as a beet.

"May Allah take you or save me from you all! You have wasted my precious life. Instead of giving birth to you, would that your mother had given birth to a piece of rock!"

Putting his hands in his pockets, he started raving like a mad dog and emptying his heart. Like a mule exhausted and on its last legs, his lips were hanging. His mustache, stained and straw-colored from smoking, was getting into his mouth. The tips of his boots were scuffed and his trousers pants were sweeping the floor. His collar was loose, and his tie was swaying back and forth. His neck, which seemed to have become thinner, was red because of the heat of the day, and its skin was peeling.

Clearing his throat, Mirza continued, "It's not your fault. It's the fault of those who have stopped you from watching the herd and have brought you to school. What business has a herdsman in school? You ought to be cleaning the stable and feeding the cattle. You have to have something in your genes, otherwise, it's impossible to change

someone by force. Sa'adi, may you turn in your grave. How true it is what you said, 'A man of base origin will not be lit by the light of the pious.' The effect of education on the intractable is like water on a duck's back."

Mirza Shafi grimaced. He remembered the time that he used to curse and swear at his former wife. Waving his arms, he shouted, "If you beat him up, it's no good. If you don't beat him, it's no good!"

This was not the first time. These robust-looking peasant boys who were sitting quietly on the benches had already figured out their teachers and knew how to deal with them. Therefore, very often they came quietly and went quietly.

They didn't say anything in front of the teacher. One student's father had said, "My son, your flesh belongs to the teacher and your bones to me." The only people who tested Mirza Shafi's patience to the extreme were members of the Komsomol (Youth Communist Organization) who made life hell for him by criticizing his drinking habits and exposing that he beat up on students and other "insignificant" shortcomings. The greatest blow came when they drew a cartoon on the school's wall newspaper. Mirza was shown up to his neck in a barrel of vodka with drink spewing out of his mouth.

It was night. On the slopes of the Alchajig Mountain, along the dusty lanes of Soyudli village, contented cows were licking and scratching themselves under the low roofs and shade of the trees. It seemed that the village cattle were slumbering. It was unlike any ordinary night. There were no sounds of carts transporting goods to and from the village, nor greetings and pleasant chattering of people returning from the city, nor the whistle of the guard of the woods. Faraway behind the mountains, rising after a swim, the moon was glowing like a copper furnace.

Inside the house, village ladies wearing long trousers were scurrying about in the light

of the burning lamps, preparing the evening meal. The sound of horse carts and ploughing had ceased. Occasionally, dogs barked at frogs croaking in nearby waters.

Mirza Shafi could not breathe because of the big piece of food that was in his mouth. Rising on his elbow, he leaned against the white embroidered pillow next to him and then he swallowed. The beams of the well-decorated white-washed room seemed longing to partake of the food. Aunt Parizad was checking the cattle outside, looking inside the window every once in awhile. Since her food was always eaten so quickly, she realized that in spite of being a novice in many things, she was an expert in cooking rice and pouring water over the hands of people after the meal was finished. This was her expertise, not the "Nazbare" dance that the teenagers knew.

"I raise this cup to toast Mirza Shafi's health who, for the past twelve years, has looked after the dead and living of the village and who has enlightened our children!"

The cups clinked against each other.

"To you, Mirza Shafi, long life! Mirza, my dear, you have taught me, too! I kiss you! May your sorrows fill the hearts of your enemies! Long live Mirza Shafi as long as the world turns."

Mirza twisted his mustache and replied, "My brothers, may we live long, stay healthy, eat and drink well. May we be like nightingales but not the ones in a cage. A cage is a terrible thing."

The glasses were filled to the brim for a second round. It was Mirza's turn to speak. While chewing a piece of onion, he slumped down like a camel onto his knees. His body was sweating and smoke coming out of his mouth. Mirza spoke a bit about history.

"The people who are gathered here today are the most learned in the village. Gentlemen, I am sure that among us there is no one who has reached manhood just this afternoon. Haji Agakishi, Mashdi Qurban, Jahan Bey, Mohammed Aga. Right from the beginning, Allah be praised, we have not suffered in any way. If we are united in words and action, we will not suffer in the future either. When I came from Iran..."

Here Mirza pointed to Haji Kishi and said with a smile, "I came from Iran with nothing but the clothes on my back. By the grace of God and the help of men like you, I am able to make a good living now. But that's not the point. I want to say a few words about life. I am known not only in this village but in other villages as well. How I teach, how I make the kids understand, how I deal with good and evil-I don't want to discuss these things. Let me get to the point. The head of the Executive Committee does not get along with me. Three or four members of the Komsomol are in my class. You know their character well! They have bothered everyone."

Haji Kishi said, "That's Luti Karim's son and Abdulbalakhan's grandson. May God strike them.

Mirza continued, "The other day they disgraced me on the wall newspaper. I came out and drove them away. The head of the Committee and Party Secretary came and said, "You have no right to do this. The regulation is this and self criticism is that. But I'm not afraid. I can take ten such committee heads and secretaries to the spring and bring them back thirsty. It is true, nowadays such people have positions, but it isn't for no reason that people call me Mirza. Whoever they criticize, it is not right to criticize a teacher. Nowadays children don't listen even to their parents."

Everyone replied in unison, "God save us! Nowadays who takes care of his father? Yesterday's baby sparrows have shed their first feathers. They've become starlings and

are teasing the teacher."

Mirza was encouraged even more. "I have written several times about them to the place that I should write to. But because of my feelings towards them, I didn't want to go too far. I know what to do! If you are a Komsomol, be a Komsomol. What business do you have at school? I haven't been appointed by a Komsomol that interferes in my affairs. Let the "white-bearded ones" of the village judge my work. Whether I drink or not is none of their business. As to the question of beating the kids, there's a famous saying, 'When you fasten the plough to the cow, it will try to get away.' If you take it easy, education is impossible. You have to beat them, you have to pull their ears. One does not become a learned man in a moment. Take me, for example. I have been several times bastinadoed. Otherwise, how could I have become a teacher. I am not the village teacher, I am the father of the village."

Jahan Bey put down his glass full of drink and interrupted Mirza, "This is very true! Mirza Shafi is our master. May we not live one day without him!"

Mirza again was encouraged and thought it necessary to list a few of his achievements. "In other villages, clubs are being opened. Not a single girl is left with a veil. Shariat is absolutely gone. I have somehow managed to keep the virtue and chastity in this place. My point is-I am very grateful to those real men who do not sell Mirza to such unruly kids. I have sacrificed for their sake and I will continue to do so. Long live the men who value honor and chastity!"

Glasses were emptied. The people around the meal leaned forward and waited. Mirza Shafi, opening and closing his reddened eyes, coming forward a bit, like a reciter of the Quran beside the dead, sang in a husky voice, "O Saki, may I be a sacrifice to your eyes..."

One month after these events the following conversation took place between Mirza Shafi and Director of the Office of Education.

"You have taken me away from my favorite village."

"Yes!"

"So where have you reassigned me?"

"To your home."

"But I have been a teacher for the last eight years. I am still teaching."

"This is why you need rest. You have worked enough."

"Can't you send me to another school?"

"No!"

Various teachers and students were coming and going to the Office of Education for their jobs. Everyone passing looked at Mirza Shafi who was sitting motionless like a stump of a tree near the wall. His face was red and his wrinkles had deepened. His eyelashes were thinning out and his sunken eyes shone like two beads.

_____

(1) "Sa'adi, may you turn over in your grave." An expression denoting that Sa'adi (a poet) would have been shocked by such an idea.

(2) "My son, your flesh belongs to the teacher and your bones to me," meaning "You have to obey your teacher and your parents."

(3) "White-bearded ones" - (agh saggal) refers to a mature man who is esteemed for his wisdom and judgement. The equivalent for a woman is "one with white side-burns" (agh birchak).

(4) The expression, "When you yoke the cow to the plow, it will try to get away" means here that a disciplinary approach is necessary to educate children.

(5) Bastinadoed - beaten on the feet. Considered one of the most severe and painful methods of torture.

(6) Shariat. Koranic law.

(7) Glasses were emptied - signifies agreement with what has been said earlier. They drank to the idea.

(8) "O Saki, may I be a sacrifice to your eyes..." indicating that he is completely drunk.

The Shade of the Willow Tree

(1937)

Everyone has a passion or a habit. This was true of Uncle Salman, the gardener. If he felt sympathy for anyone, he had a habit of helping them in every way possible.

One day, he stood deep in thought in front of the garden next to the road. The sun had risen high in the sky and shone right on his bronzed, shiny brow. As he raised his hand to shade his face from the sun, a thought suddenly passed through his mind. He looked down at the earth, as if looking for something that was lost. He walked back and forth along the road, his boots furrowing into the earth.

The next morning before sunrise, Uncle Salman dug a ditch in the same place. Soon after, he brought a willow sapling and planted it there. He put some bushes with thistles around it to protect it from the cattle.

During the summer when Uncle Salman worked in the vegetable beds, he would become breathless from the heat and would go to his hut to rest. When he would be walking down the road and he felt that there was a need for shade, a quiet voice within him would say, "Plant a tree here."

About five miles from the village where the road divides to go to the gardens and orchards, there was a place called "Dashlija." Fields stretched out to the horizon from there, but there was no shaded place to rest.

Now near Uncle Salman's orchard, there was an underground spring called "Saz

Bulaghi" (Singing Spring), and during the hot summer, no traveler would pass by without drinking from the stream and washing his hands and face. But as far as resting for a while, there was not even the shade of a stone. With this in mind, Uncle Salman planted a willow tree there where the road separates.

For five years, he did his utmost to take care of that tree. The young, lonely tree spread its branches. Its roots had already reached water. It drank the stream water and received light and warmth from the sun; it grew tall and spread its green foliage, like clusters of beautiful white jasmine, over the heads of the travelers. It cooled the dry desert-like air and its shade greeted the passers-by. Even people who didn't know about the stream would come and rest under the willow tree. Seeing this would gladden Uncle Salman's heart, making him feel very proud, like a father who had raised a wonderful son.

"I have to see," he thought, "if people appreciate the shade of this tree. I wonder what they are saying about it?"

Whenever there were people under the tree, he pretended to be passing by so that he could find out what they were saying. He would linger there, hoping to overhear their conversation.

One time two men on horses stopped there. From their appearance, they looked like teachers or physicians. They seemed somewhat intellectual. Holding a spade in his hand, on the pretext of getting water from the side of the stream, Uncle Salman moved closer to the riders and listened to them.

The men fastened their horses to a bush, and went down to the spring and drank from it. Then they went over to the green grass, to lie down.

Uncle Salman was very happy because he believed that they were the talkative type. One of the riders brought out a small box from his pocket and rolled a cigarette for himself. The other, a rather short, young man, continued a discussion which seemed to have been left unfinished from a while before.

"You're mistaken, you don't know people," the man who was smoking answered coldly. "At a single glance, I know what kind of nest this bird comes from. I'm not going to be taken in by sweet talk."

It seemed that the riders were arguing about someone. One spoke and the other answered. One proposed an idea, the other rejected it. Giving up hope of getting anything out of their discussion, the gardener returned to his hut disappointed and dejected.

The second day, Uncle Salman listened to the remarks of a man from the city. The man, not accustomed to long walks, had become very tired and seemed to be lying there without moving or talking. After waiting a long time, Uncle Salman wanted to leave, but the man from the city started talking.

"What kind of thing is this, uncle?"
Uncle Salman turned to him.
"What did you, my son?"
The man from the city sat up.

"I mean the man who planted this tree. I say, you son of a cursed father, you spent time and money, why didn't you plant a fruit tree, like a mulberry or a pear tree. Would that have been too much to ask?"

Uncle Salman was hurt by the city man's words. He didn't answer at all, and he hung

his head as he went back to his hut.

The third day, a strong, muscular cart driver came to the shade. Knife in hand, he climbed the tree. Uncle Salman came forward anxiously, but seeing that the carter was looking for a shaft for his cart, he became less anxious.

"My good man, if someone hadn't planted this tree, how would you find your shaft?" asked Uncle Salman.
The cart driver, with his head down, busy cutting the wood, said, "Damn the man who planted this. Couldn't he have planted something sturdier here, like an oak tree or an elm? How can you make a shaft out of this willow? I know it's useless, but what can I do? There's nothing else available."

Uncle Salman didn't answer him either.

On the fourth day, during the heat of the day when one could hardly breathe, a group of farmhands came to Saz Bulaghi. They were working in a farm nearby and had come to eat lunch under the shade of the willow tree. As soon as they arrived, a big lunch bag was opened. They brought out yogurt, and mixing it with the water from the stream, made "Ayran ." They cut bread, cucumbers and onions and prepared everything. Then, getting out their wooden spoons, they ate with great gusto.

At first, Uncle Salman wanted to invite them to have some fruits from his garden, but he decided to stand aside and listen to them. He said to himself, "First let's see if they appreciate good work."

The farmhands packed up what was left and putting their hands under their heads, lay down to rest.

"May you rest in peace, the man who planted this willow."
Uncle Salman looked carefully and noticed who it was who had spoken. He was a dark-haired, young man who was resting in the far corner.

"In the midst of this wilderness," another joined in, "the shade of a willow tree is better than anything in the world. Blessed be the hands that planted it!"

Uncle Salman could not contain himself any longer. Moving from his garden toward the willow tree, he said, "Thanks, all of you young men who appreciate my work." The harvesters recognized that it was the man who had planted the willow.

The young man with black hair sat up. "Uncle, please forgive me. A moment ago, thinking that you were dead, we asked for God's blessings upon your soul."

"My son, I don't mind. Blessings are necessary for the living as well. You know the value of my work and appreciate it. No blessing is better than this."

With one hand on his buckle, Uncle Salman pointed to the shade of the willow tree with the index finger of his other hand and poured out his heartfelt feelings.

"Many people have come here. Many people have sat here. Many have even cursed the man who planted this tree. I've heard them with my own ears; they were only thinking of themselves. My son, it takes all sorts of people to make the world. But I knew that people would come who would appreciate this shade and praise me for it. There are good people in the world. Now when I see you resting and talking about this place, I feel rewarded. I feel as if a new life has been given to me. It's as if I have paid my debt to the world."

A farmhand interrupted Uncle Salman, "The goldsmith knows the value of gold. We

laborers appreciate your work."

"My son, I believe in good work. A dog also leads a life. We humans should leave something-a good work or a trace of ourselves."

Uncle Salman looked out and opened his arms, as if to embrace someone. He continued, "You see, down there as far as you can see, orchards and gardens extend to the horizon. Our forefathers planted them, they sweated and prepared all of this for us. We have to do the same for our children. If everyone thought only of eating and enjoying himself, the world would be left in ruins in a few years."

The farmhands all agreed with Uncle Salman. As they got up to leave, the willow tree waved its young, green, clean leaves, and as if whispering in the breeze, it seemed to be saying "yes, yes," to Uncle Salman's words

_____

Ayran (pronounced I-rahn) is a refreshing beverage made from yogurt, water and salt. Dried mint and other herbs are added for flavor.