FAREWELL, GYULSARY!

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I

An old man was riding along on an old wagon. His pacer, Gyulsary, a golden chestnut horse, was old too. Very old.

The road winding up to the plateau was tediously long. In winter, the ground wind swirled incessantly among the bleak grey hills; in summer, it was scorching hot.

For Tanabai this climb had always been an ordeal. Slow riding irked him. In his youth, when he had frequently ridden to the district centre, he had always galloped his horse up this rise on the way back, whipping it on. If he hitched a ride on a wagon, especially an ox-drawn one, he would jump down without a word, pick up his coat and set off on foot. He would stride ahead furiously, as though rushing to the attack, and stop only when he had reached the plateau. Then, breathing hard, he would wait for the lumbering wagon crawling along down below. His heart beat fast and painfully from the rapid pace. No matter, it was better than dragging along in the wagon.

When Choro was alive he would often tease his friend about his odd ways, saying: "Want to know why you're unlucky, Tanabai? It's because you're so impatient. Honestly. Everything has to be done fast to please you. You must have the world revolution this minute! Why talk about the revolution when you haven't even got the patience for an ordinary road like the climb from Alexandrovka. You can't drive quietly like other people, can you? No, you have to jump off and go racing up the hill as if wolves were after you. And what do you gain by it? Nothing. You still have to wait at the top for the others. And you can't rush into the world revolution alone, you know, you'll have to wait for everyone else."

But that was long ago. Very long ago.

Today Tanabai didn't even notice when they passed the Alexandrovka Rise. Age and its ways had become habit. He drove neither fast nor slowly. He let the horse go at its own pace. Now he always set out alone. The crowd that had once accompanied him in the thirties along the noisy road was gone. Some had been killed in the war, some had died, some never left their homes any more and were just living out their days. The young people drove around in cars now. No one would creep along with him behind a miserable nag.

The wheels bumped along the ancient road. They would bump along for many a mile yet. Before him lay the steppe, and beyond the canal was a stretch along the foothills.

He had noticed some time before that the horse was getting tired, his strength

seemed to be failing. But, sunk in his own cheerless thoughts, he was not too disturbed. So what if a horse got tired on the road? Worse things had happened. He'd get home all right.

How was he to know that his old pacer Gyulsary, named so for his rare golden coat, had climbed the Alexandrovka Rise for the last time in his life and was marking off his last miles? How was he to know that the horse was dizzy, that the earth whirled in coloured circles before his dimmed eyes, tilting from side to side, touching the sky now with one edge, now with the other, that the ground before Gyulsary fell away into blackness from time to time and a reddish mist or fog swirled where the road ahead and the mountains should have been?

The horse's old, strained heart ached dully, the collar made breathing more difficult. The breeching had slipped and cut into his rump, something sharp kept pricking him under the collar on the left side. Perhaps it was a thorn, or the tip of a nail which had pierced the felt padding of the collar. The little wound on his old shoulder callus burned and throbbed unbearably. And his feet dragged heavily, as though he were plodding across a wet, ploughed field.

But the old horse strained onward, and old Tanabai encouraged him now and then with a word or a slap of the reins, while deep in his own thoughts. He had much to think about.

The wheels bumped along the ancient road. Gyulsary kept up his usual gait, that special pacing trot he had had from the time he first struggled to his feet and wobbled across the meadow after his mother, a big shaggy-maned mare.

Gyulsary was a natural pacer, his famous pacing gait had brought him many good days and many bad ones, too. There was a time when no one would have dreamed of harnessing him to a wagon, it would have been sacrilegious. But, as the saying goes, if trouble comes to a horse, he'll drink bridled, and if trouble strikes a man, he'll ford a river in his boots.

All this had been long ago, now it was only a memory. Now Gyulsary was struggling valiantly to reach his last finish line. Never before had he approached a finish line so slowly, never before had it rushed at him so quickly. The white line was always but a single step away.

The wheels bumped along the ancient road.

The feeling that the ground was shaky beneath his hooves aroused a vague memory in his dimming consciousness of far-off summer days, a soft wet meadow in the mountains, an amazing, incredible world in which the sun whinnied and leaped over the mountains and he, so young and foolish, would chase it across the meadow, across the stream and through the bushes until the herd's stallion, his ears laid back angrily, would overtake him and turn him round. In those far-off days the herds had seemed to move upside-down, like reflections in a lake, and his mother, the big shaggy-maned mare, would turn into a warm milky cloud. He loved the moment when she suddenly became a tender, snorting cloud. Her teats were firm and sweet, the milk frothed on his lips and he choked on its abundance and sweetness. He loved to stand thus, nuzzling his mother's belly. How intoxicating it was, that milk! The whole world--the sun, the earth, his mother--were contained in a single mouthful of milk. And even when sated, he could still take another gulp, and another, and another.

Alas, this all ended too soon. Soon everything changed. The sun ceased whinning and leaping over the mountains, it rose regularly in the east and proceeded due-west, the herds ceased moving upside-down, their hooves squelched across the trampled meadow, making it dark, or clacked on the stones in the shallows, cracking them. The big shaggy-maned mare turned out to be a strict mother, she bit him painfully on the withers when he pestered her too much. There was not enough milk any more. He had to eat grass. It was the beginning of a way of life that was to last for many long years and was now nearing its end.

In all his long life Gyulsary had never glimpsed that vanished summer again. He had carried a saddle, his hooves had traversed many a road under many a rider, and there had been no end to those roads. Only now, when the sun again leaped over the mountains and the ground heaved beneath his feet, when everything shimmered before his dimming eyes, the summer that had been lost for so long reappeared again. The mountains, the wet meadow, the herds, the big shaggy-maned mare, all now appeared in a strange haze. He strained forward, trying frantically to break away from the collar and shafts and re-enter that past world which had suddenly opened up before him. But the deceptive mirage always moved off, and that was torture. His mother whinnied softly, calling to him as she did long ago, the herds galloped by as before, their sides and tails grazing him, but he had not the strength to overcome the shimmering, whiling blackness. It whirled round him more furiously, lashing out at him with stinging tails, flinging snow in his eyes and nostrils. He sweated, yet shivered with cold, and that unattainable world sank silently, vanishing in the whirling blizzard. The mountains, the meadow, the stream were all gone, the herds had galloped away, only the vague shadow of his mother, the big shaggy-maned mare, still moved on ahead of him. She did not want to leave him. She called to him. He neighed loudly, it was a sob, but he did not hear his own voice. Then everything vanished, the blizzard, too, vanished. The wheels ceased to bump. The little wound under his collar ceased to sting.

Gyulsary stopped. He swayed. His eyes pained him. There was a strange droning in his ears.

Tanabai dropped the reins, climbed clumsily down, stretched his numb legs and went over to the horse glumly.

"Oh, hell," he cursed softly, looking at Gyulsary.

The horse stood there, his big head and long scraggy neck protruding from the collar. His ribs heaved, raising his skinny sides below his knobby spine. His coat, once golden, was now dark from sweat and dirt. Grey trickles of sweat left soapy lines from his bony haunches down to his belly, his legs, his hooves.

"I wasn't driving you that hard," Tanabai muttered as he busied himself with the horse. He slackened the girth, the collar, and took out the bit. It was covered with hot, sticky saliva. He wiped Gyulsary's nose and neck with his coat sleeve. Then he hurried back to the cart, to scrape up the last of the hay. Gathering an armful, he dropped it in front of the horse. But Gyulsary did not touch it, he was shivering violently.

"Here, eat it! What's the matter?" Tanabai said, offering him a handful.

The horse's lips twitched but they could not grasp the hay. Tanabai looked him

in the eye and frowned. He could see nothing in the sunken eyes, half-closed by the naked folds of his eyelids. The light had gone out of them, they were as vacant as the windows of a deserted house.
Tanabai looked about helplessly. In the distance were the mountains, all around was the bare steppe, and not a soul in sight on the road. At this time of the year travellers were few and far between.
The old horse and the old man were alone on the deserted road.
It was the end of February. The snow had left the plains, only the hidden lairs of winter in the ravines and among the reeds still held the wolves' spines of late drifts. The wind carried a faint scent of old snow, the ground was still frozen, grey and dead. The stony steppe was bleak and depressing at the end of winter. The very look of it made Tanabai shudder.
His dishevelled grey beard jutted forth as his eyes gazed towards the west from under the worn sleeve of his sheepskin coat. The sun hung cradled in the clouds above the edge of the earth. A pale, misty sunset was spreading across the horizon. There were no indications of foul weather ahead, but there was a cold and eerie feeling in the air.
"If I'd only known I'd never have started out," Tanabai thought miserably. "Now there's no going either way, I'm stuck here in the middle of nowheres. And I'll do the horse in for nothing."
Indeed, he should have waited till morning. If anything happened on the way in the daytime there was hope of a traveller overtaking him. But he had started out in the afternoon. Was that a wise thing to do at this time of the year?
Tanabai climbed a small rise to see if there was a car or truck in sight. But the road was deserted in both directions. He trudged back to the wagon.
"I never should have started out," he repeated, blaming himself yet once again for his perpetual haste. He was vexed and angry at himself and at everything that had hastened his departure from his son's house. He certainly should have stayed the night and given the horse a rest. But no!
Tanabai sliced the air with his hand angrily. "No, I wouldn't have stayed for anything. Even if I had to walk! Is that the way to talk to her husband's father? Good or bad, I'm still his father. What was the use of me joining the Party if I never became, more than a shepherd or a herdsman and got kicked out anyway in my old age! The bitch! And my son's no better. Never opening his mouth, afraid to raise his eyes. If she'd tell him to disown his father, he'd do it. He's a dishrag that's what he is, but he wants to get ahead and be a big man. Ah, what's the use talking about it! They're a sorry breed of men nowadays, that's for sure."
Tanabai felt hot, he unbuttoned his shirt collar and began pacing round the wagon, breathing heavily, unmindful of the horse, the road and the approaching night. But he could not calm down. Back in his son's house he had restrained himself, feeling it beneath his dignity to bicker with his daughter-in-law. Yet now he suddenly seethed, now he could have told her everything he had been thinking of so bitterly on the way. "It wasn't you who admitted me to the Party, and it wasn't you who kicked me out. What do you know, woman, of what things were like then? It's easy to talk now. Now you've all got learning, you're respected and honoured. But we were held responsible for all our actions, and

for those of our fathers, our mothers, our friends and enemies, and even our neighbour's dog, we were responsible for everything under the sun. And about me being expelled, that's not for you to talk about! That's my business. Don't you ever speak of it!"
"Don't you ever speak of it!" he repeated aloud, pacing back and forth. "Don't you speak of it!" he repeated again and again. And the worst of it, the most humiliating thing about it was that except for "don't you speak of it", he didn't seem to have anything else to say.
He kept walking round and round the wagon until he remembered that something ought to be done, he couldn't stay there all night.
Gyulsary still stood motionless in the harness, listless, hunched, hooves drawn close together. He seemed numb, dead.
"What is it, boy?" Tanabai went up to him and heard the horse's soft, drawn-out moan. "Were you dozing? Feeling bad, old fellow?" He ran his hand over the horse's cold ears quickly, he thrust his fingers into the mane. There, too, the animal's coat was cold and damp. But what alarmed Tanabai most was that he did not feel the accustomed weight of the horse's mane. "He's really old," he thought sadly, "his mane's thinned out, it's as light as, a feather. We're all getting old, there's one end awaiting all of us." He stood there undecided, not knowing what to do.
If he abandoned the horse and wagon and headed home he'd make it to his cottage by midnight. He lived there with his wife near the water inspector's house which was a mile upstream. In summer Tanabai looked after the haying, in winter he kept an eye on the ricks and saw to it that the shepherds didn't start using the hay before the proper time.
The previous autumn he had been at the firm office and the new team-leader, a young agronomist from town. had said, "We've got a new horse for you. aksakal. He's a bit old, but he'll do for your work."
"Which one?" Tanabai had asked suspiciously. "Another bag of bones?"
"You'll see. He's sort of tawny. You ought to recoginse him, they say you used to ride him.",
Tanabai had gone off to the stable. The sight of the pacer in the yard wrenched his heart. "So we meet again." The words formed in his mind as he looked at the old nag. He had not the heart to refuse and had taken Gyulsary home.
His wife hardly recognised the pacer.
"It can't be the same Gyulsary!" she exclaimed.
"Sure he's the same," Tanabai muttered avoiding his wife's eyes.
It was better for them not to delve into memories that were associated with Gyulsary. Tanabai had been young at the time, and he had been wholly to blame. To avoid an undesirable turn to the talk he spoke roughly to her, saying:
"What are you standing there for? Heat us some dinner. I'm starved."
"I was just thinking. That's what age does to you. If you hadn't told me it was Gyulsary I'd never have recognised him."
"What's so strange about that? Do you think we look any better? Time doesn't spare anyone.
"That's what I meant." She shook her head thoughtfully and added with a good-natured

laugh, "Will you be out riding your pacer at night, again? You have my permission."
"Not much chance." He waved the talk off awkwardly and turned his back on her. He should have answered the jest in like manner but he was so embarrassed he climbed up to the hayloft to get some hay and dallied there. He thought she'd forgotten but she hadn't.
Smoke poured from the chimney, his wife was warming his cold dinner for supper. Still, he fussed with the hay. She finally shouted from the doorway:
"Come down before the food gets cold again!"
She said no more about the past. It was no use.
All that autumn and winter Tanabai nursed the pacer, feeding him warm mash and chopped beets. Gyulsary's teeth were worn down to stumps. he thought he had put the horse back on his feet again, and then this had to happen. What was he to do now?
He hadn't the heart to abandon Gyulsary on the road. "What are we going to do, boy, just stand here like this'?" Tanabai said and shoved the horse gently. Gyulsary swayed and shifted his weight. "I know. Wait!"
He fished an empty sack in which he had brought his daughter-in-law potatoes up from the bottom of the wagon with his whip handle and took out a little bundle. His wife had baked him some buns for the road, but he had forgotten about them, he had had no thought of food. Tanabai broke off half a bun crumbled it in the skirt of his coat and offered the crumbs to the horse. Gyulsary breathed in the smell of bread noisily, but could not eat. Then Tanabai began to feed him. He pushed a few pieces into the horse's mouth and Gyulsary began to chew.
"Go on, eat it, maybe we'll make it home after all." Tanabai's spirits rose. "Easy does it. It'll be all right once we get home. We'll nurse you back, my old woman and me," he promised. Saliva dripped from the horse's lips onto his trembling hands, he was glad to feel that it was warmer.
Then he took hold of the bridle.
"Come on, let's go! It's no use standing here. Come on!" he said firmly.
The pacer moved off, the wagon creaked, the wheels bumped slowly along the road. They started slowly on their way, an old man and an old horse.
"He's got no strength left," thought Tanabai as he walked along the edge of the road. "How old are you, Gyulsary? Twenty, at least. No, you must be more than that."

2

They first met after the war.
Corporal Tanabai Bakasov had fought in the West and in the East and was demobilised after the capitulation of Japan. In all, he had seen almost six years of active service. His luck had held out and he got off easily; he had been shell-shocked once while serving in a supply column and another time had received a chest wound, but after two months in the hospital he had caught up with his old unit.
As he rode home the market women at the stations along the way addressed him as

"old man". They didn't really mean it and Tanabai was not offended. He was no youngster, certainly, but he was not old, it was mostly a matter of looks. His face was weather-beaten and there was grey in his moustache, but body and heart were still strong. A year later his wife bore him a daughter, and then a second. Both were now married and had children of their own. They often came to visit in the summers. The elder one had married a truck-driver. He'd pack the family into the back of his truck and they'd be off to visit the old folks in the mountains. No, he and his wife had no complaints about their daughters and sons-in-law, but his son was a failure. However, that was another story.

Long ago, on his way home after victory had been won, he had felt that life was only just beginning. It had been a wonderful feeling. Brass bands had played for the troop train at all the big stations. His wife was waiting for him at home, their boy was seven and would soon be starting school. He felt as though he had been born anew, that everything that had happened until then did not matter any more. He wanted to forget it all, to think only of the future. His picture of that future was simple and clear: he would just live--bring up children, put everything in order, build a house--in a word, he would live. And nothing would interfere any more, because everything that had happened had really been to guarantee that now, at last, a real life would begin, the life which they had always striven for, the life they had died for and won the war for.

But it turned out that Tanabai had been in too much of a hurry, much too much of a hurry, for the future demanded new sacrifices, years and years of sacrifice. At first he worked as a blacksmith's striker at the forge. He had once been skilled at the job and now, meeting the remembered challenge of the anvil, he swung lustily from morning till night, as the blacksmith barely managed to turn the glowing metal in time. Even now he could hear the measured ringing of their blows in the forge, drowning all cares and worry. There was a shortage of bread and clothes, the women wore rubbers on their bare feet, the children did not know the taste of sugar, the collective farm was in debt up to its ears, its bank account was blocked, but he brushed it all aside with his swinging hammer. He crashed his hammer down, the anvil rang, sending up blue showers of sparks. "Uh! Uh!" he grunted, swinging the hammer up and down, thinking: "Everything will turn out all right. The main thing is that we won the war! We won!" And the hammer repeated: "We won, we won, won-won-won!" He was not the only one who felt like this: in those days everyone was nourished by the air of victory, drawing strength from it as though it were bread.

Then Tanabai became a herdsman and left for the mountains. Choro had talked him into it. Choro, now long dead, was then chairman of the collective farm, as he had been all through the war. A bad heart had kept him out of the army. And though he had remained at home, he had aged. Tanabai had noticed it immediately. No one else could have persuaded him to give up the forge for a herd. But Choro was an old friend. Together, as Komsomols so many years before, they had been the first to speak up for establishing a collective farm, together they had got rid of the kulaks. Tanabai had really been zealous about it. He had had no mercy for those on the list to be dispossessed.

Choro came to the forge to persuade him to change jobs and seemed very pleased

when he succeeded.
"I was afraid you were stuck to your hammer and couldn't be pried loose," he said, smiling.
Choro was a sick man, painfully thin, with a scrawny neck and deep folds along his sunken cheeks. It was still warm, but even in summer Choro always wore the same old sweater.
They squatted to talk by an irrigation ditch near the forge. Tanabai remembered what Choro had been like as a young man. At the time he was a handsome youth, the most educated man in the village. Everyone liked him for his quiet ways and goodness. But Tanabai disliked that goodness of his. He would often jump up at a meeting and berate Choro for his intolerable leniency towards their class enemies. He sounded as good as a newspaper article. He learned everything he heard at the current events readings by heart. Sometimes he was frightened by his own words. But it sounded grand all the same.
"I was up in the mountains three days ago," Choro said. "The old men wanted to know whether all the soldiers were back. I said they were, those that had come back alive. 'And when will they start working?' I said they're all working already, some in the fields, some on construction jobs. 'We know that. But who's going to tend the horses? Are they going to wait till we die? We don't have much longer to go.' I really felt ashamed. You know what they mean. We sent the old men up into the mountains to tend the horses during the war. And they're still up there. It's no job for old men. It means being in the saddle day and night with no time off. And what about the winter nights? Remember Derbishbai? He froze to death on his horse. And they broke the horses in, too, when the army needed horses. You try riding a bucking devil over hill and dale when you're in your sixties. You'll be lucky if he doesn't break every bone in your body. We should be grateful to them for holding the fort. Now the men are back from the army and they're turning up their noses, they're so cultured after being abroad they don't want to be herdsmen any more. They don't see why they should waste their time in the mountains. That's how it goes. So it's up to you to help us out, Tanabai. If you go, we'll get others to go, too."
"All right, Choro. I'll talk it over with my wife," Tanabai replied, thinking: "We've seen so much happen in all these years, but you're still the same, Choro. Your kindness will be the end of you. Maybe that's right, though. After what we've seen in the war we should all be kinder. Maybe that's what really counts in life."
That was the end of their talk.
As Tanabai headed back to the forge, Choro called to him:
"Wait, Tanabai" He rode up on his horse, bent over the saddle to look into Tanabai's face. "You're not angry at me, are you?" he asked softly. "You know, I don't have any time to myself. I wanted to visit you and talk things over the way we used to. After all, we haven't seen each other for so long. I thought when the war ended everything would be easier, but it isn't. Sometimes I can't get to sleep, there's so much to worry about. I keep racking my brains wondering what to do to get the farm going again, feed the people and fulfil our quota. People have changed, they want to live better now."
They never did manage to sit down together and have that talk. Time passed, and

then it was too late.
When Tanabai went up into the mountains as a herdsman soon after he first saw the eighteen-month-old golden chestnut colt in old Torgoi's herd.
"Is that all you're leaving me. aksakal? The herd's not much to look at, is it? Tanabai chided the old man after the horses had been counted and driven out of the paddock.
Torgoi was a scrawny old man with a hairless, wrinkled face, as small and thin as a boy. His large chaggy sheepskin hat perched on his head like a mushroom cap. Old men of this breed are usually wiry, loud-mouthed and sharp-tongued.
But Torgoi let it pass.
"Well, it's an ordinary herd," he replied calmly. "Nothing to brag about. You'll see after you've driven the horses a while."
"I was just joking," Tanabai said placatingly.
"There's a special one, though." Torgoi pushed his hat back from his eyes, stood up in his stirrups and pointed his whip handle. "That golden chestnut colt over there, the one that's grazing off to the right. He'll come to something."
"You mean the one that's as round as a ball? He looks too small, and his back is too short."
"He's a winter foal. He'll be all right. Give him time."
"What's so special about him?"
"He's a natural born pacer."
"So what?"
"I haven't seen many like him. In the old days he'd be worth a fortune. Men killed each other at the races for a horse like that."
"Let's see what he can do," Tanabai said.
They spurred their horses, rounded the edge of the herd, cut out the golden colt and drove him before them. The colt was all for a run. He tossed his forelock saucily, snorted and set off like clockwork at a fast pacing gait, tracing a large semi-circle that would bring him back to the herd. Tanabai was delighted.
"Oho! Look at him!"
"What'd I tell you!" the old man shouted back.
They cantered after the colt, shouting like children at the games. Their voices spurred him on, he kept quickening his pace, seemingly without effort and never once breaking into a gallop, but sailed along as easily as a bird in flight.
They finally had to gallop their horses, while the colt continued in the same even gait.
"See that, Tanabai!" Torgoi shouted, waving his hat. "He's as quick to your voice as a knife to your hand! Watch him! Kait, kait! Kait!"
When the colt finally returned to the herd they left him alone. But it was a long time before they themselves calmed down as they walked their heated horses.
"Thank you, Torgoi. That's a fine colt you've raised. It makes me feel good just to look at him."
"He is good," the old man agreed. "Only mind," he said with sudden sternness, scratching the back of his head, "protect him from the evil eye. Don't let on about him yet. A good pacer's like a pretty girl, there's plenty who'd like to get their hands on him. You know how it is, a girl falls into good hands and she'll

blossom and be a joy to everyone, but if she falls into bad hands, it'll break your heart to look at her. And there's not a thing you can do about it. It's the same with a good horse. It's easy enough to ruin him. His kind will drop in his tracks."
"Don't worry, aksakal, I know a good horse when I see one.
"Good. His name's Gyulsary. Don't forget it."
"Gyulsary?"
"Yes. My granddaughter was visiting me here last summer. She named him. He was still a foal then, he was her pet. Don't forget: Gyulsary."
Torgoi turned out to be a talkative old man. He sat up all night giving Tanabai reams of advice. And Tanabai listened patiently.
He accompanied Torgoi and his wife part of the way when they left the camp. He and his family would move into their empty felt tent. There was another tent for his assistant. But no assistant had been found yet. He would carry on alone for the present.
Before parting, Torgoi had one more reminder for him.
"Leave the colt be. And don't trust him to anyone. Break him in yourself next spring. And be careful about it. Don't drive him hard at first or he'll break his gait and you'll ruin him. And see he doesn't drink too much the first few days. When you've broken him in come and show him to me if I'm still around."
And Torgoi and his old woman rode off, leaving him the herd, the tent and the mountains and taking along the camel loaded with their possessions.
If Gyulsary could have only known how much talk there was about him, how much there would yet be, and what the outcome was to be!
He ran freely with the herd as before. Nothing had changed, neither the mountains, nor the grasses, nor the streams. But instead of the old man another master herded them now. This one wore an army greatcoat and a soldier's fur hat. The new master's voice was hoarse but loud and stern. The herd soon got used to him. They didn't mind him galloping round them if he wanted to.
Then it began to snow. It snowed often and the snow lay on the ground a long time. The horses pawed the snow to get at the grass. The master's face became haggard, his hands were coarse from the wind. Now he wore felt boots and a sheepskin coat. Gyulsary grew a long coat, but still he was cold, especially at night. On frosty nights the herd pressed close together in a sheltered spot, standing motionless until sunrise, turning white from hoar-frost. The master was beside them on his horse, beating his mittened hands together and rubbing his face. He would disappear from time to time and then return. They felt more secure when he was there. He would shout or cough from the cold and the horses would lift their heads and prick up their ears, but seeing that he was nearby they would doze again to the rustling and moaning of the night wind. From that winter on Gyulsary learned to recognise Tanabai's voice and never forgot it.
One night there was a blizzard in the mountains. Sharp, stinging snow clung to the horses' manes, it made their tails heavy and hurt their eyes. The herd was restless. The horses huddled close together, trembling. The old mares snorted nervously and drove the foals into the middle of the herd. They pushed Gyulsary to the very edge and he couldn't get back inside the huddle. He began to kick,

to push, then found himself outside altogether and finally got into trouble with the herd stallion who had been circling round for some time, ploughing up the snow with his strong hooves, driving the herd into a tight cluster. At times he would gallop off, his head lowered threateningly, his ears laid back, disappearing in the darkness until they could barely make out his snorting, then he would return, terrible in his anger. When he saw Gyulsary standing alone he flew at him, swung round and kicked him in the side with terrible force.
Gyulsary choked with pain. Something exploded inside him, he squealed and nearly toppled over. He made no more attempts to be independent but stood there meekly, pressed against the outer edge of the herd, a grinding pain in his side and hurt in his heart at the brutal treatment.
The horses were quiet. Then Gyulsary heard a long, distant howl. He had never heard a wolf howl before. For an instant everything within him stopped, froze. The herd started, tensed, listened. Everything was very still. It was an uncanny stillness. The snow kept falling, clinging to Gyulsary's raised head with a rustling sound. Where was the master? How they needed him then, if they could only hear his voice or breathe in the smoky smell of his coat. But he was not there. Gyulsary rolled his eyes and went numb with fear. A shadow slid by, slinking over the snow in the darkness. Gyulsary jumped backwards, the herd shied and was off. Whinnying and neighing wildly, the horses thundered into the blackness of the night. No power on earth could have stopped them. They raced onward, carrying one another along like stones pouring down a mountain in a landslide. Gyulsary understood nothing, but he rushed on in this mad, hot race.
Suddenly, a shot rang out, then another. The galloping horses heard their master's furious shouting. It was coming from aside, then it cut across, now it was coming from up front. They raced on to catch up with the persistent voice. The master was with them. He was galloping in front of them, risking a fall off a cliff at every step. His voice was weaker now, then became hoarse, but still he continued to shout "Kait, kait, kait", and they followed him, fleeing from the terror that pursued them.
By dawn Tanabai had led the herd back to the hollow. There the horses stopped. Steam rose from them in a thick cloud, their sides heaved, they still trembled from fright. 'their hot lips snatched up clumps of snow. Tanabai, too, ate the snow. He squatted to scoop up cold white handfuls of it. Then he buried his face in his hands and remained thus, motionless. Still, the snow fell softly, melting on the horses' hot backs, rolling down their sides in dirty yellow drops.
The deep snow melted, the earth was bared, it turned green, and Gyulsary began filling out rapidly. The herd shedded, their new coats gleamed. Winter and hard times seemed unreal now. The horses did not remember them, but the man did. He remembered the cold and the nights filled with wolves' howling, he remembered how numb he was in the saddle, biting his lips at times to keep from crying, warming his frozen hands and feet by a campfire, he remembered the ice in spring that locked the earth under a leaden crust, he remembered how the weakest horses died and how, at the farm office, eyes downcast, he had signed the report stating his losses and then, exploding in a rage, banging his fist on the chairman's desk, how he had shouted:

"Don't you look at me like that! I'm no nazi! Where are the barns for the herds, where's the fodder and the oats, where's the salt? We've got nothing but the wind to hold us up! Is that how we're supposed to look after the farm? Look at the rags we're wearing! Look at our tents, come and see how I live! We never even have enough bread. It was a hundred times better in the trenches. And here you are, looking at me as if I killed those horses with my own hands!"
He remembered the chairman's terrible silence, his ashen face. He remembered how ashamed he was of his outburst and how he had tried to apologise.
"Never mind, forget it. I was just blowing off steam," he muttered.
"It's you who should forgive me," Choro said.
He had become still more embarrassed when the chairman had called the store-keeper and said:
"Issue him five kilos of flour."
"But what about the nursery school?"
"Which nursery school? Can't you ever get anything straight! I said issue him five kilos."
Tanabai wanted to refuse flatly, to say that soon they'd be milking the mares and they'd have kumiss, but when he looked at the chairman and guessed the bitter lie he forced himself to be silent. Each time he ate noodles made from that flour they scorched his mouth. He would throw down his spoon, saying:
"What do you want to do, burn me to death?"
"Blow on them, you're not a baby," his wife would calmly reply.
Yes, he remembered it all.
But now it was May. The young stallions whinnied, their bodies clashing as they threw themselves against each other angrily. They stole young mares from other herds. The herdsmen rode up and down furiously, separating the fighters, cursing each other, coming to blows at times, too, lashing at one another with their whips.
Gyulsary could not have cared less. The sun shone between showers, green grass pushed up from underfoot. The meadows were a dazzling green, the snow-capped mountains a dazzling white above them. That spring the golden chestnut pacer embarked upon the most wonderful period of his youth. The shaggy, round-rumped yearling had turned into a slim, strong colt. He grew taller, his body lost its plumpness and was taking on a triangular shape, with a broad chest and narrow quarters. His head was now that of a true pacer: lean, bony, with a bowed nose, wide-set eyes and firm lips. But he could not have cared less about that, either.
A single passion possessed him, causing his master no little bother, and this was his passion for racing. He would entice the other colts to follow him and streak along like a yellow comet. An unknown force drove him ever on, up hill and down dale, along the stony river banks, over steep paths and into the gorges. Late at night, as he fell asleep beneath the starry sky, he dreamed that the ground was still rushing by, under his hooves, that the wind was whistling in his mane and his ears and his hooves were clacking and ringing.
His attitude towards his master was similar to everything else that did not directly concern him: he neither liked him especially nor felt any hostility towards him, for his master never hampered him in any way. At most, Tanabai

cursed the colts when they had gone too far and he had to chase after them. Sometimes his master smacked the golden pacer on the rump with his looped pole. This made Gyulsary shudder, but more from surprise than from pain, and it always made him quicken his pace. The faster he ran when returning to the herd, the more it pleased his master, who galloped alongside, his looped pole balanced on his arm. The pacer would hear his encouraging shouts, he would hear him begin to sing, and at times such as those he liked his master, he liked to trot along to the sound of his singing. Later on he came to know those songs well. There were various songs: happy and sad, long and short, songs with words to them and songs without words. He also liked the times his master gave the herd salt. Tanabai would toss lumps of it into the long wooden troughs. The herd would fall on it, for salt was a great treat. Licking salt proved to be Gyulsary's undoing.

One day his master beat a tattoo on an empty pail, calling po, po, po! to the horses. They came running, heading for the troughs. Gyulsary was licking the salt, standing among the other horses and was not troubled in the least when his master and a helper began closing in with their looped poles. That had nothing to do with him. They used the poles to catch the saddle horses and the milking mares but never him. He was free. Suddenly, a horsehair loop slipped over his head and settled around his neck. Gyulsary did not know what it was all about as yet, the loop did not frighten him, and so he continued licking the salt. Other horses would pull and rear when the loop was thrown over their heads, but Gyulsary did not move a muscle. Finally, he became thirsty and wanted to go to the river to drink. He began nosing out from among the other horses. The loop drew tight around his neck, bringing him up with a start. Nothing of the kind had ever happened to him before. Gyulsary pulled back, snorted, rolled his eyes and reared. The other horses scattered. Now he found himself face to face with the men who had trapped him. His master stood in front of him, the helper behind. All around them were the other herdsmen's youngsters, recently arrived at the camp but already a nuisance, boys who kept galloping round and round the herd all day.

The pacer became terrified. He reared up again and again, the sun whirled in front of him, falling apart into burning circles, the mountains, the earth and the people kept falling, tumbling over, a terrible, frightening blackness enveloped him and he tried to beat it back with his forelegs.

But no matter how he struggled, the loop drew tighter and tighter, and instead of pulling away from the men, the choking pacer threw himself upon them. They scattered, the loop slackened momentarily, and he dragged his captors after him along the ground. The women screamed as they chased the boys back to the tents. However, the men managed to scramble to their feet. and once again the loop tightened around Gyulsary's neck. This time it was so tight he could not breathe. And so he stopped, faint from dizziness and suffocation.

His master took up the slack, approaching him from the side. Gyulsary rolled his eye at him. His master's clothes were torn, his face was bruised, but his eyes were not angry. He was panting, clucking his bruised lips, saying softly, soothingly:

"Easy now, Gyulsary. Don't be afraid, boy."

His helper followed him cautiously, keeping a tight hold on the rope. Finally, the master reached out his hand and patted the pacer's head, saying shortly, without turning:
"The bridle."
The helper handed him the bridle.
"Steady, boy, steady," his master said. He covered the pacer's eyes with his hand and slipped the bridle over his head.
It now remained to put the bit in his mouth and saddle him. As soon as the bridle was over his head, Gyulsary snorted and tried to jerk away. But his master managed to grab hold of his upper lip.
"The twister!" he shouted to his helper. The man ran up, put the rawhide twister on his mouth and began twisting it with a stick like a windlass.
The pacer sat back on his haunches from pain and resisted no more. The cold iron bit clattered against his teeth and was jammed into the corners of his mouth. Something was being put onto his back and pulled tight, his chest was being crushed in jerks by straps, he was thrown from side to side. But this was of no consequence now. The all-consuming, unbearable pain in his mouth obscured everything else. His eyes bulged from their sockets. He could neither move nor breathe. He did not even notice how or when his master sprang into the saddle, coming to his senses only when the twister was removed.
For a moment or two he stood there in a daze, strapped in and weighted down, then he rolled his eye backward and saw a man sitting on his back. He tried to flee in terror, but the bit tore at his mouth and the man's heels dug into his sides. The pacer reared and plunged, neighing indignantly, enraged, he thrashed about, kicking out his hind legs, he tensed, trying to throw off the weight, and pranced aside, but the helper, who had now mounted another horse. was holding the end of the rope and would not let him have his head. Then Gyulsary began trotting around in a circle, hoping that the circle would end and he could gallop off. But the circle did not end, he kept on running around, and around, and around. This was exactly what the men wanted him to do. His master spurred him on. In all, Gyulsary managed to throw him twice, but each time he got up and remounted.
This went on forever. The horse's head spun, the earth spun around him, the tents were spinning, the horses grazing in the distance were spinning, the mountains were spinning, the clouds in the sky were spinning. Then he became tired and slowed down to a walk. He was terribly thirsty.
But they would not let him drink. They did not unsaddle him in the evening, they merely loosened the girth and tethered him to cool him out. The reins were wound tightly around the saddle horn, making him hold his head up, preventing him from lying down, the stirrups were folded back and looped over the horn. Thus he stood all through the night. He stood quietly, overwhelmed by all the impossible things that had happened to him that day. The bit still bothered him, the slightest movement of his head brought on a shooting pain and the taste of iron in his mouth was terrible. The swollen corners of his mouth were bruised. The bruises caused by the straps on his sides burned. His battered back ached under the pad. He was dying of thirst. He could hear the gurgling of the river and

this made his thirst unbearable. As always, the herds were now grazing across the river. He could hear the sound of their hooves, of their neighing, and the night herdsmen shouting. People were sitting around the campfires outside their tents, resting. The boys were teasing the dogs and barking at them. There he stood, forgotten by all.

The moon rose. The mountains floated out of the darkness, and began to sway softly, illumined by the yellow moon. The stars burned brighter and brighter as they moved closer to earth. He stood there docilely, rooted to the spot, while someone searched for him. He could hear the nickering of the small chestnut filly, the one he had grown up with, the one he had never been separated from before. She had a white star on her forehead. She liked to race with him. The stallions had begun chasing her, but she always escaped together with him. She was not yet fully grown, while he, too, had not yet reached the age to do what the other stallions attempted to.

He heard her nicker close by. Yes, it was she. He recognised her voice. He wanted to reply, but was afraid to open his tortured, swollen mouth. The pain was too terrible. Finally, she found him. She came running up lightly, the white star on her forehead flashing in the moonlight. Her tail and legs were wet. She had crossed the river, bringing with her the cold smell of water. She nuzzled him, her firm warm lips touching his coat. She snorted gently, inviting him to follow her. But he could not move. Then she rested her head on his neck and began nibbling at his mane. He should have put his head on her neck and done the same. But he could not return her caresses. He could not move. He was very thirsty. If only she could bring him something to drink! When she ran off he gazed after her until her shadow dissolved in the darkness beyond the river. She had come and gone. Tears fell from his eyes. They ran down his cheeks in large drops, falling silently to his feet. Gyulsary wept for the first time in his life.

Early the next morning his master came to him. Tanabai looked at the mountains awakened to spring, he stretched, smiled and groaned, for every bone in his body ached.

"Well, boy, you really gave me a ride yesterday. Are you cold? Oh, yes, you look frozen."

He patted the pacer's neck and when he spoke his voice was kind and gentle. How was Gyulsary to know what the man was saying? Tanabai said:

"Don't be angry at me, boy. After all, you can't run around loose all your life. Things'll look up as soon as you get used to it. I'm sorry you had to be hurt, but there's no other way to do it. That's life for you, fellow. It makes you step lively. But after the worst is over you'll be able to take anything in your stride. Thirsty, aren't you? And hungry, too."

He led the horse to the river. There he took off the bridle, removing the bit carefully from Gyulsary's tender mouth. A shiver went through the pacer as he fell upon the water greedily, the coldness of it made him dizzy. Oh, how wonderful the water was, how thankful he was to his master for it!

And so it went. Soon he was so used to the saddle it practically made no difference to him at all. He began to enjoy having a rider to take about. His

master always kept him in check, though he would have liked to race on headlong, up and down the roads, his hooves beating out the steady, even tattoo of a pacer. He learned to carry a rider so swiftly and smoothly it made people gasp to watch him.
"If you set a pail of water on him he won't spill a drop!
"Thank you for breaking him in so well," said old Torgoi, the former herdsman. "Just watch your pacer's star rise."

3

The old wagon wheels creaked slowly along the deserted road. From time to time the creaking stopped. That meant the pacer had stopped from exhaustion. In the dead silence that followed he would hear the dull thudding of his heart echoing in his ears: thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump.
Old Tanabai gave him a chance to rest, then picked up the reins again.
"Come on, Gyulsary. Come on, boy, it's getting late."
They dragged on like that for an hour and a half until, finally, the pacer came to a halt. He was unable to pull the wagon any farther. Tanabai became alarmed.
"What's the matter, Gyulsary? Look, it's nearly dark!"
But the horse did not understand him. He stood there in harness, shaking his head which had become too heavy for his neck, swaying on wobbly legs, his thundering heart pounding in his ears: thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump.
"Forgive me, old boy," Tanabai said. "I should have thought of it sooner. I don't give a damn for the wagon or the harness as long as I get you home."
He threw off his sheepskin coat and began unharnessing the horse quickly. He led him out of the shafts, pulled the collar over his head and threw the harness into the wagon.
"There," he said, putting his coat back on. He looked at the pacer. The horse stood there like a ghost in the middle of the cold evening steppe, without his collar, without his harness, his head too big for his body. "My God, look what's become of you, Gyulsary," Tanabai whispered. "If Torgoi could see you now he'd turn in his grave."
He pulled at the reins and they trudged off along the road. An old horse and an old man. Behind them was the abandoned wagon, ahead of them in the west a deep purple darkness was descending upon the road. Night was spreading silently across the steppe, enveloping the mountains, obliterating the horizon.
As Tanabai walked along he recalled everything associated with the pacer over the years, thinking bitterly of his fellow men: "We're all like that. We think of each other towards the end of our lives, when someone becomes fatally ill or dies. That's when we suddenly realise what a fine person we've lost, how good he was, how much he did for others. So who's to remember a dumb animal? Think of all the men Gyulsary carried on his back. And now, when he's old, they've all forgotten him. Look at him, he can barely drag his feet along. And what a fine racer he was!"
And once again his memories took him back, once again he was surprised that he had not thought of the past for such a long time. Everything that had happened

came back to him. It seemed that nothing was ever forgotten. He had rarely thought of the past, or, rather, he had not permitted himself to think of it, but now, after that fateful conversation with his son and daughter-in-law, as he trudged along the dark road leading a dying horse, he looked back with pain and sadness on the years that had gone by, and all of them rose up before him. Thus he walked along, deep in thought, while the pacer stumbled on behind him, dragging ever harder on the reins. When the old man's arm would go numb he would throw the end of the reins over his other shoulder and continue pulling the horse along. Then he became tired and let the horse rest. After a moment's thought he slipped the bridle off.

"Go on at your own pace, I'll follow you. Don't worry, I'll be right behind you," he said. "Take your time, boy."

Now the pacer led the way, while Tanabai followed, the bridle thrown over his shoulder. He would never discard it. Whenever Gyulsary stopped, Tanabai would wait for him to catch his breath, then they trudged on again. An old horse and an old man.

Tanabai smiled sadly as he recalled the times when Gyulsary had sped down this very road, raising a trail of dust. the shepherds said they could recognise the pacer's gait for miles by that trail of dust. It would rise as a white line from under his hooves, streaking across the steppe and hanging over the road on a windless day like the trail left by a jet. A shepherd would shield his eyes from the sun and say: "That's him, it's Gyulsary!" He would think enviously of the lucky man who at that very moment was flying along on that grand horse, the hot wind burning his face. It was a great honour for a Kirghiz to ride such a pacer. Gyulsary had outlasted many a collective-farm chairman, and there had been all kinds: smart and stupid, honest and dishonest, but every one of them had rode the pacer from his first to last day in office. "Where are they now? Do they ever think of Gyulsary, who carried them back and forth from dawn to dusk?" Tanabai wondered.

They finally reached the bridge across the ravine. Here they stopped again. The pacer began bending his knees to lie down, but Tanabai could not let this happen: nothing would raise him again.

"Get up, get up!" he shouted, and smacked the reins across the horse's head. Angry at himself for having hit Gyulsary, he continued shouting: "Don't you understand? Do you want to die? I won't let you! I won't let you do it! Come on, get up! Get up!" He pulled the horse up by its mane.

Gyulsary straightened his legs with an effort and moaned. Though it was dark, Tanabai did not dare look him in the eye. He patted him, felt his left side and then pressed his ear against it. There, inside the horse's chest, his heart spluttered and splashed like a mill-wheel entangled in water plants. Tanabai stood doubled over beside the horse so long that his back began to ache. Then he straightened up, shook his head, sighed, and decided he would have to risk it and turn off the road beyond the bridge and onto the path along the ravine. The path led into the mountains, it was the shortest way home. True, it was easy to get lost at night, but Tanabai relied on his memory, he knew these parts well. If only the horse could make it.

While the old man was pondering over this the headlights of a truck came into view behind them. They appeared out of the blackness suddenly as a pair of bright circles, approaching rapidly, their long, wavering beams like feelers on the road. Tanabai and the pacer stood by the bridge. The truck was of no use to them, but still Tanabai awaited its approach. He did not know why he waited for it. "At last, there's one at last," he thought, relieved at the knowledge of other human beings on the road. The headlights slashed across his eyes in a blinding sheaf, bringing his hand up to shield them.

The two men in the truck looked wonderingly at the old man and the awful nag beside him that had neither saddle nor bridle, as if it were not a horse at all but a dog that had tagged along behind its master. For a split second the direct beam of light turned the old man and the horse into eerie white shapes.

"I wonder what he's doing here in the middle of the night?" the lanky youth in the fur hat said to the driver.

"It must've been his wagon we saw," the driver said, pulling up. "What's the matter, old fellow?" he shouted, sticking his head out of the window. "Was that your wagon on the road back away?"

"Yes," Tanabai replied.

"I thought so. We saw the old wreck. And not a soul in sight. We thought we might pick up a harness, but it wasn't worth a damn."

Tanabai said nothing.

The driver climbed down, walked over and began urinating on the road. The old man caught the foul smell of vodka on his breath.

"What's the matter?" the man asked.

"It was too much for the horse. He's sick and he's old."

"Hm. Where are you going?"

"Home. To the Sarygousy Gorge."

"Whew!" the driver whistled. "That high up? Too bad you're not going my way. If you want to you can get in the back and I'll drop you off at the state farm. You can start back home from there tomorrow."

"No, thanks. I can't leave my horse."

"This bag of bones? To hell with it. Dump him in the ravine and you'll have him off your neck. Want a hand?"

"Get going," Tanabai muttered angrily.

"Don't say I didn't offer," the driver chuckled. He slammed the door. "The old man's out of his head," he said to the youth beside him.

They drove off, disappearing in a foggy cloud of light. The bridge creaked heavily over the ravine, lighted up by the ruby-red tail-lights.

"Why'd you make fun of him? What if that had happened to you?" the boy said after they had crossed the bridge.

"That's nothing," the driver replied, yawning and taking a curve. "I've been in all sorts of fixes. That was some good advice I gave him. What's so special about an old nag? It's something out of the past. Technology is what counts these days, my boy. Machines are up front everywhere. It was like that during the war, too. It's curtains for old wrecks and nags like them."

"You really are mean, aren't you?" the boy said.

"What a thing to worry your head about."
When the truck had disappeared, when night had once again closed in on him, when his eyes had once again become accustomed to the dark, Tanabai said:
"Come on, boy, let's go. Come on, old fellow!"
After they had crossed the bridge he led Gyulsary off the highway. They moved slowly along the path that was barely visible in the dark above the ravine. The moon was just peeping out from behind the mountains. The stars awaited it, glittering coldly in a cold sky.

4

The year that Gyulsary was broken in the herds stayed on in the autumn pastures much later than usual. It was an unusually long autumn, the winter was mild with frequent snowfalls that soon melted, there was sufficient grazing. In spring the herds descended to the foothills again, and as soon as the steppe began to flower they moved downwards. This was probably the best time of Tanabai's life in all the post-war years. Old age, that grey steed, was still beyond the pass, though not too far away, and Tanabai could still ride the young golden pacer. If Gyulsary had entered his life several years later he most probably would not have experienced the same feeling of happiness, of manly exhilaration that riding the pacer gave him. Indeed, Tanabai was not beyond showing off on occasion. It was difficult to refrain from doing so astride a racing pacer.
Gyulsary was fully aware of this. Especially when Tanabai headed for the village across the fields and they met groups of women on their way to work. When still quite a distance from the women, Tanabai would sit up in the saddle, every muscle in his body tensed, his excitement transmitted to the horse. Gyulsary would raise his tail until it was nearly in a line with his back, his mane flowed in the wind. He would snort, his hooves skimmed over the road as he carried his rider lightly. The women in their red and white kerchiefs would move to the sides of the road where they stood knee-deep in green wheat. They would stand there transfixed, their heads turning as one, their faces flashing by, revealing shining eyes and gleaming teeth.
"Hey! Stop!" They would laugh and shout. "Wait till we catch you!"
There were times when they really did catch him, holding hands and standing in a line across the road. That was really fun! Women like to fool around and tease. They'd drag Tanabai off the horse, laugh and giggle as they tried to pull the whip from his hands.
"When will you bring us some kumiss?"
"All you do is ride around on a pacer while we break our backs in the fields!"
"What's keeping you there? You can all be herdsmen. But tell your husbands to find themselves some other women. You'll freeze in the mountains and be as cold as icicles!"
"That's what you say!" And they would begin pushing and shoving again.
But never once had Tanabai permitted anyone to mount the pacer. Not even the woman who made his heart pound when he met her on the road and pulled up beside her. Not even she had ridden his horse. But perhaps she did not want to ride him.

That year Tanabai was elected to the auditing commission. He would often have to go to the village on business. He met the woman nearly every time. Many were the times he left the farm office in a black mood. Gyulsary sensed it by his eyes, his voice, the movements of his hands. But whenever Tanabai met her his spirits rose.

"Easy does it! Whoa, boy!" he would whisper, soothing the hot-tempered pacer. Drawing abreast of the woman he would slow down to a walk.

They talked in low voices, at times they simply continued on in silence. Gyulsary felt the weight dropping from his master's heart as his voice gained warmth and his hands became gentle. That is why he was always pleased if they happened to come upon the woman on the road.

How was the horse to know that things were going very badly on the collective farm, that the farmers were hardly earning anything, and that Tanabai Bakasov, a member of the auditing commission, wanted the chairman to tell him why things were as they were, and when the good life would finally begin, when they met their commitments to the state and enough was left over so that they did not work for nothing.

They had taken in a very poor crop the year before, this year they had had to sell grain and cattle to the state above their own quota to make up for their neighbours and keep the region out of the red. No one knew what lay ahead, or what the collective farmers could hope for. Time was marching on, the war was becoming a memory, yet the people lived as before on what they could grow in their own small vegetable plots and on whatever they managed to steal from the farm fields. There was no money in the farm treasury, either; everything they sold to the state was at a loss to themselves: grain, milk and meat. The flocks flourished in the summers, but everything turned to naught in the winters, when the animals died from exposure and starvation. They needed sheds, barns and silos, but there were no building materials to be got, nor did anyone promise them any. And what were their houses like after the long war years? The only new houses were put up by those who spent their time selling potatoes and sheep at the open markets. These people seemed able to find whatever building materials they needed.

"Something is very wrong, comrades, this is not the way things ought to be. We're doing something wrong," Tanabai would say. "I can't believe that this is how things should be. Either we've forgotten how to work well or we're not being directed properly."

"What's wrong? What's incorrect?" the book-keeper asked, shoving a sheaf of papers at him. "Here, look at the plan, this is what we've received, this is what we've sold, here's the debit, here's the credit, here's the balance. There are no profits, nothing but losses. Find out what it's all about before you start accusing people. Do you think you're the only Communist here and we're all enemies of the people?"

Others would join the conversation, which soon turned into a heated, noisy argument. Tanabai sat there, pressing his hands to his head, despairing of ever understanding what was happening. He suffered for the collective farm, not only because he worked on it, but for other, very special reasons. There were men

there with whom Tanabai had old scores to settle. He knew they were laughing behind his back; they stared at him insolently when they met him, as if to say: "See how things turned out? Do you want to dispossess us as kulaks again? It'll be small pickings this time. Too bad you didn't get it in the guts during the war!"
And his eyes alone would reply: "Just wait, you rats, we'll come out on top yet!"
And these were not strangers, these people were kin. There was his half-brother Kulubai. He was an old man now, but he had spent seven years in Siberia before the war. His sons all took after their father, they hated Tanabai like poison.
And why should they have liked him? Perhaps their children, too, would hate all of Tanabai's descendants. There was good reason for it. It was all past history, but people have a long memory for ills. Had he been right in treating Kulubai as he had? Perhaps Kulubai had simply been a good farmer, what they called a middle peasant. He could not disavow their kinship--Kulubai was the son of his father's elder wife, while he was the son of the younger wife, but among the Kirghizes such brothers are considered as born of the same womb. That meant he had raised his hand against his own brother. The talk there had been at the time! Now, looking back. one might judge differently. But not then. Had he not done what he had for the sake of the collective farm? But had it actually been necessary? He had never had any doubts before, yet after the war he would sometimes wonder. Had he not earned himself and the collective farm unnecessary enemies?
"Wake up, Tanabai! What's the matter?" the others would say, drawing him back into the conversation. And they'd start all over again: the manure had to be taken out to the fields during the winter, it had to be collected from each household. There were no wheels for the wagons, that meant they'd have to buy wood and iron for the rims, but where would the money come from, and would they be able to get credit, and what would they use for security? The bank would not take their word for it. They had to repair the old irrigation ditches and dig new ones, it was an enormous job. The people wouldn't do it in winter, the ground was frozen hard, you couldn't drive a pick into it. There'd be no time in spring either, what with the sowing, lambing-time, the weeding and then the harvesting. And what about the flocks? Where were the sheds for the lambs?
Things were no better at the dairy farm. The roof had rotted, there was no fodder and nobody wanted to work as milkmaids. What had they to show for all the long hours they put in at the dairy? There were so many other problems and shortages it was frightening to think of them.
And yet, they would muster their courage and discuss the questions again at the Party meeting and the farm board meeting. Choro was the chairman. Tanabai did not really come to appreciate him until much later. It was simpler to criticise. While Tanabai was responsible for a single herd of horses, Choro was responsible for one and all on the collective farm. Yes, Choro had been a strong man. When everything seemed to be going to the dogs, when the officials in the district centre berated him and the people on the farm were at his throat he had never lost heart. If Tanabai were he, he would have either gone mad or committed suicide. But Choro kept the farm going to the last, until his heart gave out; still, he stayed on as Party organiser for two more years. Choro had a way of

reasoning with people. That is why Tanabai always left with renewed faith after speaking with him, knowing that everything would turn out well and would eventually be as they had all dreamed it would at the very beginning. Once only did his faith in Choro waver, but he was mostly to blame for that.
Gyulsary did not know what thoughts tormented Tanabai when he emerged from the farm office in a black mood, brows drawn together, flung himself into the saddle and jerked at the reins angrily. But he sensed that his master was very unhappy. Though Tanabai had never raised his hand against him, the horse feared his master at moments like this. If they happened to come upon that woman on the road he knew the master's mood would change, that he would become kinder, that he would rein him in and talk softly to her, while she patted Gyulsary's mane and stroked his neck.
No other person had hands as gentle as hers. They were wonderful hands, as firm and gentle as the lips of the chestnut filly with the star on her forehead. And no one else in the world had eyes like hers. As Tanabai spoke to her, leaning sideways out of the saddle, she smiled or frowned or shook her head in disagreement, and her eyes changed from dark to light, to dark again, like stones on the bottom of a swift stream in moonlight. When she walked off she would look back and shake her head again.
Tanabai would continue on his way, deep in thought. He would drop the reins, letting the horse proceed at his own pace, which was usually an easy trot. Tanabai did not even seem to be in the saddle, it was as if he and the horse were each riding along by themselves. Then a song would take shape, as if by itself, too. Tanabai would sing softly, slurring over the words, in rhythm to the even trotting of his pacer. He sang of the sufferings of people long forgotten. His horse followed a familiar path, taking him across the river, to the herds in the steppe.
Gyulsary was pleased when his master was in such a mood. In his own way he liked the woman. He recognised her figure, her gait, and his keen nostrils associated her with the strange and wonderful aroma of an unfamiliar grass. It was the smell of cloves, for she wore beads of cloves.
"See how he likes you. Biubiujan," Tanabai would say to her. "Go on, pat him again. Look at him waggle his ears, just like a calf. But he's wild when he's back in the herd. If he had his way, he'd be fighting with the stallions like a dog. That's why I keep him saddled and ride him most of the time. I'm afraid they'll hurt him. He's still too young."
"I know he loves me," she replied, her thoughts elsewhere.
"Meaning that others don't."
"That's not what I meant. Our time for loving has passed. I don't want to have to feel sorry for you."
"But why?"
"Because you're different. Because you'll suffer."
"What about you?"
"What do I care? I'm a war widow. But you. . . ."
"And I'm a member of the auditing commission. I just happened to meet you and I'm getting some things straight," Tanabai said, attempting to make light of it.

"You've been stopping to get things straight quite often, haven't you? Be careful."
"What have I to be careful about? I happen to be passing along here and so are you."
"I take a different road. This is where we part. Goodbye. I've no time to talk."
"Wait, Biubiujan!"
"What is it? Don't stop me, Tanabai. What's the use? You're a clever man. Things are hard enough for me as it is."
"What do you think I am, your enemy?"
"You're your own worst enemy."
"Why?"
"Because."
And she walked off. Tanabai rode down the village streets as if on business, turning in at the mill, or at the school and, circling round, he would return again to watch from a distance as she left her mother-in-law's house. He would see her come out of the house where she had left her daughter for the day and head for her own house at the edge of the village, leading the child by the hand. Everything about her was dear to him: the way she walked, trying not to look in his direction, her pale face framed by a dark shawl, her little girl and the mongrel pup that ran beside them.
She would finally disappear behind her gate. Then he would continue on his way, seeing her open the door of the empty house in his mind's eye, throw off her old quilted jacket, run out to the well in a cotton dress, make the fire, wash and feed the child, then go to meet her cow when the herd returned; late into the night she would lie alone in the dark silent house, trying to convince both herself and him that they could not love each other, that he was a family man, that it was foolish to fall in love at his age, that there was a time for everything in life, that his wife was a good woman and did not deserve to be hurt.
These thoughts depressed Tanabai. "Fate is against us," he would say, staring into the haze beyond the river, singing an old song, forgetting everything else in the world, the business at hand, the collective farm, clothes and shoes for the children, his friends and enemies, his half-brother Kulubai who had not spoken to him in years, the war, which ever so often would come back to him in his dreams, making him break out in a cold sweat, he would forget everything that was reality. He was unaware that his horse had crossed the river, that they were continuing on their way on the other side and would only come out of his trance when the pacer caught wind of the herd and started off at a canter.
"Whoa, Gyulsary! Easy, boy!" Tanabai would say, coming up with a start and pulling at the reins.

5

Nevertheless, it was a wonderful time, both for him and for Gyulsary. A pacer's fame is similar to that of a football player. A boy who was kicking a ball around only yesterday today suddenly becomes the public's darling, a topic of

discussion for the experts, the idol of the crowds. His fame continues to grow as long as he scores goals. Then gradually it dies away until one day he is completely forgotten. Those who praised him most are usually the first to forget him. A new star takes the place of the once-famous player. Such is the path of glory of a racing horse, too. He is famous as long as he can win races. Perhaps the only difference is that no one envies a horse. Horses do not know the meaning of envy, while people have luckily not yet learned to envy horses.

Old Torgoi's prediction came true. The pacer's star rose quickly that spring. Young and old, everyone knew of him. "Gyulsary!", "Tanabai's pacer", "the glory of the village" was how they referred to him.

Barefoot boys of three and four galloped up and down the dusty street, imitating the pacer's gait, shouting: "I'm Gyulsary!", "No, I'm Gyulsary!", "Mamma, tell him I'm Gyulsary! Come on, boy! I'm Gyulsary!"

The pacer learned the meaning of glory and the great power it wielded at his very first big race. It was on May Day. The games began on the large meadow by the river after the mass meeting ended. People had arrived from far and wide, from the neighbouring state farm, from the mountains, and even from Kazakhstan. The Kazakhs were racing their own horses.

It was said that this was the biggest gathering since the war had ended.

When Tanabai saddled his horse early that morning, more careful than ever in adjusting the girth and stirrups, the excited glitter in his eyes and the slight tremor of his hands told the pacer that something unusual was afoot.

"Don't let me down, Gyulsary," Tanabai whispered, combing the horse's mane and forelock. "Don't bring shame on yourself. Hear me? We have no right to do that!"

There was a feeling of expectation in the air, in the excited voices, in the commotion and noise. Herdsmen were saddling their horses in the mountain pastures, boys galloped up and down, then the herdsmen gathered together and started out for the river in a body.

Gyulsary was dazed by the sight of so many people and horses on the meadow. The air over the river, over the meadow, over the hills along the floodlands was alive with noise. He was dazzled by the bright shawls and dresses, by the red flags and the women's white turbans. The horses had on fancy harnesses. Stirrups jingled, bits and silver breastplate pendants clanged.

The horses stamped impatiently, crowded together by their riders, raring to go, pawing the ground. The old men in charge of the games pranced about on their horses within the wide ring.

Gyulsary could feel his muscles tense, he could feel his strength welling up within him. A fiery demon was coursing through his veins, and the only way he could rid himself of it was by rushing into the ring and streaking off as fast as he could.

When the master of the games signaled to them and Tanabai slackened his hold on the reins the pacer carried him into the middle of the ring and spun about, unsure of which way to go. Word passed through the crowd: "Gyulsary! It's Gyulsary!"

Everyone who wanted to take part in the big race now entered the ring. There were about fifty riders in all.

"Ask the people to bless you!" the master of the games intoned solemnly.
The riders with bands tied round their shaven heads moved along the rows, their arms raised, their fingers spread apart. Oomin, rose the murmur over the crowd as hundreds of hands were raised to touch their foreheads and then slid down their faces like streams of water.
Then the riders galloped off towards the starting line which was in a field six miles away.
Meanwhile, the games began in the ring with wrestlers on foot and on horseback, riders picking coins off the ground, and many others. All these were merely preliminaries, the main event was to begin where the riders were.
Gyulsary chaffed at the bit. He could not understand why his master kept him in check. Horses were prancing and bucking to all sides of him. The very fact that there were so many of them and that all of them were straining at their reins angered him, making him shiver impatiently.
Finally, they lined up in a row, nose to nose, at the starting line. The master of the games rode down the line from one end to the other, stopped and raised a white handkerchief. They all froze, excited, alert. The handkerchief fluttered. The horses lunged forward and Gyulsary, caught up by the single thrust, surged on ahead. The ground trembled beneath their thundering hooves, a cloud of dust rose behind them. Urged on by the shouting of their riders, the horses spread out in a mad gallop. Gyulsary alone, who did not know how to gallop, fell into his pacing gait. Therein lay his weakness and his strength.
At first they all crowded together, but a few minutes later they began stringing out. Gyulsary did not notice this. All he saw was the fast racers overtaking him and reaching the road. Hot pebbles and lumps of dry clay flew up from under their hooves, hitting his head, while horses galloped to the left and right of him, their riders shouting, whips cracking in the air and dust rolling. The dust cloud grew bigger and bigger, spreading over the ground. There was an acrid smell of sweat, flint and trampled young wormwood.
This continued until they had covered half of the distance. Ten horses had broken away and were out in front, galloping along at a speed the pacer could never attain. The noise of the race began to die down, those in back dropped behind, but the very fact that there were still others ahead of him and that the reins were being held in check enraged him. His eyes grew dark from anger and the wind, the road flashed by beneath his hooves, the sun, falling from the sky in a fiery ball, seemed to be rolling towards him. He broke out in a hot sweat and the more he sweated the lighter he felt.
Finally, there came a moment when the galloping horses began to tire and to gradually slow down, while the pacer's reserves were still untapped. "Come on, boy!" he heard his master shout, and the sun began rolling towards him ever faster. Then the furious faces of the other riders flashed by one after another as he overtook them and left them behind--the cracking whips, the bared teeth and gaping mouths of the other horses. Suddenly the reins were no longer held in check, suddenly Gyulsary no longer felt the weight of the saddle or the rider, while the fiery spirit of the chase roared in his veins.
There were still two horses racing side by side ahead of him, an iron-grey and a

chestnut. Neither would concede an inch to the other as they raced onward, spurred on by the shouts and whips of their riders. They were excellent horses. Gyulsary was a long time in overtaking them. but he finally left them behind on a rise in the road. He flew up the hillock as if it were the crest of a giant wave and for a split second he seemed to be suspended and weightless in the air. It took his breath away. The sun pouring into his eyes was more dazzling than ever as he raced down the road. However, he soon heard the thunder of hoofbeats behind them. The grey and the chestnut were catching up. They approached him from both sides and stayed with him.

Thus they continued onward three-abreast, moving as a single body. Gyulsary imagined that they were no longer running, that they had all frozen in a strange and silent torpor. He could even see the expression in the other two horses' eyes, their straining heads, their teeth, clamped on the bits, the bridles. The grey was stubborn and enraged, while the chestnut seemed nervous as he glanced uncertainly about. Then the chestnut fell behind. First his guilty, wandering eye disappeared from sight, then his flaring nostrils and he was no more. The grey was a long time in falling behind. It was a painful process, quite as if he were dying on his feet, his eyes becoming glassy from helpless rage. Thus he disappeared, unwilling to accept defeat.

As soon as his rivals had fallen behind, Gyulsary breathed easier. He could see the silvery bend of the river ahead, the green meadow, he could hear the distant roar of many voices. The most avid fans had ridden out and were now racing along to both sides, shouting and whooping. All of a sudden the pacer began to feel weak. The distance had been too much for him. He did not know what was happening behind him, whether the others were catching up or not. His strength was quickly ebbing, he knew he could not go on.

But there, ahead of him, a great crowd stirred and roared, riders and people on foot were moving towards him like two enticing arms, and the shouting was becoming ever louder. He heard them clearly now: "Gyulsary! Gyulsary! Gyulsary!" Drinking in the shouting and whoops, his lungs filling with them as with air, he lunged forward with renewed strength. Oh, people! How great is your power! Gyulsary raced along the human corridor to the sound of their exultant shouting. Then, slowing his pace, he circled the meadow.

But this was not all. Neither he nor Tanabai were their own masters now. As soon as Gyulsary caught his breath and calmed down, the people moved aside to form the winner's ring. Once again a shout went up: "Gyulsary!

Gyulsary! Gyulsary!" They were also shouting the name of his master: "Tanabai! Tanabai! Tanabai!"

And once again the effect they had on the pacer was miraculous. He entered the arena as a proud victor, his head high, his eyes ablaze. Dizzy from the very air of glory, Gyulsary began prancing and strutting as though ready to take off again. He knew he was beautiful, powerful and famous.

Tanabai rode up and down along the rows, his hands spread wide as a signal of victory. Once again the sigh of benediction, Oomin, swept over the crowd. Once again hundreds of hands touched their foreheads and then slipped down their

faces like streams of water.
Then, among the many faces, the pacer suddenly recognised a familiar one. It was the woman. He recognised her the moment her palms slipped away from her face, though now she had on a white shawl instead of a dark one. She stood in the front row radiant with joy, her shining eyes, like the stones in a sun-flecked stream, never leaving them. Gyulsary wanted to get closer, to stand by her, so that his master could talk to her while she patted his mane and stroked his neck with those wondrous hands, as firm and gentle as the lips of the chestnut filly with the star on her forehead. But for some strange reason Tanabai kept pulling the reins the other way, while the pacer pranced about, trying to reach her, puzzled by his master's behaviour. Couldn't he see that the woman he had to talk to was standing right there?
The following day, May second, was another glorious day for Gyulsary. The goat-snatching, a game somewhat like polo in which the beheaded carcass of a goat was used instead of a ball, would be held at noon in the steppe. A goat's hair is long and coarse, making it easy for the players to snatch it up.
Once again the ancient cry rose over the steppe, once again the earth thundered. A crowd of fans on horseback shouted and whooped as they galloped round the players. Once again Gyulsary was the hero of the day. This time. having already gained fame, he immediately became the strongest horse in the game. However, Tanabai was keeping him in check until the last spurt, the alaman-baiga. When the master of the games would call out the signal for the free-for-all and the nimblest and quickest of them all would carry the goat off to his village.
Everyone awaited the alaman-baiga, for this was the great moment of the contest; besides, any horseman had the right to join. Each man wanted to try his luck.
Meanwhile, the May sun was sinking heavily in the distant Kazakh side. It was a thick yellow, like the yolk of an egg. You could look at it with your naked eye.
Kirghiz and Kazakh riders raced up and down, hanging out of their saddles, grabbing up the carcass on a gallop, snatching it from each other, coming together in a shouting crowd and scattering with whoops again across the field.
When long, motley shadows raced across the steppe the master of the games finally called for the alaman-baiga. The carcass was thrown into the ring to the shout of "alaman!"
It was immediately surrounded by riders who jostled and shoved each other in their attempt to grab it. This was not an easy feat, considering the press. The horses spun around madly, their teeth bared, biting each other. Gyulsary was perishing in the stampede, he yearned for the open spaces, but Tanabai could not manage to grab the goat. Suddenly, a shrill cry went up: "Get them! The Kazakhs have it!" A young Kazakh in a ripped army shirt, riding a rearing bay stallion, broke away from the milling horses. He raced off, pulling the goat's carcass up under his leg, under the stirrup leather.
"Get him! It's the bay!" they shouted, heading him off. "You're the only one who can get him, Tanabai!"
The Kazakh on the bay stallion was heading straight for the setting sun, the carcass bobbing up and down under his leg. It seemed that at any moment he would fly into that flaming disc and go up in a puff of red smoke.

Gyulsary could not understand why Tanabai was holding him back. But his master knew that he had to give the Kazakh rider a chance to break away from the swarm of pursuers, and the crowd of kinsmen hurrying to his aid. As soon as they formed a covering detachment around the bay stallion the prize would never be regained. The only hope for success lay in single combat.
Tanabai waited for his chance, then let the pacer go. Gyulsary pressed close to the earth that was rushing towards the sun, the hoofbeats and voices behind him began falling away, they grew dimmer, while the distance between him and the bay stallion grew shorter. The stallion was carrying a heavy load, it was not too difficult to overtake him. Tanabai was heading Gyulsary over to the bay's off side. The carcass, held firm by the rider's leg, hung there. Gyulsary was now abreast of him. Tanabai leaned over the saddle to grab one of the goat's legs, but the Kazakh quickly shifted his prize to the left side. The horses were still galloping towards the sun. Now Tanabai had to fall behind to get around to the left and overtake his rival once again. It was hard to pull the pacer away from the bay, but he finally succeeded. Once again the Kazakh in the ripped army shirt managed to shift the carcass to the off side.
"Good for you!" Tanabai shouted excitedly.
And the horses raced on into the sun.
Tanabai could not risk the manoeuvre again. He pressed Gyulsary close to the bay stallion and threw himself across his neighbour's saddle. The rider tried to break away, but Tanabai would not let him. Gyulsary's speed and litheness made it possible for Tanabai to practically lie across the bay stallion's neck.
Finally, he got his hands on the carcass and began pulling it towards himself. It was easier for him to reach from the right, besides, both his hands were free. He had practically got half of it over to his side.
"Watch out, brother Kazakh!" Tanabai shouted.
"No, you don't, neighbour! You won't get it!" the other shouted back.
And so the struggle began at a dead gallop. They were locked together like eagles fighting over prey, shouting at the tops of their voices, grunting and snarling like animals, bullying each other, their arms like steel bands, their nails bleeding. And the horses, united in their riders' struggle, carried them onward angrily, speeding to catch up with the flaming sun.
Blessed be our ancestors who handed down these fierce games of courage to us!
The goat's carcass now hung suspended between the racing horses. The end of the contest was in sight. Silently, teeth clenched, straining every muscle, the men tugged at it, each trying to get a leg over it in order to suddenly pull away, and break free. The Kazakh was strong. He had large, sinewy arms, and he was much younger than Tanabai. But experience means a lot. Tanabai suddenly kicked off his right stirrup and pressed his foot against the bay stallion's loins.
While pulling the carcass towards himself he was also pushing his rival's horse away, and the other man's fingers finally, uncurled.
"Hang on!" the vanquished foe managed to shout in warning.
Tanabai nearly flew out of his saddle from the jolt, but he kept his seat. A wild yell of triumph escaped front his lips. Spinning his pacer around he fled his pursuer, pressing the prize he had won in honest combat under his stirrup

leather. A horde of shouting riders was galloping towards him.
"Gyulsary! Gyulsary got it!"
"Catch him! Get Tanabai!" A group of Kazakhs rode out to intercept him.
He had to avoid interception at all costs and give his fellow-villagers a chance to form a covering detachment around him.
Once again he spun his pacer around, heading away, front his pursuers. "Good boy! Thank you, Gyulsary!" he said gratefully as the horse, sensitive to his slightest movement, spun and turned, avoiding the riders.
The pacer all but flattened himself against the ground in pivoting, then headed straight off. At that moment Tanabai's comrades reached him, surrounded him, and together they galloped off. However, their pursuers were out to intercept them again. Once again they had to turn and flee. The hordes of riders were like flocks of swift birds careening in flight from one wing to another as they raced across the vast steppe, some fleeing, others pursuing. The air was thick with dust, voices rang out, a horse and rider would fall, a man would go tumbling head over heels, another would limp after his horse, but one and all were caught up in the spirit and the fever of the contest. No one is to blame for anything that happens in a game. Courage and risk are born of the same mother.
But a slim edge of the sun remained, twilight was descending, yet the alaman-baiga still rolled on through the blue coolness of the evening, making the earth shudder under the horses' hooves. No one shouted any more, no one pursued anyone else, still, they all continued the race, caught up by the passion of movement.
The avalanche spread out along the steppe, rolling up one hill and down another like a dark wave, governed by the rhythm and the music of the race. Was this not why the faces of the riders were intent and silent, had this rhythm not given birth to the twanging music of the Kazakh dombra and the Kirghiz komuz?
They were nearing the river. It gleamed dully beyond the dark thickets ahead of them. There was just a little way to go now. The game would end beyond the river, at the village. Tanabai and his comrades still rode in a body. Gyulsary was in the centre, a flagship surrounded by its escort.
But he was tired, dead tired. The day had been too much for him. He was near collapse. The riders to the left and right of him each had a hand on his bridle, they were pulling him along and would not let him falter. The others protected Tanabai from the sides and the rear. He was prostrated on the carcass that was now thrown across his saddle. Tanabai's head bobbed up and down, he could barely keep his seat. If not for the escort neither he nor his pacer would have been able to move. Thus, probably, did riders of yore carry off their prey, thus, probably, were wounded warriors rescued from the enemy.
Here was the river, here was the meadow and the broad, pebbly ford. They could still make it out in the darkness.
The riders splashed through the water. The river foamed and churned. Through fountains of spray to the deafening clatter of hooves the pacer was dragged onto the other bank. They had made it! They had won!
Someone removed the carcass from Tanabai's saddle and rode ahead into the village.
The Kazakhs remained on the other side.

"Thank you for the game!" the Kirghiz riders shouted.
"Good-bye! We'll meet again in the autumn!" the Kazakhs replied and turned their horses back.
It was very dark. Tanabai was a guest in another man's house, his pacer was tied up with the other horses outside. Never before had Gyulsary been so tired, perhaps only on the day he had been broken in. But then, by comparison, he had been a mere slip of a thing. Inside the house they were speaking of him.
"Let's drink to Gyulsary, Tanabai. If not for him we'd never have won the prize.'
"You're right. The bay stallion was as strong as a lion. And that boy is powerful. He'll make a name for himself one day."
"Yes. I can still see Gyulsary racing away from the Kazakhs. He was so close to the ground it made my heart stop."
"Right you are. In olden times warriors would have taken him on their raids. He's a regular Duldul!"
"When will you let him out to stud, Tanabai?"
"He's been chasing the mares already, but he's still too young. Next spring will be about right. I'll let him graze free this autumn, so he can put on weight."
The men sat over their drinks far into the night, discussing various aspects of the alaman-baiga and the pacer's fine points, while the subject of their discussion stood outside, chewing his bit as the sweat dried on him. He had a long hungry night of cooling out ahead of him. But it was not hunger that bothered him. His shoulders ached. His legs were leaden, his hooves burned and his head swam from the noise of the alaman-baiga. He could still hear the shouting of his pursuers. He would shudder and snort from time to time, pricking up his cars. Gyulsary would have liked to roll in the grass, shake himself and wander about with the horses in the pasture. But his master seemed to be detained.
He soon emerged, however, swaying slightly in the darkness, giving off a strong, acrid smell. This happened very rarely. The following year, the pacer would have a new master, one who always reeked of this smell. And he would come to hate the man and the foul smell.
Tanabai walked over to his horse, ran his fingers through his forelock and stuck his hand under the pad.
"Cooled off a bit? Are you tired? I'm dead tired, too. Never mind looking at me like that. So what if I had a few drinks? I was drinking to you. After all, it's been quite a day. And I didn't have much. I know how much I can take. I've always known that, even in the trenches. Come on, Gyulsary, stop looking at me like that. Let's go back to the herd and rest up."
His master tightened the girth, spoke to the people who had come out of the house, then they all mounted their horses and each one went his way.
Tanabai rode down the sleeping village streets. It was very still. The windows were dark. A tractor chugged softly in the distance. The moon had risen above the mountains, the blossoming apple trees foamed white in the orchards, somewheres a nightingale was singing. Strangely, only one nightingale was singing in the whole village. He would sing his song, then fall silent, as if listening to himself, then begin trilling again.

Tanabai reined in his horse.

"How beautiful everything is!" he said aloud. "And how quiet. Nothing but the nightingale singing. Do you know what I mean, Gyulsary? Of course you don't. All you want to do is get back to the herd. But I...."

They passed the smithy and should have gone down the last street to the river and there turn off to the herds. However for some reason or other his master pulled him over to a side, they rode down the middle street and stopped outside the gate of the woman's house. The mongrel that often accompanied her little girl ran out, barked, then stopped and began wagging its tail. Tanabai sat silently in the saddle, mulling over something, then sighed and took up the reins uncertainly.

The pacer continued on his way. Tanabai turned towards the river. When he reached the road he spurred the horse on. Gyulsary was also in a hurry to get back to the pasture. They crossed the meadow. Here was the river, his shoes clacked along the bank. The water was ice-cold. When they had reached the middle of the crossing his master suddenly pulled him up and turned him around sharply. Gyulsary shook his head, thinking it was a mistake. They were not supposed to be going back. After all, how much riding could they do in a day? His master brought his whip down on his flank. Gyulsary did not like to be whipped. He chewed the bit angrily, and turned grudgingly. Once again they crossed the meadow, once again they rode down the road, once again they approached the house. When they reached it his master fidgeted in the saddle, pulling the reins now this way, now that, as if he didn't know what he wanted. They stopped by the double gate. Actually, all that was left of it were two crooked posts, the gate itself was gone. Once again the mongrel ran out, barked and fell silent, wagging its tail. The house was dark and still.

Tanabai dismounted and crossed the yard, leading his pacer. He went over to a window and tapped on the pane.

"Who's there?" a voice inside asked.

"It's me, Biubiujan. Open the door. It's me!"

A tiny light went on inside and was reflected dimly in the window.

"What's the matter? Where were you so late? Biubiujan said, appearing in the doorway. She had on a white dress that was open at the throat and her dark hair lay on her shoulders. She smelled sweet and warm, and there was that strange and wonderful aroma of an unfamiliar grass about her.

"Forgive me," Tanabai said softly, "but the alaman ended very late. I'm very tired. And my horse is all in. He has to cool out, but you know how far it is to the herds."

Biubiujan said nothing.

Her eyes lit up and went out like the stones on the bottom of a moonlit stream. The pacer expected her to come over and stroke his neck, but she did not.

"It's cold out here," Biubiujan said and shivered. "What are you standing there for? You might as well come in. You certainly thought of a good excuse," she added and laughed softly. "I thought you'd never make up your mind, stamping around out there on your horse. You're just like a little boy."

"I'll be right in. I'll tie Gyulsary up first."

"Put him over there in the corner by the open hearth."
Never before had his master's hands shaken so. He hurried as he took out the bit and fussed unnecessarily long with the girth, loosening one strap and forgetting about the other.
Tanabai disappeared into the house with the woman. Soon the light in the window went out.
The pacer felt odd in this strange yard.
The moon was shining brightly. When Gyulsary raised his eyes he saw the mountains towering in a milky-white haze. His sensitive ears twitched as he listened to every sound. The water gurgled in the irrigation ditch. The same tractor chugged in the distance and the same solitary nightingale sang his song in the orchard.
White apple blossoms fell silently onto the horse's head and mane from a nearby tree. The night was becoming lighter. The pacer stood there, shifting his weight from one foot to another, waiting patiently for his master. he did not know that he was to stand there many a time, waiting for the night to pass.
Tanabai came out at dawn. His hands were warm as he put the bit into Gyulsary's mouth. Now his hands, too, had that strange and wonderful aroma of an unfamiliar grass about them.
Biubiujan came out to see Tanabai off. She pressed close to him and he kissed her again and again.
"Your moustache is prickly," she whispered. "Hurry, see how light it is." She turned back to enter the house.
Come here, Biubiu," he called. "Come and pat him," Tanabai added, nodding towards the horse. "Don't neglect him."
"Oh my! I forgot all about him," she replied and laughed. "Look, he's covered with apple blossoms." Murmuring softly, she stroked the horse with her wonderful hands, as firm and gentle as the lips of the chestnut filly with the star on her forehead.
When they had crossed the river Tanabai began to sing. Gyulsary was happy to trot along to the sound of the song. He was anxious to reach the herds and the green pasture.
Luck was with Tanabai on those May nights. It was his turn to tend the herds at night. A strange night life began for the pacer, too. He would graze in the daytime, then, as soon as his master had taken the herd to the dell at night, they would race back to that house and that yard.
At the crack of dawn they would speed away like thieves along the barely visible paths through the steppe, back to the horses that had been left in the dell. His master would round them up, count them, and finally calm down. It was a hard life for Gyulsary. His master was in a hurry both ways, and it was not easy to race over open country in the dead of night. But that was as his master wished it to be.
Gyulsary wished it to be otherwise. If it were up to him, he would never leave the herd. The male animal in him was raising its head. For the time being Gyulsary was able to get along with the herd's stallion, but with each passing day they would clash more often over some mare. More and more often now Gyulsary

would arch his neck and tail, preening himself in front of the herd. He would neigh loudly, prance about and nip the mares' flanks. They seemed to like this and pressed against him, provoking the jealousy of the herd's stallion. The pacer was often hurt, for the stallion was an old and fierce fighter. However, Gyulsary preferred the excitement and the stallion's wrath to being tied up in the yard all night. He yearned for the mares. He would stamp his feet, paw the ground and finally calm down. Who knows how long those nocturnal journeys would have lasted if not for a fateful incident.

On that night the pacer was standing in the yard as usual, yearning for the herd, waiting for his master. He was just about to doze off. The reins were tied to one of the rafters. This kept him from lying down, for each time his head nodded the bit cut into the corners of his mouth. Still, he was about to doze off. The air was heavy, clouds darkened the sky.

Gyulsary was half-asleep when he heard the trees suddenly rustle, as if someone had attacked them, shaking the tops and bending them over. A gust of wind tore across the yard, overturning an empty milk pail that rolled off clattering, tearing the clothes from the line and carrying them away. The dog whined and scurried about, not knowing where to hide. The pacer snorted angrily, then stood very still, pricking up his ears. Raising his head, he gazed intently towards the steppe, from where something dark and terrible and roaring was approaching.

The very next instant the night cracked like falling trees, thunder rolled across the sky, flashes of lightning streaked through the clouds. The rain came down in torrents. Gyulsary yanked at the tether as if he had been slashed with a whip and neighed frantically, fearful for the safety of his herd. The primeval instinct to protect his own kind from danger had awakened in him. This instinct called him thither, to the rescue. Crazed, he mutinied against the tether, against the bridle and the bit, against everything that bound him to the spot. He began to thrash about, pawing the ground, neighing incessantly in the hope of hearing a response from the herd. But the only sounds were the howling and the whistling of the storm. If only he had been able to break loose that night!

His master dashed out in his long-sleeved white undershirt and the woman, also in white, rushed out after him. The next moment their clothes became dark from the rain. A blue flash washed over their wet faces and frightened eyes, plucking a corner of the house and the door swinging in the wind from the darkness.

"Wait! Hold still!" Tanabai shouted as he tried to untie the horse. But Gyulsary did not recognise him. He attacked his master viciously, the hearth caved in under his hooves as he tore at his tether. Pressing close to the wall, Tanabai crept up on him, lunged, covering his head with his arms, and seized hold of the bridle, pulling at it with all his weight.

"Quick! Untie him!" he shouted to the woman.

She had barely managed to do so when the pacer began dragging Tanabai across the yard.

"Get my whip!"

Biubiujan snatched it up.

"Hold still! I'll murder you!" Tanabai shouted, lashing the horse on the head in a frenzy. He had to get into the saddle, he should have been out with the herd

that very moment. What was happening to it? Where had the storm driven the horses?
But the pacer had to get back to the herd, too, immediately, that very moment, back to where the great power that was instinct summoned him in this hour of danger. That was why he neighed and reared, that was why he bad fought to break loose. Meanwhile, the rain poured down, the storm raged and the night shuddered, rent by flashes and thunderclaps.
"Hold him!" Tanabai shouted, and when Biubiujan grabbed the bridle he jumped into the saddle. He had not yet got his seat and was hanging on to Gyulsary's mane when the horse dashed across the yard, knocking over the woman and dragging her through a puddle.
No longer submissive to the bit or the whip or his master's voice, Gyulsary raced through the storm-swept night, through the slashing rain, finding his way by some sixth sense alone. He carried his rider, no longer his master, across the foaming river, through the crashing of thunder and water, through thickets, over ditches and across ravines, ever onward. Never before, neither at the big race, nor at the alaman-baiga, had Gyulsary run as fast as he did that stormy night.
Tanabai did not know where the frenzied horse was taking him. The rain whipped across his face and body like scorching tongues of fire. A single thought pummelled his brain: "How is the herd? Where are the horses? God forbid if they've gone down into the valley, to the railroad tracks. There'll be a wreck! Allah, help me! Arbaki help me! Where are you? Don't fall, Gyulsary, don't fall! Take me out to the steppe, to the herd!"
White flashes of lightning rolled over the steppe, blinding the night with white fire. Then once again darkness would be absolute, as the storm raged and the wind whipped at the rain.
There was blinding light, then darkness, then light, then darkness again.
The pacer reared up and neighed, his mouth gaping. He was calling, he was entreating, he was searching, he was yearning. "Where are you? Where are you? Answer me!" The sky thundered in reply, and once again he was off, searching again, back into the heart of the storm.
There was blinding light, then darkness. then light, then darkness again.
The storm did not subside until dawn. Gradually the clouds dispersed, though the thunder still rolled in the east, rumbling, growling and stretching. The ravaged earth smoked.
Several herdsmen galloped across the steppe, rounding up horses that had strayed from their herds.
Tanabai's wife was looking for him. Rather, she was waiting for him. She and the neighbours had dashed out on horseback during the night to help him. They had located the herd and had kept it in the dell. Tanabai was not there.
They thought he had lost his way. But she knew he had not. And when the neighbour's boy had shouted excitedly:
"There he is, Jaidar, there he is!" and had galloped off to meet him, Jaidar did not move. She sat silently in the saddle, watching her erring husband return.
Tanabai was sullen. He was terrible to look at in his wet undershirt, hatless,

astride a limping horse.
We've been looking for you!" the boy shouted happily. "Jaidar was beginning to worry."
Oh, child, you should have kept your place.
"I got lost," Tanabai mumbled.
Thus he and his wife met. Not a word was spoken. When the boy left to lead the horses out of the dell she said softly:
"Didn't you even have time to dress? It's a good thing you have your pants and boots on. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? You're not a youngster any more, you know. Your children are nearly grown, and look at you.
Tanabai said nothing. What could he say?
Meanwhile, the boy drove the herd back. None of the horses or colts had strayed.
"Let's go home, Altyke," Jaidar called to him. "We'll all have our hands full today. The wind toppled over the tents. Let's go and set them up again."
Speaking in an undertone, she said to Tanabai:
"You stay here. I'll bring you some food and some clothes. You can't show your face to the neighbours like this."
"I'll be down below," Tanabai replied.
They rode off. Tanabai drove the horses towards the pasture. It was a long way to go. The sun was out, the air had become warm. The steppe steamed, coming to life. Everything smelled of rain and young grass.
The horses trotted across the shallows and across a ravine and came out on a hillock. Here a new world opened up before Tanabai's eyes. The horizon, spotted by white clouds, seemed very far away. The sky was tremendous, clear and high. A train crawled across the steppe in the distance.
Tanabai dismounted and walked through the grass. A skylark fluttered out from underfoot and rose twittering into the air. He trudged along, his head lowered, then suddenly fell headlong to the ground.
Never before had Gyulsary seen his master thus. He lay face down, his body racked by sobs. He wept from shame and grief, knowing that he had lost the happiness that had come to him for the last time in his life. And the skylark kept on trilling.
The next day the herds started out for the mountains. They would not return until early spring of the following year. The camp was moving along the river, past the village. There were flocks of sheep and herds of cows and horses. There were pack horses and camels. Women and children rode on horseback. Shaggy dogs accompanied them. The air was filled with shouting, neighing and bleating.
Tanabai drove his herd across the big meadow, up the rise where the crowds had so recently gathered for the games, trying hard not to look in the direction of the village. When Gyulsary suddenly edged towards the house on the outskirts he was whipped for his efforts. They did not stop off at the house of the woman with the wonderful hands, as firm and gentle as the lips of the chestnut filly with the star on its forehead.
The herd moved on at a lively pace.
Gyulsary wanted his master to sing, but he did not. Now the village was behind them. Good-bye, village. The mountains lay ahead. Good-bye, steppe, until we

meet again next spring. The mountains lay ahead.

6

It would soon be midnight. Gyulsary could not go any farther. He had managed to stumble as far as the ravine, stopping to rest time and time again, but he could never make it across. Old Tanabai realised that he had no right to demand anything more of his horse. Gyulsary was moaning in agony, moaning like a human being. When he tried to lie down again Tanabai did not stop him.
Lying there on the cold ground, the pacer continued to moan, tossing his head from side to side. He was cold, he shivered uncontrollably. Tanabai took off his sheepskin coat and covered the horse's back.
"It's really bad, isn't it, boy? See how cold you are, Gyulsary. You never used to mind the cold, did you?"
Tanabai went on muttering, but the pacer no longer heard anything. His heart was hammering inside his head now, drowning out all other sounds, spluttering and choking: thump-thump, thump, thump-thump, thump, as if the herd were fleeing in panic from approaching pursuers.
The moon appeared from behind the mountains, hanging above the world in a haze. A shooting star went out silently.
"You lie here while I go and get some twigs, the old man said.
He wandered about for quite a while, gathering the dry stalks of last year's weeds. His hands were scratched by the thorns by the time he bad an armful. He then went down into the ravine, knife in hand, just in case, and came upon some tamarisk bushes. Now he would have a real fire.
Gyulsary had always been afraid of a fire close by, but now the flames did not bother him. Waves of warmth and smoke rolled over him. Tanabai sat silently on a sack, alternately throwing tamarisk and dry stalks into the fire, staring at the flames, warming his hands. He would get up from time to time to adjust the coat on the horse's back and then return to sit by the fire.
Gyulsary warmed up a bit, he stopped shivering, but a yellow film covered his eyes, his chest was constricted, he could hardly breathe. The flames were caught up in the wind and beaten down again. The old man sitting opposite him, his master of yore, would disappear and then reappear again. And it seemed to the delirious pacer that they were racing across the steppe on stormy night, that he was neighing, rearing up, searching for the herd that was gone. Lightning flashed and went out.
There was blinding light, then darkness, then light, then darkness again.

7

Winter retreated. It retreated for a time to prove to the shepherds that life was not so bad after all. There would be warm days ahead, the cattle would grow fat, there would be an abundance of milk and meat, there would be races on holidays and there would be the everyday cares, too: the lambing, the shearing, raising the young animals, moving to new pastures; besides, each would be living

his own life, a life filled with love and parting, births and deaths, pride in the children's success and disappointment at their poor reports from boarding school--perhaps if the parents had stayed at home they would have done better. So many things would happen, there were always cares enough, and for a time the hardships of winter would be forgotten. The lack of food, the loss of cattle, the ice-crusted ground, the tattered tents and cold sheds would be buried in the reports until the next year. And then winter would be upon them again, thundering in on a white she-camel, seeking out the shepherd no matter where he be, in the mountains or in the steppe, and showing him how vicious it could be. Then he would recall everything he had put out of his mind for a time. Winters are no different in the twentieth century than they ever were.

This is how it was then, too. The emaciated flocks and herds came down from the mountains and scattered throughout the steppe. Spring had come. They had survived the winter.

That spring Gyulsary came into his own as a stallion. Tanabai rarely saddled him: he spared him with the mating season close at hand.

Gyulsary gave promise of becoming a good stallion. He looked after the colts like a father. Whenever a mare was neglectful he'd be right there to keep her colt from falling or wandering away from the herd. He had yet another fine quality: he did not like the herd to be annoyed unnecessarily and led it away if it was.

There had been changes on the collective farm that winter. A new chairman had arrived. Choro had handed over his post and was now in the district hospital. His heart was very bad. Tanabai had planned to visit his friend, but it was not easy to get away.

A shepherd is like the mother of a large family, his days are filled with endless cares, especially so in the winter and early spring. An animal is not a machine, you can't just switch it off and leave. And so Tanabai never did get around to visiting the district hospital. He had no helper now. His wife was listed as his helper, for they had to earn a living somehow. The workday unit pay was not worth much, still, they would receive more if two were working instead of one.

But Jaidar had a baby to care for. What kind of a helper could she be? Thus, he was in the saddle day and night. While Tanabai was trying to arrange for one of his neighbours to relieve him, he received word that Choro had left the hospital and was back home. Then he and his wife decided they would visit him later, when they came down from the mountains. But no sooner had they come back to the valley and set up a new camp than that terrible thing happened, the thing Tanabai could never think of dispassionately.

A pacer's fame is a two-edged sword. The greater his glory, the more interest the local authorities take in him.

That morning Tanabai had driven the horses to pasture and had returned home for breakfast. He sat drinking tea, his daughter on his lap, discussing family matters with his wife.

He was planning to visit his son at the boarding school and, while he was in town, stop off at the second-hand market and buy his wife and children some

clothes.
"I'll saddle the pacer, Jaidar," he said, sipping his tea. "Otherwise I'll never make it back in time. This is the last time I'll take him. I won't bother him again."
"You know best," she said.
There was a sound of hoofbeats outside. Someone was approaching the tent.
"Go see who it is," he said to his wife.
She went out and returned to say it was Ibraim, the head of the horse-breeding farm, and that there was a stranger with him.
Tanabai rose unwillingly and went outside, carrying his daughter on his arm. Though he did not like his boss, Ibraim was a guest and had to be treated with due respect. Tanabai did not really know why he disliked the man. He seemed pleasant enough, unlike many others, but there was something slippery about him. The main thing, of course, was that he did nothing. He spent his days writing down figures in a ledger. Nothing was actually being done to improve the stock, each herdsman was his own master. Tanabai often spoke of this at Party meetings, everyone always agreed, as did Ibraim, who thanked him for his constructive criticism, but nothing changed. Luckily, the herdsmen were a conscientious lot. Choro had hand-picked every one of them.
Ibraim dismounted and spread his hands wide in greeting.
"Assalom aleikum!" he said.
"Aleikum assalom!" Tanabai replied in a restrained voice, shaking their hands.
"How's life? How are the horses, Tanabai? How are you?" Ibraim rattled off his usual questions, his usual smile spread over his heavy jowls.
"Everything's fine."
"Praised be Allah. I never have to worry about you."
"Won't you come in?"
Jaidar was spreading the new rug for the guests and on it she made little piles of goatskins for seats.
Ibraim turned his attention to her, too.
"How are you, Jaidar? How is your health? Have you been taking good care of your man?"
"How do you do. Come in. Please sit down."
They all sat down.
"Pour us some kumiss," Tanabai said to his wife.
They drank kumiss and spoke of various things.
"Livestock breeding is the only thing you can rely on nowadays," Ibraim was saying. "At least it gives you milk and meat in the summer, But growing wheat or the other jobs give you nothing. So it's best to stay with the herds and flocks now. Aren't I right, Jaidar?"
Jaidar nodded, but Tanabai said nothing. He knew it himself and this was not the first time he was hearing Ibraim say it, for he never missed a chance to imply that a man should value his job as a herdsman. Tanabai wanted to say that there was nothing to be gained by people hanging on to soft jobs that provided milk and meat. And what about the others? How long more would people have to work for nothing? Was that how things were before the war? In those days each household

would receive two or three wagon loads of grain in the autumn. But now everyone was running around with empty sacks. They were the ones who grew the wheat, but there was no grain for them. Was that how things should be? Meetings and promises alone would get them nowheres. Choro's heart had given out because he could give the people nothing except kind words for their hard work. But there was no use telling Ibraim of all that lay like a stone on his heart. Then again, Tanabai did not want to start a long discussion. He had to get rid of them, saddle the pacer and set off for town in order to return as quickly as possible. Why had they come? It was not polite to ask.

"I don't seem to recognise you," Tanabai said to Ibraim's companion, a young and silent youth. "Aren't you Abalak's son?"

"Yes, I am."

"How time flies. Do you want to have a look at the herds? Are you curious to see them?"

"Why no, we've...."

"He came along with me," Ibraim interrupted. "We've come on business, but we can discuss that later. Your kumiss is excellent, Jaidar. What an aroma! Would you pour me another cup?"

Once again they talked of this and that. Tanabai sensed that something was wrong, but he could not guess what had brought Ibraim to his tent. Finally, Ibraim pulled a paper from his pocket.

"Here's what we've come about, Tanabai. Here's the paper. Read it."

Tanabai spelled it out slowly to himself, unable to believe his eyes. The bold writing on the sheet read as follows:

"An Order.

"For herdsman Bakasov.

"The pacer Gyulsary is to be transferred to the stable to be used as a saddle horse.

"Signed: Chairman of the Collective Farm (the signature was illegible). March 5, 1950."

Tanabai overcome by this unexpected turn of events, silently, folded the paper in four, put it in the breast pocket of his old army shirt and sat there with downcast eyes for quite a while. He had a funny feeling in his chest. Actually, there was nothing to be surprised about. It was his job to raise horses and then hand them over to others as work horses or riding horses. He had sent so many of them to the various teams over the years. But surrender Gyulsary! This was more than he could bear. He began thinking feverishly of a way to keep the pacer. He had to consider every angle. He had to get a grip on himself. Ibraim was beginning to fidget.

"This is the bit of business that brought us here, Tanabai," he said cautiously.

"Good," Tanabai replied, glancing at him calmly. "Your business won't run off. Let's have some more kumiss and talk a while."

"Why, of course. You're a sensible man, Tanabai,"

"A sensible man! Don't think I'll swallow your foxy words!" Tanabai thought morosely.

Once again they talked of insignificant things. There was no need to hurry now.

Thus did Tanabai first come to grips with the new collective-farm chairman, or, rather, with his illegible signature. He had not yet set eyes on the man himself. He had been in the mountains for the winter when the new chairman had taken over Choro's job. They said he was a hard man to deal with and that he had held a high post somewheres before. At the very first meeting he had warned everyone that he would deal severely with the laggards and would take all those who did not fulfil their quotas to court, that all their troubles stemmed from the fact that the collective farms were too small, but that they would soon be enlarged and things would improve. He said that was why he had been appointed to their farm, and that it was his duty to run the farm according to all the rules of modern agrotechnics and zootechnics. That meant everyone had to attend the agrotechnical and zootechnical study groups.

Indeed, they soon had the study groups going, they put up posters and started the lectures. And if the shepherds fell asleep at the lectures that was their own business.

"It's time we got going, Tanabai," Ibraim said. He looked at Tanabai expectantly, then began pulling up his boots, shaking and smoothing out his fox-skin hat.

"Listen, farm chief, tell the chairman that I won't let Gyulsary go. He's my studhorse. He's covering the mares."

"Why, Tanabai, we'll give you five stallions for him, and all your mares will be covered. "That's no problem" Ibraim said in surprise. He had been pleased to see things proceeding so smoothly and now suddenly. .. . If it had been anyone else and not Tanabai, he'd have made short shrift of the matter. But Tanabai was Tanabai, he had not even spared his own brother, and that was something to be reckoned with. He would have to go easy.

"I don't need your five stallions!" Tanabai said, wiping his moist forehead.

After a moment's pause he decided to speak his mind. "Doesn't your chairman have anything to ride? Aren't there any horses left in the stable? Why does he want Gyulsary?"

"Isn't that clear? The chairman's our chief, that means he has to be respected. After all, he keeps going to the district centre and people come here to see him. The chairman's in the public eye, he's out in front, so to speak."

"So to speak what? Won't they know who he is if he's on another horse? And if he's out in front, does it have to be on a pacer?"

"It's not whether he has to or not. Things are sort of supposed to be like that. You were a soldier during the war, Tanabai. Did you ride around in an automobile while your general rode around in a truck? Of course not. A general gets what's coming to a general, and a soldier gets what's coming to a soldier. Isn't that right?"

"This is different," Tanabai objected hesitantly. He did not explain why it was different and could not have explained it anyway. Feeling the circle tightening around the pacer, he added angrily: "I won't let you have him. And if I don't please you, you can transfer me back to the smithy. You won't take my sledge-hammer away, that's for sure."

"Why say that, Tanabai? We all respect you and value what you're doing. You're acting like a baby. It doesn't become you." Ibraim began fidgeting. It looked as

if he had put his foot in it this time. He had promised so much, it had all been his idea in the first place, he had volunteered to go, and now this stubborn ox was making a mess of everything.
Ibraim sighed heavily and turned to Jaidar: "What's one horse, Jaidar, you tell me, even if it is a pacer? There are all kinds of horses in a herd, you can take your pick. The chairman's just arrived, he's been appointed...."
"What's it to you?" Jaidar asked.
Ibraim spluttered, then shrugged.
"Why, it's a matter of discipline. I'm nobody, I just do as I'm told. It's not for me. I can ride an ass. Here, ask him, Abalak's son has been sent along to ride the pacer in."
The youth nodded.
"It doesn't look nice," Ibraim continued. "They've appointed a new chairman, he's our guest, and the whole village can't even offer him a decent horse. What will the people say when they find out? Is that the way we do things in Kirghizia?"
"Good!" Tanabai said. "Let the village know about it. I'll go to Choro. Let him say who's right."
"Do you think Choro will tell you to keep him? He's agreed to it already. You'll only make things awkward for him. It'll be like sabotage. As if we don't recognise the new chairman and go complaining to the old one. Choro's a sick man. Why spoil his relationship with the new chairman? Choro's going to be the Party organiser, he'll have to work with him. Let them figure it out."
Now, when the talk had turned to Choro, Tanabai said nothing. No one said anything.
Jaidar heaved a sigh.
"Let them have him," she said to her husband. "Don't keep them waiting."
"Now that's sensible. You should have said so long ago. Thank you, Jaidar."
Ibraim had not been trying so hard in vain. A short while later he was promoted from head of the horsebreeding farm to deputy chairman in charge of all cattlebreeding.
Tanabai sat there in the saddle, his eyes downcast, seeing it all, though he did not look up. He saw Gyulsary caught and a new bridle put on him, for Tanabai would never have given them his own. He saw Gyulsary fight against being taken from the herd, straining at the reins held by Abalak's son, he saw Ibraim thrashing him, swinging his whip in a wide arch, riding at him now from the left, now from the right. He saw the pacer's eyes, the bewilderment in them, for he could not understand why these strangers were taking him away from the mares and the colts, from his master. He saw the steam rising up from the horse's open mouth when he neighed, he saw his mane, whithers, rump, the streaks left by the whip on his back and sides, he saw his every point, even the small callus above the pastern on his right foreleg, he saw his gait, his hoofprints, everything down to the last hair of his golden coat, he saw it all and, biting his lip, he suffered in silence. When he finally raised his head the men who had come for Gyulsary were disappearing over the rise. Tanabai cried out and spurred his horse after them.
"Stop! Don't you dare!" Jaidar shouted, running out of the tent.

Suddenly a terrible thought dawned on him: his wife was taking revenge on the pacer for those nights. He turned his horse sharply and headed back, whipping it on. Pulling up beside the tent, he jumped down and ran over to his wife, his face pale and terrible in its wrath.
"Why'd you say that? Why'd you tell me to let them have him?" he hissed, staring at her.
"Don't shout. And put your hands down," she said, as always calm and collected. "Listen to me. Do you own Gyulsary? Is he your private property? What do you own? Everything we have we own in common with the farm. That's our way of life. And Gyulsary belongs to the collective farm, too. The chairman's in charge of the farm. Whatever he says, goes. That was the only reason I said it. As far as I'm concerned, you can leave whenever you want to. Go on. She's better than I am, she's younger and prettier. She's a good woman. I might have been a widow, too, but you came back. Oh, how I waited for you! But that doesn't matter now. You still have three children. What'll I do with them? What will you tell them later? What will they say? What will I say to them? It's up to you. You decide."
Tanabai rode into the steppe. He stayed with the herd till evening, for he could not calm down. The herd seemed orphaned. His very soul seemed orphaned. The pacer had taken everything with him. Nothing was the same any, more. The sun was not the same, the sky was not the same and he himself seemed to have changed. It was dark when he returned. He entered the tent in silence, his face haggard. The girls were asleep. A fire blazed in the hearth. His wife poured water on his hands and served him his supper.
"I don't want to eat," Tanabai said. Then he added, "Play 'The Camel's Lament' for me on your temir-komuz."
Jaidar lifted the instrument to her lips, brushed her finger across the thin steel tongue, breathed on it, inhaled deeply, and the ancient music of the nomads filled the tent. It was a song about a mother camel who had lost her little white baby. She had roamed the desert for many days, searching for him, calling to him. She grieved that never again would she lead him by the ravine in the twilight or across the plains in the hours of dawn, never again would they nibble leaves together, nor cross the shifting sands, nor wander through the fields in spring, nor would she ever nourish him with her white milk.
...Where are you, my dark-eyed baby? Answer me! The milk runs from her udder, from her overflowing udder, trickling down her legs. Where are you? Answer me! The milk runs from her udder, from her overflowing udder. Her pure-white milk....
Jaidar played well. Tanabai had fallen in love with the girl Jaidar for her playing many years ago.
He listened, his head on his chest, and once again he saw all, though he did not look up. Her hands, turned rough from many years of hard work in the heat and the cold. The grey in her hair, the wrinkles that now lined her neck, the corners of her mouth and eyes. Through those wrinkles a vanished youth reappeared: the olive-skinned girl with braids down her back and he, so very young, and their former intimacy. He knew that she was not aware of his presence now. She was lost in the music, in her own thoughts. And he saw half of his troubles and sorrows in her. She forever carried them within her.

... The mother camel roamed for many days, searching for her baby, calling to him. Where are you, my dark-eyed baby? The milk runs from her udder, from her overflowing udder, trickling down her legs. Where are you? Answer me! The milk runs from her udder, her overflowing udder. Her pure-white milk. . . .
The girls were sleeping with their arms around each other. The steppe, vast and impenetrable in the darkness of the night, lay outside the tent.
At that very moment Gyulsary was raging in the stable, keeping the grooms awake. This was the first time he had ever been put in a stable, that prison for horses.

8

Tanabai's joy was great indeed the morning he saw his pacer in the herd. He was saddled, a ragged piece of the halter dangled at his side.
"Gyulsary! Hello, boy!" Tanabai shouted, cantering up to him. At close range he saw he had on a different bridle, a different bulky saddle with heavy stirrups.
He was incensed at the sight of the plump velvet cushion on the saddle, as if it was intended for a broad-bottomed woman, not a man.
Tanabai spat in disgust. He wanted to catch the horse and throw the foolish harness off him, but Gyulsary eluded him. The pacer had no time for him now. He was after the mares. He had missed them so much that he took no notice of his former master.
"So you ran off after all. And broke your tether. Good boy! Go on, have a good time, I won't say a word," Tanabai thought and decided the herd needed some exercise. He wanted Gyulsary to feel at home while his pursuers were still far away.
"Kait-kait-kait!" Tanabai called. He rose up in the stirrups, cracked his whip and drove the herd off.
The nursing mares began moving, calling to their foals, the young mares pranced and shied as they started off.
The wind blew through their manes. The green earth sparkled in the sunlight. Gyulsary shook himself, arched his neck and began to strut. Then he took over the lead from the new stallion, forcing him into the back rows while he strutted in front of the herd, snorted and pranced, circling round one side, then round the other. He was heady, from the smells of the herd: the smell of mares' milk, the smell of foals, the smell of the absinthe-laden wind. Little did he care about the foolish-looking saddle and the foolish-looking velvet cushion or the heavy stirrups that battered his sides. He had forgotten that only yesterday he had been tethered at the big hitching post in the district centre, champing at the bit, shying away from the rumbling trucks. He had forgotten that afterwards he had stood in a puddle by a foul-smelling tavern and his new master had emerged with a group of his friends, all of them reeking of the same smell. His new master belched and wheezed as he clambered into the saddle. He had forgotten the stupid race down the muddy road they had had on the way back. He had carried his new master along at a racing pace, with the man bouncing in the saddle and then tearing at the bit and whipping him on the head.
The pacer forgot it all. He was heady from the smells of the herd: the smell of

mares' milk, the smell of foals, the smell of the absinthe-laden wind.
Gyulsary ran on, never suspecting that his pursuers were on their way.
Soon after Tanabai brought the herd back two grooms rode up from the village. Once again they took Gyulsary away from the herd, back to the stable.
However, he soon reappeared. This time he had neither bridle nor saddle. He had managed to throw off the bridle and had bolted from the stable at night. Tanabai laughed when he saw him, then he fell silent and after some thought he threw his lasso over the pacer's neck. It was he who caught turn, he who slipped the bridle over his head and he who led him back to the village, asking the young herdsman from the neighbouring camp to drive the pacer on from behind. On the way they met the grooms coming for the escaped horse. As Tanabai handed Gyulsary over to them he grumbled:
"Don't any of you have any hands? Can't you keep an eye on the chairman's horse? Try tying him up better next time."
When Gyulsary showed up a third time Tanabai said angrily:
"What's the matter, stupid? What the devil brings you here? You're crazy, that's what you are." He cursed, trying to lasso the pacer. Once again he dragged him back and once again he swore at the grooms.
But Gyulsary had no intention of getting any wiser, he kept coming back whenever he had the chance. The grooms were fed up, Tanabai was fed up.
One night Tanabai fell asleep late, for he was late coming back from the pasture. He left the herd close by the tent, just in case, and fell into a restless, disturbed sleep. He was exhausted by the day's work. He had a strange dream. He couldn't quite tell whether he was back at the front lines again or at a slaughter-house. There was blood everywhere, his hands were covered with sticky blood. In his sleep he said to himself: "It's a bad omen to dream of blood." He wanted to wash his hands. But people were shoving him, laughing at him, screaming, and he could not make out who they were. "You're washing your hands in blood, Tanabai. There's no water here, Tanabai, there's nothing but blood! Ha-ha-ha! Ho-ho-ho! He-he-he!"
"Tanabai! Tanabai!" His wife was shaking him. "Wake up! "
"What is it?"
"Hear the herd? The stallions are fighting. Gyulsary must have come back."
"Damn him! Can't he leave us alone!" Tanabai dressed quickly, snatched up his looped pole and ran to the hollow where the sounds of fighting came from. It was light outside.
When he approached he saw Gyulsary. But what was that? The pacer was jumping awkwardly, hobbled with an iron chain. The chains on his legs clanged, he spun and reared, moaned and cried in pain while that ass of a stallion, the herd's new stud, kicked and bit him unmercifully.
"Oh, you dog!" Tanabai raced over and hit the ass of a horse so hard he broke his pole in two. He chased him off. There were tears in Tanabai's eyes. "What have they done to you, boy? Whose idea was it to chain you? And what'd you come back for again, you poor silly creature!"
It was uncanny, he had hobbled back in his chains, covering such a distance, crossing a river, up hill and down dale, and had finally reached the herd. He

had probably been jumping all through the night, hobbling back all through the night, all alone, to the clanging of his chains, like an escaped convict.
"Well!" Tanabai said, shaking his head. He began stroking the pacer, he brought his own face close to the horse's lips. Gyulsary nuzzled him, tickled his face with his lips and closed his eyes with pleasure.
"What'll we do, boy? Why don't you lay off, Gyulsary? You're in for trouble. You poor, silly thing. You don't know what it's all about, do you?"
Tanabai examined the horse. The bruises inflicted during the fight would heal, but the chains had rubbed the skin off his pasterns and fetlocks. His coronets were bleeding. The felt lining on the chain had rotted, it was moth-eaten. When the horse had hobbled through the water the lining had come off, baring the iron. And the iron had made his feet bleed. "I'm sure Ibraim got the chain from some old man. It looks like his work," Tanabai thought angrily. Who else could have done it? The padded chain was an ancient form of hobble. Each chain had its own secret lock, you could never open it without the key. In olden times the best horses were hobbled with padded chains to keep horse thieves from stealing them from a pasture. A plain rope hobble could be cut easily enough with a knife, but you couldn't steal a horse that was hobbled with a chain. That was ancient history, nowadays a chain hobble was a rarity. Perhaps some old man might have had one as a remembrance of times passed. And someone had to go and tell him about it. They had chained the pacer to keep him from wandering away from the village pasture. Yet, he had escaped.
The whole family helped to take the chain off Gyulsary. Jaidar held the bridle and covered the pacer's eyes, Their daughters played nearby, while Tanabai lugged over his heavy tool box and sweated profusely as he tried to find a skeleton-key to fit the lock. His experience as a blacksmith came in handy, for though it took much hard work and he bruised his hands badly, he finally managed to get it open.
He tossed the chain as far away as he could. He put ointment on the pacer's bloody bruises and Jaidar led him over to the hitching post. His older girl hoisted her little sister onto her back and they set out for home.
Tanabai remained sitting on the ground, he was so tired. Then he gathered up his tools and went off to pick up the chain. He had to return it, he would be held responsible for it. He examined the rusty chain, admiring the smith's work. It was finely worked with great imagination, the work of the old Kirghiz smiths.
The trade had been forgotten now, lost forever. There was no need for chain hobbles any more. But it was a shame that other things had also disappeared. What beautiful ornaments, what utensils of silver, copper, wood and leather they used to make! They had not been expensive, yet they had been beautiful. Each was unique. They didn't make things like that any more. Nowadays everything was being churned out of aluminum: cups and bowls, spoons, earrings and basins, no matter where you went everyone had the same things. How dull. And the last great saddle-makers were living out their days. What saddles they used to make! Each saddle had a history to it: who had made it, when it had been made, whom it had been made for and what reward the craftsman had received for his labours. Soon everyone would be riding around in cars like they did in Europe. All the cars

would be the same, you'd only be able to tell them apart by the numbers on the licence plates. Meanwhile, the people were forgetting the skills of their grandfathers. They had buried the old handicrafts for good, yet a man's soul and eyes were in his hands.
Sometimes Tanabai would fall into this mood. He would philosophise about the folk crafts, becoming indignant, yet not knowing whom to blame for their disappearance. And yet, in his youth he too had been one of the gravediggers of the old ways. Once he had even spoken at a Komsomol meeting on the need to do away with the nomads' tents. He had heard someone say that the nomad's tent was a pre-Revolutionary abode, that it should be done away with. "Down with the tents! We don't want to live in the past," he had said.
And so the tent was relegated to the past. They began building houses and tearing down their tents. The sheets of felt covering were cut up for various household needs, while the wooden frames were used for fences, paddocks and even firewood.
But then they discovered that mountain grazing was impossible without tents. Now Tanabai could only wonder at having been foolish enough to criticise the tent, than which nothing better had ever been invented for the nomad. How could he have failed to realise that the tent was a truly magnificent invention of his people, wherein every last detail had proven its worth through centuries of use?
Now he lived in a tattered, soot-blackened tent left to him by old Torgoi. The tent was very old and if it still held together he had only Jaidar's patience to thank. She spent days on end fixing and patching it, making it livable, but in a week or two the old felt would start falling apart again, there would be new holes through which the wind blew, snow and rain came in. Once again his wife would begin patching, with no end in sight.
"How long will this go on?" she complained. "This isn't felt, it's dust, it crumbles in my hands. And what about the frame? You can't even call it a frame any more. Can't you make them give us some new felt? Are you the master of your home or not? Don't we have a right to live like human beings?"
In the beginning Tanabai pacified her and promised to see to it. However, when he mentioned the fact that he needed a new tent at the farm office he discovered that all the old tent-makers were dead and buried, while the young people had no idea of how a tent was made. Besides, the farm had no felt for the tents.
"All right then, give me the wool and we'll make the felt ourselves." Tanabai said.
"What wool? Are you crazy? All the wool we gather is sold in accordance with the plan, we're not supposed to leave a single strand for the farm," he was told.
Instead, they offered him a canvas tent. Jaidar wouldn't even hear of it.
"I'd rather live in a tattered old felt tent than in a canvas one," she said.
Many of the herdsmen were forced to move to canvas tents at the time. But what sort of an abode were these? You could neither stand up nor move around nor make a hearth in them. They were scorching hot in summer and freezing cold in winter. There was no place for any belongings, no corner for a kitchen, it would never look like a home inside, and if you had visitors you did not know where to put them.

"Oh, no!" Jaidar said. "I don't care what you say, I'll never live in a canvas tent. They might do for single men and then only temporarily, but we're a family, we have children. They have to be bathed and looked after. No, I don't want it."
Soon after Tanabai met Choro and told him of his troubles.
"Why are things like this, Chairman?"
Choro shook his head sadly.
"We didn't think of it when we should have," he replied. "Neither did our higher-ups. All we can do now is write letters and wonder what the reply will be. They say wool's a valuable commodity. There's a shortage of wool. It goes for export. They say it's unprofitable to use it for our own needs."
Tanabai said no more. Was he not partially to blame also? And he laughed inwardly at his own stupidity. "Unprofitable! Ha-ha! It's unprofitable!"
He could not forget that harsh word for a long time.
And so they continued living in their patched and tattered tent which needed only some plain, ordinary wool to make it sound. Wool, which was gathered by the ton from the farm's flocks.
Tanabai carried the chain back to his tent. The tent looked so wretched, he was so mad at everything, at himself, at the chain that had mangled the pacer's feet, that he ground his teeth. It was just the wrong time for the grooms that were after Gyulsary to come galloping up.
"Go on, take him back!" Tanabai shouted. His lips twitched angrily. "And give the chairman this chain and tell him that if he ever dares chain the pacer again I'll crack his skull open with it! Don't you forget to tell him that!"
He should never have said it. Never! For he always paid dearly for his hot temper and frankness.

9

It was a bright, sunny day. Spring squinted in the sun, curling out in new leaves, steaming in the fields, pushing grass up underfoot on the pathways. Some boys were playing tip-cat near the stable. A quick lad would throw his cat into the air and bat it down the road as hard as he could. Then he'd measure off the distance with his stick: one, two, three ... seven ... ten ... fifteen....
The stern judges followed, close on his heels to make sure that he didn't cheat. Twenty-two lengths.
"Seventy-eight and twenty-two," the lad counted and, totalling up the sum, shouted gleefully: "makes a hundred! I've got a hundred!"
"Hurray! He's got a hundred!" the others joined in.
That meant he had hit it on the nose. Neither more nor less. Now the loser would have to "weep". The winner went back to the starting line and from there he batted his cat again. As hard as he could. Everyone ran to where it fell. He still had two more strikes. The loser was practically in tears, for he'd have to "weep" all that distance! But the laws of the game are ironbound. "What are you standing there for? Come on, start weeping!" The loser inhaled deeply and set off at a run, chanting as be ran:

Akbai, Kokbai, don't let the calves get by,
If you do, too bad for you, boo-hoo-hoo!

His head was splitting, but he had to keep on chanting. No, he didn't make it. That meant he had to go back and start all over again. He didn't make it the second time, either. The winner was delighted. "You didn't make it! You have to ride me piggyback!" The winner got onto the weeper's back and loser had to ride him around like a donkey.
Come on, boy! Faster!" the rider said, digging his heels into the other one's sides. "Look, everybody! This is my Gyulsary! He's a real pacer."
Meanwhile, Gyulsary stood in the stable on the other side of the fence. He was becoming fretful. He had not even been saddled that morning. Nor had he been fed or watered. They had forgotten about him. The stable was deserted, all the carriages and saddle horses were out, he alone remained in his stall.
The grooms were cleaning the stalls. Boys were playing outside. How he wished he was with the herds in the steppe! He could see the wide open spaces, he could see the herds grazing on the plains. Grey geese were flying overhead, flapping their wings, beckoning to him.
Gyulsary jerked his head, he tried to break his tether. But the two chains attached to his bridle held him fast. Perhaps the herd would hear him? He raised his head to the window under the rafters and, shifting his weight on the straw, he neighed long and loud: "Where are you-ou-ou?"
"Hold still, you devil!" one of the grooms said, rushing over and swinging his spade at him. Then, addressing someone outside the door, he shouted: "Should I lead him out?"
"Yes!" came the reply.
The two grooms led the pacer out into the yard. How light it was! How clear the air! The pacer's sensitive nostrils quivered as they breathed in the heady air of spring. There was the bitter smell of leaves, the smell of damp clay. The blood raced through his veins. Oh, to have a run now. Gyulsary kicked up his heels.
"Hold still! Stop!" several men shouted at once.
Why were there so many people crowding round him today? With their sleeves rolled up, their muscular, hairy arms bared. One of them, in a grey smock, was laying out some bright metal objects on a piece of white cloth. They glittered in the sun, hurting his eyes. The others stood around with ropes. Ah, and there was his new master! He looked very pompous with his short, thick legs planted far apart in their ballooning breeches. He was frowning like everyone else, the only difference being that his sleeves were not rolled up. He stood there with one hand on his hip, while the other twisted a button on his tunic. He had reeked of the same foul smell again the previous day.
"Well, what are you standing around for? Go on! Shall we go ahead, Jorokul Aldanovich?" Ibraim asked the chairman respectfully. The chairman nodded.
"All right, everybody!" Ibraim said, bustling about. He hung his fox-skin hat hastily on a nail on the stable gate. The hat fell down and landed in a pile of manure. Ibraim shook it off squeamishly and hung it up again. "You'd better go

off to a side, Jorokul Aldanovich," he was saying. "You never know, he might kick. A horse is a dumb animal. You never know what to expect."
The skin on Gyulsary's neck quivered when he felt the horsehair noose slip over it. It was prickly. They tied it in a slip-knot in his chest and threw the loose end up over his rump. What were they doing? Why were they putting the end towards his hind leg, why were they hobbling him? Gyulsary was getting nervous. He snorted, and rolled his eyes. What were they going to do?
"Hurry!" Ibraim shouted and then squeaked in a high falsetto: "Cast him!"
Two pairs of strong hairy hands jerked the rope. Gyulsary fell to the ground with a terrible thud. The sun turned a somersault, the earth shuddered from the blow. What had happened? Why was he lying on his side? Why were the men's faces so strangely elongated, why were the trees towering up into the sky? Why was he lying so uncomfortably on the ground? No, that wouldn't do.
Gyulsary shook his head and strained every muscle in his body. The ropes cut into him like burning iron bands, pulling his legs up to his stomach. The pacer jerked, strained again and began kicking frantically with his free hind leg. The rope became taut, it started to crack.
"Come on! Get on him! Hold him down!" Ibraim shouted in alarm.
They all rushed at the horse, pressing him down with their knees.
"Press his head to the ground! Get the rope around him! Pull it! Good. Hurry! Once more around here. Come on now, pull it hard! Once again. Over here now, and knot it!" Ibraim kept up his screeching.
The rope was getting tighter and tighter around the pacer's legs until all four were brought together in a hard knot. Gyulsary moaned, still straining to free himself from the rope's mortal grip, throwing off those who pressed on his neck and his head. But they got their knees on him again. A shudder went through the pacer's sweating body, his legs became numb. And he surrendered.
"Got him!"
"He sure is strong!"
"He won't move now, not even if he's a truck!"
And then the one who was his new master rushed over to the cast pacer, crouched down by his head, breathed yesterday's stale vodka on him and smiled gloatingly, his hatred unconcealed, as if it were not a horse that lay on the ground before him but a man, his worst enemy.
Ibraim, sweating profusely and mopping his face, crouched down beside him. Thus, squatting side by side, they lit up their cigarettes in expectation of whatever it was that was to follow.
Meanwhile, the boys on the other side of the fence were playing tip-cat.

Akbai, Kokbai, don't let the calves get by,
If you do, too bad for you, boo-hoo-hoo!

The sun was shining as brightly as ever. And for the last time he saw the vast steppe, he saw the herds grazing on the plains. Grey geese were flying overhead, flapping their wings, beckoning to him. Flies were sitting on his head. He could not shake them off.

"Shall we start, Jorokul Aldanovich?" Ibraim asked again.
The chairman nodded. Ibraim rose.
Everyone started moving about, they pressed their knees and bodies down on the bound horse. They pressed his head still harder to the ground. He could feel someone's hands in his groin.
The boys had climbed the fence and were sitting there like sparrows.
"Hey! Look, everybody! See what they're doing!"
"They're cleaning the pacer's hooves."
"That's what you think! That's not what they're doing at all."
"What the hell are you doing here? Go on, get out of here!" Ibraim shouted, waving his hands at them. "Go on and play someplace else. This is no place for you."
The boys tumbled off the fence.
It became very still.
Gyulsary shuddered from a jolt and the touch of something cold. His new master crouched in front of him, staring at him expectantly. Suddenly a terrible pain made the whole world explode inside him. Oh! A bright-red flame scorched him. Then everything went black, as black as pitch.
When it was all over Gyulsary still lay bound on the ground. They were waiting for the bleeding to stop.
"Well, Jorokul Aldanovich, that takes care of that!"
Ibraim said, rubbing his hands together. "He'll never run off again. He's through running away now. And don't pay any attention to Tanabai. To hell with him. He was always like that. He didn't even spare his own brother, he dispossessed him and sent him off to Siberia. he has no feelings for anyone."
Ibraim, feeling quite pleased with himself, took his fox-skin hat off the hook, shook it, smoothed the fur and set it on his sweating head.
The children were still playing tip-cat.

Akbai, Kokbai, don't let the calves get by,
If you do, too bad for you, boo-hoo-hoo!

"You didn't make it! Now you've got to ride me piggyback! Come on, Gyulsary, let's go! Look at me, this is my Gyulsary!"
It was a bright, sunny day.

10

It was night, the dead of night. There was an old man and an old horse. A campfire burned at the edge of the ravine. The flames fell and fluttered in the wind.
The hard, cold ground froze the horse's side. He felt an iron weight pressing against the back of his head. He was tired of throwing his head up and down as he had long ago when, hobbled with an iron chain, he had made his way back to the herd. Now, as then, Gyulsary could not break his shackles, he could not run. He wanted to move his legs freely, his hooves burning from the chase, he wanted

to speed across the earth, inhaling lustily, he wanted to reach the pasture quickly, to whinny loudly, summoning the herd, he wanted the mares and colts to run along with him across the vast absinthe-drenched steppe, but his shackles held him back. He hobbled along to the clanging of the chain like an escaped convict, a jump at a time, all alone, a jump at a time. Everything was dark, deserted, lonely. The moon appeared, then disappeared on high in the wind-swept sky. It appeared when the pacer threw back his head as he jumped and came tumbling down when he dropped his head.
It was light and dark, then light and dark again. It hurt his eyes.
His chain clanged, rubbing the skin off his pasterns and fetlocks. One jump, then another, and another. Everything was dark, deserted. How long the road was when his legs were shackled, how difficult it was to hobble in his chains.
A campfire burned at the edge of the ravine. The hard, cold ground froze the horse's side.

11

"In two weeks' time they would be moving to new pastures, into the mountains again. They would be gone all summer, all autumn and all winter, returning in spring. Moving from one house to another is a great upheaval. One wonders where all the junk comes from. Is that not why an ancient Kirghiz adage says that if you think you are poor, try moving.
It was time to get ready, there were a million things to do: he had to go to the mill, to the market, to the shoemaker's, to the boarding school to see his son, but Tanabai moved about in a cloud of gloom. His wife was at her wit's end. He was always in a hurry, he'd be off to the herd at dawn before she'd have a chance to speak to him. returning at noon, sullen and irritable. Withal, he seemed to be waiting for something, he was always on the alert.
"What's the matter?" Jaidar kept asking.
He would not reply, but one day he said:
"I had a bad dream a while back."
"Are you just saying that to stop me from asking?"
"No, I really did. I can't seem to get it out of my head."
"What next? Weren't you the first atheist in the village? Weren't you the one the old women cursed? You're getting old, Tanabai, that's what. You spend all your time with the herd and you don't seem to care about us having to pull up stakes soon. It's too much for me, what with the children and everything. You might at least go and visit Choro. All decent folk go to visit the sick before starting out."
"I'll have time for that later," Tanabai said brusquely.
"When? What's the matter? Are you afraid to go to the village? We can ride in together tomorrow. We'll take the children and go. I have things to do, too."
The next day, having arranged for their young neighbour to keep an eye on the herd, they all set off on horseback. Jaidar had the younger girl in front of her on her horse and Tanabai had the elder one.
They rode down the village streets, greeting passersby. Tanabai pulled his horse

up outside the smithy.
"Wait," he said to his wife. He dismounted, then carried his elder daughter over to her, setting her down on the horse's rump.
"What's the matter? Where are you going?"
"I won't be long. You go on ahead. Tell Choro I'll be right over. There's something I have to see to at the office before they close for lunch. And I'll have to get extra horseshoes here at the smithy."
"It's not right for me to go alone."
"Don't worry. I'll be over soon."
Tanabai stopped neither at the office nor at the smithy. He headed straight for the stable.
He dismounted and entered quietly, not waiting to attract attention. His mouth went dry as he waited for his eyes to get used to the gloom. The stable was quiet, deserted. All the horses were out. Tanabai looked about and sighed with relief. He went out into the yard through a side door in search of a groom. And there he saw the very thing he had dreaded seeing all these days.
"I knew it. You bastards!" he muttered, clenching his fists.
Gyulsary stood in an open shed, his bandaged tail held up by a rope tied round his neck. A large inflamed swelling, the size of a pitcher, could be seen between his parted hind legs. The horse stood there motionlessly, his head drooping over a trough. Tanabai moaned, and bit his lip. He wanted to go over to the horse but did not dare. Icy fingers gripped his heart. He was terrified by the sight of the deserted stable, the deserted yard and the lonely, castrated pacer. He turned and staggered out. There was nothing anyone could do now.
When they returned to their tent that evening Tanabai said sadly to his wife:
"My dream came true."
"Tell me."
"I didn't want to say anything when we were visiting. Gyulsary won't ever run away again. Do you know what they did to him? Those bastards, they gelded him."
"I know. That's why I made you go to the village. Were you afraid to find out? What's there to be afraid of? After all, you're not a baby. It's not the first time and it's not the last that a horse was gelded. It's been done for ages. Everyone knows it."
Tanabai did not reply. Then he said:
"Our new chairman is a no good. I can feel it."
"Don't talk like that, Tanabai. If they've gelded your horse it doesn't mean the chairman's no good. Why say that? He's a new man here. And the farm's big, it's not an easy job. Choro says they'll put things straight now, there'll be help coming for farms. They've got some kind of a new plan. You make up your mind before you know the whole story. After all, there's a lot we don't know."
After supper Tanabai headed back to the herd and stayed there late into the night. He cursed himself, he tried to make himself forget, but the scene that had greeted his eyes in the stable that day haunted him. As he rounded up the herd, he wondered: "Maybe I am wrong in judging a man for that? It's stupid, of course. That's what comes from getting old, from spending all my time out here with the herd. I never see anyone and I don't know what's going on. But how much

longer will we have to struggle so? If you listen to the speeches, everything's fine. All right, say I'm wrong. I hope to God I am. But I'm sure the others think the same way I do."
Tanabai circled round the steppe, thinking his thoughts, unable to resolve his doubts. He recalled the time long past when they had just organised the collective farm and had promised the people a happy life, he recalled their dreams and hopes. And how they had fought for those dreams. They had turned everything upside-down, they had torn down the old way of life. Indeed, life had become better at first. And it would have been better still if not for that accursed war. And now? The war had ended so many years ago, but they were still patching the farm like an old tent. They'd no sooner cover up one hole than something else tore.
Why was that so? Why was it that he no longer felt the collective farm belonged to him, as he used to, but that it was someone else's concern? Before, whatever the meeting decided was law. They knew they themselves had adopted the law and it was up to them to enforce it. But now a meeting meant a lot of useless talk. No one cared about what you had to say any more. It was as if the collective farm was no longer governed by the collective farmers, but by others from elsewhere. As if others from elsewhere had a better idea of what should be done, of how they were to work better and how they were to run the farm. They twisted and turned things this way and that, but no good came of it. He was afraid to meet people, for anyone might ask him: "Look here, you're a Party member, you were one of the farm organisers, you were the one who did all the shouting, tell us what's going on?" What could he say? If only they'd call a meeting and explain the situation to them. And ask each of them what was troubling him, what worried him, what he was thinking about. But no, the officials that arrived from the district centre were not the same sort of people as before. In former times an official would go right to the people, anyone could see him and talk to him. But now they'd go straight to the farm office, shout at the chairman and never even bother to talk to the people in the Village Soviet. When an official spoke at a Party meeting it would be mostly about the international situation, as if to say the situation on the farm was sort of unimportant.
Come on, everybody, work hard, fulfill the plan--that was all there was to it. Tanabai recalled one such who had recently visited the farm. He had spoken about linguistics, of all things. When Tanabai had tried to discuss conditions on the farm, he had looked at him strangely saying that he found Tanabai's ideas questionable. He had not approved of them. What was going on?
"As soon as Choro gets well I'll make him tell me the truth," Tanabai decided. "And I'll tell him what's on my mind. If I'm wrong, let him tell me. But what if I'm not? Then what? No, I must be. I'm mixed up, that's what. After all, who am I? A plain herdsman, a shepherd. The people up there are wise and educated."
Tanabai returned to his tent but could not sleep. What was it that was wrong? Once again he could find no answer.
In the end he did not manage to talk to Choro. There were too many things to do before moving.
Once again the camps headed into the mountains for the summer, the autumn and

the winter, not to return until spring. Once again the herds and flocks headed along the river, across the flood-lands. There were caravans of pack horses. The air rang with voices and animal sounds, there were the women's gay shawls and dresses, young girls sang songs of parting.
Tanabai drove his herd across the big meadow, over the hills, past the village. The house, the yard, he had often stopped in, still stood on the outskirts. His heart ached. He had lost them both, the woman and the pacer Gyulsary. They were both a part of the past now, of the times that had winged by like a flock of grey geese in the spring.
... The mother camel roamed for many days, searching for her baby, calling to him. Where are you, my dark-eyed baby? Answer me! The milk runs from her udder, from her overflowing udder, trickling down her legs. Where are you? Answer me! The milk runs from her udder, her overflowing udder. Her pure-white milk....

12

In the autumn of that year Tanabai Bakasov's life was suddenly changed.
Having crossed the mountain pass he stopped shortly on the autumn grazing in the foothills, intending to take the herds up into the mountains for the winter.
While he was there a messenger from the collective farm arrived.
"Choro sent me," he said. "You're to come to the village tomorrow. You're all going to a meeting in the district centre."
The next day Tanabai rode down to the farm office. Choro was there, in the Party organiser's room. He looked much better than he had in the spring, though his blue lips and his thinness bore evidence to the illness that had not left his body. He seemed in good spirits, he was very busy, people crowded round him. Tanabai was happy for his friend. It meant he had come back to life, he was back at work again.
When they were finally alone Choro rubbed his sunken, bristly cheeks, glanced at Tanabai and smiled.
"You know, Tanabai, you haven't changed a bit. You don't seem to be getting any older. We haven't seen each other since spring, have we? It's the kumiss and the mountain air that does it. I'm beginning to slip, though. I guess it's about time." He was silent for a while and then spoke of the business at hand. "I know what you'll say, Tanabai: if you give a greedy man a spoon he'll take five spoonfuls instead of one. I have a favour to ask of you again. We're going to a meeting of livestock-breeders tomorrow. Things are going very badly in this field, especially as far as sheep-breeding is concerned, and especially here, on our farm. Things have never been this bad before. The District Committee sent out an appeal to all Communists and Komsomol members, asking them to help out in the worst sections, caring for the flocks. You'll just have to help. You helped us before when you took over a herd, many thanks for that, and now you'll have to help us again. Take on a flock and be a shepherd."
"Not so fast, Choro," Tanabai said. He was thinking: "I've got used to the horses, but it'll be very dull tending sheep. I don't even know if I can do it."
"You'll have to do it anyway, Tanabai. We've no choice, it's a Party assignment.

Don't be angry. Some day you can throw it all up to me. I'll take the blame for everything at once."
"Don't think I won't. Just you wait," Tanabai said and laughed, never suspecting that the time was not far off when he would hold Choro to blame for everything.
"I'll have to think about taking on a flock, I have to talk it over with my wife."
"Do that. But make up your mind by morning, we have to report at the meeting tomorrow. You can talk it over with Jaidar later and explain it all to her. If I get the chance, I'll ride over and tell her myself. She's an intelligent woman, she'll understand. If not for her, you'd have broken your neck someplace long ago," he teased. "How is she? How are the children?"
And the conversation turned to their families, illnesses, this and that. Tanabai yearned to bring up that which troubled him most, but the shepherds who bad been summoned from the mountains began arriving and then Choro looked at his watch and seemed in a hurry.
"Now then. Put your horse in the stable. Everybody is going by truck tomorrow morning. The farm has a truck, now, you know, and we're getting another one soon. There are good times ahead! I'm leaving now, I have to be at the District Committee by seven. The chairman is there already. I think I'll make it by evening on the pacer. He's as good as any truck."
"I didn't know you were riding Gyulsary," Tanabai said in surprise. "So the chairman's being nice to you."
"I don't know. It's not a matter of being nice or not, but he's given him to me. He couldn't manage him." Here Choro spread his hands and laughed. "Gyulsary has it in for the chairman. He hates his guts. He's a wonderful horse. You've trained him well. You know, sometimes I get a terrible pain in my heart, but the minute I mount Gyulsary the pain disappears. I'd be willing to be Party organiser for the rest of my life just for that. He really cures me!" Choro said merrily.
Tanabai did not laugh.
"I don't like him either," he said.
"Who?" Choro asked.
"The chairman."
Choro became serious. "Why don't you like him?"
"I don't know. I think he's stupid, stupid and mean."
"You certainly are a hard man to please. You've always accused me of being too soft, but you don't like him, either. I don't know what to say. I've just come back to work. I don't really know him yet."
They were silent. Tanabai had wanted to tell Choro about the iron chain that had hobbled Gyulsary, about him being gelded, but now all this seemed out of place, unconvincing. He did not want the conversation to lag and so spoke of the pleasant news he had just heard:
"I'm glad to hear they've given us a truck. That means there'll be trucks for the collective farms now. There's a great need for them. It's about time. Remember, when we got our first small truck before the war? What a crowd there was. To think, we actually had a truck of our own. You stood up in the back of it and said: 'This, comrades, is the fruit of socialism!' And then it was taken

away for army service."
Yes, there had been a time like that, a wonderful time, like the rising of the sun. Why speak of the truck! When the people returned after building the Chu Canal they brought back the first gramophones, and the entire village was swept up by the new songs. It was towards the end of summer. The people would gather at the houses of those who owned the gramophones, they would be brought outside and everyone listened again and again to the record about the girl in the red kerchief who worked best of all. These, too, were the fruits of socialism to them.
"Remember, Choro? After the meeting we all piled into the truck." Tanabai spoke with rising excitement. "I stood near the cab, holding the red flag as if it were a holiday. And we started off for the station just for the ride. And from there we rode along the railroad tracks to the next station, to Kazakhstan. We went to the park there and had beer. And we sang songs all the way there and back. But hardly any of the boys that were with us are living now. They were all killed in the war. Yes....
And, you know, I didn't let go of that red flag even at night. Who could have seen it at night? But I held onto it. It was my flag. And I sang till I was hoarse. Why don't we sing any more, Choro?"
"We're getting old, Tanabai. We're too old to go around singing."
"That's not what I meant. Our time for singing is over. But what about the young people? I was over at the boarding school to see my son. God knows what he'll grow up to be like. He's already learned how to please the authorities. He said I should bring kumiss for headmaster as often as I could. What for? He's not a bad pupil. You should hear them sing. When I was farmhand for Yefremov in Alexandrovka as a boy he took me to church one Easter. And there were our boys and girls, standing on the stage, their hands at their sides, their faces made of wood, singing like they do in Russian churches. And all their songs sound the same. I don't like it. And anyway, there's so much I can't understand these days. I want to talk things over with you. I must be falling behind, there's a lot I don't understand."
"All right, Tanabai. We'll find the time and talk it over," Choro said as he put his papers into a dispatch case. "But don't let it worry you. I, for one, have faith. I know that no matter how hard the times are, we'll make it to the top, we'll live to see our dreams come true."
He turned back at the threshold and added: "You know, Tanabai, I was riding down your street. Your house looks deserted. You're not taking care of it. You spend all your time in the mountains, and your house has no keeper. When Jaidar was alone here during the war she kept it up better than it is now. Go have a look. Tell me what you'll need. We'll try to help you with the repairs next spring. My boy Samansur was home on vacation last summer. He couldn't stand the look of it. So he took his scythe and said he'd go over and mow the weeds in the yard. The plaster's peeling, the windows are broken. He said sparrows were flying around inside just like it was a threshing-floor."
"I know. And thank Samansur for me. How's he coming along?"
"He's in his second year. I think he's doing all right. You're critical of the

youth, but judging by my son I'd say the young people of today are not bad at all. From what he tells me I can see the young people at his institute are a bright lot. Well, time will tell. They're educated, they'll be able to lookout for themselves."
Choro headed for the stable, while Tanabai went to have a look at his house. He walked around the yard. Dry, dusty weeds Choro's student son had mowed that summer crunched underfoot. He felt guilty about the house being untended. The other herdsmen left their relatives behind to look after their houses, or had someone take care of them. But his two sisters lived in other villages, he was not on speaking terms with his brother Kulubai and Jaidar had no close relatives at all. That is why the house was abandoned. And now again he would be gone with the flocks, this time as a shepherd. Tanabai had not yet made up his mind, but in his heart he knew that in the end Choro would talk him into it, that he would not be able to refuse him, that he would agree, as always.
The next morning they got into the truck and headed for the district centre. Everyone liked the new three-ton GAZ truck. "We're riding like kings," the shepherds said. Tanabai was also pleased, he had not been in a truck for many years, not since the war. He had been all over Slovakia and Austria in American Studebaker trucks then. They were powerful three-axle trucks. "If only we had trucks like these," Tanabai had wished at the time. "Especially for getting the grain in from the foothills. These will never get bogged down." And he believed that as soon as the war ended they'd have them, too. They'd have everything after the war was won.
Conversation lagged in the open truck with the wind in their faces. They were silent most of the time until Tanabai said, addressing the young people:
"Why don't you sing? Don't wait for us old men. You sing and we'll listen."
The young people began to sing. It did not sound too good at first, but they were soon singing lustily. Everyone cheered up. "Fine," Tanabai thought. "It's much better this way. But what's really good is that we're finally going to have a meeting. They'll probably explain what's going on and what's to be done about the farm. The higher-ups know that better than we do. All we know is what's going on our farm. They'll give us some good advice and before you know it, we'll be working better."
It was crowded and noisy at the district centre. Trucks, wagons and a great number of saddled horses filled the square outside the club-house. Vendors selling shashlyk and green tea were everywhere, their coals smouldered and smoked as they called out their wares.
Choro was waiting.
"Hurry up, let's go, he said. "Take your places inside. The meeting's about to start. Where are you going, Tanabai?"
"I'll be right back," Tanabai said, making his way through the horses. He had noticed his own Gyulsary as he had stood in the truck and now headed for him. He had not seen him since spring.
The saddled pacer stood among the other horses, his golden chestnut coat, his broad, firm rump, his bowed nose and dark eyes singling him out from the rest.
"Hello, Gyulsary! Hello, boy!" Tanabai whispered as he squeezed through to him.

"How've you been, boy?"
The pacer cocked an eye at him, recognised his old master and snorted, shifting his weight.
"You don't look bad, Gyulsary. See how broad your chest got. You must be getting a lot of exercise. You had a bad time then, didn't you? I know. But at least you're in good hands now. You be good and everything'll be all right," he said, fingering the remains of the oats in the saddlebag. Choro fed him well. "So long, Gyulsary. I have to be going."
The walls over the entrance to the club were hung with red banners. The slogans read: "Communists to the Forefront!", "The Komsomol Is the Vanguard of Soviet Youth!"
People were streaming into the hall and auditorium. Choro and Aldanov, the collective-farm chairman, stopped Tanabai as he passed through the door.
"Come over here for a minute, Tanabai," Aldanov said. "We've registered you in already. Here's a notebook for you. You'll have to speak. You're a Party member and you're our best herdsman."
"What am I supposed to speak about?"
"Say that as a Communist you've decided to ask for a transfer to one of the backward sections. That you want to take on a flock of breeding ewes."
"Is that all?"
"Of course not! Then you'll announce your pledge. You'll say that you promise the Party and the people to rear a lamb crop of one hundred and ten per cent and shear a fleece of three kilos each from the flock."
"How can I say that if I've never even seen the sheep?"
"Don't worry. You can choose the ones you want," Choro said amicably. "Oh yes, and say that you'll undertake to help two young shepherds, both Komsomol members."
"Which two?"
People were shoving and pushing. Choro looked through his list.
"Eshim Bolotbekov and Bektai Zarlykov."
"But I haven't spoken to them. What'll they say?"
"There you go again!" the chairman said with annoyance. "You're a strange man. Do you have to talk to them? What's the difference? It's not up to them anyway. We've appointed you as their sponsor, it's all been decided."
"Then what's the use talking to me if it's all been decided?" Tanabai turned to go.
"Wait," Choro held him back. "Is everything clear?"
"Yes, it's perfectly clear," Tanabai said irritably and walked off.

13

The meeting lasted until evening. Shortly after the district centre became deserted. The people had left, some to go to the mountain, to their flocks and herds, others to the farms, to the villages and towns.
Tanabai went back with the others in the truck, heading over the Alexandrovka Rise, across the steppe plateau. It was dark, the wind chilled him. Autumn had come. Tanabai found himself a corner and hid away with his thoughts beneath his

raised collar. Well, the meeting was over. He had not said anything worthwhile himself, but he had had a chance to listen to others. So there was still a lot to be done before things improved. The one in the eye-glasses, the Secretary of the Regional Committee, was right when he said: "No one has paved any roads for us, we must blaze our own trails." Just think, it had been like this from way back in the thirties: first up then down, up a hill, then something pulled you down again. No, a collective farm was not a simple matter. He was half-grey already, his youth had slipped by, he had seen so much and done so much; there had been foolish mistakes, too, but he had always thought: here it is, we're close to our goal. And yet, there seemed to be no end to their troubles.

Well then, if they had to work, they'd work. The Secretary was right. Life would never roll along by itself like they thought it would after the war. You had to keep pushing it on for as long as you lived. Only every time you put your shoulder to the wheel you'd hit a jagged edge, and by now your shoulders were bruised and calloused. But who cared about the calluses as long as you were content in what you were doing, in what others were doing, and your toil brought you satisfaction.

How would he manage a flock? What would Jaidar say? He hadn't even had a chance to stop by a shop and get the girls some sweets. Making all those grand promises. It was easy to say a hundred and ten lambs from every hundred ewes and three kilos of wool per head. Each lamb had to be born and survive, with the wind and the rain, and the cold all against him from the start. And what about the wool? Take a strand of wool, you couldn't even see it with your naked eye, if you blew on it it disappeared. Where was he to get those kilos? Indeed, they were worth their weight in gold. And there were probably people who never even knew where it all came from.

It was Choro who had got him into it. "You'll have to speak," he had said. "But be brief, speak only of your own pledge. Don't say anything else. Take my advice." And Tanabai had taken his advice. He had suddenly lost his nerve on the rostrum and had said nothing about all the things that were bothering him. He had mumbled his pledge and had returned to his seat. He was ashamed to even think of it. But Choro was pleased. Why had he become so cautious? Was it his illness, or because he was no longer top man on the farm? Why did he have to caution Tanabai? He had changed somehow, he was different. It was probably because, as chairman, he had strained to keep the collective farm going all his life, and all his life the higher-ups had been at him. Had he finally learned to toe the line?

Just you wait, my friend, some day when we're alone I'll have it out with you," Tanabai thought, pulling his sheepskin coat closer around him. It was cold, the wind was sharp, it was still a long way to home. What would he find there?

Choro set out on the pacer. He was alone, he had not bothered to wait for a companion. He wanted to get home quickly, for his heart pained him. He let the horse have his head, and Gyulsary, who had been idle all day, now proceeded at a swift, even pace. The cadence of his hooves upon the evening road was like the steady clatter of a machine. All that was left of the former Gyulsary was his passion for racing. Everything else had died in him long ago. It had been snuffed out in order that he knew nothing but the saddle and the road. Gyulsary

lived for racing. He ran effortlessly, tirelessly, as if he might catch up with that which humans had taken from him. He ran on and on, and could never catch up. The wind and the ride made Choro feel better. The pain in his heart subsided. He was pleased with the meeting as a whole, and especially with the speech the Secretary of the Regional Committee made. He had heard a lot about the man, but this was the first time he had seen him. And yet, Choro, the Party organiser, was not really at ease. His conscience bothered him. After all, he wished Tanabai well. After all, he knew all these meetings and conferences inside-out, he knew what to say and when to say it, and what not to say. He had learned the hard way. Though Tanabai had taken his advice, he refused to understand this. He hadn't said a word to Choro after the meeting. He had taken his place in the truck and turned away. He was resentful. Ah, Tanabai! How naive you are. Life hasn't taught you a thing. You know nothing of what's going on, you see nothing. You're the same man you were in your youth. Straight from the shoulder, that's your way. But times have changed. Now what counted was the way you said a thing, whom you said it to, making sure that what you said reflected the spirit of the times, like everyone else's words, and did not stand out, did not falter, but was as smooth as silk. Then all would be well. But if I'd let you have your way, Tanabai, you'd have started something and got us all in trouble. "How are you bringing up the members of your Organisation?" they'd say. "Where's your discipline?" Ah, Tanabai, Tanabai.

14

It was still night, the night that had caught the two of them on the road. An old man and an old horse. The campfire burned at the edge of the ravine. Tanabai got up and once again tucked his sheepskin coat around his dying Gyulsary. And once again he sat down by Gyulsary's head. The events of his life passed before his eyes. Year after year, after year, like the steady gait of the pacer. What had happened that year, that late autumn and early winter when he had tended a flock?

15

October in the mountains was dry and golden. There were only two days of rain in the beginning of the month when it turned cold and foggy. But the foul weather was dispelled in the night and when Tanabai emerged from his tent the next morning he caught his breath: the mountains had advanced towards him with fresh snow on their peaks. How the snow became them! They reached up to the heavens in their virgin white, etched clearly in the light and the shade, as if they had just been created. A boundless blue began at the point where the snow lay. In its depths, in that distant blue, lay the infinite mystery of the universe. Tanabai shivered at the abundance of light and fresh air and felt sad. Once again he thought of the woman he had rode Gyulsary to visit. If the pacer had been nearby he would have jumped into the saddle and shouting from joy and happiness would have appeared before her as this white snow in the morning.

But he knew this was only a dream. Well, half of one's life is spent in dreaming, perhaps that is why life is so sweet. Perhaps it is so dear because not everything one dreams of comes true. As he looked at the mountains and the sky he thought that not everyone could be equally happy. Each person had his own fate. It contained both happiness and grief, much as the light and shadows lying side by side on a mountain. That is what made life full. "I don't think she's waiting for me any more. But she may have thought of me when she saw this first snow on the mountains."

A man grows old but his spirit does not want to succumb, every now and then it will raise its head and speak up.

Tanabai saddled his horse, opened the sheepfold and shouted to his wife who was inside the tent:

"I'll take the sheep out, Jaidar. I'll be back by the time breakfast is ready."

The flock trotted off quickly, the stream of heads and backs moving up the slope. The other shepherds were also taking their flocks out to pasture. Here and there on the slopes and in the hollows the flocks began collecting the earth's eternal bounty: its grass. They wandered in grey-white clumps among the rust and dun-coloured grazing of the autumn mountains.

All was well so far. Tanabai had a good flock. The breeding ewes had all lambed previously, some twice. he had five hundred sheep. Five hundred cares and worries. After the lambing there would be more than twice that many. But it was still a long way to lambing time, the shepherds' time of trial.

Sheep were easier to manage than horses, but it took Tanabai a while to get used to them. Nothing was better than horses. However, they said that horse-breeding had lost its former importance. There were trucks and farm machines now. So that horses were not profitable any more. Sheep-breeding, wool, meat and sheepskins were more profitable. Tanabai was offended by such cold reasoning, though he realised that it was only logical.

If you had a good herd led by a good stallion you could sometimes leave them for half a day or more and tend to your own affairs. But you were tied down to a flock of sheep. You had to be with them every minute of the day and guard over them at night. Each shepherd was supposed to have a helper, but there were none to be had. That meant he had no one to relieve him, he had no rest, day or night. Jaidar was on the payroll as a night-watchman for the flock. Sometimes she was able to take the girls along in the daytime and look after the sheep; she also guarded the sheep-fold, armed with a shotgun, until midnight, but after midnight he had to relieve her. Ibraim, who was now in charge of all livestock-breeding on the farm, had a ready answer for everything.

"Where can I find you a helper, Tanabai?" he would say, looking mournful. "You're a sensible man. All the young people are busy studying. And those that aren't don't even want to hear about sheep. They go off to the city, they find jobs on the railroad or even in the mines someplace. I don't know what to do. All you have is one flock, and listen to you complaining. But what about me? All the farm's livestock is my worry. I'm sure to end up in jail. I never should have taken this job. You try to work with people like that Bektai of yours. He says I'm supposed to provide a radio, films, newspapers, a new tent and a mobile shop

that comes up into the mountains every week. And if I don't he says he'll leave. He'll just pick up and go. I wish you'd talk to him, Tanabai."
Ibraim was telling the truth. He was sorry now that he had set his sights so high. And what he said about Bektai was also true. Tanabai tried to find time to see the two young shepherds he was supposed to help. Eshim Bolotbekov was easy to get along with, though he was not a very efficient fellow. Bektai was a handsome, well-built youth, but there was a mean glitter in his dark, slanted eyes. He would scowl at the sight of Tanabai and say:
"Don't kill yourself, Tanabai. You'd be better off spending your time with your family. There's enough people checking on me as it is."
"It's no skin off your back."
"That's not it. I don't like men like you. You were always killing yourself, you were that eager. Running around shouting hurray! But you never had a decent life and you won't let us live decently."
"Take it easy, boy," Tanabai muttered through his teeth. "It's none of your business. It was us who killed ourselves on the job, not you. And we're not sorry. We killed ourselves for your sake. I'd like to have seen you now if we didn't. Why, you wouldn't even know your own name, to say nothing about newspapers and films. The only name you'd answer to would be kul--slave!"
Tanabai did not like Bektai, though in his heart he respected him for his straightforwardness. A strong, bold man was being lost in him. Tanabai was sorry to see the boy heading in the wrong direction. Later, when their paths had parted and they met by chance in town he would say nothing to him, nor would he stop to hear what Bektai had to say, either.
Winter was early that year.
It came thundering in on its wild white she-camel, whipping the shepherds on for their carelessness.
October was dry and golden. Then winter was upon them in a flash in November. Tanabai brought the flock in that evening and locked them in the sheep-fold. Everything seemed to be in order. His wife awakened him at midnight.
"Get up, Tanabai. I'm frozen stiff. It's snowing."
Her hands were cold, she smelled of wet snow. The shotgun was wet and cold. The night was milky-white outside. It was snowing heavily. The sheep were restless in the fold. They lay there, moving their heads back and forth, coughing, shaking the snow off, but it kept coining down. "Just wait, things'll get much worse for all of us," Tanabai thought, pulling his sheepskin coat tightly around him. "You've come very early this year, Winter. Will it be for good or for bad? Maybe you'll let up a bit towards the end? If only you take off by lambing-time. That's all we ask of you. Meanwhile, do whatever you have to. It's your right, you don't have to ask anyone's permission."
The newly-born winter was silent, busy at work in the darkness to make everyone gasp in the morning, then hurry and scurry about.
The mountains loomed icily, dark crags in the night. They cared naught for winter. Let the shepherds and their flocks worry about hard times. The mountains, would lower on high as they always had.
Thus did that memorable winter begin, though as yet no one knew what lay in

store for them.
Snow covered the ground. Several days later it snowed again, then again and again until it drove the shepherds from the autumn grazings. The flocks began to wander, seeking cover in the ravines, in sheltered spots where there was little snow. Then did the age-old skill of the shepherds come into play: finding grass for their flocks where another would have given up, saying there was nothing there but snow. But they were not shepherds for nothing. From time to time one of the farm heads would appear for a quick look around, ask a host of questions, make great promises and then hurry back to civilisation. And once again the shepherd was left to face the winter alone.
Tanabai kept trying to find the time to go down to the collective farm and see what the plans for the lambing period were, whether stores had been put in, whether everything was in readiness. It was a vain hope. He had no time to catch his breath. Jaidar rode in once to visit their boy at the boarding school but did not stay long, for she knew Tanabai could not manage without her. He had to take his daughters along while he tended the flock. He had the little one up in front in the saddle under his coat. She was warm and content, but the older girl was cold, for she sat behind her father. Even the fire in the hearth burned differently, forlornly.
What joy there was the following day when their mother returned! The girls hung on her neck and had to be pulled away. A father is a father, but he can never take a mother's place.
Thus, time passed. The winter was changeable, it would get very cold and then let up, two blizzards were followed by thaws. This worried Tanabai. If the lambing period coincided with a warm spell all would be well, but what if it didn't?
The ewes' stomachs were getting bigger. The ribs of those that were carrying a large lamb or twins stuck out. The pregnant ewes walked heavily, cautiously, they had become much thinner. Their spines protruded. And no wonder, the lambs were growing within their wombs, gaining strength and weight from their mother's body at a time when each and every blade of grass had to be hunted for under the snow. The shepherds should have fed the ewes in the morning and evening, grain should have been brought up into the mountains, but the collective-farm granaries were empty. There was nothing but seed grain and oats for the work horses.
As Tanabai let the flock out of the fold each morning he examined the breeding ewes, feeling their stomachs and udders. He thought that if all went well be would fulfil his pledge as far as the lamb crop was concerned, but he'd probably be short of wool. The fleeces grew poorly in winter, while some sheep had even begun to shed, and all for the lack of food.
Tanabai was glum and angry, but there was nothing he could do. He cursed himself bitterly for having listened to Choro and made all those promises. About what a grand fellow he was, right up there in the front ranks, and promising the Party and his country so much. At least if he hadn't said! What had the Party and his country to do with it? It was an ordinary farm matter. But no, that's what you were supposed to say. Why was it that everyone was forever throwing these words

around?
Well, there was no one to blame but himself. He bad not thought it over. He was living at someone else's prompting. What did they care, they'd get themselves off the hook. he was sorry for Choro, though. The man had no luck. He'd be well a day and sick two. He'd spent his whole life worrying, persuading people, promising, but what was the use of it? he was becoming cautious now, choosing his words. If he was sick, well, wasn't it time he went on pension?
Meanwhile, winter was taking its course, first encouraging, then threatening the shepherds. Two breeding ewes in Tanabai's flock died of starvation. The two young shepherds he was to help also lost several sheep. That was to be expected. It was not unusual to lose ten dams in a winter. The main battle lay ahead, at the approach of spring.
Then suddenly, it began to thaw. The ewes' udders began filling out instantly. The animals were as thin as skeletons, they could barely support their stomachs, yet their teats were turning pink, swelling rapidly. Where did they get the strength? Word passed round that several ewes in another flock had already dropped their lambs. That meant carelessness at tupping time. That was the first signal. In another week or two the lambs would be dropping like pears from a tree. You'd have to be quick to receive them all. Then would the shepherd's terrible time be upon them! He would worry over each lamb, cursing the day he had ever become a shepherd, and his joy would know no bounds if he reared his lambs, if they stood up and waggled their tails when winter came.
Oh, if only everything turned out well, if only it did! So that he wouldn't have to hide his face in shame.
They sent him two helpers from the collective farm. These seasonal helpers were usually old or childless women who could be persuaded to leave the village for the lambing period. The two women that were sent to Tanabai arrived with their own bedding, belongings and canvas tent. Things began to look up. Actually, he needed at least seven helpers. Ibraim said he'd definitely have them when the flocks moved to the lambing shed in Five Trees Valley, but that two helpers were enough for now.
The flocks began to move to the lambing stations in the foothills. Tanabai asked Eshim Bolotbekov to help the women move and set up their tent at their new camp while he brought the flock down. He sent them off early in the morning, a regular caravan, then gathered the flock and headed them down at their own speed, slowly, so as not to tire the pregnant ewes. He would have to traverse the same path to Five Trees Valley twice more to help the two Young shepherds.
The sheep moved slowly, but he could not hurry them. His dog became bored and started running off on side trips of his own.
The sun was setting, but it was warm. The lower the flock descended into the foothills the warmer it became. There was fresh grass in sunny spots.
They had to stop on the way when the first ewe lambed. It should not have happened. Tanabai was upset as he blew the mucus from the newborn lamb's nostrils and ears. The first lambs should not have been born until a week later. But here was the first one!
What if they'd begin lambing on the way? He examined the other ewes. No, it did

not seem likely. He calmed down, his spirits rose. The girls would be happy to see the first lamb. The first one was always the sweetest. It was a fine lamb, white with black eyelashes and tiny black hooves. There was several coarse-fleeced sheep in the flock and it was one of these that had dropped her lamb. These lambs are usually born strong and wooly, unlike the fine-fleeced sheep whose lambs are born nearly naked.

"Well, since you were in such a hurry, have a took at the world," Tanabai said gently. "And bring us luck. Bring us many more like you, so many that there won't be room to move, make our ears ring with the sound of your voices, help them all to live!" He raised the lamb over his head. "Here he is, Protector of Lambs, the first one! Help us!"

The mountains crowded in. They were silent.

Tanabai tucked the lamb tinder his coat and started off, driving the flock on ahead. The darn followed him, bleating anxiously.

"Come on, come on!" Tanabai said to the mother. "He's right here, he's safe and sound." The lamb dried off and became warm under Tanabai's coat.

Tanabai brought the flock to the lambing station towards evening.

Every one was settled, smoke curled up from the big tent. The two women helpers were pottering around outside their canvas tent. That meant everything was in order. Eshim was nowhere in sight. Yes, he had taken the pack-camel back to move down with his flock the next day. Everything was in order.

But the sight that met Tanabai's eyes a few moments later staggered him. He had not had any illusions, but he had never expected the lambing shed to have a rotted, collapsed roof of rushes, holes in the walls, no doors or windows and the wind whistling inside. There was hardly any snow on the ground outside, yet there were snowdrifts inside the shed.

The sheep-fold, originally made of stones, was in ruins. Tanabai was so upset he didn't even stop to watch the girls exclaim over the new lamb. He merely thrust it into their hands and went off to inspect things. No matter where he looked he saw unbelievable mismanagement. It seemed that nothing had been mended here since the war. Each year the shepherds had managed to get through the lambing period somehow and then moved on, leaving everything to the winds and the rain. There was a lopsided pile of rotted hay and scattered clumps of straw on the roof. This was all the food and all the bedding there was for the flock's lambs and the ewes, not counting two half-filled sacks of barley flour and a crate of salt in one corner. Several lanterns with broken panes, a rusted pail of kerosene, two shovels and a broken pitchfork were piled up in the same corner. Tanabai's one desire was to splash kerosene over everything, burn the whole place down to blazes and leave.

He stumbled over frozen heaps of last year's dung and snow. Words failed him. He kept repeating the same phrase over and over like a madman: "How could they do it? How could they do it? How could they do it?"

He dashed out of the shed and grabbed up his saddle. His hands shook as he saddled his horse. He'd ride down at once, get everyone up in the middle of the night and then he'd do he knew not what! He'd get his hands on Ibraim's neck, on that chairman Aldanov and Choro. there'd be no mercy for any of them! If that's

what they were doing to him, he'd repay them in kind! This was the last straw!
"Wait!" Jaidar cried, as she managed to grab hold of the reins. "Where are you going? Don't you dare! Get down, do you hear!"
It was useless. You could not stop Tanabai.
"Let go! Let go!" he shouted, yanking at the reins, pushing the horse against his wife, whipping it on. "Let go, I say! I'll kill them! I'll murder them!"
"I won't let you go! Do you want to kill someone? Kill me.
The two women helpers came running to Jaidar's aid. The girls joined them and began to wail.
"Don't, Father! Don't!"
Tanabai cooled off, though he still tried to get started. "Don't hold me back! Can't you see what the place is like? Can't you see the pregnant ewes? Where'll we put them tomorrow? Where's the roof? Where's the grain for them? they'll all die. And who'll be responsible? Let me go!"
"Wait! Listen to me. All right, say you go down and yell at everybody and make a row. So what? If they haven't done anything till now, it means they can't. If they had the lumber, wouldn't the farm build a new shed?"
"They could have fixed the roof, couldn't they? And what about the doors? And the windows? Everything's falling apart, the shed's full of snow, they haven't cleaned it for years! And how long do you think that rotten hay will last? Is that the kind of hay you give lambs? And where'll we get straw for bedding? Let the lambs die in the dirt, is that it? Is that what you want? Let me go!"

"That's enough, Tanabai. Do you think you're better than everyone else? We'll manage just like everyone else does. What sort of a man are you?" his wife shamed him. "Try to see what can be done before it's too late. Never mind them. We're responsible, it's up to us to fix things. There's a thicket of sweetbrier near the hollow. It's prickly, but we can patch the roof with it and hold it down with dung. And we can mow weeds for bedding. We'll manage somehow if the weather holds out."
The two helpers urged Tanabai to listen to his wife. He gave in finally, slid out of the saddle and headed for the tent. He sat down inside, his head drooping as after a long illness.
Everyone was quiet. They were afraid to speak. Jaidar took the kettle off the coals, brewed the tea strong and brought her husband some cold water to wash his hands. She spread a clean cloth, unearthed some candies and put little yellow pats of boiled butter on a plate. She invited the two women to join her and they sat down to tea. Oh, those women! They sat there, sipping tea from their bowls, chatting pleasantly, as if they were at a tea party. Tanabai was silent. When he finished his tea he went out and began laying the scattered stones of the sheep-fold in place. The amount of work to be done was staggering. But they needed something to serve as a fold for the night. The women joined him. Even the girls tried to carry the stones.
"Go on back home," their father said to them.
He felt ashamed. He worked without raising his eyes. Choro had been right: if

not for Jaidar, Tanabai would have broken his wild neck long before.

16

The next day Tanabai went off to help the two young shepherds move their flocks; then he worked all week till he was ready to drop. He couldn't remember working like that before, perhaps only at the front lines when they had dug trenches round-the-clock. But there it had been a regiment, a division, an army setting up fortifications. Here there were only himself, his wife and one of the women helpers. The other was out with the flock nearby.
The hardest jobs were cleaning the filthy shed and chopping sweetbrier. The thicket was a mass of thorns. Tanabai tore his boots to ribbons there, his only army greatcoat gave up the ghost and hung in shreds. They tied the sweetbrier in bunches and dragged it to the shed, for it was too thorny to be carried or loaded on a horse. Tanabai cursed Five Trees Valley in which you couldn't even find the five stumps of the original trees. The sweat ran down them as they dragged the cursed brambles along, bent over double, ploughing a deep track to the shed with them. Tanabai felt sorry for the women but there was nothing he could do. He worked under tension: every minute counted, he had to keep an eye on the sky. Was it changing? If it began to snow their work would be in vain. He kept sending his older girl to the flock to see if the lambing had begun.
Cleaning the shed was worse still. It would take a year to carry out the dung. When dry hard-packed sheep manure is protected by a good roof it's a pleasure to clean it. An axe would break it into large chunks. These were stacked outside to dry. The heat of burning sheep-dung is as pleasant and pure as gold. Shepherds use it for firewood in winter. But if it was left out in the rain and the snow, as it was here, nothing could be worse than getting it out. It was backbreaking work. And time did not stand still. All through the night, by the light of the smoking lanterns, they kept carrying out the cold, heavy, sticky mess on a wooden stretcher. They had been at it for two days and two nights.
A huge mound of dung now rose in the back yard, but there was no end in sight. They were trying to clear at least one corner of the shed for the expected lambs. But what was one corner if the large shed itself was too small to accommodate all the ewes and their lambs, expected at a rate of twenty to thirty a day! "What'll we do?" this thought was uppermost in Tanabai's mind as he piled dung on the stretcher, helped carry it out, then returned, and so on endlessly until midnight, until dawn. He felt nauseous. His arms were numb. As if that were not enough, the wind kept blowing out the lanterns. Fortunately, his two helpers did not complain, they worked as hard as Tanabai and Jaidar did.
A day and a night passed, then other, and another. They kept carrying out dung and stuffing up the holes in the walls and the roof. Then one night, as Tanabai was carrying out a load of dung, he heard a lamb bleat in the fold and its dam stamp and bleat in reply. "It's begun!" His heart sank.
"Did you hear that?" Tanabai said, turning to his wife.
They dropped the heavy stretcher, grabbed up their lanterns and rushed to the sheep-fold.

There they swung the flickering lanterns back and forth. Where was he? Over there, in the corner! The dam was licking the tiny, shivering body of the newborn lamb. Jaidar bundled it into the bottom of her skirt. Luckily, they had been in time to prevent him from freezing to death outside. Another ewe had lambed nearby. She had twins. Tanabai wrapped them in his cape. Five more ewes were in labour, grunting softly. Yes, it had begun. These five would drop their lambs by morning. They called to the helpers. They led the ewes that had lambed out of the fold and into the corner of the shed they had about cleared.
Tanabai spread some straw along the wall, placed the lambs on it after this and covered them with a sack. It was cold. He led the dams to them. He bit his lip thoughtfully. But what was the use of thinking? All he could do was hope for the best. There was still so much to be done, so much to see to. At least if he had enough straw, but no, there wasn't even that. Ibraim Would be sure to find an answer to that one, too. He'd say: "You try to get straw into the mountains when the roads are washed out."
Well, he'd have to take things as they came! He went into his tent and returned with a can of ink. He drew a figure "2" on one lamb's back and a "3" on each of the twins' backs. Then he numbered their dams accordingly. You'd never get them straight otherwise when there were hundreds of them milling about. The time was close at hand, the shepherd's hectic time had come!
And it had begun cruelly, unmercifully, as in war, when tanks advance upon you and you have nothing to defend yourself with. And so you stay in your trench and do not retreat, because there is no place to retreat to. It's either, or: either you survive the battle by a miracle, or you perish.
In the morning, before the flock was taken out to pasture, Tanabai stood in a hillock, looking about in silence, as if reviewing his positions. His defence line was dilapidated, worthless. But he would have to stand firm. There was no place to retreat to. The small winding valley with its shallow stream lay between two hills. Higher mountains rose beyond them, and farther still were the highest, snow-capped peaks. Bare cliffs loomed black above the white slopes and winter lay on the ice-bound ridges. Winter was only a stone's throw away. It had only to move a bit, to toss the clouds down, and the little valley would be plunged into darkness, lost to the world.
The sky was grey, enveloped in a cold grey mist. There was a ground wind blowing. Everything was desolate. They were hemmed in by mountains. Anxiety chilled his heart. The first lambs were bleating in the tumble-down shed. He had just culled another ten ewes from the flock, for they would soon lamb.
The flock moved off slowly in search of meager grazing. You could not leave them alone for a moment on the slopes. Sometimes a ewe would be down behind a bush and drop her lamb without warning. If no one noticed, the lamb would get chilled on the damp ground. It would not live long after that.
However, Tanabai had been standing on the hillock too long. It was no use. He headed towards the shed. They had only scratched the surface; they would have to get as much done as they possibly could.
A while later Ibraim brought up some flour. The man had no shame. "Don't expect me to get you a palace," he said. "These are the lambing sheds the farm has

always had. There aren't any others. We're not living under communism yet."
Tanabai felt like knocking him down and barely managed to restrain the impulse.
"You picked the wrong time to joke. Something's got to be done. I'm responsible, you know."
"Don't you think I'm worried, too? All you're responsible for is your flock. I'm responsible for everything: for you, for all the others, for every head of cattle. Do you think it's easy?" And then, to Tanabai's amazement, the wily Ibraim burst into tears, covering his face with his hands, mumbling: "They'll send me to jail, that's what they'll do. I can't get anything any place. Nobody even wants to come here as temporary help. Go on, kill me, tear me to pieces, there's nothing else I can do. And don't expect anything else. I'm sorry I ever took this job!"
And so he rode away, leaving Tanabai, the simpleton, feeling rather embarrassed. And that was the last anyone saw of him at the lambing station.

The first hundred ewes had delivered their lambs. The flocks of Eshim and Bektai, located higher up along the valley, had not begun lambing yet, but Tanabai sensed the disaster awaiting them. All of them, the little band of three adults, not counting the old woman helper who was constantly out with the flock and his elder, six-year-old daughter, did nothing but receive the lambs, dry them put them on to the ewes, try to keep them warm with whatever was at hand, carry out dung and bring in dry weeds for bedding. They could hear the hungry bleating of the lambs now. There was not enough milk for them, for the ewes were in poor condition, and no wonder, there was no grain for them. What lay ahead?
The shepherd's days and nights became a dizzy whirl. The lambs were coming hard and fast, they had no time to catch their breath.
How the weather had frightened them the day before! It had suddenly become very cold, dark clouds obscured the sky, a hard, granular snow beat down upon them. Everything browned in the murk, all was darkness.
But soon the clouds were dispelled, it became warmer. There was a smell of spring in the air, of dampness. "Maybe spring has come to stay. If only it were here for good. There's nothing worse than changes back and forth," Tanabai thought as he carried watery after-births out on a pitchfork of wet straw.
Then spring arrived, but not as Tanabai had expected it. It was suddenly upon them in the night, carried in by rain, fog and snow. It came crashing down upon the shed, the tent, the sheep-fold and everything else in all its chilly wetness. Streams and puddles made the frozen, muddy earth buckle. It seeped through the rotted roof, washed away at the walls and began flooding the shed, chilling its inhabitants to the bone. It got everyone to their feet. The lambs stood in the water, pressing close together, the ewes bleated wildly as they delivered their lambs standing up. Spring christened the newborn in streams of cold water.
Three people in raincapes carrying lanterns rushed back and forth. Tanabai was everywhere at once. His large boots dashed through the puddles, the dungwash, like two cornered beasts in the dark. The edges of his cape flapped like the wings of a wounded bird. He shouted hoarsely at himself, at the others:
"Get me the crowbar! Give me a shovel! Pile the dung here! Block the water!"

He had to divert the streams of water that were pouring into the shed. He chopped away at the frozen ground, hacking out ditches.
"Give me some light! Over here! Don't just stand there!"
Fog choked the night. It snowed and rained. And nothing could stop it.
Tanabai ran into the tent. He turned on the lamp. It was dripping everywhere. But not as bad as in the shed. The girls were sleeping, their blanket was getting wet. Tanabai scooped them up together with their bedding and moved them into a corner, clearing as much space as possible. He threw a piece of felt on the girls to keep the blanket dry and, running outside, he shouted to the women in the shed:
"Get the lambs into the tent!" and rushed in to help them.
But how many lambs could they take into the tent? Several dozen, no more. And what about the others? Oh, if only they could save as many as possible.
Dawn had broken. But there was no end to the torrents. It would let up for a while and then rain again or snow, or rain or snow again.
The tent was jam-packed with lambs. They were all bleating. The stench was unbearable. They had piled their belongings in a heap under a piece of canvas and had moved in with their two helpers. The girls were cold in the canvas tent, they whimpered wretchedly.
The shepherd's black days were upon them. He cursed his fate. He cursed everyone and everything. He neither slept nor ate, working feverishly among the drenched sheep, among the freezing lambs. Death was already mowing them down in the icy shed. It found easy entry here, there were holes enough. It could come in through the rotted roof, through the gaping windows and doorways. And in it came, cutting down the lambs and the weak dams. The shepherd carried out the tiny blue bodies and dumped them, several at a time, behind the shed.
Out in the open, in the sheep-fold exposed to the rain and the snow, stood the big-bellied, pregnant ewes. They would soon deliver. The rain beat down on them, their jaws were locked from the cold. Their wet fleeces hung in dripping strands. The sheep refused to leave the fold. Where could they graze in such cold and dampness! The old woman helper, a gunnysack thrown over head, chased them out, but they ran back again, as if the sheep-fold was heaven. The woman wept, she herded them together and chased them out again, but they only turned back. Tanabai ran out in a rage. He could have broken a stick over their stupid backs, but they were all pregnant. He called to the other women and together they managed to get the flock out to graze.
From the moment disaster had struck Tanabai had lost count of time, count of the lambs that were dying left and right. There were so many twins and even triplets. And all this wealth was being lost. All their labours were for nothing. The lambs were born and died in the mud and dungwash the same day. Those that survived coughed and choked, they had the scours and dirtied each other. Ewes whose lambs bad died bleated, scurried about, jostled each other, trampled those that were in labour. There was something unnatural, something monstrous about it all. Oh, how Tanabai wished that the lambing-time would bold back a bit!
But the ewes seemed to be in a conspiracy: they kept delivering one after another, one after another, one after another!

And a terrible, dark wave of anger rose up within him. It rose up, filling his eyes with black hatred for everything that was happening here, for this rotten shed, the sheep, himself, his life, and for everything he was struggling for so desperately here.
His senses became numbed. He would become sick from his thoughts, he drove them away, but they would not retreat, they bored into his soul, into his brain. "Why is it like this? Why should it be like this? Why do we breed sheep if we can't raise them? Who's to blame? Who? Tell me who's to blame? It's you, and other blabbermouths like you. Why, things will pick up, we'll catch up, we'll overtake, we pledge. Fine words, aren't they? Well, you can go and pick up the dead lambs now and carry them out. Drag out that dam over there, the one that died in a puddle. Go on, show us what a fine fellow you are."
At night more than ever, as he waded knee-deep in dungwash and urine, Tanabai's bitter, scorching thoughts all but suffocated him. Oh, those sleepless nights of the lambing period! There was a sea of dungwash underfoot and rain coming down through the roof. The wind whipped through the shed as through a field, blowing out the lanterns. Tanabai felt his way along, stumbled, crawled on all fours so as not to trample the new-born lambs, then found the lantern, lit it, and by its light saw his dirty, swollen hands covered with manure and blood.
He had not seen himself in a mrror for a long time. He did not know that he had turned grey and had aged terribly. And that forever after now he would be known as an old man. He couldn't care less, he had no time to think of himself. He had no time to eat or wash. He drove himself and the women mercilessly. Faced with complete disaster, he told the younger of his two helpers to saddle his horse.
"Go find Choro. Tell him to come at once. If he doesn't tell him I never want to see him again!"
She came galloping back towards evening, slid out of the saddle, drenched to the skin, blue from the cold.
"He's sick, Tanabai. He's in bed. But he said he'd come in a day or two even if he dies on the way."
"I hope he never gets up!" Tanabai raged.
Jaidar wanted to stop him but did not dare, it was better to leave him alone.
The weather began to clear on the third day. The clouds crept off grudgingly, the fog rose higher into the mountains. The wind subsided. But it was too late. The pregnant ewes had become so thin by now that it was frightening to look at them. They were living skeletons with bloated bellies. How could they ever suckle their young! And what about those that had lambed and whose lambs were still alive, how many of them would live till summer and gain strength from the green grass? Sooner or later sickness would fell them. Even if it didn't, they would yield neither fleece nor meat.
No sooner did the sky clear than another misfortune befell them: the ground began to freeze. It would soon be ice-crusted. However, it thawed by noon. Tanabai heaved a sigh of relief. Perhaps they'd be able to save some of the flock. Once again they took up their spades, the pitchfork and the wooden stretcher. They had to make paths in the shed, for the slush had become impossible. However, they had little time for this. They still had to put the

orphaned lambs on to the lambless ewes. But the ewes butted, they did not want to suckle strange lambs. The lambs bleated for milk, each cold little mouth searched for a teat, grabbing at your fingers, sucking them. You shoved them off and they sucked at the dirty hems of the raincapes. They were hungry. They followed you about in a crying little band.

It was enough to make you scream, to go crazy. How much farther could he drive these women and his little daughter? They were ready to drop. Their capes had not dried for days. Tanabai said nothing. Once only did he lose his temper. The old woman brought the flock back to the fold at noon, thinking she would help Tanabai. He ran out to check the sheep. One look made the blood rush to his head: the sheep were eating each other's fleece. That meant death from starvation was imminent. He screamed at the woman:

"What's the matter with you? Can't you see what they're doing?! Why didn't you say anything? Go on! Get them moving! And don't let them stop. Don't let them eat fleece. Keep them on the move. Don't let them stop for a minute. I'll kill you if you do!"

Then another blow fell. A ewe that had twins disowned them. She butted them and kicked them and would not let them suckle. The lambs pushed close, falling and bleating piteously. Such things happen when the brutal law of self-preservation comes into force and a dam instinctively refuses to feed her young in order to survive herself, since her system cannot nourish another. This action is like an infectious disease. No sooner does one ewe set an example than the others follow suit. Tanabai was alarmed. He and his daughter drove the hunger-maddened ewe and her lambs into the yard towards the sheepfold and here they tried to make her accept her sucklings. First Tanabai held the ewe while his daughter put the lambs on to it. But the dam twisted and turned and butted. The child could not manage it.

"They can't suck, Father."

"Yes they can, you're too dumb to help them."

"No, see, they keep falling." She was close to tears.

"You hold her, I'll do it myself!"

But how much strength did the child have? No sooner had he put the lambs onto the ewe, no sooner had they begun to suck than the ewe broke free, knocked the child over and ran away. Tanabai exploded. He slapped his daughter across the face. He had never hit his children, but now his temper flared. The girl began to cry. Tanabai stalked off. He cursed everything and stalked off.

He walked off his anger and returned wondering how to ask his daughter's forgiveness, but she came running up to him herself.

"She's feeding them, Father. Mother and I put them on to her. She's not butting them any more."

"That's fine, dear. Good for you."

He felt much better. Perhaps things were not as bad as they seemed. Perhaps they'd still be able to save some of the flock. And look, the weather was improving! What if spring had really come to stay and the shepherd's black days were over? Back to work again. Work, toil, it was their only salvation.

A youth on horseback rode up, it was a boy from the farm office. He asked how

things were going. Tanabai was about to tell him where he could go, but the boy was not to blame.
"Where were you all this time?"
"Checking the flocks. It's hard, there's no one to help me.
"How are things in the other flocks?"
"The same as here. These last three days killed a lot of sheep."
"What do the shepherds say?"
"They're all cursing. Some won't even talk to me. Bektai chased me away. He's so mad you can't get near him."
"So. And I haven't had a minute to spare for him. Maybe I'll manage to get over there. What about you?"
"Me? My job is keeping the records straight."
"Is there any help-coming?"
"Yes. They say Choro's back at work. He sent out a string of wagons with hay and straw. They cleaned out the stable, he said he didn't care if all the horses died. But they say the wagons got stuck on the way. The roads are all mud."
"Mud! Why didn't they think of it before? It's always like that. And what good'll the wagons do now? Wait till I get my hands on them!" Tanabai raged. "Don't talk to me. Go and see for yourself, count the heads, write it down. I don't give a damn any more!" Cutting the conversation short he headed back to the shed to receive the new lambs. Another fifteen ewes were lambing.
As Tanabai walked back and forth, picking up the lambs, the youth came over and thrust a sheet of paper at him.
"Here, sign the report on your losses."
He signed without looking at it. And he wrote so savagely he broke the pencil.
"Good-bye, Tanabai. D'you want me to take back a message?"
"I've got nothing to say." But then he called the boy back. "Stop off at Bektai's place. Tell him I'll try to be there by noon tomorrow."
Tanabai needn't have worried. Bektai forestalled him. He came himself, and in a most unlikely manner.
That night the wind blew up again, it began to snow, not heavily, but enough to make the ground white by morning. It covered the sheep in the fold. They had stood up all through the night. They did not lie down now. They would huddle together and stand there motionlessly, listlessly. They had been hungry too long, spring had battled winter too long.
It was cold in the shed. Snowflakes drifted through the holes in the roof made by the rain, they circled in the dim light of the lanterns and settled gently on the chilled ewes and lambs. But Tanabai worked on, performing his duties like a soldier of a burial detachment on a battlefield after a slaughter. He had become used to his terrible thoughts, his indignation had turned to sullen anger. His soul was impaled on it, gripped by a throbbing pain. As his boots slopped through the mire, as he did his job, through the long hours of the night, the past would come back to him in snatches.
As a child he had been a herdsboy. He and his brother Kulubai had tended a relative's flock together. When the year was up they discovered they had been working for no more than their food. Their master had cheated them out of their

pay. He did not even wish to discuss the matter. And so they had left empty-handed. They had on torn sandals, and each carried his meagre belongings in a little bundle slung over his back. In parting Tanabai had warned the man: "I'll get even with you when I grow up! " Kulubai had said nothing. He was five years older than Tanabai. He knew that words would not frighten the master. What you aimed at was becoming a master yourself and owning a flock and land. "When I have my own land I'll never cheat my workers," he would say. That is how the brothers parted that year. Kulubai became another rich landowner's shepherd, while Tanabai went off to Alexandrovka to work as a hired hand for a Russian settler named Yefremov. He was not a very rich farmer, all he had was a pair of oxen, a pair of horses and his own field on which he raised wheat. He took the wheat to the rolling-mill in the town of Aouliye-Ata. He slaved from sun-up to sun-down, while Tanabai's job was to look after the oxen and horses. Yefremov was strict, but you couldn't deny that he was just. He paid the wages agreed upon. In those days poor Kirghizes preferred hiring out to Russian masters than working for their kinsmen who always skinned them. Tanabai learned to speak Russian. Working as a carter he saw the town of Aouliye-Ata and a bit of life as well. And then the Revolution was upon them. Everything turned upside-down. The time of the Tanabais had dawned.

Tanabai returned to his village. A new life had begun. It swept him up and carried him along, making his head whirl. Everything came to him at once: land, freedom, civil rights. He was elected to the local Committee of Poor Peasants. That was when he met Choro. Choro was literate, he taught the young people to read and write. Tanabai had to learn, after all, he was a member of the Committee. He joined a Komsomol cell. And here he and Choro also worked together. They joined the Party at the same time. Things were moving fast, the poor making their way to the top. When the campaign for establishing collective farms began. Tanabai threw himself into it heart and soul. Who, if not he, was to fight for the peasant's new life, for making everything--the land, the cattle, their efforts and dreams--the common property of all? Down with the kulaks!

It was a time of drastic measures, of harsh winds blowing. He would be in the saddle all day and at meetings and conferences far into the night. They drew up lists of kulaks. The landowners, the mullahs and the rich were pulled up by the roots like weeds in a field. The field had to be cleared to make way for new crops. Kulubai's name was put on the list of kulaks. At the time Tanabai was busy riding up and down to meetings and conferences his brother had already made his own way in life. He had married a widow and had a house of his own. He owned some cattle: a cow, some sheep, a pair of horses, a milking mare and her colt. He had a plough, several harrows and other equipment. He hired field hands at harvest time. You couldn't say he was wealthy, but he was not poor. He lived well and worked hard.

When Kulubai's name came up for discussion at the meeting of the Village Soviet, Choro said:

"We have a problem here, comrades. Should we dispossess him or not? The collective farm could use men like Kulubai. After all, he comes from a poor family. He has never been hostile to the Soviet Government."

There were various opinions. Some agreed, some disagreed. Tanabai alone had as yet said nothing. He sat there sullenly. Though only a half-brother, Kulubai was still his brother. And he would have to go against his brother. They had always been on good terms, although they rarely saw each other lately. Each was busy with his own affairs. He might say: "Don't touch him." But what would they do about the others then, for each would find a relative to defend him. He might say: "You decide." Then they would think he was a coward.
They were waiting for him to speak. And the very fact that they were waiting made him bristle.
"You're always like that, Choro," he said, rising. "They write about people with learning in the papers, what is it they call them--entellectuals. Well, you're an entellectual, too. You can never make up your mind, you're always afraid things'll turn out wrong. What's stopping you? If he's on the list, it means he's a kulak! And there can't be any mercy for him! I wouldn't spare my own father to protect Soviet power. And don't worry about him being my brother. If you can't do it, I'll dispossess him myself."
Kulubai came to see him the next day. Tanabai met his brother coldly. He did not offer him his hand.
"What do you want to dispossess me for? Didn't we hire out as farm-hands together? Didn't the landlords cheat us and kick us out together?"
"That doesn't count now. You've become a rich landlord yourself."
"I'm not rich. I worked for everything I have. I'm willing to give it up. You can have it all. But what do you want to make a kulak of me for? Have you no conscience, Tanabai?"
"It doesn't matter. You're an alien class. And we have to liquidate you in order to build a collective farm. You're standing in our way and we have to get you out of the way.
That had been their last talk. In the twenty years that followed they had not spoken to each other. The village had been full of talk and gossip when Kulubai was exiled to Siberia.
There were few who spoke up for Tanabai then. Most people censured him. "Pray to God you never have a brother like him. It's better to have no kin at all." Some said it to his face. Yes, people renounced him then. It wasn't done openly, but when it came to re-electing him, they abstained. Thus, he was gradually removed from every office. He justified his actions to himself by saying that kulaks were burning down collective farms and murdering farmers, but most important, that the collective farm was gaining strength, that things were improving from year to year. A different way of life had come to the village. No, what had been done had not been done in vain.
Tanabai recalled it all to the last detail. It was as if his entire life had remained behind in that wonderful time when the collective farms were gaining strength. Once again he recalled the songs of the time, he recalled the farm's first small truck and the way he had stood in the back of it holding a red flag in the night.
Tanabai stumbled about the shed that night, carrying out his bitter job, thinking his bitter thoughts. Why was everything falling apart now? Perhaps they'd

made a mistake, perhaps they'd taken the wrong road? No, it couldn't be, it just couldn't! The road had been right. But what was wrong then? Had they lost their way? Gone off the road? How and when had it happened? Take their pledges, for example. All they did nowadays was write them down in a book, and no one cared less about how you were making out. Before they used to have a red bulletin board and a black bulletin board. Each day they all talked and argued about those on the black board and those on the red board. It mattered then. Now they said that was all ancient history. But what did they offer instead? Nothing but empty talk and promises. But nothing real. Why was it so? Who was to blame?
These bleak thoughts exhausted him. He was overcome by a weary indifference, a state of torpor. He couldn't apply himself to anything. His head ached. He wanted to sleep. He saw his young helper lean against the wall. Her inflamed eyelids closed as she battled sleep, then she began slipping down slowly and finally sat on the ground and fell asleep, her head resting on her knees. He did not waken her. He, too, leaned against the wall and also began slipping down-slowly. He could not resist, he could not throw off the terrible weight that was pressing upon his shoulders, forcing him farther and farther down.
He awoke from a muffled cry and a heavy thump. The sheep scattered in fright, trampling over his feet. He jumped up in a daze. It was getting light.
"Tanabai! Help me!" his wife called.
The two helpers ran to her, he followed. Jaidar was lying beneath a fallen rafter. One of the ends had slipped off the crumbling wall, then the rafter had come crashing down under the weight of the rotted roofing. Sleep vanished from his eyes.
"Jaidar!" he cried. He got his shoulder under the rafter and lifted it with a jerk.
Jaidar crawled out and began to moan. The women wailed over her. They felt her bones. Tanabai, frightened to death, shoved them aside, his trembling hands felt his wife's body under her sweater.
"What is it? Where does it hurt?"
"It's my back! Oh, my back!"
"Here, help me!" He tore off his cape, they put Jaidar on it and carried her out of the shed.
They examined her in the tent. There weren't any visible bruises, but the blow had been a bad one. She was unable to move.
Jaidar began to weep.
"What'll you do now? What a time I picked. What'll you do?"
"My God!" Tanabai thought. "She should be thankful she's alive. But look at what she's worried about. I don't care if the whole place goes to blazes! If only you get well, my poor dear."
"Everything will be all right, Jaidar," he said aloud, stroking her hair. "You just worry about getting well. Nothing else matters. We'll manage."
Now all three of them, having recovered from the first shock, tried to calm Jaidar. She brightened at their words and smiled through her tears.
"All right. But don't be angry at me. I won't be in bed long. You'll see, I'll be up in a day or two."

The women made her bed and started a fire in the hearth, while Tanabai went back to the shed, still unable to believe that disaster had passed them by.
It was a white morning, everything was covered with soft new snow. Tanabai found a dam crushed to death beneath a rafter in the shed. They had not noticed her in the excitement. Her suckling lamb was nuzzling the dead ewe's udder. Tanabai became still more frightened and still more relieved that his wife had been spared. He picked up the orphaned lamb and went to look for a foster mother. Later, as he set a support under the rafter and reinforced the wall with a post, he kept thinking that he should go and see how his wife was.
As he emerged from the shed he saw a flock of sheep approaching slowly through the snow. A shepherd was driving them towards him. Whose flock was it? Why was he driving it here? The two flocks would get mixed up, how could he do such a thing? Tanabai went forward to warn the stranger that he was in someone else's territory.
When he got closer he recognised Bektai.
"Is that you, Bektai?" he called.
He received no answer. Bektai was driving the flock towards him in silence, whacking his stick across the sheep's backs.
"He's crazy! They're pregnant ewes!" Tanabai was appalled.
"Where are you coming from? Where are you going? Hello," he said.
"I'm coming from where you won't find me again. And you can see where I'm going," Bektai said, approaching him. A rope was tied tightly around his waist, his mittens were stuck under his cape on his chest.
Holding the stick behind his back, he stopped within several feet of Tanabai but did not return his greeting. He spat angrily and ground the spittle out viciously in the snow. He threw back his head. His features were darkened by the black beard that seemed pasted to his young, handsome face. His sullen, wild-cat eyes were full of hate and challenge. He spat again, and waved the stick at the flock.
"Here. They're yours. You can count them if you want to. There's three hundred and eighty-five heads."
"What's the matter?"
"I'm leaving."
"What do you mean? Where to?"
"I don't know."
"But why me?"
"Because you're my sponsor."
"So what? Wait! Where do you think you're going?" Now only did the situation dawn on Tanabai. The blood rushed to his head, choking him, making him hot. "How can you do such a thing?" he mumbled helplessly.
"Just watch me. I've had enough. I'm sick of this lousy life."
"Do you know what you're saying? Your ewes will begin lambing in a day or two! How can you do such a thing?"
"If that's how they treat us, that's how we treat them. Good-bye!" Bektai swung the stick over his head, sent it sailing off as far as he could and walked away.
Tanabai froze. Words failed him. Meanwhile, Bektai kept on walking without a

backward glance.
"Wait, Bektai!" He ran after him. "You can't walk out. Think of what you're doing! Do you hear me?"
"Leave me alone!" Bektai spun around. "You do the thinking. I want to live like other people. I'm no worse than they are. I can work in the city, too, and get wages. Why do I have to waste my life here with these sheep? No grain, no shed, no felt tent. Leave me alone! Go on, kill yourself, go drown in dung. Have a look at yourself, see what you look like. You'll drop dead here soon, but even that's not enough. You'll still be shouting slogans. You want others to follow your example. Well, not this boy! I've had enough!" And he stalked off, stamping through the white, virgin snow so fiercely that his footprints filled with water and turned instantly black.
"Bektai! Listen to me!" Tanabai caught up with him. "I can explain everything."
"Do your explaining someplace else. Maybe some fools will listen to you."
"Stop, Bektai! I want to talk to you."
But Bektai kept on walking.
"You'll be arrested!"
"I'd rather go to jail than live like this!" Bektai muttered and did not turn back again.
"You're a deserter!"
Bektai kept on walking.
"Deserters like you were shot at the front!"
He kept on walking.
"Stop! Do you hear me!" Tanabai grabbed his sleeve.
Bektai wrenched free and kept on walking.
"I won't let you go, you've no right to!" Tanabai gripped his shoulder and spun him around. Suddenly, the snow-capped peaks lurched and dissolved in blackness. An unexpected blow on the jaw had knocked him out.
When Tanabai raised his spinning head Bektai had disappeared beyond the rise. A forlorn string of dark footprints followed him into the distance.
"What'll become of him?" Tanabai moaned, raising himself on all fours. He stoop up. His hands were covered with mud and snow.
He caught his breath, herded Bektai's flock together and drove it dejectedly towards the sheep-fold.

17

Two riders left the village, heading towards the mountains. One rode a golden chestnut, the other a bay. The horses' tails were tied in knots, for the journey would be a long one. Clumps of mud and snow flew out from under the horses' hooves.
Gyulsary was pacing smartly against the tight reins. He had become stiff in the stable waiting for his master to recuperate. However, it was not his master who rode him now, but a stranger in a leather coat with a canvas cape over it. His clothing smelled of paint and rubber. Choro rode beside him on the bay. He had let important visitors from the district centre ride the pacer before. Gyulsary

did not really care who rode him. Many men had ridden him since he had been taken from the herd and his first master. There had been all sorts, both kind and mean, those who rode well and those who rode poorly. Some had been show-offs. They lost their heads in the saddle. That kind would pull the pacer up on his haunches in a dead chase, then whip him on again and jerk him to a halt again. They didn't care what they did as long as everyone noticed they were riding a pacer. Gyulsary had become used to everything. The only thing he resented was languishing in the stable. His former passion was still alive within him: he wanted to run, run, run. He did not care who his rider was. It was the rider who cared about the kind of horse he was on. If he was given the golden chestnut pacer it meant he was respected and feared. Gyulsary was strong and beautiful. A rider felt secure in the saddle.

This time Segizbayev, the district procurator, was riding the pacer. He had been sent in from the district to check on how the collective farm was doing. The fact that the farm's Party organiser was accompanying him was yet further indication of the respect they had for him. The Party organiser was silent, he was probably worried, for things were going poorly with the lambing. The situation was very bad. Well, let him be silent. Let him be afraid. There was no need for him to pester a procurator with idle talk, subordinates should be in awe of their superiors. Otherwise there would never be any order. There still were officials who were on a familiar footing with their subordinates, but these very same subordinates later knocked them so hard that the stuffing came out of them. Power was an important, responsible matter, not every man was equal to wielding it.

Such were Segizbayev's thoughts as he rode along, swaying in the saddle in time to the pacer's gait, and one could not say he was in a bad temper, though his mission was to check on the shepherds and he knew things were pretty bad. Winter and spring had clashed, neither would give way, and those to suffer most from the clash were the sheep: the lambs were dying off, the emaciated ewes were dying, and nothing could be done to stop it. It was the same story every year. And everyone knew it. But since he was an official representative, he would have to find someone he could hold responsible for it. And somewhere in the dark reaches of his soul he knew that the heavy losses of sheep in the district were even to his advantage. After all, it was not he, the district procurator and only one of the members of the District Committee Bureau, who was responsible for the state of affairs in the livestock breeding programme. The First Secretary was the one who would be held responsible. He was a new man in the district, well, let him worry about it. Segizbayev, for one, would be watching. And the people higher up might do well to watch him, too. Perhaps they'd begin to wonder whether they had been right in appointing an outsider. It had been a blow to Segizbayev, he resented having been by-passed for the job. He had been district procurator for many years and had proven time and again that he was a trustworthy man. No matter, he had faithful friends who would always support him. Indeed, it was high time he became a Party functionary, he'd been a procurator too long. The pacer was a fine horse, it was like rocking on a ship, and neither dirt nor slush could slow him down. The Party organiser's bay was in a lather,

while the pacer was just getting damp.
Meanwhile, Choro was thinking his own thoughts. He looked dreadful. His emaciated face had a yellow cast, his eyes were sunken. His heart had been bothering him for many years, it kept getting consistently worse. His thoughts, too, were depressing. Tanabai had been right. The chairman fussed and shouted, but all to no avail. He spent most of his time in the district centre, he always seemed to have business there. Choro felt they should discuss the matter at a Party meeting, but the people in the district centre told him to wait. What was there to wait for? There were rumours that Aldanov wanted to resign anyway, perhaps that was why? Well, why didn't he? And it was time he himself resigned. What good was he? He was always sick. When his son Samansur was home for the holidays he, too, advised him to resign. He could certainly do that, but what about his conscience? Samansur was a smart boy, he knew more about what was going on in the world than his father. He kept talking about farm management. They were taught well, perhaps things would one day be as their professors said, but by that time his father would most likely be dead. And he could not escape his burden. You could not escape and hide from yourself. What would people say? He had promised so much, he had raised their hopes, he had plunged the collective farm into terrible debt, could he say he was going to retire now? There'd be no rest for him, there never would, so he might as well stick it out to the end. Help would arrive, things could not continue as they were much longer. If only they'd hurry. And real help, not like this fellow here. "We're going to take you to court for the mess you've made," he had said. Let him! A court sentence wouldn't solve anything. Look at him scowling, as if the people up in the mountains were all criminals and he was the only one who cared about the farm. Actually, he didn't give a damn for anything, it was all a show. But you couldn't say anything.

18

The great mountains were shrouded in mist. Forgotten by the sun, they towered gloomily on high like offended giants. Spring was out of sorts. Everything was damp and murky.
Tanabai was having a hard time. It was both cold and suffocating in the shed. Several ewes would lamb at once and there was no place to put the lambs. It was enough to drive you mad, the bleating and the jostling. They were all hungry, they were all thirsty, and they were dying off like flies. To top it all, his wife was still laid up with her back. She had tried to get up but could not. Well, things would just have to take their course. He had no strength left to fight.
He kept thinking about Bektai, and was choked by a feeling of helpless rage. It was not because Bektai had walked out, to hell with him, and not because he had deserted his flock like a cuckoo leaving its eggs in other birds' nests, they'd send someone around sooner or later to take over his sheep: no, it was because he had not found the words that would make Bektai cringe with shame and wish he was dead. That pup! That snot-nosed pup! And he, the veteran Communist who had

devoted his life to the collective farm, hadn't found anything worthwhile to say. He had tossed his stick away and left, the pup. Could Tanabai ever have dreamed such a thing would be possible? Could he ever have dreamed anyone would laugh at his life's work?

,,,That's enough!" he would say to himself, but a moment later his mind returned to the same thoughts.

Another ewe lambed. It was twins, both fine lambs. But what would he do with them? The dam's udder was empty, and where was the milk to come from? So these two would also die. Oh, misery! And over there were cold dead lambs. Tanabai gathered up the little bodies and was about to carry them out when his daughter came running in breathlessly.

"Father, two riders are coming here."

"Let them come," Tanabai muttered. "Go look after your mother."

As he came out of the shed he saw them. "It's Gyulsary!" It was a happy sight. There was that same old pang in his heart. "It's been a long time! But look at him go, he hasn't changed a bit!" One of the men was Choro. He did not recognise the man in the leather coat that was riding Gyulsary. It was probably someone from the district centre.

"Well, it's about time," he thought maliciously. Now was his chance to tell them what a time he'd been having, to get it all off his chest, but no, he wouldn't complain, let them feet ashamed. Was it right? Leaving him to battle alone and then coming round to have a look?

Tanabai did not wait for them to ride up, he turned the corner of the shed and threw the dead lambs on the heap. He returned slowly.

The men were there. The horses were breathing hard. Choro looked beaten, guilty. He knew he would have to face his friend's accusations. But the man on the pacer was angry and stern. He started shouting without even greeting Tanabai.

"It's outrageous! It's the same everywhere! Look at what's going on!" he bellowed, addressing his words to Choro. Then he turned to Tanabai. "What's the matter, Comrade?" and he pointed towards the heap where Tanabai had deposited the dead lambs. "How come you're a Communist and your lambs are dying?"

"They probably don't know I'm a Communist," Tanabai retorted and suddenly it was as if a main spring had broken inside him. There was an emptiness in his soul, he felt indifferent, bitter.

"What?!" Segizbayev turned purple. He paused. "Did you make a pledge?" he finally said, jerking the pacer's head up as a warning.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"I don't remember."

"That's why your lambs are dying!" Segizbayev jabbed his whip in the direction of the heap again and stood up in the stirrups, inspired by the opportunity to teach this insolent shepherd a lesson. However, he began by attacking Choro. "What's going on? The people here don't even know their own pledges. They're wrecking the plan, they're letting the sheep die! What have you been doing? How are you educating the Communists? And what sort of a Communist is he? I'm asking you!"

Choro hung his head in silence. He fingered the reins.

"I'm just the kind I am," Tanabai was the one to reply calmly.
"Right, just the kind you are. Why, you're a saboteur! You're destroying collective-farm property. You're an enemy of the people. You should be in jail, not in the Party! You're mocking at our socialist competition."
"Right. That's where I should be, in jail," Tanabai agreed in the same calm voice as before. And his lips twitched from the overwhelming rage that exploded inside him, from the bitterness, the hurt, from all that had filled his cup to overflowing. "Well?" he said, staring at Segizbayev, trying to control his twitching lips. "What else do you have to say?"
'Why are you talking like that, Tanabai?" Choro interrupted. "What for? Why don't you explain everything?"
"Oh! So I have to explain things to you too? What'd you come here for, Choro?" Tanabai shouted. "What'd you come for? Answer me! To tell me that the lambs are dying? I know that myself! To tell me that I'm up to my neck in dung? I know that myself! That I've been a fool all my life, killing myself for the farm? Well, I know that myself!"
"Tanabai! What are you saying!" Choro turned pale and jumped down.
"Get away from me!" Tanabai said, shoving him aside. "To hell with my pledge, to hell with my whole life! Go away! I should be in jail! What'd you bring this new lord in a leather coat here for? So he could badger me? So he could put me in jail? Go on and put me in jail, you rat!" Tanabai spun around, looking for something to grab. He snatched the pitchfork that was leaning against the wall and rushed at Segizbayev with it. "Get out of here, you scum! And stay out!" Blind with rage, he began waving the pitchfork.
Segizbayev, half-dead with fright, jerked at the reins in confusion, pulling the pacer back and forth, the pitchfork came down upon the crazed horse's head and bounced off with a ring, then came down on his head again. In his wrath Tanabai could not understand why Gyulsary's head was jerking violently, why the bit was tearing at his hot red mouth, why the horse's rolling eyes were dazed and frenzied.
"Get out of my way, Gyulsary! Let me hit that lord in leather!" Tanabai bellowed, bringing the pitchfork down again and again on the pacer's innocent head.
His young helper came running, she hung on his arms, trying to wrench the pitchfork from him, but he threw her to the ground. Choro managed to jump into his saddle.
..Let's go! Hurry! He'll kill you!" he shouted, riding between Segizbayev and Tanabai.
Tanabai swung his pitchfork at Choro as both riders galloped off. His dog pursued them. barking wildly, snapping at the stirrup and the horses' tails. Tanabai ran after them, stumbling, snatching up clumps of clay, throwing them after them, shouting all the while:
"I should be in jail! In jail! Get out! Get out of here!"
Then he turned back, still mumbling breathlessly: "I should be in jail, in jail!"
His dog walked alongside proudly, as one who has done his duty. He expected praise, but his master did not notice him. Jaidar, pale and frightened, was limping towards him, leaning on a stick.

"What did you do? What did you do?" "I shouldn't have."
"Of course not!"
"I shouldn't have hit Gyulsary."
"Are you crazy? Do you know what you did?"
"Sure. I'm a saboteur. I'm an enemy of the people," he said, overcoming his shortness of breath. Then he fell silent. Pressing his hands to his face, he doubled over and his body was wracked by sobs.
"Tanabai, Tanabai," his wife pleaded, weeping together with him, but he sobbed bitterly, swaying from side to side. Jaidar had never seen her husband weep before.

19

The Bureau meeting of the District Party Committee was held three days after this dramatic incident.
Tanabai Bakasov sat in the reception room, waiting to be summoned to the office in which his case was being discussed, He had thought long and hard in the interim but still could not decide whether or not he was to blame. He realised that his was a grave offence, that he had raised his hand against a government representative, but if this was all it amounted to it would be simple enough. He was ready to accept any punishment for his unworthy conduct. However, in a fit of rage he had tossed everything to the winds, all his anxiety and concern for the farm, he had discredited all his cares and thoughts. Who would ever believe him now? Who would understand him now? "Maybe they will understand after all?" A glimmer of hope appeared. "I'll tell them about everything, about the winter we've had, the shed, the tent, of the lack of fodder, my sleepless nights, and Bektai. Let them decide if that's the way to run things." He no longer regretted what had happened. "Let them punish me," he thought, "maybe it'll make things easier for others. Maybe this'll make them take a closer look at the kind of life the shepherds lead and at our troubles." But a moment later, recalling all he had been through, he would become embittered again, clench his fists between his knees and repeat stubbornly: "No, I'm not guilty, not one bit!" And then he would begin to have doubts again.
Unaccountably, Ibraim was also waiting in the reception room. "What's he doing here? He's like a vulture waiting for carrion," Tanabai thought angrily and turned away from him. Ibraim was silent. He sighed as he glanced at the shepherd's bowed head.
"What's taking them so long?" Tanabai wondered, fidgeting in his chair. "If I've got it coming to me, well, let me have it!" Everyone seemed to be assembled behind the closed doors. Choro had been the last to enter a few minutes before. Tanabai recognised him by the bits of hair stuck to his boot tops. It was the yellow hair of the golden pacer. "He must have been in a big hurry if he drove Gyulsary to a lather," he thought but did not raise his head. And the boots with the trickles of horse's sweat and hair stuck to them stood near him, hesitated a few moments, then disappeared behind the door.
Time dragged on. Finally, the secretary opened the door and said:

"Come in, Comrade Bakasov."
Tanabai started, rose, deafened by the pounding of his heart, and entered the office to the incessant booming in his ears. Everything seemed dim. He could barely make out the faces of the people in the room.
"Sit down." Kashkatayev, First Secretary of the District Committee, indicated a chair at the far end of the long table.
Tanabai sat down and put his leaden hands on his knees, waiting for the haze to clear. Then he glanced down the table. Segizbayev, looking very arrogant, sat on Kashkatayev's right. Tanabai's hatred for the man was so great it disspelled the mist in front of his eyes. The faces of the men around the table stood out clearly. The darkest face belonged to Segizbayev, it was a dark purple. The palest face, completely drained of blood, was Choro's. He sat towards the end of the table and was closest to Tanabai. His thin hands twitched nervously on the heavy green cloth. Aldanov, chairman of the collective farm, sat opposite Choro, wheezing loudly, looking around sullenly. He did not conceal his attitude towards the case at hand. The others still seemed to be waiting. Finally, Kashkatayev looked up from his papers and said, accentuating each word:
"We will now discuss the case of Comrade Bakasov."
"You mean so-called comrade," someone said sarcastically.
"They're out for blood," Tanabai thought. "I can't expect mercy from them. But why should I expect mercy? What am I, a criminal?"
He did not know that in deciding his fate two forces competing secretly against each other would clash, each desirous of making the most of this unfortunate incident. One side, represented by Segizbayev and his followers, wanted to test the strength of the new Party Secretary, to see whether he could be cowed from the start. The other side, represented by Kashkatayev, who sensed that Segizbayev had an eye on his job, was searching for a solution that would uphold his authority without straining his relations with these dangerous men.
The Party Secretary read Segizbayev's report. It enumerated every crime committed, both in words and in deeds, by Tanabai Bakasov, a shepherd of the White Stones Collective Farm. There was nothing in the report that Tanabai could deny, but its general tone and the way the accusations were worded drove him to despair. He broke out in a sweat when he realised how helpless he was in the face of this monstrous report. Segizbayev's report was far more vicious than the man himself. You couldn't attack it with a pitchfork. Everything Tanabai had intended to say in his defence collapsed in a heap, losing its significance in his own mind, becoming nothing more than a shepherd's trifling complaints against the usual hardships. Was he not a fool? What were all his excuses worth in the face of this terrible report?! Whom had he intended to fight?
"Comrade Bakasov, do you admit the truth of the facts described in the report by Comrade Segizbayev, a member of our Bureau?" Kashkatayev asked when he had finished reading.
"Yes," Tanabai replied in a hollow voice.
No one said a word. It seemed they were all petrified by the report. Aldanov looked at everyone with smug satisfaction, as if to say: see what's going on.
"If the comrades will permit me to, I'd like to say a few words to clarify the

situation," Segizbayev said resolutely. "I would like to warn the comrades from the start not to try to explain away the actions of Comrade Bakasov as a simple act of hooliganism. Believe me, if this were so I would never have brought the case to your attention. We have other means of dealing with hooligans. And, naturally, my own feelings have nothing to do with it. I represent the Bureau of the District Party Committee, and, if I may say so, I represent the Party as a whole in this case. I cannot permit its authority to be trampled upon. However, the main point is that what has happened is further indication of the sorry state of the political and educational work being carried out among Communists and non-Communists, of the serious shortcomings in the ideological work of the District Committee. We are all to be held responsible for the political outlook of such rank-and-file members as Bakasov. We must determine whether he is alone in his way of thinking or whether there are others who share his views. Think of the significance of his words: 'A new lord in a leather coat!' Let us dismiss the coat. Now, according to Bakasov, it would seem that I, a Soviet citizen, a representative of the Party, am a new lord, an exploiter, an oppressor of the people! Indeed! Do you realise what this means, do you realise the significance of his words? I think there is no need for further comment. Now let us have a look at the other side of the case. I was very upset by the state of affairs at the White Stones Farm. When Bakasov declared he had forgotten his pledge, I called him a saboteur, an enemy of the people, and said he should be in jail, not in the Party. I admit that I insulted him and I was ready to apologise. But I'm convinced now that I was right. I do not take my words back but insist that Bakasov is a dangerous and hostile person."

Tanabai had been through much in his lifetime, he had been through the war, from beginning to end, but he had never suspected that his heart could cry out as it did now. And with this cry that was as an unending cannonade in his ears, his heart sank, rose, crawled upwards, slipped and tried to rise again, but the bullets were hitting it point-blank. "What's happened to everything that was the meaning of my life, the meaning of all my work?" Tanabai's head throbbed. "I never thought I'd live to see the day when I'd be called an enemy of the people. And there I was, worrying about that lousy shed and those scouring lambs and that fool Bektai. But who gives a damn?!"

"Let me review the points made in my report," Segizbayev continued, setting up his words in iron rows. "Bakasov hates our system, he hates the collective farm, he hates socialist competition, he hates our entire way of life. He stated that much quite openly in the presence of Comrade Choro Sayakov, the Party organiser of the collective farm. Besides, his actions are also punishable under the penal code: he attacked a government representative who was on official duty. I want you to understand me correctly. I demand that Bakasov be held legally responsible and that he be put under guard when he leaves this room. Article 58 makes provision for his crime. And there can be no question of Bakasov's right to remain within the Party ranks."

Segizbayev knew he was asking for too much. However, he hoped that in the event the Bureau found it unnecessary to institute criminal proceedings against Tanabai Bakasov, his expulsion from the Party would at least be guaranteed.

Kashkatayev would not dare to oppose this demand, which fact would further strengthen Segizbayev's hand.
"What can you say for yourself, Comrade Bakasov?" Kashkatayev asked, becoming irked.
"Nothing. Everything's been said already," Tanabai replied. "It sounds like I've always been a saboteur, an enemy of the people. So who cares what I think? Do whatever you want to, you know best."
"Do you consider yourself a true Communist?"
"I can't prove that now."
"Do you admit your guilt?"
"No."
"Then do you think you're smarter than everyone else?"
"No, just the opposite, dumber than everyone else."
"May I have the floor?"
A youth with a Komsomol badge on his jacket rose. He was the youngest one present, thin of face, thin of body and still very much an adolescent.
Tanabai had not noticed him before. "Go on, boy, pour it on, don't spare the ammunition," he addressed him silently. "I used to be just like you, never sparing anyone."
"Yes, Kerimbekov?" said Kashkatayev.
"I don't approve of Comrade Bakasov's action. I think he should be punished accordingly by the Party Bureau. But I don't agree with Comrade Segizbayev, either." Kerimbekov tried to sound calm. "In fact, I think we should discuss the case of Comrade Segizbayev as well."
"Well!" someone interrupted. "Is that the way you run things in the Komsomol these days?"
"We're all governed by the same rules," Kerimbekov replied, becoming more flustered and turning red. He stopped, searching for the right words, trying to overcome his constraint and then, as if in despair, he began to speak scathingly, angrily: "What right did you have to insult a collective-farm worker, a shepherd, a veteran Party member? I'd like to see you call me an enemy of the people! You said you did it because you were very upset by the state of affairs at the farm, but don't you think the shepherd was upset, too? When you got there did you ask him what his living conditions were like and how things were? Or why the lambs were dying? No. judging from your own report, the minute you got there you began shouting at him. Everyone knows what a hard time the collective farms are having now during the lambing period. I have to be in the mountains quite often and I'm ashamed, I'm terribly ashamed when I talk to the young Komsomol shepherds, because we place big demands on them but don't offer any real help. Did you see the kind of sheds they have? And what about the fodder? I'm a shepherd's son myself. I know what it means to lose newborn lambs. They go on in the old way, nothing like what they taught us at the agricultural institute. And it makes your heart bleed to see what's happening!"
Segizbayev interrupted him. "Don't try to arouse our pity, Comrade Kerimbekov. Emotions are a loose concept. What we need are hard facts, not feelings."
"I beg your pardon, but we're not trying a criminal, we're discussing the case

of a comrade," Kerimbekov continued. "A Communist's fate is being decided. That's why we should stop to think why Comrade Bakasov acted the way he did. His actions should certainly be censured, but what made one of the farm's best cattlemen, as Bakasov certainly was, come to this?"
"Sit down," Kashkatayev said with displeasure. "You're leading us away from the main problem, Comrade Kerimbekov. I think it's evident to all of us that Comrade Bakasov has committed a very grave offence. Think of what he did. Who ever heard of such a thing? We will not permit anyone to attack our representatives with pitchforks, we will not permit anyone to undermine the authority of our Party officials. I would suggest, Comrade Kerimbekov, that you worry about improving things in the Komsomol Organisation instead of engaging in useless arguments about bleeding hearts and emotions. Emotions are one thing, actions are another. Bakasov's willful action should alert us. Needless to say, there is no place for him in the Party. Comrade Sayakov, as Party organiser of the collective farm, do you corroborate the report?" he asked Choro.
"Yes, " Choro said, rising slowly. He was very pale. "But I'd like to explain...."
"What's there to explain?"
"In the first place, I think we should discuss Bakasov's case at a meeting of our own Party Organisation on the farm."
"That is not mandatory. You can inform the Party members of the Bureau's decision later. What else did you want to say?"
"I would like to explain.. .
"What is there to explain, Comrade Sayakov? Bakasov's anti-Party words and actions are self-evident. There's nothing more to explain. You, too, are responsible for what happened. And we'll hold you to blame for disrupting the educational work among the rank-and-file. Why did you try to dissuade Comrade Segizbayev from bringing the case to our attention? Did you want to cover it up? It's disgraceful! Be seated."
They began to argue the case. The director of the machine-and-tractor station and the editor of the district newspaper supported Kerimbekov. For a moment it seemed that they would succeed in defending Tanabai. However, he was so crushed, so confused, that he did not hear what was being said. He kept asking himself: "What's happened to everything I lived for? I don't think anyone here cares a damn for what's happening to the flocks and herds in the mountains. What a foot I've been! I've wasted my life for the collective farm, for those sheep and lambs. And none of it counts now. I'm dangerous now. Well, to hell with you! Do whatever you want to. I won't be sorry if any good comes of it. Go on, kick me out. It's all the same to me now."
Aldanov, chairman of the collective farm, took the floor. Tanabai could see by his expression and gestures that he was raging about something, but it made no impact upon him until he heard the words: "chain-hobble ... the pacer--Gyulsary...."
"And what do you think?" Aldanov was indignant. "He threatened for all to bear that he'd crack my skull, and all because we were forced to hobble the horse. Comrade Kashkatayev, members of the Bureau, as chairman of the collective farm I ask you to rid us of Bakasov. He really should be in jail. He hates every government official. There are witnesses waiting in the reception room, comrade

Kashkatayev. They all heard Bakasov's threats. Should we ask them to come in?"
"No, that won't be necessary," Kashkatayev said with distaste. "Your statement is sufficient. Be seated."
He put the matter to a vote.
"It has been moved that Comrade Bakasov be expelled from the Party. All those in favour. ..."
"One second, Comrade Kashkatayev." Kerimbekov rose quickly to his feet. "Members of the Bureau, aren't we making a terrible mistake? I have another proposal: that we limit ourselves to a severe reprimand and warning. At the same time, I propose that we reprimand Segizbayev, a member of the Bureau, for insulting Comrade Bakasov's dignity as a Party member and a human being, and for Segizbayev's intolerable method of work as a District Committee representative."
"What demagogy!" Segizbayev shouted.
"I must call you to order, comrades," Kashkatayev said. "You're at a meeting of the District Committee Bureau, not at home, and I request that discipline be maintained."
Everything depended upon him now. And he did exactly as Segizbayev expected he would. "I do not think it is necessary to institute criminal proceedings against Bakasov," he said, "but he certainly cannot be allowed to remain in the Party. Comrade Segizbayev is absolutely right about this. We will now put it to a vote. All those in favour of Bakasov's expulsion will raise their hands."
There were seven members of the Bureau. Three voted for expulsion, three voted against it. Kashkatayev had yet to vote. He paused, then raised his hand in favour of expulsion. Tanabai saw nothing of this. He discovered the outcome when he heard Kashkatayev say to his secretary:
"Enter the following in the minutes: 'By a decision of the Bureau of the District Party Committee, Comrade Tanabai Bakasov has been expelled from the Party'."
"That's all there is to it," Tanabai thought, feeling his body turn to ice.
"But I insist that Segizbayev be reprimanded," Kerimbekov persisted.
This did not have to be put to a vote, the motion might have been declined, but Kashkatayev decided they would vote on it. He had a secret reason for this, too.
"All those in favour of Comrade Kerimbekov's proposal will raise their hand."
Once again it was three to three. And once again Kashkatayev raised his hand to make it four, and thus saved Segizbayev from being reprimanded. "I wonder whether he'll understand and appreciate this favour?" he thought. "Who knows? He's cunning and treacherous."
Everyone began moving their chairs out, as if getting ready to leave. Tanabai decided it was all over. He rose and headed for the door without a word, without looking at anyone.
"Where are you going, Bakasov?" Kashkatayev said. "Surrender your Party card."
"What?" Now only did he realise what had happened.
"Leave it on the desk. You are no longer a member of the Party and have no right to carry a Party card."
Tanabai did as he was told. The card was under his jacket, under his sweater, in a little leather pouch Jaidar had made for it. He wore the pouch on a strap over

his shoulder. It took him a long time to extract it in the dead silence of the room. He finally pulled it out, took out his Party card, heated by his chest, and placed it, warm and smelling of his body, on Kashkatayev's cold polished desk. he shivered as if he, too, felt the cold touch of the wood. Then, still not looking at anyone, he worked the pouch back under his jacket and prepared to leave.

"Comrade Bakasov!" Kerimbekov's voice was sympathetic. "Haven't you anything to say? You haven't said a word. Perhaps it all happened because things were so difficult. We hope the door has not shut and that sooner or later you'll be able to return to the ranks. Do you want to say anything?"

Tanabai turned, feeling awkward in front of this strange youth who was still trying to soften the blow.

"What is there to say?" he said sadly. "I can't outtalk everyone. All I can say is that I'm not guilty in any way, even if I did raise my hand against him, even if I did speak badly. I can't explain it. So I guess that's all."

The silence was oppressing.

"So you have a grudge against the Party?" Kashkatayev spoke irritably. "Aren't you forgetting yourself? The Party is setting you right, it's kept you from being prosecuted as a criminal, yet you're still dissatisfied, you're still resentful! That means you really are unworthy of being a Party member. And I doubt whether the door back will ever open to you!"

When Tanabai left the District Committee building he seemed calm. Too calm. And this was bad. It was the end of a warm, sunny day. People were walking and riding in all directions. Children were running around in the square near the clubhouse. Tanabai found it unbearable to look at them. He was disgusted with himself, too. He had to get back to the mountains, back home. Before anything else happened.

Gyulsary was tied up beside his horse at the hitching post. He was big and strong, he shifted his weight when Tanabai approached and his dark eyes were calm and trusting. He had forgotten how Tanabai had battered his head with a pitchfork. After all, he was a horse.

"Forgive me, Gyulsary," Tanabai whispered. "I'm in bad trouble. Very bad trouble," he sobbed, throwing his arms around the horse's neck, but controlled himself, ashamed to weep in front of all these passers-by.

He mounted his own horse and headed home.

Choro caught up with him beyond the Alexandrovka Rise. As soon as Tanabai heard the familiar cadence of the racing pacer behind him he scowled. He did not bother to glance back. A feeling of hurt darkened his Soul, darkened his eyes. Choro was now a different man from the one he used to know. Take today, for example. No sooner had Kashkatayev raised his voice at him than Choro had sat down as obediently as a schoolboy. Now what? People had faith in him, but he was afraid to speak the truth. He was cautious, he chose his words carefully. Who had taught him to be like that? While Tanabai was just an ignorant man, a plain hard worker, Choro was educated, he knew everything, he had held important jobs all his life. Couldn't Choro see that things were not as Segizbayev, Kashkatayev and all the others like them said they were? That their words were pretty on the

outside, but false and empty inside? Whom was he fooling, and what for?
Tanabai did not even turn his head when Choro caught up with him and fell in step beside him, reining in the heated pacer.
I thought we'd start out together, Tanabai, he said, "but when I looked around, you were gone."
"What do you want?" Tanabai muttered, still not looking at him. "Go on your own way."
"I want to talk to you. Don't turn away, Tanabai. Let's talk like friends, like Communists," Choro began and bit his tongue.
"I'm no friend of yours, and certainly no Communist any more. And you haven't been a Communist for a long time, either. You just pretend you are."
"You can't mean that," Choro said in dismay.
"Well, I do. I haven't learned how to choose my words yet. I don't know how to say the right thing in the right place. This is where I turn off. Good-bye."
Tanabai turned his horse off the road and headed across the fields to the mountains, never glancing back, never once having looked his friend in the eye. He did not see Choro become deathly pale, stretch his hand out to stop him and then suddenly grab at his chest convulsively and fall onto the horse's neck, gasping for breath.
"Oh!" Choro moaned, writhing from the terrible pain in his heart. "Oh!" he groaned hoarsely, turning blue. "Take me home, Gyulsary, hurry!"
The pacer carried him swiftly across the dark, desolate steppe. The man's voice frightened him, for there was something terrifying, something ghastly in the sound of it. Gyulsary laid back his ears, snorting in terror as he raced along. The man in the saddle writhed in agony, his hands and teeth clenching the horse's mane. The reins hung loosely from the horse's neck.

20

Tanabai was still on his way back to the mountains that evening when a man on horseback galloped up and down the village streets, rousing all the dogs.
"Anybody home? Come on out!" he called, stopping by the houses. "There's a Party meeting at the farm office."
"What's the matter? What's the rush?"
"I don't know," the messenger replied. "Choro sent me. He said to hurry."
Meanwhile, Choro was at the farm office. He was bent over, his chest against the desk, gasping, his hand tinder his shirt pressed hard against his heart. He groaned with pain, and bit his lip. Cold sweat broke out on his face, which had turned a ghastly green, his eyes had sunk deep in the hollow sockets. His gaze would become blank for a few moments, and then it seemed to him that the pacer was still carrying him across the dark steppe. He wanted to call to Tanabai, but Tanabai, after uttering those scorching words in parting, would not even look back. Tanabai's words scorched his heart.
Choro had been half-carried into the office from the stable where he had rested a while on a pile of hay. The grooms had wanted to take him home but he refused. He had sent a man to summon all the village Communists and was now awaiting them

anxiously.
The watchwoman had lit the lamp and left Choro alone in the office. She busied herself at the stove in the front room, looking in through the half-open door occasionally, sighing and shaking her head.
As Choro awaited his comrades, time trickled away in drops. With each passing second the time he had on this earth was running out in painful, bitter drops and only now did he discover its worth, after having lived so many years. He had not noticed the days and years slipping away, and before he knew it, they had disappeared in toil and cares.
Not everything had come out as he would have wanted it to. he had failed in many things. He had tried hard, he had struggled, but had retreated at times to by-pass a sharp corner, to take the easier road. And yet, he had not by-passed them all. The force he had always avoided clashing with now had him up against the wall and there was no retreat. The road was ending. Oh, if only he stopped to think sooner, if only he had forced himself to look life in the eye before this.
And time was slipping away in bitter, hollow drops. Where was everyone? Why was it taking them so long?

"I have to make it!" Fear gripped Choro's heart. "I have to tell them everything." He tried to hold back the life that was ebbing away with a silent, desperate cry. He hung on stubbornly, readying himself for the final battle. "I'll tell them everything. How it all happened. What they said at the Bureau meeting, how they expelled Tanabai. Let them know that I disagree with the District Committee's decision. Let them know I'm against Tanabai's expulsion. I'll tell them what I think about Aldanov. They can see what he has to say after I'm through. Let the Communists decide. I'll tell them all about myself, just what I am. And about the collective farm and the people. If only I make it. Where is everyone?"
The first to arrive was his wife with some medicine. She wailed and wept at the sight of him.
"Are you mad? Haven't you had enough of these meetings? Let's go home. Look at you. My God, can't you ever think about yourself!"
Choro refused to listen. He waved her away as he gulped down the medicine. His teeth chartered against the glass, the water spilled down his chest.
"It's all right, I'm better now," he uttered, trying to breathe evenly. "Wait for me there, you'll help me home later. Don't worry. Go on."
And when he heard people arriving outside, he sat tip straight, suppressed 'the pain and mustered his strength to fulfil what he considered to be his last duty.
"What happened? What's the matter with you, Choro?" they asked.
"Nothing. I'll tell you as soon as everyone's here."
And time was slipping away in bitter, hollow drops.
When all the Communists had gathered, Choro Sayakov, the Party organiser, rose, took off his hat and called the Party meeting to order.

21

Tanabai reached home late at night. Jaidar came out to meet him with a lantern.

She had been waiting for him, straining her eyes to see him.
One glance was enough to tell her how bad things were. He unbridled the horse in silence and took off the saddle while she held the lantern, and he said nothing to her. "I wish he'd have gotten drunk in town, it might have eased his heart," she thought. Still he was silent, and this silence of his was frightening. She had good news for him. They had been given some fodder, straw, and barley flour. It had been warmer today, they had taken the lambs out to pasture and they had nibbled the grass.
"They've taken Bektai's flock. They sent a new shepherd for it," she said.
"To hell with Bektai and the flock, and your new shepherd."
"Are you very tired?"
"Tired? They've expelled me from the Party!"
"Don't shout, the women will hear you."
"Why shouldn't I shout? What's there to hide? They kicked me out like a dog, it's as simple as that. It serves me right. And it serves you right, too. We deserve worse than that. Well, what are you standing there for? What are you looking at me like that for?"
"Go lie down."
"I don't need you to tell me that."
Tanabai went into the shed. He looked over the sheep. Then he went to the fold, wandered about in the darkness a while and returned to the shed. He was restless. He refused to eat and refused to talk. He dropped onto the straw that was piled in a corner and lay there motionless. Life, its worries and cares had all lost their meaning. Nothing interested him now. He didn't want to live, he didn't want to think, he didn't want to see anything at all.
He tossed and turned, trying to fall asleep, to blot out his thoughts, but be could not run away from himself. He saw Bektai walking away again and the trail of black footprints in the white snow, and remembered how he could think of nothing to say to him; he could hear Segizbayev shouting again as he sat upon the pacer, the harsh words raining down upon him, and the threat to put him in jail, then he saw himself at the Bureau meeting, presented as a saboteur and an enemy of the people, and this marked the end of everything, the end of his life. And once again he wanted to grab the pitchfork and rush off shouting into the night, shouting for the whole world to hear, until he tumbled into a ravine and broke his neck.
As he dropped off to sleep he thought that it would be better to die than to go on living like this. Yes, it would be better to die.
He awoke with a heavy head. At first he did not know where he was or what had happened. Sheep were coughing nearby, lambs were bleating. That meant he was in the shed. Dawn was breaking. Why had he awakened? What for? He wished he had never woke up. There was nothing for him but death. He would take his own life.

Later he drank handfuls of water from the stream. It was ice cold, there were thin slivers of crunchy ice in it. The water rushed out between his shaking fingers and he scooped more up and drank spilling it over himself. After a while he came to his senses and then realised the absolute stupidity of his intention

to commit suicide, the stupidity of doing away with himself. How could he deprive himself of life that was given only once to man? Was Segizbayev and his like worth it? No. Tanabai would go on living, he would move mountains in his lifetime yet!
Returning to camp, he hid his gun and bandoleer and worked hard all day. He wished he could be more gentle towards his wife, his daughters and his helpers, but he restrained himself to keep the women from suspecting anything. They worked as always, as if nothing unusual had happened, as if everything was as it should be. Tanabai was grateful to them for that. He said nothing and kept on working. Later he went to the pasture and helped drive the flock home.
That evening the weather took a turn for the worse. It would either rain or snow. The mountains were lost in mist, the sky was heavy with clouds. Once again they would have to think of ways to protect the lambs from the cold. Once again they would have to clean the shed and spread clean straw to keep the animals from dying off. Tanabai looked grim, but he tried to forget what had happened and not lose heart.
It was dark when they heard a rider outside. Jaidar went out to greet him. They exchanged a few words. Tanabai was working in the shed.
"Come out for a minute," Jaidar called. "There's someone here to see you." The very tone of her voice told him it was bad news.
He came out and greeted the man. It was a shepherd from the neighbouring camp.
"Hello, Aitbai. Come on down. What brings you here?"
"I've just come from the village. I was there on business. They asked me to tell you that Choro's very sick. They said you're to come."
"Choro again!" he thought. The hurt that had subsided blazed anew. He did not want to see him.
"What do you think I am, a doctor? He's always sick. I have enough to do here without worrying about him. And the weathr's changing again,"
" It's up to you, Tanabai. Do whatever you want to. I gave you the message. I'll be going. It's getting late. Good-bye."
Aitbai started off, then checked the horse.
"Think it over. He's really bad this time. They've called his son home from college. They've gone to meet him at the station."
"Thanks for giving me the message. But I'm not going."
"Yes, he is," Jaidar said, mortified by his words. "Don't worry, he'll be there."
Tanabai said nothing, but when Aitbai was gone he turned on his wife angrily.
"Stop talking for me. I know my own mind. if I said
I'm not going, it means I'm not going."
"Think of what you're saying!"
"There's nothing to think about. I've had enough. I've been thinking so much they finally kicked me out of the Party. I don't have a friend left. I don't want anyone to come and see me if I get sick. I can drop dead by myself!" He sliced the air angrily and headed towards the shed.
But he could not calm down. As he assisted the ewes to lamb, as he carried the lambs into the corner, cursing at the bleating sheep, shoving them aside, he kept mumbling:

"If he'd left his job long ago he wouldn't be so badly off now. He's been sick all his life, moaning and clutching at his chest, but he spent all his days in the saddle. Some chief. I never want to see you again after what's happened. I don't care if you mind or not, but I mind what you did to me. And nobody gives a damn."
It was night and snowing lightly. The silence was so complete one could hear the soft rustle of the snowflakes as they fell to the earth.
Tanabai stayed away from the tent, reluctant to face his wife, and she did not come over to him either. "Go on, stay there," he thought, "you won't make me go anyway. I don't care about anything any more. Choro's no friend of mine. He's gone his way, I'm going mine. We used to be friends, but not any more. And if I'm his friend, where was he all this time? Well, I don't care about anything any more."
In the end, Jaidar did approach him. She brought him his cape, his new boots, his belt and mittens and the hat he wore on special occasions
"Get dressed," she said.
"You're wasting your time. I'm not going anyplace."
"Don't you waste time. You don't want to be sorry all your life."
"I won't be sorry. And nothing's going to happen to him. He'll be up again soon. This isn't the first time, you know."
"I've never asked you to do anything for me, Tanabai. But I am now. Give me your hurt, give me your grief. Go. Don't be so hard-hearted."
"No." Tanabai shook his head stubbornly. "I'm not going. Nothing matters now. All you're thinking about is manners and duty. What will people say? But I don't care what they say any more."
"Please go, Tanabai. I'll have a look at the fire, I don't want the coals to fall on the felt."
She walked away, leaving him his clothing, but he did not move. He sat there in a corner, unable to overcome his own resistance, unable to forget what he had said to Choro. What was he supposed to do now, come up and say: "Hello, I've come to see how you're getting along. Is there anything I can do for you?" No, he could never do that, it was too unlike him.
"Haven't you dressed yet?" Jaidar said, returning.
"Stop nagging. I said I'm not going."
"Get up!" she shouted angrily. To his utter surprise he rose at her command like a soldier. She took a step towards him, and in the dim light of the lantern her eyes were full of torment and indignation. "If you're not a man, if you're not a human being, if you're nothing but a snivelling old woman, I'll go instead of you, and you stay home and feel sorry for yourself! I'm leaving this minute. Go saddle the horse for me!"
He went off obediently to saddle the horse. It was snowing lightly. Darkness seemed to be circling silently in a slow merry-go-round, like water in a deep whirlpool. You couldn't see the mountains for the darkness. "Bother! How will she get there in the middle of the night?" he wondered anxiously as he threw the saddle over the horse's back in the darkness. "No use trying to talk her out of it. She'll never go back on her word, not for anything in the world. What if she

loses her way? Well, she'll have no one to blame but herself."
As he saddled the horse he began to feel ashamed of himself. "I'm a dog, that's what I am. I've lost my senses after what happened. What am I parading my feelings around for, so everyone can see how miserable I am? What am I torturing Jaidar for? What's it got to do with her? I'll have to pay for it. I'm good for nothing. I'm a beast, that's what I am."
Tanabai hesitated. It was hard to go back on his word. He returned looking sullen, his eyes on the ground.
"Is it saddled?"
"Yes."
"Then get ready to go." Jaidar handed him his cape.
Tanabai began dressing in silence, pleased that his wife had taken the first step. Still, his pride made him say:
"Maybe I'd better start out tomorrow morning?"
"No, go now. You'll be too late tomorrow."
Night swirled over the mountains like water in a stream. Large flakes of the last spring snow settled softly on the ground. Tanabai rode on alone among the dark slopes, heeding to the call of the friend he had disowned. Snow clung to his head, his shoulders, his beard and his hands. He sat upright in the saddle, unmindful of the snow. It was easier for him to think if he did not move. His thoughts were of Choro, of all that had bound them together those long years when Choro first taught him to read and write, when they had joined the Komsomol together and then joined the Party. He recalled the time they had worked on the canal. Choro had been the first to bring him the newspaper with his picture in it and an article about him. Choro had been the first to congratulate him, to shake his hand.
Tanabai's heart was softening, it was thawing out. Then a gnawing feeling of anxiety came over him. "How is he? Maybe he's really bad this time? They wouldn't have called his son home otherwise. Or maybe he just wants to tell me something? To talk things over?"
Dawn was breaking. The snow still circled in the air. Tanabai urged his horse on. The village would soon come into view in the valley beyond the hills. How was Choro? If only he were there already.
Then, in the stillness of the morning, a distant muffled voice reached him from the village. It had been a cry that had risen and suddenly stopped. Tanabai reined in his horse and turned his ear into the wind. All was quiet. He must have imagined it.
The horse carried him onto the rise. The streets of the village, deserted at this early hour, lay before him among the snow-white gardens and bare trees. There was not a soul in sight. Then he saw the black crowd outside one of the houses, with saddled horses standing under the trees. It was Choro's house. Why were there so many people outside? What had happened? Could it be....
Tanabai rose up in the stirrups, gulped a burning mouthful of icy air and stood stock-still. Then he spurred his horse on. "No! It can't be! It just can't be!"
He felt as wretched as if he were personally responsible for what had probably happened down there. Choro, his only friend, had asked him to come for a last

word before parting forever, but he had nursed his hurt feelings stubbornly. No name was base enough for him. Why hadn't his wife spat in his eyes? What is there in this world that deserves greater respect than a dying man's last wish?
Once again Tanabai recalled the road in the steppe and Choro overtaking him on the pacer. What had he said to him then? Could he ever forgive himself?
Tanabai rode along the snow-covered streets in a trance, bent under the weight of his guilt and shame. Suddenly he sighted a large group of men on horseback beyond Choro's house. They were approaching in silence and then suddenly they all began to wail, swaying back and forth in their saddles:

"Oibai, baurymai! Oibai, baurymai!"

"The Kazakhs have come," Tanabai said to himself and he knew now there was no hope left. The neighbouring Kazakhs had come from beyond the river to mourn Choro as a brother, as a neighbour, as a man close to their hearts and known throughout the region. "Thank you, brothers," Tanabai thought. "We've always been together in sorrow and in joy, at our weddings and games, since the time of our fathers and grandfathers. Weep with us now!"
And then he, too, raised his voice in a heart-rending cry which echoed through the quiet village.
"Choro-o-o! Choro-o-o! Choro-o-o!"
He trotted on, swaying now to the left, now to the right, weeping for the friend that had departed this world.
Here was the house, here was Gyulsary, a black saddle-cloth on his back. The snow settled on the horse and melted. The pacer had lost his master. Thus was he to stand with an empty saddle.
Tanabai buried his face in his horse's mane, raised his head and fell against the horse again. All about were blurry faces and weeping. He did not hear someone say:
"Help Tanabai down. Take him to Choro's son."
Several hands reached up, helped him dismount and led him through the crowd.
"Forgive me, Choro, forgive me!" Tanabai wept.
In the yard, standing with his face to the wall of the house, was Choro's son, the student Samansur. He turned to Tanabai with tears in his eyes. They embraced and wept.
"Your father is no more, my Choro is no more! Forgive me, Choro, forgive me!" Tanabai sobbed.
Then Tanabai saw her standing among the women nearby. It was Biubiujan. She gazed at him and tears ran down her cheeks. Sobs shook Tanabai.
He wept for all he had lost in life, for Choro, for his guilt, for the fact that he could never take back the words he had hurled at Choro on the road, he wept for her who now stood beside him like a stranger, for their love, for that stormy night, for her being alone in the world and getting older, he wept for his pacer Gyulsary standing by in mourning, for his hurts and suffering, for all he had kept pent up inside him.
"Forgive me, Choro, forgive me!" he repeated. It was as if he were asking her

forgiveness, too.
He wished Biubiujan would come up to him and comfort him, but she did not. She simply stood there and wept.
Others consoled him.
"Come now, Tanabai. Tears won't help him now. Get hold of yourself."
But this only made things worse.

22

They buried Choro in the afternoon. The sun's hazy disc appeared faintly through the pale layers of overhanging clouds. Soft damp flakes of snow still circled in the air. The funeral procession was as a black, silent stream cutting across the white field. The stream seemed to have appeared from nowheres, and to be carving out its bed. At the head of the column a truck with lowered sides carried the deceased Choro, bound tightly in a white felt winding sheet. His wife, children and relatives sat beside him. Everyone else followed on horseback. Two men walked behind the truck: his son Samansur and Tanabai, who led his dead friend's horse, the pacer Gyulsary carrying an empty saddle.
The road beyond the village was covered by a blanket of soft snow. It appeared in the wake of the procession as a broad dark strip, churned up by the horses' hooves. It seemed to mark Choro's last journey. The road led to the cemetery on the hill. And here it ended for Choro forever.
As Tanabai led the pacer on he addressed him silently: "Well, Gyulsary, we've lost our Choro. He's dead. Why didn't you shout at me then, why didn't you stop me? Ah, God has not given you a tongue to speak with. But here I am, a man, and I'm unworthy of you, a horse. I left my friend in the middle of the road, I never looked back, I never realised what I was doing. I killed Choro, I killed him with my words."
All the way to the cemetery Tanabai begged Choro's forgiveness. When he and Samansur climbed down into the grave to place Choro's body to rest eternally in its earthen bed, he said: "Forgive me, Choro. Farewell. Do you hear me, Choro? Forgive me!"
First earth fell into the grave by the handful, then it poured down by the shovelful from all sides. It filled the grave and rose up in a fresh mound on the hill.
"Forgive me, Choro!"
After the funeral repast Samansur called Tanabai aside and said:
"There's something I must tell you, Tanabai."
They crossed the yard, away from the people, the smoking samovars and the campfires, out the back way to the orchard. They walked along the edge of the irrigation ditch and stopped beyond the village by a fallen tree. They sat down on the trunk and were silent, each lost in his own thoughts. "Such is life," Tanabai thought. "I remember Samansur as a boy, but look at him now. Grief has made him a man. He's taken Choro's place in the family. We're equals now. And that is how it should be. Sons take their fathers' places. Sons carry on the family name, they carry on their fathers' work. May he be worthy of his father.

May he go farther still, rising above us in wisdom and knowledge, bringing happiness to himself and others. Yes, we are fathers and we bring forth sons, hoping they will be better than us. That is the meaning of it all."
"You're the eldest in the family, Samansur," Tanabai said, smoothing his beard as old men do. "You've taken Choro's place now, and I'll listen to what you say as I would have listened to Choro."
"There's something Father told me to tell you, Tanabai."
Tanabai started.
The son's way of speaking reflected the father's voice and intonation. He realised for the first time how greatly the boy resembled his father, the young Choro his son had never known but whom Tanabai had known and remembered well. Is that not why people say that a person does not die as long as others live who remember him.
"Yes, my son?"
"Father was still alive when I got home, Tanabai. I arrived last night, an hour before he died. he was conscious to the very end. He was waiting for you so. He kept asking: 'Where's Tanabai? Hasn't he come yet?' We kept saying you were on the way, that you'd be there any minute. He wanted to tell you something. And then it was too late."
"I know, Samansur. We had to see each other. It was very important. I'll never forgive myself. It's my fault. It was me who was too late."
"He asked me to tell you this. He said, 'My son, tell my Tanabai that I beg his forgiveness. Tell him not to be angry at me and ask him to take my Party card in to the District Committee. Tell Tanabai to hand in my Party card personally. Don't forget to tell him this.' Then he closed his eyes. He was in great pain. And he wept, but we couldn't make out what he was saying. And when he died he looked as if he were waiting for someone."
Tanabai was shaken by silent sobs. Choro was gone. Choro had carried off half of Tanabai, he had carried off part of his life.
"Thank you for telling me, Samansur. And thanks to your father, too," Tanabai finally uttered, gaining control of his emotions. "There's something that bothers me, though. You know I've been expelled from the Party, don't you?"
"Yes."
"Well, if I've been expelled, how can I take Choro's Party card in to the District Committee? I have no right to."
"I don't know, Tanabai. You'll have to decide. It's my duty to tell you Father's last wish. And I ask you to carry out his last wish."
"I want to, with all my heart. But this terrible thing has happened to me. Won't it be better if you take it in yourself, Samansur?"
"No. Father knew what he was doing. If he trusted you, why can't I? When you get to the District Committee, tell them it was the dying wish of my father, Choro Sayakov."

It was still dark the next morning when Tanabai left the village. Gyulsary, that grand pacer Gyulsary, reliable both in sorrow, and in joy, now cantered along, his hooves shattering the frozen lumps of clay on the rutted road. This time he

carried Tanabai, on a mission for his dead friend, the Communist Choro Sayakov. Dawn was slowly breaking far ahead, above the invisible edge of the earth. A new day was being born in dawn's womb. It was growing there, inside the grey haze. Gyulsary was running towards the dawn, towards the lonely bright star that still shone on the horizon. The sharp tattoo of the pacer's even gait resounded on the deserted ringing road. Tanabai had not ridden him in a long time. As always, Gyulsary's pace was swift and reliable. The wind ripped at his mane, hitting the rider's face. Gyulsary was a grand horse, he was still in his prime.

On the way Tanabai kept wondering why Choro had chosen him of all people to carry out his last wish and take his Party card in to the District Committee, him, who had been expelled from the Party. What was the meaning of it? Was this a test? Or was this Choro's way of saying that he disagreed with Tanabai's expulsion from the Party? Tanabai would never know now, he would never find the answer. Choro would never speak again. What terrifying words these were: "Never again!" All words failed after that.

Once again memories rushed at him, once again all he had tried to forget, to cast away forever, came back to life. So everything was not over, after all. He was carrying, he was conveying Choro's last wish. He would take the Party card in and tell them about him, about Choro, he'd tell them everything: the kind of person Choro was to everyone, the kind of person he was to Tanabai. And he'd tell them about himself, for Choro and he were inseparable, like two fingers of a hand.

Let the people know what they were like in their youth, let them know what their lives had been like. Perhaps then, they would realise that Tanabai did not deserve to be separated from Choro, either in life or in death. If they'd only listen to him, if they'd only let him have his say.

Tanabai visualised himself walking into the District Committee Secretary's office, putting Choro's Party card on his desk and telling him everything. He would admit his guilt, he would apologise, if only they let him rejoin the ranks, for life was unbearable outside the Party, for he could not imagine himself outside it.

But what if they asked him what right he, a man expelled from the Party, had to bring in a Party card? "You had no right to touch a Communist's Party card, you should never have undertaken this. Someone else could have brought it in," they'd say. But this had been Choro's last wish! He had said so in front of everyone before he died. His son Samansur would bear him out. "So what?" they'd say. "A dying man, delirious or half-conscious might say anything." What would he say then?

Meanwhile, Gyulsary trotted along the frozen, ringing road, across the steppe to the Alexandrovka Rise. The pacer had got Tanabai to town quickly. Before he knew it, they were there.

The office day had just begun at the district centre when Tanabai arrived. He stopped nowheres, but headed his sweating pacer towards the District Party Committee building, tied him up at the hitching post, brushed the dust from his clothes and entered, his heart pounding loudly. What would they say to him? How would they receive him? The corridors were empty. People on business from the

villages had not yet arrived. Tanabai entered Kashkatayev's reception room.
"Good morning," he said to the secretary.
"Good morning."
"is Comrade Kashkatayev in?"
"Yes."
"I've come to see him. I'm a shepherd from the White Stones Collective Farm. My name is Bakasov," he said.
"Yes, I know you," she said with a strange smile.
"Would you tell him that Choro Sayakov, our Party organiser, died. He asked me on his death-bed to bring his Party card in. That's why I've come."
"All right. Wait a minute."
The secretary was gone but a few minutes, yet Tanabai was in agony as he waited impatiently for her to return.
"Comrade Kashkatayev is busy," she said, closing the door firmly behind her. "He said you're to hand Sayakov's card in at the Registration Office. It's along the hall on the right."
"The Registration Office ... along the hall on the right." What could it mean? Tanabai was confused. It all came to him in a flash, like a crushing blow. Was it possible? Was it all that simple? And here he had thought....
"I have to see him. Would you please tell him? There's something very important I have to see him about."
She seemed uncertain, then went back into the inner office. She came out and repeated:
"He's very busy." And then she added with a note of sympathy, "There's nothing more to discuss." And still more softly. "He won't see you. It's no use waiting."
Tanabai walked down the hall and turned right. A sign on a door read "Registration Office". There was a window cut in the door. He knocked. The window opened.
"Yes?"
"I've come to hand in a Party card. Our Party organiser, Choro Sayakov, died. I'm from the White Stones Collective Farm."
The clerk waited patiently while Tanabai pulled the leather pouch from under his jacket, the very one on the strap in which he had carried his own Party card until so recently and in which he had now brought Choro's Party card. He handed the card in at the window. "Farewell, Choro!"
He watched her enter the number of Choro's card in a ledger, then Choro's name and the year he had joined the Party. It was the last remembrance of him. Then she asked him to sign the ledger.
"Is that all?" Tanabai asked.
"Yes."
"Good-bye."
"Good-bye." The window slammed shut.
Tanabai went out. He began untying the pacer.
"That's all, Gyulsary," he said to the horse. "That's it."
And the tireless pacer carried him back to the village. The boundless spring steppe rushed towards them with the wind, to the pounding of the horse's hooves. Tanabai's aching heart was soothed by the swiftness of his pace.

That very evening Tanabai returned to his camp in the mountains.
His wife met him in silence. She took the reins. She helped her husband dismount. Tanabai turned to her, embraced her and buried his head on her shoulder. She embraced him and wept.
"We buried Choro. He's no more. I've lost my friend, Jaidar!" Tanabai said and once again gave vent to his tears.
Later he sat in silence on a large stone outside the tent.
He wanted to be alone, he wanted to watch the moon rising, appearing slowly from beyond the jagged crest of the white mountain range. His wife was putting the girls to bed inside. He could hear the fire cracking in the hearth. Then the humming string of her temir-komuz began its heart-rending song. It was as if the wind were howling anxiously, as if a man were running across a field weeping, singing his plaintive song, while all else was silence, waiting with bated breath, while all was soundless, and only the lonely voice of human sorrow and grief kept running on. It was as if it ran on, not knowing where to find shelter for its grief or how to find consolation in the silence and wilderness, and not a soul called out to him. And so it wept and harkened to its own grief. Tanabai knew his wife was playing "The Old Hunter's Song" for him.
...In times long past an old man had a son, a brave young hunter. The father had taught his son the difficult skills of hunting. And the son had surpassed him.
He never missed. No living creature could escape his sure and lethal shot. He killed off all the game in the nearby mountains. He had no mercy for pregnant dams, he had no mercy for the newborn. He killed off the herd of Grey Goat, mother of all goats. None remained save old Grey Goat and old Grey Billy Goat. She begged the young hunter to spare old Billy Goat so that they might multiply. But he did not heed her words, he felled the great Billy Goat with a single shot. Billy Goat tumbled over the edge of the cliff. Then Grey Goat began to moan, she turned sideways to the hunter and said: "Shoot at my heart, I will not move. But you will miss and it will be your last shot!" The young hunter laughed at the words of the mad old Grey Goat. He took aim. He fired. But Grey Goat did not fall. The bullet had only grazed her foreleg. The hunter was startled, nothing of the kind had ever happened before. "See?" Grey Goat said to him. "Now try to catch me, lame as I am!" The young hunter laughed. "Fine! Try to run away from me. But if I catch you, don't expect any mercy. I'll slit your old throat for bragging!"
And so lame old Grey Goat ran off, with the hunter close behind. The chase continued for many a day and many a night, over cliffs and across gorges, through the snow and over the rocks. But he could not catch Grey Goat. The hunter had cast away his rifle, his clothing hung in tatters. He did not realise that Grey Goat had led him to the sheer cliffs from which there was no escape, up or down. This was where Grey Goat left him. And this is the curse she put on him before she left: "You shall never leave here, and no one can rescue you. May your father weep for you as I weep for my murdered children, for my vanished herd, may your father howl here, alone among the cliffs, alone among the cold mountains as I, old Grey Goat, mother of all goats, howl. I curse you, Karagul,

I curse you. And Grey Goat ran away weeping, jumping from rock to rock, from mountain to mountain.
The young hunter remained there on a narrow ledge at a dizzying height, his face pressed against the cliff, afraid to look around, unable to step up or down, left or right. He could see neither the sky nor the earth.
Meanwhile, his father searched everywhere for him, he climbed every mountain. When he found his son's rifle on a path he knew that an accident had befallen his son. He ran along the deep gorges, through the dark crevices. "Where are you, Karagul? Karagul, answer me!" In reply the stony mountains rumbled in stony laughter, flinging his own words back at him: "Where are you, Karagul? Answer me!"
"Here I am, Father!" he suddenly heard a voice calling to him from above.
The old man looked up and saw his son on a high, sheer cliff standing like a baby crow at the edge of the precipice. He stood there, his back to the world, unable to turn round.
"How did you get there, my unhappy son?" his father asked anxiously.
"Don't ask, Father. I am here as a punishment for my sins. Old Grey Goat led me here and put a terrible curse on me. I've been standing here for many a day and cannot see the sun, or the sky, or the earth. And I will never see your face, Father. Have pity on me, Father. Kill me. Relieve me of my suffering, I beg of you. Kill me and bury me."
What could the father do? He wept, he rushed about, and all the while his son kept pleading. "Hurry, kill me.
"Shoot, father! Have pity on me. Shoot!" The father had not the heart to do it. Finally, just before the sun went down, he took aim and fired. Then he broke his rifle on the rocks and sang a song of mourning over his son's dead body.
I have killed you, my son Karagul.
I am all alone in the world now, my son Karagul.
Fate has punished me, my son Karagul.
Fate has smitten me, my son Karagul.
Why did I teach you, my son Karagul,
The hunters' trade, my son Karagul.
Why did you kill, my son Karagul,
All the game, every living thing, my son Karagul.
Why have you destroyed, my son Karagul,
All that was to live and multiply, my son Karagul.
I am all alone in the world now, my son Karagul.
No one weeps with me, my son Karagul,
In my sorrow, my son Karagul.
I have killed you, my son Karagul,
I have killed you with my own hands, my son

Karagul....

Tanabai sat outside the tent, listening to the ancient Kirghiz lament, watching the moon rise slowly over the dark and silent mountains, then hang suspended over the jagged, snow-capped peaks and the towering cliffs. And once again he

begged his dead friend for forgiveness.
Inside the tent Jaidar still played the lament for the great hunter Karagul:
I have killed you, my son Karagul.
I am all alone in the world now, my son Karagul.

23

It would soon be dawn. As old Tanabai sat by the fire by the head of his dying pacer he recalled all that followed.
No one knew that he had gone to the regional centre soon after. It was his last attempt. He wanted to see the Secretary of the Regional Committee. He had heard him speak at that conference at the district centre and he wanted to tell him about his trouble. he believed that this man would understand him and help him. Choro had spoken well of him, and others had praised him, too. It was not until he arrived at the Regional Committee, however, that he discovered the Secretary had been transferred to another region.
"Didn't you know?"
"No."
"Well, if it's very important I'll speak to our new Secretary, perhaps he'll be able to see you," the secretary in the reception room said.
"No, thank you. It's a personal matter. You see, I knew him and he knew me. I would never have bothered him otherwise. Thank you, anyway. Good-bye." He left the building, sincerely believing that he had known the former Secretary well and that the man had also known him, the shepherd Tanabai Bakasov. And why not? They might have known and respected each other, he did not doubt it, that is why he said what he did.
Tanabai walked down the street towards the bus stop. Two men were loading empty beer barrels on a truck outside a beer stall. One was standing in the truck. The one on the ground who was rolling a barrel up a board turned by chance, looked at Tanabai as he passed, and froze. It was Bektai. He balanced the barrel on the inclined board as his narrow wild-cat eyes stared with hatred, waiting to see what Tanabai would say.
"What's the matter, are you sleeping?" the man in the truck said irritably.
The barrel was rolling down, Bektai tried to steady it, holding it back with an effort, his eyes never leaving Tanabai. But Tanabai did not greet him. "So this is where you are. Some place. No doubt about it. Right close up to the beer," Tanabai thought as he continued on his way. "The boy'll come to no good here," he then thought, slackening his step. "He could have been a fine man. What if I have a talk with him?" And he wanted to turn back, he was sorry for Bektai, he was ready to forgive him everything if only he came to his senses. However, he did not turn. He realised that if Bektai knew he had been expelled from the Party there would be no real conversation. Tanabai did not want to give this sharp-tongued youth a chance to deride him, his life, the cause to which he remained faithful. No, he did not turn back.
He picked up a ride home on a truck and kept thinking of Bektai. He could not forget how the boy had tried to steady the slipping barrel, staring at him

expectantly.
Later, when the collective farm took Bektai to court,
Tanabai was a witness. All he said, however, was that Bektai had abandoned his flock and gone off. He did not want to say anything else. He so wanted Bektai to realise he had been wrong and repent. But Bektai had no intention of repenting. "When you're out, come over to my place. We'll see what we can do about the future," Tanabai said to him. Becktai did not even answer. He never raised his eyes. Tanabai walked off. He had lost his self-confidence since he had been expelled from the Party, he was forever feeling guilty. He had become timid. He never thought things would come to this. No one threw anything up to him, still, he avoided people, he avoided conversation and kept to himself.

24

The pacer Gyulsary lay motionlessly by the campfire, his head on the ground. Life was slowly leaving his body. Something was gurgling and wheezing in his throat, his eyes widened and dimmed as he stared unblinkingly at the flames, his legs, straight as poles, were becoming stiff.
Tanabai was bidding his pacer farewell, it was the last time he would be talking to him. "You were a great stallion, Gyulsary. You were my friend, Gyulsary. When you go you will carry away the best years of my life, Gyulsary. I will never forget you, Gyulsary. You're still alive now, but I'm thinking of you as of one dead already, because you are dying, my wonderful horse Gyulsary. Some day we'll meet in the hereafter. But I won't hear the sound of your hoofbeats. There are no roads there, no earth, no grass, there is no life there. But as long as I live you will never die, because I will always remember you, Gyulsary. To me the sound of your pacing gait will always be the song I love best."
Such were old Tanabai's thoughts. He was sad, for time had sped by like a cantering pacer, they had both become old so quickly. Perhaps it was too soon for Tanabai to think of himself as an old man. And yet, it is not the weight of his years that makes a man old quite as much as the realisation that he is old, that his time has passed, that he is living out his days.
Now, on this night, as his pacer lay dying, Tanabai looked back once again, more keenly, more intently at the past, regretting that he had yielded to old age so soon, that he had not followed the advice of the man who had not forgotten about him after all, who had discovered his whereabouts and had come to see him.
It had happened seven years after he was expelled from the Party. At the time Tanabai was the warden in charge of the collective farm's holdings in Sarygou Gorge where he lived in a cottage with his wife Jaidar. First his daughters left for school, then they married. His son, who had graduated from a technical school, was working in the district centre and had a family of his own.
One day in summer Tanabai was mowing the grass along the river bank. It was a fine day for mowing, hot and bright. It was very still in the gorge. Cicadas were chirruping. Tanabai, wearing his shirt over his wide, white, old man's trousers, followed the ringing scythe, cutting down a thick, close mane of grass with each swinging movement. His work gave him infinite pleasure. He did not

notice a jeep pull up nearby, two men get out and head towards him.
"Hello, Tanabai! Allah be with you!" The voice was but a few feet away. He looked round and saw Ibraim. He was still the same: quick in his movements, round-cheeked and round-bellied. "See, we've found you after all, Tanabai," he continued, grinning from ear to ear. "The District Committee Secretary himself has come to see you."
"You old fox!" Tanabai thought with grudging admiration. "You always land on your feet. Look at you bowing and scraping. Aren't you the kindest soul, ready to do anyone a favour. And to serve anyone!"
"Hello," Tanabai said, shaking their hands.
"Don't You recognise me, aksakal?" the man who had come up with Ibraim asked warmly, still holding Tanabai's hand in his firm grip.
Tanabai could not place him. "I know I've seen him before," he thought. The man seemed very familiar, yet he must have changed markedly. He was young, healthy, sunburned, with a frank and confident gaze, dressed in a grey linen suit and a straw hat. "Must be a city fellow, Tanabai decided.
"Why, it's Comrade... ." Ibraim began, but Tanabai interrupted him.
"Wait, I know myself," and he chuckled inwardly. "I recognise you, my son. How could I mistake you! Hello again. I'm glad to see you."
It was Kerimbekov. The former Komsomol Secretary who had boldly defended Tanabai at that memorable Bureau meeting when Tanabai had been expelled from the Party.
"Well then, since you've recognised me, I'd like to talk to you, Tanabai. Let's walk along the bank here. You can do some mowing for him meanwhile," Kerimbekov suggested, addressing Ibraim.
Ibraim, eager to please, began unbuttoning his jacket hastily.
"Why, certainly. With pleasure, Comrade Kerimbekov." Tanabai and Kerimbekov crossed the meadow and sat down on some stones by the river.
"You've probably guessed why I'm here, Tanabai," Kerimbekov said. "You look as strong as ever, and if you're mowing, it means you're in good health. I'm glad you are."
"Yes. And I'm happy for you, my son."
"Well, to make a long story short, you know that much has changed. Many things have been put in order. You know that as well as I do."
"I do. It's true enough. I can see that on our own farm. Things seem to have picked up. Sometimes I can't believe it. I was down at Five Trees Valley a while ago, that's where I had such a hard time the year I was a shepherd. I envied them. There's a new shed. A good one, with it a slate roof. It'll take five hundred head easy. There's a house there for the shepherd and his family. And a barn and stable next to it. Not at all like it used to be. And it's the same at the other winter camps, too. And the people in the village are putting up new houses. Every time I go down there's a new house some place. I only hope it keeps up."
"It's up to us to see that it does. A lot of things still need changing. But we'll get to them. And now, as to what brought me here. Come back to the Party, Tanabai. We'll review your case. We spoke of it at a recent Bureau meeting. As they say better late than never."

Tanabai said nothing. He was confused. He was both happy and bitter. The past returned, his hurt was very deep. He did not want to stir up those memories, he did not want to think of the past.
"Thank you, that's very kind of you," he said. "Thank you for remembering an old man." He paused, then spoke his heart: "I'm too old now. What good can I be to the Party? What can I do for it? I'm no good for anything much any more. My time has passed. Don't take offence. Let me think it over."
For a long while after Tanabai could not make up his mind. He kept putting it off, telling himself he'd go tomorrow, or the day after, while time kept slipping by. He had become sluggish.
One day he actually made up his mind to go, saddled his horse and set out, but turned back after he had gone half-way. Why? He knew it was his own foolishness that had made him turn back. He told himself he was a fool, a baby. He realised it all, but could not do a thing about it.
He had seen a pacer raising a trail of dust in the steppe. He recognised Gyulsary immediately. He rarely saw him nowadays. The pacer was chalking a white trail across the dry steppe of summer. As Tanabai watched him from afar his face darkened. The dust raised by the pacer's hooves never used to catch up with the horse. He had always raced onward like a swift, dark bird, leaving a long billowing trail of dust behind him. Now the dust engulfed him. He would surge ahead, but a moment later the clouds of dust he himself was raising enveloped him. He could not break away. It could only, mean he had aged, had got weak and was giving in. "You're in a bad way, Gyulsary," thought Tanabai watching him with a heavy heart.
He imagined how hard it was for the horse, choking as he was on the dust, with the angry, rider whipping him on. He could see the pacer's confused eyes, he sensed how frantically he was straining to break away from the billowing dust, yet could not. And though the rider could not possibly have heard Tanabai, for the distance between them was too great, he shouted: "Stop! Don't ride him so hard!" and set out at a gallop to intercept him.
But he stopped before he ever reached them. If the man understood him, fine, but what if he did not? What if he'd say: "What damn business is it of yours? And who are you to teach me? I'll ride him as I see fit. Get out of my way, you old fool!"
Meanwhile, the pacer was getting farther away, his gait uneven and laboured, disappearing, then reappearing from the dust cloud. Tanabai watched him for many long minutes. Then he turned his horse and headed back. "We're through running, Gyulsary," he said. "We've gotten old. Who needs us now, the way we are? I'm no runner any more, either. All that's left to us now, Gyulsary, is to live out the rest of our days."
A year later Tanabai saw the pacer harnessed to a wagon, and it wrung his heart again. He could not look at the old racing horse gone to seed, whose lot it was now to wear a moth-eaten collar and pull a wretched cart. Tanabai turned away, he could not bear the sight.
He saw the pacer once again after that. A boy of about seven, dressed in shorts and a torn undershirt, was riding him down the street. His bare heels spurred

the horse on, he was so proud and excited to be riding a horse all by himself. It was probably his first ride, and that is why he had been given the gentlest, slowest nag, the former pacer Gyulsary.
Look at me, Grandpa!" the child shouted triumphantly. "I'm a general! I'm going across the river now!"
"That's fine. I'll watch you. Go on!" Tanabai said encouragingly.
The boy rode boldly into the river, slapping the reins, but as the horse was clambering up the far bank he lost his seat and slipped in.
"Mamma!" he cried, wet and frightened.
Tanabai fished him out and carried him towards the horse. Gyulsary was waiting patiently on the path, holding now one leg now the other suspended in the air. "His bones ache," Tanabai thought. "He's really sick." He set the boy on the old pacer.
"Off you go, and don't fall again.
Gyulsary wandered slowly down the road.
And now, for the very last time, after the pacer had been returned to Tanabai and after he had seemed to have put him back on his feet again. now, for the very last time, Gyulsary had taken him to town and was now dying on the roadside.
Tanabai had been visiting his son and daughter-in-law, who had just had a son, their second child. He had brought them a gift of a lamb, a sack of potatoes and home-made bread and other goodies Jaidar had prepared. Jaidar had not come along, saying she was ill. Though she never spoke about it, she did not like her daughter-in-law. Their son was a weakling, and the wife he had chosen was hard and despotic. She stayed at home, ruling her husband with an iron hand. There are people who think nothing of hurting or insulting others just to get the upper hand, just to show who's the boss.
This was the case now. His son was to have been promoted but was by-passed for the job and another man got it. Now she flew at her innocent old father-in-law.
"What was the use of your joining the Party if you never got above being a shepherd or herdsman? They kicked you out in the end anyway, and now your son can't get ahead because of you. He'll spend his whole life in his job now. You live up there in the mountains. You don't care, but we have to suffer because of you."
And so on, and so forth.
Tanabai was sorry he had come. He tried to calm her by saying uncertainly:
"Well, if that's how it is, maybe I'll ask them to let me join the Party again."
"As if anyone wants you! Do you think they're sitting around waiting for you? That they can't do without an old wreck?" she said scornfully.
If it were anyone else and not his daughter-in-law, the wife of his own son, Tanabai would not have stood for it. But there's nothing you can do about your own kin, good or bad. The old man said nothing, he did not argue, he did not say that it was not he who was keeping her husband down, but it was because his son was worthless, and the wife he had chosen as the kind of woman any man in his right senses would run away from. The old saying was very true: "A good wife will make a middling husband of a bad one, a good husband of a middling one, and will bring glory to a good one." But the old man did not want to shame his son

in front of his wife. Let them go on thinking he was to blame.
That is why Tanabai was in such a hurry to leave. He could not bear staying with them.
"What a fool you are!" he scolded his daughter-in-law as he sat by the campfire now. "Where do people like you come from? You've neither honour nor respect, nor a kind word for anyone. All you think about is yourselves. You judge everyone else by yourselves. But you won't have it your way. They still need me. I can still be of use."

25

Morning was upon them. The mountains rose above the earth, the steppe was coming into view, stretching away into the distance. The ashes of the dead fire at the edge of the ravine barely smouldered. A grey-haired man stood beside it, his coat thrown over his shoulders. There was no need to cover the pacer with it now. Gyulsary was in the next world, running with Allah's herd.
Tanabai looked at the dead horse and could not believe it was his Gyulsary. He lay there on his side with his head thrown back in a last convulsion. There were deep ridges on his cheeks left by the bridle. His legs were stiff, extended, the shoes were worn thin on his cracked hooves. Never again would they carry him anywheres, never again would they leave their marks on the roads.
It was time for him to go. He bent over the horse for the very last time. closed his cold lids, picked up the bridle and walked off without a backward glance.
He was crossing the steppe to the mountains. And as he walked he picked up his unhappy trend of thought. He was thinking that old age was upon him, that his days were numbered now. He did not want to die as a lonely bird that has dropped behind its swift-winged flock. He wanted to die on the wing, he wanted those with whom he had shared the nest and life to circle over him, to hear their farewell cries.
"I'll write to Samansur," Tanabai decided. "I'll write and say: 'Do you remember the pacer Gyulsary? You must remember him. I rode him when I took your father's Party card to the District Party Committee. You were the one who sent me on that mission. Well, I was returning home from town last night and my fine pacer died on the way. I sat by him all through the night, I had time to review my whole life. Soon my time may come, and I will die along the way like the pacer Gyulsary. My son Samansur, you must help me return to the Party. I have not long to go. I want to be as I was always. I know now that there was a reason why your father Choro's last wish was for me to take his Party card in to the District Party Committee. You're his son and you know old Tanabai Bakasov well.' "
Tanabai walked through the steppe bridle slung over his shoulder. Tears ran down his checks, wetting his beard. He did not wipe them away. He was weeping for the pacer Gyulsary. The old man looked at the new morning through his tears, at the lonely grey goose flying swiftly over the foothills. The goose was hurrying, it was catching up with the flock.
"Hurry! Catch up with your kin before your wings give out," Tanabai whispered. Then he sighed and said, "Farewell, Gyulsary!"

As he walked along an ancient, haunting melody came to his ears.
...The mother camel roamed for many days, searching for her baby, calling to him. Where are you, my dark-eyed baby? Answer me! The milk runs from her udder, from her overflowing udder, trickling down her legs. Where are you? Answer me! The milk runs from her udder, her overflowing udder. Her pure-white milk....

1966

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