



“SOLDIER OF CULTURES AND EMPIRES”

ANTHOLOGY OF POETRY AND SHORT STORIES

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

BY: DR. MAHIR J. IBRAHIMOV

Anthology of Poetry and Short Stories
Soldier of Cultures and Empires
By Mahir Ibrahimov
Outline

What is intriguing about a story that does not have a moral? Answer: it's honesty. There is no moral to these poems and stories, only truth. It is a story about a man who has experienced world-changing events. It is not a story about a man who initiated these events or even played a major role; most people do not. It is the story of a man's response to those events. It is important because it is the response of the everyday ordinary person as the unit of measurement against which history judges whether an event is a success or a failure. This is a first-person narrative lived and learned behind the iron curtain. It is a story about a man who embraced communism and then the freedom following communism's demise. Only to learn the failures of that system cannot be erased merely by its absence. It is a singular story; in that it is the story of a single escape. It does not answer the moral or political question of how-to bring fairness and democracy to a culture that has never known it. Instead, it presents a realistic view of the situation as it exists, leaving the decision regarding how to fix it to the politicians and peacemakers.

The presented anthology of poetry and short stories is the reflection of Dr. Ibrahimov's thoughts and feelings based on his own experiences over the years. Because of the special nature of poetry, the linguistic and cultural authenticity is kept. It makes the narrative original and unique. However, the author tried to translate it, although it is not usually an easy task translating poems from foreign languages without losing its cultural flavor and uniqueness. The original text follows the English translation, prior to author's biography in the end.

The poems and stories are written in Russian and Azerbaijani languages between the periods of 1980s and 1990s. The Soviet empire was coming to its end with the last Soviet troops leaving Afghanistan in 1989 and the final demise of the country in the beginning of the 1990s.

Table of Content

Introduction and Acknowledgements X

With Thought about my Mother X

The poem is written in summer 1989.

The author lived and worked in Moscow in the final years of the Soviet Union.

He was away from his mother with whom the author had always had a very special relationship. That was the period when Ibrahimov witnessed truly historical changes in the country in its final days. The author shares his thoughts and feelings in the poem. Particularly, he became disappointed in the system, when he started to witness Soviet soldiers returning from Afghanistan wounded and morally devastated.

Like the author, they used to believe in the system which misled, wasting their trust and lives.

Dialog..... X

The poem is also written in summer 1989. It reflects on the author's philosophical analysis of the same historical period which was characterized by uncertain and unpredictable future.

The Legend of Love and Friendship..... X

The poem is based on the ancient Caucasus legend. It was written in November 1989 and dedicated to love, friendship, and wisdom.

The Bitter Lessons of Wisdom X

The author wrote the poem in March 1990. It's dedicated to the so called "Black January" events in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The poem is the emotional description of the deaths and suffering which took place in January 1990 because of the former Soviet leader Michael Gorbachov's attempt to suppress the independence movement in this former Soviet Republic. But the Soviet military action against the Azerbaijani people could not stop the people's desire for freedom and independence. The events only accelerated the demise of the empire.

The Dreams Came True X

The poem is dedicated to the author's wife. He wrote it in March 1990 and reflects the author's feelings and appreciation that he had finally met his wife who also became his closest friend and ally for the next 24 years. It was particularly important morally after having lived and worked in Moscow without any family for many years. It was also especially important during that difficult historical period which the author lived through.

My Dagger is Presently RustyX

The figurative title of the poem is the description of the author's feelings related to the unplanned and unexpected collapse of the country which caused a lot of sufferings among the millions of ordinary people. It led to several bloody conflicts across the vast territories of the former USSR and Eastern Europe. As the head of the press service of the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry accompanying Western journalists to the war zone the author particularly witnessed one of the bloodiest of them: Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict around Nagorno-Karabakh. It also directly affected his family which had lived in the area and had to flee the combat zone at virtually the last minute before it was completely occupied. The poem was written in September 1990.

My DreamX

The author wrote the poem in October 1991.

It is about the value of human principles such as honesty and integrity.

The philosophical approach is an analysis of the situation when the people were unexpectedly left with an ideological vacuum after having lived under Communism for more than 70 years. It all proved to be fake and empty promises which caused a lot of disappointment and frustration.

Dedicated To My Daughter.....X

Unlike the rest of the poetry and short stories, which were written in Russian, this poem is in Azerbaijani-native tongue of the author. It's dedicated to his newly born child and expresses a concern for her future because of the increasingly uncertain world. The poem was written in November 1991.

The Poem on Human Values..... X

It was written in December 1991. The poem philosophically discusses the value and meaning of life and human principals.

The Awakening..... X

The poem was written in January 1993. It's dedicated to the Azerbaijani intelligentsia.

The author was invited by the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister to join the emerging diplomatic ranks of the newly independent country. Ibrahimov and his family decided to move to Baku, Azerbaijan after having lived and worked in Moscow for many years. The honest aspirations of supporting the independence and development of the country soon turned into the author's disappointment because of corruption and nepotism. The country's intelligentsia was alienated and isolated at the time when it could contribute to the common cause.

Look into the SoulX

This is a short story about the fate and moral crises of a person whom the author met in the final days of the collapse of the former USSR. Additionally, the experience of meeting Soviet soldiers returning from Afghanistan prompted Ibrahimov to write this story. It's the first part of the story to be continued. Although the incident took place in 1986, it was written in the beginning of 1990s.

The End of The Empire and Soviet Experiment in Afghanistan.....X

Original Text in Russian and Azeri.....X

Author's biography..... X

With thoughts of my mother.

I have often thought of you.
In my moments of sorrow
In moments of affliction and disappointment in days of long, hard partings.
You were always with me.

I have longed for you in my thoughts.
In my soul I've been longing
I've asked you, I've asked you
And you appeared.

Just like in the old days
In the years of my youth

You sat beside me, shared my pain and sadness.
And you made me feel better.

Tell me how you're living, my son.
How do you eat, how do you drink, how do you sleep?

I couldn't tell her
To my dear mother
That I've been ill for a long time
A sickness of my heart and soul
That I haven't found in this life
What's lurking somewhere
And that...

I don't know why I live
I can't bear the fate
♪ The fate that fate has given me ♪
Whether I need a woman or a wife or a friend
To cure my soul's sickness,
I don't know.

But I have no wife, I have no friends
♪ When I'm in trouble ♪
To understand me

You're the only one who understands
With your warm heart you embrace
♪ My grief's gusts of grief ♪

Life is so dull and dull and drab
When you need treasure, or glory?!
Or perhaps Faith?!
That can lift up your days
♪ Breathe in thee another treasure ♪
Leading the straight paths
To happiness!
Not faith in God or in devils
But faith in life, in people themselves!
That's where the key to happiness lurks!
Life will be so much better
♪ Without lies, without greed, without evil intentions ♪
Among my trustworthy friends.

I want to live with my chest Fuller!
But once again there are only judges around me...
They're stern, dark and inaccessible
They are ready to do their duty
Cloaked in the mask of false honor.

(Summer 1989)

Dialogue.

I had a dream one night
That I could see with my own eyes
Christ descended to me from heaven.

He looked menacingly at me.
Tell me, my son, what do you see
The meaning of this life?

What have you done for the good of men
In the past thirty-three years?

At thirty-three I ascended to heaven
Tired of this mundane life
When I realized the futility of my efforts
To transform this world of men.

Can you know the happiness
That is promised to you now?
As long as there's foolishness and dishonor
There will never be a life without loss.

And thou shalt be a man!
Thou shalt not transgress honor and duty
Neither for glory nor riches
Don't be bound by the chains of slavery
Your life and your soul!

Live, let life caress you
With its charming hand
And not a fool push you around
To do deeds like a blind man.

For life is one without repetition
You live it day by day
So, without conscience let it go its own way
Let it go its own way!

(Summer 1989)

A legend of love and friendship
(Or cunning and wisdom)

Whether it was long ago or recently
That's not what's important, it's the meaning ♪
Which is implicit or explicit ♪
That's not a fiction, believe me.

♪ In the desert, hot and waterless ♪
Old man and young man in trouble
Now only water can save them.

Only water can bring them back to life
That will give them strength and drive them
To new things to do
That they have sworn to do "And they'll share their troubles.

And suddenly he saw a tree in the distance
And shouted, "There's water!
And the old man rushed there
Forgetting with happiness his old years
And he was filled with the sweetness of hope.

But when he reached that tree
He found no water of the long-awaited
Only an image of a fairy tale.

And then a great argument ensued.
Whose girl is this?
The young one said mine.
The old man said mine.

Then the old man by right of years
"That's enough," said the old man.
That's no way to settle our heated argument.

♪ And we'll climb a high tree ♪
To look at the horizon far away
♪ To find the source of the water ♪
For without life-giving water
We have no life.

But there's one condition
You must keep your clothes
Without damaging them.
And whoever does this
Call that girl his own.

"You are wise," said the young man respectfully.
"So be it."
So be it, said the old man.

The old man climbed up the tree
But he was wise and clever
So first he folded his clothes under the tree.

But when the old man came down from the tree
He found neither a girl nor a young face.

So may the wisdom of the young live on forever and ever
The cunning of the young and the wisdom of the old!

(November 1989)

Your bitter lessons.

Azerbaijan, the land of fires
Embattled by grief and misery
They trampled your children's honor
They shot our mothers
Without a shadow of compassion

Bloody January! Forever and ever
Will remain in the hearts of the people
My soul cries out, what have you done?!
O wise guardian, master of the race!

O my pain! O my land!
The sons have closed their eyelids.
They've closed their eyelids, their sons...
To eternal freedom, the voluptuous.

But these sacrifices are not in vain,
Though the agony of your suffering soul
of your suffering soul.

The people live and will live
With hope and faith. To serve
The ideas of good and happiness
Not drowning in the mire of evil.

And the wisdom of life
♪ Without crossing the threshold ♪
Of hardness,
He must only learn a lesson
That he will learn from the past
From past mistakes repetition.

(March 1990)

I dedicate it to my wife and my friend.

(Dreams come true)

If you're happy
Then I'm happy, too
So be happy
My darling!

These words I repeat often
When I look at your sincere and clear face
I have long sought, amidst lies and falsehoods
To drink the cup of love and sincerity.

And now you're here
And I breathed again
My dreams have come true

And now you're with me
And I've parted from my sadness.

(March 1990)

My dagger is now rusty.

My dagger is rusty.
My tongue is no longer sweet
My soul is also impoverished
I'm often rude.

The whole world is in an abyss of evil and flattery
My country lives without honor
The news they send us is not good
The "perestroika" beast is failing.

Here and there we hear wailing
The Kremlin's men of high stature
The men of high standing in the Kremlin.

Well, this is only the beginning.
As they often tell us
Of a great and important road.

And there's nowhere for us to go.
For we are a great country
♪ We're the only one ♪
In the whole universe there's none
Soviet, pure and dear.

(September 1990)

My dream.

Fly, fly my dream
Rising from the depths of my soul
You're like the universe eternal
Carrying within you the rays of hope

The rays of unrealizable hope
To the eternity of happiness
The soul's unrecoverable losses
I replace them with dreams.

But no, the rock will tell me
Dreams are dreams, what good are they?
You must learn a lesson
From this ungrateful life
And like an omniscient prophet
And like an omniscient prophet, look ahead with a distant sight.

You must do your duty
♪ To men and to yourself ♪

May God help thee
For that noble goal.

(October 1991)

Dedicated to my Niqar daughter.

You are my dream
You are my joy
In your favorite farm
You are a major sim
You are the light of my heart
You are the apple of my eyes
You are my dear baby
You are my only concern.

In this cruel world
What awaits you
In your destiny
Are there cages?

Or in this world
There was a buzz
In a free flight
He sat on a tree
You will have fun
In a happy moment
Then you will fly
In their dreams.

(November 1991)

A poem about the human.

I'm afraid of this eternal life.
I want to take the path of the Milky Way.
When with my carefree pen
I'll write a poem about the human.

The time of enchantment is over
It's time for me to realize
The meaning of human existence

Oh, man! You are the God of nature!
Return to it, to your breed
To the eternal wisdom to please.

O man! You are part of nature!
By betraying her you have betrayed God.
Bring her back, your nature
In the consciousness of your duty.

(December 1991)

Sobering Up.

(Dedicated to the Azerbaijani intelligentsia)

I have drunk the sobering cup.
The time of enlightenment has come.
We were full of feelings of longing.
We were ready for humiliation.
Ready for bitter separation
The soul's heavy expectations.

What have we suffered for so long
What have we dreamed, what have we tried
We didn't get greasy, we didn't get greasy, we didn't get greasy
And we feared the honor of the code
And fought as fearlessly as we could.

And now we find ourselves
On the brink of the abyss
And we have been stopped in our swift flight.
With a single swing of the lash.

And so we're here
What we feared.
The front builds happiness, for whom?
The people's, is it for the people?

Again deceit, again hope.
And only the laughter of the ignorant can be heard.
Only I am now the master of the race.
Only I decide the people's fate
To my kin, my friends, to please them.

So what are you, you lost son?
Sing your soul's hymn to them
Let the heavens open
And let miracles be done

And the world will finally be settled.
And honour shall go with it to the wedding.

I have drunk the cup of sobering.
The time of enlightenment is at hand.

(January 1993)

A look into the soul.

(Story)

The church was crowded. But she immediately caught my attention among the many other girls and guys who had come to this little Moscow church today.

I was struck by the expression of her face and eyes shining with the monotonous singing of the priest and the old ladies. As I got closer I got a good look at her. Beautiful blond hair, regular facial features, slender frame, about 19 years old at most.

I stood greedily inhaling the scent of her hair, but she was too absorbed in her own world. Her eyes, her big eyes radiated light and something that made my heart flutter. I stared at her in amazement, trying to get a glimpse into her inner world.

The service was over. After putting down the candle and wrapping herself in her woolen shawl, she followed the others to the exit. I followed her. I had to solve her mystery, to fully know her. Curiosity mixed with a strong desire to possess her pushed me.

It was freezing, bitterly cold. Everything was frozen around me. There seemed to be no power to revive the sleeping nature. The cold, just the cold inexorably penetrating the hearts of eternally hungry for warmth and light.

I jumped on the step of the bus and squeezed closer to her. She was still thinking about something, but now she was completely different, just like everyone else.

She looked away when she saw me staring. I made up my mind. Leaning toward her, I whispered: - "Girl, I'm dying!"

She flinched in surprise, then looked at me in surprise, and suddenly laughed. She continued to laugh, and I feverishly considered my next move.

Suddenly, she also suddenly stopped laughing and looked at me.

I couldn't bear to look at her, so I lowered my eyes. She walked toward the exit.

But good luck accompanied me. As she was getting off the bus, she slipped, but when I ran up I carefully supported her, then stepped aside with an innocent expression on my face.

She looked at me again and smiled. What a smile it was! I probably would have sacrificed a lot for that smile.

On that cold evening, it was as if a life-giving warmth washed over me, emanating from the very human heart.

I walked up to her and gazed at her beautiful face for a long time. Her plump, slightly open lips beckoned with unknown power.

"So what happened to you?" she asked, and her lips curled back into a smile.

I couldn't understand what was happening to me. In front of me there was a beautiful ...and looking at me with big, tender eyes. I could not say a word, I was in a strange state, as if I were delirious.

At last I muttered:

"Now, in church, when I saw you, your eyes, I knew I needed you like air. I feel like I've known you all my life."

Women have come and gone from my life without leaving any deep mark on it. But then, the fear of her saying no took hold of me. I was trembling, feeling powerless.

She squinted her eyes and asked:

"Aren't you cold?"

Only now I noticed I was standing there without a hat and with my coat open.

"Here's my phone number, She squinted her eyes and asked:

"Aren't you cold?"

Only now did I notice that I was standing there without a hat and with my coat unbuttoned.

-Here's my phone number, call me tomorrow at 9 p.m.," she said, and she gave me the warmth of her amazing eyes.

"Now I beg you not to follow me," she said slowly, "I promise I will see you very soon. But I'm afraid that after the meeting..." Without finishing, she turned and walked away.

I looked after her for a long time, and suddenly, I remembered that I forgot to ask her name. "What's your name!" I shouted in a hoarse voice. But she kept walking without looking back. I ran after her. When I caught up with her, I looked at her face. I cried out in horror: instead of the beautiful, familiar face, I saw the wrinkled face of an old woman with a smirking, toothless mouth.

I do not know how long I ran. Finally, stumbling, I bumped into a snowdrift. The cold snow sobered me up. What's going on? Who is she? These questions were keeping me awake.

I didn't sleep a wink all night. And in the morning, without waiting until evening, I decided to call my mysterious stranger.

After the fourth long ring, they picked up at the other end of the line. I was silent, not daring to speak. "I'm listening to you," I heard a familiar voice on the line, "go ahead. "Hello," I said in a faltering voice, "it's me. We were with you yesterday..." "Oh, it's you. How did you get here yesterday?"

I wondered if I was dreaming about all this last night. She spoke to me as if nothing had happened: in a tender, caring voice, as when we had met, before...

But I remember that I got home, and the landlady where I rented a room opened the door and gave me a frightened look.

When I approached the mirror, I did not recognize myself: a pale, elongated, anxious face with glistening eyes, my coat in the snow, my scarf dragging at my feet, my hat in my hand. So, it wasn't a dream.

Meanwhile, she waited for an answer.

"Good trip, thank you-Thank you," I blurted out. When can I see you and I? "

"Have you changed your mind?" She asked me, a little mockingly, but with a faintly wistful tone in her voice. Apparently, you're not a bad person, and if anything, I'll be sorry," my stranger added quietly.

Her last words sounded so mysterious and with a clear hint of something, that for a moment I wanted to hang up and stop the whole story. But her smiling, beautiful face and affectionate gaze flashed before my eyes again, and all doubts dissipated.

In the evening we met. Olesya, the name of my new acquaintance, came almost exactly at the appointed time. The evening passed in a small cozy cafe, where we went at the suggestion of Olesya.

They knew her and were, as it seemed to me, very pleased to see her. I attributed this to her sociability and simplicity of character.

The next evening Olesya invited me to her place.

We sat in the kitchen and drank coffee. Olesya told me about her life:

"My father would often come home drunk and start cursing and beating my mother. I used to cry. In the beginning that stopped my father. He would come up to me, hug me

"My father would often come home drunk and start swearing and hitting my mother. I cried. In the beginning that stopped my father. He came up to me, hugged me, wiped away my tears as a child, and promised me it would never happen again. But the next day it was the same: Scolding, beatings, tears. Then my father stopped paying attention to me at all. The scandals at home became more frequent. I was then nine or ten years old. My mother meekly endured all the suffering. There was no one to stand up for us. Of the relatives, there was no one, and the neighbors pretended not to see anything. Nobody wanted to interfere in the affairs of others; all lived closed in their apartments, as if in cages. Even then, I felt a terrible thing—human indifference. I remember how, after another drunken scandal, my father, right in his clothes, fell asleep. A few minutes later, he was snoring loudly. Mother laid me down, sat beside me, and silently looked at me with tears in her eyes. I did not know then that my mother was already seriously ill. Two months later, she died. I stayed with my father. My father began to come home less and less and finally disappeared. Since then, nothing interests me. I've lost trust in people, and the only comfort I find is in God." Then she calmly added, "Our lives and the entire country are going through the most difficult times and it is going to be worse."

The next day, I tried to call her, but nobody picked up the phone. I kept calling the day after and almost every day: no reply. I decided to go to her apartment. I rang the bell; an elderly woman opened the door.

When I asked about Olesya, the woman said that there was no such person and never had been at that address. I told my friend Elchin about the incident. He suggested I not go there alone; the world was becoming very dangerous. We went there together. Nobody opened the door this time and we left. A few years later, similar to Olesya and her father before that, the entire country disappeared, like it never had existed before. Elchin told me that it was my imagination, a reflection of the emotions and stresses we all were going through. It was likely the case.

In 1989, at age thirty-three, I decided it was time for me to marry. I had been spending many evenings after work walking along residential streets, looking into the apartments of men and women and their families, and suddenly I felt very lonely. I come from a culture where arranged marriages are still customary. I believed that if I could meet a young woman who I liked and liked me, I could convince her family to allow her to marry me. I did just that. I asked my supervisor at the Red Cross for a week off to return to Baku to find a bride. He looked at me like I was out of my mind, but he decided to take me up on the challenge and let me go. My family knew of my plan and had lined several dates up for me, but it was too structured. It felt too traditional, too much like the arranged marriages of the past. I wanted a relationship that at least reflected, in some way, the times in which we were living, and I wanted the attraction between my bride and myself to be mutual and independent of our families. During one of my last days home riding bus #65, I saw her. She was at the front of the bus holding onto some books. I moved up to where she was seated and

asked her for the time—admittedly not the most creative introductory remark, but it worked. I was able to continue the conversation until she disembarked. By that time, I had learned her name—Leila—and obtained a phone number. Truth is, I was not as successful as I believed myself to be, because she had given me her aunt’s phone number and not her own. But I was undeterred. I returned to Moscow without my bride, but I truly hoped and believed it would only be a matter of time. I was persistent. Leila’s aunt and I had many telephone conversations over the next few months. She was indeed an excellent gatekeeper. She delayed

my meeting with Leila until she was sure I was honest and sincere in my quest.

Finally, a family meeting was arranged. I flew back to Baku and met with Leila and her family at the appointed time. My mother and older brother joined me. Her family was fifteen people strong, including aunts, uncles, and grandparents. I have taken a lot of exams in my life, but I was the most nervous for this one. I took a deep breath and told them everything I thought they would want to know. I told them I was healthy, educated, had a good job, and would take good care of Leila. I told them my worst fault was my single-mindedness when pursuing a goal. They turned from me and conversed among each other, and then smiles broke out on all of their faces. I passed, I won, I got the deal! They approved. They brewed some sweet tea, which traditionally marked the family blessing, and, on December 12, 1989, we were married.

The next day, we left for Moscow. When I was coming to Baku, my close friend Elchin was with me on the same flight. I did not tell him about the real reason for my travel to Baku, because I was not sure of the outcome. His return flight was also the same. When he asked me about the lady with me at the airport, I replied that she was my wife. First, he did not believe me, thinking that I was joking. When he realized that I was telling the truth, he was shocked that I could achieve my goal to get married just by making a couple of brief trips to Baku and meeting my future wife for about twenty minutes on the bus. When we arrived in Moscow, it was a beautiful introduction to the city. A light snow had fallen, and the city was silent and glistening. My new bride had never been away from her family and had never traveled out of Azerbaijan. I believe in omens, and it was a good omen. Neither of us has ever regretted our decision.

During my time there, Moscow suffered from a severe housing shortage. The remedy was communal housing, or

kommunalka. I had already been living in the *kommunalka* when I met my wife. It was actually an improvement from my previous living quarters, which included renting space from a temperamental alcoholic who threw me out the door with no forewarning. It was so bad that one night I was forced to sleep in the train station because I had nowhere else to go. The *kommunalka* is the quintessential Communist incarnation. It is a living unit in which several families share a bathroom and a kitchen. Privacy, such as it is, can only be achieved in the bedroom. It was more like living in a barracks or dormitory than in an apartment. Leila and I shared a three-room flat located near the Medvedkovo metro station

that included a communal area and two bedrooms. When I left for Baku the second time in hopes of bringing Leila back as my wife, the woman with whom I shared the apartment, Olga Ivanovna, was quite ill. I never thought she liked me very much during our time together, but I later learned it was merely a reflection of the pain she endured daily. As I was about to leave for the airport, Olga called out to me. For the second time in my life, I entered a room where

death hovered overhead. Her son and daughter were at her side. She said goodbye and wished me luck. She died the next day. Leila and I attended the funeral together. Olga's son told me it

was his mother's wish that I take her bedroom, which was the bigger of the two.

Unfortunately, before we were able to make the exchange, Olga's longtime friend arranged for a man named Evgeniy to take over the space.

Evgeniy was an alcoholic and prone to violent episodes. He was divorced but remained obsessed with his former wife and frequently forced his way into our bedroom, looking for her and accusing me of having sex with her. Despite this, my memories of romancing my new wife in that strange environment leave me with a sweet taste instead of a bitter one. We were unknown to one another, and my wife was barely out of her teens and inexperienced. In the early days of our marriage, she would follow me around the apartment as if playing a child's game and mimic everything I did. Finally, we would break into peals of laughter. We still do whenever we remember our lives there.

Before we celebrated our first anniversary, our daughter was born, and I decided it was time to get away from Evgeniy. Because of my employment, I was able to arrange for my family to move to a single, noncommunal apartment. It was a sixth-floor walk-up, smaller than the *kommunalka* and on a noisier street, but it was far more private and located near a shaded area where Leila could walk with our daughter in the new perambulator we purchased. The day we were to leave, Evgeniy came into our apartment very drunk and very belligerent. When asked, he refused to leave. Fearing for the safety of my wife and daughter, I pushed him outside. My pent-up anger with that lunatic reached deadly proportions. I forced him down and smashed his face repeatedly into the ground. Finally, I was pulled away by a concerned neighbor who didn't want to see my wife and child abandoned while I served time in jail for murder. My small family moved the next day and stayed in the new apartment until we left Moscow two years later.

On March 11, 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was elected general secretary of the Communist Party and de facto ruler of the Soviet Union. The world changed. When he came to power, the Soviet economy was failing, worsened by miners' strikes. Store shelves were empty. Some of the Soviet republics continued to call for greater independence, and ethnic conflicts in Transcaucasia (which includes Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan) were accelerating.

Gorbachev transformed the Soviet Union. His policies of

Glasnost (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) gave the populace a sense of power and a taste of freedom that was the

ultimate undoing of a seventy-year union among the republics. For the first time, representatives of foreign countries came to the Soviet Union to invest and exchange goods and ideas.

The entire structure of Soviet society as I had known it began to shift. At the time, I was unsure how I felt about it. Fortunes were being made, but it seemed as though the people who

were making them were the same people who had been in power during the old system.

Independent newspapers, magazines, television, and radio popped up. The

Ploshad Nogina (the square named after Nogin in Russian) where I worked was situated across from a quiet

park. Before Gorbachev's reforms, an elderly woman used to sweep the square every morning. Every morning I would say hello to her, and she would reply, "Good morning, son."

Then the character of the Ploshad Nogina changed; it became a gathering place for new Russian businessmen, complete with cell phones, laptop computers, and prostitutes. Clothing styles changed. Even the manner of talking to other people changed. Life became louder and more frenetic. Restaurants popped up along the plaza like mushrooms. One afternoon, I decided to try one. The obsequious waiter fawned all over me, insisting on seating me near a window that was unobstructed so that I could watch the activities outside, unfolding my napkin and pouring me a glass of water with just the correct number of ice cubes. Then he brought the menu. The prices were, to my mind, outrageous and unreachable, and I left. So, apparently, did the elderly woman. It was not a course of steady progress forward.

Perestroika

in theory should have led to greater debate and understanding among the different populations of the Soviet Union; instead, it created an opportunity for many to express long-held ethnic hatred with little fear of reprisal. People like myself were jeered at on the street, and one time, my wife was threatened while waiting in line to purchase food. It's all in the language, in the definitions, in the types of words you use: comrade instead of friend, microrayon instead of home or apartment, Azeri or Armenian or Georgian instead of citizen. The heat and fire from the mixing of races and ethnicities in the United States created a melting pot. In the Soviet Union, those same elements only served to create greater friction and separation among its people.

During the period of perestroika, things turned ugly and unpredictable. The children of Communism had never been taught how to deal with freedom, and the state as parent had been too restrictive during their youth. The release of state control over all things created a vacuum. The population acted as though a bunch of ill-behaved teenagers who no longer needed to heed common rules of civility. The disintegration and ultimate demise of Communism as a system was a good thing, but its unexpected and unintended consequences have led to a proliferation of ethnic conflicts—first among the people of the former Soviet republics and later in the Middle East, which was no longer controlled through the balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States.

The changes initiated by perestroika and glasnost were beginning to have an effect on my career. In November 1990, I left the Red Cross and began employment at the League of Scientific and Industrial Associations of the USSR. As chief expert interpreter of the International Department, I was part of a team responsible for developing economic and trade

relations between the Soviet Union, the United States, Canada, and Japan. It was one of the first organizations created specifically for the purpose of opening up Soviet markets to foreign

investors, and it was my first opportunity to work with educators and businessmen from the West. The president of the association was a former influential employee of the Central Committee, Arcady Volsci, who wisely used his contacts within the Communist system to secure his position in the association. It turned out to be a very successful move for him. Others who failed to adapt quickly found themselves in unfamiliar positions of ordinariness.

They soon lost all the accoutrements of privilege—some with very dire results. Dmitry Lisovolik, who I reported to at the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, was one such individual. No longer invited to shop at the stores reserved for the party elite, he was required to stand in line with the rest of the masses to purchase food. He was unable to tolerate his change in circumstance. Rumors circulated that his wife had a bad character, which contributed to his ultimate decision to commit suicide on a day he had failed to purchase food and returned home empty-handed.

My boss at work asked me to assist the family of

Dmitry Lisovolik with funeral arrangements, because I knew him personally. Therefore, I spent some time with his wife and newly arrived son from overseas, where he was studying, to make the necessary arrangements.

It was a frightening omen of events to come. Western journalists showed up at Lisovolik's funeral. They were quietly convinced to leave, having been given the party line that all was well with Soviet society. My boss showed me a few men who were keeping low profiles at the funeral and explained to me that they were from the GRU, (*Glavnoye Razvedyvatelnoye Upravleniye*, main intelligence directorate).

There was little discussion about the change in the political and economic climate at my place of employment, at least with me. I was outside the loop of the powerful and connected. Those with whom I did converse seemed, like me, cautious. We had grown up believing in the Communist system, and

it was hard to accept that changes were permanent. We were convinced that despite the rhetoric, the KGB (the notorious Soviet intelligence agency) continued to have eyes and ears everywhere, and it was only a matter of time until things would return to normal and those who were too vocal would be jailed or worse.

A month after I joined the team at the League of Scientific and Industrial Associations of the USSR, I was hired by Luna-Trading Inc. to help coordinate economic and trade activities between Japan and the USSR. In addition, I was working on my PhD, hoping that the new era of glasnost

would allow me the opportunity to travel. Still, prospects continued to pass me by.

Control seemed to shift from the Kremlin to individual mafioso, who were even more brutal in

their grab for power. In spite of many promises, I was never asked to join any of my employers on their trips overseas. In truth, the policies of perestroika and glasnost, which were meant to open Soviet society, were impediments to my opportunities for advancement. And I was not alone. Government, Soviet culture, and the economy were crumbling. In an effort to save the system, Gorbachev negotiated a new union treaty that would have converted

the Soviet Union into a federation of independent republics. On August 19, 1991, the day before the treaty was to be signed, a group of hardline Communists attempted a coup d'état. The putsch of August 19th through the 22nd was a dizzying three days.

I awoke on the 19th to news reports that Gorbachev had suddenly taken ill and power was being transferred to vice president Gennady Yanayev and the newly formed State Committee for a State of Emergency, or GKChP. A chill ran down my spine upon learning that

the committee was composed of the leaders of the KGB, the military, and the police. I was not frightened, but I am cautious by nature, and I arrived at work careful not to respond to the comments and questions of my colleagues. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, except perhaps there appeared to be more police on the street than was typical. Later that morning, I heard a low rumble and the floor shook. The central boulevards in Moscow are unusually broad, designed for military control. Within hours, most of them were filled with tanks and armored personnel carriers. I tried to maintain my routine during those three days, but entering and leaving the building sometimes proved difficult. On the first day of the putsch, hundreds of people filled the Ploschad Nogina, and some of the demonstrators tried to break into our building. Arkady Volsci, the president of Scientific and Industrial Associations, managed to convince the crowd that our organization had nothing to do with the Central Committee of the Communist Party, even though we shared space with them on the Ploschad Nogina.

Later that day, troops surrounded the area and kept the crowds at bay during the remainder of the uprising. I kept my distance, as I did not want to anger any of the weapon-toting soldiers. I could still remember the steel-toed kick to my ribs. I also did not want to participate in demonstrations. I am a quiet man, and as an interpreter, I am by nature an observer; more importantly, I had a young wife and child, and I was responsible for their safety. Each day, more people filled the streets. Many approached the tanks; some stood in their path while others stuck flowers in the guns. At one point, I watched a mob of people storm Dzerzhinsky Square, the place where the KGB was headquartered. Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky was widely recognized as the father of the notorious intelligence agency, a ruthless murderer who was responsible for the death of millions in the early years of the Russian revolution. A number of people tried in vain to topple the statute of Dzerzhinsky. What was odd was that the KGB brutes just stood on the roof of their building, quietly watching. There was an unreal quality to the whole affair, almost as if it were completely orchestrated on both the part of the military and the crowds. In fact, I was unable to shake that feeling during the entire event, and I was unwilling to become a tool used by others for their own gain.

Later, I went back to Dzerzhinsky Square, curious to see what was going on there. A crowd was still milling about, and there was a frightening energy in the air. The doors to the KGB and Central Committee of the Communist Party buildings had the word "fascists" spray-painted across them, and several of the doors and windows to the buildings had been

57
smashed. The Dzerzhinsky statute lay prone on the ground. I asked a man standing near me what had happened, and he explained to me that a crane had come and brought the statue down, all under the noses of the KGB! Again, I couldn't shake the feeling that this was someone's dangerous game of chess. I saw no future in it, and I instinctively knew I would soon be starting over.

By August 20, all independent news agencies were officially shut down. A couple of them resorted to handing out flyers to keep everyone abreast of developments. Curfews were imposed, and mass gatherings were banned. Younger people still openly discussed events in public places, but older people were much more cautious, still uncertain how events would play out. At home, I turned on the television to see if I could learn more about what was

happening. Central Television was broadcasting the ballet *Swan Lake* of all things.

Police began checking passports and identification papers. And more than once I saw Russian officers abusing non-Russians. It was open season. I approached one such policeman and asked him why he was mistreating a young man. He responded to me by saying all Caucasians were criminals and should be treated as such. I was speechless. I felt I was safe, because I had a *propiska*, a document that proved I was a proper resident of Moscow, which was particularly difficult for nonprofessional Caucasians to obtain, but under those conditions, I was afraid the situation could change at any moment.

Then, on August 22 it was all over. Gorbachev was miraculously healed but severely weakened politically. It was time for me to go home.

- To be continued...-

The End of The Empire and Soviet Experiment in Afghanistan

My father's death was quick and painless, for him. The death of the Soviet Union was slow. It was marked by periods of deterioration, followed by short surges of power for the old communist leaders. Iraq, too, is suffering a long painful death. Former leaders and those who held privileged positions are fighting to retain their power. Of course, the details differ significantly, but the general story is the same. As the old regime dies, the coalition forces are playing midwife to the difficult birth of a new order. For me, it felt like déjà vu all over again.

In June 1986 I had begun working at the Executive Committee of the Red Cross for the USSR. I had a job typical of the communist era: I was assigned to the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and it was my responsibility to use my language skills to review open and public information published by Western agencies regarding Soviet-American relations. I assessed the information and reported to the former USSR ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, and later to Valentin Falin, former Soviet ambassador to West Germany, as well as Dmitry Lisovolik, who headed up the U.S./Canada division of the Department.

I met Nikolai at the Medvedkovo metro station in a suburb of Moscow in November 1988. Moscow still was the capital of an empire that was destined to collapse in just few years. Nikolai was telling me about his past experiences in Afghanistan as a former spetsnaz (Soviet Special Forces) member. Seven hundred members of this elite spetsnaz, under the commander named Ruslan, stormed President Hafizullah Amen's palace in winter 1979. That marked the beginning of the ten-year Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The reason for the invasion: The Soviets decided that the pro-Soviet Afghan president was not pro-Soviet enough.

Afghanistan once again became a battleground of empires. Many years later I would be fascinated to learn from the BBC that Ruslan, who now lives in Moscow, and a woman, who as a girl had survived the onslaught in the Afghan president's palace, would be connected through VTC. More than thirty years later she was asking Ruslan difficult moral questions. Almost everybody in the palace was murdered that night as part of the former Soviet military doctrine, which ultimately led to more than one million Afghan

deaths, destruction of the country, and loss of hearts and minds of Afghans.

Nikolai is a huge, athletically built guy in a primitive wheelchair that he moves with his hands. He returned from Afghanistan after being ambushed by Afghan Mujahedeen (holy warriors) and lost legs. Despite his youth he seemed to be completely lost and morally devastated. He blamed the West and China for the support of mujahedeen and Afghans for the betrayal. He was telling me that many Afghans were calling them friends and brothers but then turned against them and joined the insurgency. He was repeatedly asking what went wrong and why the “internationalist duty” of the Soviets was not appreciated and welcomed. He said that the country was making huge sacrifices: militarily, politically, and economically. Yet he still believed in the popular notion in the country that Afghanistan was going to become the sixteenth Soviet Republic of the USSR and he still considered himself a proud Soviet citizen. “Nobody can defeat our country; our country is the greatest!” he proudly declared.

He showed me the brochure (below) given to him and his comrades as a part of the Soviet counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics in Afghanistan. More than twenty years later I see the equivalent of those materials with “do’s” and “don’ts” disseminated to U.S. troops being deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. The brochure, published in 1987, contains prohibitions for Soviet troops serving in Afghanistan:



- 1) Do not enter into unsanctioned contacts.
- 2) Do not try to talk to local women.
- 3) Do not visit private stores or individuals to buy goods, alcoholic beverages or drugs.
- 4) Do not accept any gifts from local officials or individuals.
- 5) Do not take your clothes off for sunbathing in front of locals.
- 6) Keep the secrecy while discussing military topics, be aware that many Afghans are fluent in Russian.

Figure 1.2 Soviet Soldier Cultural Awareness Guide. Picture and translation from Soviet Guide given to the author in the 1980s by a SPETZNAZ member. Author's personal collection.ⁱ

The country of which I was then a citizen no longer exists. The Army, in which I served, luckily before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, is also gone.



Figures 1.2 and 1.3 The author in the Soviet Army, 1974-1976 and Russian Strategic Military Culture. Graphic created by the author, which includes his personal collection in the Soviet Army.ⁱⁱ (photos are taken by a Soviet Army photographer on Soviet military base in the city of Volzhskiy, Volgograd Oblast, Russia, USSR in 1974 and on the Soviet military base in the city of Kaliningrad, Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia, USSR respectively). He compares his 1970s military uniform with present Russian military uniform as a reflection of the Russian Strategic Military Culture.

The Accords of April 14, 1988 included the principles of non-interference and non-intervention, the voluntary return of Afghan refugees, and interrelationships for the settlement of the situation. The phased withdrawal of foreign troops was supposed to begin on 15 May. The U.S. and the USSR also signed a declaration on international guarantees, stating they would both refrain from any form of interference and intervention. In the first three months, it was reported that some 50,183 foreign troops had withdrawn, another 50,100 left between 15 August 1988 and 15 February 1989. During the withdrawal, troop convoys came under attack by Afghan fighters, 72 Soviets were killed. The total withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Afghanistan was completed on 15 February 1989. In a symbolic move, Lieutenant General Boris Gromov, commander of the Soviet contingent in Afghanistan was the last to leave the country.

I remember the TV images when he turned the last time towards the Afghan territory and walked away. He was the last Soviet Soldier to walk from Afghanistan back into Soviet territory. These images of the Soviet troops withdrawing from Afghanistan over the bridge to the former Soviet Central Asian Republic still live in my memory.ⁱⁱⁱ

Original text in Russian and Azeri

С думой о матери.

Я часто думал о тебе
В минуты горести душевной
В минуты недуга, разочарований
В дни долгих, тяжких расставаний
Всегда была со мною ты.

Стремился мысленно к тебе я
В душе своей тоску тая
Делился, спрашивал
И ты, являлась.

И как в былые годы
Далекой юности моей
Садилась рядом, делила боль мою и грусть
И становилось легче.

Ну как живешь сынок, скажи
Как ешь, как пьешь, как спишь, и лишь

Не мог тогда сказать я ей
Родимой матери моей
Что болен я давно и тяжело
Болезнью сердца и души
Что не нашёл я в жизни этой
То, что затаилось где-то
И это...

Зачем живу я, ведь не знаю
Не в силах вынести ту долю
Которую судьба дала
Нужна ли женщина, жена или друг
Способный устранить недуг
Души моей, не знаю.

Но нет жены, друзей надёжных
В минуты трудные способных
Понять меня.

Лишь ты родная понимаешь
Горячим сердцем обнимаешь
Порывы горести моей.

Жизнь так скучна, глупа и сера
Когда тебе нужны сокровища, или слава?!
А может Вера?!
Способная возвысить дни твои

Вдохнуть в тебя сокровища иные
Ведущие пути прямые
К счастью!

Не вера в бога и в чертей
А вера в жизнь, в самих людей!
Вот где таится к счастью ключик!
И станет жизнь намного лучше
Без лжи, корысти, злых затей
Среди надёжных мне друзей.

Я жить хочу дыша полнее грудью!
Но вновь вокруг меня одни лишь судьи...
Они строги, мрачны и недоступны
Они готовы выполнить свой долг
Прикрытый маской лживой чести.

(Лето 1989 г./ Summer 1989)

Диалог.

Приснился сон мне как-то ночью
Что вижу я воочию
Христа, сошедшего ко мне с небес.

Взглянул он грозно вопрошая
Скажи сын мой в чем видишь ты
Сей жизни смысл?

Что сделал ты во благо людям

За тридцать три прошедших лет?

Я в тридцать три вознёсся в небо
Устав от жизни сей мирской
Поняв всю тщетность тех усилий
Чтоб преобразить сей мир людской.

Сумеешь ль ты познать то счастье
Которое сулят теперь?
Пока есть глупость и бесчестье
Не будет в жизни без потерь.

А ты останься Человеком!
Не преступай чрез честь и долг
Ни ради славы, ни богатства
Не связывай цепями рабства
Себя и душу!

Живи, пусть жизнь тебя ласкает
Своей чарующей рукой
А не глупец тебя толкает
Свершать поступки, как слепой.

Ведь жизнь одна, без повторенья
Ты проживаешь день за днём
Так пусть же без совести зазренья
Пройдёт она своим путём!

(Лето 1989 г./Summer 1989)

Легенда о любви и дружбе **(или хитрости и мудрости)**

Давно ли это было иль недавно
Не это важно, важен смысл
Который скрытно или явно
Заложен здесь поверь не вымысел.

В пустыне знойной и безводной
Старик и молодой в беде
Теперь спасенье лишь в воде.

Лишь влага к жизни их вернёт
Придаст им силы и толкнёт
К свершениям новым и делам
Которые вершить поклялись
Деля невзгоды пополам.

И вот вдали вдруг дерево увидел он
И крикнул – там вода!
И устремился старик туда
Забыв от счастья свои преклонные года
Окрылённый сладостью надежды.

Но достигнув дерева того
Не нашёл он влаги долгожданной

Лишь образ сказочный желанный.

Тут спор великий завязался

Чья будет девушка сия?

Младой сказал моя

Старик сказал моя.

Тогда старик по праву лет

Сказал,-довольно, нет

Так мы не уладим спор наш жаркий.

А мы взойдём на дерево высокое

Чтоб посмотреть на горизонт далёкий

Чтобы найти источника следы

Ибо без живительной воды

Нам жизни нет.

Но есть условие одно

Ты должен сохранить одежду

Не повредив её.

И тот, кто сделает сие

Назовёт ту девушку своей.

Ты мудр – сказал младой почтенно

Да будет так

Да будет так – сказал старик.

На дерево полез старик

Но он был мудр и умён
Поэтому, сначала он
Раздевшись, сложил одежду под деревом.

Но спустившись с дерева старик
Не нашёл ни девушки, ни молодого лик.

Так пусть же живёт во веки веков
Хитрость молодых и мудрость стариков!

(Ноябрь 1989/November 1989)

Уроки горькие твои.

Азербайджан—страна огней
Объята горем и страданием
Попрали честь твоих детей
Стреляли в наших матерей
Без тени чувства сострадания.

Январь кровавый! Навечно ты
Останешься в сердцах народа
Душа кричит, что сделал ты?!
Премудрый страж, хозяин рода!

О боль моя! Земля моя!
Закрыли веки сыновья
Порыв стремленья не тая
К свободе вечной, сладострастной.

Но жертвы эти не напрасны,
Хоть и мучения ужасны
Твоей страдающей души.

Народ живёт и будет жить
Надеждой, верою. Служить
Идеям счастья и добра
Не утопая в тине зла.

И мудрость жизни сохраняя
Не преступив через порог
Ожесточенья,
Он должен лишь извлечь урок
Который будет ему впрок
От прошлого ошибок повторенья.

(Март 1990 г./ March 1990)

Жене и другу посвящаю.
(Сбылись мечты)

Если счастлива ты
То значит счастлив и я
Так будь же счастлива
Любимая моя!

Слова я эти повторяю часто
Смотря на лик твой искренний и ясный
Стремился долго я среди лжи и фальши
Испить любви и искренности чаши.

И вот явилась ты

И вновь вздохнул я полной грудью
Сбылись заветные мечты
И вот теперь со мною ты
И я расстался с грустью.

(Март 1990 г./ March 1990)

Кинжал мой нынче заржавел.

Кинжал мой нынче заржавел
Язык мой перестал быть сладок
Душой я также обеднел
До хамства стал я часто падох.

Весь мир в пучине зла и лести
Страна моя живёт без чести
Плохие шлют нам нынче вести
Хромает “перестройка” бестия.

То здесь, то там слышны стенанья
Не оправдали ожиданья
Мужи высокие в Кремле.

Ну что же, ведь это лишь начало
Как часто говорить нам стали
Большого важного пути.

И никуда нам не уйти
Ведь мы великая страна
Специфика у нас одна
Во всей вселенной нет такой

Советской, чистой и родной.

(Сентябрь 1990/September 1990)

Моя мечта.

Лети, лети моя мечта
Взметнувшись из глубин души
Ты как вселенная вечна
Несёшь в себе надежд лучи.

Лучи надежд неисполнимых
На вечность счастья бытия
Потерь души невосполнимых
Мечтами заменяю я.

Но нет, мне скажет твёрдо рок
Мечты мечтами, какой в них прок
Ты должен извлекать урок
От жизни сей неблагодарной
И как всеведущий пророк
Смотреть вперёд с прицелом дальним.

Ты должен выполнить свой долг
Перед людьми и пред собой
Да будет в помощь тебе бог
Для цели благородной той.

(Октябрь 1991 г./October 1991)

Həsər olunur mənim Nigar gızıma.

Sən mənim gəlbimsən
Mənim sevincimsən
Sevimli tarımda
Əsas bir simimsən
Ürəyimin nurusan
Gözlərimin şurusan
Mənim əziz balamsan
Yeganə nigarımsan.

Bu gəddar dünyada
Səni nə gözlər
Sənin taleyində
Varmı qəfəslər.

Yoxsa bu aləmdə
Bir bül-bül olub
Azad bir uçuşda
Ağaca gonub
Cəh-cəh vuracagsan
Xöşbəxt bir anda
Sonra uçacagsan
Arzularında.

(Noyabr 1991 il/November 1991)

Стих о человеческом.

Боюсь я жизни этой вечной
Вступить хочу на путь я млечный
Когда пером моим беспечным
Сложу я стих о человеческом.

Прошла пора очарованья
Настало время осознания
Значения бытия людской.

О человек! Ты – Бог природы!
Вернись в неё, в свою породу
Извечной мудрости в угоду.

О человек! Ты – часть природы!
Предав её, ты предал Бога
Верни её, свою природу
С сознанием отданного долга.

(Декабрь 1991 г./December 1991)

Отрезвление.

(посвящается азербайджанской интеллигенции)

Испил я чашу отрезвления
Настало время озаренья
Полны мы были чувств стремленья
Готовы были к униженьям
К тяжёлым горьким расставаньям

Душевым тяжким ожиданиям.

За что ж страдали мы так долго
О чём мечтали мы, старались
В жиру и масле не катались
А чести кодекса боялись
И как могли бесстрашно дрались.

И вот сейчас мы оказались
У края пропасти крутой
И остановлен бег наш быстрый
Один лишь взмах плети тугой.

Так вот дождались
Того, чего мы опасались.
Фронт строит счастье, для кого?
Народный, значит для народа?

Опять обман, опять надежды
И слышится лишь смех невежды
Лишь я теперь хозяин рода
Лишь я вершу судьбу народа
Родным моим, друзьям в угоду.

Так что же ты заблудший сын
Пропой же им души свой гимн
Пусть разверзнутся небеса
И совершатся чудеса.

И мир устроится вконец
И честь пойдёт с ним под венец.

Испил я чашу отрезвленья
Настало время озаренья.

(Январь 1993 г./January 1993)

Взгляд в душу. **(рассказ)**

Церковь была переполнена. Но она сразу привлекла моё внимание среди многих других девушек и парней, пришедших сегодня в эту небольшую московскую церквушку.

Меня поразило выражение её лица и глаз, сиявших под монотонное пение попа и старушек. Подойдя поближе я рассмотрел её.

Красивые светлые волосы, правильные черты лица, стройный стан, лет 19 не более.

Я стоял жадно вдыхая аромат её волос, но она была слишком поглощена своим, одним лишь только ей ведомым миром.

Глаза, её большие глаза излучали свет и нечто такое, что приводило сердце в трепет. Я с изумлением смотрел на неё, пытаюсь заглянуть в её внутренний мир.

Служба кончилась. Поставив свечку, закутавшись в шерстяную шаль, она вслед за другими направилась к выходу. Я двинулся за ней. Я должен был разгадать её тайну, полностью познать её.

Любопытство, смешивающееся с сильным желанием обладать ею толкало меня.

Стоял мороз - трескучий, лютый. Всё застыло вокруг. Казалось нет силы, способной оживить заснувшую природу. Стужа, одна лишь стужа неумолимо пронизывающая сердца вечно жаждущие тепла и света.

Вскочив на подножку автобуса, я протиснулся поближе к ней. Она продолжала о чём-то думать, но теперь она была совершенно иной, такой-же как все.

Заметив мой пристальный взгляд, она отвела глаза. Я решился. Наклонившись к ней, я прошептал: - “Девушка, я погибаю!”.

От неожиданности она вздрогнула, затем удивлённо взглянула на меня и вдруг расхохоталась.

Она продолжала смеяться, а я лихорадочно обдумывал свой следующий шаг.

Вдруг, она также внезапно перестала смеяться и взглянула на меня.

Не выдержав её взгляда, я опустил глаза. Она пошла к выходу.

Но удача сопутствовала мне. Выходя из автобуса она подскользнулась, но подбежав я заботливо поддержал её, затем отошёл в сторону с невинным выражением лица.

Она снова взглянула на меня и улыбнулась. Какая же это была улыбка!

Наверное я многим бы пожертвовал ради этой улыбки.

В тот холодный вечер меня словно обдало живительным теплом, исходящим из самого человеческого сердца.

Я подошёл к ней и долго рассмаривал её прекрасное лицо. Её пухлые, чуть приоткрытые губки манили неведомой силой.

“Так что же с вами случилось?”- Спросила она и её губы снова сложились в улыбку.

Я не мог понять, что со мной происходит. Передо мной стояла красивая девушка и смотрела на меня большими, ласкающими глазами. Я же не мог произнести ни слова, мной овладело странное состояние, я словно бредил.

Наконец, я пробормотал:

- “Сейчас, в церкви, когда я увидел вас, ваши глаза, я понял что вы мне нужны как воздух. Мне кажется, что я знал вас всю свою жизнь.”

Женщины приходили и уходили из моей жизни, не оставляя в ней сколь-нибудь глубоких следов. Но тут, страх перед тем что она скажет “нет” овладел мною. Я весь дрожал, чувствуя своё бессилие.

Прищурив глаза она спросила:

-“Вам не холодно?”

Только сейчас я заметил, что стою без шапки и в растёгнутом пальто.

-“Вот вам номер моего телефона, позвоните мне завтра в 9 часов вечера,”-

Сказала она и обдала меня теплом своих удивительных глаз.

- "А теперь я прошу вас не ходите за мной,-произнесла она медленно, я обещаю что очень скоро мы с вами увидимся. Но боюсь, что после встречи..." Не договорив, она повернулась и пошла.

Я долго смотрел ей вслед и вдруг, вспомнил что забыл спросить её имя. "Как вас зовут!"-Крикнул я хриплым голосом. Но она продолжала идти не оглядываясь. Я побежал за ней. Догнав её, я взглянул ей в лицо. От ужаса я вскрикнул: вместо прекрасного, знакомого лица на меня смотрело сморщенное лицо старухи с ухмыляющимся беззубым ртом.

Не знаю, сколько времени я бежал. Наконец, споткнувшись, я уткнулся в сугроб. Холодный снег отрезвил меня. Что происходит? Кто она? Эти вопросы не давали мне покоя.

Всю ночь я не сомкнул глаз. А утром, не дожидаясь вечера я решил позвонить моей таинственной незнакомке.

После четвёртого длинного гудка на другом конце провода подняли трубку. Я молчал, не решаясь заговорить.

"Слушаю вас,-послышался в трубке знакомый мне голос,-говорите."

"Здравствуйте,-Сказал я срывающимся голосом, это я. Мы вчера с вами..."

"А-а-а, это вы. Как вы вчера добрались?"

У меня мелькнула мысль, а не приснилось ли мне вчера всё это?

Она говорила со мной как ни в чём не бывало: ласкающим, заботливым голосом, как тогда во время нашего знакомства, до того как...

Но ведь я помню, что добрёл до дому и хозяйка квартиры, у которой я снимал комнату, открыла мне дверь и испуганно взглянула на меня.

Подойдя к зеркалу, я не узнал себя: бледное, вытянутое, встревоженное лицо с блестящими глазами, пальто в снегу, шарф волочится в ногах, шапка в руке. Значит это был не сон.

Тем временем она ждала ответа.

"Хорошо добрался, спасибо-Выдавил я. Когда мы с вами можем увидеться?"

"А вы не передумали?-" Как мне показалось, чуть насмешливо, но в то же время с еле заметной тоской в голосе спросила она. Видимо вы неплохой человек и если что-мне будет жаль," - Тихо добавила моя незнакомка.

Её последние слова прозвучали настолько загадочно и с явным намёком на что-то, что в какое-то мгновение я хотел повесить трубку и на этом прекратить всю эту

историю. Но перед моими глазами снова всплыло её улыбающееся, прекрасное лицо, ласковый взгляд и все сомнения снова рассеялись.

Вечером мы встретились. Олеся, так звали мою новую знакомую, пришла почти ровно в назначенное время. Вечер прошёл в небольшом уютном кафе, в который мы зашли по предложению Олеси.

Здесь её знали и были, как мне показалось, ей очень рады.

Я это объяснил для себя её общительностью и простотой характера.

Вечером следующего дня Олеся пригласила меня к себе.

Мы сидели на кухне и пили кофе. Олеся рассказывала о своей жизни:

“Отец часто приходил домой пьяный и начинал ругаться и бить мать.

Я плакала. В начале это останавливало отца. Он подходил ко мне, обнимал меня, вытирал мои детские слёзы и обещал что этого больше не повторится. Но на следующий день всё повторялось:—ругань, побои, слёзы.

Потом отец вообще перестал обращать на меня внимание, скандалы дома участились. Мне тогда было лет 9-10. Мать моя безропотно переносила все страдания.

За нас никому было заступиться. Из родственников никого не было, а соседи делали вид, что ничего не видят.

Никто не хотел вмешиваться в чужие дела, все жили закрывшись в своих квартирах, словно в клетках.

Уже тогда я почувствовала какая это страшная вещь—человеческое равнодушие.

Я помню как после очередного пьяного скандала отец прямо в одежде завалился спать. Через несколько минут он уже громко храпел.

Мать уложила меня, села рядом и молча смотрела на меня полными от слёз глазами. Я тогда не знала, что мать уже была тяжело больна.

Через два месяца она умерла.

Я осталась с отцом. Отец стал приходить домой всё реже и реже...

-Продолжение следует-

Dr. Mahir J. Ibrahimov Biography

Below are the links to author's latest autobiographical book and video trailer:

<https://kansaspres.ku.edu/9780700632237/across-cultures-and-empires/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amvjJrfjgsg>



Dr. Ibrahimov (also known as Dr. I.) is the Director of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) Cultural and Area Studies Office (CASO), the U.S Army Combined Arms Center. As the first U.S. Army Culture and Foreign Language Advisor, he established a successful Culture and Foreign Language Program during the U.S. and coalition military and related Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere at that time. It was recognized as the Army-wide model, and he was promoted to become the Army's Senior Culture and Foreign Language Advisor. In that position, and later as Director of CASO, he continues developing and improving the program with an outreach extending across the Army and beyond with a variety of educational programs, including publishing, guest speakers, direct support to CGSC classes, live panels, video podcasts, international cooperation, and research.

Dr. Ibrahimov has been tasked to support the U.S. Army Chief of Staff's study. As part of the study he traveled to Ukraine and provided follow on recommendations to the U.S. Army leadership in support of U.S. national security.

Based on his extensive and first-hand knowledge, regional and global expertise, Dr. I has been regularly invited overseas to support NATO and other partners to inform and shape NATO and Partnership for Peace policy development.

Dr. Ibrahimov provided vital assistance as a multi-lingual cultural adviser to U.S. forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom II in Iraq and became the subject of a Department of Defense newsreel, "Jack of All Languages. It was another combat experience, which Mahir has also witnessed first-hand.

He has also instructed U.S. diplomats in languages and cultures at the Department of State. Mahir was the President of the U.S. Corporation on education and culture in Washington, DC, as well as the professor at the American University in Washington, D.C. He has also served as a senior consultant for several American multinational companies.

He is the author and editor of several books among numerous other publications, including in foreign languages. His new fifth book "Across Cultures and Empires: An Immigrant's Odyssey from the Soviet Army to the U.S. War in Iraq and American Citizenship" was recently published by a major U.S. publisher.

This is a fast-paced narrative, based upon the author's experiences, and is already *gaining a significant international traction among the scholars, public and movie industry.*

His other books "Cultural Perspectives, Geopolitics & Energy Security of Eurasia: Is the Next Conflict Imminent?" "Great Power Competition: The Changing Landscape of Global Geopolitics," and "Life Looking Death in the Eye" have also received an extensive recognition, including from the Army leadership. Related video interviews and trailers are available for public.

Dr. I's expertise has been featured in global media outlets such as BBC World News, Los Angeles Times, movie industry and U.S. Department of Defense venues.

He is fluent in multiple languages and versed in many cultures. *He is married with one daughter, who is an active-duty officer with the U.S. Army.*











}

My Hero



(the author's daughter wrote on the back of the photo after his return from deployment to Iraq)

ⁱ Soviet Soldier Cultural Awareness Guide. Picture and translation from Soviet Guide given to the author in the 1980s by a SPETZNAZ member. Author's personal collection.

ⁱⁱ The author in the Soviet Army, 1974-1976 and Russian Strategic Military Culture. Graphic created by the author, which includes his personal collection in the Soviet Army (photos are taken by a Soviet Army photographer on Soviet military base in the city of Volzhskiy, Volgograd Oblast, Russia, USSR in 1974 and on the Soviet military base in the city of Kaliningrad, Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia, USSR respectively). He compares his 1970s military uniform with present Russian military uniform as a reflection of the Russian Strategic Military Culture.

ⁱⁱⁱ E.g., see Marshall, Phased Withdrawal, Conflict Resolution and State Reconstruction, Conflict Research Studies Centre (Watchfield: Defence Academy of the UK, 2006. Accessed a: [http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/ca/06\(29\)AM.pdf/view](http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/ca/06(29)AM.pdf/view).)