

**KIRSAN ILYUMZHINOV**  
**The President's**  
**Crown of Thorns**

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*Introduction by Sam Sloan*

## **The President's Crown of Thorns**

**by KIRSAN ILYUMZHINOV**

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This is an amazing, remarkable and noteworthy book, although not because of its connection with chess, because most of the chess events described in this book are familiar to readers of ChessBase and “The Week in Chess”. Rather, it is because this book describes the break-up of the Soviet Union and provides an autobiography of how a man realizing the huge changes in the process of taking place in Russian society was able to become a millionaire.

Most of the public commentary about this book has been concerned with the title to Chapter 8 on page 143: “It only takes two weeks to have a man killed”. However, this has been misrepresented out of context. The correct context is that in 1993, following the break-up on the Soviet Union, free elections were going to be held for the first time in Kalmykia. Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, a young businessman, decided to run on the platform that he was going to abolish the KGB. This made a lot of people unhappy, especially the KGB. Kirsan received a threatening telephone call in which the caller said:

“You go everywhere without bodyguards. It only takes two weeks to have a man killed today. Think about it.”

Most people, upon receiving a call like that, would have immediately dropped out of the election race. Kirsan did not do so and was elected in a field with 14 candidates.

How Kirsan unexpectedly became the President of FIDE only two years later is another amazing story, but I will leave that for the book to explain.

Since the publication of this book in 1998, Kirsan has been re-elected President of FIDE four times, each time in the face of significant opposition, with each country having one vote. In 1998, he defeated a slate headed by Grandmaster Jaime

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Sunye Neto by 87-46. In 2002, he defeated a slate headed by French Grandmaster Bachar Kouatly. In 2006 in Torino, Italy, he defeated a slate headed by businessman Bessel Kok by 96-54. In 2010 in Khanty-Mansiysk Siberia, he defeated a slate headed by Grandmaster and former World Chess Champion Anatoly Karpov by 95 to 55.

I was personally present at the 2010 election in Khanty-Mansiysk Siberia and I plan to write a book about that if I can ever get around to it, because it is easily worth a whole book.

The United States Chess Federation tried to defeat Kirsan for re-election in 2010 by using the American way. The USCF filed a lawsuit to kick Kirsan off the ballot. The USCF also sued to remove former **USCF President Beatriz Marinello** from the Kirsan election slate. The USCF's lawsuit against FIDE, Beatriz Marinello and the Kirsan re-election campaign was unsuccessful. The decision dated September 27, 2010 by the **Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne, Switzerland** is available at <http://www.tas-cas.org/recent-decision> . Now, FIDE through its treasurer **Nigel Freeman of Bermuda** is asking the court for one million dollars in damages and attorney's fees.

When it came to the actual vote count, FIDE put an American, Carol Jarecki, in charge of the vote count and the vote was 95 to 65, almost exactly the same as the count in the 2006, which was 96 to 54.

So, it seems that Kirsan will be with us a long time. I am suggesting a new title: President-for-Life.

In this book, Kirsan explains on page 232 that the first crisis he had to deal with when he became President of FIDE was a controversy involving Zsuzsa Polgar. Kirsan "settled" this problem by paying her the money she was demanding out of his own pocket. He did not know Zsuzsa well at this time. Zsuzsa has been having constant disputes with organizers involving money since she was 12 years old. It is not a good idea to pay her the money she is demanding because she will

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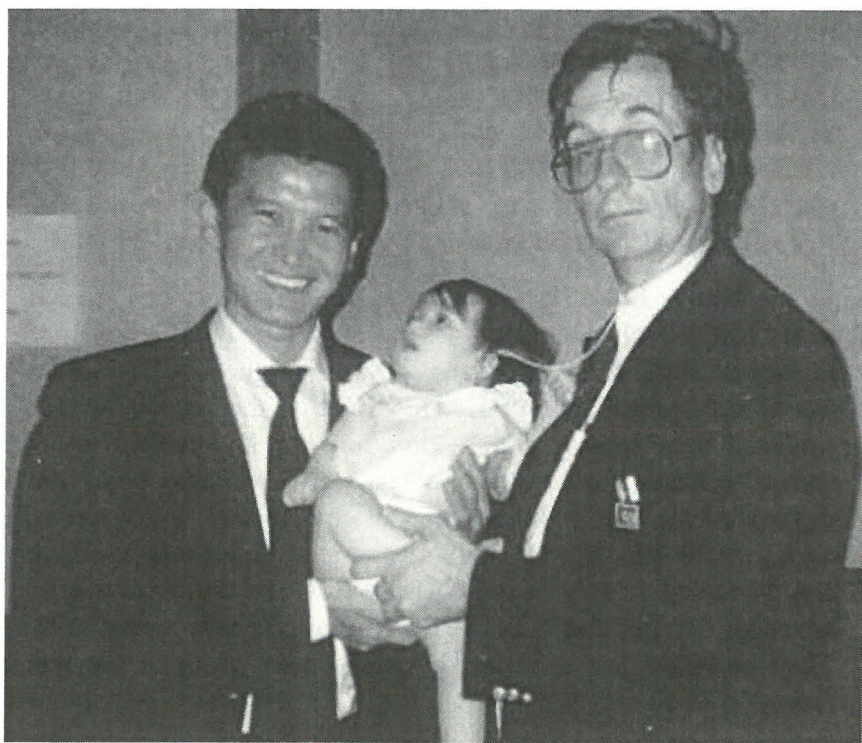
just demand more. The USCF insiders decided to use her against me and the result was that she sued them all and the USCF had to pay \$600,000 in attorney's fees. Now FIDE wants \$1,000,000 (one million dollars) in attorneys fees from the USCF when the the USCF has not even paid off the \$600,000 yet. As a result, one wag suggests that "USCF" stands for "Usually Sues Chess Federations".

Kirsan Ilyumzhinov came to the USA to give a speech to the USCF Delegates at a meeting in Cherry Hill New Jersey in August 2002. Bill Goichberg, the ruler of the USCF, walked out of the speech in protest. He said that the reason for his walk-out was human rights violations in Kalmykia, but it seemed obvious that the real reason was Goichberg being the dictator of the USCF did not like another dictator encroaching on his bailiwick. Hardly anybody noticed Goichberg walking out. I noticed it only because Goichberg had announced it in advance. I doubt that Kirsan or anybody else was aware of it. They probably just thought Goichberg was going to the rest room.

I prefer the pragmatic approach. We must recognize that Kirsan is the ruler of the World Chess Federation and deal with him accordingly. Also, it is not fair to call Kirsan a dictator because he has now been elected four times to four-year terms in fair and hotly contested elections, unlike Goichberg who simply buys his elections. Since I knew that Kirsan was a successful politician and successful politicians like to kiss babies, I offered my baby to be kissed by Kirsan. Here is the picture with my 8-month-old daughter Sandra in 2002.

Kirsan has certainly used the power of the press. Although often criticized for this, he has gotten chess in the news in surprising ways. In this book in Chapter 10, he describes how he was searching for the money to hold the World Chess Federation Title Match between Karpov and Kamsky, when Saddam Hussein offered to put up two million dollars in prize money provided the match were held in Iraq.

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**Kirsan Ilyumzhinov with Sandra Sloan, aged 8 months, and Sam Sloan in August 2002 in Cherry Hill New Jersey. Photo by Maxine Brady, wife of Marshall Chess Club President Frank Brady**

The reason was that Saddam Hussein wanted to break the UN sanctions against Iraq and a mere \$2 million was a small price to pay. However, the World Chess Community was outraged when Kirsan accepted the offer from Iraq. Finally Kirsan had to withdraw the acceptance and hold the match in the Republic of Kalmykia. Kirsan paid the prizes himself.

When the Government of Iraq was tottering and about to fall, Kirsan, always loyal to his old friends, flew into Iraq to see his old friend Saddam Hussein. At this time, the UN was imposing a no-fly zone, shooting down any airplane flying into or out of Iraq. So, in order to get out Kirsan got special permission to fly his airplane out of Iraq without being shot down. Thus, he made history, being the last person to see

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Saddam Hussein and to fly out of Iraq before the US Army invaded Iraq.

It would seem hard to top this one, but Kirsan did so with another old friend, Gadhafi of Libya. It must be said that Kirsan has friends in high places. While the UN was bombing Iraq, Kirsan felt the irrepressible urge to play a game of chess, so he flew into Libya to play chess with Gadhafi.



**Kirsan Ilyumzhinov playing chess with Gadhafi in Libya on June 14, 2011.**

However, journalists watching this chess game commented that Gadhafi did not seem to know how to play chess or at least he was not playing very well and Kirsan seemed to be teaching him. Finally, Kirsan declared the game to be a draw. The score of the moves of this momentous chess game has yet to reach ChessBase.

Once again, Kirsan got out of Libya alive before Gadhafi was killed. Any person brave enough to defy the wishes of the KGB in order to run for election in Kalmykia would not be worried by a little thing like associations with

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Saddam Hussein and Gadhafi.

Kirsan saw another chance to gain publicity for chess with the “Ground Zero Mosque” affair. A big item in the news arose with a offer to buy a building near Ground Zero, the place where two airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center on 9/11, for an Islamic Center. There was a tremendous outrage and uproar when the news broke that a Muslin mosque would be built there.

After Donald Trump topped the bid price for the building where the “Ground Zero Mosque” would be established by bidding \$7.5 million, Kirsan jumped in with an offer to use some of his pocket change to pay \$10 million for the same building to establish a chess center there. The headline of the New York Post on September 16, 2010 was **“World Chess Federation Chief Kirsan Ilyumzhinov bids for Ground Zero Mosque Site”**.

I was personally at a press conference in Khanty-Mansiysk Siberia in Russia when Kirsan discussed this proposal to buy the World Trade Center Mosque site. This itself is an example of how small the world has become. Here we were ten time zones away from New York City. Khanty-Mansiysk is almost exactly on the opposite side of the world from New York City, yet we were discussing it like it was some place across the street. I was going to ask Kirsan if he realized that the entire “Ground Zero Mosque” incident was really a fake incident, as the building is several blocks away and more than a kilometer away from Ground Zero and no mosque was ever proposed to be built there, just a prayer room for workers in the neighborhood who needed a place to pray.

Kirsan did not take questions from the audience so I did not get to ask my question, but it quickly became apparent that Kirsan knew all of this already.

**Sam Sloan**  
**San Rafael California USA**  
**October 26, 2011**

## Chapter 1. DUALITY

I open my eyes. The city is still asleep, but the emerging sun has already colored the steppe pale white. I take my climbing irons out of my cache and hurry outside to the telegraph-pole which the boys were climbing yesterday, each marking the highest point he had reached with paint.

I fasten on the irons and, holding the paint brush in my teeth, put my hands around the slippery pole and climb higher and higher and higher still. I reach the nearest marks. The sharp points of the climbing irons make a crunching sound as they bite into the wood of the pole. One step up and then another. At last! Here is the uppermost stroke, painted yesterday by the boy next door. I climb still higher. Now the last mark is right against my stomach. No one has climbed this high! I can imagine how surprised the boys will be today when they see my mark. How they will wonder who made it!

I reach up with the brush and paint a thick stroke. "I've won! I've done it! I've overcome my fear! I've managed! I've managed!" I am full of triumph. I look down and feel tingles creeping down my spine. The ground seems far beneath me. What if I... Suddenly my hands become sticky and slip off the pole. I fall over backwards and see the world around me turning upside down...

I am hanging down head-first, my hand-made grapnels caught in the wood of the telegraph pole. I am immobilized by fear. There is not a person on the street. Crying or calling out for help would be shameful; the boys would laugh at me. The firm dry earth is below me and the sun rises over my feet. And suddenly for the first time in my life I make a great discovery: the world is upside down!.. And this sense of living in an upside down world did not leave me for many years. I think

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that is why I still remember this seemingly insignificant episode from my childhood.

I was born on April, 5 in 1962, two years before the ousting of Khrushchev and the beginning of the Brezhnev era. The Khrushchev “thaw” was coming to a close, yet the spirit of freedom released from behind the barbed wire of the ruling ideology was still animating the country. And yet...

After a thirteen-year exile imposed by Stalin, during which half of my people perished in the snows of Siberia, in 1958 the nation was rehabilitated and the surviving Kalmyks returned home. However, fear had settled deep into the older generation. They were never able to rid themselves of it.

But as for us, we were luckier. We were born free on the free land of our forefathers. And I never experienced the pain and humiliation of the Stalin years. But at this time I knew very little about all this, since people were reluctant to talk of the past. The Party, having admitted its mistakes, began to tighten the ideological screws again. “Enough of this talk of exile and prison camps! The people have to focus on accomplishing our great ideas, on building communism!”

However, it was impossible to forget the recent past when there was not a family that had not lost a brother, a sister, a father or a mother in the severe cold of Siberia's vast expanses. We all remembered that. We kept silent, but we remembered. It was only that the adults never discussed this in front of the children. They were afraid that one of us might blurt something out on the street, in the yard or at the kindergarten and then... So they kept quiet when kids were around, as well as at work, in meetings, and when they were out and about. People knew the rules of the game with the government.

This kind of existence, with life and conscience split in two, became as natural and organic for our generation as the

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need to breathe and move. We were born in this upside-down world and considered it to be normal since we had never known or seen anything different.

I first saw the light of day that early morning, at four minutes to six, in the Kalmyk Year of the Tiger. And I think this may explain why I have been a very early riser all my life. The Year of the Tiger is an austere year. "And the days will come when the souls of the believers will dwindle to the size of an elbow and man himself will become as faint-hearted and timorous as a hare, and the lustre of Buddha's great and pure teaching will grow dim. Then the people will indulge in drinking and greed, and the worthless will rule the world. Then he will emerge, the Tiger, the powerful protector of the Earth and the Lord of all oriental lands. The Earth will be shaken by his horrible roar and the worthless and miserable rulers will scatter in fear, there will be no more lies and the minds of the stray will regain clarity ..." the Kalmyk horoscope reads. It predicted that this would be the year when the struggle between the opposing forces of black and white would reach its climax.

I do not know whether the above is true, but my birth was marked by the first conflict in our family. I was my parents' second son, Vyacheslav was the first-born. After his birth my parents longed for a girl. On the night I was born, father had a dream that his brother Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, known all over Kalmykia for his heroic deeds during the Civil War, knocked on the window. He was wearing a leather jacket with a Mauser pistol fastened to his belt. He was staring hard at my father, wordless:

- "Can it be that you're still alive, Kirsan?" father asked. "Weren't you killed during the Civil War, huh?" Kirsan shook his head and vanished.

That same night my grandmother, Sulda Badmanovna, saw her own father Badma in a dream. He shook his finger at her

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and said: "You will have a grandson. Name him Badma" And granny promised to fulfill her father's request.

Shortly afterward, my aunt came to announce the arrival of a boy weighing 3.8 kilos.

- "Kirsan has been born," father said.
- "What are you talking about," my grandmother exclaimed. "He must be called Badma, not Kirsan."

Each one stood his ground, unwilling to give in; it was the first discord in our family. For Kalmyks a man's word weighs more than a woman's. So when the time came to make out my birth certificate I was registered as Kirsan. Granny would not give in, however, and persisted stubbornly in calling me Badma. And since I spent most of the time with her, father and mother being at work, I did not know my real name, and answered to the name of Badma until I started school.

I do not remember when I started walking. It seems to me that the first steps I took were an attempt at running. I think I was rather naughty and mischievous and it was dangerous to leave me on my own. Every morning my grandmother would take me by the hand and hurry out for a tour of the shops to buy some food. In those years food was not that easy to buy. Things appeared briefly in food-stores but, if you were not quick, it would sell out, since there was never enough of anything for everyone. The moment meat, milk or butter appeared in a shop the customers lost control over themselves and rushed inside swearing and elbowing their way to the counter. One had to be fast and determined to get even the staples to stop the family from starving. People turned into animals. One had to be omnipresent to manage to get milk, meat, bread and fish.

I was falling behind my grandmother who walked too fast for me. I tripped over, fell, picked myself up and skipped after

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her struggling and whimpering. Granny almost dragged me on from queue to queue. By lunchtime my arm and shoulder began to ache and I was really terrified to think how the next morning grandmother would grab hold of my hand again and we would start the same wild-goose chase about town, racing from one queue to another. Seizing the moment when granny was breaking through the crowd to the shop-assistant, I would free myself and, pushing my way through the people's stomachs and legs, go outside and race back home at breakneck speed. I would hide somewhere and my grandmother would have to look for me for hours on end.

As a result she had no time to buy necessities and in the evening we had our supper without tea which, as is well known, is the essential ingredient of every Kalmyk meal.

This situation was untenable. The family council decided that I was sufficiently grown up to be taught how to live in a collective. After a great deal of painstaking legwork, applications to various administrative bodies, requests, letters and all that, I was finally admitted to a kindergarten.

I vividly remember my first day in the kindergarten. The new group lined up for a walk, lined up for lunch, and marched in formation to the toilet, to wash hands and to bed. I was absolutely unable to understand why I had to eat when I was not at all hungry. Why walk in formation? Why ever should I act like everybody else?

From the very start I felt a sense of inner resistance. I did not want to be like everyone else. I was scolded by the teacher repeatedly, and then I was made to stand in the corner. There I thought to myself why should I stay in this stupid corner like a fool? So I walked out, climbed over the fence and ran to join the boys in my street. Until late in the evening we raced about the neighborhood yards simulating war, and playing cops and robbers. I didn't realize that my parents by now were searching

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for me, all over town, and that they had raised the alarm with the police, the ambulance service and all the hospitals.

I came back home late in the evening. The following morning they would not accept me back in the kindergarten. "We do not want such kids," announced the kindergarten's head. I was overjoyed about this. Living in formation was not for me. It was from that very day that I began my street boy's loose life. That same summer I began to smoke and learned to fight one to one, and not to bawl with pain afterward. I also learned to overcome my fear of heights by climbing fire escapes onto the roofs of houses; I learned to stand up after I had fallen with a smile on my bruised and bleeding lips. I learned to keep my word on the street, for the street never forgives lies, cunning, chic cold-heartedness or treachery. The street taught me the severe laws of justice and comradeship. I bow before you, the streets of my boyhood!

My first fistfight: the boys from the neighboring courtyards paid us a visit to show us who was cock of the walk in our district. The gang was known as the "Strays". They came armed with opened penknives and waving wooden sticks. We were really scared. We had heard a lot about the menacing fame of the "Strays", and we felt jittery when they turned up on our street. I felt like breaking into a run and hiding. Two of our number rushed off home. Later, they were heartily derided by the whole street. For a long time afterward, they bore the brand of traitor. Perhaps the only reason that I still remember that fight is because it was my first encounter with treachery and cowardice.

We were playing football and the "Strays" ripped open our ball with their pen-knives before our very eyes. To us that patched-up ball was a real treasure. We were enraged and went for them. They outnumbered us, but we did not think about it at that moment. We were overcome by fury and fought with everything that came to hand: rocks, wooden sticks and such

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like. We wheezed, hollered from pain and fear and thrashed one another with abandon. My adversary, a scrawny, sunburned and sinewy boy, was an experienced street fighter. Deftly dodging my weak fists, he ducked under my arms and jabbed one right in my eye.

Suddenly I felt the light die out in my eyes and, in the ensuing darkness, pink, blue and green sparks burst open. Then I got it in the crotch. I choked with sharp pain and collapsed. The scrawny one grabbed hold of my hair and began thrusting my nose into the firm, brick-like earth. My nose was smashed and my face covered in blood. Several times I attempted to rise, but each time the scrawny one knocked me off my feet laughing nastily.

“Run, Kirsan, run!” I heard the boys shouting behind me. But I didn't want to run. I was choking with blind rage. Crying, I staggered to my feet and went for the scrawny one over and over again. Again he knocked me down expecting me to stay lying there. But I got up once more and, spreading dirt, blood and tears over my face and clenching my feeble fists, threw myself at the scrawny one.

“Stay down!” he hissed through his teeth. You can't hit a man when he's down, so you had better lie down.”

The scrawny boy's voice had betrayed his deeply concealed fear and suddenly I realized I was the winner.

After that scrimmage I spent several days at home in bed. When I recovered I went to the gym and joined a boxing team. There I learned to stand a punch, developed fast reactions and, among other things, realized that strong fists are far from being the most important attribute. In later years I often noticed that most conflicts start over nothing, because of inflated ambitions on both sides.

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Many years later, when they shut me up behind the sound-proof door of a solitary confinement cell in a KGB prison, and I found myself alone with my thoughts, I would for some reason vividly recall these episodes from my boyhood life on the street and the inviolable law: never betray your friends and never cringe before the powerful. And this notion of high morality inculcated by the street would help me not to break, to withstand the powerful pressure of the investigation system and to overcome fear.

But that would come many years later. In the meantime, we stealthily picked up cigarette stubs from the street, pilfered grown men's fags, ran to the ravine and smoked there sprawling on the sand, blowing smoke rings with a jaunty air. We were proud of our heroism and immeasurably happy that we had a secret, a true secret unknown to the grown-ups.

I am six. From morning till night I race about the sun-scorched, dusty streets of our small town. I am suntanned and grubby and have a lot of urgent things to do. I must find the treasures of the famous pirate Captain Flint who, according to Petka Shunkhurov, hoodwinked everybody into believing that his gold was buried on an island when in fact is hidden in our Kalmyk steppe near Elista. Also, Mitka Fiodorov is busy inventing a secret weapon in case we are attacked by our arch-enemies, the Americans, so after lunch I will have to go straight to his shed, help him finish his work, and test the bomb in the ravine before sundown. Mitka needs my help, so I will take three rusty nails and five match-boxes to him so that we can make powder from the match sulfur.

I have these urgent things to attend to, but my elder brother Vyacheslav sends me to the grocery shop to buy macaroni and then makes me scrub the floor and dust all the furniture. My brother is already a schoolboy. He is an excellent pupil and, during parents' meetings, the teachers always praise him to the skies. Vyacheslav is always busy learning his lessons. He won't

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understand that I've got a lot of things to do today and that nothing terrible will happen if we live without macaroni for one day. But my brother keeps insisting and I, head hung low, go to the shop, a hold-all in one hand and money in the other. My heart is full of resentment for my elder brother.

At lunch-time grandfather comes to play chess with me. It is our long-standing tradition. At first he taught me to play draughts; and later chess. He told me many stories and legends about the game of chess; in particular one about two pieces of grain. Once, while playing the Shah at chess, a player laid down the following condition: if he won the Shah would have to put two pieces of grain on the first square on the chess board, four on the second, eight on the third and so on. The Shah agreed and he lost the game. When they began adding up the winnings it turned out the amount of grain was so vast that the whole country would not be able to harvest it and fulfill the promise.

I became fascinated by chess; I would sit at the checker-board for hours forgetting everything. My ardent and unrestrained imagination as a child, influenced by the movies I had seen and the books I had read about outstanding men, all became oddly mixed up with my love of chess. The thirty-two white and thirty-two black checks on the board seemed to me to encompass the duality of the whole world. My love for chess has remained with me until this very day.

A Buddhist legend has it that two residents of heaven once descended to earth and started to play chess in the middle of the boundless steppe. They were approached by a very young fellow who was grazing a flock of sheep. He began to watch the game. When the game was over the Gods disappeared. When the herdsman looked back he saw that his clothes had been reduced to ashes, his whip had crumbled from old age, and he himself had become a decrepit old man. People say that chess was invented by the Gods.

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The mystique of boyhood: reality spills over into invention and invention becomes reality. Take yesterday: Petka Shunkhurov saw some gigantic monsters appear on the steppe. They arrived from outer space in order to subjugate the residents of the planet Earth. Preparing to fight the extra-terrestrials we produced home-made grenades, removing the sulfur from matches; we made bows and arrows and smeared the tips with some deadly mixture. That same night, I climbed over the fence of our back yard to join Petka and we set out, sneaking along the secret paths which lead to the enemy's lair. My heart beat faster and I felt a chill creeping down my spine. I believed it and yet I did not. But I was still anxious, unimaginably anxious to believe that the monsters did exist, that they were our enemies, while we were the noble protectors of humankind.

Perhaps this is how the image of an enemy originates in the human mind? Later it takes on frightening and ugly shapes. Everyone that differs in the set of their eyes, the color of their hair, or their customs, is hostile and loathsome to you and calls for destruction. Perhaps...

We sneaked up to a construction site. The hoists, the outline of the building, the piles of bricks, all looked fantastic and bizarre in the dark of the night. Petka was right. That one couldn't be a construction crane, it must be a space invader with a huge iron beak. Holding our breath we crept a little closer.

- "Forward!" Petka hollered like a madman. We rushed out from our hiding place, set the grenades alight and hurled them at the alien comer. The charmed arrows flew off into the darkness. "Hurrah!"

A watchman leaped out of his shelter. The deafening sound of his shotgun was heard in the still of the night. "Halt! Hands up!" Two flashes of blinding light tore the darkness apart and flew up into the pitch-black sky. In reply our throats emitted a

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scream of terror. The watchman chased us. We scattered in different directions, stumbling, falling and breathing hard.

“A-a-ah!” I heard a blood-curdling shriek escape my lips unwittingly. Suddenly I ran into a spring wire screen, bumping my head against it. The screen flung me back and I hollered still louder: “A-a-ah!”

I got up quickly and began to run again not knowing where I was going; the farther away the better. Now I didn't care about space monsters, I only wanted to make it home as quickly as possible. But I was absolutely at a loss as to where the town or my home is. Only after I fell into a ditch, exhausted, did I suddenly begin to come to my senses. Now I began to fear that something terrible might have happened to Petka. Maybe the monster has gobbled him up?

In those years I seemed to be living two lives. In my day-life I was an ordinary boy playing hide-and-seek and cops-and-robbers. But the moment I went to bed a black-masked ghost came out from the wall, sat down, and produced a glimmering checkerboard with chessmen from the inside of his velvet cloak. We played chess in my mysterious night-life until morning, placing incredible bets.

Shortly afterward, I won a chess tournament which took place on our street, surprising even myself. A six-year-old urchin had beaten thirteen and sixteen-year-olds (our street community was rather amicable and the older kids never turned us little ones out of their company).

By this time Leonid Brezhnev had been in office for already four years. Our country and the whole world were following his peace-keeping activities with a feeling of great relief that the recent opposition between the two receding into the past. In the hearts of the older generation, who still vividly remembered the last World War, nervousness had given way to confidence in the future. After the long years of strain, spent

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anticipating a new war, the people saw a long-coveted happiness in the first signs of stagnation. Little by little the food-stores began selling sausages, meat and bread. People scoured the city in search of imported suits, looked for carpets and cut glass. Now nobody felt shocked by the fact that the Soviet Union began to purchase grain from abroad. Our country sold crude oil for nothing and took pride in having reduced oil prices on the world market. Now the oil dollars showered the country with gold.

Every day numerous jokes about the Party, the government and our terribly happy life emerged. The people found an outlet in these jokes for all their anger and dissatisfaction with our crazy, topsy-turvy world. People laughed so as not to cry, or go insane.

However, the political winds were blowing over the heads of us kids. We were born in this divided world and knew no other. I believe we were happy. On summer evenings, when the long-awaited cool descended on the steppe, I would take my folding bed out and sleep in the back-yard. The somewhat uneven disk of the moon would glisten dimly right over the roof of our house. The sky would grow dark very rapidly and the sounds of our provincial town would die down. Not a peep was to be heard from the hen-coop or the shed; the trees, houses and the vines all around acquired an eerie, awesome look. An altogether different life started for me. A parallel one. And this different world was far more real and rich and meaningful for me than the life of the adults.

Witches, devils and jinnees darted about the courtyard reaching for me with their bony hands, and I felt a sweet terror clasp my heart. Any sound: a door creaking, the rustle and squeak of the bats slicing the black sky in their precipitous flight, the clusters of sparkling stars, all stirred my childish imagination and my dreams carried me away to the mysterious expanses of different worlds. It is a great pity that adults look

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at the sky less and less often; one somehow loses the ability to feel oneself a tiny particle of universal space.

And again I remember the plain, dusty streets of my boyhood. We grew up like weeds on the sun-baked, salty earth. Our fist-fights usually took place behind the sheds or on the sands where we walloped each other till we bled, always following the strict rule that you never beat a boy when he's down. We fought, not out of rancor, but because we had to vent our excessive, seething energy, and because we wanted to test character, resolve and endurance. Later in life, these street trials helped me more than once to pick up the pieces, take a hold of myself and keep going, holding my will in my fist.

New fads washed over our boyhood streets like waves. We wrote plays and rehearsed with wild abandon from morning till night, making costumes, knocking together sets from crates and plywood. A week passed and the new passion was card games. I played "fool", "seka" and "poker" with the boys till I was blue in the face. Then it was on to treasure-seeking. All these activities were so engrossing that I did not notice the passage of time. In those days I was an unruly fellow. Much to their horror, my family discovered that I had started smoking, learned to play cards, swear and fight.

At that time father was a member in the Department of Industry of the City Party Committee, and my mother was a veterinary doctor. By Elitsa standards, ours was a decent, cultured family.

I learned to swear in a sanatorium. I must have been five or six years old when I became ill and so my parents sent me to convalesce in a town bearing the Kalmyk name of Yessentuki. "Yesin" means nine, "toog" stands for banner. Nine Kalmyk Khans had once met here and concluded a truce.

In the sanatorium I shared a ward with grown-ups and, as so often happens in these situations when a child appears

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among adults, I became first the darling of the ward and then of the whole floor. They treated me to fruits, sweets, chocolate and cookies, took me to the movies and to a shooting gallery while I bought them matches and cigarettes from the nearest shop. During the evenings, lying in my cot, I would listen attentively to their juicy talk and indecent jokes, liberally spiced with words from the mighty lexicon of Russian curses. And my memory has always been excellent.

“Come on, Kirsan, give us some sedatives so we can sleep well!” the men would demand. And I would stand up on my bed and, catching the spectators' delighted eyes, I would spout a filthy one-minute soliloquy. The ward would roar and sob with delight. The men from the adjoining wards would hurry to our ward to listen to my one-man show. They asked me to repeat the performance and then reward me with bursts of laughter, candy and fruits. The men admired me and I was proud of it. When I got back home I waited impatiently for an opportunity to display my newly discovered talent.

As is customary with all families in Elista, many of our relatives lived with us. Some came to our town on business, some came to study in college or university, and others were just passing through. So we usually had at least six or seven relatives staying with us at any given time. As bad luck would have it, at this particular moment we had no guests at all. It was a real torment for me to keep my burning secret intact. And then it came at last, the sweet moment of triumph.

One evening several guests were gathered at our house. Choosing a moment when all the talk died down at the table I ran into the sitting-room and shouted: “Now, guys, who's gonna come and service some broads with me?” I threw in some spicy oaths for good measure and felt well pleased with myself.

The guests' faces visibly paled. Somebody choked on his tea and kept coughing for five minutes, unable to clear his

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throat. That night mother took valerian drops as I lay in bed sniffing beneath a blanket. I lay on my stomach, my face buried in the pillow, thinking resentfully: how can it be that I was praised me to the skies in the sanatorium, yet given a good hiding by my family for the same thing? Maybe they did not understand what I said; perhaps I should repeat it again?

By the end of August my parents had bought me a schoolbag and uniform and had begun preparing me for school. Every day I heard a lot of boring homilies: comb your hair, trim your finger-nails, don't run, speak quietly.

I can vividly picture my first day at school. We sit at our desks quivering with tension. Everything around looks strange and unfamiliar. The class-room still smells of fresh paint. Our form mistress Yelena Alekseyevna is taking the roll-call: "Ilyumzhinov Kirsan" I am silent. In our street we never use family names. And, as for my first name, most of the boys call me Badma and that is what I'm used to; it has become part of my identity. Badma means lotus.

"Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, why don't you answer?" The teacher bends over me. "My name is Badma," I answered, beginning to gather up my things. "I am tired of this place, I'd better go home."

The following day my parents were requested to come to the school. Soon after, however, I got used to it. Several days after the incident I made friends with some of the boys, and everything took its normal course. I enlisted in all the hobby groups and very enthusiastically took up sport, played music and learned to perform various dances. I became a kind of Jack-of-all-trades. I would always come back home late. At night, hiding under the blankets with a torch so as not to be caught, I would read books, sometimes till dawn.

When I turned ten I was elected captain of the school chess team. Our team went to the city of Togliatti where we won the

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Kalmyk Republic championship. That was the first team I ever lead and, during the first days of the trip, when differences of opinion led to quarrels and hurt feelings, I was completely at a loss as to what to do. All of them seemed to be nice boys, and I didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but everyone had their own character, habits, likes and dislikes. I tried to persuade them, threatened them with this and that, made demands, all to no avail. I didn't know what to do and was on the point of giving up. Until I was forced to deal with the most intransigent trouble-maker, when I somehow found the right words:

“Now listen. You are the cleverest boy here and I have not come to quarrel with you. What I need is your advice. What's to be done? Please think of something.” I was not actually flattering him. This boy really was very intelligent, but he was also unsociable. I told him openly that I thought highly of him and needed his help. This admission won him over to my side. And it helped me make a discovery about people: it is not always necessary to force someone to do what you think best. Sometimes it is more effective to let somebody's mistakes go unnoticed, to praise him publicly and to win his friendship.

Shortly afterward, the discord was settled and our team became a close-knit and friendly family. If there was trouble brewing they would call for me saying: “Come on, Kirsan, go and tell him that's not the way to behave... Kirsan, we need you to sort this out ...”

These trips gave me a lot of experience. Step by step, at first without being conscious of it, I began to get the hang of leadership. I overcame my shyness and learned to get along with strangers. Before long I had made friends with lots of people in different cities and republics. I learned to keep a close rein on myself and to control my behavior; in short, I acquired self-discipline and self-reliance.

On trips, when I was on the spot, I often had nobody to talk to, or ask for advice. And sometimes I had to take a risk and

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assume responsibility alone. We lived in hotels and I laundered my own socks and shirts, ironing them, sewing on missing buttons, and darning the occasional hole in a sleeve. My family approved of my desire to be self-sufficient. They did not give me much money, but I was free to spend the little that I had on whatever clothes I wanted. I toured the shops searching for bargains, and stood in line when something inexpensive but fashionable was on sale. By the time I was twelve years old I was well-versed in prices and recognized good quality in a product. I knew that the milk was cheaper in the marketplace than in the stores, and that potatoes and tomatoes were cheaper still off the back of a collective farm truck. That way I was able to save ten to twenty kopecks, and sometimes even a couple of rubles a day.

And this was my own, hard-earned money.

I cannot say that my parents did not give me money to go to the pictures or buy an ice-cream, but it was real pleasure to earn something of my own. Soon after another child was born into our family. Yet another boy, called Sanal. Practically all the burden of looking after him was left to me. My parents would not take no for an answer, so I had to wash Sanal, feed him, change his diapers, take him for walks and baby-sit him in general. I would come home from school, throw down my bag, and dash off to the nearest shop to buy milk and sour cream for my little brother. Next I tidied up around the house, and only then could I start on my homework. And I had to get all this done before my parents came home from work, otherwise they would not let me out to play with my friends. They were terribly strict about doing household chores properly.

I believe that it was during these years that I learned to work fast and efficiently. I knew with certainty that botched work would have to be redone, so I taught myself to see every job properly through to the end. To add fun to my tedious

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chores I thought up the most improbable and fanciful stories while I worked.

Here I am, washing the floor in our house. The floor is made from wood from the east Siberian taiga. Nobody knows that many years ago a dying Chinese smuggler drew up a map revealing the whereabouts of gold he had buried. Now if I draw a line with a piece of moist cloth I will break the secret cipher...

And now I am bathing my kid brother. All of a sudden, as if by magic, my chores no longer seem boring to me. All routine work hides some mystery. In the years to come I would resort to this trick many times and so was able to do the most sickeningly tiresome job with ease and pleasure, efficiently and speed. The great rule for all activity is to be keen to get the job done. Remain inquisitive, continually question everything and try to come up with the correct answers. How many steps do you have to take between home to the school? How many men and women will you meet on the way there? What are their professions? Is it possible to work out how many residents there are in the city from the quantity of bread on sale daily in the shops? Can you tell the time by measuring the length of your shadow? How many times must one breathe in and out between here and the milk-shop?

I was driven by curiosity; more than that, it had become my second nature. Because of this curiosity I got into trouble many times. If I caught a hen, for example, which flapped its wings and screeched fearfully, I would open its beak to find out where the agonizing sound was coming from. What is the physiognomy of the bird's throat?

Why can't dogs drink fast I wonder to myself as I fill a cup with water and go up to our dog, open its jaw and pour the water down its throat. The good natured beast goes wild. Yes, the road to Hell is indeed paved with good intentions. With my trousers torn, I race back home with the enraged dog snapping at my heels...

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I am starved of interest and entertainment with which to feed my curiosity in this country where nothing ever happens. On TV, Brezhnev kisses foreigners every day. The big shots openly steal and then go on binges at their Party dachas, and the entire population gets drunk year after year. The level of morality in the nation has dropped to zero.

Socialism has reached a peak of idiocy. At night the whole of Elista sit glued to their short-wave radios listening hard to “**The Voice of America**”, “**Radio Liberty**”, and the BBC through the KGB jamming signals and the static. We are a nation in search of spiritual and moral values. And then suddenly... The unrest in Czechoslovakia. To the accompaniment of the song: “Do the Russians Want a War?” Soviet tanks squash the residents of Prague. Dubcek has been put under arrest. And in Moscow, people demonstrating against the invasion of Czechoslovakia are beaten-up. Now it is an internecine scuffle.

Twenty-five years on and our citizens' blood will be shed again, outside the walls of the White House. As yet no one knows about it. The country shudders and awakens for a moment. Quite a number of youngsters join the hippie movement. They sedate themselves with drugs, and abandon society for the wilderness of the taiga where they set up communes. The intelligentsia crusades to rediscover God or goes underground and begins the so-called dissident movement. The men who will throw themselves in the path of tanks in down town Moscow during the ill-named coup of 1991 have already been born.

My sensitive child's ears feed on scraps of adult conversation. I can see and sense the discrepancy between how the grown-ups think and what they actually do. So I can't help asking myself a lot of questions. Nobody, however, wants to give me answers. “Ask your questions, boys, go on, ask your questions, and you fellows give ‘em straight answers,” goes the

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song by the famous singer Bulat Okudzhava. The husky voice of Vladimir Vysotsky is heard from the windows of every communal flat in our strangled, crippled Russia: "Will you heat up the steam-bath, dear. I've been out of touch with the wide world for quite some time." How ill-fated you are, Russia! "Where are you racing off to, Rus? Give me an answer! No answer".

No answer. The older generation keeps silent. The years in exile, and under KGB interrogation have taught them to stick tenaciously to the old refrain: I don't know, I saw nothing, I don't remember.

"I don't know". Just three words. At the same time "I know" means so very much; that is what my grandmother used to say. Our father's generation, who endured exile, KGB questioning and a lot more besides, have trained themselves to remember nothing so as not to betray. No dates, no cases, no names!

This was how the history of the Kalmyk people became depleted and the chain of generations was broken. And this link of sorrow can never be fully restored...

At school, I am put in charge of political information for my year. There is so much that I want to understand about life; a life at once simple and complicated. I ask questions and get no answers. I feel that there is a mystery behind that silence. Should one trust official newscasts or hearsay?

The older generation has betrayed us. They have cast us out into the turbulent sea of life, a life rent apart by contradictions, without teaching us first how to swim. We have found ourselves floundering like blind kittens. Only the strongest will reach the shore. Give us a hand, somebody! But no hand is offered.

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Okay, who cares! We'll sort things out after a while. I become an avid reader, a veritable book-worm, devouring philosophy, history, psychology. Perhaps these books will give me an answer? I develop a passion for physics, chemistry, and mathematics. These disciplines are devoid of lies, they are logical and clear. I wish to understand the world, its forces, laws and secret springs.

Everything is a mystery, but I like mysteries, they arouse my interest. I read a textbook: "... the law-abiding nature of the history of social development ..." If there is such a thing as a law-abiding nature, there must also be a law. Why is there no such law in effect in, say, Japan or the USA? Why in this country alone? And what does "the role of an individual in history" mean? How can the law-abiding nature of social development co-exist with the cult of personality?

I study volumes from the "Lives of Outstanding Individuals" series thoroughly. What motivated these people? How did they feel? What did they long for? Why did they do what they did, regardless of what people around them thought? I compare myself with these heroes: could I replicate their courage? Could I imitate their actions? Could I resist all the pressure?

The more I read the more aware I become of my ignorance and stupidity. The more I try to understand the more questions arise and the more complicated life becomes.

As the best pioneer and chess-player I am awarded a place in Artek, the All-Union Pioneer Camp. I prepare for the trip with great enthusiasm. I sit at my desk for hours pouring over a map of my republic, studying the regions, the names of different settlements and gullies. I listen to the local radio and suddenly realize, to my horror, that I know virtually nothing about either the republic or the Kalmyks. I can recount in detail the history of Kievan Rus or Ancient Egypt; I know about the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. I remember the dates of all

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the Crusades, and I am familiar with the biography of Lenin, yet I know practically nothing about my own people.

It appears that there is no place for the Kalmyks in the great history of the USSR. Not one hour of our republic's school curriculum is dedicated to Kalmyk history. I feel a great anger and resentment slice through me like a knife. How can this be? It would seem that we don't count in the history of the country; we are nothing! Not a word about the Tuva people, the Buryats, the Yukagirs...

I well remember how deceived I felt at that moment, as though I had been robbed and kicked out of my home. I have the eerie sensation of being a stateless orphan with out a country to call home. "Why?" I kept feverishly asking myself: "why?"

One could only gather tiny fragments of information about the Kalmyks from the odd, obscure bulletin, issued by the Institute of Linguistic and Literary Studies. Plowing through the standardized verbiage, laden with quotations from the Marxist-Leninist cannon and Party Congress documents, one would stumble upon the occasional name, date and fact about my people. And that was it, apart from the odd reference by Pushkin, Gogol, Yesenin...

Why should a Kalmyk know his own history? Why should he know about his origins, and all the distinguished contributions his people have made to the world? The main thing to teach the young is that, prior to the revolution, the ethnic nationalities were dying out and that, ever since the cruiser Aurora fired her volley, there has been happiness and rejoicing in the Soviet Union.

At Artek I discovered, during the course of conversations with the representatives of other ethnic groups, that they too had only the vaguest idea of the history of their people and their nation. Years later, while watching a perestroika-era film, I saw a scene about a prison kindergarten. A three-year old

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child is being persuaded to denounce his parents who are enemies of the people. "What a fine and conscientious boy!" the overseer-teacher exclaims in admiration. "You must follow his example, children. Let us sing his praises!" And the children of political prisoners begin to dance and sing around the three-year-old Judas.

It occurred to me then that all the minority nations have behaved in the same way. They renounced their history and identity; they denigrated and trampled on their ancestors' achievements, for the sake of receiving degrees and state awards so as to get nearer to the socialist feeding-trough. Can we ever be pardoned for that?

My soul started aching unendurably. I came out of the movie-theater overcome by this inexplicable anxiety: a country and people who are forgetful of their past are doomed. Was this not why in the old days children had to remember the names of their ancestors going back seven generations? These names were memorized in infancy. They were a source of pride, a moral code and guiding star throughout the child's life. Like the Russian nobility, the Kalmyks treasured their family's honor, venerating the memory of their forefathers, and never daring to bring disrepute to the clan through cowardice, treachery or baseness. It was only after that memory was lost and the continuity of generations broken, that we declined, rolling downhill like Buddhist beads, with nowhere to go. Everything became permissible.

Incidentally, I learned a lot in Artek. While preparing for the trip, I discovered, much to my surprise, that the Kalmyks are the only Buddhists in Europe. Through out recent history the Kalmyks have always sided with Russia. Their cavalry regiments put the fear of God into the Swedes and guarded the southern borders of Russia from raids. During the Napoleonic wars, Prince Tyumen armed and clothed two cavalry regiments at his own expense. These regiments were the first to enter

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Paris, giving Parisians the chance to see soldiers on camelback for the first time. I learned that our small nation had produced twenty-three Heroes of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. And, had they not been exiled at this time, the Kalmyks would undoubtedly have doubled that tally by the end of the war.

I read our mighty epic “Jangar” and I felt as though I had stepped onto firm ground for the first time; I was immensely proud of our small nation. I began to feel at one with this barren land. I learned that Kalmyk folklore is second only to that of India in terms of its richness and imagery. I looked on my homeland from a new perspective and began to view our wind-blown, dusty township swept by the sands and snows of the steppe in an altogether different light.

Just as I was beginning to feel again that nothing, but nothing ever happened in our country, something did begin to happen. At that time there was a popular saying that when they start trimming fingernails in Moscow, people in Kalmykia lose their fingers.

We began to feel the effects of the Communist Party's so-called “historical” decisions. The celebrated black earth of our cattle-breeding republic, with its rich grassy pastures where farmers had been grazing sheep as well as cattle for centuries, was plowed to make room for cereals. Our old people warned us that to do such a thing would be disastrous, but the big brass did not listen. In the regional Party Committee meetings they brutally be rated the elders, shouting: “Who do you think you are? Do you consider yourselves cleverer than the authorities in Moscow, huh? Is that why you come out against the decisions of the Party? Tell us your names'?”

In these circumstances anybody would surrender. Nobody relished the prospect of returning to Siberia. So the elders stopped fighting the Party officials.

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The thin layer of black earth was pierced by the plow, exposing the sand which lay below; sand began to encroach on more and more land.

First rare grasses and herbs were destroyed, and then the indigenous population of wild animals followed. Adverse winds buffeted the steppe, causing great damage to the fragile balance of the ecosystem.

St John's Revelation reads: "One woe is past and, behold, two woes followed." Another historical decision was implemented like a bolt from the blue: the creation of the Volga-Chograi canal interrupted the age-old migration route of the saigas. Countless numbers of these ancient beasts perished in a grave hundreds of kilometers-long. The steppe suffocated with the stench of rotting carcasses. And again they sang in the regional Party Committee meetings: "C'est la lutte finale"... "This is our final battle... And we will fight to the last man in our struggle".

They sang this revolutionary song beautifully with one voice. But then how could it be otherwise? A word of dissent and you were a goner, crawling back to your lair to die from that final and decisive heart attack. When I hear today the outraged voices of the older generation berating the vandalism of the young who destroy historical monuments and sculptures, and set churches alight, I think to myself what did you expect? Was it not your generation who blew up the Cathedral of Christ Our Savior in Moscow, which had been built with contributions from the entire nation as ordinary people donated their last penny? Was it not you who turned churches into warehouses and cow-sheds? Did not your generation dynamite and flatten the unique Zhiguli Hills? How do you account for the pollution of Lake Baikal with industrial waste? Was there a corner of the Soviet Union that was not trampled underfoot by the heavy boot of Socialism? No such place exists.

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I have heard that in ancient China the emperor would test all his ministers by sending them away from Beijing to spend several years in the provinces. If, when the time came to recall the man, the people of that province did not howl in protest, then he was publicly flogged. Had such a law been in force in Russia then I believe that there would have been many vacancies in the upper echelons of power.

Like all of my generation, I went through several stages of ideological indoctrination aided by extensive state censorship. First I was an Oktyabryonok (a pre-pioneer), then I became a pioneer, progressing to the Young Communist League, and finally becoming a member of the Communist Party. I also served on the pioneer squad council, the Young Communist League Committee, and I was chief of the "Vega" Young Communist League city squad. For many years I lived as though I were drugged; it was only gradually, layer by layer, that I began to peel away at the truth.

I wanted to do something worthy and important for my country. I wanted to feel needed by my homeland. Perhaps this was just a small town boy's longing to be special, but that is another story.

As the best Komsomol boy I was photographed before the unfolded flag of the "Aurora". I flew to Moscow and from there took a train to Leningrad. I was very curious. I roamed that historical city taking in the splendor of Russia's former capital. The city had been decorated and renovated to commemorate the coming 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution. There were crowds of militiamen patrolling Nevsky Prospekt, the Peter and Paul Fortress and St. Isaac's Cathedral. They were dressed in military coats; "revolutionary" leather jackets and some of them even sported wooden Mauser holsters from their belts. There were a lot of sailors whose black coats and caps with red ribbons stood out from the crowd. They reminded me of the theater and, for some reason,

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made my heart beat faster. I entered Palace Square feeling strange, imagining myself in 1917 Petrograd.

At midnight they fired the cannon at the Peter and Paul Fortress and the sound of the clock-gun was absorbed by the foggy city's air. I could see the reflection of the weak northern sun on the golden steeple of the Admiralty. And I was overcome by a cold kind of rapture.

That same day I had marveled at the wide steps of a marble staircase in an old palace, with its intricately patterned cast-iron and shining brass banisters. We entered the huge hall and took in the velvet upholstery of the chairs, the amazingly beautiful molded ceilings, the enormous cut-glass chandeliers and the tiled fire-places of a regular palace, And I, a small town boy raised on a dusty street, could see it; I could really see all that. There were lots of boys from various cities and republics in that hall. Like me, they had the honor of being photographed next to the unfolded flag of the "Aurora", their faces flushed, their eyes shining with excitement and joy. We were hypnotized, really. Old veteran Bolsheviks and Party officials delivered speeches and handed us badges and presents as memorabilia.

"You are the best of the best! You are our hope! Our support! Our generation has to ensure that the might of our Socialist power remains in good hands, strong and spotless. We must see that the ideals of Lenin - for which millions died for which millions upon millions endured incarceration, torture and execution in tsarist prison - will live forever. We hand you the helm of our country! May you be worthy of our hopes!"

The atmosphere in the hall was becoming heated. The crowd thundered in a standing ovation; we jumped to our feet, and our voices echoed loudly in the old hall as we sang, carried away by a collective gust of passion. It seemed as if we were witnessing, at that very minute, an historical event. We were

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creating history. We were invincible. We would wipe out any obstacle standing in the way of the bright future that lay ahead.

And all the doubts that had tormented me before this event, all my painful thoughts, dispersed and disappeared like the fog. In its place came a patriotic enthusiasm and a blind, enraptured belief in the triumph of Lenin's ideas and in the correctness of the chosen historical way preordained by the Party.

We are ready! We swear! We are burning with the desire to go through any trials, to give our life for the first socialist state. My homeland, I am happy to give my life for you!

Why conceal all this? It was a fact of our time: the mass hypnosis and the hysterical longing for self-sacrifice. We were quite inexperienced in politics. We were eager to believe faithfully in some greater good and in our role. We were at the age when one rushes recklessly from one extreme to another. And I think that, in that hall on that day, there indeed stood some of the finest representatives of our generation.

I look back on the past and recall all the offices to which I have been elected. This might have been the starting point, the springing board from which I was to launch my career as a Party apparatchik. Many chose the well-trodden and tested path of the Higher Komsomol School (HPS) and the Higher Party School (H PS), before scaling the heights of first the Regional Party Committee and then the Central Party Committee; only membership of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party then lay between a man and the Soviet Politbureau.

This path, in a word, spelt power: limitless, typically Russian power which even the tsars might have envied. But that was not for me... At the time I was not yet able to

## Chapter One - Duality

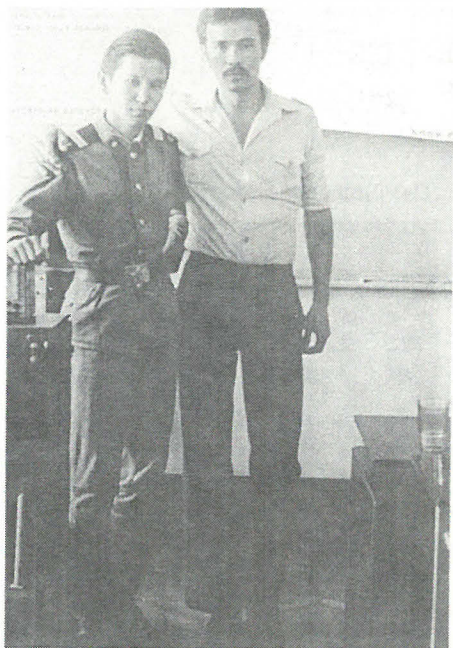


The future president



The leader of the team of young Kalmyk chess players

## The President's Crown of Thorns



Serving in the Armed Forces



Congratulating future officers

## Chapter One - Duality

understand this myself, for I lacked education and sensitivity. Yet. I felt quite clearly that all this was alien to me.

I corresponded extensively with many of my acquaintances, calling them on the telephone and watching them all go gradually to seed. And what grand fellows they once were! Bright, inexhaustible, the flower of the new generation. I believe that, in the right circumstances, many of them could have become excellent statesmen.

Odd as it might seem, the nomenclature system of the Party managed rapidly to eat away at a person's heart and soul, distorting their sense of direction so that they began to decay from the inside. There is a Kalmyk saying that "the juiciest apple will be eaten by worms." And the system devoured my contemporaries just as it had the generations that went before.

Lev Tolstoy once wrote that Gorky had been spoiled by books. Perhaps I too saw the world through the eyes of my romantic heroes. I wanted to believe that all the dirt and misery of life was something temporary that could be swept away by change. I have already said that, during this time, the City Komsomol Committee organized the "Vega" squad made up of two representatives from each of the city schools. I happened to become one of them. They made a team out of us for appearances' sake, to show off their ideological zeal. However, soon we turned into a real team, strong and muscular. We began to feel a sense of mutual need and trust. Perhaps this was because none of us had actively sought power - we just wanted to do something good for the city. Our friends were dying of boredom, without any decent places to go in the evening, for there were no dances, no parties and no discotheques in our town, there were only smashed streetlights. Out of boredom many of us clubbed together to buy alcohol and then began to thief and brawl, picking fights among ourselves or with innocent passers-by. Juvenile delinquency was spiraling out of control.

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So we in the “Vega” drew up our own charter with its rules and laws. We began to arrange parties which were soon the hottest places in town. We trod the invisible line between the permissible and the unacceptable, sometimes overstepping the limits. But that was what we liked best about it; that was how we got our kicks! Several times they banned our parties which made them even more popular. The “Vega” events were attended by boys and girls from all the schools of our city.

It was in this way that I learned about all the intricate details of organizational work. But being part of “Vega” taught me a more important lesson: for our group would meet regularly to discuss, in open and frank candle-lit sessions, the current state of the country and the prospects for change. By our unwritten rules anything that was said at headquarters was to remain within its walls. And nobody ever breached this rule. So, at last, we were able to speak our minds openly on any subject. You could discuss absolutely anything with anyone, safe in the knowledge that your friends would understand you and not betray you.

We all tried to teach each other something new; we practiced mutual enlightenment and enrichment. There is a popular saying: “even a drop is useful for the sea”. We felt as if we were these drops in the great sea and were striving for the happiness of all. How innocent and naïve we were, trying to turn ourselves into the ideal citizens of the future! We were deluded and ignorant in many ways, but I have never again encountered in my life such frank idealism or such purity of mind.

It was thus that long ago, meeting by candle-light in a provincial city lost in the boundless steppe, a group of schoolboys developed a code of honor and morality. We began with ourselves. Each “Vega” boy had to confess his faults openly to the group and hear how they responded; and these mutual confessions made us very close. Everyone was meant to

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strive for perfection. For a start, we had to learn to play a musical instrument and to dance Kalmyk folk dances as well as foreign dances such as the waltz. These were very happy days: days without treachery, lies or loneliness.

Many years later, when I was a deputy of the Supreme Council of Russia, I won a dancing prize in South Korea for doing a dance which I had been taught during my “Vega” days. The following year, on a trip to the United States, I caused a furor by out-dancing my hosts in a cowboy dance which I had also learned in the “Vega” squad.

During the four years of the squad's existence, I acquired inner freedom and eventually overcame my innate shyness. Public-speaking helped me learn to express my thoughts succinctly and clearly.

In the ninth grade I won the chess championships of the republic and for the first time in my life, I let it go to my head. I couldn't sleep that night for imagining all the international and Soviet tournaments that I would win, the laurel wreaths I would wear after victory upon victory. I wallowed in that sweet mist until daybreak and was nearly late for school where my class-mates greeted me with great enthusiasm:

“Hail to the champion! Our hero!” My schoolbag was thrown aside as I was grabbed by my friends and lifted aloft. “One, two, heave-ho!”

Suddenly, absurdly, I found myself in mid-air, heading for the ceiling as the floor was left way below. “And again. One, two, heave-ho!” I nearly bumped into the ceiling.

And then I saw the teacher entering the classroom. Some of the boys hurried back to their desks forgetting about me, the rest just stared at the teacher in silence. “This is the end of me,” thought as I crashed down on my classmates' heads. I

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was lucky not to break a bone, but since then I have never indulged in boastful dreams...

That spring of my final year at school. The snow had melted and as usual Elista was awash with cloying mud and dirt. The streets and lanes of the city flowed with dark brown slush. Passing cars churned it up and flung it onto the sidewalks at unwary pedestrians. At these times all the people of Elista would don rubber boots. Every building and office block had an iron water trough at the doorway, with special wooden sticks wrapped in cloth, so that people could scrape the filth from their boots.

I recall the dim yellow light of the lamp-posts, the dark silhouettes of the passers-by, the moon spilling its powdery-silver light onto sullenly glowing ditches and the humid air weighed down by the low Kalmyk sky and saturated with the energy of youthful, awakening life. This is how I will always remember my last spring as a schoolboy in Elista.

In school I was nicknamed "Master", because after classes I used to have people round to my place. I had a record-player with amplifiers and a big record collection. Every day I would bring home ten to fifteen boys and we would listen to records, argue about jazz music and singers, and strum our guitars. We even created a rock-group and we spent our evenings rehearsing songs. We thought our singing was brilliant and we were really getting a kick out of it when the neighbors began to complain about the noise. So we had to move to the DMW, that is the Department of Mechanized Work. My parents became so accustomed to our gatherings that when nobody came to our place they would ask me with a worried air: "Anything wrong, Kirsan? Had a tiff with the boys or something? Why has nobody come to see us?"

I never set out to become the most influential member of my class and to boss others around. Had I done so they wouldn't have hesitated to give me a good thrashing. The

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pupils in my class were too independent and willful to tolerate any authority. Yet I think the boys were drawn to me because I arranged so many parties, dances and excursions. Simultaneously, my relationship with my peers suffered because I was an excellent pupil and kept winning numerous school prizes. I couldn't help feeling guilty about my friends. We would set out on excursions together, or play a game of football and then the next morning I might still get top marks for my work, while they would only do adequately, or even badly. I felt as though I had hoodwinked them in some way, or had acted dishonestly. So when people praised me to the skies I really didn't know what to do. My school year was regarded as capable but unruly. And sometimes our shenanigans did indeed infuriate our teachers.

“Okay, we will see who is a hero during the exams!” the teachers would say, “just you wait!” However, foolhardy as we were, we did not pay the slightest attention to what they told us. As exam-time approached even the most reckless of us grew more docile and quiet. No one wanted to get into conflict with the teachers. Naturally we all wanted to finish school with a normal certificate which would make it possible for us to study at an institution of higher education. The pupils' activity levels had risen visibly. Everyone zealously tried to improve his or her marks, preparing diligently for lessons, and raising a hand whenever our teacher asked this or that question.

The corrupt system of the Brezhnev nomenclature had become firmly established throughout the country and, as a result, many of the teachers shamelessly boosted the marks of their, shall we say, proteges. People were used to this. Our school No 3 was nicknamed “the children's home” because the children of almost all the prominent ministers, secretaries and members of the city Party Committee and the regional Party Committee of Kalmykia studied here. Simultaneously, the teachers penalized students who had no Party big shots to protect them. It was unfair; but we all maintained a gloomy

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silence, it was as if we were deaf and blind. Everyone was scared about jeopardizing their careers and risking their money, position and security.

By this stage, human weakness no longer provoked straightforward indignation in me as it had done when I was a child. I didn't feel the old acute pain. In those shabby years we had grown accustomed to treachery and lies and, a decade later, this would become a state sanctified norm. Depressing, but true...

I was a sure candidate for the gold medal. In these circumstances to have provoked the teachers would have been suicidal. I couldn't rid myself of a vile and cowardly thought: "why should I stick my neck out when the others keep silent?.."

Russians love abusive hand-signs. There's the collectivist upbringing for you! You are nothing, a nobody, while your collective is the important force. So don't stick your neck out, be like everybody else, a small cog in the wheel. And if baseness is universal then it cannot be called base at all, and you're better off not worrying about it. I, like everyone else, have no mind of my own; ours are collective brains, the brains of a herd. And indeed, why should I behave in a responsible manner? If you are caught in a gang fight you will be jailed for ten years, but if you act like a coward along with everyone else then it is no big deal! No one will arrest you because you have broken no law. Even if you have held your tongue, what does it matter? The whole country has been silent for seventy years and it still manages to survive.

It is true, that these cowardly thoughts did occur to me. But then one day my true, inner self suddenly awoke, rose up and rebelled. To hell with the gold medal! Damn these people! Enough is enough! I am sick and tired of it all!

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I spoke out at a class meeting. I exposed the whole corrupt system, revealing how the teachers systematically doctored our results, improving the grades of the children of prominent local Party officials. The senior school teachers immediately ganged together in defense of their “honor”. Immediately me and my family came under heavy artillery fire; there was friction at my father's workplace, and my mother's bosses began to quibble with her work. And my fellow-pupils were summoned to the teachers' room, one by one, where they were brainwashed.

“...This is a conspiracy against our school. Ilyumzhinov has spat in our faces. A monstrous accusation!.. The outrageous behavior of Kirsan... And to think that he is a member of the Komsomol...” All this was uttered in a high-flown style, in quivering tones and with noble indignation. The boys were reminded of the upcoming exams and they were asked to defend the school's honor.

I could sense the imminent danger of a storm brewing over my head. I was branded a “libelous liar... a renegade ... man-hater, mud-thrower in public. They threw words at me as though they were stones. They were trying to crush me, to trample on my reputation, but, curiously enough, I felt a profound sense of inner calm and my soul was tranquil. Listening to a boy who was beside himself with indignation I thought to myself sadly: “well, it looks as though our paths are going to part. I wonder how many silver coins you think you are worth?”

After his exercise in scathing criticism, this student began getting only good or excellent marks in school. Two days later, when we were alone, he spoke to me, averting his eyes: “all that doesn't mean a thing to you, Kirsan. After all, you are an excellent student. But I've got to do something so as not to wind up on my ass. The end justifies the means, you know. Living with wolves makes you howl like one.”

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Where is he now? Maybe he is still howling like a wolf? I must give credit to many of my class-mates, however, who spoke out in my favor at that meeting. The flame of this scandal was soon put out by the teachers. They pulled the necessary strings to prevent gossip penetrating the school walls, but I had achieved my goal. They stopped picking on those kids who did not have influential parents.

However, my quest for justice did have a lasting effect: for although I graduated with distinction, I received no medal. The school authorities claimed not be to able to put my graduation papers in order in time. As for myself, I took it all rather lightly because I had expected something much worse...

A new, adult life beckoned. Every day I would catch my parents looking anxiously at me, wondering "what is Kirsan up to now?" Whenever my life became uneventful they would worry that more trouble was brewing.

Several times mother and father tried to talk to me which institute was I going to apply to? I didn't answer, because I didn't know. I was at a cross-roads...

## Chapter 2. THE ANATOMY OF DARKNESS

I felt capable of competing with the applicants to any university or institute in Moscow, but since I had no idea of where my vocation in life lay, or what I wanted to do, I was unwilling to sit the entrance exams to an institution just for the sake of it. I felt a little jealous of those of my school-mates who knew exactly where they wanted to study and what they wanted to do. They poured over text-books and pass-notes day and night and attended consultations.

Everyone was so busy that our house, once a noisy gathering place, became unusually quiet. I was torn by contradictory feelings and could not decide what I really wanted. For the first time I had lost my sense of direction and the future seemed vague, as if shrouded in the transparent haze of the steppe sky. Life seemed to grind to a halt and this abnormal state of affairs made me feel uneasy and sick at heart.

When I ran into boys in the street, I couldn't but notice the silent question in their eyes. Friends called me from time to time, but our conversations usually flagged. I felt as though life had outrun me, racing ahead while I had stopped dead in my tracks. I did not know where to go or what to do. I floundered in a sort of swamp with nothing to support my feet, unable to see behind me or ahead. I began to feel nervous. For a number of years I had been constantly busy and suddenly all this activity, along with all my aggressive, pushy, creative energy, stopped abruptly.

Almost a month went by in this way; a monotonous, unendurable long month. One evening I took my folding bed out into the court-yard, lay down and, covering myself with a blanket, began to stare thoughtlessly at the upside-down abyss of the sky studded with intricate star-shaped Kalmyk patterns.

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For some time I listened to the rumbling of a distant train and the barking of dogs and then imperceptibly I fell asleep.

I woke abruptly. I was filled with an extraordinary sensation of peace and fathomless inner joy. Staring into the infinite abyss of the black, velvety night sky I suddenly felt consumed by a love and compassion for every living thing on earth. I contemplated the millions of people who have lived and died beneath this eternal sky. Their bodies have turned to dust, yet their passions, grievances, dreams, love and pain are immortal regardless. The air we breathe is saturated by their passion and pain. We drink the moisture which has traces of their sadness and love. We walk on the soil that preserves the memory of their great passions. And I am just the merest speck of dust in this boundless, living world.

I sensed, almost tangibly, how up there, in the depths of the sky, time was flowing along the Milky Way, from the past into the future. My life began to look worthless, superficial and petty compared with the vastness of all that.

What do all my feelings, wishes and thoughts matter in this world? All our defeats and victories are nothing but man-made delusions. One should live a simple, natural life, free of vainglorious ambition. Just as the grass grows or the sun rises, one should dissolve the selfish ego in the measured flow of time: that is the fundamental meaning of man's existence. This is where the truth lies...

Everything suddenly became clear on that night and I vividly remember how my heart was filled with extraordinary lightness and purity. And it was only then that I fell into a really deep sleep. Perhaps every man experiences these moments of divine revelation in his life, when the heart and soul are washed in the sacred water of a mountain-spring? After bathing in this fount you feel as though you have been bone anew.

## Chapter Two - In Anatomy of Darkness

August had come and gone. My schoolmates had become students in different cities. They sent home letters full of new and exotic words like “examination sessions, lectures, the dean's office, and professors”... It was an altogether different, unknown and wonderful world.

As for me, I had my life to live, my own way to go. I chose my path on that very night and I walked it with increasing confidence. Mine was to be an unadorned and unromantic route, austere and unkind.

I got a job at an industrial plant. I had no trade and formally, on paper, I was classified as an assembly-worker. However, in reality I was a kind of jack-of-all trades, a roustabout. I lugged hefty iron molds to the machine-tools, took out garbage, unloaded trucks, sawed and planed and in general did the most loathsome and filthy work. I never complained, nor tried to cheat or shirk my duties. I just clenched my teeth and hung on. From time to time I noticed the sneering glances of the old-timers. But I bore their jeers and jokes. This was crude reality. This was life. It was not nearly as vivid and romantic as we had been taught in school. It had very little in common with the life we saw portrayed in movies or read about in books.

Not a minute went by in the factory without hearing a curse liberally laced with a good old four-letter word. The workers were perpetually pilfering. They were hard drinkers and would sleep off their hangovers in cubbyholes and make love on the filthy floor. This was an unappealing and ugly world, and the socialist press worked hard to hush up its existence. The daily work was boring and grueling and at the end of each quarter or year we were burdened with extra emergency jobs.

Unused to this life, my body ached all over, my legs felt weak and my hands were clumsy and heavy as lead. However, I tried to hold on. When my alarm went off at 5 o'clock in the

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morning I would count to three with my eyes closed before jumping out of bed, doing some exercises and having a wash.

Before going to work I would find time to buy milk and bread, write a few letters and make an entry or two in my notebook. My elder brother Vyacheslav had already returned from the army and was studying at the Institute of Foreign Relations. He had acquired some experience of life and in his letters to me he expressed his sincere alarm for my future. He was against my decision to work at the plant. We were different in many ways. He was a solid, decent person who did everything properly, thoroughly considering each step. In school they called him a "walking encyclopedia" and the teachers told me to follow his example. As for me I bounced from one extreme to another, bruising and battering myself in the process, but to no avail. I kept getting into all sorts of trouble and had no idea how to get out of it. Whether this was a form of sub-conscious, spontaneous rebellion which was deeply ingrained in every serf of socialism, or something peculiar to my own character which defied the accepted order of things, I do not know.

A few months passed. And although the revelation which had come to me on that August night had not been forgotten, it had somehow faded and lost its original lustre. I remembered it less and less often...

Now that I was no longer the new boy at the plant, I didn't have to load and unload trucks and drive all over the place. I was already eighteen and at this age you always want too much too soon. You want to dress smartly, to have some pocket money and a car, to see something of the world, to go to a cafe with friends and show off a little when your girl-friend is around. You want so many things when you're a green eighteen-year-old with a lot of rubbish in your head, a hole in your pocket and not a care in the world - when you have your whole life ahead of you! I wanted to earn a lot of money. Every

## Chapter Two - In Anatomy of Darkness

morning I winked at the poster of Leonid Brezhnev with his outstretched hand pointing into the distance. Below the portrait there was an inscription which read: "Our tasks are set, the aims determined. Time to set to work, Comrades!" Brezhnev and I understood each other well. But the same could not be said of my fellow-workers.

One morning a man approached me and stood for some time looking at my work before glumly remarking: "You're a regular smart ass, aren't you? What the fuck d'you wanna rough it for? Now look, if you are going to go on slaving away like that you'd better watch out or you'll never know what hit you!"

- "Why?" I asked him in puzzlement.

- "Why!" he mimicked, sticking out his lower lip. "You going to strain your back and make two hundred percent and then they sure as hell will reduce the price or raise the average output rates. Do you get it, you jerk?"

I got it, alright. If you worked hard, you got very little - some socialism. Afterwards, in the smoking-room that man added with a sigh:

"We all need dough. But those creeps," he gestured upwards with his finger, "they'd rather die than let you earn some. No way, pal, no way."

This was how I discovered for myself the first rule of socialism: there is no profit in hard work. At the same time stealing was permissible. They turned a blind eye to it. It was almost expected that a worker would steal to make up the difference between his basic needs and the miserable subsistence wage. It was a sort of free-for-all. Everybody stole everything: wooden planks and boards, bricks, tools, powdered concrete, everything and anything in short which could be exchanged for a bottle of vodka, the hard currency of socialism.

## **The President's Crown of Thorns**

That same year I met an old man who worked at my plant. He lived in a ramshackle adobe shack and had been on a municipal housing waiting list for about fifteen to twenty years. Getting a flat was his religion, his life-long dream, his everything. His conversation always began or ended with the same words: "And when I have a new flat ...". His senile mother had died without ever getting the longed-for accommodation. His son had succumbed to pneumonia. His wife had deserted him after many years of renting rooms in all sorts of sleazy places. He was now all alone and lived in constant fear of being kicked out on a pension after which he could kiss goodbye to a one-room flat (a bigger one was out of the question). And then at last his luck turned. He was given a warrant for a living space and then he moved into a squalid, old place, but still a home of his own. Fearing that he might be kicked out of his new home, he fixed the door up with a lot of locks, "just in case". In no circumstances would he ever let anybody into his house. If somebody knocked at the door, he did not answer it.

Two weeks later he died. His heart could not stand the strain. There were no living relatives to bury him. His body was taken from the morgue to some unknown place and there he was buried along with other homeless beggars; he too was essentially homeless for all his life.

Rumor had it he had been a good chess-player in his time, but when I sat down at the chess-board with him I won easily, declaring a so-called kid's checkmate in three moves. He was really amazed at the outcome of the game and kept blinking his eyes for some time staring at the board in silence. Then he looked up at me and his face brightened.

"But when I have my flat ...". He just could not think of anything else. There was something eery about that.

That year two of my acquaintances died of alcoholism. After the funeral their friends got drunk and started a brawl

## Chapter Two - In Anatomy of Darkness

which ended with people drawing their knives. This was an ugly, monotonous, somnambulant life which pulled you into its hypnotic slumber. It took a lot of effort to survive this dreary existence and after half a year I began to feel as though it was strangling me. My brain needed continuous stimulation. I was bursting with inner energy that required an outlet. I would decide to take up something on one day, then change my mind and start something quite different on the next. I wanted to find myself in life, but I couldn't. I was not a lover of cigarettes and vodka and did not like to lounge on the street aimlessly like many of my friends. I read books on history, psychology and philosophy, copying parts of them out. At night I listened to the BBC English-language service. In those days no foreigners ever set foot on Kalmyk soil and we never had a chance to listen to real, live English.

As it happens I was fascinated with the English language and I wanted to speak it fluently, without an accent. During those years half the country spent their nights glued to their radios. Listening to the short-wave programs of the Voice of America, Radio Liberty and the BBC we would try to discover, beneath the howl of the jamming signals and the crackle of static, what was going on in our own country...

There was also a growing dissident movement. Human rights activists began to speak out against political persecution; a magazine called "The Record of Current Developments" was disseminated among the intelligentsia, and banned books were self-published secretly in samizdat editions. The smoldering discontent among the population was beginning to be voiced. People were no longer jailed for making jokes which was an obvious sign of the loosening of the iron grip of the Party. When not on duty, people spoke their minds almost openly. At the same time a broad-based network of informers was in operation and a great many people built their careers on ratting on their colleagues and friends.

## **The President's Crown of Thorns**

Actually, a great many detailed accounts have been written about this whole area of activity. KGB operatives led an easy and care-free life in our hick town, whose residents knew about the existence of secret agents and spies only from books and films. Foreigners were not permitted to visit and our town boasted no munitions factories, major industrial plants or industry to speak of at all, so the only information going was about incidences of cattle-plague and the growing number of vodka-addicts among the local communists.

Nonetheless, we had our own branch of the Committee for State Security (KGB) who, in order to justify their idleness, did their best to uncover individuals who had relatives residing abroad, checked out the rumors and gossip circulating in the marketplace, and compiled lists of individuals who were known to listen to foreign broadcasts and tell irreverent jokes. The most prestigious activity was to seek out the relatives of those Kalmyks who had followed the Germans west, or left with the White Guard.

Later, when in the West, meeting up with Kalmyk emigres, I would hear their terrible stories, feel their pain, and admire the purity of these people's hearts. It was they who, while still in the filtration zones after the war was over, came out against exiling the Kalmyks, collected signatures, wrote petitions and turned for support to the UNO, heads of state and prominent churchmen. It was they who first raised the issue of allowing Kalmyks to return to their native land; who rang the bells and cried out to the world public, thus forcing Khrushchev to allow them to come back home after thirteen years in exile.

The issue of the Kalmyk forced emigration is a special and tragic period in the history of my people, people who have managed to preserve their traditions and their national civilization while at the same time absorbing European Culture and the European world outlook. The greatest discoveries of the 20th century were made on the borderline between physics

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and biology, chemistry and mathematics; this is the law of our century, and it seems also to be true of nations which can accommodate two viewpoints and two cultures. I firmly believe that in the very near future Kalmykia is to enjoy its own renaissance. And the Kalmyk emigre population is one of the cornerstones in the foundation of this future building.

Who knows what would have become of me had I not endured the school of proletarian life, and the dull and stupefying "apprenticeship" of an errand boy doing chores for the ever-tipsy foreman. That year I shook off the last traces of romantic delusions. I realized a great deal about life and felt a growing and maturing sense of protest in my heart. I think that everybody saw the idiocy of our life. At any rate, most of our people did. At the same time fear, socialism's greatest achievement, cemented society strongly together. Who is marching out of step? Who is breathing out of time? Look out, get him!

An Englishman once remarked to me that "in Russia drinking is a kind of inner protest, some sort of latent non-conformism." Well, I am inclined to agree. For the common man doing your work well meant nothing, but the impetus to steal or drink was a necessity in order to forget the impoverished hopelessness of your life. In this country we even had a special word for these thieving workers, we called them "carriers" (for they carried off everything they can lay their hands on) or more flatteringly, "go-getters" ! And if someone succeeded in grabbing hold of some "big time booty" then he was the object of universal admiration, a hero, a doer in life.

The bosses of ordinary people were not averse to stealing either. They too drank too much at home, in restaurants and at one banquet or another. In this respect the people and the party were at one. A party worker in Kalmykia once instructed me: "Remember: drinking without toasting is simply a vulgar

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drinking bout, but when it is accompanied by toasts then it is ideological work.”

And they never begrudged money for ideological work. Culture was always under funded but there was an endless sea of money for ideological purposes; “whiskey galore!” as it were. Perhaps this explains why we have always had so many politicians, making up almost half the population of the country. Especially if one downed one drink too many. The moment a gathering of more than one person took place then a bottle of vodka appeared and the session was accompanied by a lot of chin-wagging about sexual exploits or politics. What else was there to talk about anyway? About life? It was sickening. Everyone was fed up with life. About the future? What did we care for a future that would never transpire. All that was left was fear. So everybody tried to be content with their lot for fear of something worse. But what could be worse than living the way they lived?

## Chapter 3. IN THE SERVICE OF THE SOVIET UNION;

### “YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW”

Whether it was due to the usual Russian laxity and disorderliness, or to some other obscure reason which would be totally incomprehensible to foreigners, the authorities in charge of military service somehow overlooked me that autumn. Boys of my age had already been in the army for a whole month; they marched in formation and sang the favorite song of Soviet generals in chorus: “Don't cry, my girl, the rains will pass, your soldier will come back to you, you need only wait...” while I was still waiting for a summons from the military enlistment office.

I waited for a month or so. It was pointless to wait any longer. From the experience of boys' older than me I knew that it was better and easier to go into the army with your contemporaries. At the same time it would be stupid for me to hope that the military would forget about me altogether. One or two years might pass and then someone would come across my registration papers and I would have to serve with kids. No dice! I'd be better off serving with guys my own age. So I presented myself at the recruitment office and told them that my age group had already been through “quarantine”, while I had still not received my summons.

“Well, well,” drawled the lieutenant, pushing a bottle of yoghurt and half a loaf of bread over to the edge of his desk, “if it isn't our dear deserter! Going to shirk military service, were you?”

- “But I came here of my own free will.”

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- "What do you mean of your own free will? Do you know that shirking the army is punishable by several years in jail? How would you like to do three years in prison, smart guy?" the lieutenant felt bored; he had no one to talk to. And he needed to instill the fear of God in a young conscript, to teach him some military etiquette and respect for the officers. It dawned on me that it would be senseless to start an argument with him. The best thing for me to do was to keep silent.
- "Your motherland brings you up, your motherland feeds you and educates you, for free. Free education, free medical service, free everything! Your home land is as good as your mother! and you ..." He was staring at me with unblinking eyes. Well, come on, say something, you dumb-bell!"

A fly-blown window, guarded by iron bars. A black telephone on the desk. A book-case cluttered with volumes of Brezhnev's speeches with uncut pages and an edition of the criminal code.

"Be here first thing tomorrow morning, clean-shaven, close-cropped and with the necessary belongings! Is that clear?"

- "Okay.""
- "Bullshit! None of your "okays" in the army! You've got to answer 'Right, Comrade Lieutenant!' Repeat it!"
- "Right, Comrade Lieutenant!" I barked. It looked like fun, and I felt cheerful. So far.

I can't but remember the verse: "With a shoulder belt on me I'm as stupid as can be." For at that moment it still looked like a scene from an old provincial amateur theatrical performance. For the time being it was funny and I was having a good time.

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My introduction to the army was as follows: at the plant my co-workers arranged a hell of a farewell party for me. I bought an air-ticket so as not to travel by train as a transit passenger and depend on the lieutenant finding the time to send me off to join the others. So I arrived at my unit early with a suit-case and all my papers. I spent the first night tossing and turning in a soldier's cot unable to fall asleep, listening to the loud snoring of my fellow-conscripts and breathing in the heavy smell of soldier's sweat. I lay there staring at the ceiling. My head was full of incoherent fragments of thought that flashed through my mind with lightning speed.

My years in school and at the plant had receded into the past. Now the third stage of my life was beginning. As the popular song goes, "You're in the army now". I had heard a lot about the so-called "dedovschina" (when senior recruits push around the first-years), the beatings of greenhorns by their older so-called comrades, the numerous cases of absence without leave, the guard-houses and the parachute jumps. I had been told about how they made home-brew in fire-extinguishers, of the inventiveness of privates and of the regiment's top brass. I would have to experience all this during my two years of army service. Two years. By force of habit I counted up the days and came up with seven hundred and thirty. Seven hundred days and nights make seventeen thousand five hundred and twenty hours.

Some demobbed guys had taught me the ins and outs of army life.

Number one. Don't let them humiliate you at the start. If they try to bend you do not give in; bear up! If they succeed in breaking you you're a goner, and an MBS, that is a man with a broken spine. Then everyone will ride you any way they please. Number two. Never argue with senior recruits. Better try to get along with them. A second-year soldier is king. And number three. There's no way you can shirk your duties in the

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army so you'd better so a job well from the very beginning. At first it will be hard on you, but hang in there and you'll get to grips with it eventually. And most important of all: if a soldier sleeps through his service hi basic training is prolonged.

All these scraps of information, along with some nonsensical rubbish, whirled in my mind. They say that initially a soldier dreams of home when he sleeps. Maybe. I did not dream of mine. I had no dreams at all. I slept poorly. Out of habit I began to think about what good the army might do me: discipline, physical training, determination... and what else? I might learn something, some kind of practical knowledge that might come in handy later on in life. On the other hand, maybe not. Life is long enough and, as my granny used to say, "knowledge does not weigh you down. It is not you who carries it, it is knowledge that carries you."

I fell asleep toward morning, when the white of the dawn began to burst through the frosted glass of the barracks' windows with its promise of the first rays of the rising sun. Sleep was sneaking in on tiptoes and bending over me.

"Company! Stand to!" The blood-curdling command makes me jump in my cot. I look around crazily and see the hectic movement of bare feet, arms and close-cropped heads. The barracks is full of heavy-breathing, snuffling, stamping and thundering. I wrap my feet in foot-cloths, but there is a bulge on the heel and my foot won't fit into the boot. I try to pull the boot off. No way. Dammit!

"Come on, hurry!" the first sergeant hollers. Finally I have sorted out the foot-cloths, the boots and the rest of my uniform. I am covered in sweat. My first soldier's sweat.

"Stand down!" drawls the sergeant lazily. "The bastard's just humiliating us!" I think to myself. His voice is full of disgusting malice. The recruits peel off their clothes and get

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Kalmykia makes the choice



Meeting voters

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The oath of the president

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into their cots. I lie down too and close my eyes. I am dying to sleep. I relax.

“Companee-e-e!” the sergeant’s husky voice reverberates through the barracks growing louder and louder until it reaches its blood-curdling pitch. “Stand to!” I jump to my feet, this time without looking around. I already know that the last one to get dressed will have to prolong his basic training. “Stand down!” We hurry back into our cots.

“Comm...” No sooner does the sergeant take in enough air to bark the rest of the word, then I jump to my feet and pull on my boots. The whole company looks at the sergeant with unsuppressed hatred.

“Look lively, heroes!”, the sergeant hollers as he struts along the barrack’s isles. “On the double, my gallant soldiers!”

“May you have a blister in the throat!” a voice from behind is heard.

The sergeant turns around quickly: “who said that? It looks like somebody has something to say, huh? Was that you?” He thrusts his finger at me and then at someone else. “Or you?” The company is silent. Rivulets of sweat stream down his face and neck. Let him holler. The better for us. That way we can at least grab a little rest.

“Stand down!”

“Stand to!”

“Sta-a-a-nd down!”

Washed out and half-dead, we go out of the barracks and tramp to the drill ground in formation. There is going to be a parade drill for us.

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"Left! Left!" The sergeant's voice is lusty and vicious. On the drill ground there are companies already marching who were brought out before us.

"Don't cry, my girl... You need only wait," the recruits breathe out rhythmically in time with their step. "And now the song! Set the tune!" the sergeant commands. We start singing as loud as we can.

"I can't hear a thing! Pipe Lip! Louder! »

Once I left the army I would wince every time I heard this song.

"The rains will pass. Left! Left!" Our voices are muffled by the low cloudless sky. It is hot. My collar stands on end and it has chafed my neck. My legs feel wooden.

"Your soldier will come back ..." And between our breathing in and breathing out we hear the distinct and springy: "Left! Left!"

My feet are burning. The foot-cloth in my boot has become unwrapped and lumpy; it hurts my foot. I feel an acute pain in my heels as though someone were hitting them with a rod.

How long have we been marching? An hour? Two hours? Or maybe ten? My head is fuzzy, empty of thoughts. My first day in the army.

"At a run!" "Thump! Thump! Thump!" go hundreds of heavy soldier's boots, or it is my heart which is beating so loudly that it echoes in my skull? This is nothing, nothing at all. I can stand it. It's all right. Everything is all right. You'll make it, Kirsan.

After that daytime began to race at a maddening tempo. Parade drills, combat training, sports training, technical

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training, political training. Company, stand to! Night alarms, battle alarms and so on and so forth. The officers on your right and the “dedovschina” on your left. Thousands of guys squeezed into a small space. For all to see, side by side. Likes and dislikes. Character against character. Iron scraping iron.

Military unit number nine-zero-two-five-two-three had, once again, sucked in recruits and, like a sculptor chiseling everything unnecessary and excessive off a piece of granite, it worked on us, trying to make us behave and think automatically. With so many young men gathered together in one place and put under this kind of moral and physical strain conflicts were unavoidable...

We stand in the narrow space between the beds holding our heavy soldier's belts with their tail ends wrapped around our wrists. There are four of us. The rest of the first-year servicemen avert their eyes in silence. Someone has stolen a new uniform shirt from a “grand-dad” (a second-year serviceman), the very same shirt that was taken away from us “sons” by a “grand-dad”.

The settling of accounts is in full progress. The granddads beat up everyone until somebody confesses to his guilt. The officers are nowhere to be seen. That is a custom. The granddads must educate the sons. A ringing silence, as taut as a bow-string. There are only four of us who refuse to be beaten. Four guys bold enough to stand up for themselves and defend their honor and dignity. Four recruits who have refused to abide by the unwritten law of the army. Four out of one hundred. It is too much. It's a mutiny. That's why the grand-dads have come. They are going to teach us a lesson. The grand-dads are the power to be reckoned with. They are closing in on us unhurriedly, toying with their belts and flexing their muscles. We stand and wait. We know we have no chance of fighting off the grand-dads. There are too many of them and they stick together. And yet...

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“Stand back, Kirsan.” One of the grand-dads wants me to stay away from the imminent scuffle. We met at a chess competition in Pyatigorsk. He doesn't want to beat me up, but the brotherhood of grand-dads is far more important than his personal feelings.

“Come on, Kirsan, step aside.”

“No!”

“You'd better, or else ...”

Blood has flooded the veins of my hand. It has grown heavy and my body is like a spring, stretched to the breaking point. One more second and... suddenly someone turns out the light. And immediately all hell breaks loose. The swishing of soldier's belts, shouting, screaming, moaning, cursing, the thunder of overturned beds, wheezing, snuffling and the sound of powerful, mighty blows. The thumping of bodies sprawling on the floor...

Suddenly the barracks are flooded with light... The first-year boys scatter. Many of them have bleeding noses and lips, injured skulls, and swollen cheekbones. The grand-dads look no better. They leave.

“You are as good as dead. It's high time you ordered coffins for yourselves” one of them says in passing. I look at the chess-player. One of his eyes is swollen, and the sleeve on his shirt is torn. He shakes his head, maybe because of the pain or perhaps he is about to tell me something, I don't know.

The grand-dads have their revenge: the punishments include out-of-turn chores, being locked in the cooler, uninterrupted, exhausting drills, continuous fault-fin ding. By nightfall we return to the barracks and slump into our cots feeling absolutely washed out. In about forty minutes the barracks reverberates with the siren-like: “Company! Stand

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to!” We jump up. Just another night alert. A double-time march in the cold, monotonous autumn rain.

“That does it! I am going to shoot them all now, the fucking bastards!” a soldier running next to me says, panting and gritting his teeth. “They’re going to kill me anyway.”

I believe him. He really could do that. It is not a mere threat. We are all at the end of our tether. It is quite probable that this idea has occurred to many of us. We are dying to sleep. Our clothes are soaked and heavy. Our boots are covered in clods of earth. Now and again we slip on the wet treacherous ground, we fall and curse in four-letter words, but we still keep running, now automatically, subconsciously, although we are beyond the limits of our strength.

I am going to the grand-dads to negotiate. It is time we put an end to our discord, this problem. Otherwise we may end up in big trouble. Someone might not be able to stand the strain, fly off the handle and pull the trigger. I tell the guys that I want to have a word with the chess-player.

“Listen, buddy,” I say, “let’s call it a day. The guys can no longer live like this. You’d better stop this shit. Don’t overdo it. You were first-year suckers yourselves once. And we’ve had it, understand? Enough is enough. Otherwise things might get bloody.”

The chess-player is contemplating me silently. He is thinking over what I have just said. “Okay” he nods, “I’ll talk to the boys. As a matter of fact, we have overdone things a little.”

He smiles and stretches out his hand. “Come on, put it here. I’d say your lot aren’t wimps. We weren’t as tough as you are.”

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The chess-player did not go back on his word. The grand-dads left us alone. And step by step we too got accustomed to the hardships of army service.

Half a year later I was promoted to deputy platoon commander and laughed recalling the impressions of my first days in the army. In all that seemingly senseless routine of army life, the stupefying drills and political classes, the rigorous schedule when not one second was to be wasted, there was a well-thought-out, precise and iron logic at work. As for the methods, that was a different matter. There was also some logic in the so-called “dedovschina” even though I myself did not accept the system and did all my own chores myself. I washed my clothes and ironed my under-collars, I sewed on buttons, mended things and polished my own boots.

After basic training the new recruits were heard to say “Comrade grand-dads! There's only ninety-six days lei; till your demobilization!”

“Hurrah!” the entire barracks would shout joyously. Then everything would go quiet and I would make the round of the sergeant's room to check on their training schedule. It usually took about two hours. The soldiers were fast asleep and we, non-commissioned officers gathered together in the depot of our unit and fried potatoes. We would chat about home and life in general, and I had time to iron my uniform, clean it up, sew on my undercollar and polish my boots. I had acquired the habit of keeping my own clothes in order while I was still in school, making trips to different cities to participate in chess tournaments.

I would go to bed at one or two in the morning and by 5:30 AM the orderly would wake me. I had fifteen minutes to get dressed, have a shave and wash. At quarter to six the duty officer would come to the barracks and by six o'clock the reveille would sound.

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I am a great one for lying in! I like nothing more than to luxuriate in bed in the mornings, but already in school I began to fight this harmful habit. Every morning I made myself get up at a certain time and do physical exercises. I studied many books on yoga, autosuggestion and all that, so as to teach my body to need no more than three to four hours of restorative sleep. But it is one thing to get up early at home when your body is not aching with physical fatigue, and altogether another in the army.

During my first days of army service my eyes were constantly heavy with sleep, my mind dull and dopey and my body flabby and unrested. But gradually I got accustomed to the strain and life took its normal course.

Truthfully speaking, there is nothing more insufferable than the rank of sergeant in the army. A sergeant is not yet an officer and, at the same time, no longer a private. He is the buffer layer between the officers and the soldiers. On the one hand his responsibilities are those of an officer, on the other he eats and sleeps with privates.

You are in sight of your subordinates day and night. Hundreds of alert eyes watch and assess you: who are you with, who will you side with in the eternal opposition between the commanding officer and his subordinates? If you stick to the officers you will lose the respect of the soldiers, your buddies with whom you must bear the burden of army service. If you side with the soldiers there will be a lot of pressure put on you by the officers. The rank of sergeant requires a great deal of psychological subtlety, diplomacy and resourcefulness.

I saw how sergeants immediately found themselves in a tight spot if they either detached themselves from the soldiers or, at the other extreme, came out against the officers. Nothing good came of it. Those sergeants were considered to be traitors and ass-kissers by the privates, and at the same time they were

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given a hard time by the officers. I thought that there had to be a way out if only I could find it.

Incidentally, my "Vega" experience, as well as the days when I was the captain of the chess team, held me in good stead in the army. I had already acquired the knack of settling conflicts between guys. And, of course, I had had the advantage of observing human behavior at close quarter. The continuous physical strain and sleep deprivation were no longer hard on me; I was accustomed to all that and now it was my brain which required more training. Always a stickler for self-analysis, I spent my evenings going over the events of the day and making mental notes of my misjudgments, blunders and achievements. I watched how the other sergeants' behaved in similar situations, and the way in which the officers and privates reacted to it.

Soldiers have a very different psychology to civilians. Everything is clearly demarcated and your individuality is suppressed. On the one hand you are not supposed to think for yourself since your officers think for you. On the other hand, the soldier's resourcefulness makes it easier to bypass the stumbling blocks of life in the army.

I made a habit of writing down some typical cases of friction which occurred between the soldiers, sergeants and officers. I analyzed, systematized and contemplated the way a sergeant should ideally act in different circumstances. Soon I had worked out a set of rules which I followed meticulously when I became a sergeant. This helped me in many ways to maintain a balance between the soldiers and officers. Basically, everything in life boils down to human relationships. You make your destiny and shape your success by the way you behave. Later I came to realize that these rules were applicable not only to army life, but also to business, politics and family relationships, in fact to all areas of life.

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Rule number one: look and learn. I analyzed my mistakes and those of my fellow-soldiers who had just become sergeants. Situations recurred, they were typical. So I chose one or two standard conflicts as an example, analyzed them and suggested a way out. I tried to understand why one solution was preferable to another.

Then I defined in writing where my priorities lay and tried to concentrate on them, once again using the system of analyzing a particular situation and drawing conclusions.

Learn to say no to both an officer and a private.

Show determination in what you do.

Do not be slow to praise when a soldier deserves it.

Assume responsibility if necessary.

Work according to plan.

Suppress your anger.

Learn to sense the passage of time. Etc...etc..

Naturally, these rules were not perfect, but nonetheless they helped not only me but also future generations of conscripts. For several years after I left the army, when I was in Rostov, I called in at my unit and saw that my note-pad, now battered and pasted together in many places, was in the hands of a sergeant. It had the following inscription on the front cover: "de for Young Non-Commissioned Officers". It was handed over from sergeant to sergeant, from call-up to call-up.

By the way, before I wrote "An Aide ..." had only the vaguest notion of what an officers' life in the army was like. But my observations helped me to understand the motives behind officers' orders, their behavior, and their personal and

## **The President's Crown of Thorns**

professional problems. The continuous combat alert keeps an officer under stress for years. His responsibility for the lives of others, compounded by the housing shortage, the frequent moves, and the poorly organized structure for private life, all resulted in broken families and outbursts of uncontrolled rage. In short, this kind of life was far from sweet. Besides, an officer's wages left much to be desired. And then there was fear: the constant fear of being discharged from the army and finding oneself without a profession, without shelter, without anything. In such cases an ex-officer often dropped out of life without anyone to care for him. And, at the age of forty-five or fifty you could find yourself facing an empty life, a vacuum.

My ex-commander, a man with a heart of gold, Anatoly Vladimirovich Luzhnevsky, was on a waiting list for an apartment for twenty-five years and he never got one. He was transferred to the reserves and it took me, then a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of Russia, a lot of effort to see that justice was done for him.

In later years, when I was already working in business, I attempted to resurrect some of the attributes I had acquired in the army. After all, it was there that I became tough and polished up my character...

Bearing in mind the acute needs of the army, I established the "Katyusha" charitable foundation to see that servicemen were given social security, while also giving my old unit computers, TV-sets and a carpet. I presented the officers with wristwatches, renovated the mess and distributed over ten million rubles (quite a big sum of money at that time) as bonuses for the employees.

Whenever the army turned to me with some request, I always tried to find the necessary funds, however strained my budget was. I realized that one should not expect fighting spirit or energetic defense from an impoverished army.

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Once I came across the following fact in the press: immediately before the war against Hitler over two thirds of the top-rank officers were shot or exiled to prison-camps. By 1941 the flower of the Red Army had been exterminated. As a result tens of millions of soldiers perished unnecessarily during the Second World War.

Marshall Blucher's innovative paratrooper landing operation, the brilliant tank maneuvers during pre-war exercises, the legendary individuals, the great military talents - all this was crushed, betrayed and destroyed. "We will pull down the world of violence and coercion and in its stead..." they used to sing the world-famous formulaic propaganda-song. And in its stead... they pulled down the new-born world, along with the old one. And everything has been paid for with rivers of blood, our fathers' blood.

It is true that there were terrible things going on in the army. During the two years of my military service I saw a lot and was terrified by a lot too. However the army life is not an island in the sea. As a matter of fact it mirrors our civilian life. The only difference between the two is that in the army everything is visible on the surface, unadorned and without make-up. It is a life which is stripped naked. Here it is in all its glory! Help yourself to it! The same thievery and corruption, the same old cruelty.

The Kalmyks say: "When the strong exert themselves they grow even stronger, but when the weak do the same they break their backs". If you did not buckle in the army, then you were ready for civilian life where the same laws govern. In that sense the army is a great school of survival. I survived it. I built-up strong muscles and learned a great deal in the army which prepared me for life under socialism...

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### **Chapter 4. THE CREAM OF SOCIALIST SOCIETY**

The residents of the steppe used to call the Kalmyk nobility "tsagan yasn", literally "the white bone", or the cream of society. And although the khans and noyons were exterminated along with the clergy, the people of Kalmykia never forgot either the term tsagan yasn or the people whom it represented. However, nature does not tolerate a void, even under socialism. So people gave that name to the Communist Party bureaucrats, the top rank administrators, and the tsagan yasn were born anew.

I remember an occasion when an illiterate old man, listening to a radio report on the ceremonial funeral of some important statesman, shook his head in wonder.

"A ceremonial funeral, huh?... What the hell is all this solemnity for? After all he was not a beast to rejoice in his death. Those big shots aren't man-eaters, are they?"

After the army I returned to my old factory only to find that nothing had changed there. I worked as a fitter. It was not only the plant which had not changed; there had been no change in my home city or the Kalmyk republic either. Only one thing had changed: me. I was a different man now. In provincial towns life flows at a slow and unhurried pace. After the time spent in the army I felt as though the city of my childhood was fencing me in.

On one occasion I stumbled upon a typescript of the Kalmyk horoscope. In those days this was tantamount to dissident literature, something almost illegal. It was impossible to find published horoscopes now. Like anyone raised under the oppressive Soviet system who was lucky enough to get his hands on a semi-legal treatise, I did not throw it away or hand it in to the KGB or the local party Committee. Instead I began

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to study it thoroughly. Most Soviet citizens realized during their high-school days that any individual who is severely criticized by the official press must be a good and decent person and, if something is forbidden, it means that there is truth in it.

As I have already mentioned I was born in 1962, the year of the Tiger. "And the days will come when the souls of the believers will dwindle to the size of an elbow and man himself will become as faint-hearted and timorous as a hare, and the luster of Buddha's great and pure teaching will grow dim. Then the people will indulge in drinking and greed and the worthless will rule the world. Then he will emerge, the Tiger, the powerful protector of the Earth and the Lord of all oriental lands. The Earth will be shaken by his horrible roar and the worthless and miserable rulers will scatter in fear, there will be no more lies and the minds of the stray will regain clarity. Those born in the Year of the Tiger will be summoned to govern then and bring nobility to their people."

After reading this I thought to myself that perhaps in faraway Simbirsk or in Moscow such a man had already been born. Perhaps he was even my age and would set our upside-down world to rights. What might such a man be thinking now, I wondered. Maybe he was twelve years my junior or senior. After all the Year of the Tiger is repeated every twelve years according to the Buddhist calendar. How would he begin to implement future changes? And how would they come about?

That same year I had an acute presentiment of change. Something was brewing in the air at that time. It was becoming harder and harder to breathe as though a thunderstorm was approaching. The country was longing for the air of freedom. With every nerve and fibre of my being I felt that somewhere, at the other end of the Soviet empire, a future reformer was living, thinking and already beginning to act. What would his

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first steps be? Would he start out with political or economic reforms? Or perhaps both? Which was more important?

In order to be able to answer these questions I began to study text-books on economics and politics, to collect statistics and read the newspapers closely. These new areas of interest proved very helpful during my entrance examinations to the Moscow Foreign Relations Institute (FRI), the most prestigious and inaccessible higher educational institution in the USSR.

I had never dreamed of becoming a diplomat. The terms “diplomat” and “ambassador” belonged to a different, more beautiful world, the unobtainable world of the Soviet elite which I, a mere fitter from a small-town factory, had only the vaguest notion of.

The FRI was rumored to be a school for the chosen few, the offspring of people with top-level family connections. So, in spite of all the unadventurous spirits surrounding me, or perhaps in order to prove to myself that I was worth something, I applied for the prestigious and virtually inaccessible Japanese department. My chances were very slim, but I had nothing to lose. Besides I was desperate to find out if I could pass the test and be admitted to the institute.

- “You haven't learned anything in either the army or the factory,” my parents told me when I announced my decision to them. “It is time you stopped trying to catch pie in the sky. Come down to earth.”

- “Whatever for? After all Slava has managed to enter the institute, hasn't he?” I said.

- “How can you compare yourself with Slava? His is an altogether different case!”

That was quite a support! As a matter of fact my parents have always treated me with some caution. And also one had to appreciate the mores of a small provincial town.

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Here everyone knows everyone else, rumors spread with lightning speed and became overgrown with invention and opinion. In short, my parents did not want people to laugh at me behind my back and wag their fingers at me saying: "Just look at him! Can you picture that wretched fitter as a diplomat?" As for me, I was not in the least upset by their chin-wagging. You cannot curb people's tongues anyway; such is human nature. The Bible says: "A prophet hath no honor in his own country."

Actually I could understand these people. An acquaintance of mine once said to me: "Perhaps Russia has too many talented people to really value them. Hundreds of thousands of such people are now living in villages and regional centers planting potatoes, watching over their grain barns and getting drunk on vodka. They could be excellent cosmetologists or chemists, but they would have to go to a big city, preferably Moscow, to develop their talent. However, to live there you need a permit, which is next to impossible to acquire. This is why gifted people live on the periphery of the country. Our country doesn't need them. What it needs is mediocrities, standardized folk. Standard buildings, standard clothes and wages, hackneyed thoughts and standard behavior. Everyone is content and equal. They are easier to govern that way. In Russia people survive not because of the state, but in spite of it. If the great scientist Lomonosov had not come to Moscow, he would have remained a swineherd for the rest of his life."

My acquaintance was right in many respects. Living in a small town I saw how many bright people took to drinking to drown their anguish. Their unneeded energy was spent wastefully on gossip, petty intrigues, useless effort and fits of motiveless rage...

When you ride in the summer steppe for many hours and the monotonous landscape begins to lull you to sleep,

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sometimes, quite unexpectedly, a bewitching mirage appears before or besides you in the web of the transparent air. Then reality and imagination get mixed up and you are unable to distinguish where dreams begin and reality ends because the borderline between them has seeped.

It is said that a butterfly once appeared to the ancient Chinese philosopher Chuan-tsi in his sleep. When he awoke he started to reflect on his dream trying to understand whether it was he who had seen the butterfly or the butterfly who had seen him. So what is reality? Are dreams real, or is reality perhaps nothing but a dream?

Several years later, when our country was undergoing radical change, I remembered how clearly I had sensed the future advent of a reformer.

The day came for me to fly to Moscow to take the entrance examinations. On the way to the airport I spotted a seagull from the car window. It was circling above the steppe. There was nothing unusual about this, for Kalmykia is situated on the ancient seabed of the Caspian Sea, so the age-old instinct of these birds makes them fly far into the remotest parts of the steppe. Like harbingers of times long past, they fly low over the sun-baked land issuing plaintive throaty cries when they cannot find the erstwhile nests of their ancestors. That morning I felt as if I was seeing these sea birds for the first time and an acute anguish gripped my heart. I took a deep breath, smelling the thick, herbal aroma of the steppe and the salty hot air, and then dived into the spacious belly of the airplane.

I was at the beginning of yet another stage in my life. What was awaiting me? How would Moscow - a bustling city burdened with its own problems and concerns, unforgiving of failure, and filled with pride for its fussy and gaudy life-style - greet me?

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The plane taxied along the runway, then stopped. minute later the engines set up a deafening roar, and a shiver ran down the YAK-40's metal body as it raced along the strip of concrete. I was looking through the window. Down far below was my home town with its unpresentable and squat one- or two-story houses, a town that had rolled itself into a ball like a stray kitten. Suddenly I was overcome by an acute sense of pity and love for my home. My heart filled with light and a piercing yearning which did not leave me until I reached Moscow...

Much to my surprise I was effortlessly accepted into the institute and became a student of Japanese. However this did not make me feel especially happy. On the contrary, I was a little dissatisfied and disillusioned. For everything turned out to be very different from how I had imagined it.

I was walking along Tverskoy Boulevard. The air was white with floating poplar-seeds. A light breeze sucked them into fuzzy whirlpools and carried them away to the edge of the sidewalk. Children were everywhere, running to and fro with loud cheerful cries, while chess-players sat on park benches contemplating their next move and clicking their chess-clocks. The sun was shining through the crowns of the boulevard's trees as if crucified on their branches. Just another typical Moscow day, with life following its own course regardless of me. For no obvious reason I felt upset and hurt, as though Moscow had deceived me. It was only later that I realized the source of this mood. With no friends around and not a single soul to share my joy with, it was only natural that I felt unhappy.

After the years in the army and at the factory I had a big thirst for knowledge and pounced on books with great enthusiasm. The chief political institute in the country was essentially intended for young men aspiring to big-time careers and a place at the top of the Party hierarchy. I must do the students credit, however, for whenever they set themselves a

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goal they did their utmost to achieve it. The FRI made it possible for them to live abroad officially, which was one of the shortest routes to the top. Small wonder then that the children, grandchildren and close relatives of the Communist Party elite studied there: Gromyko's grandson, Brezhnev's grandson, Sholokhov's son, every one of them a "white bone". The institute was also filled with the privileged youth of other Soviet republics and socialist countries - the secretaries of regional party committees, district committees and general officers.

It was only natural that a circle should form around these so-called "golden youths" in the IFR student body. Many behaved obsequiously and literally danced attendance on them, trying to make friends with the scions of powerful families who were "doomed" to getting the most enviable job placements. As a matter of fact, quite a few among the patricians were rather decent and likeable fellows; they had their faults and flaws (but who doesn't?) and their strong and weak points. So the commoners often pestered the chosen few, trying to curry favor with them by going out of their way to be helpful whenever possible. But there was nothing special about this. Obsequiousness had been cultivated since the very birth of this country. Officially they called it "a devotion to the cause of the Party and personally to...". "Personally" was preferable and valued more highly because not everyone was admitted to the sweet and nourishing class of prominent individuals.

On the second or third day at the institute I chanced to overhear a conversation between two students.

- "I've got myself a place in Petrov and Sidorov's seminars."

- "Whatever for?"

- "What do you mean what for? Petrov is the secretary of the institute's party organization and Sidorov is chairman of the commission for the job-placement of graduate-students. I have already spoken twice at their seminars. I want them to

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remember me. You see, the more often they see me there the better. That way they will surely not forget me.”

- “Big deal! I've made the acquaintance of Brezhnev's grandson.”

The first one gave an envious whistle. To get acquainted with the grandson of Brezhnev or Gromyko was the same as drawing a lottery ticket worth a million dollars or even more.

“Could you arrange for me to meet him?” There was envy, entreaty and hope in his voice.

Well, such things did happen. The primary political institute in the country was full of the keenest pawns of socialism who would fulfill orders without thinking, and display their zeal by ripping their shirts and banging their fists on the rostrum when demanding the death sentence for a Party enemy. I had heard many times that the FRI was an institution for the privileged but, being from a one horse town, I could not believe that. Yet now I saw for myself that all this was true.

“Shit! I'll have to live alongside these creatures for five whole years,” I thought to myself. From the very beginning, without having had time to succumb to the charms of the place, I became utterly disillusioned. Again I should add that there was nothing peculiar to rail against. The institute's students were not the worst representatives of their generation. Other educational institutions were filled with the same kind of people. Some drank vodka and went to jail, others concentrated on building their careers, and others still just drifted with the current. They were the typical offspring, as it were, of the great pioneer-hero Pavlik Morozov and the no less famous Bolshevik-Cossack organizer of one of the first collective farms, Makar Nagulnov from Sholokhov's “Quiet Flows the Don”.

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I must say that the institute did provide its students with a good and thorough education. I did not cling to the children of the powerful or try to win their friendship. I was not one for seeking a sure-fire way to a successful career; I belonged among the commoners.

By attending lectures, seminars and consultations, I began to see many historical events from a new and different angle. I studied the history of covert diplomacy, conducted political and economic analysis of various countries, and learned in depth about other cultures, ways of life, customs, traditions and religions. I attended Language-training sessions, lectures in human psychology, the art of communication, the history of political movements and coup d'état, etc, etc. For a small town boy like me all this was a new discovery. I was astonished at the subtlety of diplomatic negotiations and the complexity of political intrigues. I investigated the behind-the-scenes mechanism of politics. I discovered for myself the secret springs of state and world government.

A nation's raw materials, her industrial and scientific potential, her favorable geographic location and sea-ports, rail-roads and motor-ways, all that became the object of secret political and diplomatic warfare whose ultimate goal was world domination.

It was only later that I came to realize the true meaning of it. As I accumulated knowledge my views changed too. In time I became more and more convinced that politics in general was nothing but a pile of dirt. The history of policy-making is based on general deceit, trickery and the power of the strong, with very few exceptions.

Three centuries prior to the birth of Christ the great Indian king Asoka defeated his enemy. However, the terrible slaughter which had preceded victory radically changed Asoka's attitudes. From that time on, he renounced war and begun to blaze a trail of peace. Asoka's words - in which the

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king tells of his repentance and loathing of war - were carved in stone and metal for the edification of future generations of his people. "The only victory," he wrote, "is one over oneself and the winning of people's hearts by means of law, duty and piety."

He concluded peace agreements with both his neighbors and more remote kingdoms, following the fundamental tenet of Buddhist teaching: non-violence, non coercion and religious tolerance. All over the country hospitals and gardens blossomed, along with a network of wells and roads. In the 3rd century B.C. King Asoka founded four universities, and students from nearby and distant lands flocked to India to study there. Asoka founded special schools for women. He banned the sacrificial killing of animals. Asoka introduced vegetarianism which later began to spread all over the world. He also passed a decree advocating the good treatment and medical care of animals who should be regarded like a sibling. Asoka's thirty-six-year-long reign in government resulted in an unprecedented spiritual blossoming in India.

The famous science-fiction writer Herbert G. Wells wrote: "Among the thousands of names one comes across in history books, among all those emperors, monarchs and kings and so on, the name of Asoka stands out dazzlingly like a solitary star."

There was also the great Mahatma Gandhi who raised the spiritual banner of Asoka many centuries after the former's death. His non-violent struggle for India's emancipation from British rule should serve as a good example for states and nations. His teaching could enrich the world and take humanity to a new stage of development. It could. But instead of spiritual development, mankind has chosen to focus on earthly, material values.

There have been some exceptions, but unfortunately, they only serve to confirm the rule that mankind learns too little from the lessons of history.

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At that time I believed that the teachings of the great profets: Buddha, Christ and Mahomed were just separate chapters torn from the same great book: "the moral law of humanity". Maybe there would come a time when these chapters could be brought back together and man would finally realize that there is only one God and that He is the Moral Law.

Some scholars and scientists maintain that mankind has chosen the wrong path of development and that our road to civilization is a dead-end. There is now a great imbalance between technological achievements and spiritual development. The era of space-flights and nuclear energy started, not with atomic-power stations, but with the obliteration of human beings by the atom bomb. The planet Earth has encountered a fatal barrier.

When I am told about the durability of peace, the dependability of the army and unquestionable honesty of our diplomats, I can hardly believe my ears. I have seen soldiers standing guard next to a rocket launching button after smoking marihuana. I have seen officers giving commands while suffering from the after-effects of the previous night's drinking bout. Those orders were obeyed since you cannot argue with your superiors in the army. I have seen future diplomats who will stop at nothing for the sake of their careers. And don't forget the case of my fellow-soldier who was driven to despair by one of the grandads and was ready to kill his antagonist come what may. He had nothing to lose anyway. What difference did it make to him whether he pulled the trigger or pressed the launch button? Or another case, of a soldier whose fiancée did not want to wait for him. He dreamed of shelling the city where the unfaithful girl was living. If there is no moral law then everything is possible. Everything is permissible.

## Chapter 5.

### DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A STOOL-PIGEON, KIRSAN?

At the institute the students used to think about the possibilities for the future, gambling with their professional lives and trying to deduce the formula for success: at what age might they become analysts, counselors and ambassadors? The sweet charm of a career imbued with the fascinating patina of power, of belonging to the empire's highest circle, to the "white bone", was at hand. The FRI's graduation certificate, unlike that of any other educational institution, offered students the most promising starting point for a prosperous future.

Professional ambition became a kind of obsession for many students in the fifth year. I, however, was taking it easy. Everybody wants to do well. It is a bad soldier who does not dream of becoming a general. Few would turn down an offer of status, power, money and fame and anybody who denies this is either a hypocrite or a fool. What is important is the means by which one achieves such an end. And here again one confronts the force the moral law: either, or. Either everything is permissible and the end justifies the means, or you stick to your principles of refusing to betray and compromise your friends or cringe to anybody.

A new breed of twenty-somethings had already firmly established themselves in society during this period. They were bright, intelligent and aggressive and they side-stepped any notions of conscience, friendship or even blood kinship without much difficulty. They prepared themselves for power and for key positions at the helm of the state fully expecting that, in ten to fifteen years time, they would become the sole rulers of the country. At the time I regarded their ideas as childish, even

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insane. Actually to me their new masonic lodges and secret societies were just child's play, the hide-and-seek games of mentally retarded adults. At the time... I wonder where those people are now? Did they get their much coveted power?

The majority of students kept away from these societies. It was rumored they were being run by a special KGB department to expose minor, passive dissidents. At that time I did not yet know that each student of the FRI was automatically kept under observation by a special department of the KGB and that two or three students out of every group wrote monthly reports for the plainclothes men from Dzerzhinsky Square. I was not at all aware then that even my innocent attraction to chiromancy, graphology and anomalous phenomena would come under the scrutiny of the KGB.

We students had free access to many western publications. A number of articles on UFOs, on the way in which a person's individuality manifests itself in their handwriting, on the experience of clinical death, on clairvoyance and bio-energy, aroused my interest and I became an avid reader of everything dedicated to these enigmatic phenomena. I spent my evenings translating articles and notes from the foreign press and in the mornings I hurried back to the institute.

That is not to say that I was a total square, who poured over books constantly, diligently took notes in lectures, was never late for class and never played truant. I was a normal Soviet student; I liked to go dancing, I had been known to spend all my monthly grant at one sitting in a cafe or restaurant to show off to a girlfriend and then live on bread and water for the rest of the time. I was full of unrestrained youthful energy which coursed turbulently in my veins. Within a short time I made lots of friends, and Moscow no longer struck me as a cold, aloof capital. I had become a part of that contradictory, crazy, revelatory city and caught onto its fast jazzy rhythm.

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Somehow I had time enough for the institute as well as the theater, parties and friends. It was there, in the FRI, that I was given the chance to see the world with my own eyes. Boys returning from training trips in various countries described their impressions to one another. As a result of this kind of access no amount of propaganda, however sophisticated, could suppress the question: why? Why is everything so bad in our country?

Take Korea for example. Superficially it is one country, made up of the same people with the same ethnic roots and religion. However North Korea and South Korea are incomparably different. The same went for East and West Germany, China and Taiwan, South and North Vietnam. As for their living standards they were as different as night and day! Where did the errors, the miscalculation in the system, lie?

I studied the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin. I read them not so as to pass my exams, but in order to understand where the theoreticians of Communism had gone wrong. Was it their substantiation of future equality or fraternity? Or maybe the abolition of private property? Could it be that mankind was not yet ready, either morally or economically, for building Communism?

In those days it was fashionable in our elitist student circles to talk of the working class, the peasants, Lenin, Marx and Communism with a sneer of condescension. I argued with people who spoke that way. My point was that one could not dismiss all this thoughtlessly. I advised them to read the Marxist cannon so that they could discover all that was instructive and truthful in it. While much of the doctrine had been distorted and platitudinized, I felt that we should recognize and accept all that was right in it.

- "Kirsan," they would say, "your problem is that you have been spoiled by your Pioneer- Komsomol past."

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I refused to go along with that tired old Russian attitude where everything is characterized as either good or bad.

- "You cannot draw conclusions in a reckless cavalier fashion. Let's draw a line between what's wrong and what's right," I continued. "There is no denying the fact that millions of people do believe in Communism."
- "Millions of idiots. Nietzsche called them the masses, the mob, riffraff. The hopelessness of their existence makes them stupid. All they want is sausage and vodka. Marxism is nothing but the herd instinct of the poor. Failures, bums and fools crowd together in gangs because they are unable to survive on their own. They have neither the brains, nor the energy and perseverance to make it. A smart, determined and energetic man is always a loner. There are few such people, but it is they who make history. As for Communism it is the bible of slaves with animal instincts."

I did not look upon the masses as a herd. After my experience in the army and at the factory I could see and sense in people a feeling of discontent and inner resistance.

I read these lines now and smile to myself as I remember how my parents' had worried about what would become of me? Now I studied well and a successful career was predicted for me. I was young, lived in Moscow, had good friends and excellent prospects for a bright future.

The Brezhnev era had by now receded into the past. Andropov had died and Chernenko had succeeded him as head of state, although not for long. And then at last the young and energetic Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Party. The term 'perestroika' became popular throughout the world. Everyone's eyes were focused on the Soviet Union. Our country was undergoing breath-taking change. We grew

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intoxicated on fresh air. For the first time in many years people began to show an interest in politics. They gathered together in small crowds in the streets, squares and Metro stations arguing, proving a point, and floating their personal theories. The most aggressive and enterprising segment of the population realized that undreamed-of prospects were opening up for them. So they rushed in to fill the gap and earn themselves fantastic money at unimaginable rates of interest.

Some students at our institute viewed perestroika as a blow below the belt. The formerly prestigious graduation certificates of elitist educational institutions like ours were devalued, and people began to be judged not on the basis of their degrees and family connections, but for their professionalism and efficiency. Practically everyone was permitted to travel abroad. Traditional career structures were no longer so important. In fact, any small-time businessman was already earning ten, or even a hundred times, as much as a high-ranking official. Many could not stomach it and wanted to rebel. And under these circumstances the competition between graduates grew particularly severe.

Unlike many of my fellow-students, I had not at that time set myself ambitious goals, such as becoming an ambassador or a member of the Central Committee. Life was changing radically along with people's aspirations and I realized clearly that it was pointless to make plans in this situation.

- "How will it all end, Kirsan? What do you think about the situation?" I would be asked during the continuous debates about the future of our country which raged in our hostel, as in the rest of society. And I would just shrug my shoulders. To prove something or understand a situation you have to be in possession of the facts. And there were few.

- "Either you are very naive or very clever: but you must be one or the other, that's for sure," a fellow student once said giving me a suspicious look.

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I told him to go to hell.

To tell you the truth I was growing tired of these debates. That unimaginative chatter day in, day out was so boring! I had grown used to an active life and considered these conversations a waste of time.

On one occasion we gathered to celebrate my birthday. We drank a bit as was the custom, and someone suggested that we have our pictures taken as a memento. We began to pose for the camera, grimacing and fooling around just for the fun of it.

- "Kirsan, get closer to the grub. Great!" Bottles of vodka, brandy and something else were placed in front of me.

- "Now pick up something with the fork, will you?" We were laughing and enjoying ourselves.

- "Now freeze! Once more! That's it!"

When you are twenty it is hard to believe that your friends might be corrupt, that they might betray and deceive you. The revelation hits you like a bolt from the blue, and you begin to think in utter surprise: how can this be? It's just not possible!

We were all unarmed and unprepared. The first interrogation at the KGB overwhelmed me. For a long time I couldn't take the situation seriously. It seemed to me that at any moment the lieutenant would start laughing, slap me on the shoulder and say:

- Well, Kirsan, how did you like our joke?"

However, the lieutenant was quite serious. And I suddenly felt the full weight of that powerful and well organized criminal investigation system bear down on me. I seemed to myself to be a small and miserable creature, defenseless before that enormous, ruthless and heartless machine. In the hands of

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the investigator everything that I had ever said and done, the most innocent facts of my biography, acquired an altogether different, sinister meaning. My friendship with the son of Babrak Karmal, the chess games I had played with foreign ambassadors, my visits to restaurants and even my membership of the institute's branch of the Party, were all presented as part of intricate plan conceived and put into operation by the Afghan and Iranian intelligence services. I myself was accused of espionage on twenty-eight counts. I realized, at that time, that everyone is absolutely defenseless before the investigation machine of the state.

A psychologist once told me that there are two types of charges which are impossible to disprove: the first is that of being a stool-pigeon and the second is having a venereal disease. Any attempt to defend yourself against these charges in a courtroom just digs you deeper in. However, such accusations looked like kid's stuff compared with the charge of espionage.

- "Is that you?" The investigator put a number of photographs in front of me which were taken during my birthday party.

- "And what about this one?"

He showed me a photo in which I was getting into a car with a foreign license plate, then another, and another one.

- "How many bottles of vodka do you usually drink a day?"

- "Well, a hundred-gram measure or two. And that's only on festive occasions."

- "How much do you need to drink to get drunk?"

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I shrugged my shoulders. How could I answer? For on some occasions one glass is more than enough, while at others you can manage a whole bottle without any difficulty.

- "In this photo," he jabbed his finger at one of the photographs, "a liter bottle of "Sibirskaya" is almost empty. And yet eye-witnesses say that you were not at all drunk at the time."

- "That doesn't mean that I drank it. Maybe somebody just propped it in front of me for the photo."

- "And you, a diplomat-to-be, agreed to be photographed with that pile of vodka bottles before you? Sober? You, a member of the Institute of Foreign Relations Communist Party branch! That's quite interesting," the lieutenant grinned. He opened a folder and took a scrap of paper from it:

- "... Ilyumzhinov drank nearly a whole bottle of vodka and did not get drunk. Before that I noticed how he turned away from me and swallowed some pills. Then he drank brandy and something else, but still he stayed absolutely sober. That put me on the alert. Any normal man would have been knocked off his feet after such a big dose of liquor. The following morning we had to sit some exams and Ilyumzhinov gave clear and well-thought-out answers to all the questions, a fact confirmed by his getting excellent marks. All the rest of the guests at the party either could not pass the exams on account of their terrible headaches or only just scrapped through".

The lieutenant paused and looked at me meaningfully. He waited for my reaction.

- "What pills? That's absurd!"

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- "Such pills really exist. We know that. Intelligence officers use them to keep a clear head." The lieutenant showed me another photo.

- "What did they give you? And why? For what purpose?"

In the photo I was playing chess with a man from a foreign embassy.

- "Nobody gave me anything. What's all this about?"

- "Tell me what a graduate student has in common with an ambassador and don't give me any shit about chess, okay?"

- "Why not? You can see for yourself. It's all on the photo."

- "Sure. For lack of anything better to do ambassadors entertain themselves by playing chess with students, right?"

I was about to say something but the lieutenant cut me short.

- "Be warned, we are not damn fools here. I can see through you, see? You'll start singing soon. Your kind always does. So you'd better stop fooling around. Cough up!"

- "Cough up what?"

- "Contraband, foreign currency dealings, and of course, how you betrayed your country. To whom? How much did you get for it? When? And where were you trained for it? ..."

- "Nowhere."

- "Alright." The lieutenant paused again. "Were your parents ever exiled?"

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- "Yes."

- "Don't you have hard feelings on account of your old folk's having been exiled?"

- "What are you driving at?"

- "Answer my question!"

"Answer me! Answer me!" I still remember those shrill, loud yells that sounded like gun-shots. I stiffened, ready for resistance. Cold rage rose slowly inside me and suddenly my mind became absolutely clear. I concentrated on screwing my willpower into a fist which is what I always do at times of imminent danger. My brain began to work like a computer.

They gave me time to think things over by locking me up in a windowless room. I remember a room brightly lit by a bulb hanging from the ceiling. A desk. A chair. Four walls. On the desk there was a piece of paper and a pencil. The lock clicked. I was alone in the faded infinite stillness.

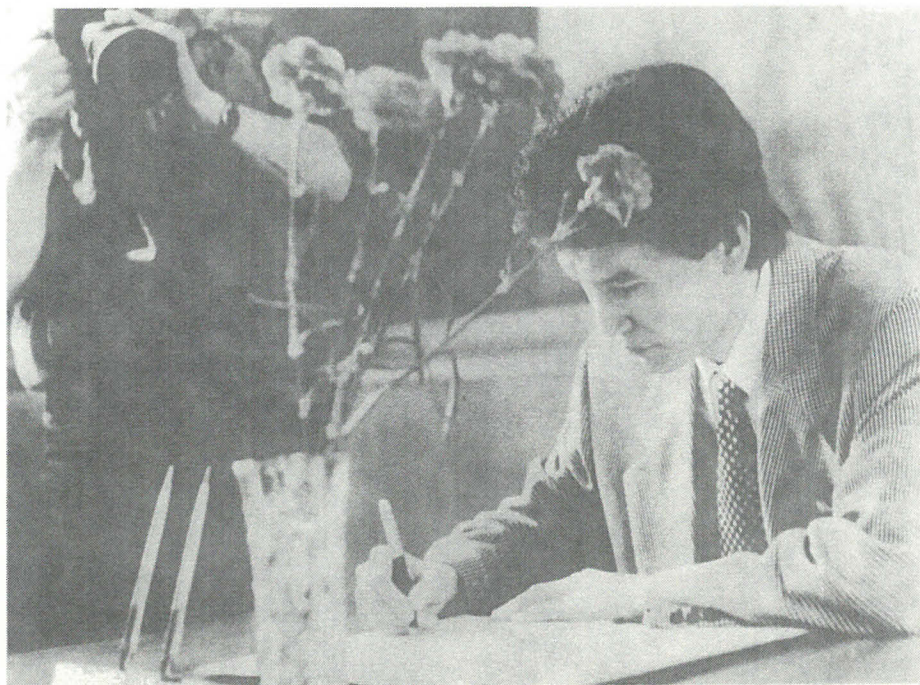
My head spun, assaulted by thoughts from every side. Each thought was different, scrappy, inarticulate, alarming. Who has ratted on me? Why? Why? I told myself to calm down, that it made no difference at this point who had informed on me or why. I must concentrate and not let myself be distracted.

I sat down at the desk. Jesus! They had even supplied me with a pencil and paper. Some psychologists! Make yourself comfortable and start pushing your pencil. Nothing will deflect your attention, buddy.

I recalled the interview with the lieutenant and this time round inventive and logical answers to his questions presented themselves to me.

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The first presidential decree is signed



In a working study

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Meeting the 14th Dalai-lama in Moscow



With Aleksii II, Patriarch of All Russia

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Suddenly I realized that during those two short, yet meaningful hours, I had had to readjust all my values. The institute, my diplomatic career, distant lands, all those beautiful dreams had lost their glitter in the face of an oncoming catastrophe. And one more thing... Locked up in that KGB quasi-cell I understood for the first time in my life how wonderful it is just to be able to walk about town, to see the streams of cars and sit on a bench looking up at the sky.

Little by little I regained control over myself and began to see clearly the full idiocy of my situation. How could I prove my innocence? What kind of arguments could I come up with? And was it really possible for me to prove anything when nobody was prepared to listen to me at all? The lieutenant had already made up his mind and come to his own conclusions: all those questions were simply routine.

That is how people discover that they are absolutely helpless, with a millstone around their neck and no way out. The machine of state will grind you up, there's no doubt about that. I must have stood in the way of someone at the institute and that someone ratted on me to the KGB. The KGB brought trumped up charges against me. The case reached this lieutenant who was desperate to be promoted to captain. Because, if this story of a diplomat-to-be who was recruited by foreign intelligence was presented in the right way then the lieutenant would be certain to get another pip on his shoulder straps. To them I was just one more rung on the ladder up. This is why the lieutenant wouldn't believe me.

Granny told me how in Siberia they had had to present themselves at the KGB commandant's office twice a month to be marked in a special register. They walked the ten to fifteen kilometers in any weather, even when it was forty degrees centigrade below zero. If they hadn't made the trip they would have been considered runaway criminals. So they walked there, dragging the sick and dying behind them on sledges to be

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registered as well. They even carried the dead in order to get official death certificates. They would walk to the office every fifteen days... The wolves knew that too and would group alongside the paths through the taiga waiting for their prey. Enemies of the people were not allowed to carry guns, axes or knives, especially when they were visiting the local KGB office. If a knife had been found on a person, then they would have been as good as dead. That would have been interpreted as an attempt to kill a KGB officer. It was very frightening, but there was no way of escaping those visits. So they undertook these long treks and then stood for hours in line in front of the commandant's house waiting until the officer was free to receive them. And then they would retread the same path back home, through the night-time taiga and the corridor of wolves.

“‘I don't know’ is three words long, but ‘I know’ requires very many words,” my granny used to say. This formula was worked out by the Kalmyks after lengthy KGB interrogations. But no, this was not the moment to reflect on this, I thought to myself. I must try to detach myself from my troublesome situation. I closed my eyes and tried to picture in my mind the vast expanses of the steppe. I felt that the cloistered space of the cell was weighing me down and destroying my willpower. It reminded me of a stone coffin. I had to recreate in my memory the steppe with its tulips, feather-grasses and the sound of larks singing. I sat with my eyes closed and sensed almost tangibly the mighty strength of the steppe, with the thick and astringent aroma of its herbs and the chopped rhythm of the susliks' whistling. I visualized the oozing heat of the huge red-hot disc of the sun. And then, quite inappropriately to the time and place, I remembered an altogether insignificant and uninteresting occasion which triggered other memories in my brain.

Six years earlier a couple of my friends and I were out driving across the steppe when we lost our way. There was not a single road or path in sight. We were driving around in

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circles trying to find some tracks with almost no gas left in the tank and the merciless sun beating down on us.

At last, far off in the distance on the jagged line of the horizon, someone spotted some barely visible black dots. We turned the car around and headed towards them. It turned out that two herdsmen had met up in the boundless steppe and decided to play a game of chess. In the limitless expanse, two tiny living beings were at play, crouched over the ground. The chess board was no bigger than the palm of a hand and the chessmen were next to invisible. The two herdsmen were holding sway and disposing of the destinies of their little chess soldiers in the infinitely complex world of the board's black and white checks. Is this not the way that destiny casts its shadow over us in the world? I was reminded then of the Kalmyk saying: "the infinity of the soul is the same as the infinity of space..."

The recollection of that saying calmed me. "The book of destiny has already been written. What was to happen has already happened. You cannot change the situation. You can only choose how you respond to it. The KGB and their interrogation, the four walls surrounding me and the nervous fear which was eating away at my soul, all this would pass and be forgotten about after a time. However, now you must bear up and see it through" I told to myself, "your game is not finished yet."

Now, five years have passed and, every time I recall these events, I ask myself whether the KGB really believed that I was an Afghan-Iranian spy? I still cannot answer this question. Our minds were so poisoned by the fear of omnipresent spies that the lieutenant really might have believed this nonsense.

As a boy I really believed that everyone in the West dreamed of sneaking into the Soviet Union and blowing up a factory, poisoning our rivers and wells or derailing a train. That was what we had been taught since childhood. This kind of

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information was rammed into us via movies, books and newspaper articles. They taught us to hate those who lived a better, freer and more secure life, and they awakened in us a vicious, beastly envy. He who lives better than me is an enemy or a thief. That was how they distorted the slogan of equality and brotherhood. If I am a fool, then everyone has to be a fool. The intelligent are enemies. If I do not want to work then you must not work either. That is equality for you.

Several centuries ago the divided and suppressed people of Rus were united around a great religious idea which transformed the nation into a great power. Hitler united Germany with the notion of national superiority and selfishness. However, as a popular saying goes, don't take pride in your strength, since there will always be someone stronger than you. What will unite us now? Envy? Our sense of superiority? These are wild and unruly forces which will certainly ruin whoever nurtures and releases them.

Five years ago I did not torment myself with these questions. At the time they did not appear to me in all their gigantic enormity. Then I was only fumbling for the tiny broken links in the chain.

Questionings, questionings, questionings. The lieutenant literally sank his teeth into me. He demanded the addresses of my friends and acquaintances. He intimidated and threatened me. He was desperate to win another pip for his shoulder straps and build a big case around me! Who knows, maybe luck would come his way. After all, in the heat of the moment Kirsan might blurt something out which would help construct a sure-fire case and get him hooked. I was driven to distraction by his never-ending questions: "What? Where? When? And with whom?"

Perhaps it was my young age and naive belief that truth always triumphs in the end that sustained me in my resistance, dissent and denial of everything. I did not try to make excuses,

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but I proclaimed my innocence in a very assertive manner. The more I was pressured the more I resisted. I think it was my sacred belief in justice which saved me then. If it hadn't been for that I might have broken. It was this very belief that gave rise to my resistance.

And so we kept on clashing, character against character. The whole power of the KGB infrastructure was behind him and I, who was cornered like a rat, had nothing to lose. I am inclined to believe that I developed the ability to withstand coercion and violence during the frequent street-fights of my boyhood. I couldn't give in to the lieutenant. He seemed to have underestimated me.

At some point between the second or third questioning session I had already categorized his methods and could foresee many of his questions. His tactics were simple. He planned to intimidate me, rob me of my ability to grasp what was going on, and then squeeze me for whatever information he required. I would then begin to expose my friends and acquaintances, buying my own freedom by slandering all and sundry.

The lieutenant was slow to realize that I was not scared I got over that after our first meeting. In my mind prepared myself for the worst and regained my composure. I told myself that my case carried a death penalty. It was possible they would put me up against a wall. But then we are all mortals and sooner or later death will come to each one of us. My fate had already been decided in heaven and whatever was to happen would happen anyway

Profoundly gripped by this kind of fatalism I stopped worrying. All my fear evaporated and I began to struggle for survival. I was lucky that since my memory was excellent I never wrote notes but kept everything in my head. That was why the KGB found nothing, no diaries, note-pads, address books or lists of telephone numbers. They could hang nothing

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on me and I revealed no names or addresses. Why get my friends mixed up in all this?

It took the lieutenant a few days to understand that he had been wrong to count on my fear. He changed tactics. I was paroled and warned that they would summon me again soon. The routine was repeated several times. I was summoned, kept under lock and key for a few days and then released. And they kept on questioning me.

After my first interrogation at the KGB headquarters in Lubyanka many of my fellow students immediately broke off relations with me and began avoiding me like the plague. I remember walking down the corridors of the institute's hostel. I had just been released and was feeling happy and affectionate, enjoying the sweet air of freedom.

- "Hi, Igor!" I shouted gaily at a young man with indifferent ice-cold eyes.

- "I don't know you, young man."

Doors, behind which I had always been welcomed, were suddenly slammed shut on me. A new stage in my life was beginning which spelled "es-trange-ment". People who have been through this situation will know how acutely oversensitive one becomes. You detect the faintest glance or gesture behind your back. You sense instinctively, with every inch of your soul, how the conversation will flag the moment you approach a group of your former friends. You are an untouchable, surrounded by a dead zone.

I entered the canteen, joined the queue and sensed their curious and alert glances in my skin. I turned to some guys who were sitting at one of the tables and they stopped talking right away. All of those munching and drinking people averted their eyes from me. To them I was an Afghan-Iranian spy and

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any association with me might hold grave consequences. I was branded with the mark of Cain.

And then I was invited to visit Lubyanka again. I felt a chill between my shoulder blades. The institute's hierarchy were already in the know. But the explanations which I gave in the rector's office and the Party bureau won me nothing. Indeed, how could anyone be bold enough to speak out against the all-powerful KGB? I was kicked out of both the Party and the institute. My circle of friends dwindled before my very eyes. I was exiled from life and treated me as a thing of the past.

That's how it was. I lived through all that. However, not everyone turned their back on me. Some people remained friends with me and were not afraid. I bow down to them.

My friends advised me to leave Moscow. I was through with Moscow. The only thing that linked me with the city was a temporary registration pass valid until the end of the academic year. The only tie. A small and almost illusive one, but still a tie. My friends were really at a loss as to what else could be done. They wrote solicitous letters trying to help me, but all in vain. My friends could not see any other way out.

"What? You mean you are going to stand up against the KGB, the Foreign Ministry and the Central Party Committee? You are crazy!" my friends argued convincingly. "You'd better leave while it's not too late. Otherwise they will make mince-meat out of you. They'll crush you like a mosquito!"

There is a popular saying: "If you've lost a friend it is your hard luck, if you've lost your parents it is a grief, but if you've lost courage then you've lost everything." I was all set to fight to the end. I did not see any other way out and decided to stay.

- "It's tantamount to suicide, Kirsan," a friend told me, throwing up his hands.

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Still more summons and questioning sessions with the KGB. I often caught my ex-friends' amazed glances: how come you are still at large? Haven't they shot you yet?

- "Well, perhaps you are not a spy," the lieutenant told me. "But you have entered our grinding-machine and now there is only one way out."

- "What do you mean?"

- "We might be able to help you if you can prove your devotion to your country."

- "You mean if I agree to go to Afghanistan, right?"

- "Not necessarily. You could also be of assistance here." The lieutenant started to talk about the treacherous nature of the foreign intelligence services, the feebleness of our youth and one's duty to one's country. I had already understood what he was driving at.

Seemingly casual, he gave me to understand that requests from the KGB could not be denied. "Incidentally, we consider your expulsion from the institute and the party to be premature. They are great ones for overdoing things."

The lieutenant paused and looked at me meaningfully. He was waiting for my reaction.

- "Am I supposed to sign something?" I asked.

- "An application." The lieutenant put pencil and paper in front of me.

- "An application..." I started formulating a sentence aloud as if rehearsing what I was going to write. "You are kindly requested to recruit me as a stool-pigeon. Is that okay? Did I understand you correctly?"

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- "Oh, come on! That's not the way to phrase it," the lieutenant said wryly. "After all you're a diplomat, aren't you?"

- "But not a stooge." I carefully pushed the paper away from me. Very carefully and very smoothly.

The lieutenant's Adam's apple twitched visibly. We kept silent.

- "As a matter of fact we could help you," he said at last.

- "Are you really in need of stool -pigeons?"

Suddenly I felt free and calm. That was it: I had declared myself. Now come what may! And yet somewhere inside of me the remains of my old fear were quivering. A sickening tremulous fear.

- "I am inclined to think you will come to us of your own accord soon," the KGB man said. He had no doubts at all. He was positive that I would come...

The sun was shining brightly. I was enjoying the smell of exhaust fumes and the sound of the passing cars in the streets. It felt as though I had not heard all these sounds for years. Freedom. I was free from the doubts and the nervous tension of the past days. I had made my crucial decision. I had passed the test.

Many years later, in Tajikistan, an old man said to me: "You know, son, you have been through the kind of trouble that not every fifty-year-old man would be able to endure without cracking. Great is the nation which has such sons." That is how the Tajik sage referred to my people: a great nation.

The temporary registration gave me the right to live in Moscow for a few more months. After that I would have to

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leave the city. I realized quite clearly that the lieutenant's polite threat was not a joke. Now that I was under surveillance, they could put me in jail for being unemployed, for violating the so-called "Passport Regime Act", for crossing a street in a wrong place. Or else they could have me beaten up by "hoods". They could arrange anything! They had a lot of tricks up their sleeve. I had several months left before my registration expired and I decided to use them to my further struggle. I could not sit and do nothing, but nor did I intend to beat a retreat.

It would have been naive of me to think that I could have beaten them in my struggle for justice. They could definitely have crushed me and ground me into the ground. After all they were very experienced at burying people alive. But I was lucky because perestroika was gathering momentum in the country. Glasnost and democracy had become household words. People were beginning to speak their minds publicly. The rusty, screeching wheel of justice began to revolve slowly not in accordance with the arbitrary will of those in power, but along the track of history. For the first time people were given a genuine opportunity to defend themselves.

I spent eight months sorting out my case, writing letters and applying for different things. It was a long and exhausting struggle, a hard-won victory. Hope jostled with disillusionment.

I learned a lot during those months. Wandering along the numberless corridors of power, it occurred to me for the first time in my life that there were an excessive number of absolutely unnecessary offices and posts in our country. All those pen-pushing clerks sat in their chairs deciding nothing. They occupied themselves by substantiating ready-made opinions and preparing different drafts and resolutions. Couriers ran around, telephones rang, "VIP" cars pulled into doorways expelling from their bellies sullen, self-important looking citizens who were weighed down by the burden of

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their own significance. They carried themselves majestically into huge offices, settled into chairs and took no decisions. They sat and waited for instructions. At the same time, the corridors were teeming with nervous, harried sweating suppliants.

“This is why people flee this country,” I thought to myself. “They run away from all this gloom. I'd rather die than be a slave and crawl on my belly before these people.”

My friends advised me to stress the fact that I was a representative of a minority group. “Give them a way out. It's just a rule of the game. Why not? This will all be forgotten about eventually.”

- No, it won't. Nothing disappears without a trace in this world of ours. The Kalmyks say: “Boiled meat will never be raw again.” Why repent? For what? I did not accept the rules and would not play their game. To hell with it all!

It seemed unthinkable to beat the omnipotent officialdom. Looking at the gigantic and cumbersome machine of the state one could not help but wonder how the state managed to exist at all. Our powers of survival seemed truly amazing. We lived not thank to, but in spite of all the prohibitions, decrees, guidelines and historical decisions of the state.

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## **Chapter 6.**

### **I BECOME A MILLIONAIRE**

A revolution was sweeping through the country: the revolution of the mind. The Socialist camp had gone to pieces. Academician Sakharov had returned from exile in Gorky, and East and West Germany were in the process of reuniting. Gorbachev had become the most popular man in the world. In the Soviet Union a cooperative movement was gathering speed and there were infinite commercial opportunities opening up for business people.

Soviet executives, dragged out of their seventy-yearlong lethargy, were confused and overwhelmed. The newspapers, radio and TV were full of hitherto unknown words such as 'consulting, advance payment, go-between, realty, clearing'... A new class sprung up in the land of the worker and peasant: the class of private owners and businessmen.

They were a daring and adventurous people. Endowed with great energy and willpower, they were literally dying to start some big-time enterprise. Builders, physicians, scientists, engineers and workers rushed into the breach opened by perestroika. They created the first wave of business in Russia. They made improbable deals with incredible interest rates and built up fortunes worth millions of dollars. All this was accompanied by the almost inevitable bankruptcies which in turn were followed by new starts from scratch, new risks and new victories.

They were all beginners, learning the ABC of business by making mistakes and then rectifying them: the first negotiations with foreign partners, the first contracts and trips abroad.

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By this time I had been reinstated at the institute, received my graduation certificate and was deliberating about where to work. Having fought my way down the corridors of power in order to clear my name, I had witnessed at first hand the rot at the core of the old state system which could no longer function and was doomed. I had no hard feelings or malice towards my former friends, the institute or the organs of state security. One cannot demand honesty, integrity and adherence to principles from serfs living behind the barbed-wire of socialism. At the same time I had no wish to work for that system either. I felt that the future of the country would lie in the hands of the evolving new class.

It meant freedom. In the future there would be no place for monthly party and trade-union meetings, with instructions being phoned in from above as part of the so called 'telephone law'. It would no longer be obligatory for an employee to wear out the seat of his pants by sitting idly at his desk from 9 a.m. till 6 p.m., five days a week. One now had to be active, make decisions, assume responsibility and take risks. I could not resist the attraction of this new world, a world of enterprise and action. I realized that business was not just a question of profitable transactions; it was a way of life. It was a vast world with its own laws and rules which were sensitive to any changes in society. It was a world which could change and restructure itself almost overnight; a world without geographical or national borders.

In September 1989 the Soviet-Japanese company "Liko-Raduga" announced that they would be interviewing for the post of manager. Candidates should have a higher education, a good working knowledge of English and, if possible, Japanese. This was an opportunity and I decided to go for it. Twenty-four of the applicants were invited to take the exams.

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A couple of days earlier I had called my parents and told them that I wanted to join the business world and work for a Japanese company. To them it was a shock.

- "Here we go again! Can't you just work in the Foreign Ministry like a decent man? In any case, they will probably close down all these cooperatives and foreign companies and put you in jail again because of your contacts with foreigners," my parents said.

The years of exile had told on their generation. Decades later that Siberian fear was still present. I sometimes wonder in horror what would have become of my generation had Khrushchev not rehabilitated the Kalmyks and allowed us to return to our homeland. If he had not removed the stigma of being enemies of the people from us, what kind of nation would we be now? They would have hacked the Kalmyk branch off the tree of life and dispersed it among other nations, other countries and lands so that we would have turned to ashes in the slow burning flame of time.

I passed both the oral and written exams in English and Russian. I also did well in the interview with the company employees, and in numerous tests. They tested for psychological compatibility, for one's reactions in a critical situation, for one's capacity for work, intellectual potential and a great deal of other things besides. Each test was assessed with a mark. There is no room for cheating or string-pulling in these kind of examinations. And the Japanese were very particular and meticulous about their prospective colleagues.

I remember how about ten years back our psychologists attempted to introduce the same kind of tests. Experiments were conducted in a number of different companies and were given wide and positive coverage in the media. However, when it came to testing the heads of these companies they very quickly put a stop to it and the experiment was never attempted again.

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My first meeting with Mr Savatari, head of Liko Raduga: a polite, oriental and somehow intrinsically serene smile. A quick glance which appraised my face in a second as though photographing it. Savatari gestured to me to have a seat. It seemed as though I could hear a tiny computer whirring busily in his brain during those few seconds. He was appraising me, the way I looked, my manners, my face. The Japanese are real face-readers. Savatari congratulated me on getting the job and wished me success. It was the usual conversation and it lasted no more than a few minutes. But it was long enough for Mr. Savatari to form a personal opinion of me. He looked satisfied with the results of my tests and the meeting. And that was that! From that very minute I became the manager of Liko-Raduga.

My life took a sharp turn. I walked out of his office a rich man. From that day forward my professional skills and abilities were deemed to be worth five thousand dollars a month, plus a sum in rubles, plus a percentage of each successful deal. I was fabulously rich! The company resolved all my accommodation problems in no time. They found me a two-room apartment and a car. The philosophy of Liko-Raduga was that their workers should never be bothered by everyday problems.

I had been studying the Japanese language and the culture of the Land of the Rising Sun for six years, but that was only theory. Now I was working side by side with the Japanese, greedily absorbing everything I could from these incredibly industrious and utterly punctilious people.

An oriental sage once said that “problems start when people do not love one another.” Psychological compatibility played an important part in the workings of the company. They kept a watchful eye on us, and allotted considerable resources to recreational group activities which encouraged friendly relations between the employees. Politeness, good-humor,

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smiles and encouragement were the hall-mark of the company. They created a high-spirited and cheerful atmosphere, and time flew by imperceptibly.

The Japanese view their company as home and their colleagues as family. The honor of the company is as sacred as that of your kin. These are the tenets of the company's moral code and are cherished by each worker, from Mr Savatari down to the humblest of charwoman.

I marveled at the way the company functioned. It was run scientifically and everything was calculated and analyzed by computers. A person spends one third of his life at work. Thus the work place does indeed become one's home and when you join it you are linked to your colleagues as in a family. A new member should not bring an atmosphere of nervousness and psychological tension in with him for this will effect the rest of the company's performance and resulting profits. Every worker gets a percentage of the profit. The higher the profits the bigger your income. It is a tightly connected and well organized structure, understandable to all. The company sends its workers on training courses and guarantees their protection so long as you abide by their code.

I learned so much from working with the Japanese. After some time with Liko-Raduga I was able to see how totally idiotic Soviet methods of production were by comparison. Frankly speaking, after six years in the institute I was dying to work. Here I had the opportunity to work and study at the same time. I was happy. All the knowledge and experience which I had accumulated in the early years, came in handy at this stage of life. My chess-player's logic, my memory and willpower, my sense of self-discipline and ability to manage on only three to four hours sleep a night, as well as my network of friends throughout the Soviet Union and abroad, all that somehow merged into one essential whole which proved vital for my work.

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Liko-Raduga was involved in the sale of Audi and Volkswagen cars and traded in cattle skins. It also dealt with manufacturing agricultural produce, organized commercial art exhibitions and opened restaurants in Moscow and Japan.

My life was just work, work and more work: contacts, meetings, business negotiations, flights, train journeys, never enough time, and the excitement of competing with rival companies. I was racing through life, past cities, countries, railway stations, hotels and airports. I was young, determined and intensely focused. I was not yet thirty years old, but I signed bills and contracts worth hundreds of thousands, and sometimes millions, of dollars. I could see how, unbeknownst to most people, vast amounts of invisible money flew from country to country to be turned into factories, grain, crude oil and diamonds. I was young and eager to make it, to know everything and do everything. I was full of unrestrained energy.

I worked eighteen to twenty hour days, seven days a week continuously. I would grab a few hours of sleep in an airplane or a car. I did not even remember whether I had had breakfast, lunch or anything at all to eat during the past twenty-four hours. I was always wrapped up in my work, journeying like a plane in the sky. A stop meant imminent death. I first had this sense that if YOU stop you die in the autumn of 1989, and it has been with me ever since.

During the years of Soviet government they inculcated a hypocritical and negligent attitude to money in us. I remember that, when I first started work at the factory, I was too shy to ask what my salary was going to be. To show an interest in one's pay in advance was regarded as indecent. The Soviet people were supposed to work not for money, but for the sake of an idea, for their bright future. None of us ever saw real money. We were paid a laughable sum. Wealth was not

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real for us and the rich man was a black sheep in a flock of the equally poor.

It was while I was working with the Japanese company that I came to realize and understand the true power of money. I stopped being afraid of figures with six or seven zeros.

While I was still in the army I learned that the first days are the hardest and that you must never succumb to self-pity. The more you pity yourself the longer it takes you to get accustomed to the severity of the daily army routine. You must exert yourself mercilessly, to the point of exhaustion, until your constitution adapts itself to the strain of the drills. Once you get the hang of the new rhythm you will discover that you have even more strength. "Debes, ergo potes" goes the Latin proverb: "you must, therefore you can". Every man can endure and resist a great deal. That is nature's gift and it is sinful not to take advantage of this.

Days, weeks and months flew by. I was becoming more and more independent in my work. At first, the company's heads controlled my activities and gave me advice and instructions on how to handle major, complicated deals. However, I was gaining experience rapidly and, after a while, they let me handle important deals on my own.

They raised my wages and I began to earn ten thousand dollars a month plus a percentage of each contract signed. Our circle of business partners in the Soviet Union and abroad was growing dramatically and most of these companies were reliable and financially stable.

Liko-Raduga applied the working practices which it had evolved from its past experience in other countries to the Soviet working environment. These practices worked well in the West, with its abundance of consumer goods and tough competition for each new market and client. The company liked to identify a niche in the market place, get a foothold in it

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and then fill the vacuum. Liko-Raduga avoided excessively risky deals, preferring smaller, more reliable profits.

But I favored bigger risks. My view was that money had to be invested in newer business areas and that the company's resources should be shared between numerous smaller projects in different branches of trade. The general lack of commodities and the unpredictability of Russia's economic policy required a different approach. That was how I viewed things at the time and I was eventually proved right in many respects. I saw that we were missing great opportunities because the company did not deem them to lie in their sphere of activity or to fit their business profile.

The management of Liko-Raduga received information from all over the world. Their computers registered, systematized, selected and processed that information before passing it on to the management. However, it was one thing to analyze the bare facts, and quite another to fly to these places and attend events, meet and talk to people in person, form impressions, and get a sense of the way things are from chance phrases, fine details, innuendo and intonation. As a result of these meetings secondary business contacts were established and fresh prospects opened up, which the company often reacted cautiously to since they involved highly risky areas. But it is impossible to foresee everything with the help of a computer. You cannot program a computer to take account of your feelings and intuition, of the minutest and undetectable nuance, the time factor or your general impressions. Yet these are a vital part of the decision-making process.

I took the responsibility for all these risky banking and stock broking operations upon myself. By that time I had accumulated my own personal savings, so I could risk these funds without violating the company's rules. And my intuition did not fail me. The very first money which I invested earned me big profits. On the wings of success I began investing

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money in major industrial enterprises in big plants and factories, until I came to realize that those monsters were too unwieldy to respond quickly enough to the ever-changing markets.

My trips to different countries and meetings with business people convinced me that giant enterprises could be efficient only in countries with a stable economic situation. On the Russian market they were replaced by small dynamic companies. It was not a coincidence that, according to our experts, in the 1960's the canny Chinese painlessly invaded the American market and established themselves firmly in it by buying into small companies. They now control over twenty percent of the United States' economy.

Training has to be paid for. Many times I was on the brink of disaster. But I always knew how things might end. A risk presupposes a loss. Fake companies, treachery, cunning, non-payment, unfulfilled commitments, bribery, these are the rocks of enterprise in Russia on which many businesses and joint-stock companies have been wrecked.

I had to go through all that to gain experience and develop my intuition. The Jesuits have a saying: "honey on the tongue, milk in the words, jaundice in the heart and deceit in reality." Not once did I encounter this in life. My business was a risky one, however, you had better not set out at all than stop half way to your goal.

My working day ended at 3 A.M. and often I was away from home for several days at a time. However, when I did make it back to my Moscow apartment I would find a crowd of about twenty people waiting for me there. This did not surprise me since practically every Kalmyk family has a continuous flood of relations visiting: some are on business trips, others are sitting exams, others still are just visiting. I was used to this. The presence in my apartment of my countrymen never shocked me. On the contrary, it helped me to stay constantly in

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touch with the people of Kalmykia. I did my best to help them. I set up contacts between Kalmyk businessmen and foreign companies, arranged consultations, offered advice on the current prices and found buyers for their produce. I never had enough beds to accommodate all of my visitors. Many slept side by side on the floor. Actually none of them minded these inconveniences. As a matter of fact we all were accustomed to living inconveniently in the Soviet state.

Incidentally, traveling around the country on business, and noticing the ever-increasing number of small-time entrepreneurs, I began to entertain the idea of creating a chain of inexpensive hotels. These hotels would serve inexpensive food in their canteens, would be equipped with rail and air ticket-offices, and be linked by bus to the airport, railway station and city center. That would have been a surefire, profitable business. It would have been possible to come to an arrangement with local farmers to supply their produce to the hotel restaurants, to build warehouses, some of them refrigerated, for retailers, to work out a system of privileges for customers, conclude agreements with companies and farms and to create guarded hotel parking lots. I could have founded an entire hotel empire had not other interests distracted my attention from the above project.

The world of business is vast, powerful, ever changing and fascinating. Join the business world and you will be utterly absorbed by it without a second to spare for yourself. Your head will become a whirlpool of telephone numbers, fax-messages, prices, deals, percentages, production volumes and delivery dates. So during the rare hours of rest, you look at the world around you with surprise as though seeing it for the first time. So there is another life where people are not always in a hurry, but can go for walks or see a movie! You are transported back to the city of your childhood, contemplating something long forgotten. Then you remember that you once lived like this too. However, somewhere inside you, a bell starts ringing

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in alarm. Your internal clock is ticking away the seconds, and your heart thrills with excitement at a new beginning, while your soul thirsts for battle. So you again plunge into the world of figures, bank accounts, letters of credit and stock-exchange shares.

Some time ago I happened to read the biography of a multimillionaire. According to the author "He was one of the most successful businessmen. He only went bankrupt three times in his life."

I recalled those words every time I found myself cast down. At such moments I would say to myself Cheer Lip, Kirsan! Things are not as bad as they look. What is there to worry about if even that most fortunate and talented of businessmen found himself out on a limb several times? It is no use complaining about your lot. Don't worry! Forget about it! Stop pitying yourself and nursing your wounds. The strong shouldn't behave this way. If you stop in your tracks you are as good as dead.

And again, just as in childhood, I raced ahead across bumps and hollows, collecting bruises and injuries along the way, but never contemplating the losses and damage. I was protected by fate and I came to trust in it.

I was always pressed for time. But even when I was utterly exhausted and my eyes had grown swollen from lack of sleep, my brain would continue to whirl. I even balanced figures in sleep, as my mind sifted through recent events, extracting the key nub of information from a conversation or meeting, and making a game plan for the next day.

The next morning I would wake up with several decisions ready made. However, most often I would have to make decisions on the spot. Sometimes that decision might effect the future of the company with whom Liko-Raduga was making a deal, as well as the destiny of the tens of hundreds of

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people who were linked to that firm. The situation changed daily, even hourly, and you were crushed if you responded slowly to events. It was a big war of nerves, intelligence, experience, foresight and, to some extent, luck. An intuitive feel for business - the sense of timing which tells you when to strike, the flair for accumulating information and making spontaneous risk assessments - does not come immediately, but is gradually acquired. More often than not you are unable to assess a situation objectively and your intuitive sense proves to be a finer barometer than logic. It is as inexplicable as the instinct for danger and discomfort.

In themselves money and material possessions are worthless. They are only important because we imbue them with value. This is why big companies invest nearly a third of their profits in advertising. You have to make people believe that they need your product, to overcome the customer's inner resistance and make them buy whatever you are selling.

But where does the admissible barrier lie? Is it ethical to intrude on an individual's consciousness? Ours is an aggressive environment. Politics, newspapers, television, art, all have an effect on us, breaking our will, changing it, or subjugating it to their influence. How can one tell good from evil in a situation where everything is mixed up and confused? Pondering over this issue, I kept coming to the conclusion that a new universal code of moral business practices was needed.

You cannot stop progress any more than you can stop life itself. Nevertheless, it is necessary to raise morality to the level of science and technology. Of we do not make them commensurate, we will perish.

Every minute hundreds of millions of deals are being concluded all over the world and business people are taking different decisions. Due to the energy, intuition and efforts of these people the enormous and complex machine of world economics operates.

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No, I had no regrets about taking up business rather than becoming a diplomat. My rather infrequent meetings with my former fellow-students made me all the more convinced that I was on the right track and doing something real.

- "You can't go on working like this, Kirsan. You are burning the candle at both ends," they said, "it's suicidal."

Well, as the Eagle in the popular Kalmyk tale of the Eagle and the Raven says: "I would rather feed on blood for thirty years than on carrion for three hundred". One's contribution to life is not determined by how long you live, but by what you do with your time. Everything in nature works in harmony, nothing is superfluous. Out of the billions upon billions of possible beings it is you, I, us that have been given a chance to come into this life. Why? What has nature pulled us out of non-existence for? What is our mission on earth? We are all alike and, at the same time, we are all unique. Each one has his own duty and destiny.

I believe that there is a high court in Heaven and that everyone will appear before that court at the end of their days to settle their debts. This certainty was revealed to me when I was languishing in a KGB cell. It was there that I first felt how long a second can be, and how much energy and information each minute can hold. It was then that I truly understood the value of time.

# **Without Me the People Are Incomplete**

## **Chapter 7.**

### **WITHOUT ME THE PEOPLE ARE INCOMPLETE**

I flew to Kalmykia in the winter of 1990. I was to make contact with the government of the republic and arrange for the wholesale purchase of grain and wool. I was also to investigate the local market as a whole and outline prospects for future business transactions between the company and the Republic of Kalmykia.

I felt happy about the trip. My assignment was rather simple and, as far as I could see, I would be left with some spare time to visit my friends.

During the flight I suddenly realized how homesick I felt and how I missed my family. I remembered seeing the white-winged seagull circling over the dried-up steppe on the day that I left to sit the entrance exams for the institute. For some reason, the Kalmyk popular belief that the steppe eagle flies back to its birthplace at least once a year came to mind. Some long-forgotten sensations came flooding in and stirred my heart. I closed my eyes and sat through the whole flight reminiscing about the past. I had no way of knowing then that destiny was opening up a dramatic new chapter for me.

Kalmykia greeted me with a cutting wind. The earth on both sides of the road leading from the airport to the city was covered with dirty gray snow. Here and there you could see dark reddish-black patches of ground in the snowy steppe.

I had heard that a pre-election campaign for the nomination of candidates to run as People's Deputies in Moscow was just beginning, but that had no bearing on my

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trip. It was still the same old system: the nomenclatura would nominate their candidates and the people would obediently cast their ballots. A sheer formality. That was the way it had always been done.

Absorbed in business, I had been paying little attention to political passions, although I was aware of the continuous pressure which politicians brought to bear on business. A lot depended on their decisions, resolutions and inclinations. Our foreign partners closely followed the goings-on at the political center. Many a contract had been wrecked during negotiations because of Kremlin decisions; and vice versa.

The resolution radically to reduce the production of alcohol aroused a veritable storm of activity among businessmen. Vast foreign contracts for wines, vodka and spirits were hurriedly concluded and paid for. The new policy brought unheard-of profits to those who were the first to take advantage of the situation. I remember the frenzy of activity in business circles. Funding was withdrawn and contracts broken in other areas. Businessmen stopped production, withdrew already invested money and paid fines in order to purchase liquor immediately. The vodka profit covered their expenses many times over.

My workday began with a quick read of the newspapers. A digest of information regarding the political situation in Russia and abroad would be on my desk every morning; this kept me abreast with new policies, upcoming issues, crop-failures and droughts and the new political and economic forecasts. An analysis of the situation made it possible to conclude where, when and in which areas there would be a shortage or an abundance, how to exploit rapid price changes, which contracts were best concluded straightaway and which could wait and where to concentrate capital. Well-established companies fed information about the current situation, political trends, inclinations of the regional

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leaders and hierarchy into their computers; they analyzed the transport situation and investigated a company's potential.

Big money was paid for confidential information and there were those who tried to bribe People's Deputies by offering jobs to their wives and children. This kind of expense justified itself many times over for the well-informed businessman was a few tactical steps ahead of his rivals. He had the opportunity rapidly to concentrate huge amounts of money in areas with good prospects for profit. During that period it was political policies which determined short-term financial investments. Hardly anybody was ready to finance a deal that would make a profit within one, two or three years. The thing was to make short-term plans and earn a fast buck. Many serious companies were scared off by the reckless operations which our inexperienced businessmen plunged into. More often than not these businesses went bankrupt, while those who had not miscalculated became firmly established.

As it happens business and politics are two sides of the same coin. However, the primary advantage which politics can offer a businessman is the supply of trust worthy information which lowers the degree of risk in commercial deals. Therefore, the biggest illegal fortunes were made not by businessmen, but by the civil servants who had access both to information and to the authorities who could ban or permit a project. Judging from the number of licenses which were issued for the export of raw materials there were quite a few of these businessmen-politicians in the Soviet Union. Within a short time Russians had created confusion in the international economy by selling crude oil, timber, cement and metals on the world market at dumping prices. That resulted in many western companies almost going bust. International stock-brokers raised the alarm.

To prevent falling prices the commodities brokers in raw materials, steel and suchlike, began purchasing Russia's

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supply of these products instead of selling them. But this achieved nothing. It simply meant that a new wave of raw materials were exported from Russia. Freight cars turned out to be the item most in demand in Russia. The country's seaports were cluttered with containers. Businessmen with suitcases packed full of cash descended on the train stations, bribing railway officials to allow their products to jump the line for space on freight trains.

As I mentioned earlier, the heads of Liko-Raduga occupied their own niche in the Russian market-place and were unwilling to engage in such risky ventures. Nevertheless they monitored economic developments closely.

One winter evening, meeting in a tumbledown shack in Elista to the accompaniment of dogs' barking, we began negotiating the delivery of a large amount of Kalmyk wool to my company. My colleagues had just come back from the government ministry building where they had tried, to no avail, to have the necessary paperwork signed. Government officials kept dragging out the decision-making process. We were pressed for time because our deal was under threat of disruption and penalty payments were due imminently. The boys had been unable to gain access to the republic's big shots for several weeks already. It was then, all of a sudden and quite spontaneously, that the idea came to some of us to nominate me as a deputy-candidate.

- "You've got to become a deputy, Kirsan. After all you are the one who understands our problems. Those White-House types are going to ruin the republic." I burst out laughing.

- "Me, a deputy? That's absurd!"

- "Why are you laughing? Are you not a Kalmyk? Don't you feel pity for the republic?"

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A Gift for the Pope, Bishop of Rome John Paul II

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With Florencio Campomanes  
and Russian star of dance Makhmud Esambaev



A visit to Vanga - an honourable citizen of Kalmykia

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- "Sure I do. But how could I help?"

- "What do you mean how could you help? If you are elected you will certainly do a lot. There are a great many problems to be solved. Just take a look around. We are the people, aren't we? We are the electors. What the hell! We will kick out the party brass. They are no good anyway. You have just been talking about how things should be done. Well, we'll give you the authority to do something for the republic instead of talking endlessly and sulking in back alleys."

I would have to travel around Elista and to Iki-Burulsky, Yashaltinsky, Gorodovikovsky and Priyutninsky districts as well as settlements, herders' points, local and Soviet collective farms: in short to more than half of the republic, and quickly too. I would have to give speeches explaining my program and persuading people to believe in me.

How well I remember those trips in that uncomfortable old Niva car, the bumpy roads, the piercing night cold, the car's dancing head-lights, the nights in unheated local hotels, the thin, tepid watery tea, the sound of cockroaches scurrying around, a brief sleep snatched until four in the morning, the semi-dark horse-milk colored dawns, the rusty screeching of the car's springs, the melancholy howling of the icy wind penetrating the gaps in the car's metalwork, and the jolting on the uneven dirt roads!

Five in the morning. My first speech at a milk farm. Forty minutes later another speech followed, this one addressed to the members of an agricultural equipment repair shop and then it was on to a school and a herders' point. Six to seven meetings a day separated by great distances. From district to district, farm to farm. The innumerable questions and the wrinkled faces of old men and women. Their thoughtful quiet-looking eyes and the unhurried and dignified words of their blessings.

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- "May success attend you, son..."

- "Do you think there'll be another war?"

Great sadness and great patience. The austere life and the wisdom of steppe people honed and polished by generations of their forefathers.

All around I could see devastation, ruin and poverty, the miserable conditions in which the peasants of the steppe eked out their existence. Talking to people and trying to understand their everyday cares, problems and hopes, I could not help but be astonished by the truly great patience of those who make up the backbone of the country, republic and state. What biblical faces, what strength of character, what well-wishing, kind eyes!

The new discovery of my republic and my people, and the understanding of my place in the nation, and the part, however small, which I could play in it, filled me with pride and happiness.

I would come back home feeling hoarse and too exhausted to talk or even eat. I'd go straight to bed and fall asleep immediately. And Gennady Amninov and Valery Solomov, who accompanied me on these trips and shared the hardships of that painstaking election campaign, were as shattered as I was.

At that time I was still a novice in politics. We were young and could not help but make unpardonable mistakes. But people forgave our youth and some of the inconsistencies in our program. We were longing for change and the people sided with us.

Before taking the decision to run as a deputy I called my elder brother Vyacheslav and asked him for advice. He was in Mongolia at the time and came out against the scheme.

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Vyacheslav briefed me on the current stature of the political figures in Kalmykia, foretelling how the election campaign would progress and adding in conclusion: "They will make mince-meat of you."

Vyacheslav proved right in many respects. Venomous articles about me began to appear in the press and the mass media and, as the campaign reached its peak, more and more mud was thrown at me and my program. Ironically, however, this may have even helped me to win. During all the years under communism, with its lies, slander and propaganda, the people developed a certain reflex towards the press: if they berated and criticized a person then that must mean that that person was decent. Such was the case with Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov and many others dissidents besides. A more recent example was the political struggle between Gorbachev and Yeltsin when people took to the streets wearing home-made badges bearing the inscription: "Boris: you're right!"

In any case, right or wrong, the voters spoke their minds and I became a People's Deputy of Russia. By that time I was already beginning to feel that I had acquired enough experience in business to be able to work alone.

Before long I created the "Sun" Corporation. Its co-founders were the newspaper "Izvestia", the Textile Industry Ministry, Moscow's Regional Truck Company and a number of other organizations. The initial allotment of capital was very small - just enough to get us started. The great temptation was to earn a lot of money quickly by staking all our assets in high-risk operations. However, by this stage, having been educated in the Japanese school of business, I had already been cured of this particular beginner's disease. Which is why the Sun Corporation took its first steps along a well-trodden and tested path.

I applied the skills and experience which I had acquired while at Liko-Raduga to the new company's work. The Sun

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Corporation did not advertise itself; it entered the market carefully, operating on a sure-fire basis. I think that this tactic is known as the cobra step in the East. The golden rule of business which I learned from the Japanese is to be honest and honor your commitments. No shady dealings; the reputation of the company is sacred.

That year a vast number of fake firms, companies and investment banks mushroomed all over the country with the aim of grabbing for themselves as big a piece of the state, bank or collective pie as they could, and getting away with it. As for us, our long-term objective was to break into the world market and earn a place for ourselves there, something which can only be achieved with a spotless reputation.

It took a great deal of time and effort firmly to establish our company in business. The shortage of money slowed down many projects. Banks were unwilling to give credit to an unknown corporation and well-established firms were very circumspect in their dealings with us. It was one thing to do business with a well-known Japanese company and quite another to risk allying yourself with a newly hatched corporation without reputation, recommendations or even substantial capital. But business eventually picked up.

As a result of my experience working with the Japanese, we did our best to sustain a friendly atmosphere within the company. And I think it was due to this factor that the company did not disintegrate during the first and hardest six months of work. We went through a lot and survived.

I remember how we bought champagne and a cake to the office to celebrate the conclusion of our first deal and the beginning of activity. Then a second and a third deal followed and business began to gather momentum... We won the confidence of well-established companies who were willing to cooperate with us and, as a result, our reputation in business circles grew.

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I was twenty-eight years old when I was appointed head of the corporation. Despite my being almost half the age of my co-founders, they believed in me: Nikolai Mikhailovich Solodnikov, director of the Moscow regional truck company and his deputy Nikolai Yuryevich Giller, Boris Semyonovich Belyaev, textile industry minister, Valery Vladimirovich Ryazansky, general director of the Ismailovo district hotels, Valentin Tsoi, People's Deputy and head of the "Expo" concern and many others...

Naturally we made mistakes and even blunders, but then who doesn't? I recall a big hullabaloo about the successes of funding scientific research. Scientific discoveries and research projects into new technologies were being bought wholesale and were much sought after. We could not avoid this area. I rashly put part of our hard-earned funds into a scientific research project. It looked to me like a secure, even a sure-fire, investment. For we found a solid western buyer for the technology. At the same time the research institute in charge of the project had too little money to see things through, and something was amiss there. I gave them the money and waited a month, then two, and then six for the results. As it turned out I gained nothing by waiting. The money was thrown to the wind. We found ourselves on the brink of financial disaster. It took a lot of painstaking effort to set up a line of credit, at a huge rate of interest, from a western company to save our enterprise and not go bankrupt. We survived and luck came our way again.

Luck plays an essential part in big business. It is impossible to factor it into any mathematical equation, but nonetheless it exists and should not be neglected. We began signing substantial contracts with German, Japanese and South-Korean companies. The corporation was extending its areas of activities. Together with French partners we started producing animated cartoons, we financed feature films, arranged exhibition-sales of paintings, started new newspapers and

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organized a Russian paper commodity exchange. The range of our activities was rather broad and I think my Japanese ex-colleagues would not have approved, but that was the climate in which we were operating in those days. One thing led to another and it turned out to be cheaper to create something of your own than buy it from middlemen.

We began earning huge profits which increased the amount of capital in circulation. We channeled the profits into new projects, joint-ventures and companies, creating numerous business structures in different regions. Some of our companies went bankrupt and brought us nothing but debt, but most of them stabilized and grew quite profitable. Our corporation began to resemble an unsinkable aircraft-carrier with hermetically sealed modules; the holes in this or that section did not affect the sea-worthiness of the ship itself.

However, the sheer size of the operation generated new problems. We could no longer keep track of the money. It was impossible to put your finger on how much this or that company earned in a month, a quarter or a year, what percentage it was paying, where the profits were going and how many new jobs it was creating.

Sometimes we felt that enormous sums were vanishing into thin air. We had neither the time, nor the means to prove it or catch the thieves in action. But we could not afford to work like this any longer. The corporation had become too sluggish and immobile and required reorganization. We needed a new management mechanism.

I began making notes, calculations and diagrams, until a real plan took shape in my mind. I shared my ideas with my assistants and we started to work everything out in detail. We decided to get rid of all superfluous links, putting the dependent companies in direct subordination to us, uniting them in groups, introducing the profit motive and giving each group more independence, etc.

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We applied several rather original methods which helped us reveal the real state of affairs in the subordinate companies. Now it became disadvantageous to conceal profits from the head company. Naturally, we also arranged for penalty sanctions.

We spent a share of the profits on social benefits for our employees. I introduced free lunches. Once every three months our employees could order free clothes: suits, dresses and shoes. The corporation bought vouchers for vacations abroad, covered the costs of medical treatment and did its best to improve the living conditions of the workers. The average company salary was one hundred thousand rubles, which was quite a sum in those days.

My duties as a Deputy meant that I had to spend a lot of time at the Kremlin attending sessions and debates, forming coalitions and programs, and dealing with discord. A major political game was in progress. Lobbying at the Kremlin, sounding out opponents, dealing with presents and promises as well as threats and rumors, all this was a characteristic part of the mechanism of any parliament. But since this received extensive newspaper and media coverage at the time there is no need to dwell on the subject in detail here.

Kalmykia had a number of acute problems and a budget deficit. So I had to make the rounds of ministries and various government offices to defend the interests of my republic. I had to argue, solicit, beg, explain and convince, by letter and in person in order to arrange the necessary credit and privileges. It required a lot of nerve, patience, and time.

I began to allot money from my personal funds for the support of the needy: I provided for the medical treatment of the sick, paid for surgical operations in foreign hospitals, supported the Arshansk orphanage. It had already become a tradition. In Moscow I had already established a charitable foundation and I created the same kind of organization in

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Kalmykia. And these were not the only foundations which I helped to fund. I also initiated the “Katyusha” charitable foundation for army servicemen and their families; a charity which helped the families of convicts, donated money for the construction of churches, rendered financial assistance to pensioners, etc.

People phoned, wrote and came to me in person from all over the Soviet Union with various requests and I tried to do my best to help them.

Every time someone came to me for help I would picture in my mind the weather-beaten, sun-burned faces of the inhabitants of the steppe, and recall their kind and patient eyes: “May your way be white (successful), son!”

I remembered the old woman with watery eyes who I once met at a remote herder's point. She was sitting in a tumbledown adobe but fingering her beads. She was almost blind. She had lost her husband and son in the very first year of the war, and she had lost her eyesight during the years of exile in Siberia through exposure to lime dust. She felt my face with her hard bony fingers:

- “Do you think that there will be war, son?”

- “No, there won't be, grandma. That's for sure,” I said.

She nodded, pausing to tell her beads, and then said:

- “Will you tell the people at the top that they must never allow a new war, son? Please do tell them that.”

- “I will, grandma.”

She bowed and placed her hands on her chest in a gesture of prayer.

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I offered her some money but she wouldn't take it.

- "What for? I've got everything I need. It's better if you buy something for yourself. You're young and you youngsters always need a lot for themselves."

I said goodbye to her, walked out and remained silent all the way to the regional center. I just couldn't talk. I met a great many such people in the steppe; people whose lives were rent apart and often ruined altogether. And yet they were so extraordinarily generous of heart and pure of mind! They refused to give in to the tribulations of fate and did not expose their wounds and injuries for all to see. Moreover, they seemed to play down their own spiritual grandeur so as to not embarrass or discomfort me.

These were the people who voted for me and trusted in me, and I never forgot that. I wanted to pay my respects to their precious gift of keeping intact the spirit of our nation. I was willing and ready to help them, and help them I did help whenever I could. In order to this, however, I had to be able to earn good money.

Many mistakenly believe that anyone can become a businessman. But business requires a special mind-set and talent. It puts enormous mental and physical strain on your body and soul. To earn real money you have to be a workaholic. You don't get something for nothing. I never considered myself a natural businessman. I always felt my inherent limitations and weaknesses in comparison with others who were instinctive businessmen.

But nonetheless I am a happy man. Over the past thirty years I have lost quite a few friends, but not all of them. I was detained by the KGB, but in spite of their intentions, I remained free. Ninety percent of the time I have been betrayed, deceived and conned by people because of my gullibility and faith. However, the remaining ten percent who fate has brought

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me together with have proved to be decent honest citizens. They are my friends and I value their friendship very highly. Ten percent is a very big proportion. Every day I encounter almost a hundred people and if ten of them become my friends that means that I make ten new friends a day. Is that not the definition of happiness?

Letters arrive daily. There are hundreds of them and they are all different. Some concern business, others are personal. In my race against time, during flights, train and car trips, in between meetings, negotiations, conferences, with my head full of figures and dates, I had to bear in mind these dramatic letters full of anxiety and entreaties so as not to forget to send money to one person, or arrange for a hospital bed and essential medicines for another.

“Dear Kirsan Nikolayevich. I am twenty-seven years old and have been an invalid since childhood. I can't move my legs and arms. Please excuse my scrawl. I am writing this letter holding the pencil in my teeth. My pension is very small. When mother was still alive we somehow managed to feed ourselves. Now that she is dead I live with my granny. She takes care of me. Our radio broke and we have no money to have it fixed. I have not left home for many years now and the radio is my only joy and entertainment in life. Please can you send me a radio of some kind, no matter how old it is I will be very happy so long as it works...”

When I read a letter like this a lump rises in my throat. How can one not help in such a situation? And I receive these kinds of letters every single day! Thank you for your letter, boy, thanks for believing in me. Thank you!

God in Heaven, there is so much grief and suffering in our country! Can our land really be doomed? And who is to blame for this?

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I try not to give in to fatigue. It comes on me slowly, yet inexorably. It weighs me down...

“O Lord!” I think to myself. “I am almost thirty years old and have done so little good in my life. How many more years of life will Heaven grant me? Twenty? Thirty? Will I have enough time to pay my dues? To repay all the good that others have done for me? Will there really be enough time for me to do that?”

It was three minutes to ten in the morning. Three minutes to go until the directors' meeting began. I was in a hurry. Two minutes left, now one minute. A car pulled over and stopped next to me. Thank God, I'll make it on time. I jumped out of the car and into a muddy ditch. My foot was drenched as my shoe filled with filthy, freezing, half-thawed snow. Suddenly I realized that spring had come. I looked around and saw that icicles were sprouting on the roofs, the sun was shining and everything was lit with unusually bright daylight. Spring! In the continuous nervous tension of the crazy rat-race, I had not noticed how fast the winter had flown by and that the thaw had set in. I inhaled the still frosty air full of the promise of spring, and that was it. My mind turned back to the upcoming meeting again. Mentally I sifted through the various parts of the agreement, the system of mutual concessions, delivery terms and many other things, but I was still filled with the sense of joy and freedom that the previous moment had brought.

I was filled with a growing sense of confidence, a certainty that everything would be all right. It's okay, boss. No problem, Kirsan! I ran up the stairs and opened the heavy wooded door of the office. Spring is here!

The meeting dragged on. I had to decide whether our company should become one of the founding partners in a project. The organizers were promising us a hell of a lot, in fact too much. This put me on the alert. I began to smell a rat. What

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was going on here? Establishing a bank would mean good prospects and beneficial business terms. We were discussing the primary issues: the nature of the project, its cost, the overall banking situation, the development prospects for our bank, the potential investors, the system of services, the production process and promotion.

Then it clicked! At last I found what was troubling me: the general banking situation. Various banks, or sub-branches of them had gone bankrupt recently. Major banks were doing their utmost to conceal the facts so as not to damage their reputations. However, some information had leaked out. There was talk in the Kremlin of a banking conspiracy: forged notes, mutual non-payments and unreturned credit. The main cause of trouble was not lack of finance, as many thought, but poor planning and an incorrect investment policy.

I ran through the list of the principle founders, examining their areas of responsibility and their financial plans as well as reading the summaries of their business histories. I also looked at the proposed members of the future bank's board.

- "How many of these people are resident in this region?" I asked. "And what percentage of them are blue or white-collar workers, and businessmen?"

It looked as though my questions had put the rest of the founders on alert too:

- "How many banks are already in operation in this region?"

- "What kind of commercial structures are active in the area?"

- "Are there any connections with the authorities?"

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- “How much will the renovation of the building cost?”
- “What kinds of expert are we going to employ and how many of them?”
- “How much will the equipment cost? Can we possibly rent it?”
- “What criminal gangs are in control of this region and how do we propose to deal with them?”
- “How far is the bank from the nearest Metro, bus and trolley-bus stops?”
- “How much are you going to pay your employees?”
- “Could you tell us about your bank's main-line activities? Where do you intend to derive your profit from? Who will you give credit to? What dividends do you expect to receive? How much will the bank's license cost? Officially and unofficially.”

These questions were all disagreeably direct. But what other choice did we have? The co-founders had to know where their money was going. If we came to a general decision, the details would be sorted out by our experts. This talk was just a preliminary and general one.

At last the unpleasant and troublesome thought which had been vaguely troubling my subconscious crystallized. It confused and worried me. The law-making fever again! The Supreme Soviet was hurriedly amassing whole packages of different papers as draft-laws were being submitted daily. There were so many of them that the executive bodies found themselves absolutely at a loss as to how to proceed. The whole area was a minefield. Legal protection was needed. How could I miss that out? That was my first task. It looked as though I would really have my work cut out for me.

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Society was in turmoil. The old system was collapsing along with its barriers and restrictions. The situation was not yet acute or tragic, but you could sense the coming disintegration of a superpower in the air. A powerful force was ripening which would pour onto the streets of Moscow and tear Russia apart. And the bitter smell of the opposition party's burnt gun-powder tickled people's nostrils with its promise of the imminent civil war which would manifest itself in first one, then another corner of the Soviet empire.

However this was still in the future, and for the moment a euphoric wave of freedom was sweeping the whole country. The old borders were coming down along with the outdated laws. Everyone of us wanted to believe that at last we were witnessing the long-anticipated turning point when the state would for once look into the face of its people...

According to cosmic law whatever is going to happen, happens. On the Kalmyk steppe they say that the light is borne of the darkness. A new chapter in history was opening up and new victims would suffer during the struggle between the old and the new.

Three days and nights of high nervous tension with only two hours of sleep. My brain was exhausted. My body was tired and aching all over. I was in desperate need of a rest. If only a short one, for about an hour.

I was at Sheremetyevo airport, standing by the white building of terminal two. All the approaches to the building were crammed full of cars. Suitcases, the sound of foreign tongues, customs control with declaration forms to be filled out. The loud speaker was inviting passengers to board a plane. I thought that it might be warm already in Paris.

It would be great to go there as an unhurried tourist, to take a leisurely stroll along the Champs-Élysées, to visit Montmartre, sit and sip coffee in the famous Parisian cafes...

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But somehow I was always busy and in an awful hurry. I don't remember how many times I've been to Paris. And what have I seen of it? Some streets through a car window, office buildings, the road from Orly airport to my hotel and back. That was as much of Paris as I had a chance to see.

I settled into my seat anticipating a three-hour flight. I needed thirty minutes to concentrate and review all the details of the upcoming negotiations and consider at greater length the complexities that might arise during the course of our talks. And arise they most certainly would. I had to try of sidestep potential errors in advance, as well as spotting possible omissions.

I had been urgently and unexpectedly summoned. This could hardly promise to be something pleasant. I had received a fax message on the afternoon of the previous day and so I was now flying out to meet my partner. My partner-to-be. We had drawn all the capital out of our subsidiaries thereby putting them on starvation rations. The corporation had decided to buy out the share-holding of a French company. Our experts and lawyers had studied the project in the minutest detail. This deal was vital to us since the corporation was entering the world market. And now this sudden request to come to Paris. That meant some difficulties had arisen. Some serious difficulties.

So I gave myself an hour to analyze the situation and two hours to get some sleep, relax and let my body take a breather. I would have to wake up thirty minutes before touch-down and quickly go over the whole thing again in case something had been overlooked...

In my sleep I vaguely heard the voice of the air-hostess: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are now flying over Copenhagen." Copenhagen. So there was over an hour to go before we reached Paris, an hour during which I could sleep. I would make it.

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And again I was sinking into the dense, lulling fog of oblivion. I relaxed my shoulders, then my legs and spine. My hands and eyelids had grown heavy. All right. Now I could stop thinking about everything and just relax. My body was resting, my mind calmed down. I was fast asleep...

During that visit I finally found myself with an hour or two of free time. The meeting had been scheduled for the evening. Spring. I took a walk around the capital of France. Fine smells mingled with the thawing snow and the acrid car exhaust. I walked along a bridge, past two your people kissing, past a smiling street trader peddling badges, old coins and chains, and past British tourists. Suddenly I saw the world-famous Isle de la Cite and then the enormous gray wonder of the slowly approaching Notre Dame.

I bought a ticket, entered the building, sat down in the third row and felt my chest slowly fill with a sweet pain. How many times had I dreamed of coming here! I felt intimations of a miracle. Awesome fear gripped my heart. And the anticipated miracle did happen.

Here in the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, from somewhere high above, majestic organ music streamed down on us. My heart responded to the divine music with a lucid and sad echo. My soul was crying and purifying itself. And then for the first time in my life a tremendous feeling of powerful and undisturbed peace descended on me and my ego was absorbed in space. My heart sensed the presence of God.

Born a Buddhist in the sun-baked Kalmyk soil, I looked at the image of crucified Christ and everything earthly and transient left me, my soul sparkled and began to be filled with crystal sounds. It seemed as though I was reliving in detail that long-forgotten night in Elista when, lying on a folding bed in the garden staring up at the night sky, something unthinkably huge revealed itself to me, the Revelation of Fate or Heaven.

## Without Me the People Are Incomplete

But then it might have been a magic sign which I, an imperfect being, could neither read nor understand.

These moments occur sometimes in the life of a man. Perhaps this is why our souls feel drawn to places of worship in order to retrieve, however fleetingly, that illusory sensation which has no name.

Perhaps initially, while still in one's mother's womb, the human creature takes in this light and this love, but later, once in the world, the tiny human being breaks the divine thread and only its soul keeps the sacred spark intact. Is this not why our memory lives simultaneously in the present, past and future? We are equally disturbed by reminiscences of days long past, the feeling of the present and the presentiment of the future. Is it not due to this very spark? Maybe this is why sometimes life suddenly stops dead in its tracks and you find yourself overcome by a fleeting, acute and unbearable yearning for the life you lived prior to your reincarnation.

But maybe the soul echoes in response to the silent scream of a dying tree, the sorrow of a stone, and the agony of a beast in its death throws? What was there at the beginning of my soul's infinite regeneration? Birth or death? And what will happen in the end? Will it be a universal exhalation or inhalation? In Kalmykia the old say: "Before dying one draws a deep breath which takes in the entire universe and then steps into that side of life carrying the universe within itself."

They say that temples have always been built where the earth's magnetic fields cross one another, giving off purifying springs of energy. The world is cruel and austere and the laws that govern us are imperfect and crude. Modern man is in need of repentance, since only a continual process of spiritual purification will regenerate us for the future life. Some call it conscience, some call it duty and others still call it the great moral law which man must abide by blazing a trail for generations to come.

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Maybe the Soviet Union has disintegrated because, overcome by fear, we have not traveled the tormenting, yet enlightening, way of repentance and spiritual purification to the end; and thus we are all to blame for the destruction of this great state. We have carried that bowl past our lips. But future generations will call us to task and they will stamp the brand of Judas on us. It is quite possible... possible.

I often think that years will pass and my life will come to a close unnoticeably and then there will only be ten minutes left before I die and disappear into eternity. Then everything insignificant, transient and fleeting will disappear and each event and deed will be reconsidered. Will my soul not cry out in bitter resentment for what we did? Will it not shake with horror? Or will we leave this world in peaceful dignity knowing that we did everything we could and that there is no cause for self-reproach? Ten minutes before death... Maybe our entire life is just a preparation for these ten minutes?

## Chapter 8.

### IT ONLY TAKES TWO WEEKS TO HAVE A MAN KILLED

The sages of the Orient have a saying that the family is destroyed if it is ready to be destroyed, and the state similarly is destroyed if it is ready to be destroyed. The socialist camp has disintegrated taking with it the Warsaw Pact and Comecon. This collapse, as always, has been very rapid, spontaneous, chaotic and rash.

The degrading, impoverished life of the empire's republics, the blatant falsity of the law and the media, the arbitrariness and stupidity of the authorities that stood above the law, the inherent Antisemitism and national conceit all accelerated the ruin of the USSR. Indeed, if God wishes to punish a person He removes their rational abilities. While Europe was in the process of dismantling its national borders and uniting its states we, according to a classic model, were busy setting fire to our former idols, and bowing to the ashes.

I remember the euphoria of those days. The radiant faces of people congratulating one another. It seems that only the Communists spoke out against what they considered to be inadmissible. But who cared about what they had to say at the time? The hitherto suppressed hatred of the people for the CPSU - which had trapped the country in a steel web of ideology and was used to giving commands and telling everyone how to live, what to eat, say and think - broke out and smashed down all barriers.

In 1989 Yeltsin left the CPSU. He became a national hero. Yeltsin demanded the closure of privileged shops ("distributors") and hospitals for the Party nomenclatura and the Kremlin elite, he urged the ruling class to give up their

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“personal”, that is to say their official, cars and country houses, he went to work by bus, stood in line at the local polyclinic and, in a strange and inexplicable incident much dwelt upon by the press, he fell off a bridge, and all this made him extremely popular throughout the country.

Komsomol and Party members hurriedly left their posts for commercial organizations which were subsidized by Party money. They got preferential credit and licenses for purchasing foreign goods and exporting raw materials. Theirs was a special and highly privileged business elite in Russia.

Huge sums of money left the country via joint ventures, limited liability companies and mushrooming firms and were transferred to bank accounts abroad. A premonition of disaster caused the Party to prepare for going underground. Uncontrolled by anybody or anything, Communist Party money was pumped out of the country through multiple channels. But that is a separate issue.

I think many people involved in business were aware of that powerful stream of money which seemed to be going nowhere. Business is very sensitive to the movement of capital, especially big sums. The money should eventually surface somewhere as produce. Otherwise, it immediately becomes obvious that something is amiss.

The country was in for big trouble. On the morning of August 19, 1991 a coded cable arrived at the headquarters of the regional party committee of Kalmykia:

“Classified:

To the first secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Parties of the Union Republics, Regional and District Party Committees.

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In view of the imposition of the state of emergency take measures to involve Communists in activities aimed at supporting the State Committee for the State of Emergency in the USSR.

In your practical activities you shall be guided by the Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Further information on the coming Plenary Session of the Central Committee and other events will be supplied later.

No 116/

Secretariat of the CC of the CPSU”.

The top echelons of the Kalmyk Party nomenclatura stood to attention while the people of Kalmykia, just as people all over the Soviet Union, could not understand what was happening in Moscow. The plants and state institutions continued to function, people did not take to the streets and squares.

Augusto Pinochet had this to say about that attempted coup d'état: “They have tried to do in the Soviet Union what I did in Chile eighteen years ago.” At the same time the well-known Chilean military expert Raoul Sor wrote: “If one looks at the “technical” aspect of the overthrow it will become absolutely obvious that your conspirators had no determination whatever to see it through. The Chilean military began bombing the presidential palace from the air during the very first hours of the putsch and then President Allende died. From a military point of view the move was absolutely nonsensical, but at the same time it instilled horror into people and paralyzed their will to resist...”

It might have happened though.

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- "We must act more determinedly!" Yazov said on the evening of the 20th at the council meeting of military and KGB heads, held in the Ministry of Defense. "We have helicopters and tanks and we will certainly use them."

The conspirators were considering the possibility of bombarding the first and second floors of the White House with helicopters. Only the warning given by the commander-in-chief of the Air Force, General Shaposhnikov, not to use aircraft made them abandon that plan.

We should not forget the gold stockpiled by the Nazi party of the 3rd Reich. Where is it? And how much of it is there? How is it kept? Where will it surface and how will it fire? Maybe it has already surfaced and is being worked?

A growing anti-Fascist movement is developing in the West. Neo-Fascist parties are sprouting up in Russia. And it is still too early to exclude the Communists. The Party's gold reserves would be able to finance any movement, overthrow or new putsch.

There was something very strange, even laughable, about the notorious Committee for the State of Emergency of August 1991. The leakage of Russian gold and Party money was also rather bizarre. There are many riddles in those two interconnected facts. To me the following is certain: Party money will operate as a terrible destructive force for Russia.

After August 1991 I began to feel intimations of disaster. The country was exalting and celebrating the victory, but in spite of that I smelt death in the air during those days. Hysterical individuals appeared on the streets in whose eyes I read terrible anguish and a thirst for blood. Little by little the country was going mad. Everyone realized that it was not yet over. Everything pointed to an impending slaughter. Dark shadows hung over the country. To many the murder of the priest Alexander Men and the death of Andrei Sakharov was a

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bad omen. National, political and other varied forces clashed with each other and found themselves deadlocked. The rehearsal for the use of force was over. Civil war loomed on the horizon. The country was becoming ungovernable, rent apart by inner contradictions. And who knows where we would have ended up had not Yeltsin exploited the situation, and liquidated the diarchy by concentrating full authority in his hands. In these circumstances it was absolutely imperative that power is held in one strong fist. The Soviet Union was precipitously heading for disintegration. The union republics demanded sovereignty.

Then the famous Belovezhskaya Puscha Conference took place. The Russian state confirmed the republics' right to self-determination. The Gordian knot of acute socio-political and inter-national problems was cut. Power was redistributed to republican structures and the ill-famed "parade of sovereignties" began.

The fire that threatened to sweep the whole of Russia spread to the fringes of the former Soviet Union. Meskhetin-Turks were slaughtered, war broke out between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis, the Ingush and Ossetians, and the Georgians and Abhazis, and a civil war raged between the clans in Tajikistan and in the Dniester Region. All this proved that during the seventy years of its existence prior to disintegration the USSR was not able to come up with a clear and attractive common idea that could have united the nations. All the ailments of socialism that had been driven forcibly inside broke loose.

Ethnic exclusivity and racial discrimination, a clannish mentality and secretly cultivated xenophobia had all been latently maturing in the country and blazed up from a single spark.

Pain and loneliness seize me every time I remember my friends who now live in other states. Russia has become

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orphaned. Every so often I recall the words of an old woman who felt in her wise heart the oncoming trouble already then: "Please, son, tell the people at the top that they must not let another war happen."

A herdsman once told the following story: once he lost five of his sheep. He suspected his neighbor, who had shifty eyes and an evasive manner, of theft. The herdsman believed that his neighbor's ways were the ways of a thief; "He's the thief, that's for sure!"

Several days later the herder found the lost sheep. They had gone astray in the gully. While driving them back home he bumped into his neighbor. He took a closer look at him and saw that there was nothing unusual about his eyes. His face looked friendly and there was nothing suspicious about his behavior. "Why did he look like a thief to me a few days earlier? That's what I can't figure out", the herder wondered to himself.

By 1993 Kalmykia was fully in the grip of opposing local political forces, groups and clan (ulus). The power struggle between the chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the republic and the Chairman of the council of ministers for governing Kalmykia grew acute. The elections resolved nothing. New elections were scheduled. The people were indifferent to the cabinet war. Devastation, corruption and clan rivalry, all of Russia's ailments were reflected in Kalmykia as if in a drop of water.

The inert and cumbersome administrative structure - forty ministries, one hundred and thirty deputies of the Supreme Soviet, and a whole army of apparatchiks - turned out to be too burdensome for a population numbering just three hundred and forty thousand. A major reorganization of the government and the administration was needed, along with a new idea that would address the aspirations of the people who had lost all faith in the possibilities of change. "It makes no

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difference whether you strike a pot with a rock or bring a pot down on a rock,” goes a popular saying, “whichever way you do it You are to blame.”

During my infrequent visits home as a deputy, in contrast to the hustle and bustle of Moscow life where was forever busy working at something, I sank into a kind of stupor. Time seemed to have stopped in Kalmykia years before. Like a boat with a hole beneath the water-line, the republic was slowly sinking to the bottom while the midshipmen were fighting for the captain's job.

By this time I had six to seven hundred people working for me in my commercial operation. It was a well-regulated company with a very efficient system of management. Our employees earned good, even very good money, but on the other hand they worked really hard.

In the city I saw a great many unemployed young people who were hanging about the streets doing nothing. They wanted to have cars, flats and good clothes, but had no idea or possibilities for earning real money. People kept coming to me for help and I did not refuse it to them, but this solved nothing. While I was in the United States I had a talk with, if I am not mistaken, Mr DuPont. As I was telling him about the activities of my charitable foundation, Mr DuPont asked me the following:

- “Mr Ilyumzhinov, do you not think that your philanthropic activities spawn a whole army of bums? You'll ruin your people that way. You accustom them to doing nothing. The aim of philanthropy is to create new jobs, not hand out money. People should earn their own money. By creating the conditions for them to earn well, you save your nation.

According to contemporary economists the most terrible category of paupers consists of people who are not

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prepared to work to get rich. But they constitute a most insignificant minority. Ninety-nine percent of poor people want to make good by the sweat of their brow.”

By force of professional habit I tried to reflect on how to change the republic's administrative structure, and where we could most profitably concentrate resources in order to yield tangible results within a short time. By my estimate, if we removed the excessive red tape, made the republic more market-orientated and stirred things up a bit. Kalmykia had the potential to leave behind her debts. I thought up structural changes and honed ideas until, little by little, a clear policy of economic transformation developed in my mind.

It became obvious that a superficial overhaul would yield nothing. The republic was in dire need of decisive and drastic reform which appeared to be too far-reaching for the present administration of Kalmykia. Russia was already suffocating in the rarefied air of its stagnant economy. The ruble was being disastrously devalued, factories had stopped production, and powerful strikes and demonstrations were spreading throughout the country. As before, Kalmykia's government was still holding out for subsidies and help from Moscow. I, however, knew that Moscow had already run out of money and that in the nearest future all subsidies would be substantially reduced.

Of course I could have been sitting pretty in Moscow, now and again helping the republic out by donating money, cars, medicine and food so that everybody would say: “Kirsan is a good guy, a really good guy. Look how he helps us.” My popularity among the people would have kept growing and everything would be just fine and dandy...

I was chairman of the Russian paper commodity exchange and the Russian chamber of commerce, as well as heading numerous other enterprises and companies. I was known in the business circles of Moscow and Russia. I had

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With sculptor Ernst Neizvestny and poet David Kugultinov



Among football players

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Meeting Mikhail Gorbachev

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connections and an operational base. Money, power, position, a real job that was yielding real results and great satisfaction, and all at a young age. What else could wish for, anyway? Nobody would have reproved me for my doing little for Kalmykia and its people (no other Kalmyk businessman has done as much for the republic as I have). Noone except me. My conscience tormented me as though saying: you are capable of much more, you must... You have no right to refer to others.

As a businessman I had learned self-reliance. Let's suppose that you are a long-distance runner. You are alone and there is no hope for help from outside, no friends or partner to offer you a helping hand and to indulge your weaknesses. Once you have started you have to run to the finish. If you undertake a project, set yourself an almost unattainable goal and let the best man win. You make yourself vulnerable if you hope for help.

A Buddhist lama once told me there is a certain human spiritual state which they call the bowman. Your bow's string is taut, your mind is concentrated and you can see nothing and sense nothing other than the target. Even if you hear a sudden thunder-clap or see a flash of lightning right over your head you must stay rooted to the ground and remain absolutely unperturbed. It is just you and your target. You are at one with the target and an integral part of it, and the arrow you shoot will doubtless hit the bull's eye.

That was precisely the feeling I once experienced in the army. I was running a long-distance cross-country race, in full equipment. Some runners fell behind, others rushed forward and ran ahead of me and I suddenly found myself running all alone. My eyes smarted with sweat, time moved inexorably, the heavy machine-gun was battering my body making it difficult to breathe. The luminescent compass needle jumped and quivered impatiently pointing to the goal. Faster! Faster! I was running through the night, falling, getting back on my feet

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again and breaking through the brushwood. I was tired out; iridescent rings of color swam in my eyes. I felt like lying down on the soggy cold ground and remaining motionlessly. But with clenched teeth and driven by willpower alone I took one step, then another and still another: I can! I must! I will make it!

Taking the decision to run for president of Kalmykia, I realized clearly that people were fed up with continuous elections, political intrigues and playing at democracy. What Kalmykia needed was a dramatic change of structure and attitude which would take the needs of the people into consideration, and would awaken and instill in each citizen the belief that he could, and must, earn a real wage for real work, rather than the miserable pennies which he was paid now. The republic must quickly embrace a market economy before it was too late.

I was fully aware that if I were elected president my popularity would swiftly slide downhill. I would be held accountable for the misfortunes and problems that had already accumulated in Kalmykia and the people would demand urgent improvements. But all that was insignificant compared with the economic precipice the republic was dangling over.

At that time an extremely dangerous situation had developed in the Northern Caucasus and there was a risk that the flame of ethnic discord might spread as far as the Kalmyk steppe. Urgent measures had to be taken peacefully to quench the smoldering fire in order not to let it set off a blast in that highly explosive area.

I was beset by doubts not knowing whether it was worth my while taking on this additional burden. I was not sure I could cope with it.

I flew to Bulgaria to visit the famous clairvoyant Vanga.

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- "Jesus, you are so young!" exclaimed the woman when she saw me. She shook her head and again said that I was surprisingly young. I asked her if I should run for presidency. Perhaps there was a more deserving candidate than myself? Someone who would make a better president than me? I also asked the prophetess what in her view the future might hold for Kalmykia.

- "Your people have suffered much," Vanga said. "But they have atoned for their guilt. I can see the clouds disperse and the sky getting clearer. I see flowers. Go to your people. You are able to do much for them."

After my meeting with Vanga I visited India and His Holiness the Dalai Lama to ask for his blessings. And then in March 1993 I entered the pre-election campaign.

My main rivals were Major-General V.N. Ochirov, a Hero of the Soviet Union who had served in Afghanistan, and V.H. Bambayev, chairman of the Association of Kalmyk Farmers.

On the day following the announcement of my decision somebody called me.

- "Is this Kirsan Nikolayevich?"

- "Yes."

- "Why ever should you campaign for presidency? There are too many others aspiring to office besides you. Stay out of it!"

- "Why should I?"

- "You go everywhere without bodyguards. It only takes two weeks to have a man killed today. Think about it."

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My election campaign was underway. I informed people of my program which included among many other details: the liquidation of Soviet Government; the abolishment of the KGB; the promise to prioritize the interests of private citizens above those of the state, to abolish all but five of the forty active ministries and to reduce parliament from 130 to twenty-five deputies; private property was to be viewed as sacred and inviolable; and church and state would be reunited.

There were some people in my campaign team who tried to play down some of the more radical parts of my program.

- "Why announce the abolition of the KGB, Kirsan? Can you imagine what enemies you will make because of it? Strike it out. When you have become president you can do away with it, on the quiet. Otherwise the whole nomenclature, along with the deputies, will come out against you. They have tremendous power behind them, don't forget. It's an entire army, and a strong and influential one at that. They will easily gobble you up.

However, I decided not to succumb to such tricks. The people had the right to know what I was planning. My program was intended for the people and I believed that they would support me.

- "Enough of our hush-hush talks," I said. "The campaign must be fair and above-board. Let our programs compete openly. As for the people they'll decide for themselves what is best for them."

I was launching the first capitalist revolution in the country. It was going to be Russia's first experience of the transition from socialism to capitalism. I intended to show the electorate promptly what you could achieve if you were willing and ready to work, and work very hard.

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I imported a nine-meter-long Lincoln to Kalmykia for the election campaign. I used it to travel to the different districts, herding stations and farms. During a whole month I subsidized bread and milk with my own money, thereby cutting the price by half all over the republic. I brought a team of Russia's leading physicians to Kalmykia. And Kalmyks also had the unexpected pleasure of watching performances by the rock singer Chris Kelmi, the band "Car-Men", as well as many other singers including Gazmanov, Apina and Rasputina. The people woke up and the election campaign began to gather momentum.

By the beginning of April it had become clear that my primary opponent was General Ochirov. He was supported by the international "Russian Club" of which he was a member.

The presidential elections in Kalmykia were so unusual and new that they aroused the most intense interest both in Russia and abroad. Observers arrived in Elista along with journalists from all of Russia's major newspapers and networks and foreign correspondents. Each day more and more newsmen, analysts and political figures arrived in Elista from Moscow. For the first time in the seventy year history of socialism a millionaire businessman was trying to become a presidential candidate while openly announcing his intention to abolish Soviet government.

The campaign became dirtier with every passing day. An initiative was launched to discredit my name. Newspaper headlines screamed out: "The Enigma of Kirsan Ilyumzhinov's Millions", "What Does the Coming Khan Have in Store for Us?" A team of people from the Security Ministry of Kalmykia, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, along with deputies from the group "Soyuz" ("The Union"), was urgently put together to investigate banks and companies with which I was associated in the search for compromising materials. All sort of rumors and lies were spread. I had been expecting these

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tactics from the first moment that I announced my participation in the presidential race. After all, I had been warned several times over the phone that if I persisted with the campaign they would waste me. I was surprised at the primitiveness of my rivals' thinking. Would an intelligent man whose fortune was built supposedly on "shady" capital make so public an exhibition of himself? Would such a man allow himself to be examined and scrutinized under the magnifying glass of the public eye?

The investigation team worked day and night to dig up information with which to discredit me. Their task was to find compromising material at any price before the 1<sup>st</sup> of April and they conducted more than ten audits within one month, all to no avail!

Then they moved on to examining the oil market, trying to link my name in any way they could to the millions of dollars that had never reached Kalmykia and had been frozen on the accounts of Vneshekonombank. But this was all so transparent that their whole case crumbled the moment they started to unravel it.

As I have already mentioned when we established the Sun Corporation we set ourselves very strict rules never to engage in doubtful deals, operations and agreements. At the time our aim was to gain an honest name and fair reputation on the world market. Now, I thanked God that my subordinates had not let me down and or taken one wrong step. Thus I felt absolutely confident about these investigations into my business dealings.

My worries were different. As the elections neared and the open competition deteriorated into cheating, cunning and lies, I realized that anything could happen. The other candidates had reneged on their promise to make it an issue-driven, rather than personality-based, campaign. Tension was mounting and urgent protective measures had to be taken. Our

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campaign staff was told to be scrupulous about avoiding conflicts and provocations. It was strictly forbidden to drink even beer during the elections. Instructions were issued and security measures taken. But still the tension kept on growing. The opposing forces were dangerously experienced in dirty political combat.

At the time the situation in Moscow was also far from quiet. The Ninth Congress was imminent and deputies in the Kremlin were divided by the power struggle between the executive (represented by Yeltsin) and the legislative (Khazbulatov) branches of government. Anxious days of strife set in. A group of deputies demanded Yeltsin's retirement. The still extant Supreme Soviet of Kalmykia supported that demand. It was clear to me that if Yeltsin was removed from power the reforms which I had planned for Kalmykia would never come into effect. At the most intense moment I had to break off my election campaign and fly to Moscow to support Yeltsin.

This was a very risky step. During my absence my rivals were able to score points off me and win more and more supporters over to their side. And yet I realized quite clearly at that time that the main struggle for the future of Kalmykia was now going on in Moscow.

Moscow was a tinder box. Both Yeltsin's supporters and opponents crowded into the capital's squares, carrying banners and chanting their contradictory slogans, their eyes full of vehemence and a frightening implacability. At any moment disturbances could have flared up in the city with disastrous consequences. For the first time in many decades, the shadow of a civil war hung over Moscow.

There is a Kalmyk saying that if you play with a knife you will eventually get hurt. And there was a portentous feeling in the air, like a thunderstorm brewing, although no one

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at the time guessed that this was the final rehearsal before the October events.

The Ninth Congress solved nothing of import. Both Yeltsin and Khazbulatov retained their positions. It was clear that this was only a lull and that the main battle still lay before them.

During this period I was approached by a deputy in the lobby of the Kremlin:

- "Listen, Kirsan. We want to have our man in Kalmykia and you are in the way. Stay out of it or else you'll never know what hit you, understand?"

- "How do you mean? There are 350,000 people in Kalmykia. It is for them to elect a president."

- "Come off it!" he said with a contemptuous grimace. "My security forces alone number twenty thousand, so it will take us just one night to bring your Kalmykia to its knees."

- "But why such an interest in the Kalmyks?" I asked the deputy.

- "Nobody cares about your Kalmyks...? All we need is oil and gas. And we're going to get it. I wouldn't advice you to get into conflict with us."

This was a conversation that I had in the Kremlin with one of the deputies of the Supreme Soviet. At that moment I understood that I was on my way to winning the elections. The people would vote for me and my program. Otherwise that man would not have risked threatening me so brazenly and openly.

- "Beware, Kirsan, we'll have you taken out of Kalmykia in hand-cuffs," he said by way of farewell.

The Congress was over but I was detained in Moscow for a few more days to witness the audit of my companies. Was it just a coincidence that this should have been precisely scheduled at the height of the election marathon? Actually, this was yet another proof of the fact that my program had popular support.

One of the auditors from the Ministry of Internal Affairs made the following confession to me:

- "The case is quite clear to us. We have absolutely nothing against you. And we would have finished the check-up long ago, but for intense pressure from above," he cast an expressive glance up at the ceiling.

I was growing more confident of my prospects for victory in the elections. I received a report from Kalmykia that a group of deputies were demanding a postponement of the elections till a later date, which proved that my rivals needed to delay. They were lacking votes.

By early April the number of privatized properties, stores and warehouses had increased twenty-fold. The nomenclatura felt that their days were numbered and were grabbing hold of everything they could still lay their hands on in barren and impoverished Kalmykia.

From the very beginning of the by-elections farmers came to me complaining that their bosses had threatened not to give them fodder, gasoline or financial credit if they cast their ballots for Ilyumzhinov. What were they to do, they asked me.

Now the big wheels were feverishly writing off, privatizing and buying cheap everything and anything that might come in handy. The meager sums they paid for the people's property was really striking:

A crane - 700 rubles.

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A warehouse - 600 rubles

A Volga car - 470 rubles.

Appearing on local television I warned them that we were going to return to the people everything that they had stolen from them, and I advised these wise guys to do so immediately of their own free will.

On the night of April 11, many residents of Elista did not sleep at all. Cars kept coming in with news from the districts because telephone communications with many of these areas had been broken off; another strange feature of the election campaign. People talked of ballot boxes with false bottoms and vote rigging. And on the way to the central polling station a ballot box suddenly disappeared. People started fervently to look for it. Telephones rang and couriers ran around. People had crowded into our headquarters and the nearby street. City residents jostled with visitors from the outlying districts, émigré Kalmyks and reporters. Everybody was waiting for the election results.

The election committee was counting up the votes. However, it was already clear that I and my program were winning. The tension of those days began to subside and I felt its heavy weight on my body. Kalmykia was the first in the ex-Soviet Union to turn sharply towards capitalism. The hours and minutes of Soviet Government were numbered.

And I was sitting and thinking of what I would have to do and what pit-holes were awaiting me as president.

By April 12th the White House, (that is what Kalmyks call the republic's Government Building) had been completely plundered. The carpets, furniture, telephones and even the paper had been stolen. The ministries' bank accounts had been cleaned out and raw materials taken out of the republic.

My first day in office: Congratulations were still pouring in from different cities, CIS states and foreign countries. Congratulatory telephone calls were received from Oppenheimer and Philip Maurchand, and telegrams from Dupont and Chon Ju Yen of South Korea. Meanwhile in the White House, hundreds of people had gathered with their multiple financial, housing and working problems. Sorrow, misfortune and tears poured through my presidential office in a torrent. One problem followed another. People wanted to speak out openly after many years of silence. There was at last a hope for justice among the people. They kept coming to me until 3:00 in the morning.

A few days later, the inauguration ceremony was held. The squares and streets were crammed with triumphant people cheering me and my - their - victory. I received telegrams of congratulation from the neighboring republics and cities, as well as visits from prominent representative of all three religions. The Kalmyks have a saying that three infinities collide in the steppe: The infinity of the steppe itself, the infinity of the sky and the infinity of the human soul. And due to its geographic location three powerful religions overlap in the territory of Kalmykia: Christianity, Buddhism and Islam.

While still the head of the Sun corporation, I transferred many millions of rubles to Kalmykia in order to erect churches and khuruls and to help Moslems too. I was especially happy that representatives of all three religions had congratulated me on my inauguration as president and had wished me luck on my thorny way.

Not a single Buddhist meeting-house was still standing in Kalmykia by the time I was born. Everything had been bulldozed, burned down or blown up. The lamas and gelyungs had been ousted, exiled or shot. The religious foundation was lost, and the spiritual and moral level of the Kalmyk nation fell dramatically. There could be no future for Kalmykia without a

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spiritual rebirth, but arranging this renaissance was problematic. Therefore, I decided to invest my money in churches. I wanted to strengthen the spiritual foundation of my people as well as that of the other religious groups living in Kalmykia. I provided the means to construct an orthodox church and gave 100 million rubles towards a Kalmyk khurul.

Soon construction will start on a Moslem mosque and a catholic church. Kalmykia is open to all religions which preach the restoration of the human spirit, the general good, and national and religious tolerance. Kalmykia wishes for happiness for all, irrespective of nationality, religion or the color of your skin. This is the great moral law bequeathed by our ancestors. The law of heaven is the same for all. As for the religions they are different chapters in the same great and sacred book of humanity. I believe that a day will come when these chapters will finally unite, life will become prosperous and peace will at last settle on the tormented soul of man.

No one is isolated from his fellow men, the world and the universe. The misfortune or happiness of each of us affect all those living on Earth. God has no nationality.

## Chapter 9.

### THE PRESIDENT'S CROWN OF THORNS

During my very first days in office I disbanded the various bodies of Soviet Government, abolished the KGB, suspended privatization and organized a commission to return everything to state control which had been unlawfully privatized by the former nomenclatura. I disbanded the Supreme Soviet which consisted of 130 deputies, and formed a parliament of twenty-five people's representatives. I shut down all but four of the forty ministries I had inherited, and established a new department of religious affairs which reported directly to me. I abolished clause 46 of the Kalmyk constitution and reunited church and state.

All these changes were implemented peacefully, without bloodshed or violence. The Patriarch of all Russias Alexis II called the reunification of the church with the state an event of international significance.

As I have already mentioned, when I took office everything that could be carried had been stolen from the White House. I even had to send out to the nearest shop to buy paper so that we could type up the first decrees.

That was how we started out. All my cars, computers, telefax machines and other appliances I turned over to the republic since there was no government money available in Kalmykia at the time.

Everybody knows that politics is a concentrated expression of economics, but at that time there simply was no economy in the republic. An economic system had urgently to be created which did not offer incentives to people to do their work badly. And that applied not only to the republic, but to

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individuals as well. Kalmykia had to become a huge company with a well-outlined structure which everyone could see and understand, where salary was related to productivity, ability and talent.

The tenets of my program were that each person should earn their own living and live according to their means and that only the satisfied could provide guarantees of stability and security.

But it is one thing to write something down and quite another to implement it. When I contemplated the true and complete picture of the state of affairs in the republic, I felt a chill creeping down my spine. There were so many problems to be solved: the airport needed rebuilding as did the health service and the road network, the republic's financial system needed reorganizing, there were environmental problems, and crime had to be tackled while the general standard of living was raised... I knew that all these issues would immediately fall to me, along with thousands of other questions.

Prior to the elections I had known that everything was in decline: economists, sociologists and scientists had briefed me fully on the subject. And I was aware that all these problems awaited me. However, what neither I nor anybody else could have predicted was that literally within a month of taking office the ruble would crash horribly, taking the living standard and everything else down with it. And this situation would develop in a republic where everything, everything of even minimal value, had been rapaciously plundered, including the reserve housing fund, and the food and currency reserves. My team was made to face the facts. But there was no way back under the circumstances.

I refused to accept my salary, travel allowance or any other payments. At my request these sums were transferred to the Arshan orphanage and placed in the republic's budget.

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We had to work hard and not just the eight hours a day prescribed by law either, but as long as the situation required. The republic had to be dragged from the edge of its economic precipice at all costs. Now we were responsible for everything we had inherited from the old nomenclatura. It would be improper and shameful for us to blame our predecessors; we had to justify ourselves by disentangling the knot of their mistakes. As the Kalmyk saying goes, never catch a panther by the tail, but if you do, don't let go.

I put together a team of energetic young men who would be able to endure the strain of a double or triple work load. The men who had worked with me during the election campaign had passed the test of that tough marathon. Naturally we made mistakes, and were surprised sometimes by events or our failures. It can happen to anyone. Many of my people lacked experience in administrative work, organizing large-scale projects, and getting to the gist of a problem quickly. But I knew that these were only temporary problems and I was proved right. Basically my team was rapidly developing muscles. That was very important if we were to stop the republic's sliding into the economic abyss.

Just as I had predicted, Moscow's subsidies to the republics were sharply reduced and we were forced to think up a solution of our own. Russia's own economy was on the point of collapse and this had immediate repercussions on the situation in Kalmykia. During my first days as president I sent an invitation, on behalf of the Kalmyk people, to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of all Buddhists who lived in exile in India. The Kalmyk nation was ready to give him a refuge, a plot of land on which to build a residence, as well as total support. The Dalai Lama's arrival in Kalmykia would have strongly stabilized the political situation in the republic. And, as is well known, political stability is the milk of economic growth.

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April 12 marked the beginning of an exhausting struggle for the republic's survival and to put an end to the multi-ethnic population of Kalmykia's acute impoverishment.

By 1993 more than 70 percent of the ex-Soviet Union's population were living well below the poverty level. The death rate exceeded the birth rate and there was a steep increase in the number of suicides. Russia had nine million alcoholics and seven hundred thousand drug addicts whose ranks were growing with every passing day. That catastrophic wave did not bypass Kalmykia, it crashed down on us like a hurricane.

We created a department to deal specifically with the problems of young people. I allotted tens of millions of rubles from my own purse, created companies who were responsible to the department and which were designed to make it profitable, imported different goods from abroad to help move young people off the streets and into the work place where they could start earning a living on their own. I financed sports organizations, bought the necessary equipment and so on.

I held meetings with the Minister of Internal Affairs and we gathered together the city's semi-criminal groups and advised them to stop their rivalrous enmity:

- "Enough of your fist-fights and boozing around, kids. Start doing something worthwhile," I said. "We will help you with money and some concrete, serious business proposals. Now go and earn money, get rich, help your republic."

The move took immediate effect. Literally within the next few months general crime dropped by 16, percent and particularly serious crime by eight percent. The smuggling of saiga horns, black caviar and sturgeon also diminished. Rackets and organized crime that had been tearing our country apart were stopped, they no longer took root in Kalmykia. The republic remained an island of quiet and peace. I worked hard to expand the peaceful zone continuously. Kalmykia became a

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place dedicated to settling inter-national war conflicts in the Northern Caucasus. Although the republic was going through hard times it still allotted five thousand tons of grain for ship merit to warring Ossetia and the Ingush Republic. Also Kalmykia offered its territory for peace talks. History shows that all wars end in the warring sides sitting down at the peace table. It would have been much better if they had started where they ended, without plunging their peoples into an abyss of disaster, sorrow and tears.

Economic, political and legislative reforms continued in Kalmykia. A code setting out the legal terms of trade, which had been absent from Russian law since 1917, was implemented during a parliamentary session. My long-cherished dream of creating an offshore area in Kalmykia was becoming a reality.

The republic's reforms began to be talked about in Russia, the CIS and abroad. Within a short period about twenty thousand articles about Kalmykia appeared in the foreign press. Delegations came to Kalmykia from different regions, districts and autonomous republics to learn how to adopt our peaceful methods of liquidating local Soviets.

We were on the threshold of major fundamental change. The republic was precipitously turning towards the market. I was doing my utmost to employ, and modify, every policy that could be of use to Kalmykia. I wanted people to see the light at the end of the tunnel, as it were, and to feel some relief at last. These steps took a lot of painstaking effort. Every problem led to another one. A whole knot of contradictions! I had to single out the priorities. A severe centralization of power was needed.

In order to get the republic working as an integral whole we founded the "Kalmykia Corporation" whose equity and capital totaled one billion dollars. A tannery was built, the biggest one in the Northern Caucasus. Agreements were made

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with Lockheed and ITT, on the construction of an international airport. Soon video-telephones and satellite communication will appear in Elista. An agreement was concluded with the Ministry of Defense on a program of road construction and the creation of a modern sanatorium on the Caspian Sea coast, with a helicopter pad for over-sea tourist flights and submarines for those who prefer underwater journeys. Work is in progress on all these projects and soon we will see the results.

Delegations of businessmen flew to Kalmykia from all over the world. Work was in full swing. The president's team worked fourteen to eighteen hours every day. Some could not bear the strain and left. But they were the minority. As a rule everybody worked selflessly regardless of how it consumed their time.

In order not to become dependant on foreign companies I began creating companies abroad which were one hundred percent Kalmyk financed. According to some economists in one year alone Russia paid 25 to 30 billion dollars to intermediary companies. Such a situation was unacceptable for Kalmykia. Some Kalmyk companies have already started working abroad and some will begin working in the very near future. Thirty percent of the stock of all our companies abroad, as well as that of the Kalmykia Corporation, will be given over to the people of the republic free of charge. That means each resident of Kalmykia, including new-borns, will get a share worth one thousand dollars.

The reforms in Kalmykia put many on their guard. I could sense it when I came to Moscow and met with ministers, deputies and heads of various regions. There was a certain group of people at the helm of the state who felt frightened by Kalmykia's self-reliance. They were afraid Kalmykia might become too independent and uncontrollable. Their habit of governing from the center was too deep-rooted for them to change. With their high-and-mighty manners, and their

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condescending and scornful attitude to the provinces they were used to having unquestionable authority.

I do not remember an occasion when residents of a provincial town, regional center, village or settlement ever scrutinized Moscow. What has Moscow traditionally been to them? A selfish sponge city that keeps sucking in everything that is best from the huge country. The best food, best houses, highways, the metro. All that was stockpiled by, and accumulated in, Moscow. Small wonder that over time Moscow has gathered the greatest riches from every nook and cranny of our boundless homeland. These riches are our property, our common labor, sweat and talent. We have been nourishing this city for many years, feeding it the sweetest and tastiest tidbits. I believe this is why Moscow has to impose itself on every region, town, settlement and also every individual.

Simultaneously the capital city has always dictated to every kolkhoz and region how to live, when to harvest crops, what to eat, when to go to bed and when to get up.

I could not understand why anyone should dictate their own terms to my homeland when, by law, Kalmykia was equal to every other republic. Kalmykia did not violate any law, Kalmykia did not infringe any constitutional norms, so everything else was the republic's own business.

I remember how we once received instructions from Moscow to switch to standardized winter and summer time. Dairymaids rose with the new clock and tried to milk their cows, but the cows would not give milk however hard the women tried. The animals refused to switch to Moscow time. They did not care a hoot about instructions from Moscow, or the messengers of these instructions, even if they were officers from the KGB itself.

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What could Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Gorbachev know of a shepherds' life in the Kalmyk steppe? Indeed, what did the Chernozemelsky or Yashkulsky regions need more, tights or wells? What was more profitable: sowing or cattle-breeding? But the big bosses in Moscow kept on commanding, pressuring and dictating. They were ordered to sow corn in Yakutia and apply the Ipatov method in the Pamirs.

This is why I initiated the creation of the Council of the Federation's Subjects. The subjects of the Federation knew what the true state of affairs was in their own regions and consequently in the whole country. They knew how, when and where to start construction work, what to procure and secure. They were well aware of their people's general mood and needs. They were real politicians, who carried true political clout which should not be toyed with. If the regions provided their share of the capital then they should be treated as equal partners. To regard them like an exploitable Cinderella-figure is an unreasonable and short-sighted policy. The covert and smoldering discontent will one day turn into open opposition and another outburst of unrest.

In the halls of the Kremlin they would ask me:

- "What the hell do you Kalmyks keep running ahead of the engine for? Why do you always kick against the pricks? First you come up with a draft constitution for Russia, and next with the devil alone knows what! Take tip economics and steer clear of politics. That's none of your business."

Wrong! This is our business! There is no economics without politics. Is this not the reason why so many businessmen become politicians?

Well, whatever the reason, our reforms aroused discontent among certain echelons of power, and pressure began to be exerted on Kalmykia. Moscow was tightening the

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screws. It was a warning: stay out of big-time politics and don't stick your neck out!

A financial knot began to be tightened around the republic's throat. The promised credits were not forthcoming. Agreements were breached and delivery dates missed, and the republic's enterprises were rationed severely. Many flights from Elista airport were canceled due to lack of fuel. Non-payments accumulated. Construction stopped. People began showing their discontent. Rumors began to spread across the republic like cockroaches: "Kirsan is finished, Kirsan has breathed his last."

The opposition was exaggerating dramatically the mistakes of the president and his team. Days, weeks and months passed without any inflow of credit. Western investors started to come to me with offers of help, but their terms were enslaving. I was surprised that they were so well informed about Kalmykia's economic situation. Their knowledge proved that informers must be operating in the highest ranks of power.

"Brotherly friendship, the united family of nations", all that is nothing but communist tall tales. Perhaps in the future, a hundred-odd years from now, mankind will become one happy family of blood brothers and sisters, without borders and countries, and an era of harmony and prosperity will open. But not now. Now the country is riven by turmoil and internecine strife; there are no friends in politics and economics. There are only partners bound by the same goal and bent on benefit alone.

I knew that Yeltsin approved of my reforms and was watching them closely. However, in those days I could not approach him or ask for a meeting with the president of Russia. Those determined to force Kalmykia to her knees blocked all my attempts to see him. But I could wait no longer. Every morning summaries of the economic situation in the republic's

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regions appeared in my office. It was deteriorating. A catastrophe was brewing.

Every day I read the confusion in the eyes of my ministers and received telephone calls from the heads of local administrations: what is to be done?

From the money I had earned in business I was able to bridge many gaps and to patch up holes. But my resources were melting before my very eyes. But still, I had not gone into the presidency with closed eyes.

We managed to avoid to a certain degree a sharp increase in prices. The price of bread and milk remained acceptable. In any case they were lower than those in other regions of Russia. In Elista we had no paupers begging for alms. Subsequently many asked us in bewilderment: "How did you manage to hold Kalmykia back from the edge of the precipice? We thought the republic was done for. Everything indicated that you were heading for ruin."

They "thought"... I remember the nervous tension and sleepless nights of that period, the vast numbers of interwoven problems, and I think to myself. "How was I able to withstand that gigantic avalanche and see everything through?" I still can't believe it. It is due to nature's striking wisdom that man is endowed with enormous reserves of endurance and strength... Towards 3 or 4 a.m., when the last visitors were leaving my office, I'd go back home for a short rest until 7 or 8 in the morning. Very often I caught the sympathetic glances of my mother and wife who seemed to be saying: what do you need all this for? Why did you load this burden onto yourself? You won't be able to carry it for long, you will end up breaking your back!

I had neither the strength nor the time to answer or argue. I lay in bed silently, but sleep would not come to me. Kalmykia's numerous problems were overshadowed by a new

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and far more terrible threat: the threat of the general disintegration of Russia. Moscow was experiencing the lull before the storm. This sensation was getting stronger with every passing day. Something was brewing. The struggle between Yeltsin, on the one hand, and the Khazbulatov-Rutskoy axis on the other, had reached a critical point. The events of October 3rd and 4th were approaching. Analyzing the situation I came to realize that blood was bound to be shed in Moscow. I think many understood that, and played for time until it was clear whose side would win. I repeatedly tried to convince the heads of Russia's regions that something had to be done. A catastrophe was closing in on the country. The air reeked of impending civil war.

- "Stay out of it," I was told. "They will sort it out themselves. They don't want us to get involved in big politics; let them take the heat."

- "They won't be able to sort it out, that's for sure," I answered. "The opposition has gone too far. It may lead to carnage in Moscow and that's not just their problem, it is also ours. If Moscow burns we'll be buried under the debris."

- "Come on, Kirsan, there's nothing to worry about. We will hole up in the mountains, woods and the steppe and wait until this all blows over. Let the people of Moscow handle their own problems. We have a lot to do here."

- "There's no way we'll be able to while away the time here. Any modern missile could reach us in five to ten minutes."

- "You'd better not get involved in all this, Kirsan. They'll be sure to destroy you if you do. And it does not matter who "they" are precisely. You have enemies on both sides. In the end it'll be you who'll be to blame ..."

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Eventually everything happened as I had predicted. The Dniester Region, Karabakh, Tbilisi... can it be that life cannot teach us anything? When street hoods beat up a passer-by we do not interfere. When mobsters rob our neighbors we prefer to sit quietly behind locked doors lest they shoot us. It never stops. The Ossetians were fighting the Ingush. Abkhazia was warring with Georgia. Let both sides bleed to death, what business is it of ours? We have our own problems to deal with! Bread has become more expensive. A drunken neighbor spent the whole night hollering so we couldn't get a wink of sleep. And where does all this trouble come from? "A dam crumbles because of a minute chink made by ants," the wise say.

About ten days before the start of the bloody events I tried to make telephone contact with Yeltsin, but the operator did not put me through. I attempted to arrange a meeting with the president - all in vain. One day I arrived at the Kremlin and sat waiting in the reception room for five hours, again to no avail.

Policy is made during congresses and parliamentary sessions. Political issues are resolved in meetings and interviews. It is there that the details are settled, coalitions, blocks and groupings are formed, and political trends established. Political, economic and personal interests are all cooked up secretly in the same pot and this is what gives decrees, laws and directives their political flavor.

I did not belong to any coalition, bloc or tendency. Many times during sessions and congresses of the Supreme Soviet I was invited to join representatives of this or that block:

- "Come on, Kirsan, join us, we have real power. We control the industrial regions. We have our finger on the country's pulse."

But I would answer that groupings, tendencies and blocks could come and go, but Kalmykia had been, was and

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would always be. The interests of Kalmykia did not belong to any group.

Later Yeltsin would say laughingly: "that Kirsan walks all alone."

Yes, Kalmykia had its own agenda to unite the regions and the nations and put a stop to the disintegration of the country, to create a state. The peace-maker's path.

Within the republic we have united religions. We offer to host peace negotiations between warring parties. We supply bread and food to war-torn populations. We do our best to prevent man from killing man. I was certain that a compromise solution could be found to the conflict between Yeltsin and Khazbulatov. This is why I tried to meet Yeltsin.

According to Oriental legend a pilgrim-monk once came to visit his ruler. However, the ruler's courtiers would not give him access. At long last, after much effort and bribery of the servants, the monk managed to gain admittance into the palace. He bowed low to the viziers and nodded casually to the ruler.

- "Hey, monk!" exclaimed the enraged Shah. "I am the ruler here and those you bowed to are just my servants! You have made a mistake."

- "No," replied the monk. "I can see who runs this palace. The viziers decide everything here. As for you, you only carry out their commands."

The tyranny of those closest to the throne is a terrible thing.

By the end of September the Moscow White House had already been cordoned off. The final days of peace were passing unnoticed. Something had to be done, urgently, since

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the situation was flying inexorably out of control. There was still time to prevent tragedy. The chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Buryatia, L. Potapov, and the chairman of the executive committee of the Leningrad Soviet V. Gustov, along with two other administrative heads and myself approached the White House. The colonels standing at the cordon tried to talk us out of entering. The White House had already been fenced off with barbed wire and it brought to mind a palace erected in a prison-camp zone. We entered the building and met Rutskey and Khazbulatov. A session of the Supreme Soviet was going on in the conference hall. I took the floor and asked the deputies to show reason, agree to negotiate and, above all, to resolve this conflict in a peaceful manner. I said that we were neither with the president nor with Khazbulatov and Rutskey. All we wanted was to protect the unity of Russia. Now our main goal was to preserve the Russian Federation as an integral whole and prevent bloodshed.

Ours was a voice in the wilderness. They would not hear us. My belief is that no one seriously considered the possibility that the White House would be subjected to gunfire. Naturally, there was much talk of this and people scared one another by imagining these developments, but in their heart of hearts nobody believed in such an outcome. They seemed to be playing some game. He who got scared first was the loser.

And they went on talking, saying many beautiful, commendable words about legitimacy and our duty to the country and the people. We have all heard many such words in our lifetime. If only these words were ever backed up with action! If only that were so...

If they really had made Russia's destiny their priority then blood would never have been shed. A way out would have been found. I don't know which exactly, but it would have been bloodless.

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The White House sit-in had already been in progress for twelve days. There were sick people in the building, it was cold inside, the lights had been turned off and people in the building were surviving on rations of rusks and dried food. For two days and nights International Red Cross vehicles, loaded with medicines and food, stood by the cordon. They were not let in. Why?

Via satellite communication I was able to contact the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Russia. I said that the blockade had to be stopped, otherwise it would result in provocations from either side. Any drunkard or psycho who happened to have access to a weapon could reduce the situation to tragedy.

There was no reaction at all. A total silence. It was rumored that the White House was crammed full of weapons. To verify this we decided to make the rounds of the building.

Volunteers stood by the outer cordon: Cossacks, pacifists, communists and fascists, all of them unarmed. It was the militiamen who carried their regulation weapons. They stood guard inside the building. Their presence set us more or less at peace. I stayed in the White House for three days. During that time I tried to make contact with Yeltsin and wrote two notes to him in which I stated my opinion that Khazbulatov and Rutskoy were ready to negotiate and that it would be best to initiate these negotiations as soon as possible.

Here was an opportunity; perhaps the last one. I turned my notes over to the Kremlin. No answer. During this time a car with two loud-speakers was brought to the White House. Day and night stupid music was played at full blast and in between a loud booming voice demanded: "Give up your arms and come out! You are criminals!" That voice and the music. Around the clock.

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They were aiming at forced, mass psychosis. Later the Bulgarian academic Todor Dichev, an expert in different aspects of psychotropic warfare and Zombifying tactics would write that the "White House was radiated with the aim of depressing the psyche of those inside and especially so during the Supreme Soviet's sessions. The people guarding the buildings were given drinks which, in my view, contained some mind-bending ingredients. The pupils of many of these people were excessively dilated. Besides, for some obscure reason, watering trucks, which had not been seen in the city all summer, began washing away the autumn dirt from the asphalt. I believe that the water in their tanks also contained psychotropic ingredients."

Some newspapers published the address of Kalmykia's President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov to the republic's government. Direct speech has its own rules. However, if a psychologist were to follow the text he would find inconsistencies there and, in some places, omissions and gaps. Is this nothing other than a brief memory lapse or, is there some scientific basis for regarding this as the syncopated state of mind typical of people who have undergone a form of psychotropic radiation?

So Ilyumzhinov's words about feeling unwell and oppressed by an uneasy heavy sensation while he was in the White House are borne out ..." ("Interview", No 2, 1993).

We made another appeal to Yeltsin, Khazbulatov and Rutskoy on behalf of the subjects of the Federation. No answer. Now we had no more time left. I remember the feeling of powerlessness and imminent danger. It was a frightening feeling. Then all hell broke loose. The capture of the mayoralty, the blood bath by the Ostankino television studios, the siege of the White House... Death, blood and human victims... And who was to blame for all that? Most likely we were, the inhabitants of multi-national and multimillion-strong Russia. We were all responsible for the turn which events took.

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We could have stopped it, but we didn't. Our indifferent neutrality resulted in bloodshed for which we, Russia's residents, are to blame. In any case I do not consider myself innocent.

After the first blood and the first deaths something went awry in the minds of Russia's people and nations.

The country had overstepped a moral and religious taboo - thou shalt not kill. I realized that we had entered a new and terrifying period: the era of shoot-outs. Now everything was permitted. Forgive us, our children. Forgive our silence and our doing nothing.

Will we ever be able to realize fully what happened in those days? Will we ever absorb the terror of those events, and comprehend objectively the fact of humans killing humans, without trying to hide behind political slogans? And all this took place in the heart of Russia, before the eyes of hundreds of millions of people?

On the morning of October 3 a public prayer meeting was held in the Yelokhovskaya Church for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. However, Heaven turned a blind eye and a deaf ear on those who had turned their backs on God. The Lord God struck Moscow and the backbone of Russia with His scourge...

I look at my Gold Medal of Peace and the Medal of Honor which I was awarded in Paris, as well as my many other medals, awards and honorary decorations, and think in terror of my little son. Time will pass, he will grow up and ask me what I did in the days when people burned down houses and slaughtered ethnic Turks in Central Asia, when blood was shed profusely in the Dniester and Karabakh regions? Did I acquire my Peace Medals at the time? Or perhaps the title of academician?

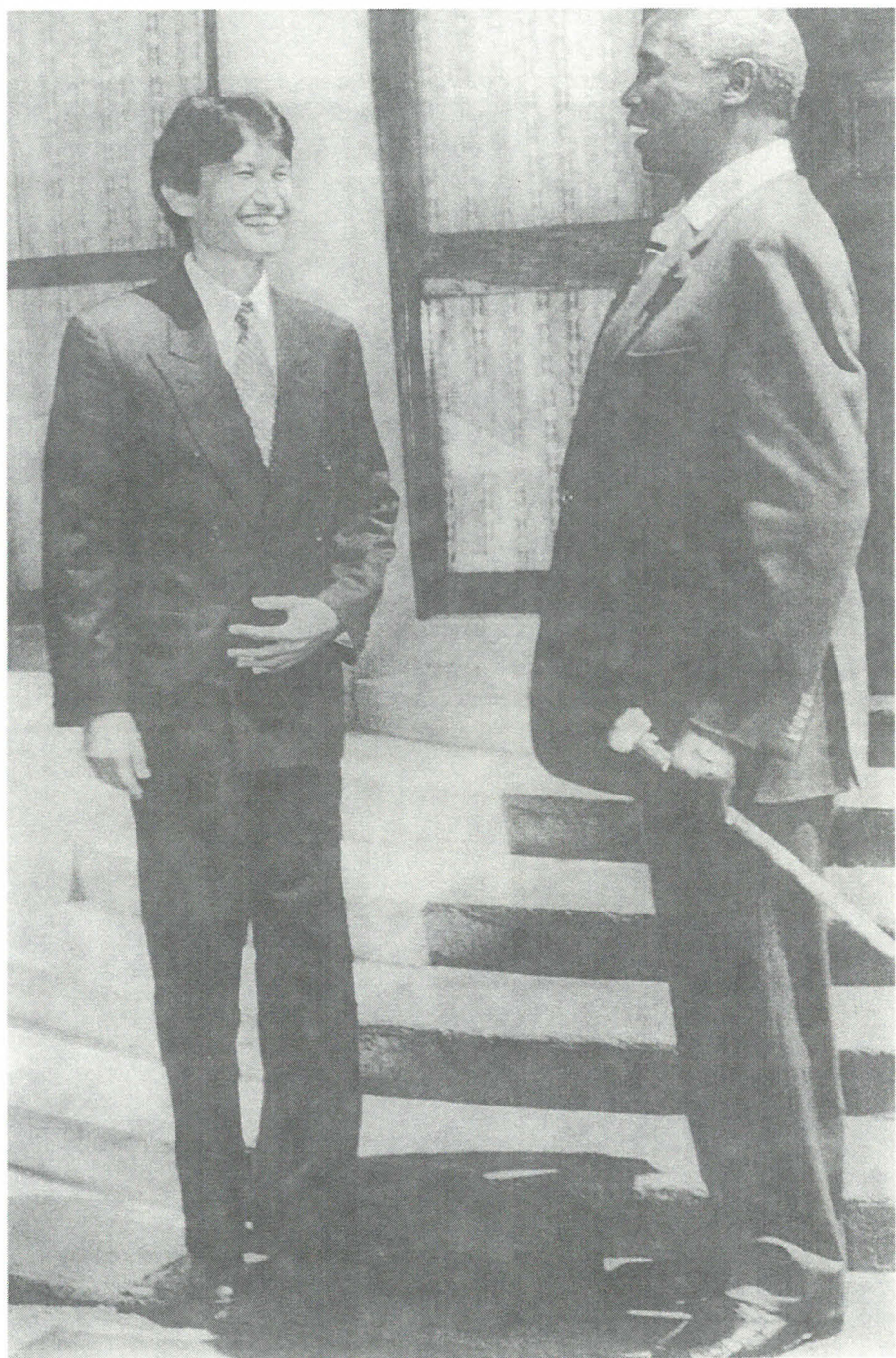
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What will I tell him? What will we all tell those who come after us? What kind of country will we leave to our children? A state divided into sectors by criminal gangs, one full of cruelty, murder, lawlessness and poverty? How are our children supposed to live in such a country'?

On the morning of October 4 tanks opened fire on the White House. Moscow shed its blood. It was a time of total confusion. One could not distinguish the truth from lies, treachery from heroism. Hearsay, contradictory information, nervousness, excitement, confusion swept the city. A civil war was barging in through tile door. Now all the deputies and the whole of Russia realized it. We pulled down a curtain from the window's of Valery Zorkin's office, made a flag from it and once more went to the White House. Now we numbered ten or so but, strangely enough, on the way over many disappeared silently from our ranks. After that disappearing act the only people left in the group were myself, Ruslan Aushev and a couple more men. Women and children had to be taken out from the building. Big crowds surrounded the White House. Some of the people were on the side of the White House, some supported Yeltsin. But what struck me most was the presence of a whole sea of idle fun-seekers. Many came there with their children to watch people being killed. A rare show indeed! One a thousand times more interesting than the fairy tales about Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood. Look, kiddies! Look and learn to kill! It's not frightening at all, it's great fun! Bang goes a tank, and somebody's father is gone!

After lengthy negotiations and arrangements Aushev and I crossed the barrier and went inside the building. The shooting seemed to have stopped, but when we approached the entrance we again heard gunfire and bullets swishing over our heads. Again dead bodies and the groans of the wounded. General Achalov came up and said:

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A visit to the President of Kenya D. Moye

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An intense working day



Minutes of rest

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- “We have intercepted military radio communications. A command's been issued to shoot the President of Kalmykia.”

My nerves were over-strained and I was a little slow to grasp the meaning of Achalov's words. For some reason I recalled the expression: “The road to hell is paved with good intentions...”

Below a shoot-out was in progress as well. A lieutenant from the Dniester region shouted up to those in the floors above:

- “Don't shoot! The Presidents of Kalmykia and Ingushetia are here!” We also called for them to stop shooting. It was dark all around and in that darkness the hollow sound of gunshots echoed. The shooting was gradually subsiding. We started climbing the stairs. In the upper part of the building we saw young, inexperienced and overly excited youths. They were nervously fingering their triggers. And in all that messy bustle it was impossible to tell who was where.

Up the dark stairs and along a dark corridor, stumbling and fumbling we got to the top floor of the building. We kept our flashlight directed at the white flag. Whining bullets flew past hitting the walls, chipping off plaster and filling the whole space with the acrid smell of gun-powder. Sometimes crawling, sometimes at a run, stair-well after stair-well, we climbed to the top. Snipers were shooting from the roof of the Ukraine Hotel. The bullets whined very low, right over our heads, preventing us from standing.

For some reason I still remember how I crawled under a window over sticky coagulating human blood. Whose blood was it? Was it Ukrainian, Russian or may be Chechen? The body had already been carried off but the blood remained. In the semi-darkness of the room it looked black and it took me some time to realize what it was. The floor was covered in shattered glass and I cut my hand. Blood was trickling off my

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hand and onto the floor where it was mixed with the already coagulated blood. This was how my blood brotherhood with an unknown dead man came about. Did it really matter what nationality he was? We are all just human beings.

Some time later, in Chechnia, they would take me to see the memorial to the victims of Stalin's genocide. In 1944, after the deportation of the Chechens, their cemeteries were razed to the ground in order to uproot the very memory of this nation. Their tomb-stones were used to pave roads. So about half a century later cannons and tanks rolled, and soldiers' waterproof boots marched, over these very stones, trampling the grief and tears of the Chechen people, marching right ahead, along the road leading to a bright future for the whole' world.

Upon returning from exile the Chechens took the road to pieces, extracted what remained of the tomb-stones and set them alongside the memorial to the victims of Stalin's genocide, accompanied by the following short yet significant inscription:

“We will not cry, nor grow despondent, but we will never forget”.

At that moment I remembered how my hot live blood had dripped onto that of the cold, dead one, and how my heart ached at the memorial to Chechen suffering...\*

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(Begin footnote)

\*By early 1992 the conflict between Yeltsin and Dudayev had become acute. The mass media began to stir up the conflict with tawdry and sensational stories: “Chechnnn Mafia in Moscow!”

“Chechen Trouble makers!”, “Chechen Weapons!”, “Chechen Drug Traffic!” and a lot of material on the so-called “Caucasian –type”. A fearful image of Chechens was deliberately rammed into the minds of Russia's citizens. Behind all that there were powerful forces pursuing strategic

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interests: oil, weapons and the huge supply of illegal money whose criminal path was harder to trace during wartime. The conflict benefited many political groups who were trying to clear the road to power for themselves.

Now it was Russia which was in danger of an imminent war. Kalmykia was troubled. During the seventy years of communist rule many conflicting claims and smoldering resentments had built up between Russia and the minor nations and nobody knew what effect the Chechen war might have on this situation. Yeltsin was very worried about the coming conflict. I flew to Moscow to see Boris Nikolayevich and then to Grozny to meet with Dudayev. I proposed that talks to settle the dispute between Russia and Chechnia be held in Kalmykia. The negotiations with Dudayev proved successful. When I informed Yeltsin of the results his face brightened. Having secured the basic consent of both the parties I began working out the details of an upcoming meeting in Elista. However, events took a different course. The forces opposing peace and working behind the scenes turned out to be far too powerful. Too much money had been put into the machinery of war, oil, criminal, political and narcotics deals to let the fuse go out. All those forces needed a war and they got what they wanted: hundreds of dead bodies, the destruction Of Grozny, refugees, the hostage seizure at Budyonnovsk...

(End footnote)

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Back at the White House I think we met Rutskoy and Khazbulatov in a lobby. And again we tried to convince them to order a cease-fire. Just as we were talking two well-aimed shells exploded in the rooms where Rutskoy and Khazbulatov had been sitting five minutes earlier. We made the rounds of all the darkened halls, rooms and corners in search of terrified women and children who might be hiding there. Most of them were attendants who just happened to be inside the building at that time. We came across a kid who was shriveled up in a corner shaking all over, his eyes wide with terror. Aushev took him by the hand and brought the boy to join the others.

We got in touch with Oleg Lobov, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia, by satellite and told him that we were bringing out unarmed women and children. The deputies we knew gave us notes and letters for their families for they no longer believed that they would make it out alive...

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For some reason our guides took us down the right hand, as opposed to the left hand, staircase. That seemed strange since we had settled all the details on the telephone of how we would remove people from the building. Now we were on the ground floor. We could not go outside on account of the shooting. What could we do? A passing shell would make mincemeat of us. We were consumed with horror, feeling responsible for the people we had brought to the ground floor. They were looking at us with hope and fear. They trusted us.

A minute passed. An uneasy and tormenting one. They were demanding a ceasefire, shouting from the building in the direction of the armored personnel carriers via loudspeaker that we were bringing out women and children. Again we made contact via satellite to reaffirm that we had women and children with us.

Then all was quiet. Everyone's nerves were overstrained. Suddenly in that silence, after the deafening thunder of exploding shells and the groans of the wounded, I heard the sounds of Moscow, a peaceful Moscow. The din of the traffic on the Garden Circle and, I think, from the direction of the Kiev railway station I could hear the rumble of a suburban or passenger train. After what I had seen in the White House it seemed odd and eerie. Here it was bloodshed and the dead growing cold before our very eyes, while a hundred meters away one could see carefree citizens going to get a haircut, setting off for their dachas with kids running about in the squares. It was a different life, a different epoch, another planet.

For the moment I thought Moscow had gone crazy and become blind and deaf. I just couldn't grasp it. It was impossible, unimaginable, incredible. How on earth could this be? What was the matter with my fellow-countrymen? And what was the matter with these Muscovites who did not care a

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hoot about people being killed while they went on reading newspapers and eating ice cream!

I drew a deep breath and tried to regain my composure. But how on earth could I stay quiet under the circumstances? I breathed out to get rid of the strain and the throbbing pain in my temples. I had had an agonizing headache for two or three days now.

- "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! Women and children are leaving the building!"

Now! We waved our flag and went outside... The women and children were holding on to one another. Everyone wanted to penetrate the column and become smaller in size.

As I walked I was aware that, somewhere up on the roof, there were snipers following our every step. I seemed to sense them, almost physically, taking aim with their guns at my chest. The muzzles of the tanks' guns were cooling off. The silence had grown deafening. My body seemed huge, incredibly huge. My legs felt woolen, my body seemed to be that of a stranger, stiff and bulky. I looked at Aushev. His face seemed to be carved of stone and was impossible to read. Suddenly the silence was ripped apart by a roar rising to a crescendo:

- "A-a-a-a!"

We were approaching the crowd. It was impossible to make out the words. They were screaming, hollering, cursing, threatening and their threats and curses merged into a savage and blood-thirsty "a-a-a-a!"

Here and there one could see wooden sticks and iron rods swinging in the air. The boy Aushev had picked up in the White House looked pale, his chin quivering, his eyes wide with terror. He had already seen death and knew what it was

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like. The kid was frightened. He was twitching and backing away. Silently. He realized it was no use crying and entreating. During those few days he had become a grown man. A blinding fury gripped my whole being: Stop it, citizens! After all we are all human beings! No matter who we side with, Ruskoy or Yeltsin. We are human beings, all of us! Enough of this bloodshed! No more death!

The crowd wouldn't listen. It was electrified to the point of fanaticism. The words of reason had no power over it any more. The mob wanted blood and destruction.

"There they are, the black-assed bastards!" Someone poked his finger at me and Aushev, eyes bloodshot with a wild rage and fists clenched. "There they are!"

The mob was ready to do away with us. They were swinging their sticks and iron rods. A few bricks flew over our heads. The machine-gunners at the cordon could hardly hold them back.

- "Make for the buses! Hurry!" We urged those following us to make for the safety of the buses. There was something horrible in the hysterical crowd's furious roar. The women and children hurriedly got into the buses.

The cordon of machine-gunners broke up and dozens of people rushed towards me and Aushev. Ten, then five paces, separated us. Now we could clearly see the blackness of open, savagely bellowing mouths, and the unrestrained hatred in the eyes of the mob which seemed determined to tear us apart. I tried to shout to them: "Stop it! Just think what you are doing!" My body-guard pulled open the door of the car that had stopped next to us, pushed us inside and got into the car himself. The door slammed shut. Dozens of iron rods and rocks hammered at the Lincoln's roof, hood and bullet-proof window glass. Somebody was pulling at the door-handle.

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- "Come out, you black-assed creeps!" Curses alternated with threats. The crowd was mad with fury since it had missed the chance to kill...

The road was cluttered with steel pipes and pieces of iron grillwork. A group of soldiers clad in the spotted green uniform of paratroopers gestured to us to turn the corner. The road there was free.

Later we discovered that had we followed that order we would have been met by professionals with orders to waste us.

Our experienced driver Valera put his foot down and our Lincoln car roared into life, racing forward, thrusting its seven-ton body right into the barricade. The Lincoln broke through the barrier to the accompaniment of screeching and clanging iron. We could hear the staccato of machine-guns firing in pursuit and the smacking sound of bullets hitting the glass, wheels and armor of our car. At full speed we hurtled into some street, then another turn... Fine. Now we were on the Garden Circle.

Aushev was saying something, but I could not make out his words. My temples were flooded with throbbing blood and each heartbeat echoed hollowly in my ears. I saw a smile on Aushev's pale face. A disarming, boyish smile which looked absurd under the circumstances. I did not know how I myself looked then. Most likely equally absurd.

Our security people tried to break through the crowd behind us. They were cut off. Armed men dragged our boys from the car and made them lie down on the ground right there, near where we had been told to drive.

- "Where's Kirsan? Where's your president?" The troopers beat the boys with gun butts and pulled them by their hair. "How come Ilyumzhinov gave us the slip? Where is he?"

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Then their walkie-talkie crackled into action: "Task force. Ilyumzhinov has broken through in a Lincoln. Shoot on sight."

Who would have benefited from my death? Who kept insisting on it? Whose order were the experts in spotted uniforms trying to fulfill? There is no answer to this question. In the turmoil of those days, on October 3 and 4, personal accounts were settled and murder contracts put into action as rivals and unnecessary witnesses were eliminated. In those troubled days the well-aimed shot of a sniper could be easily disguised by the sound of machine gun fire and the thunder of tank guns.

Aushev and I went straight to the Kremlin from the White House, unwashed and unshaven. The residents of the pristine Kremlin were surprised by our dirty clothes which we had not had time to change. But we could not have cared less. We were all set to stop the carnage. At 3:00 PM, a conference of members of the Federation was due to begin. I did not speak, fearing that I would fly off the handle and start screaming my head off there. It was Aushev who took the microphone.

Voltaire once noted that "it is quite dangerous to be in the right where the great of this world are in the wrong ..."

Several hours later a warrant for my arrest was on the desk of the President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin.

- "What's Ilyumzhinov got to do with all this?" Yeltsin asked.
- "Well... After all he did happen to be at the White House. Who knows what he was doing there"...

Isn't that strange? They did not know! I sent notes there, called them up, spoken at the conferences, talked to Yeltsin's

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associates on the phone and — lo and behold — they knew nothing about it...

Then all hell broke loose. Initiative will be punished. This formula of socialism and post-socialism should be carved in golden letters on Red Square and the former buildings, schools and kindergarten of the central and city party committee. "INITIATIVE WILL BE PUNISHED", in the biggest possible letters.

Central and Russian TV showed the same shots of me over and over again, walking into the White House with a white flag. into the lair of the communists where Rutskoy and Khazbulatov, and Generals Barkashov's and Anpilov's men had established themselves. But I do not recall a single occasion when they showed me and Alishev taking women and children out to safety. There were neither photographs nor commentaries in the newspapers about that. They only showed Aushev and I heading for the White House with a white flag.

There is no such thing as coincidence in politics. A part of the whole truth, whether told or shown, is a refined form of lie. There was someone who very much wanted to portray me in this light, exposing me for all to see and instilling the conviction in everyone's mind that I was a criminal, a monster: "Just look at the bastard! Get him! Stick it to him!"

I could guess what forces were at play, but I had no proof. Most likely I never will have. They were not so stupid as to leave evidence behind. Theirs was a big-time gamble and fools had no place in it. After all it was Kalmykia, and her resources, that were at stake: crude oil, gas, black caviar, wool, meat and minerals. At stake was the whole republic and its population. But then they did not care a hoot about the population. It was the resources they were after.

Those events can be broken down in the following way:

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1. Give us the republic and get out of the way or else we'll break your back.

2. Order the killing not of both Ilyumzhinov and Alishev, but Ilyumzhinov alone.

3. Just at the moment when it was known that we were supposed to be holding negotiations in Ruskoy's and Khazbulatov's office the tanks opened fire on those very offices. Was that a chance coincidence?

4. Semi-truth shown on all the TV channels with the sole purpose of convincing the viewers that Ilyumzhinov was an enemy.

5. While I was still in the White House a warrant for my arrest was filled out (in case I remained alive). That very day the warrant was on the desk of B. N. Yeltsin.

Each individual episode could have been accidental, but taken together it began to seem improbable that these elements were merely coincidences.

I flew into Elista. The republic was in a state of confusion. People's heads were crammed full of lies, hear-say, inventions and truth.

“What's to become of the republic? Whatever did you go to the White House for? Now they will cut us down to size. You have exposed yourself to them and let all of us down!” my fellow citizens kept telling me in my home town.

Local politicians and prophets were seething with indignation and made statements. The anti-government press were whipping up rumors.

- “Now Kirsan is finished. As a politician he is dead. Kirsan is still president, but there is an “ex” in front of his title” I heard them saying behind my back.

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Now suddenly the whereabouts of missing barrels of oil and the fourteen billion raised for the purchase of wool was uncovered. It seemed odd that, by some sort of miracle, the central newspapers had got hold of some secret paper written by Yeltsin in which he described the "obscure origin" of my fortune and ordered that Kalmykia be strangled with an economical noose so that the people would go wild from hunger and overthrow their president.

According to Lenin revolution can never be forged by men in white gloves. And the same goes for politics. To starve the 350,000 residents, including new-horns, of the republic almost to death, in order to get rid of one particular man! Logical, isn't it? And why? Because I had gone to the White House to rescue people. But more importantly, because I had to be scared away from big time politics: sit tight, young man, and mind your sheep, will you? Good boy!

To give Yeltsin his due, he did not sign the warrant for my arrest despite being urged to strike while "the iron was still hot". However cool breezes had already run along the Kremlin's corridors of power fanning all sort of rumors. Indeed, it was not for nothing that the TV kept advertising my activities as though I was a Snickers bar, and newspaper articles spread their wild speculation.

During those months Moscow played an old children's game with Kalmykia in which those going to a party must wear neither white nor black, and say neither "yes" nor "no". On the surface of it the republic had been denied nothing, but at the same time it was being given the cold shoulder whenever possible. All my efforts drowned in the tug-of-war of ministerial red tape.

However, now the acute danger had passed. Russia had avoided a civil war and millions, even tens of millions of people, whose lives had been overshadowed by the threat of

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death were now walking, breathing and living. And yet everything might so easily have turned out differently...

Passersby who happened to be walking along the Arbat Street in Moscow on one occasion noticed a huge white metal balloon on the roof of one of the buildings. What is that? What is it doing there? One day some curious journalists tried to climb onto the roof. They were stopped at the entrance and asked for their papers. The security men did not give them access to the roof. Nothing doing, guys, off limits. They wouldn't answer questions. They told the journalists to beat it implying that it was none of their business, that they should not be too nosy.

Well, whose business is it then? We are fleeced by tax-collectors who seize big taxes to finance the army, the security services, the militia and the public prosecutor's office. We have the right to know where our money is going. Journalists phoned the Ministry of Security who said that they had no idea. Odd, wasn't it? Then they got in touch with the Ministry of Defense. The people there knew nothing either. Wherever the journalists turned for an explanation they received the same answer. Either they knew not the first thing about it or they just kept mum.

Incidentally, there are several such balloons in Moscow: on the Arbat Street, on the Garden Circle, by the US embassy and somewhere else. Inquisitive journalists discovered in a roundabout way that those balloons were equipped with modern appliances for satellite communication. Was it possible to overhear telephone conversations, they wondered? It transpired that it was possible. One could even eavesdrop on two people talking on the street. And not only that.

Psychologists noted the unusual aggressiveness of people on both sides during the October events. Did anyone test the drink and food that was brought to the supporters of

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Rutskoy and Yeltsin? Why immediately after the events did they so thoroughly clear the area around the White House, washing the pavements with special cars at such length? Was it a coincidence? There were too many of them. Was both the strange somnambulism of many of the deputies and the aggressiveness of people who just happened to be in the area simply coincidental? ... And three hundred meters away people sat peacefully on park benches and went shopping, bought bread and flowers. Normal, unaggressive, law-abiding citizens...

Politics, business, the science of government. For many it is an unquenchable Mist for power. Each living man is a riddle. We do not know ourselves until we try to govern others. While still not fully knowing our own value on this Earth, we encroach on the lives of the rest.

Neither economics nor politics can justify the oppression of human beings, the crushing of their delicate and complex inner worlds, their beliefs, principles, morals and spirit. However, those in power do try to destroy and influence. Without our willing it or even being aware of it billions of cells live in each one of us. Why not use these cells against the people themselves? Each hair and molecule exists independent of our will, thoughts and feelings. So it is possible to suppress people's emotions and desires at a molecular level. We live most of our lives chaotically and unconsciously. So it is possible to increase the chaos, penetrate people's dreams, ruin their inner selves, subjugate them and make docile automatons out of them. We long for communication because deep down we are afraid to be alone. Why not intensify this fear? Our subconscious fear of the future makes us try to look younger than we really are. You can exploit that too. Man feels drawn to whatever is banned. So you can intensify this feeling too, making it irresistible. And then, quite independently of our desire and will, envy, vanity, fear, hatred and the desire to kill flair up in us... The border between the conscious and

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subconscious mind is quite elusive, the former flows into the latter and that is what constitutes one's inner self.

After subjecting a person to radiation and mind-bending drugs the subject's character can be ruined, his ego is lost and he becomes a biochemical automaton without a soul, emotions or thoughts. He is nothing more than a zombie and a slave. Thus we violate the cosmic, moral laws and a terrible taboo. Now everything is permitted.

Once we enter the era of mind-bending soul-enslaving drugs, mankind will be unable to develop even to the level of feudalism. Perhaps it would be the end of life itself, the apocalypse which all of the world religions have warned us about for centuries.

The prospect of a population of zombies is not just a nightmare, but also a reality. Maybe all those coups and wars are experiments which leave entire nations and continents Zombified? Perhaps a well-hidden third force exists, with the power and resources to initiate and control these processes? A third force that dreams of dominating the world by means of manipulating the population's psyche?

What about the hundred billion dollars which has been stashed away in foreign banks by the CPSU? What is that money meant for? One hundred billion is only the amount we know of. The truth about the full amount of stolen money will certainly remain the secret of the century.

Before Hitler came to power there were millions of jobless in Germany. The people were impoverished, utterly dissatisfied and ready for anything. The current situation in this country resembles that of Germany in the early thirties. The same impoverishment, discontent, uncertainty and corruption. Society longs for an immediate change for the better. Such a society will believe anything; indeed it ardently wishes to be deceived. Millions of our fellow-countrymen are prepared to

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follow any politician who promises them a better life immediately. I am afraid that such a politician will manifest himself soon, if he has not already done so.

All our lives we have been fed a diet of fairy-tales: communism by 1980! A separate flat for each family by the year 2000! And now, to and behold, there is an absolute vacuum. And yet nature does not tolerate a vacuum...

Much has been written about the hypnotic powers of Hitler and the mass psychosis of the German people. However, very little has been written in this respect about Stalin although the universal "Ey!" of the Homo Sovieticus was the very definition of mass psychosis. Our population has been Zombified for several decades now. Now and then we read short items about it in the press. What is it, this third force that secretly governs us? Does it really exist? Where will the hundred billion dollars surface? Which kinds of political movements is it intended to support? What kind of secret scientific research projects will this money finance? And, most importantly, what are they ultimately hoping to achieve with these billions?

At first glance these questions seem contrived. I wish I was wrong. I wish that the Bulgarian Academic Todor Dichev would prove to be wrong. I wish we would...

But then I remember how a few years ago a man came to the Sun Corporation and tried to sell us some pills or powder which suppressed will-power.

- "What do I need them for?" I asked.

- "Well, Kirsan Nikolayevich. After all you are an important businessman and see a lot of people every day. You are a big wheel, as it were. Let us suppose that you have to talk someone into something... Well, you only have to pour some of this stuff into their coffee and you are away. No problems! No

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unpleasantness and no bad consequences. Your counterpart will simply sign everything over to you.”

I refused to buy the medicine. But I am sure that chemist went elsewhere and found another buyer. Once moral law is removed then everything is permitted. And how many such scientists are there at work in this country? How many physicists and chemists are in possession of secret formulas?

Every morning I find a pile of newspapers on my desk. I run them through. Now and again I read a short article about our grossly underpaid scientists. We have no means to fund their research or their wages, and so scientists have no choice other than to leave for the countries of the third world. These countries need them since their authorities are bent on creating nuclear, atomic and other weapons. They have the means to fund their work. Our country cannot do this. We can afford to finance the Good-Will Games but we cannot support the best brains of Russia. According to the poet Tyutchev “Russia cannot be comprehended by reason alone”. There has always been an over-abundance of talent in Russia.

So what is wrong with us? Is Russia simply ill fated or have we perhaps dropped out of world progress and stopped motionless on the roadside? Every now and again we take a step forward, then we retreat and stop dead in our tracks again not knowing where to go, what to do and who is to blame.

I often recall the words of the Bulgarian visionary Vanga:

- “You are now at the end of a hard trail. Soon the skies above your people will clear. You will be recompensed for your suffering. I can see flowers which means that the glory-days of your nation are approaching.”

Redemption... It was raining in Sofia. Our plane broke through the clouds and a bright blinding sun flashed over their

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Participating in a folklore festival



With parents

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With the IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch

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dark-blue mass. I was flying to Russia thinking that in all probability it was true. The earth is enveloped in thin layer of human souls. Nothing can be lost in this world, be it our thoughts, desires or our spirit. Everything is stored in space. The academician Vernadsk, along with Teilhard de Chardin the Darwinian theologian called this invisible accumulator the sphere of reason. Other scientists define it as an all-penetrating vacuum and the Buddhist Kalmyks think of it as the great emptiness and nirvana where time flows both forwards and backwards.

Nothing disappears without a trace. Nothing. Every one will be summoned and called to account for his deeds...

Over the centuries Christianity, Islam and Buddhism have been guiding the world towards spiritual purification and thereby working towards the creation of a new man; A man who is far more spiritually pure than contemporary man.

Technological civilization is just a change of clothes. Will a savage dressed in a Pierre Cardin suit stop being a savage?

Many present-day politicians neglect the spiritual side of life. It is already a little late to bemoan the proliferation of dozens of millions of guns, grenades and mines among Russia's citizens. It is a fact. Bans, decrees and restrictions in this area have in the past proved quite ineffective. The overall level of discontent has reached its peak. Now the most important thing is to prevent the people who have guns from using them. And that is where the sphere of the spiritual comes into play. Since 1917, when a destructive war against the church was embarked on, all moral taboos have been breached at a cost to the human soul. This emptiness has grown wider and deeper. The Bolshevik attempt to substitute God with communism has flopped. We have lost the former, without acquiring the latter. Perhaps this is because we dropped out of the world process. A dreadful, incomprehensible new generation was born, the

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Homo Sovieticus, with his topsy-turvy mentality, who accepted lies as the natural state and spoke a special coded language which no normal person living in a free society could understand. Here was a man living in economic and spiritual slavery and poverty.

Nothing can be lost in this world of ours. The great emptiness has absorbed all that we, in our folly, cast away and a black aura has overshadowed our world, blocking out the sun.

I spent several hours talking to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in India. At the Vatican I sought answers from the Pope and in Sergiev Posad (the Monastery of St. Sergius) I talked at length with the Patriarch of All Russias Alexis II and became more and more convinced that only the spiritual purification of the people will enable us to enter the 21st century, the third millennium, with minimal losses and in a state of national good health. The path to redemption and spiritual purification is long and full of thorns, but then there is no other way out. We have slid back down to the Middle Ages, to the time of Russia's disintegration into separate independent principalities, and we have become an easy prey for anyone with power be it a sword or a nuclear weapon, or simply economic and criminal might.

Nobody could stop the disintegration of the great superpower: the independence movements, devolution of power, establishment of new areas of sovereignty, new customs and currencies. Everybody realized that catastrophe would follow if this process were not checked. And yet, the process proved to be beyond our control. The chain reaction was in its final stages and nobody dared to attempt to defuse the explosive charge.

I do not consider myself a politician. I thought that at these crucial moments a weighty word would have been spoken by the politicians of stature in the Kremlin (or at least by those who viewed themselves in this way) who spoke at

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sessions there and strutted around the halls of the administration buildings.

Everything in its own time, they would say. "Sit tight and do not poke your nose into big politics. Go graze your sheep! And we will sort everything out without you." I expected some drastic and decisive steps from these politicians. We had no time to lose, but they kept silent. Now the Urals region has been declared a republic and the Far East has begun talking of succession and sovereignty while those "big-time" policy-makers still remain silent.

Since the 17th century the Kalmyks have linked their fate to Russia. They sacrificed too many lives in the name of the Great Russian state to witness her destruction and ruin with indifference. Someone had to take the first step to stop the fatal process of disintegration, to free ourselves from national egotism, race discrimination and self admiration. Someone had to embark on the path of self-sacrifice and abandon the great right to self-determination.

I realized that taking such a step would destabilize Kalmykia, alienate some of my allies, and swell the ranks of the opposition who did not understand that we were standing on the verge of a precipice. It was clear to me that my authority with the people would be fatally undermined should I take this step. However, there was no other choice.

On March 11 1994 I made a statement declaring that the Kalmyk nation renounced its right to self-determination and that I was substituting the Kalmyk constitution with the great steppe law which we had worked on for many months.

I proved right. An echo of great indignation rumbled all over the republic. The next day, on the spur of the moment, a public committee for the defense of the constitution was created. Again rumors and slander were spread about. The hitherto ramshackle opposition united against me. It was their

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moment of glory. That very day they threw all manner of insults at me, accusing me of betraying my people, of selling Kalmykia to the Kremlin authorities; they demanded my immediate resignation.

The following morning there was a picket line outside the government building. Many had heard about my statement at second or third hand. The public defenders of the constitution did their best to aggravate the situation. I gave a two-hour live interview on television, justifying my political stand and describing the general political situation in the country. I told our viewers what kind of future would await Kalmykia if Russia disintegrated completely.

After that I met with the leaders of the opposition in my office. We had a long, difficult, impassioned and intense conversation. I believed that, so long as we all were patriots who cherished Kalmykia and her future, we would come to an understanding, regardless of our different political perspectives and views on the country's prospects. My opponents would see that the step which their president had taken was painful, but essential to prevent the disintegration of the state. If our aims were the same - the happiness of the Kalmyk people - then we would understand each other.

Meanwhile the economic situation in the republic left much to be desired. The Caspian Sea was beginning to flood the steppe. The republic needed twelve billion rubles to fund urgent counter-measures. This natural disaster, which had ruined many settlements and pasture lands and washed away roads, scattered our highly volatile resources. In addition, the disintegration of the Soviet Union had a bad effect on our trade and economic ties. The warehouses were full of wool, Kalmykia's gray gold, but our partners no longer had the means to buy it. Mutual non-payment had reached a catastrophic point. At the same time the republic was in urgent need of money to finance exploration work on new sources of oil and

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gas. Unemployment was growing, the birth rate dropping and the death-rate rising. I showed my opponents some figures which proved that there was no other way out. Only by uniting Russia could we restore our economic links and put a stop to the impoverishment of the people. Russia had given us a lot and now was the time to return our debts. We must make this step.

The highly explosive situation in the North Caucasus and the prospects for imminent war in the region, put Kalmykia, which was still relatively secure, at risk. During that year we built several schools and hospitals, laid forty-three kilometers of gas pipe line and one hundred kilometers of gas supply networks, we laid a hundred and twenty kilometers of power-lines, as well as building new roads and hot-water systems. However, it was vital to our future development that we have a strong state. The efforts from above, from Moscow, met with resistance from the regions. So the only way out was to start uniting from below, at a regional level. That was our chance. We were not going to renounce ourselves as a republic. We were going to preserve our territory, coat-of-arms and flag. We would conclude a treaty with Russia by which we would be given certain guarantees, rights and authority. Why should Kalmykia strive for self-determination? Was Kalmykia realistically going to separate from Russia?

I spent several hours trying to convince the opposition that I had done the right thing. All in vain. They wouldn't understand me. The committee for the defense of the constitution distributed leaflets in the regions, in settlements and factories. They gathered ex-deputies, and former bureaucrats, sent petitioners to Moscow to meet with Yeltsin. In a nut shell the committee was absorbed in feverish work. I could not understand the logic of our hard-line patriots. On the one hand they accused me of betraying Kalmykia to Moscow, while on the other they went to the very same Moscow to complain about Kalmykia's president.

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As a matter of fact my television address aroused not only Kalmykia. The telephones in my office rang nonstop and my desk was cluttered with telegrams and fax messages.

- "What are you doing, Kirsan? Can't you see you are setting us up!" representatives from other republics told me with indignation. "Are you going to instigate a civil war in Kalmykia? People do not understand this kind of tactic."

- "What is going on in Kalmykia?" asked government officials in Moscow. "What is this steppe side law all about? Why have you renounced your constitution? You should have negotiated this matter with us first."

There were telephone calls from countries in the CIS, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, France and Germany. Former President Nixon phoned me from Washington as well as the leaders of parties and political blocks all of whom were trying to find out what was happening in Kalmykia.

Politicians appeared to be especially worried, convinced that some intricate political game was afoot. They tried to guess what was behind all this, what Ilyumzhinov wanted and what he was up to.

I did not believe that civil war in Kalmykia was a possibility regardless of what the heads of the neighboring regions might say. The Kalmyks are Buddhists and Buddhists do not accept bloodshed and slaughter; they are more oriented towards non-violence and compromise. This is why Kalmykia managed to preserve her political stability notwithstanding all the economical and social turmoil in the republic. I believed in the wisdom of Kalmykia's people, no matter what ethnic group they belong to. I did not have the slightest doubt that the people would understand me.

The great steppe side law was adopted for the first time in 1640 at a congress between Jungar and the Khalkhass khans.

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Those were troubled times, years of general discord. The tribes were scattered and weakened both by wars against external enemies as well as themselves. Twenty-eight khans and three Buddhist activists grouped together to adopt the great steppe side law which aimed at eradicating internecine battles and conflicts between the khans which had torn the land apart for centuries. They gathered together to establish order and a durable peace on the territory of the Mongol Khanates. The wisdom of a nation is based on the experience of the past. The Kalmyks say: "The hand has five fingers, all of them different, but each one hurts if you cut it, since each finger is but a part of the hand and all the fingers complement one another."

All the clauses of the great steppe side law begin with the same exclamation: "May there be well-being!" The great words of our ancestors.

The well-being of an individual, the well-being of a family, the republic, of Russia. A man must be well off. With money he will quickly learn the fundamentals of economics and know where to invest his funds, how to return his money with interest, how to create a company and entrust his earnings to the state. This money will work for the republic and create the foundation of its wealth. This is why in my program "the interests of the citizens are more important than those of the state. Private property is sacred and inviolable". This path is a long one, involving hard work without respite or holidays. But when you work for yourself and not for the state you will not feel as though you are breaking your back.

With the rise in the standard of living here people will consciously strengthen their public morality, and a tightening of the sublime, universal and spiritual spheres will also follow. This is why I reunited the church with the state, and am embarked on a program of building churches, mosques, khuruls and catholic and protestant cathedrals. Out of my personal means I have allotted over three hundred million rubles for the

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consolidation of religion, thereby creating the foundation for the spiritual rebirth of Kalmykia's population. However, restoration comes about gradually rather than immediately. It requires time, money, patience and a lot of painstaking effort.

I told many of my opponents that I had turned down my salary and my travel allowances. I do not take a single kopeck from the republic's budget for my personal needs. I have invested hundreds of millions of my own money into Kalmykia's economy. I work eighteen hours a day without breaks or holidays. My program is practicable. I have tested it on my former companies which employed 600,000 workers. When I left the business world many cried because ironically I had begun to create communism for them. Personally I need nothing. I have long since solved my own problems. I only want prosperity for Kalmykia.

There may be some flaws and weak points in my program. After all to err is human. If you have a better program why not come out with it? If you can prove that you can do more for Kalmykia than me, I will go. I could easily give in my president's chair. In Moscow I had far more power and money.

So far no one has come forward with an alternative program. They are only able to whimper and criticize the existing program. A year has passed and there is no communism in sight. But then it will never happen if you sit idly by waiting until Kirsan Ilyumzhinov has built it for you. You should never let grass grow under your feet.

I want to create a powerful and integral economical body named Kalmykia. That is the only way to withstand the general decay, devastation and instability. Every resident of the republic must work bearing only one goal in mind, that is the well-being of one and all.

- "You promised to help people. Give people money."

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- "To help does not mean to hand out money. I have given enough to realize the simple truth - easy come easy go. To help means to teach others how to work for themselves."

- "Now look! You have taken away the constitution from the people. How are we supposed to live without it? We will be buried, dispersed and diluted. Now we are nothing but a province of Russia."

I have been told that when Stalin died the whole country became hysterical: what is to become of us now that Stalin is dead? It is the end of us.

I do not like to draw conclusions, but there were some striking parallels in the situation. The funny thing was that the leaders of the opposition realized that the constitution was only an illusion. The constitution could not prevent the Kalmyks from spending thirteen years in exile where almost half the population perished. The constitution proved unable to stop impoverishment and decay. The constitution was outdated. New times call for new conditions of life and new laws.

But still they would not listen. What did they care about my reasons? Now was a good time to earn political dividends by stirring people up, coming to power and earning their place in the history books. The most important thing was to fan the fire while the people were still unaware of what was going on.

I foresaw the rallies in the town squares, the demonstrations and delegations to Moscow. I realized there would again be a wave of rumors, accusations and lies and that many of my supporters would be scared and run into the arms of the opposition. But I knew that the froth would subside and that the people would eventually understand my actions. I believed in the people's wisdom.

The defenders of the constitution met with the president of Russia's administration head S.A. Filatov. Elista was visited by

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R.G. Abdulatipov, deputy chairman of the Federation Council. However, despite the allegations of the committee for the defense of the constitution that a coup d'etat had occurred in the republic, the residents of Kalmykia did not rush to savings banks to withdraw money from their accounts, they did not start hoarding matches, salt and flour. There were no queues at Aeroflot's ticket-offices or at railway station. Little by little the people began to understand what was what.

- "You know there are all kinds of unnecessary rumors circulating," R.G. Abdulatipov said at a meeting with Elista residents. "The constitution of the Russian Federation provides exceptional guarantees and is inviolable in its authority. It envisions cooperative plenary powers. At the same time it has room for other legal possibilities which allow for the resolution of problems independently. This is exactly what the constitution of Russia grants you. You'd better arrange things on your own and not seek supporters or detractors in Moscow ..."

It was clear that Moscow had understood and approved my initiative. The process of Russia's disintegration worried not only me. First and foremost it concerned Russia herself. So the step taken by Kalmykia was vitally important for all the peoples of the Russian Federation.

By the end of March our information department conducted an opinion poll with anonymous questionnaires. The replacement of the outdated constitution with the great steppe side law was welcomed by 34.9 percent of the population.

Those more "in favor" than "against" - 20,8.

Those more "against" than "in favor" - 10,1.

Against - 13,1.

It was a victory. The tension in the republic was ebbing. One could breathe again. I was well aware how difficult the situation was for all residents of the Kalmyk republic.

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Throughout our lives we have had notions such as “the constitution is sacred, the constitution is the sole defender of our rights, the constitution is the people's hope and support and that the constitution means freedom” rammed into our heads.

These simple formulas have been taken as a given, just as the phrases “Stalin is the father of all nations”, “the Party is the brain, honor and conscience of our time” or “religion is the people's opium” were taken for granted by the older generation. It is a hell of a job to remove these truisms from our mind, and the process is messy and painful. However, this painful transformation is absolutely unavoidable. During that very dangerous moment - dangerous both for Russia and for all of us - we had to rise to the occasion, to overcome our national pride, lift the visor and fling away the sword. Someone had to be the first to do this during those days of general inter-national distrust and fear. So Kalmykia set an example for the rest and sacrificed its national egotism for the sake of the general national renaissance of our Fatherland.

My dream is to turn Kalmykia into a republic in which citizens are proud to live just as in America, England, Japan or France. We must do everything we can to ensure that our children can say with pride: “I live in Kalmykia.” Everyone must begin to think of his or herself as a resident of Kalmykia first, and only then a Chechen, Darghin, Russian, Kalmyk or Ukrainian. Your little homeland, the land on which you live, comes first; the rest follow. My cherished dream is to see Kalmykia blossom, just as the clairvoyant Vanga predicted.

Cicero once said the timeless words: “I did what I could. Let others do better.” I wish that we could adopt this as our motto. Let there be mistakes! Only those who do nothing do not make mistakes. But it is our duty to raise our Kalmykia because if we don't then what is our purpose in life? I do see and understand how hard life is for the peoples of our republic. But is life any easier elsewhere in the former Soviet Union?

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Such are the times we live in. We must strive to survive. There is no other way. Our struggle will be severe and tough. We live in a period of great change and we must pay for the mistakes and sins of the past. We must clearly understand that it will take a long time for us to repay our debts.

No sooner did we put a stop to impending economic disaster than another problem appeared before us in all its horror, a spiritual one, and then a third, environmental one. We can't know what kind of horrible revenge nature will take on us for all the abuse it has suffered.

In 1966 there were forty-three natural disasters on the planet, but by 1979 that figure had risen to eighty-one. Over recent years the number of natural disasters have exceeded even the most pessimistic figures. The number of genetic diseases have increased four fold. Nowadays every child on earth carries strontium-90 in its bones. Out of one hundred malignant tumors eighty develop as a result of the environment. And does this horrify us? No. We have grown accustomed to it. Each year many species of plants and animals disappear from the face of the earth. The extraction of metals, coal and gas has caused gigantic underground hollows which result in earthquakes and floods. Are we aware of that? What do we do to protect ourselves? Nothing. We have poisoned our rivers and air. We breathe in and eat God knows what. We call our environment Mother Nature and mother earth and yet we repeatedly kill this mother ruthlessly and unmercifully. So what are we? Are we human beings or zombies?

One day in spring my car broke down and we had to spend the night in the steppe, on the dead bank of the Volga-Chograi canal. The sky had grown dark and was covered with the steel spots of the stars. And then we heard the long and eery death scream of a mother-saiga antelope which was coming from the bottom of the dried-up twenty-meter deep canal. For several days she lay dying, her legs broken, crying on a pile of rotting

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carcasses of other beasts. And all the while a little saiga fawn was running along the edge of the canal's bank crying like a human child. The two animals kept on crying to one another till they died.

So what is the big deal? What do we care about their agony if we don't even give a damn about ourselves? What do we care about saigas when our entire country is now a prison camp, now Chekhov's ward six? If there is no moral law then the interconnected chain of life is broken. Without moral law human egotism, both personal, familial, tribal and national, screams and demands: give! We have forgotten the word "here!" We have forgotten a lot over the recent years. We have lost our memory.

To restore the continuity of time and find a way out of this chaos we must consolidate our resources and prepare for self-sacrifice. Only after passing this test and understanding it can we save ourselves, our people, our land and the earth. Nobody can save himself unaided. And the same goes for individual communities and whole societies such as Kalmykia, Russia or the USA. No nation and no race has sufficient strength, resources and time to save themselves individually from the coming world catastrophe. It is better that we understand this today since tomorrow will be too late.

Neither political parties nor the most intelligent and just governments will save us until most of the people on this earth have accepted this universal moral law into their hearts. It is a long and tormenting process, one of consolidation through mutual repentance, mutual concessions and self-abnegation. There is no such thing as small peoples, countries and nations. Each nation is great just as each human being is unique. The death of any individual diminishes the spirit of the era and of the whole universe. With every passing life, a person's dawns and sunsets, his first love, his friends, the things he knew and

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his unique individuality also dies. A person takes all the worlds he knew in his lifetime with him to the grave.

Yes, we need a universal moral law. Some might say that first we should develop our economies and build a normal life before turning to morality. But there will be no "before" if there is no law of conscience and heart. The whole country will be plundered, pulled apart and transferred to Swiss banks piece by piece. And again the people will be left with nothing.

Each month one billion dollars are sent abroad, which means that every year twelve billion dollars leave Russia to work for other countries and raise their living standards. Why is that? Bans will not help. According to a classic maxim Russia's happiness lies in the fact that its residents poorly abide by poor laws. Not until everyone of us rebels against unscrupulous behavior will we set out on the way of regeneration. We will step on firm ground and build a better future.

I am deeply convinced that a new stage in the development of the nation, its spiritual regeneration and economic growth will become possible only when we have eradicated our insensitivity to the suffering of others. Otherwise we will be lost in the labyrinths of lies and false values.

"There is a record in the old Tibetan books," a Buddhist priest once told me, "which predicts that the Buddhist nations will blossom again once the smallest and most westerly of our people start the process at the beginning of the third millennium."

The deeply ingrained, profound and receptive morality of the Orient and the technological progress of the West are the two wings which can guide Kalmykia to prosperity. They are the two pillars that will support the sublimation of individual consciousness under the super-national moral law of humanity,

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thus releasing the people from the wolf's trap of tribal and ethnic egotism, spiritual and economic poverty.

“Hail to well-being!” This is the spiritual rallying cry of our nation. It was bequeathed to us by our forefathers as the most cherished treasure. Well-being is the balance of conscience and deed, body and soul. Well-being is security. Well-being is the root and the trunk of life in our wind-swept times. It is also an incentive to activity, to develop every individual's talents and capabilities.

I was addressing a UNESCO meeting in Paris. I said that Kalmykia is a small republic, but that its people participate in the world process the same as all the peoples of the globe. The sun, the moon and the stars shine for everyone, irrespective of race, nationality or political convictions. Such is the great wisdom of nature. We are all inseparable. Even the smallest thorn in the foot can topple your balance and render you lame. The Kalmyks are the only Buddhists in Europe. The flora and fauna of Kalmykia are in a sorry plight. Unique herbs have become extinct, the climate is undergoing change, and the sands advance on the pastures threatening to create the first desert in Europe. If it grows large enough a whirlwind or hurricane will carry these sands as far as France, England and Germany. If we do not take urgent measures the pavements of Paris will be covered in sand. It is too late to ask who is to blame. Today the main question is what's to be done.

I think I managed to convince them. The “black soil” environmental protection scheme was launched in Kalmykia. The reserve received an international UNESCO certificate. It was brought to Elista by an adviser on the protection of endangered species, Professor James Gear, and an expert in international programs to protect wild life, Frederic Lindsey. Now the area of the Black Soils will be under the protection and control of UNESCO.

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It is a very important step for the protection of the environment which means it is good too for the health of Kalmykia's peoples.

Thirty percent of the republic's population are listed as disabled. The death rate is rising and the birth rate declining. One of the causes is the extent of the ecological disaster. There has been an increase in cases of chromosomal abnormality. An ecological knife is hanging over our heads and we have sounded the alarm. Physicians from France, the USA, Germany and Tibet have visited the republic and still more are expected from other countries. We are planning to open a center of Tibetan medicine in Elista.

The biggest tannery in the North Caucasus, equipped with machine-tools from Bulgaria, is already in production. Construction has started on an international airport. Kalmykia has hosted a conference on the "The Weak of Tibet" as well as an international congress "Women as Peacemakers and Creators" aimed at unifying and consolidating the peoples of the world in the name of peace, stability and world-wide tranquility. Roads are being built in the republic. If there is anyone who could do more and better, we invite him to do more and better for Kalmykia. We will reward him with a bow from all the peoples of the republic.

Kalmykia is taking the first steps to ensure the well-being of each of its citizens. These steps are hard, and the light at the end of the tunnel is still too distant. However, we have started marching and, hard though it is, we will continue.

Some time ago in Moscow a newspaper correspondent asked me this question:

- "In 1994 your name was entered in the year's diplomatic calendar which is published by Queen Elizabeth of England. Do you feel proud of this?"

- "No, I don't," I replied.

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- “Why?”
- “I don't have the time for it.”

When am I supposed to feel proud, anyway? During my twenty-minute lunch breaks? In my sleep? The remaining time is devoted to hard, intensive work which requires all my abilities and energy. Sometimes I try to remember if I have eaten today and cannot say definitely whether I did or not. But most often I have no time to remember.

On December 31, the very eve of 1994, I got a call from Salyn, the so-called “zone of convicts”. The man on the phone reminded me of my promise to visit them during that year and it was already the year's last day. The convicts were arguing about whether the president would keep his promise or not.

Meanwhile my wife was busy preparing a festive meal for the family and guests. Nothing doing. I could not go back on my word. We loaded the car with New Year presents: two packs of Marlboro cigarettes for each convict, and left for the zone to see the new year in. The meeting lasted five hours instead of the expected two. Questions, answers and more questions. I had not anticipated that our interview would be so lively and frank. They asked me about my philanthropic foundation for the families of convicts, the reforms in Kalmykia and the republic's prospects. They touched upon international and domestic affairs and showed an interest in the real implications of the political reforms. And of course they brought up their own problems.

So it turned out that I left home in 1993 and came back in 1994. The guests were tired of waiting and my wife looked offended.

- “Where on earth did you see the new year in?” she asked me.

“With convicts,” I said. “You voted for me, didn't you? So you've no right to complain.”

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One year ago Kalmykia was considered to be Russia's outskirts. A foreign visitor here caused a sensation. As a matter of fact the number of such visits throughout the history of Soviet Kalmykia can be counted on the fingers. Now no-one pays attention to people speaking English, German, Turkish or Finnish. They have got used to it. Each day delegations from all over the world arrive in Kalmykia with offers of cooperation, bringing different projects and plans. Kalmykia entered the international economic arena as an equal partner and soon the results will make themselves felt in the standard of living of all.

I look at the richly bejeweled sword of Genghis Khan which was presented to me by a delegation from Mongolia in the hope that I might unite all the Mongol peoples scattered throughout the world, not by the sword but by the supreme law of reason... I look at it and contemplate how many more incredible problems I will have to overcome. Do I have the strength, energy and willpower? I must find it. It is imperative. It is essential...

An All-Russia Chess Tournament has drawn to a close in Elista. The grandmaster Garry Kasparov has left the city. The guests are leaving. All the excitement of the event has subsided. This was the first time that such a tournament took place in Elista. Kasparov conducted a display of multi-board chess-play...

It is now 3:00 AM My workday is ending. The last visitors have gone. Elista is asleep. I go up to the window of my office. In the thickened pre-dawn blackness of the sky I can see the sparkling, shimmering and twinkling stars, as unassailably high and bright as our dreams.

The two halves of the cosmic chess board have already been joined on the plains of the Milky Way. The chessmen have taken their places. I start a new game with fate and make my first move. May success attend me!..

## CHAPTER 10.

### PARIS, ELISTA, YEREVAN...

Time passes quickly... it seems only yesterday that I was elected President of FIDE in Paris, and now there are elections, this time in Yerevan. I have been President of FIDE for around one year: a short time by usual standards, but which have happened during the first year long time in the world of chess. Looking back at the ground FIDE has covered I can see what mistakes and oversights were made, why they were made, and how they can be avoided in the future. In short, I will briefly summarize my first period in office.

I became President of FIDE to the surprise of many people, not least of all myself. In November 1995 I was resting after having just won a second term of office as President of Kalmykia. To tell the truth, at the time I did not plan to attend FIDE's general Assembly in Paris. However FIDE was interested in how plans for the XXXIII World Olympiad, set to take place in Elista in 1998, were progressing. This was included on the agenda for me second day of the conference. FIDE President Florencio Campomanes called and invited me to take part in the General Assembly, therefore I decided to fly to Paris. The General Assembly was scheduled to last three days, November 22nd to 24th. I thought to myself: I will make a quick speech on the state of preparations of the Olympiad, rest a little in Paris, and then fly straight home again. Before departing I called in on Garry Kasparov and asked him if he was going to Paris. But Kasparov said no, he was too busy.

On the evening of November 21st I arrived in the Paris hotel where all the delegates were staying, and discovered that Campomanes had been severely criticized at a meeting of his FIDE Central Committee. The question of removing him from the post as president of FIDE had been raised. Thus the night

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of November 21st-22nd in the hotel was lively to say the least. Delegates did not sleep, but spent their time discussing who could replace Campomanes, and calculating possible permutations of voting for other candidate for the post of FIDE President, the up shot of it all was that no single candidate would receive majority support. I observed all the running to and from the hotel lobby, and in the process received a mass of interesting information.

Then, at some late hour already closer to morning, the question of my candidacy unexpectedly arose. Campomanes asked me to stand for the post of FIDE President. His reasoning was understandable. I am well known in the chess world as a chess enthusiast, a former businessman, and currently a politician. I had never fought for power in chess, and have friendly relations with both Karpov and Kasparov, therefore me candidacy would suit everyone. Also a politician's experience is very useful in chess. Political battles and the struggle for power in the chess world are one and the same. And as a politician with considerable power I could serve chess well, since the President of Kalmykia's has greater means at his disposal than, say, a mayor or even a minister.

Of course one could not say that Campomanes' proposal took me completely by surprise. As an amateur chess player I too had suffered from all the confusion in world chess. Given had thought about the role of FIDE and the best way its work could be reorganized. Back in 1994 during the opening of the Russian championship in Elista, I had a discussion with Kasparov. Garry was very anxious that the Olympiad was collapsing as FIDE was unable to organize it what could be done? I said we could find a solution to the crisis, that nothing is impossible.

We saved the Olympiad: it took place in Moscow, and the discussion about FIDE remained only a discussion. But the program of action to solve FIDE's crisis stayed in my mind.

## **Chapter ten - Paris, Elista, Yerevan ...**

Now then in Paris the opportunity to realize this program had presented itself. I agreed to Campomanes' proposal.

Campomanes spoke at the Conference as scheduled on November 22nd. He announced that he had achieved much for chess, that he was already 69 years old, tired, and that he wanted to retire. And he surprised many by proposing Ilyumzhinov as his successor. What happened next had to be seen, as words hardly suffice. Discussions went on for three days... There were of course other candidates. Arab countries proposed the head of the United Arab Emirate chess federation, Mr. Ghobash, and European countries proposed Mr. Koualty.

On November 23rd I called Victor Ilyushin the Russian President's first deputy in the Kremlin, informed him of the situation and said that in so far as I am the President of the Republic of Kalmykia and member of Russian Federation Council I considered it my duty to consult with the country's leadership. Ilyushin met with the President of Russia, Boris Nikolaevich Yeltsin, who approved my candidacy and wishes me success in the FIDE Presidential elections.

I spoke at the General Assembly, retold them myself and the foundation of my program of action to solve FIDE's crisis. My program was founded on addressing several key issues: finding reliable sponsors; improving FIDE's image; designing FIDE's future policy; solving organizational questions. It would seem that I managed to persuade the majority of delegates.

It is true that the Americans had their doubts. For them my candidacy carried political overtones, as the President of FIDE would be not only a Russian citizen, but also the President of a Republic of the Russian Federation, a Senator. However after consultations with the State Department and members of the U.S. Congress, it became clear that there would be no political complications in my becoming President of FIDE.

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There were other doubts, concerning whether this General Assembly had the authority to elect a new President. It was not an official item on the agenda. Furthermore, some delegates opined that there could not be two members of the same country in the FIDE leadership (President of the Russian Chess Federation, Andrei Makarov, is the Vice President of FIDE). A special commission of senior lawyers was appointed who discussed the matter for three hours, and came to the conclusion that the elections were legitimate. The FIDE General Assembly, as the highest body, is empowered to make this decision.

It seemed that objections were overcome when the Secretary of the Russian Chess Federation, Y. Zelenkov, unexpectedly asked for the floor and read a telegram from the leadership of the Russian Chess Federation:

“The Russian Chess Federation hereby expresses a strong protest against the gross violation of FIDE Statutes committed during the FIDE Congress in Paris over the election of the new FIDE President.

In connection with this, the Russian Chess Federation hereby announces that it never proposed Mr. Kirsan Ilyumzhinov as candidate for FIDE President, and does not support his quest for FIDE Presidency.

The Russian Chess Federation believes that all FIDE activities must be based on strict adherence to its statutes. The individuals, who are self-interested trying to trample on the statutes, have once again shown their main goal is to undermine the agreement between FIDE and the PCA and to prolong the split in the world of chess.”

In general the logic was understandable. Given that my standing for FIDE President had not been agreed upon by the national federation, it was not legitimate and therefore the RCF could not support my candidacy.

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The letter was not a sharp as it first appeared. It caused confusion, even laughter, amongst the delegates. Imagine a representative of Russia, supported by the President of the country, for the first time in the history of FIDE being proposed to its highest post and not receiving the support of his national federation. This despite the fact that the President of FIDE is an honor for Russia and recognition of her role in world chess. The RCF's telegram worked in my favor and even those deputies who were undecided cast their vote for me, thus I was elected almost unanimously!

I was not offended by the telegram, as it was not so much directed towards Ilyumzhinov as against FIDE, and I only experienced repercussions. On the contrary, for some time Garry Kasparov felt offended by me, but this was honestly a total misunderstanding. Garry complained that during our lunch on my way to Paris I had concealed my intention of becoming FIDE President. People said what a cunning Kalmyk this Ilyumzhinov was, deceiving everyone. But I really did not know that I would be proposed for the post of FIDE President. And with regards to being cunning, I believe that honesty is the most cunning of all. The quickest way to achieve an aim is to tell the truth. I have always followed this rule in business, and continue to do so in politics. I started my political career in the beginning of the 1990's. At that time 21 people were competing for the position of Deputy. If I had not told the truth I would not have become deputy.

I also told the truth at the Paris General Assembly. I said that I had long term plans to solve FIDE's crisis and to unite chess players; that I was a friend of both Karpov and Kasparov, and would attempt to bring them to agreement. I called for a new chapter to start in the history of FIDE, to start with a clean slate and forget former conflicts; I promised to promote order and discipline.

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Did I understand what trials awaited? Of course. But at the same time I was certain that my experience as a businessman and politician, with the post of President of Kalmykia and all this involves, would guarantee that fulfilled my promises.

One could of course say that I was elected President of FIDE by chance. There was nothing in the proverb – “nothing happens by chance”. It is not by chance that international organizations should be headed by people who have graduated from the school of business and politics, with experience of working in powerful positions, having passed as they say in aviation sufficient “flying time”.

In becoming the FIDE President I also inherited FIDE's problems. I considered the main problems to be as follows: the unification of chess players in the world; the strict adherence to the chess calendar; advertising FIDE and promoting the further popularization of chess; social provision for professional chess players. However none of these matters could be satisfactorily solved without improved internal organization of FIDE including better financial management. If we are able to improve FIDE's image then sponsors will give money, and FIDE will then strengthen and expand. It is necessary to reorganize FIDE in such a way that it bring real benefits, including financial ones. An international organization cannot not live alone by taking its slice of the pie from world championship match prize funds. On the contrary, FIDE should itself make money and pay professional chess players for their labor. But for this to happen there must be a strong energetic team of professionals within FIDE with a clearly defined program and a clear idea how to implement it, not bureaucrats who only worry about their own interests and in fact do nothing for the development of world chess.

I want to separate chess from politics and divorce politics from chess. I believe that chess players should play and

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World Chess Championship in Elista:  
FIDE president makes the first move



With the president of Russia chess federation Andrey Makarov,  
Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov

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earn a living while FIDE organizes tournaments, matches, and finds reliable sponsors. Grandmasters should not themselves organize chess tournaments.

After my election a number of businessmen and representatives of large companies announced their support for chess. We received our first donation from one of the largest construction corporations in the world. This was a real start, paving the way for further energetic work.

One month after my election the Presidential board met in Singapore and I presented my program. It included increasing the stability and advertising of FIDE, and attracting new countries to FIDE. Trips were planned to Asia, Latin America and Africa, so as to allow me to meet with heads of State and governments, to seek support for the development of chess and to found FIDE exhibition centers in every continent, as well as separate FIDE commercial centers to professionalize FIDE's marketing strategy and attract multinational companies as general sponsors.

However the main tenet of my program was the proposal to totally change the world chess championship system. I based these proposals on the assumption that the old system is in conflict with the modern world and has no real future. It is incapable of attracting sponsors. Nobody wants to give money for zonal and interzonal tournaments, or quarterfinal candidates matches; sponsors are not interested in them. Therefore within the old system it is impossible to raise the income of professional chess players. I proposed conducting the world chess championship as an Olympic system, with the participation of the world's 100 top players and a 5 million dollar prize fund, to take place during the Christmas holidays. The competition would be a knock out system with eight rounds, and include Garry Kasparov and Anatoly Karpov at the semi final stage.

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The Olympic system is the only fair way, from a sporting point of view, of organizing an event with so many participants. My initial plan was to conduct the new championship every year, however I later came to the opinion that the championship should be held every other year with the chess Olympiad to be held each year in-between the championships.

Critics stated that the new system subverts the tradition of the world chess championship, that it will even change the meaning of the world championship title. But this does not mean that the new system is necessarily bad. Sometimes tradition inhibits future development and has to be rejected. One of the main advantages of the proposed new system is the considerable increase in the prize fund, with its fair distribution amongst a wider number of professional players.

Many critics were afraid that under the new system champions would change too quickly while the world champion should be a phenomenon in chess. But no one is stopping the champion from defending his title in the new system, under equal conditions with everyone else. A change of champions would be nothing terrible as it would remove the halo of exclusiveness of one or two players, and with it the basis of many conflicts. There are now many top class professionals, and it will give them the opportunity to prove themselves.

The new world championships system has become attractive to many serious sponsors as the event will include the world's strongest players, take place at one venue, over a fairly short and convenient time period when people in many countries are on holiday, and the exciting knockout system will attract expressed interest in hosting the event. The first application was made by Yugoslavia (Pec), then Vietnam (Hoshimin), and another realistic candidate is Japan. Countries which offer to host the event are ready to cover all expenses for

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its organization and realization. The main sponsor will determine in which city the match will take place, and this will be included in the contract to be signed with FIDE. There is no longer any question about the prize fund as everyone I held negotiations with was prepared to offer 5 million dollars, and it will most probably be possible to hold a tender for the right to host the championship.

Of course there must be some changes and technical improvements, but in general terms FIDE is ready to conduct the championship according to the new system.

The individual men's world championship is the main competition, but far from the only event organized under the aegis of FIDE. A clear calendar must be created around the world championship.

Analogous to the men's world championship, the women's world championship could take place every two years as a knockout system. It might take place at the same time and place as the men's championship, with a considerable prize fund, to include the stronger 13 women chess players in the world (with world champion Zsuzsa Polgar entering the competition at the semi-final stage).

I propose that the men's and women's team championships (chess Olympiad) should take place once every two years, in the years between the world championship competitions.

The 1996 Olympiad is starting in the capital of Armenia, Yerevan. The Republic of Kalmykia is preparing itself for the 1998 Olympiad.

Despite all these plans for the future it was necessary to complete the present world championship cycle. I “inherited” two unplayed world championship matches: Xie Jun - Zsuzsa

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Polgar and Anatoly Karpov - Gata Kamsky. The organization of these matches required great effort.

The Women's match took place in the Spanish town of Jaen, with the prize fund of \$200, 000. Zsuzsa Polgar upheld a brilliant victory and became world champion. It is true the match was not without incident: literally on the day before the closing ceremony I had to instantaneously solve some fairly delicate problems caused by the impressive formulation of the regulations. I decided that the interest of the players was paramount, and in order to avoid conflict I had to use my own personal resources.

Large problems arose in the Karpov - Kamsky match. The Canadian organizers dropped out at the last moment due to lack of sponsors, despite the fact that up to this point there had been a constant stream of faxes assuring us that everything was in good order.

After Montreal pulled out the situation seemed hopeless to many people: no money for the match and no time to look. My experience as a businessman told me that only non-standard measures could save a desperate situation: at a press conference in Paris on March 7th I announced that the match would take place in Baghdad in June. For many people the extremely negative reaction to this decision, but there were several significant reasons for choosing Baghdad.

Firstly, there were no regulations in any international documents that chess competitions could not take place in Iraq, thus we would not be breaking the regime of economic sanction. (Furthermore, I believe that economic sanctions are a very suspect argument in politics, as the main victims of sanctions are ordinary people who are in no way responsible for the action of their Leaders. Not to mention that chess and international politics are entirely different things!) Secondly, Iraq had offered that largest prize fund of two million dollars (out of which half of million would go to Iraqi children.)

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Last but not least I acted as a businessman who needed to give FIDE and the match a maximum amount of publicity at minimum expense. I intended to cause a stir! The international uproar put the match at the center of world attention. Worldwide this press published caricatures of me embracing Saddam Hussein, and some European Federations wrote letters of condemnation. Several months later when the match had been rerouted to Kalmykia, it was broadcast on television in America, where chess is not yet very popular, "This is the same Karpov - Kamsky match which did not take place in Baghdad!"

On April 3rd the President of the US Chess Federation Denis G. Barry sent me letter stating that the USA State Department had refused Gata Kamsky a visa for Iraq. I expected this turn of events and had a reserve plan ready. The match took place in my home town of Elista, the capital of Kalmykia, with the same prize fund of 2 million dollars, from which half a million went to "The children of Kalmykia" fund with the agreement of both Karpov and Kamsky, to provide medical treatment, purchase medicine, and equip schools with computers. The prize fund and all match expenses were covered by sponsors. The main sponsor was the company Rosneft, and also the Stolichni Saving Bank.

There was virtually no time left to prepare the match, but despite this it was organized on the highest level according to many reports. How was this managed? The main reason is the universally popular nature of chess in Kalmykia and the State support provided to chess. A Kalmyk Presidential decree was published on "state support for the development of chess", and chess is included in the school curriculum. The chairman of the match's organizing committee was head of the Kalmyk government, Valery Bogdanov. We were also aided by the experience of having hosted the men and women's Russian championship for the last three years in a row. While I have been President of Kalmykia interest in the Republic has greatly increased and the investment environment has improved.

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Elista awaits its next test, the Olympiad of 1998. This world chess forum will be funded mainly by sponsors. The construction of an Olympiad Village, 180 cottages, a hotel and other amenities is part of the plan of socio-economic development of Kalmykia, and after the Olympiad these developments will remain for the citizens of the capital, Elista. This is supported by the Russian government's program for social and economic development of the Republic, with a corresponding Presidential decree. We work on the basis of these documents. Construction in Elista has already begun for a new international airport, a Palace of Culture which will seat 10,000 people (a venue for chess tournaments), and the so-called 10th micro region, where tens of thousands of people will be guaranteed residential accommodation and other public works after the Olympiad. There is a Russian proverb "you can only reach the destination by going on the journey". I am sure that we will overcome the road ahead, pass this difficult test, and Elista will become the chess capital of the world.

The match, which finished with the convincing victory of Anatoly Karpov, generated enormous interest; several dozen Russian and foreign correspondents were accredited. Furthermore, in far corners of the world chess players could follow every nuance of the match by receiving moves on the Internet virtually as soon as they were played on the stage. The journalists had their own competition. The main prize was a Hyundai car, won by the Elista newspaper *Isvestia Kalmykii*. Prizes for different media categories were won by 64-Shakhmatnoe Obozreniye, Sport Express, Russian TV channel 6, and Komsomolskaya Pravda.

I changed the subject to the mass media on purpose, as any international organization needs advertising to work efficiently. Surprisingly, before my arrival, FIDE had never advertised itself. Furthermore, even the FIDE emblem had not been registered anywhere! I have used personal resources to patent the FIDE emblem as a commercial logotype, and the

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FIDE advertising film has now been shown on international Television networks. A world wide audience of millions has interval after seen the FIDE logo on their screens and heard my voice “Gens Una Sumus, Let's play chess – FIDE”. I personally funded this advertisement, paying \$128,000 to CNN and \$168,000 to Ostankino (Russian Channel 1). I am sure that many companies will soon pay to use the FIDE logo in their advertising. By the way, after the Yerevan Olympiad I intend to start a new advertising campaign on CNN. We are also in discussion with the BBC about a series of half hour programs (monthly or bi-monthly) – “Spitting Image - Chess School”, where my puppet will learn to play chess along with its puppets of Princess Diana, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Michael Jackson and other celebrities.

In order to make life easier for journalists who work for both chess and other publications, we must reinvigorate AIPE (The International Association of Chess Press).

I will continue to try and bring the 11<sup>th</sup> World Champion Robert Fischer back to the board. The first step in this process was to compensate him for his book “*My 60 Memorable Games*”, which was published in the USSR more than twenty years ago. I met with Bobby Fischer in Budapest at the end of last year and paid him \$100,000. Although the Soviet Union had not been party to the Bern Convention on copyright laws, and strictly speaking Fischer had no formal right to claim this fee, I think he fully deserved it (even if somewhat late)!

In general I believe that FIDE should financially support any chess player who has made an outstanding contribution to the development of chess. The first steps in this direction have already been taken. The ex-world champion V. V. Smyslov was awarded a pension of \$1,000 per. month. The Grandmasters Andre Lilienthal (Hungary) and Arturo Pormar (Spain) were awarded a monthly pension of \$750. FIDE is

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preparing similar awards to other outstanding chess veterans (over 65 years old) who have served the world chess movement, and their anniversaries will not pass unnoticed. Every year we plan to hold the World Senior Championship (for chess players over the age of sixty).

Of course one of the most important roles of FIDE is the development of junior chess. By investing money in junior chess we invest money in our own future. The most talented young chess players in the world will be awarded personal grants.

We need to hold more junior tournaments, both individual and team events. Perhaps the current system of World Junior championships in the age groups of Under 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20 is questionable as it pushes too many talented juniors into early chess professionalism. Maybe it would make healthy sense to hold the world junior championships yearly in two age groups, Under 14 and Under 18. We should probably direct more attention to a yearly Junior Olympiad (Junior team championship).

It has proved most difficult to organize a match between the twelfth and thirteenth world champions, Anatoly Karpov and Garry Kasparov. For a long time all attempts to organize this match were in vain, and it was only recently during my negotiations with Andrey Makarov, Kasparov's representative, during the Karpov - Kamsky match in Elista, did it appear likely that such a match will eventually take place. Garry Kasparov is in principle ready to play a match in 1997 for a prize fund of not less than 2 million dollars, as is Anatoly Karpov. During their first informal meeting for many years, which took place in August 1996 in the Kalmyk representative's office in Moscow, Karpov and Kasparov already began discussing technical details of the match. I am sure that these minor matters will soon be agreed and these two great chess players will once again provide a chess festival.

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At Paris I stated my aim of uniting the chess world and realizing the motto GENS UNA SUMUS. In the first nine month of my Presidency I have managed to fulfill many of these promises. Most importantly, not only were the matches between Xie Jun - Zsuzsa Polgar and Anatoly Karpov - Gata Kamsky successfully completed, but also agreement was reached to play a match between the two "K's", Kasparov and Karpov. The Yerevan Olympiad is commencing, and preparations for the Elista Olympiad in 1998 are in full swing. At the end of the year we intend to run the new world championship competition with the participation of the world's one hundred strongest players and with a prize fund of five million dollars. I would reiterate that many nations have expressed an interest in hosting such an event, in particular Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong.

People are now starting to talk about FIDE again as it is becoming attractive to sponsors, and if there we do have sponsors then FIDE will grow from strength to strength. But to attract reliable sponsors FIDE should be unified and stable, without discord or conflict, and be headed by someone with real authority and financial freedom. Sponsors must feel certain that their money is being put into reliable hands. Unfortunately within and around FIDE there are still as many arguments and conflicts, today as they were 9 month ago. This must change: people should stop arguing, reach agreement and get on with the real business. Otherwise FIDE will fragment and disintegrate.

The antiquated structure of FIDE, with its cumbersome and inefficient apparatus, provides fertile ground for conflicts. The existence of such bodies as The General Committee, The Executive Council, and The Presidential Board, creates a mass of bureaucracy and intrigues, and is too onerous for the FIDE budget.

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Apt is the saying “the rot starts at the top”. I propose to reorganize the structure of FIDE and thereby rejuvenate it. The apparatus should be more transparent and effective in the spirit of LENS UNA SUMUS. The President should be able recruit staff, making it possible to manage employees; otherwise effective work is impossible. This is why it is logical to only elect the President and Deputy President, leaving them to appoint the rest of the FIDE leadership. Instead of The Central Committee, The Executive Council and The Presidential Broad, it is possible to create a single body, the so called FIDE Security Council, whose permanent members would be representatives of the largest chess federations: Russia, Germany, USA, China...

The situation which has occurred around the current FIDE Presidential elections in Yerevan affirms the appropriate and timely nature of my proposals for the whole sale restructuring of FIDE. At the FIDE Executive Council meeting in Elista in June it was decided that delegates at the Yerevan Congress would vote for a so called “Presidential ticket”. The ticket includes the whole FIDE leadership from the President to the Treasurer, and all members on the ticket should be from different federations. It was also agreed that the teams should be proposed under a strict deadline; by July 22nd, that is two month before the elections. I held personal discussion with every member of The Executive Council, and each expressed his desire to be included on the Ilyumzhinov Presidential ticket. After departing we communicated regularly by phone and fax.

During the busy period of organizing Russian Presidential elections in my Republic I knew absolutely nothing about the separate discussions going on behind my back. Soon another Presidential ticket appeared which excluded me. Some members of the FIDE leadership with whom I held discussions had included their names on a different ticket. One might say they reverted to their former

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roles. The actions which threatened to destroy FIDE were being repeated.

It seemed in response I should have formed my own 8 person team and begun an election campaign. However I intuitively felt that some wished to drag me into FIDE's internal battles, into a back-stage game on the "65th square". I am against conflicts on principle as they hinder people from working properly. Behind the leader of each warring faction there is a team of people who suffer much more than their leader if he loses the battle. Maybe thanks to my Buddhist mentality, or my many years experience working in a Japanese firm, I am against all conflicts and always try to lower the temperature, find common ground, and reach a compromise. During the mad days in Moscow October 1993 I went from the President in the Kremlin, to breaking through the barricades around the Parliament holding a white flag, trying to stop any blood shed. Alas, at that time a tragedy was not averted...

Peace and stability is in the interest of all chess players. Chess players need a FIDE which is understandable and predictable in its actions, which operates in a transparent and non-partisan way, with no privileges or exceptions. The battle which determines a winner and a loser should only take part in the chess board. I did not want take part in the whispering, plots and intrigues, in short to "play" in an uneven field according to the rules of certain members of the FIDE leadership. I want to conduct a policy which is honest and transparent to all chess players. All disagreements and conflict should be solved by compromises and round table discussion, and not by underhand games.

I oscillated for a long time. Let's say there are eight people in one team, and eight in my team. Even if there are only two teams then sixteen leading federations will be immersed in an election race for two month. This at a time when FIDE needs more than ever creative work!

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Furthermore, I always feel the great responsibility of my position as President of The Republic of Kalmykia. I can not run the risk of losing! I can run the risk for my self, but cannot risk the name of a people who have expressed their faith in me in elections and stand behind me.

After difficult deliberations I decided not to forward my own Presidential ticket. I was in Taiwan on July 22nd and when the deadline to submit the ticket arrived, I sent a letter from Taipei:

To: All National Chess Federations

Dear Chess Friends,

At the Paris Congress last year, I was approached to accept the nomination of FIDE President in order to restore chess unity in FIDE. Since I took office, The Karpov - Kamsky World Championship Match has been completed. I am negotiating for the Karpov - Kasparov unification match. With this match in the pipeline, it means that FIDE shall be finally united and that I would have accomplished what I had been asked to do by you.

FIDE is lacking the most important element and this is finance. Potential sponsors want to be sure that their money is well managed. My opinion is that in order to attract sponsors, FIDE must be united and that we need to restructure FIDE according to this need. For this, I agree with the decision of the Congresses of Moscow 1994 and Paris 1995 that the 1998 FIDE Election should be held for the offices of President and Deputy President only. However, 1998 is too far away and we need to have a restructure of FIDE as soon as the FIDE family meets in Yerevan. I therefore propose that the Moscow and Paris decision be implemented for the 1996 FIDE Elections. If my proposal for a restructure is accepted at the Yerevan Congress, like at the Paris Congress in 1995,

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I am ready to offer my candidacy for the office of President in the FIDE Election in Yerevan 1996.

GENS UMA SUMUS

What will happen at the Yerevan Congress? I will offer my report and program up to around year 2,000. If the FIDE General Assembly thinks that this program should be realized, if they accept my proposal to vote for the President and Deputy President rather than for a team of 8 people, if they propose my candidacy I am sure the majority of delegates will support me, then I will stand for FIDE President.

Not only the future of FIDE will be determined at the Yerevan congress, but also the future direction of world chess. This prestigious international organization, founded in 1924, should not today be stuck behind the times! The fate of FIDE cannot be left in the hands of people whose archaic and bureaucratic style of working hinders the development of chess and leaves FIDE on the verge of collapse.

I believe that FIDE will become a prosperous, dynamic and rich organization, persistently working in the interests of all chess players around the world, realizing the immortal motto

GENS UNA SUMUS!

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