

OUT THE DARKNESS OF AGES

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Idris Bazorkin

TRANSLATED FROM ORIGINAL IN RUSSIAN

THE HUMBLE TRANSLATOR

FOREWORD

This book is not an encyclopedia of the life of the Ingush people over the past century. It narrates the shaping of individuals, the struggle of characters under historically significant circumstances, and the people creating this history.

What prompted me to write this novel? For many years material has been accumulating. A thousand people crossed my life's path. Participant of or witness to the many events in our era — turbulent, arduous and romantic — I had to be myself. All this forced me to think I should share it all with my contemporaries and those readers who will have to acquaint with us already from afar.

— *Idris Bazorkin, 1968*

*...The life of a people is
without death, whatever may
happen to them.*

Nikolai Tikhonov

INTRO

Snowy heights,
towering cliffs,
from the world's creation
in the chaos risen to the sky,
dense forests,
boiling streams of clamorous rivers,
meadows, caught in a rainbow of blossom
and the aroma of grasses,
and a proud soul ready to die for friendship,
honour, freedom, —
all this from times immemorial
is referred to in folk tales
as the country of epics
and the name — Kavkaz¹!
In many languages
here sounds human speech.
Here lives a brotherhood of peoples.

¹Kavkaz — Caucasus (Russian).

When did they come, whence and why?..
 Nobody will answer this to the people.
 But perhaps, they are here of yore?..
 Among the mountain spurs is a Blue lake² in Chechnya.
 There swim the stars, and the moon,
 and the dawn — at the break of day.
 In it drowned a reflection of the ancients...
 On its secret shores
 scientists found
 a site of the first settlers.
 At hearths, ignited by lightning,
 their silhouettes were frozen in the darkness of ages.
 What did they see?
 How imagined they
 the fate of future generations?
 Silence. No answer.
 Surmise alone can relate about the past...
 That was twenty thousand years ago!
 But perhaps, these were our ancestors?
 Strabon and Pliny; Movses Khorenatsi
 left for the world names of
 people once present on the Caucasus.
 And through the fog of three thousand years
 our peoples' names came to be.
 For hundreds of years we inherited the cliffs,
 on those cliffs — stone towers,
 cemeteries of mute corpses...
 Where an imprint of man's hand,
 where the sun a sign — earth's motion symbol,
 where a tur's horn on faded walls

²Blue Lake in Chechnya — Lake Kezenoyam.

tell us sparingly about our ancestors.
But there was yet another secret keeper — language!
Ever alive and strong,
to decay, to battle unyielding
language the sage of my people is.
In it the memory of days past
and the nightingale's song.
In it preserved the myth about Teyshabayn³,
the tale about Batu, — grandson of Genghis Khan —
and the battle with Timur the Lame,
world conqueror, but not those mountains!
Language told me how hard it was for our forefathers,
how their courage and love for freedom
extended our lives to these days...
And yet a non literate people — almost mute.
That's how it was from the world's creation
till these hundred years on earth.
And here came our age —
the age of triumph of progress,
search for thoughts enlightened, joyous hopes!
Henceforth
there will be no secrets of our people.
To the future dead will not be legends,
tragedies, victories and love.
The sign of time is different. Different life is flowing.
Who gazes intently, is the one who sees very much.
Who listens, to that one time speaks.
My years were extended — by the elders.
They brought me to the day of yesterday.
To the day of tomorrow

³By ancient lore a city believed to have once been on the Caucasus.

we depart together,
to those following suit,
leaving this story
about how
the people came out the darkness.

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DREAM

The cliffs of the Tsey-Lom¹ shone white in the setting sun, surrounding like a wall the small terraces of the farming lands. In the centre of these lands towered an enormous boulder stone. Hundreds, maybe thousands of years ago it broke off the mountain and came to rest here, halfway to the precipice, crushing beneath it a whole mountain field. In days of old songs were passed on about it. But time has left the people only a tale about how in his fury the mighty nart² Seska-Solsa brought down the cliff onto his enemies. And that it's called — the cliff of Seska-Solsa.

Nearing towards its end was the month of the Cuckoo³, and the mountaineers were preparing for fieldwork. Au-

¹Tsey-Lom — Holy mountain (Ingush).

²Nart — a rich man in Caucasus folk epics.

³For the Ingush the month of the Cuckoo approximately coincides with April.

tumn downpours, winter snowslides carried rocks onto the ploughlands and meadows. Not having them removed, one could neither plough nor mow. For the third day already Daouli had been walking about the slope, carrying pebbles to the edge of the field, where over many ages from such stones entire mounds had grown. When having to walk far till a mound, Daouli put the stones down at the abuttal's edge, straightening the low side of the terrace. For the third day she was alone at work, because the meat preserved from spring was used up, cereal flour was running out and her husband had departed for the blue cliffs, the snowy heights, to procure a tur⁴ or a chamois.

Daouli was tired, hands scratched all over by the stones. Back aching, yet there was still such work ahead! They had to fertilize their lands in that year. Three years Daouli had been gathering manure, and now it had to be carried over in baskets and scattered about the ploughlands. Otherwise the land would not bear anymore.

All this was business as usual for Daouli. But now Daouli was expecting a child. At times work fell from her hands. She was afraid of lifting large stones from the land. After all, already two children the gods had taken to themselves. Her husband reproached her that there was no heir.

Five years back⁵, when the tsar ordered to drive away the Ingush from their planar aouls⁶ back into the mountains, Daouli together with the others came back here to these ancestral bare towers. Their house and all that

⁴Wild goat native to the Caucasus.

⁵The current year is 1865.

⁶Aoul — Village (Ingush).

they had remained in the village Angusht⁷, surrounded by green gardens. But here one had to lift to the fields not only the manure, but also the land. There was nobody to look after the children. The first year they hardly reaped what they sowed. Winter in a tower, like in a bottle dungeon, then — famine... The children weakened. And when in spring they had to procure themselves sustenance in the forest, eat different herbs, they withered and died one after another.

Since then Daouli hasn't had children. Her husband, and he already had become a muslim in his childhood, somehow brought her from the mullah blessed water, bought an amulet, but nothing helped. The women elders explained it with the «change of life» having ruined her, and advised to turn to the help of the local gods. Daouli obeyed. Secretly, she went to the aoul Kek, where in front of the temple of fertility of the divine-faced Tousholi there stood a stone pillar — symbol of manly power. She pushed into the window of the temple a triangular flatbread with the image of a cross and lighted in the niche an improvised candle, then, falling onto her knees in front of the stone statue, showed him her bared chest and prayed to send children. And here the fruit of her prayer, her hope lives with her under her heart.

Daouli rested at the water spring, which beat out from underneath the cliff of Seska-Solsa, listened to how the little one moved, and reassured went home. The footpath to the village twined high over the mountain, the slope of which sometimes broke by the steep wall. Below rushed about a river squeezed by boulders. Daouli stopped to rest.

⁷Angusht — Ingush aoul.

Lately these slopes came to her uneasily. She looked round the lower path, to the extent allowed by the meandering gorge, but her husband was not to be seen.

The sun had already doused on the heights when she returned to the aoul. In someone's garden an axe beating, shouting children herding cattle into stables, from the windows and toungouls⁸ smoke billowing: wives preparing dinner. On her half of the garden Dokki — wife of the brother-in-law — was milking a cow.

⁸Toungoul — short pipe (Ingush).

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PAGANS

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FIRST LOVE

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AT THE OLD TOWER

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CELEBRATION OF THE
DIVINE-FACED TOUSHOLI

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BEFORE DAWN

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SOLDIERS

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«I – COMMITTEE!»

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