As the train plowed through the withering fog, the winds spread across the cold Sarozek plains. The engineer stopped the train in the snowy February night. He was standing still, taking in, with little effort, the sight of his surroundings: the blowing snow at the crossroads of Boranly-Buran. Snowy whirlwinds embraced each other as the night trains came and went through the fog; the scene was as a disturbing dream.

During this night, it seemed that a curtain of snow appeared like it had been aroused by the Earth itself, born out of some primordial chaos. The curtain was some sort of dark blockade of wind that stretched across the Sarozek steppe all the way into the ocean of cloudy darkness. It was growing darker around the junction, and the lights were growing dimmer...

Every night in this great desert expanse, a single lit window on the horizon could be seen from the junction. It was there, behind this window, behind the showers of snow, that there was a great illness. The inhabitants could not be seen, for they were not near that window, but they were all suffering from a certain dismay. There, behind that little window of the hut, the family of Abutalip Kutubaev was waiting for him. His wife and children waited every day and every night for him, with the gas lamp burning all night long. Zaripa would have to trim the wick and light it anew, so that they light would live on. Every time she lit it, she unwittingly glanced at her sleeping children – two black-haired boys sleeping like a pair of cubs. She was sitting on the chilled floor with her hands together, clasped in a knot over her breasts. She was frightened. She looked to her children, fearing that her sons were dreaming of their father and that they were running to him without fear in their sleep. He would stretch out his hands, crying and laughing but alas, he was not here and they were not running to him.

When they had awakened in the morning, they waited for their father at the train station. A train had just come in, its brakes screaming as it rolled to a stop. The boys were already tugging on the window sills, ready to open them upon seeing their father. His name was not announced though; the reading of the list of new arrivals went on with no word of him or about him. They were told to keep waiting, for perhaps another train, because there was a landslide in the mountains and nobody knew where and when this had happened, and the landslide had caused a communications blackout of a sort. Maybe that’s what was keeping him, and because of it, he could send no word.

There was one window, covered with wrought iron, which stood at a distant place on Earth, in the basement of Alma-Ata’s investigatory unit, where the night was not ended by the morning. Here, the entire month had passed with Abutalip Kutubaev forced to sit before glaring electrical lamps that hung from the ceiling. This was his damnation. He did not know where he was or how to defend himself from the boring and cutting of the knife. The light from the lamps attracted his eyes. He turned his head, so that he could forget what was happening, if only for a second, and remember what why he was there. How little of a chance did he get to answer his own question, staring at the wall and away from the light, for he was immediately disturbed by the warden, who was watching through his supervising camera. The overseer scorned him with a level, penal voice: "Don't turn to the wall for freedom! Don't turn your head, snake! Criminal!" Abutalip did not shout back, for he was not a criminal, and he had done no such thing to make him one.

Again he lied down, remaining face to face with the electrical light, and he was yearning hungrily to find himself in the dark – in pitch-black darkness. He longed to be in his grave where his eyes and brain would be able to rest from this existence, and then neither the warden nor the investigator would be interrogating and torturing him with unendurable pain, light, sleep deprivation, and coercion to give an indication of his guilt.

The warden was not so bad, though he was still cruel – not one of them in the prison showed mercy; not one took liberties to ignore him once when he faced the wall, to the opposite direction of the light. They only waited and listened, plotting every one of their future blows with fury and brawn. Abutalip Kutubaev understood the warden's purpose and responsibility, though, every now and then, he would ask himself in despair: "Why are they like this? How could someone bring himself to such malice? It's not in me. I didn't do what they think I did. I can't make nothing from nothing. They don't know me. I don't know them, but yet they maul me and mock me until I'm a bloody mess. Why? Where do they get these people? How do they become
like this? Where did they come from? Why? What do they torture me for? How can I get through this? How can I not lose my sense? How can I not break my head into pieces against this wall? There is no escape."

One time he was not able to endure the torture. They had shocked him with this white lightning. He did not understand how he had managed to grapple with the interrogator, kicking him repeatedly. They wrestled on the ground in a rabid fight. "I would shoot you in the face, over and over, so that you could see it, you mad dog!" – Abutalip shrieked while tearing the interrogator’s collar with a strike and throttling his neck with flailing hands. He would have ended everything for the interrogator had not the guards entered just in time.

Abutalip came to his senses, but not until the next day. He opened his eyes, trying to see through the slime that his vision was. There was an electric lamp on the ceiling that penetrated the blurriness. Then the orderly came over to him.

"Rest, now that you already went to the shocks," the orderly said to him quietly. He applied a lotion to Abutalip’s wound. "And don’t be a greater fool. They may be done hurting you for now, but they could kill you like a dog. Be glad Tansulkaev does not need your body anything but alive. Understand?"

Abutalip held his tongue. Everything was clear to him. Everything that happened with them would be brought forth during his trial, insomuch as he was not killed and renounced before then, and he would be fine. He would then immediately and thankfully go to a shower to ease his sufferings.

On that day he had an obscure moment of reasoning, or rather, of disillusionment. At that moment, Abutalip was wishing that he was not hiding or running away from the light, that, on the contrary, that relentless torturer of irradiation would break. It appeared to him to soar in the air, drawing close everything into a whirlpool of disease and annoyance, overcoming him, so that the floor was dazzling with light, and he hoped that the light would dissolve and go done the drain into nothingness.

He had kept a line of defense between him and the torturers; he had disfigured his consciousness so that, in a moment, he could step into the past. Though one thing could always permeate through that line: his persistent fear for his family.

Suffering from unbearable yearning to be in the Sarozek, Abutalip Kuttubaev attempted to lie down and make himself sleep. He attempted to figure out what he had done – a thing that the bearer of such a charge should do, so that he would not perish from the torturing of the interrogator. He did not figure out the cause. The noose over his head was not divining the answer. In captivity, he had failed to amass a reason for why he was there and how thousands of others could be doomed to a similar fate. How many others could there be? Already, the war was long over. How long until he was completely paid up – with blood, with labor camps, times already behind the mountains of his days. They had placed all who had taken part in the war in labor camps and all it did was to instill with him a possessing, binding lust for vengeance. But he never did anything wrong.

Not finding any answers, Abutalip was cherishing his sleep, for in his dreams, the day became simple: an annoying misunderstanding was happening, and then he would be found to have made no offenses. If only he could run – no, fly – home quickly as though he had wings, to his family in the Sarozek at Borannyi-Burannyi, where they were waiting for him. Let the children wait for him no longer. Ermek, Daul, and his wife, Zarip, who, in that snowy step protects their children as does a bird with her wing, with the children pressed firmly against her beating heart. And by her tears and her beauty, she attempts to convince them, to soften fate, to implore mercy, so that the rescuing would be left to her husband.

So that he would not begin to bawl with grief or fall into folly, Abutalip yielded to his fleeting temptation. He struggled to appease himself, to see it all be justified, even with the absence of absolutely any fault, so that he would suddenly appear home. It seemed to him that in his journal that he wrote while in the labor camp, he had mentioned the misery of the mother and father of an executed prisoner, how they had said farewell to their child. The writing was eternal, and it applied to him now. He is also executed by his separation from his children... Indeed, death is only the beginning of what parents suffer when they are separated from their children. There is nothing more...
Abutalip cried grievously for a while. He shamed himself by not knowing how to stop the tears, which little by little moistened his strong cheeks, like rain spattering on stones. Indeed, even in the War he did not suffer so much. But then he had only himself to think about, he was just one mischievous head who did not have to take care of anyone. He was now convinced of one well known fact – children instilled within a person a great sense of life, and in each specific instance – happiness: it is wonderful when you are with them, but when you are without your children, you suffer a grave misfortune. This is fact: there can be no comparison except with each case of the same kind; he was now convinced of just how life meant before his loss of it. When in that last hour, when illuminated by that last terrible night, nearing the inevitable withdrawal into the dark, there comes a last review of one's life. And the main thing that is recalled is one's children. The memory of one's children is a mineshaft, and it digs deeper for its continuation. But if we take away the parent from the children, it is to deprive the child of the possibility of carrying out his ancestral destination; it is to doom the child's life to an empty outcome. It was difficult for Abutalip, after such enlightenment, to not fall into desperation or depression, especially after being moved to such pity with his thoughts of his children. He had almost, with his own eyes, visualized the unrealizable: bitter scenes of finally being reunited with them. Abutalip became an eternal victim as his visions severely took possession of his entire spirit. They bent and bent and weakened his will, his desperation accumulated inside of him as wet snow builds on the steep slope of a mountain, where a sudden avalanche could happen at any moment.

Tansuikbaev, the KGB interrogator, had to question Abutalip Kuttubaev methodically and purposefully, to unwind the secrets of the former prisoner of war. Tansuikbaev endlessly questioned him about his connections with the Anglo-Yugoslav special forces and what kind of propaganda did he and the Anglo-Yugoslav forces spread throughout this distant region of Kazakhstan.

It was all still a general formulation. The work of consequence was still in progress, and thus it was still only a prospective acknowledgement of Abutalip Kuttubaev's crime. It was, however, already being brought up as a charge of extraordinary urgency. The urgency with which this was being pushed was a testament of the exceptional vigilance and zeal of Tansuikbaev. And for him, this matter could mean great success in his life. However, for Kuttubaev it was a trap, a circle of predestination; it was in this frightening formulation that only one result could come about, that is, his complete acknowledgement of the crimes for which he was incriminated. No other outcome would be allowed. The case was decided beforehand and the success of the trial only served as an unconditional proof of the crime. Therefore, Tansuikbaev did not have to worry about the final success of his enterprise. By that winter, though, the shining hour of his career was to come.

Currently, the charge was a general formula. The investigative work was still yet to be presented in elaboration with the qualification of several details, though a full presentation of Abutalip Kuttubaev's crime was yet to be made. The main crime, though, was already supported in the formula of the charge of the extremely vigilant and zealous Tansuikbaev.

If the matter was of great fortune for Tansuikbaev, it was a disastrous affair for Abutalip Kuttubaev; it was the corner of doom, for at the end of such an awesome formula, there could only be one thing. Abutalip's doom was the full summation of the incrimination of his crime with his oncoming fate. There was no other way out. The instance was absolutely simple: the highest charge itself was already served as an unconditional proof of the crime.

Thus, Tansuikbaev was unable to be troubled about the final result of his undertaking. That winter was the beginning of the starry hour of his career. Because of an earlier omission of an insignificant duty, he stayed at the rank of major for a few years more than he should have. But now a new outlook was coming upon him. The struggle to obtain information from the depths was something of a parallel to the matters of Abutalip Kuttubaev. Indeed, it could be said, that in the February night of 1953, history was good to Tansuikbaev; apparently, history was strange and existed if not only for this reason: so that it might serve his interests. Never had he been so conscious of his hopes; he felt this good service of history. Everything now was growing paramount in significance, and this particular service was most of all primary in his eyes. For this reason, he was glowing and his breath heaved. Strolling to the mirror, he astonished himself for
half an hour -- long enough for the youth to stop shining in his un-winking eagle eyes. He put his shoulders back, satisfied; he crooned under his nose in an un-adulterated Russian tongue: "My luck makes such a fairytale into truth..."

His wife, a beautiful woman who understood what was going on, was a complete distraction for him; she was also in a good mood and was talking about their good fortune: "Not too long from now we will be better off."

His oldest son, although he was a komsomol activist, was damningly disobedient. He said with a straight face: "Dad, soon you will be promoted to lieutenant-colonel?" But this was his own pretense; Tansuilkbaev would not be stung no matter what...

Half a year ago there was a celebration of late in Alma-Ata, which consisted of a closing procedure: the war tribunal had just judged a group of bourgeois nationalists. The decision was that these enemies of the workers were to be mercilessly liquidated forever. Two of the workers' enemies received top measures of punishment -- they were shot -- for scrawling in the Kazakh language on the walls of the language institute, of which several scholars had testified about in court. Apparently, for twenty-five years they were writing propaganda that ideologized the Kazakh patriarchal-feudal history. But the main matter of the decision was in this: that reporting operations that were contrary to the state was highly encouraged. The courts took immediate concern for the conviction and the merciless liquidation of bourgeois nationalists. Truly, this also brought a character to the decision, though this did not at all detract from the morale question of the matter. There were regular awards for preserving the state dignity, medals and large monetary rewards for accomplishing the task with effort that was above and beyond the needed ability; all in appreciation for the fulfillment of beautifying the state. This instance was very similar. From the crape of the leg, a voice took heart; indeed, it was the drumming of heels against the floor.

Tansuilkbaev did not quickly rise in rank and honor in his job, for he had always taken an active participation in helping his colleagues. But now was different. Almost every evening he and his wife, Aikumis, were sent the regular "soap suds" of a new rank: medals and gifts. There was a change in their lives coming, and the talk of new beginnings was still in the cannon of the New Year, which now was beautiful and unforgettable. With ease there was a warmth after the cold, a light in the streets of Alma-Ata; guests at the doorstep were dipping into the cordiality and warm movements in the new hosts of the apartment. And so much of an unaffected radiance, of animation and pride outpouring from the threshold of his face: his eyes! They knew that they shared their holiday with the elect citizens. They knew the ranks of their guests, and to them, it was a taste of happiness.

At this time those who lived in the far-reaches of Russia had not yet forgotten the recent poverty and faminethat they underwent during the war years. It was especially rapturous; before any dizziness with success, they were already beginning to embrace a new, refined comfort. Already, the smell of fresh horsemeat could be smelled from the lobby. The food was a wonderfully adapted recipe inherited from the nomadic life in the steppe, and the fragrance of the steppe lingered in the new walls. Here, only rich cognac entered, in the fashion of the wealthy. Hanging above was a crystal chandelier, and they ate with crystal utensils. From the ceiling, glass radiated with a trophy-like luster upon the snow-white cloth that covered the table. A shimmering Germanic servant, who gripped everything, covered it all with a devout temperament. Nothing in the world was able to be outside his worthy attention.

As everyone gathered around, the officers were provided seats, surrounding the covered table. But there was a sense that the table andthe food were not yet entirely satiating, and the men began to internally suffer from the rich food that was placed in front of them. So much talk surrounded the table, about congratulations and thanks. In this ritual praise was something of an unending sweetness, and this sweetness was interfering with everything, eating up everything in a shower of praise. In time, even that which normally would not be envied becomes envied. Kindness, jealousy -- in making friends, sincerity broke off for a while. And each of those present, was transfigured into a surprising, praiseworthy image. It was possible to speak more intelligently and clearly, more eloquently, while unwittingly entering into private competition with others. Oh, this was as breathtaking as childhood! Such magnificent toasts, similar to birds of bright color, were made under the ceiling with the shining chandelier. Such speeches poured out like writings,
infecting all of those present with a higher state of mind.

One toast, by a Kazak lieutenant-colonel, was especially enflaming to Tansuikbaev and his wife. This is what happened: the lieutenant-colonel solemnly rose from his chair, speaking with much gravity, as though he were an actor in the theater, performing the part of the king, he rose thus as if he had risen from a throne.

"Wealthy guests!" the lieutenant-colonel spoke in Kazakh. On the first word he had placed extra emphasis. He took a tardy look while sitting in a lackadaisical manner, emphasizing with a most hollow necessity and with a perfectly serious manner. "You understand, today my soul is complete, it is a sea of happiness. Understand. And I want to say a few words. This is my hour, and I want to speak. Understand. I always was an atheist. I scrounged in the komsomol. I was a good Bolshevik. Understand. And all this had a very bitter taste. God for me was this place. Even though, there is no God, and it was known in every Soviet school. But I want to say something entirely different, understand, that in the light there is God. A moment, stop, don't smile, my rich friends. You all think that you understand my words. No, not quite! Understand. I do not believe in a god per se, of the fictional oppressor of the labor of the mass of the Revolution. Our God is a holder of power, and, they write in the newspaper, the volley of which one believes in an age on this planet and we walk from victory to victory, to the global exercises of communism; our God is our general-leader, holding the reins of an epoch in His hands. Understand. He holds the fugleman of the caravan, the rein of the head camel. This is our Joseph Vissarionovich! And we look after him, he is in charge of the caravan, and we are behind him, following one path. And anyone, who had thought otherwise, or who had a thought contrary to our own idea, did not escape from the Chekist who punishes by the sword, from the testament of the iron Derzhinsky. Understand. In the enemy we were declaring a struggle to the end. Their strain, their family and every sympathizer has been destroyed in the name of the proletariat. Understand. Such a list burns the autumn flame in a single pile. Because there can only be one ideology, understand, and none other. There we cleanse the earth from the ideological enemy – the bourgeois nationalist, understand, and the cleaner, who is the doctor, who heals the problem, who could not be fooled by the disguises of the bourgeois, who would not to be merciful to him. Everywhere and anywhere, the enemy of the class has been exposed, he has been brought out of hostility, understand, just as Comrade Stalin teaches. To beat the enemy, to consolidate the breath of the people – here is our device. Today, when you distinguish me, when you are engrossed in the dignity of the assignment before the appointed time, I am not, understand, looking for the enemy to find and to bare his criminal mind, which he loses to the indvertible, harsh punishment. Do you understand that we have not only neutralized the head of the nationalists, but we have also buried the institution and eliminated the sympathizers? Our enemies cannot hide from us and they can do nothing to us. During the questioning by me of one nationalist, he said that our history has come to a dead-end, that it can go no further, and you will be cursed; damned like the devil. Do you understand?!

"This is hardly the place!" Tansuikbaev was not deterred and he angrily stood up.

"Truly, major, I will behave," the lieutenant-colonel interrupted him, "but I spoke to him, understand, I spoke to him; when we come to a dead-end, you will not be long in the light! A dog barks and Stalin's caravan goes on..."

For a time everyone burst out laughing, applauding the worthy comeuppance by the pitiful nationalist, who presumably spoke with an unheard of boldness. For a time, everyone got up with readiness and extended their hands with their glasses. "For Stalin," they breathed out and then everyone drank, demonstrating to each other while their glasses emptied that they confirmed the reality of the spoken words and the truth of them.

Thereafter, many spoke in the continuance of this thought. And these words were self-interrogative and multiplying, for a long time they rang through the heads of those who had met, amassing in them a secret wrath, like a swarm of stinging wasps. Everyone was more embittered by this, it was poisoning everything. In the heart of Tansuikbaev, a sharp wave was building upon itself, disturbing his thoughts, justifying and strengthening his own ways, and because any such utterance was new to him, and not completely different from his own thoughts, new to his entire life and the life of all of his many colleagues, he was shaken. Altogether, it overlooked the social environment, for the name of this eternally flowing atmosphere was
adjusting from day to day, it was inside every insuppressible class struggle and had to be eradicated absolutely. But there was one secret legitimacy. For the constant incandescence of the struggle, every new object was needed, new directions of denouncements; insofar as many with these thoughts were already wasted, for there was hardly any successive to the bottom. The right-of-way was to the deportation of an entire people into the dinness of exile to Siberia and Middle Asia, thus it became more difficult to meet harvest “without exception” with the penal fields, coming running in the old manner to the accusation of the most current variant in the nationalist borderlands — that is, bourgeois nationalism. The scholars with bitter experience, when for the bare fear of ideological suspicion or of a different face promptly follows their reprisals with them in close proximity, already did not accept such a fatal mistake. None of them were able to interpret how this manifestation of nationalism occurred. Against, many became a bit thick with caution and paranoia, in so much as in a loud voice they deny the other nationalist insolences, the right-of-way to the denial from the native tongue. Attempting to get a hold of them, if every trace was announced, would result in his speaking and thinking in the necessary tongue of Lenin...

During this eventful period, another difficult day of interrogating about the emergence of new hidden enemies was, for Major Tansuikaev, over. Occasionally, during the interrogations, inconveniences would rise up, but typically he was in luck and able to overcome them. The charge against Abutalip Kuttubaev, of him corrupting the people of the junction of Boranli-Burrannyi, was not given to him in entirely a pretty and facile fashion and it did require significant material and serious probing. Tansuikaev, though, did not fly off to visit the Sarozek and puzzle things out. Everything was fleeting, and he was in rush to finish things; indeed, it is a modest thing to say that his invention did not require a fair amount of pondering. And, having done his work, if everything was brought to reason, he would have been able to survive the trial without failure. For him, there was only one way, and that was through the truth. He had the vigilance to find that one thing from the subject, who he held in captivity.

And there, he had in prison an enemy who was also standing perfectly vigilant. The criminals knew that if they did not empty their heads of their information and surrender, then they would die. Indeed, death proved to be the most absolute of loyalties. Such loyalty was to the Power of God, to die and not surrender in prison. He who surrendered in prison was himself a criminal against the Highest: he was running away from judgment because of his need to save himself at that time, he was not thinking of serving for all time — for eternity. Such was fitting for the Most High Power of God.

Kuttubaev was a prisoner of war after all, and was probed immediately after his capture. It was extremely important that every actual detail of his affairs were revealed. If one was not able to succeed in beating the score of recognition out of Kuttubaev, then, even though this would not be a major detail, it would still be a bit affair, that such a thing happened. He had to denounce his traitorous designs that he had in favor of the revisionist clique of Tito and of Rankovich, who pretend to be on the path of cultured citizens of Yugoslavia without the approval of Stalin.

They wish! A single year hadn’t passed since the War’s ending, and they have already chosen to secede. They cannot leave! Stalin refused this idea as if it were a pile of ashes in the wind. It was not at all unnecessary to show that, in regular time, the traitorous and revisionist idea had already begun to spread itself within a year of the English Special Forces spreading their propaganda throughout the partisan armies of Yugoslavia. This fact was in Abutalip Kuttubaev’s autobiographical notes, that the Yugoslav Party met with the English, joined them and made all of their bases collaborate with them, concerning anything they requested. At the time, though, it was necessary to do this so that the partisans did not fail. It broadened the cake; to make this Sarozeki come across with everything, just as Tansuikaev needed. It’s politically useful to fly downwind. Every small discrepancy may come to fit in, every detail could yet serve as a rock for the forsaken enemy, even a pebble, even if it were an unnecessary pebble, metaphorically speaking, so that it could be written in the newspapers the truth about the traitorous revisionist Tito and his right-hand man Rankovich. But his zeal could not achieve everything in failure; Tansuikaev gazed at all those who were sitting down at this famous event. It’s a thought about life — success begins with happiness.

Thinking about this was entertaining to Tansuikaev, and, sitting that the table going
through the motions of conversation which was being overrun by cues from others, he, being the swimmer in the stormy rushing river, swam in for an hour in the rough rapids of their passions and desires. And only his wife Aikumic, thinking well of her husband, had thought that it would come to him, that he would embrace one of those cues, of a plan or something, and then he would be the lead bull. She could see that in his unblinking eyes were becoming clouded over in agitation, like a falcon whose stare has become numb with the cold. For this reason, she whispered to him, "They came here together with everyone, at our home!" Tansuikbaev did not think it was worth it. In his mind he was forming a new plan of action, a new version of Abutalip Kuttubaev's affairs. Together, Kuttubaev and the Yugoslav Party had visited many other former prisoners of war, whom today were living right around the corner – growing. It could not be too difficult to find these things out and force Kuttubaev to name most of the activists in the war, especially the officers, who, joining together with the Slavic partisans, became one with them. It was necessary for him to scour the material. On the next day, he had to do the proper questioning of Kuttubaev's account. He had to get down to it sooner or later. And he had to puzzle it out, to dig it out, and to influence Kuttubaev to confess to the charges. But for this, the basis of the questioning had to show the accusations against the former prisoner of war, having been visited by the Yugoslav Party, caught the eye of the Soviet government and now was bearing down the responsibility of keeping quiet, for the facts would then be passed on to a committee of deportation of traitors from the Soviet Union. It was not only necessary to bring this to light in a hundred or a thousand questions, but also in the form of his secret writings, in which he had to be ground with more questionings, so that they could drive out all the corruption from the public.

This thought had dawned on Tansuikbaev as he was sitting at the table, which was set at every place with a glass of cognac. He was beginning to feel lightheaded, he wished to continue drinking, to eat now, and to sing, and to worry and laugh from pleasure of the anticipation of a new period in his life. Tansuikbaev cast off his presently thankful demeanor with a mysteriously defensive eye. All who were present at the table were natives, of the race of the first masons in the world, and that was why they had been sitting so pleasantly in their chairs. No one suspected that these natives were, at the moment, bearing great ideas. Tansuikbaev was sitting amidst all of this chaos: turning back and forth from person to person, already with the flow of hot blood in his head, with frequent joyful pats of friendliness and the clinking of glasses; there was such excitement. He was satiating himself amongst his beloved fellows.

Occasionally a thought appeared that condemned many of actual political importance, closing in on himself a completely real perspective that he would rise in office. It was greatly surpassing even reason and logic: the more time he spent dragging in their enemies, the more he would win. Such matters inspire the wind of revolution. He was even thinking not without pride: "Here they are dealing with smart people in their own ways! And I will not remain on the pulpit, but I will be busy with them!" And he was wishing to leave, to get into his car in the garage and dart off to the sub-basement with the closed windows, which were called the "interrogation insulation." He was yearning to pry into the basement with the cell of the violently electrifying Abutalip Kuttubaev and move immediately to serious business; to interrogate, without losing any time, so that the shower he had from the fear in his gut would soon die. And such ambiguity was concerning the conclusion of the issue – finding Kuttubaev guilty of all charges, wiping out his Anglo-Slav mission, finding out who was with him and who were the top people in the Party, and, in this instance, earning for Kuttubaev 25 years in the labor camps and for the other locally embedded agents collaborating with foreign operatives: death. Let him think hard.

Preparing himself for all of this to happen, Tansuikbaev anticipated things in advance: the interrogations would all add up and Kuttubaev would resist and he would have to use measures to make him confess, and since Tansuikbaev would be prepared for such things, he would bear down and not go anywhere. Kuttubaev would have no choice but to confess if he wanted to live. Of course, he would try hard to justify himself: he would ask what crime he was guilty of, that his captivity was atoned for, and that, with gun in hand fighting together with the Yugoslav Party, he was wounded, had shed blood, and at the end of the War he had gone to the Committee of Deportation, after which he had honestly labored, and so on. All of this would be allowed in their conversation. It would be a part of where he had gone, and eventually Tansuikbaev would find that he had a different story with different merits. If Kuttubaev would only cooperate in the
eradication of the enemies of the state, then he would be able to work in the camps of a certain amount of time and then maybe be free. Tansuiibaev would only have to figure out the first link, for what did Kuttubaev do that would be above state interests? They think that the state is the life of the people. Idiots! The state is an oven, which heats only a single log – the people. However, this oven will die. And the necessity would not be in this. The people would not be able to exist without the state. But the people create the state. And the fire must be given wood, and thus, the fire has a cost.

Tansuiibaev was philosophical in his own way, since in the Party school he had once heard the classical doctrine. He was sitting at the table next to his wife, from whom, it would seem, it was difficult to hide his thoughts. He was absently nodding and shaking his head as his neighbors talked on in general conversation, but this conversation did not interest Tansuiibaev. He was more enraptured by a single great secret: the way the men were arranged. Here, for example, sits in his company, dignified guests, as if their presence completely reflected the significance of the moment, and he himself thought completely about the former. What can it represent, to where was he going, what appealed in their intentions? They were peacefully sitting at the table, concealing something crushing, inevitable, something that depends only on their will. Thus far, though, it had been a secret, a concealed force of which, he realized, would force people to creep on their elbows before and through it – and before God – authority itself, and that in this occasion, he is the one for whom the table was set, and nevertheless he looked for the meaning to the frightening establishment before him, and he became impatient for the sight of the tasty food, though perhaps he was frenzied because of what was to come. And from each next wineglass, this excitement in the secret increased and it took possession of him, spreading throughout his body like the heat of blood, and it took a large effort to remain in control. He told himself that he would soon know; that he still had time.

Ignorant of the details in the forthcoming matter, Tansuiibaev experienced a feeling of deep satisfaction by the soundness of their intentions. There was nevertheless a certain sensation, that something more was needed to be able to tell what would happen; he needed more evidence, so that his formulations of the charges would be proper and they would be comprehended in a sufficient measure.

For example, something indeed was concealed in the records of Kuttubaev about the mankurt. The mankurt! That stinking mankurt killed his mother! Yes, of course, it was an ancient legend, but Kuttubaev had hidden something in the way he had written it! Kuttubaev did not write down this tale so diligently in vain. Yes, yes, the mankurt, the mankurt... however, what exactly was concealed there? The main thing was that Kuttubaev had gathered the history of the mankurt for instigative purposes, but how? He vaguely guessed what it was that was concealed in the legend of the mankurt, and there was definitely something suspicious. Tansuiibaev, however, could not assert anything yet, he had no confidence that he could expose it for sure. He could claim the legend, as was fit in such a case, was written for antinational purposes, but how? In this matter, Tansuiibaev's competence was not sufficient, this he understood. It was necessary to be a scientist. Indeed, he was to find the nationalists, which they tried to wash out, so that everyone would be in a single group. Expert scientists had charged many with nationalism, with the glorification of the past to the detriment of Stalinist socialist society, and this proved to keep them occupied, so that the mill was turning round twenty-four hours a day.

Something was concealed in how thoroughly Kuttubaev had written about the mankurt. He had to read it again, carefully and attentively thinking about each word, so that he could understand the composition of the crime. Furthermore, among the papers of Kuttubaev, he had discovered the text of one additional legend, by the name of "The Execution in the Sarozezk," which took place during the times of Genghis Khan. Tansuiibaev did not immediately turn his attention to this ancient history, but only now began to take note of it. Indeed, in it, if he thought it over well enough, he knew that he was likely to perceive some hint of a political purpose.

Marching to the West on a crusade, Genghis Khan had gathered people from throughout Asia for his army. Genghis Khan had conducted an execution before his army and their support in the Sarozezk steppes. The execution was the hanging of a soldier and his woman, both of whom had betrayed him. The soldier was a Sotnik, or a lieutenant in the Khan's army, and the
woman was an embroiderer, who had sewed the golden triumphal silk flags that were embroidered with a dragon, whose breath of flame made the borders.

By that time, all of Asia east of the Himalayas was under the plow of Genghis Khan. The land had been divided to be governed between his sons, grandsons and generals. At this time the Western boundary was at the city of Itil, which was on the Volga River, and then beyond that was Europe.

In the Sarozeki steppes, it was already autumn. During the summer, the rivers were dried up and there was no way to give drink to the horses. Thus, the passage through the Sarozeki steppe was considered to be the most difficult part of the march.

In the front marched three tumens, or cavalry divisions, of ten thousand soldiers each, which marched with widely unrolled flanks. The power of the tumens could be judged by their step – the dust underneath their hooves was churned up, making it seem as if there was a great fire on the steppes. Two more tumens marched with spare herds, whose convoys and barren herds were slaughtered or left behind every day. There was also a lot of dust being churned up by them as well. Furthermore, in their presence were more military forces, who could not be discovered by a simple glance because of the vast number of people. Three tumen marched on each wing of the armada. Those troops did not move alongside the rest of the army, but they tended to miss a day of marching every now and then and then catch up. At the beginning of the march, the generals of all eleven tumens had all agreed with the Khan to meet at the shores of Itil at the beginning of the cold season, so that they could cross the Volga River when it was iced over, and then invade that rich and glorious city and the countries beyond, subjugating them under the rule of Genghis Khan, has he and each one of his riders had dreamed.

Thus they moved their troops on their own, without being distracted, without pausing or losing time. In the convoys traveling with the troops were women, and this was what the misfortune of the execution had been caused by.

Genghis Khan himself with the Kazakh cavalry and his imperial guard, the Djasaal, marched in the middle column of the crusade, like a swimming island. But here also they marched separately, for they were in front of all the other tumens. The Overlord of the Four Corners of the Earth felt that he should be in the front of the march so that he could keep silent and look to his front and think about his future.

Binding it all together was a love and respect for the Khan riding on each saddle. The love was biased and smooth as the pebble stone, powerful in the breast and the minds, both white and black, and like silk in motion. For each soldier there were two spare horses, which were being taken care of by slaves. The Khan was like a moneychanger of horses in motion, as soon as a horse fell sick, he would change it.

The most remarkable thing, however, was not the fearless Kazakh horsemen or the Djasaal, the life of whom belonged to Genghis Khan moreso than to themselves or the that they marched with a select breed of horses, who had been raised on the grass of Klinik. Those horses were as rare as native ores of gold in nature. No, there was something more remarkable in their march. Before Genghis Khan, shielding him from the sun, sailed a little white cloud. Where he was, there was the cloud. No matter where he marched or where he camped, the little cloud was high above. It was a sign that he was the sovereign in this world. However, Genghis Khan, was unsure about this, but as it seemed more and more like he was controlling it, he slowly became more convinced that it was a sign of the will of the god of the sky, Nebo.

The appearance of the cloud was predicted by a certain wandering shaman, which Genghis Khan had once allowed to approach him. That shaman-stranger did not flatter him, nor did he prophesy him with any favor. He stood before the terrible face of the conqueror, inside the palatial yurta, with his head raised as though he were worthy and emaciated, and his hair was long and flowed to his arms, braided up like a woman. The stranger was strict in his view, He wore a beard, which disguised the feature of his face.

"I came to you, great Khan, to tell you of a sign," his words were translated by a Uigur interpreter to Genghis Khan that the supreme lord of the sky would give him a special sign from the heights.

Genghis Khan stood still in the distance. He thought initially that the stranger was merely in his mind, then he did not understand why he had done this.
"What is the sign? And how did you find this out? Genghis Khan replied, hardly trying to control his irritation. "What is the sign? It is hardly a subject that can be proclaimed. It is in the care of the divine. As far as your sign is concerned, though, I would say it has to do with the cloud that will follow you."

"A cloud?!" Genghis Khan threw up his eyes sharply. All those around him were straining in fear of their expectation that the Khan would explode in anger. The lips of the interpreter became white with fear. He knew that he could be touched by the Khan's wrath.

"Yes, a cloud," answered the prophet. "It will be the finger of great Nebo, a symbol of your high position on this Earth. But for you, it will be necessary to take care of this cloud, since, after you lose it, you will lose your powerful force..."

In the golden yurta a silence began. All who were inside expected the Khan to suddenly burst in fury at the sight of the prophet, as though he were the flames of a great bonfire. Overcoming his wild impulse towards violence, the Khan understood that one ought not to receive the word of a vagrant wanderer with impudence, and all the more a punishment to him would do honor to the Khan. Then Genghis Khan said, hiding his insidious smile underneath his reddish whiskers: "Let us assume that the great Nebo suggested to you to tell me these words. Let us assume that I believe you. Then please tell me, wandering stranger, how I can protect a cloud, free in the sky? Do I have riders on winged horses to send there so that they can guard it? Should I tie it down with one of those riders, just in case? So, how do you think I could safeguard this celestial cloud, which will, no doubt, be persecuted by the wind?"

"Is this already your concern?" the newcomer answered briefly.

Again, everyone froze. A dead silence again ascended to the throne, the lips of the interpreter again became white, and no one in the golden yurta laughed or raised his eyes towards the unhappy prophet. They were uncertain about, first his stupidity, and then whether he was doomed to certain death.

"You will give presents to him, and then let him go," Genghis Khan uttered. His words fell on their souls like drops of rain dry up on the Earth.

Strangely, this absurd case was soon forgotten. The Khan did not understand how, if that were the truth, it could be concealed in such a man who was so chatty. But simply to judge a foreigner from the lightness of how he risked his head, would not be entirely proper. Indeed, he could not understand it, but that's how it went. This caused the Khan to tie the knot on the tail of a wild horse, knowing that the wanderer knew that he could betray the one who would warn him with the disrespect of a shameful death. However, something inspired that desperate newcomer to appear, without having trembled as though he were standing before a starving lion, which indeed he was, since the Khan was the most terrible and merciless ruler in the world. Was that an act of a madman or the act of a messenger from Nebo?

When everything had been forgotten after those days had long passed, this incidence was suddenly recalled by Genghis Khan, after exactly two years. Two years, the empire had grown and had been standing in preparation to conquer the Occident. Lately, Genghis Khan was convinced of the fact that his authority was finding away to be irreplaceable, and the expansion of the empire's borders during those two years was the most active period of the gathering of forces and support throughout the world. They were ready to do his desire: to seize the ends of the Earth. After conquering the West, he could rightfully be considered as the Lord of the Four Corners of the Earth. The only peace that could be found was the peace that was found after the passing of his indestructible cavalry. This ruling was his destiny, it was the most severe essence of the steppe lord, it was his historical destination. And therefore, throughout the entire life of the empire, in which all its subjects had dwelt on Asian soil, an entire population had been pacified under the unity of a single, solid hand. All the rich were deprived of their cities and the camps of nomads ruled, and in a final analysis, no city that could ever belong to another other than the Khan, no matter by whom or what wished to occupy it, though the occupier would look at it with insatiable eyes that flamed with devilish passion. All achievements of cities and men were subordinated to the united concept; all growth, accumulations and improvements were done for the armed forces of Genghis Khan. And everything that was possible to obtain from the depths of Asia, in order to provide an armament and men, was gotten. Genghis Khan would ride into
Europe, to its fairytale bourgeois cities, where each of his soldiers expected to see abundance, for their small souls wished for greatness as well. There would be fields to fill the bellies of their horses, koumiss would flow in rivers, and the joy of authority over peace, over his soldiers who would willfully march, would be the highest sweetness to him. To go, to conquer, and to subjugate the Earth! Thus the Great Khan had commanded, and for that reason he was setting out.

Genghis Khan was, in this case, to the highest degree, a shrewd and prudent man. In the preparation for the invasion of Europe, he had dedicated his time to things that would seem to be mere trifles. Through loyal scouts, he found out about the deserts, through Chinese businesses and the Uighurs, he found out about the Arabs and the Persians, everything which could be known for the advance of such an enormous military machine. He learned about all the most convenient ways and passages. He took into account the dispositions of each culture, the religion, trade, or occupations of the inhabitants of those places where his troops would move. He did not know how to write, and so it was necessary for him to hold all of this information within his head, and the mind has a nature of correlation, that could be to the benefit or the harm of each item known.

Only thus could anything be achieved by the coordination of his mind, and most importantly, by an iron discipline, which was the key for any design for success. Genghis Khan allowed no relaxations—no one and nothing could interfere with his central objective, the march West, no matter what it was. Specifically, then, he was thinking over his strategy. Genghis Khan had decided to make a command that was unprecedented in the centuries, he decreed a prohibition on child bearing in the army. The reason was because pregnant wives and small children of combatants could not move from place to place quickly with the army. There was a tradition that existed since olden times, since the internal wars of the Khan's tribes, that when in vital need, enemies would seek to kill the wives and children of their own enemies, who remained in a place without protection. Moreover, pregnant women were killed first in order to stop the root of the clan.

But life in the course of time had changed. The tribes had constantly quarreled before Genghis Khan had reconciled them and united them under the gold flag of the Great Power. In his youth, when Genghis Khan was still named Temuchin, there were several wars and he suffered much. Indeed, this was when his dear wife Borte was stolen by the raid of the Merkit, who took hostages. After gaining power, Genghis Khan began to suppress internal civil wars with complete mercilessness. Conflicts would prevent the empire from growing and would undermine the state. After many years, the necessity for the old form of transport of an army with their families dropped off. The main thing was that the family became a burden for the army, and it interfered with an army's mobility in military operations of wide scale, especially when an army was on the offensive or when it was passing through water obstacles. Hence, the decree of the steppe lord, he had categorically forbid all women to join the army, and also that the soldiers would become husbands of any in the support staff, or would become fathers with any who were in the support staff, until the completion of the conquering of the West. This command was made one and a half years before this point. He had said: "After we subjugate the western countries, we will stop our horses, we will descend from our saddles, and we will then transport the women, and you will do what you want. Thus far, though, my ears must not hear any news about such affairs in the tumens..."

Genghis Khan knew that, above everything else, this would be what would depend upon the success of the crusade, and that the failure of that achievement was unacceptable. He rejected even the laws of nature for his military considerations, blaspheming as though he were above life itself and above God. He wanted to put God into his service, since conception is the will of God.

No one in either the army or the support had opposed, or even thought of opposing, the decree. At that time, Genghis Khan's authority had reached such an unprecedented force and focus that the entire army unquestioningly obeyed the unheard command on the prohibition on child-bearing, since disobedience was unavoidably punished by death.

It was the seventeenth day, and Genghis Khan could be found on his way to crusade in the West. He was constantly trying to discern the condition of the spirit, although no one was
able to understand this. Outwardly the Great Khan was standing just as he always did, becoming one with himself — strictly, aloof, like a falcon in the hour of repose. But under his breath he was exulting, singing a song and composing a verse:

... The cloudy night, as a smoke
was covering my yurta,
Surrounding it, as a guard,
the smoke was lying guarding my golden yurta.

Today on my way I want to speak in thanks:
My eldest night guard
Was raised on the altar in thanks!

In the snowfall and little rain,
Shivering in the icy cold,
In the torrential rain and the simple rain,
Around my cold yurta
Standing, without worry,
My guard was calming my heart!

Today on my way I went to speak in thanks:
My strong night guard —
Raised on the on the altar in thanks!

Among enemies, who have been sent to hell,
From the birchen bark of the shiver,
One can hardly hear the whisper,
Without delay, it throws contempt.

My vigilant night guard,
Today on my way I want to speak to him in thanks.

The back of the neck fiercely quivers underneath the moon.
The faithful pack of wolves:
The alpha leads them into the hunt,
That is how it is to the West — with me
Separating the mourning from my pack.

The white fangs of my might are everywhere with me...
In thanks I sing to them on the road...

This verse, which was spoken aloud, was inappropriate in the mouth of Genghis Khan — to him it was to occupy his overflowing spirit. However, from the morning to the night he was in the saddle, and in his own way, by reciting this poem, he was able to take liberty and entertain himself with such a luxury. His stern exercises had a cause: that here already on the seventeenth day, from the morning to the night, a white cloud was sailing in the sky over the head of Genghis Khan— where was it going, from whence did it come? It was busy acting out the prophecy of the wandering prophet. Who was to know! To be put to death is the cost of such a freak show of defiant flippancy and boldness, it is even forbidden to think of acting in such a manner. But the wanderer did not die. It means that it was the will of fate.

On the first day of the crusade, when the caravan and the herd moved to the West, the fog was filling in all of the spaces in the stirring mass, like black hands in a flood, changing at noon to the march of the yearning horses under himself, Genghis Khan occasionally glanced
upwards, but not to give any kind of significance to some white cloud, slowly swimming in the sky.
It was a sampling of the place high above his head – few clouds hover about in the world. He
continued on his way, being accompanied by a movement further off; he was busy with his
thoughts, preoccupied with the surveying from his saddle. He gazed at the movement of his
multitude of troops, obediently and zealously marching to the conquest of the world, a few of his
personal most obedient oxen and a few of his most zealous troops were busy at the fulfillment of
his thoughts. If there were to be no people, would their ever lie a spirit of such greatness, such
as that which lies in him, in the palms of his hands, as he was looking over the reins of the horse.
Glancing afresh at the sky and finding it to be mostly overcast, Genghis Khan again did
not think of anything exceptional. No, he did not think about the possessing idea of world
conquest, but rather about why the cloud was running along the same course as the horseman
down below. Might there have been a connection between them?
From a distance, the cloud did not distract one’s eyes from the crusade. No one
supposed that the clouds were of any importance; that an inevitable miracle of grayness had
occurred on that day. For who was fumbling a gaze to the boundless skies, when it was
demanded that he look underfoot? The army went with him, drawing out the crusade, the gloomy
mass advancing along the road, over the low hills, stirring up the dust from under the hooves and
the wheels, leaving behind the moving expanse, possibly for ever. Everyone willingly
committed themselves to follow the Khan’s passion and oxen, and ten thousand men willingly left,
blown and inspired, thirstily adhering to his words, his power, his greatness. There they were
going and already approaching the evening. They stopped and made camp at the place where
the darkness of night had finally had overtaken them, and in the morning they would go on their
way again.
For their camp, the Khan and his attending convoy built the palatial yurta first. The white
domed yurta could already be seen from afar. The Khan’s banner, newly made for the crusade to
the West, was black with bright red corners of flame. The flame was emblazoned with needles of
silk and there was a dragon that was imprinted on it with beads. The flag was fluttering in the
wind, standing high beside the main palatial yurta. Not lowering their eyes from the road, the
Kezeguls – his royal guard, his select and most fearsomely strong men – were standing alert
beside their overlord. Here the generals were coming in to sit at the evening table, here after
Genghis Khan was done eating. He had gathered his generals together for the first meeting with
them, so that they could talk over the results of the first day on the crusade and the plans for the
next day. The Khan’s success began with his ability to communicate – he had prepared on that
night a feast for the generals, so that he could listen to their accounts and their thoughts at their
behest, and then, he could cut all of their doubts into pieces. When each figure there had had his
share of attention, finishing all of their thickened milk and having spoken through all four makers
of light, the Maker of Light would soon rise to attention with his own words, for this he knew of his
troops: they would grab onto his words. The word is his deepest strength.
But Genghis Khan hereafter called the meeting off. The commotion of the soul required
full isolation. For that reason...
Approaching the place for camp, Genghis Khan again paid attention to his cloudy
company far above his head – for the third time already. His heart missed a beat. He was
stricken by a sudden dizzy spell and the earth swam across his eyes, he barely had time to
grapple for the mane of his horse. With him, this never happened, just as the dark-chested Earth
God was never able to wrench breath and dominion from Nebo, nothing was able to take the
Khan aback causing more than a grunt of surprise. It seemed that already everyone had come to
know that nothing under the light was able to stagger his brutal mind, to delight or to sadden him
was a remarkable sight in bloody affairs. Never was he, dropping the dignity of a khan, so
frightened as to hold on to the mane of a horse like some country girl. Such things must not
happen, and have not as long as he had been able to speak in his earliest years, since he had
taken aim with his bow at his vender brother, Bektera. They were having a quarrel with each
other because he had not been fishing as Bektera had wanted him to do, and instead he
hadwoken up early to catch wolves, for Bektera’s way was not in the seat of the saddle of destiny.
In his own waye had made a certain plan for a most true life; to live in an unerring way, with
overriding strength, that nothing could overpower. He would not beweak at the knees, or grow
dim, or bewail in ashes under the pressure of harsh memories; he would be as stone, fire, water, tree, beast or bird, not speaking like a grass snake or a wicked man. When the strong break the strong, the two become amazingly alike, and it is beautiful — and pitiful. From here his conclusion kept his balance — everything that was overriding and everything that was pitiful, and everything that was outstretching — was worth condensation in the measure of a whim. And by this the world stood...

A completely different matter: wandering scribes from the Himalayas had speeches about Nebo, the personified form of Eternity and Infinity, which pushed the Khan every now and again. Indeed, only He, the incomprehensible Nebo, was omnipotent, intangible and inaccessible. Before Nebo, it is said that there is no one—none to turn against, to direct, nor to set out on a crusade. And all there was remaining to do was to pray and to worship Nebo, Whom knew the fate of the earth. Truly now, Nebo was confirming those Himalayan scribes by the very movements of the Earth. If any mortal, in sincere assurance and sacrifice, could beg Nebo, to give thanks to Him and to ask for His patronage in helping him firmly possess the people of the world, if such a thing under the moon was possible, the wandering scribes asserted the great mass of the world that it was Genghis Khan. Nebo stands to give the world to him, in entirety and complete dominance, as his clan was in possession of each horse and every horse, he would have both to the light more powerful and worthy among people. The scribes hit it; none could surpass him in strength, so that the Choice Maker of Light would govern everyone. In the mystery of his thoughts he believed greater things were true, that he would possess something apart from what the Supreme Nebo had, he would take liberties to express boundless mastery over all peoples, that he would be the one to possess supreme governing power, so he would let him go, so that he would be able to overcome other strong men. In his boundless grace Nebo did not repair his hindrance in his conquests, in increasing dominance, and, furthermore, he was strengthening more in confidence, that Nebo held him in a special light, that the supreme strength of Nebo, the unknowing people, was on his side. Everything came to him by hand, and only furious damnation did not call his head from his flagrant mouth in all the edges, where he was forging a sword with a flame, but not one of these pitiful curses that were spoken to him in all of his rising power and awesome glory. On the contrary, the more he was cursed, the more he trampled on moans and complaints as he went to Nebo. However, the instance happened, when he shut in the spirit of leaden doubt and fear, that he drove away the Eternal Nebo, that he had cursed Nebo Himself in his judgment. Then the Great Khan was dead for some time, for he had subdued himself, giving the subject a rest and then he was ready to pick up the fair rebuke of the Great Nebo and even quit if he had to. But Nebo did not punish him, for he displayed his discontent with grace. And then he, like in the plunge, the greater the risk he took, to a certain extent, the more he passed Nebo’s justice, he was experiencing the patience of Nebo. And Nebo was patient! And from this he had made his conclusion that everything was granted to him. And over the years he consolidated in his certainty, that he was chosen by Nebo, that he was the Son of the Sky.

Not for this reason only did he think that he was chosen, but also that his name was spoken in fairytales and in the great stories of the great minstrels and songwriters, riding through crowds of people singing songs in the name of his Sky-father with thousands of raised hands that were bringing him to Nebo — it was the flattery and adulation of the people that made him believe. He was locked in his own experiment — the Divine Nebo gave him patronage in all affairs, so that he would act out the thoughts of Nebo on the ground, in other words, he was the representative of Nebo on earth. Nebo, like him, knew only strength, only the display of strength, only the carrier of strength, He Himself was such and that was what he respected.

Now and then this marveled even Genghis Khan: that he was like the soaring falcon in his impetuous ascent in which he was flying higher to the fearsome dizziness with success. He was flying from his lowly place as an orphan boy from an impoverished clan of petty blood, who were, since the beginning of time, simple hunters and herdsmen, and now he was to be the overlord of all the world. He may even become the greatest power in all of history: what better instance was there than that of a desperate orphan who was given such a fortune? The augur did not see that without the pact with Nebo, Temuchin’s banner with the single horse would have never become the banner of gold, with a dragon breathing the embroidery of flames — but then,
the augur had never sat with Temuchin under the dome of the Golden Yurta.

There in the sky was his confirmation that all was just; there appeared the incontestable evidence; there was the visual proof of Nebo endowing him to be the Khan of Asia! There in his gaze was the wondrous cloud: the sign of the prophecy of the wandering seer, who had spoken strangely, although his word was true. The white cloud was the message of Nebo to the Son of Heaven, a sign of approval and blessing, it was the herald of the great forthcoming victory.

No one appeared to be at the head of the thousands of people that were marching; their movement could have been a miracle. No one noticed the large white cloud, or that no one was at the head of the crusade, or even to where they were marching or why they did so. Really, who looked after the licentious cloud? Only he, the Great Khan, heading nomadic armada and host to a new world order. They would seize this great destination, and the sight of the white cloud was a sign of the impossibility of their defeat. At times he believed in the significance of the strange phenomenon, at other times he didn’t. Terrible doubts possessed him, though. He stood divided by his observations and his thoughts if he did not stand. What if the cloud disappeared in the blink of an eye? Would he crumble, destroyed by that terrible mystery? The people did not know that he was fighting a battle in his mind. Then he again strengthened his spirit and believed: that this cloud was indeed a good omen; that it was not going to disappear suddenly; that it was sent by Nebo: a sign that foretold a great destiny. Then he was filled with joy, a sense of inspiration, of faith in what has been foretold, in the unmistakable undertaking of the crusade to the conquest of the West: to assert his power, and by sword and flame create a worldwide empire. With that, he walked. World conquest, for the Great Khan, was an uncaused, insatiable desire. The more he would have, the more that he would want...

There are dark days of the crusade.

The white cloud in its height did not divert from its course, smoothly swimming through the gaze of Genghis Khan. They sat still together, as if all life had been frozen...

The evening turned into other evenings and the days moved on. Just before dusk, the low rays of the distant coming sun extended over the steppe. The sun took itself away slowly from the sight of the world. In the space between the horizons, the colors of the glowing sun, which was already half gone from the horizon, was moving along the columns of troops, the thousands of cavalry. Every soldier was in their place and each was moving towards the setting sun. If one was far away, the great mass of troops would seem to be a great black river, flowing through the cloudy fog...

At dusk, the tireless Khan sat in his saddle, leading the crusade. No one jumped ahead with their own ideas, no one stopped their gallop and disturbed their place within the moving columns; receiving directions to march, they marched. It was necessary to rest, though they had to hurry because they would soon be marching in the rainy season, wherein the bad roads would become the main obstacle of the crusade. If the cold lasted long, the great banks of the river itil could be traveled on—the water having been turned to hard ice—and the advance could continue forward. Such a flood of ice would be a blessing that would allow them to continue on their conquest of the West.

The work-worn backs of the horses were resting from the saddles of the horsemen as the troops rested through the night.

Soon it was morning, the camps again clattered with activity—the drummers, who were in charge of the reveille were zealously drumming on hide pelt-drums near the fires to send a thundering sound throughout the camp, signaling to the army that they needed to hustle so they could continue on their journey. Indeed, it was no simple thing for ten thousand men to stir from their sleep.

At that hour the Khan was already awake. He barely slept, and indeed it was not the first night that he had barely slept, passing the night beside the palatial yurta with the autumnal colors of the morning. He centered himself, thinking over his thoughts that were running in his head throughout the night. He turned his attention to the booming of the drumming pelts that were waking the army and the horses. He began his regular day, preparing his voice, the movements, the bells, beginning anew the crusade that was disrupted by the night.

The drummers continued their drumming, growing louder as they went along. This morning reveille was not the only thing growing, and it encompassed itself. This caught Genghis
Khan's attention: who walked together with them on their great crusade? It was a memento of an exact and stern overlord, breaking in with the thunder of drums, even through closed doors, spilling through conscience. The frost was advancing upon them, they were canoodling, that they radiated from this, imposing itself on his oxen, as though they were in a dream: they were not a part of this foreign realm, for it was not the land of his oxen, this dream—they were losing their way, losing freedom to interrupt for that which is necessary with the premier of an instant return from the dream, to invade decidedly and roughly, in order to give back to those who are waking, again in reality—to the service, to the unquestioning submission, to the crusade.

Every time Genghis Khan heard the banging of the drums against the ox-hide pelts, a chill rose from inside of him—he was reminded of an old memory. In his childhood, he and his half-brother, Bekter, were fishing and quarrelling with each other when they noticed near them were two oxen. They picked up their bows and shot the oxen, and they ran to the river, bellowing wildly and clanking their hooves against the banks of the river. He did not remember, though, how an arrow pierced into the side of Bekter. Bekter screamed with savagery, jumping and he threw himself down to the ground, spilling over with blood, and he Temuchin kept himself composed as only Temuchin could do. Soon after the death of his brother, the frightened orphan ran to a hill, where, with his shoulders, he rammed drum that was lying beside a yurt. There, on the hill, he threshed the drum for a long time and in a single tone, but his mother by adoption, Agolen, screamed and howled below, tearing into him with her voice, cursing his fratricide. Later others ran to him, and all of them were screaming at him, waving their fists in the air, but he did not hear anything, striking hard the ox-hide drum. No one approached him for any reason. He sat down on the hill until dawn, hitting the drum...

The mighty boom of a hundred ox-hide drums now were militant cries in the morning, the furious drummers, their intrepidity and ferocity, his signal to those who marched on the crusade. The signal was to get their attention, for them to begin to move, to get going, to move into their lines, to conquer the world. They were going to the end, where the end was marked by the horizon and everything that existed on Earth, to rule over all the people and beasts. It all began every morning with the military drums. Yet the little white cloud was a witness to the changing season of his thoughts that he held in secret, not deviating, fluently whirling over the morning battle of the drums. The rough breeze created an imperial note, being a reminder of the rippling flame of the dragon. There the dragon ran in the wind to the breadth, digging holes in the bright banner...

The nice morning gave way to this day.

Through the night, before he slept, Genghis Khan glanced at the country. Throughout the barren expanse, there were campfires everywhere, blazing near and flickering beyond. Through all the military and support camps, through all the stands of teamsters, the flames were making a bed of whitish smoke. At that hour, people were swallowing their stew and cramming meat into their mouths. The smell of boiled meat, extracted by the flames underneath the cauldrons attracted the hungry beasts of the steppes. Here and there in the dark, their eyes were gleaming in a feverish gaze and they moved about in silent misery.

The army quickly fell into a deathly sleep. The hails of the night patrols, who wandered about their fellow troops, bore witness that in the night, life moved in a severely routine order. They trusted that their destination, in the end, was towards a single and higher goal—strict and whole-hearted service of the ground-conquering Genghis Khan. In such a moment, taking a drink of the soul, he apprehended his own heart—a heart of a superman—inconsumable, possessed by a thirst for power, for more power, for as much power as he could hold, and to this end he overflowed with the necessity for an absolute end—he was needful of this: that he measured his growing power with a goal, and that he would never answer to anyone—he would have truth as an entity.

For this reason was the decimation of the Sarozek, the tradition about which after many times Abutalip Kuttubaev would enter disaster...

During one night on the camp a mounted patrolman passed by rows of soldiers, looking to this place and that. Everyone was in order, people were sleeping around side by side—in the yurtas, in the tents, and many under the blazing stars of the open sky. Everything around was
quiet, and all the yurts were dark. The mounted patrolmen already completed his patrol. There were three patrolmen who made rounds together. Holding onto the reins, they talked to each other about different things, patrolling further as they talked. The one who was the ranking officer, patted his fellow horseman on his fur hat and said softly:

"Well, everything is fine. You too go to sleep; I’ll stay up and keep watch."

The two other horsemen left, leaving behind their sotnik, or lieutenant. At first, he attentively kept watch, looking around and listening to everything. Then, remembering his purpose, he went by the mustering wagon-train and the marching workshop, by the cart that carried the saddles and the armory that was in one yurta that stood at the farthest end of the camps. While he went about, he thoughtfully inclined his head and listened to a sound, watching how the lunar light effused everything from above. The dim light embraced the contours of his round face and the large, foggy and pale eyes of the horse, which obediently followed his commands. Sotnik Erdene approached a yurta, where they waited. From the yurta, a woman came out and stood expectantly beside the entrance.

"Hello," her voice nervously choked out.

He greeted the woman in return.

"Well, how are you?" he asked with care.

"All is in order, all is good, praise Nebo. Now nothing is worrying me," the woman quickly said. "She is really waiting for you. Listen, she is really waiting for you."

"Yes, and I am tearing apart my soul!" Sotnik Erdene replied. "But, just for spite, I have decided to busy myself with the horse. For three days I could not break down, waiting for the taboo to end."

"Oh, you are not being nice, Erdene! What did she do to cause this? Why would there be a taboo on your eyes?" The woman said softly, shaking her head. She ran up to him, saying, "The main thing is that the birth went safely and easily. Not once did she even cry out or scream. And in the morning, I wanted to arrange for her to stay in a closed wagon, but she didn’t let me! You have a very nice woman. Oh, if only I had such luck!" She suddenly remembered to salute, thinking now that it was very important. "Sotnik, he has arrived to you by hand, and he will always be with you!" She congratulated him. "Think of a name for your son!"

"Let Nebo hear your words, Altun! Dogulang and I will be thankful for a century," the sotnik thanked her. "We will think of a name, for this matter grows."

He handed the reigns of the horse over to the woman.

"Don’t trouble yourself too much, as long as it is needed, the horse will be taken care of, as always," reassured Altun. "Go, go, Dogulang is really waiting for you."

The sotnik waited no longer, as though he had met a ghost. He then walked into the yurta, opening the heavy, thick deer skins bed-crelains. Gathering himself together, he went inside. In the middle of the yurta burned a small fire, and in the weak, fading light was his Dogulang, sitting on the far side of her home, wearing on her shoulders a silk shawl. In her right hand, she was gently rocking a cradle filled with what seemed to be only a bundle of quilt, which she had woven herself, visible.

"Erdene! I am here," she softly called out at the appearance of the sotnik. "We are here," she smiled and giggled, motioning towards the child.

The sotnik quickly dropped his quiver, arrows and knife at the door and went to the woman with the outstretched hands. He kneeled and showed his face to them. They embraced, their heads lying on each other’s shoulders. They held each other dead in each other’s arms. The world beyond the dome of the yurta no longer existed for them. Everything would remain beyond the boundaries of the marching home, they lost all reality. Reality was a double, uniting them in a gust of light after three days.

Erdene was the first to break the silence: "Well, how are you? How do you feel?" he asked, barely restraining himself from breathing rapidly. "I was so worried."

"Now already it’s behind you," replied the embroiderer, smiling in the semi-darkness. "Don’t think about it anymore. Now ask about us, about our little son. He has such a strong demeanor. He sucks on my breast so hard. He is very much like you. And Altun also says he looks like you."

"Show him to me, Dogulang. Give him here so I can take a look!"
Dogulang opened up the blanket that was over the cradle. The babe was listening, unwittingly pricking up his ears at outside sounds. Suddenly all was quiet.

The sotnik watched the child for a long time, trying to see his own features on the infant. Gazing at the newborn and holding his breath, he, maybe, could first apprehend the divine backbone in the light of posterity in the plan of fate. This is possibly why, measuring every word, he said: "Here now I will always be with you, Dogulang, always with you, even if something happens to me. This is why you have my son."

"You—with me? If only!" the woman smiled grievously. "You want to say that the child is the second incarnation of Buddha. I was thinking about this while nursing him. I was holding in my hands the little baby, who was born three days ago, and I said to myself that this is you in a new incarnation. Now what do you think?"

"I was thinking... only not so much. I can't compare to Buddha."

"You might not compare to him. You are no Buddha, but you are my dragon. I can compare you to a dragon," Dogulang affectionately mused. "I am sewing on a weaving of a dragon. Nobody knows that this is you. You are on all of my embroideries! Sometimes, when I dream, I see you. I'll weave a dragon and it comes to life. I join the dragon and it carries me off. In the sweetest of moments the dragon turns into you. You are with me in my dreams, Erdene, as a dragon and as a man. I wake up and I don't know what to believe. I know it's you, Erdene, and I have always said that you are my fire-breathing dragon. I'm not joking. I wove the flag of the dragon, which was secretly an incarnation of you. And now here, I gave birth to a dragon!"

"Let it be, if this is love to you. But listen here, Dolugang, to what I want to say." The sotnik gathered his thoughts and then said: "Here, now that we have given birth to a child, we have to think. And about this we have to talk to each other. I wanted to talk earlier, so that you would know, but I will say it all now: I always felt sorry for you. It's so terrible, I fear losing this battle, and I would lose all yearning, and I would lose control to my yearning. I think about this all the time, leaving the army in one way or another, dividing myself from this yearning, so that I will not die with it, and then I could stay with you. I am not able to think about anything else, and I dream about it; the yearning changing into a bird, or, in time, into something with life, and I can take it in my hands and say, 'Here, take my yearning and let it always be with you. And now I won't die terribly. Now I understand that my son is born from my yearning to you. And now at least he will always be with you.'"

"But we still haven't given him a name. Did you think about a name?" asked the woman.

"Yes," answered the sotnik. "If you agree, he can be known by this name... Conan!"

"Conan!"

"Yes."

"It is a very good name. Conan! 'Young jumper.'"

"Yes. A three year old horse, the highest in strength. And the mane, such a storm, and the hooves are leaden..."

Dolugang lowered the babe. "Listen, your father says your name."

And the sotnik Erdene said: "Your name is Conan. Did you hear, son? Your name is Conan. It is true."

They whispered, unwittingly lending themselves to the moment. The night was quiet, except for a dog barking loudly, maybe talking to a horse about the nighttime surroundings of the hills in its motherland; the rapid rivers, the thick herbage, the sunny colors in the spine of the horses... The baby was sleeping peacefully, and fortune was lying down near him. But soon fortune would remember what it had to do.

"I thought not only about the name of our child," Sotnik Erdene said, troubled. Looking at his strong hands, he said with a sigh: "I thought about another thing, Dogulang. You understand me; you cannot remain here with the child. You must leave quickly."

"Leave?"

"Yes, Dogulang, leave. And the quicker the better."

"I was thinking this too, but where would we go? And would you come with us?"

"Now, I tell you. We will go together."

"Together? This is impossible, Erdene!"

"We will only do it together. But is there really any other way?"
"But think about what you are saying. You are asotnik in a powerful army."
"I already thought about this. I thought a lot about it."
"But where will you go from the hands of the Khan? There is no place that is not under his power! Erdene, pull yourself together!"
"I already thought about everything. Listen to me more calmly. We will go into hiding, when, maybe, when we enter a bazaar near a large city."
"To what kingdom would we flee, Erdene?" the embroiderer exclaimed with grief. "Where is there a place where we could live by ourselves? It's better to live with God than the Khan. That is why we cannot make up our mind, you understand? Who else in the army could do this? So we kept our love secret, because of fear — you can't leave the army, it would cost you your head, and I could not leave you, because it would cost me my happiness. So now, we are not alone, we have a child."
They became silent with worry. And then the sotnik said: "People run from shame, from infamy, from payback for betrayal; they run just to save themselves. We will have to run because Fate sent to us a child; we have to pay by the same coin. We can't expect mercy. Dogulang, we have to leave, before it is too late. We don't have any other choice. Don't shake your head. There is no other way. Happiness and grief grow from the same root. We have happiness, we can't be afraid of grief right now. We must leave while we still can."
"I understand you, Erdene," the woman said silently. "Of course you are right. But, I think that it might be better to die than to stay alive. I'm talking not about myself. I'm really happy with you. I told myself: if it is necessary, I'll die, but I won't let you or our child die with me. Stupid or smart, but my arm cannot do it..."
"Don't sacrifice yourself. Don't. You should not die, you don't have to worry yourself that much — to live or not to live! We did not want to sacrifice the one who would be born. Now, we have to live for him. We must run away and live. We both wanted to have a son."
"I'm thinking about myself. I'm thinking about others. Can you tell me, that if they execute me, that they will leave you and our son alive?"
"Don't... don't hurt me like this, Dogulang. Do you know what you're saying? Tell me how you feel. Can you live? You will go into a wagon with Altun, she is ready to go with you. I'll be right next to you, on a horse, in case we need to fight back..."
"As you say," said the embroiderer, "I just want to be with you! I want to be near you..."
They became silent again, bending their heads over the baby's bed.
"But tell me," said Dogulang, "People say that soon the army will come to the river Gaika. Altun heard about it."
"Maybe in a couple of days, it won't be too long. We will come to the place maybe even by tomorrow."
"So, is it a big, deep river?"
"It is the greatest on the way to Itil."
"And the deepest?"
"Not every horse will be able to make it through, even in the more shallow areas."
"So, it is deep, and the water is smooth?"
"It is like a mirror, yet there are some places where it is rough. You know, I spent my childhood in Gaika's prairies, where I was born. All of the songs I sing to you are from the Gaika area. They are about the nights when the moon is out."
"I remember," the embroiderer said thoughtfully, "one song that you sung to me, I still can't forget it. It was a song about a girl who was separated from her loved one, and she drowned herself in the river Gaika."
"It is an old song."
"Erdene, I have a dream. I want to make an embroidery on a white silk cloth. On it there will be birds, plants, and butterflies; all around there will be water with little waves. There won't be any girl on it, because she could not stand the grief. So, if anyone sees this embroidery, they will hear that sad song."
"You will see this river in a day. Listen to me carefully, Dogulang. You have to be ready tomorrow night. I will come with a spare horse and you will have to enter the lullaby right a way. We cannot procrastinate. Today, now, I would take you anywhere. Yet, everywhere is just open
prairie; there is no place to hide. But closer to Gaika there are more forests, so it is going to be different..."

They were talking for a while, discussing they should expect and what fate they may meet. Now that fate was for three of them, including the babe. The babe did not want to wait on him, and a little bit later he started crying like a little puppy. Dogulang took him in her arms quickly, holding him to her breast, which was so familiar to the sotnik, who had kissed it so many times in gusts of passion. The smooth and white breast he compared with a little white duck. Now, everything is going to be different, in the new light of motherhood. The sotnik thought about it, he thought about how much they had gone through, and how he had become a father.

Dogulang is a mother; she was feeding the babe with her breast, just as how it was meant to be.

The babe was enjoyably sucking on his mother's breast.

"Oh, it tickles!" Dogulang laughed happily. "He is very nimble. He just got stuck to it, and there is no way he's going to let go." She was justifying her happy laugh.

"Doesn't our Conan look like you? Our little dragon, son of a big dragon! Look, look, Erdene, he opened his eyes! Look, his eyes are just like yours, and so are his nose and his lips..."

"Yes, he looks a lot like," the sotnik said, "someone I can recognize."

"Who is that?" said Dogulang surprisingly.

"Myself, of course!"

"Here you go, take him in your arms. He's such a lively little thing. He's so light. Just like a bunny!"

The sotnik carefully took the babe. He did not hold him very tightly for the moment, for he did not know how to hold him. He carefully put the child close to his heart, trying to find a proper comparison to something that he had never experienced. The feeling of such dearness, he was smiling happily and said the first thing that came to him:

"You know, Dogulang, he is not a bunny. He is my heart in my arms."

Soon, the child fell asleep. The sotnik had to go back to his place in the army.

Late that night, Erdene came out of his lover's yurt. He looked at the moon and he felt very lonely. He did not want to leave, he wanted to go back to Dogulang and his son. He felt something that he could not comprehend, an evil that had revealed itself to him. He felt that he was being involved in the doings of the great Khan, by going with him on the crusade to the West, by serving him, he and his lover and his son were all in jeopardy. At any time the Khan's punishment for bearing a child might destroy them. So, the only thing that connected them with the Overlord of the Four Sides of the World, was something that was unnatural, something that was not comparable with their own fate, mutually exclusive, and the only exit from this situation was to run, to get freedom, to save the life of the child.

In short time, he found the servant, Altun, who was looking after his horse all that time and was feeding it grain from her trip-bag.

"So, have you seen your son?" Altun started talking to him.

"Yes. Thank you, Altun."

"Have you given him a name yet?"

"His name is Conan!"

"Conan... it is a good name."

"Yes. I want Nebo to hear it. Now, Altun, I need to tell you something, something I need to tell you now, without procrastination. You are like a sister to me, Altun. You are like a mother to Dogulang and our child, sent to us by fate. If not for you, we would not be able to be together on this trip, we would have to suffer in separation. And who knows, we might have never seen each other, and we might never see each other again: because the one who goes to war will eventually meet war. I appreciate what you do for us..."

"I understand," said Altun. "I understand that you, Erdene, can decide to do such an unheard of thing!" Altun shook her head and said, "God help us. I understand," she went on, "today you are sotnik in this big army, and tomorrow you might become a colonel, living in honor for the rest of your life. And if this happened we could not talk about the things that we are talking about right now. You are a sotnik, and I am a slave, and that is that. Yet, you had to choose different: as your soul led you. My help to you is to hold your horse. I have to serve you,"
because of Dogulang, and you know that. It is my job to help her, and so I help you. I am attached to her with all of my soul, because she is a daughter of a god, the god of beauty. Yes, yes! She is very good looking! But I am not about that, I am about something else. Dogulang has magic power in her hands – anyone can have a thread and a needle, but none can repeat the things that Dogulang does...I know this for myself. On her banners, the dragons are alive and the stars shine like they are in the sky. I am telling you, she is a mistress from God. And I will be with her. If you have decided to leave, I will go with you. She would not be able to handle it by herself, she has just borne a child."

"That is what I'm talking about, Altun. Tomorrow, close to midnight, we have to be ready. We will be leaving. Dogulang and you will be in your wagon, and I will be on a horse, with a spare horse on a leash. We will go to the Gaika. The important thing is to go as far as possible before the sun rises, so that those in pursuit cannot find a trace. And then, maybe we can get away..."

They stayed silent for some time. Before Erdene mounted the horse, he lowered his head and kissed the dry arm of the maidservant Altun, understand that she was sent to him and Dogulang by God. This little woman was in prison so many years ago in China, and she became a slave in Genghis Khan’s army. If one thought about it, she was merely a random stranger in Genghis Khan’s army. Who was she to him? Yet, in reality she was the only help for these two lovers in such a hard time. The sotnik understood that he could rely only on her, on the maidservant Altun, and not on anybody else in the whole world. Not anyone! Among thousand of armed men who took part in this great crusade, she was the only one who could stand behind him, an old wagon maid.

The sotnik was thinking of what was going to happen in the future, and he prayed to God for help in the name of the child...

In the morning, the drums became loud again, ordering people to get up, get armed, get on their horses, and throw their stuff onto the wagons so they could get moving again. They would move by the indomitable power of the Khan, toward the West. It was the seventeenth day of the crusade. They were in the largest part of the steppe. Soon they would be in the hardest part, the "pripoiennu," the land near the river, the land near the Gaika. Then they would get on a road that led to the great Itil, which the river had divided into two halves: the East half and the West half.

Everything was as it was before. In the front, the banner carriers were riding graceful horses. Following them was Genghis Khan, escorted by his bodyguard and his retinue. He was riding his stud, Khuba, who walked at a steady pace. He had a white mane and a black tail. On the ground, from one side to the other, there was a dark mass of humans moving to the West. The clash which was coming from all these moving people, wagons, armor, and weapons, was in the air like a clash from a storming sea. The entire crowd, this moving avalanche of people, was the embodiment of Genghis Khan. This power and strength all came from him, and its beginning was all because of him. At that particular moment, he was thinking about regular humans, and he did not even think about ruling the world, about his own superpower, which he would be ruling even after his death. How? His orders would be carved on a tablet to be carried out even after his passing. As far away as rocks stood, there would be signs of his will ruling the world; his will would be a constant presence in the world. That is what he was thinking about at that moment and the thought of rocks and tablets as the way to reach immortality did not leave him. He decided that he would do it in winter on the coast of Itil. In the expectation of crossing the river, he planned to gather his scientists, sages, and seers, to tell them his golden thoughts about superpower, to tell them his wills, and then they would be carved in stone. These words would change the world, and the world would fall to his feet. He had gone on the crusade, and everything on the Earth had to serve this purpose, and everything that contradicted it and did not assist on the success of the crusade had to be destroyed.

And poems started coming again:

My true diamond power
I will raise to a glistening place in the sky... Yes!
And the ants on the path will step aside
From the iron hooves of my army... Yes!
The changing tides of history
By my sweat I lead the horses on
Thankful descendents dismount,
Understanding the price of power... Yes!

On this day at noon, Genghis Khan was told that one of the women had borne a child against the ban. A woman had borne a child and the father was not known. He was told about it by Arasan, who was in charge of food for the palatial Yurta. With eyes and ears all across the army, he always knew everything and was the first one to bring the Khan news. "My duty is to tell you how it is, oh Greatest, because you have decreed a law for this matter."

Genghis Khan did not respond to him immediately. He concentrated for a moment on his own thoughts, though he did not yield to the disappointment that came with the news right away, for a while he did not want to accept that such news would have such a big influence on him. Outraged, he stayed silent, and he started to ride faster, the sides of his light mink fur coat were fluttering in the wind like wings of a scared bird. Arasan, who was riding next to him, knew that he was in a difficult situation and he did not know what to do. Should he slow down and try not to make the Khan even more angry with his presence, or should he ride faster and stay next to him to be ready to hear his words, if they would be pronounced. He did not understand why the Khan stayed silent for so long – he needed to say just two words: "Kill her," and that woman with her child would be killed within the hour, since she was brave to disobey his great order. She could be hanged as a lesson for others and that is it.

All of a sudden, the Khan said over his shoulder: "So, why before the bitch bore a child, no one noticed that she had a belly? Or maybe people saw it and they just did not say anything?"
Arasan tried to explain how it might have happened, but his words were jumpy and Genghis Khan interrupted him: "Silence!"

Some time later he asked: "Since she is nobody's wife, then who is she? Is she in a family or a herd?"

He was frankly surprised that the woman who bore a child happened to be the woman who embroidered the flags, and it never had crossed his mind that somebody actually did such a task. Somebody cuts and sews the Khan's golden flags; as well as he never thought that someone made his boots for him or someone built the yurts for him. He never thought of such insignificant things. Why would he think about such things, did the flags not sew themselves? Right next to the Khan and all over his army they were appearing like fires before his arrival. They were on camp stands, moving among the cavalry, into battle and feasts. And now in front of him there were flag posts carrying torches to give light to his route. The Khan went with the crusade to the West with the intention to raise his flags there, throwing away somebody else's flags. That is how it will happen... nothing and nobody would stand in his way. And any insignificant disobedience among his people would be punished by nothing else but death. The death penalty was his greatest power: the power of life and death over another.

Yet, in the case with this embroiderer, it was not just her fault; there was somebody else, someone who was in the army. But who was it?

From that hour, Genghis Khan grew dark, and it was noticeable by his stoney face, heavy sight, soaked eyes, and flexed seat. No one came to talk to him about important things, though Genghis Khan was not upset about the fact that some embroiderer and her unknown lover had a child, but because it reminded him of a completely different story, which left a bitter, shameful and inerasable mark on his soul.

Again his bleeding and burning soul was reminded of something that he lived through in his youth. It happened when he was called by his real name, Temuchin, when none would think twice about the orphan Temuchin, none thought that he would become the ruler of the Four Corners of the World. Even he did not think of such things. Then, in such youth, he was thrown into tragedy and shame. His adopted parents matched him up with a woman named Borte to be his wife. She was kidnapped on their honeymoon, during an attack by a neighborhood tribe of Merkits, and before he got her back in a crusade of vengeance, many days had gone by. This
delay he considered was because of his lack of strength, and he thought about this as he went with a many thousand man army to conquer the West, in order to make his throne reach across the world.

During that night when the dirty Merkits had randomly retreated after three days of fighting, when they were running away and leaving all of their stuff, the ran from a frightening, merciless attack, trying to save their miserable lives from a terrible vengeance. When the swearing of such a vengeance came true, it was said:

Long ago, far from the sight of the flags,
I sprinkled the crusade with the blood of sacrifice,
In the nearby fate, covering
The drums on which I hit,
I was riding on a black horse.
I was wearing comfortable armor.
I was wielding in my hands a terrible sword.
I will strike dead the fleeing Merkits...
The Merkit people I exterminated,
Soon the Earth will be empty of them...

This frightful oath became true in the night, sounded by screams, among those who panicked and ran from a covered wagon, which was going away. "Borte! Borte! Where are you Borte?!" Temuchin desperately called, and when his guards finally reached the wagon, they killed all of the charioteers. Then Borte replied to him, "It's me, Borte!" and she jumped off the wagon and he jumped off of his horse. They both ran to each other and hugged in the darkness. At that moment, when his young wife was in his arms, alive and without any injuries, something unsuspected hit him right in the heart. He could smell something unfamiliar to him, a smell much like someone's beard, which probably was left from someone who had touched her smooth neck. The battle was going on around them, there would be vengeance wreaked upon that man.

At that moment, he did not fight anymore. He put his wife into a wagon and turned back, trying to handle himself, in order to tell what burned his heart so badly. He suffered for the rest of his life. He understood that not by his wife's will that she was in the hands of his enemies. Yet nevertheless, what was the price that she was not injured, that not even a hair fell off of her head. It seemed that Borte was not suffering in captivity, and she did not look like she was in torment. Later on they did not talk openly about it.

When those few Merkits who did not make it to different countries after that fight felt as though they were not in any kind of danger, when they had become herds and servants, no one could understand Temuchin's hardness, who had since become Genghis Khan. Those Merkits were killed. And none could say that that one had some kind of relationship with Borte when she was in the Merkits' captivity.

After that, Genghis Khan had three wives, but nothing could cure the pain from that first cruel hit of fate. So he lived with this pain, with this bleeding, this soul wound that no one knew about. After Borte bore their first son, Dguchi, Genghis Khan was calculating the time of pregnancy, to determine whether Dguchi was truly his son. Someone who remained unknown impinged upon his honor by taking this piece from him for the rest of his life.

Even though that this other guy, with whom the embroiderer had a child, did not have any relationship to the Khan, his blood boiled.

A human needs so little, that just in a moment the world became different for him; it was not rational or completely perceivable... This change took place in the soul of the great Khan. Everything became the same as it was before he received the news. In the front, the banner carriers were riding on their beautiful horses, under him was the stud Khuda, around him was his retinue and guards. All the space that his eyes could see was taken by his army. Overhead, above this stream of humans, was a little white cloud, the same cloud from the first days of the crusade where he witnessed the Mandate of Heaven.

Everything seemed to be the same, yet something had changed, and that something was feeding a growing danger within the Khan. Someone had not followed his will, someone had put
their physical passion over his great goal, and someone had intentionally gone against his order! One of his people wanted more than a woman in bed; he wanted the Khan’s embroiderer! And some miserable woman like the embroiderer, was it that hard to substitute her? Neglecting his order, she decided to bear a child, while all the other women were saving themselves, waiting for the Khan’s special permission.

These thoughts were growing inside of him, like a wild forest; the forest was making his eyes darker. Even though he understood that the incident was not that big, that he should not spend much of his energy on it, a different, strong and powerful voice, was demanding a severe punishment for her. An execution of the perpetrators in front of his entire army, and that voice was growing more and more powerful, chasing away all other thoughts.

Even his untiring stud Khuba, on which the Khan stayed for the entire day, felt an extra weight, which was getting heavier and heavier. The untiring horse, always running like an arrow, was covered with sweat, which had never happened to it.

Genghis Khan continued on his way silently and fearlessly. Even though nothing was disturbed on the crusade, nothing was getting in the way of the army moving to the West, on his plans of world dominance, something had happened: a little stone fell of his unbreakable rock of orders. This kept bothering him. He was thinking about it on the way, it was bothering him like a splinter under a fingernail, and the more he thought about it he was becoming more irritated at his coterie. How dare they tell him just now, when the woman had already birthed the child. Where were they before? Was it that difficult to notice a pregnant woman? And then the discussion would be completely different, she would have been thrown away like a dog. And now what to do? When he was told about what had happened, he strictly asked about the man who was responsible for the wagons, and how did it happen that all of this had gone unnoticeable until the screams of the newborn were heard? How did something like this happen? The man was responding obscurely; the woman Dogulang was living in a separate yurt, she did not talk to anyone, she explained her absence by her being busy, and she had a wagon and a servant, and when anyone came to her about business, she was covered with her flags. So, it was hard to tell that she was pregnant. The father of the new-born child was not known. They had yet to question the embroiderer. The questioner asked over and over again, but she knew nothing.

The wind in the fields was rising.

Genghis Khan thought with annoyance about this, that this affair was unworthy of his great attention, but, insofar as his ban on child-bearing was concerned, that every one of these old impediments, he feared in his mind, would spread about the ranks. The Khan had to make a judgment.

Around midnight the sotnik Erdene, was coming from the camps with reins in hand, so that he could run together with his lover under the cover of night. He had not known yet that the Khan already knew everything. He did not know that the Khan was running to him with Dogulang and the child did not turn out with the child.

The spare horse in reins, the hunting dog nicely tethered down, the sotnik Erdene left the camp in a good mood, staying in the camp at night, and approaching the yurt of Dogulang, praying to God about one thing, so that he would not suddenly be caught by a patrolman. The patrolman was the most cantankerous and cruel man; if suddenly he had caught sight of someone who was intoxicated, being too drunk from milky vodka – he would never have mercy – would clench the harness of the horse, and the rider would whip the perpetrator.

Leaving in a run, Erdene knew that if they caught him, they would threaten him with the highest scourging, that of a hundred lashes of the whip, or the nightmare of execution by hanging. Another event could happen in any moment; if he was successful in fleeing, they could go to the far edge of the world in some different country.

It was night in the steppes and at the time the moon was out. Everywhere was visible in the camp, everywhere the smoldering embers of dying fires. Among such a quantity of people and wagons there were only a few things that mattered to him, which was where he was going. On this the sotnik Erdene was calculating, with Dogulang and his son fleeing successfully, unless that was not his fortune.

What happened then, he understood at once, how he was closer to the camp leader.
Dismounting, the sotnik stood in the shade of the horse, holding the reins tightly. Indeed, there was a disaster at hand! Beside the last yurta burned a large bonfire that illuminated everything around it in an uneasy light. With ten imperial guards, one was speaking out loudly as Erdene treaded beside where the horses were tethered. Three of the men were busy harnessing a cart, the one on which he was going to meet Dogulang so that they could run away together into the night. Then Erdene saw an imperial guardsmen leaving Dogulang’s yurta with the child in his hands. She was standing in middle of the guardsmen, the pale baby closed-fisted, helpless and frightened. A guard was asking the attendant Altun about something. He was yelling at her: “Answer! Answer us! Slut! Whore!” Then Altun told the interrogators. Indeed, it was undoubtedly her voice. Altun screamed: “How would I know! What do you take me for? How would I know whose child she gave birth to?! It didn’t happen on the steppes, it didn’t just happen in front of us! Yes, she gave birth to a child recently, as you can see. You really don’t get it, it was conceived ten months ago! Ten months ago! How would I know, where and with whom she did it? What do you take me for?! Why are you frightening her to death – she is with a newborn! Did she really not serve you, or sew all of your flags, which you are using on this crusade? Why now do you want to kill her? What for?”

Poor Altun, how tragically in danger she was; what could she do; how could the sotnik Erdene dare slip in and what could he do against ten imperial guards? Could he really do anything? Maybe he could take out one or two with his bow. But at this distance? He could only take at most two of the guards. If only they would stand there, so that they would all lose, so that he could spill their blood!

Sotnik Erdene saw how the guards threw Dogulang and the child into the cart, which was where they had thrown the attendant Altun and carried them into the night.

Then everything died down, all was suddenly quiet, the area became empty. And now one could only hear in the distance a dog barking, the snickering of horses, and other unknown sounds of a camp.

The yurta of the embroiderer Dogulang had a fire burning down. Absorbing the stirring and torturing of the people, impassively the flames danced about radiantly and serenely. The stars absorbed the emptying area, leaving no trace of what had happened.

Getting sleepy, the sotnik Erdene found he was speechless, like a shot of a cold spell, with his hands holding the reins of the other horse. He pulled the reins off of the horse, without effort, and he made the horse bareback. The horse silently whinnied. Erdene listened to his own breath, which was becoming heavier. But he still found strength, so that he swatted the horse and it went forward. This horse that would be Dogulangs was now free, it was not needed, and so now it was trotting through the night. The sotnik Erdene aimlessly went about the steppe, not knowing where he was going or why. For they treaded quietly in the reins of the constellation Akjalduz – the true and inseparable battle horse, toward which the sotnik Erdene went in to the battle, but to which he was not successful in galloping, driving away from the cart that held his love and his newly born child.

The sotnik moved along at random, as though he were blind; his eyes were filled with tears, which were dripping onto his wet beard, and even the light of the moon streamed in an uneven wavering onto his shivering shoulders... He brought himself together, an outcast from the troops like a lone wild beast, separated now from the entire world: if you can survive, then there is life; if you can survive, then there is death. There are no other paths. What was to happen to him now, where was he to go? He could not think of anything worth doing anymore, aside from dying right at that place. He could stab himself with his knife, stab himself into his chest, into his suffering heart, and then he would be calm. He would be finished with this burning pain. Or he could disappear, rot, flee, or perhaps lose himself somewhere for forever...

The sotnik collapsed onto the ground and loudly sobbed. He was half on his stomach and flailed about the rocks with his hands and feet, but the ground did not part. Then he rose to his knees and found his knife that was tucked into his belt.

The steppes were silent, deserted, and dimly lit by the stars... The true horse Akjalduz patiently stood in the moon’s illumination, soaking it in, waiting for further orders from his master...
In the morning, the army was formerly preparing for the day’s march, the drummers were on top of a mound, loudly drumming to muster the troops. Striking the drums, the drummers were not yet slowing down; they were causing the region to echo with the loudening banging. The ox-hide drums were booming, sounding like wild beasts in a snare, summoning an execution that was to take place underneath the embroiderer’s flag – few knew that the embroiderer’s name was Dogulang.

At the call of the drums, mounted cohorts were aligning themselves near the shaman’s mound. Hundreds of troops gathered as though they were in a parade, with arms showing, and they formed a semicircle around the mound. The wagons were arranged about the flanks and on them were the drivers and servants – all from the clans of the marching troops. The ancillary groups were made up of the yurta makers, the blacksmiths, the saddlers, and other men and women, all of whom were young, all who were of the most productive season of life. The ordering of the troops deterred the completion of the execution. Everyone, daring to break the will of the Khan, was cheering for the execution.

The drummers continued to send a thunderous roar from atop the mound, chilling the blood in the veins, calling in the spirit of the fear of death. Afterwards and following the lead of the drummers, the soldiers had appeared around the ox of Genghis Khan, and cheered.

Here under the boom of the drummers on the mound, the Khan was carried in on a green cart, which showed to the crowd that the execution was for some grave matter. He did not call out the name of the convicted, or that the convicted had borne a child. The cart lowered onto the red mound that was underneath the flag, which was bathed in the first rays of the sun and fluttering in the wind, with the ornate silk and beads woven as the flames of the dragon. This was he, the Khan, whose symbol was the dragon in mid-leap. He did not suspect that the embroiderer, empowering her needle, did not have him in mind, but rather another. Truly, the dragon was another person, who had been dashing and fearless in her embrace. No one was near her, she stood alone now, solemn and ready to face her fate.

A moment passed. The drummers slowly softened and faded their thundering, signaling that the execution was near, heating the tension. When the moment of terrible suspense was realized throughout the crowd, the drumming altogether disintegrated and died. Then again the drums rose into a deafening rumble, accompanied by the wild roar of the crowd. The drums were calling in the drunken consciences of each spectator who had gotten lost in the ecstasy of the moment. The Khan did not incur a violent and secret joy from the hanging, though others no doubt did.

The drumming grew softer. Everyone was united in the tension, even the horses under the horsemen were still. There was a stony tension on the face of even Genghis Khan himself. His lips were drawn and tight and the gaze in his eyes was cold and unblinking.

The drumming ceased when the embroiderer Dogulang was removed from the execution yurta and revealed to the crowd. A stalwart guard tied her hands behind her back and brought her to the cart that was alongside a team of two horses. Dogulang stood in the cart, supported from the rear by two gloomy imperial guards.

Some of the people in the audience, especially the women, began to shout: “Here she is, the greatest embroiderer! Whore! Nobody’s wife! Although she may have youth and is pretty, she is not even a second or third wife of a noble or a peasant! And the father was probably an old man, better than none! She doesn’t know suffering. She did not settle herself a lover and give birth, the tramp! All the same that the Khan spits on your face! Now let you pay. Let her be jerked up onto the hump of a camel! Make the pretty bitch ugly!” This merciless court of rumor continued in spite of the booming of the drummers, for they thundered on the ox-hide drums emphatically and deafeningly, so that they would take back the excited hatred onto them and the Khan would not come to hate them.

“Here is the servant with the child! Behold!” they screamed, with great malevolence, at the marked woman. The servant was really Altun. She brought the newborn, wrapped up in rags. Imperial guards accompanied her, looking quite apprehensive. Whoever happened to be caught in their gaze would cower. Altun went to the cart, confirming the burden of criminality on the embroiderer, condemning her to death.

Gaining order for the execution was a daunting task. Dogulang understood that now a
different event could not happen; there would be no pardon, no mercy. In the yurta, from where she was brought in shame, she had time to hold the babe to her breasts one last time. Ignorantly, the misfortunate child was grumpy, dwelling in an easy sleep under the silky lulling calls of the drums. The servant Altun was nearby. She held back her crying, deterring a loud wail, she put her hand to her mouth. When she had successfully held back her sobbing, she said a few words:

"Where is he?" she said quietly, hurriedly moving the babe from one breast to the other, although she understood that Altun did not know the answer either.

"I don't know," she answered in tears. "I think he's far away."

"Only if! Only if!" Dogulang wailed.

The servant bitterly abandoned her answer. They both knew about that one thing, only that the sotnik Erdene had vanished, galloping away, disappearing from their eyes.

From outside the yurta they could hear a voice: "Well, peasants! Carry on!"

The embroiderer cuddled the babe one last time, grievously taking in his smell in one breath and, with trembling hands, gave him to the servant.

"Get along soon, look..."

"Don't think about this!" Altun wiped away a tear with a rag and could speak no more. She loudly burst out sobbing and parted.

The guards came in and escorted them outside.

The sun already rose above the steppes, hanging just above the horizon. Every unit in the assemblage of soldiers and their support were prepared to set out again on crusade after the execution of the embroiderer. Their assemblage extended out across the Sarozej, an unending masse scattered across the fields and mounds that made the steppe-land. On one such mound, the golden cart of the Khan was shining in the sun. Stepping out of the yurta, Dogulang was in time to see the cart, in which the Khan sat, in the corner of her eyes. He was unapproachable, like God, and above the cart, fluttering in the winds of the steppe, was the flag that she had made with her own hands: the flag with the fire-breathing dragon.

Genghis Khan, watching from underneath a canopy, saw that all was well on top of the mound, and in the steppes, and amongst the troops, and amongst the support staff, and that far above his head, as always, swam the little white cloud. The execution of the embroiderer stopped the crusade for the morning. But it had to be done, so that other similar incidents would not occur. The forthcoming execution was not the first and it would not be the last execution under his rule. This was indeed, though, the most unique instance of insubordination used as an example of the punishment for the thought of freedom, and the Khan knew that the experience of every execution was necessary for the continued obedience and unification of his people. His stern face was fixed on order: as long as there was fear, and the base satisfaction that a violent death would not seize you, then the people would be compelled to perceive the terrible judgment that had to be dealt as justified, and they would applaud the display of such power.

At the time the embroiderer was brought from the yurta and forced up the mound in a shameful display, the people, like a swarm, were growing wild. On the face of Genghis Khan, not one muscle moved. He sat underneath his canopy amidst his coterie underneath his ambient flag, he was so motionless that the stones seemed to hold more life. There was a declaration of the execution to tell the reason — so that all would know — that even such a minor obstacle in the way of the crusade to the West was inadmissible. The Khan understood in his soul that he could not come running to stop such a cruel act being put upon a woman, a mother, that he could have mercy on her, but he did not see this as a possibility. His power would weaken and his people would begin to rebel. No, he would not repent, and he would even feel sore about not being able to bring out of her who her lover was.

Sentenced to death, Dogulang had already gone to the mound to stand before the army and the support staff, in a gown torn from the chest and with disheveled hair that was like a black woolly mop, shining with coaly brilliance in the morning sun, hiding her pale white face. Dogulang, however, did not raise her head. She looked about in devastation, with a stressful glance — now nothing concealed her from others. Indeed, here she was, the man she loved was greater than her life; this was her child's curse: to be born from such a love!

But the people wanted to know, they screamed: "Mare, where is your stallion? Who is
he?” They were growing excited and empoisoned from their ignorance of who was at fault, the crowd was anxious for a quick liberation from this ignorance of such a sin. Someone shouted: “Hang the bitch! Hang her now! What are you waiting for?”

The executioners had to calculate if the rage of the crowd could bear down the ghost of the embroiderer. From the ambience of the Khan, the imperial supporters were divided. One of the nobles, a real deep voiced, in-your-face warrior, was ready to be on the side of the Khan for this matter. He jumped during the mournful process; he walked to the mound with the doomed embroiderer and went to the servant with the child in her hands.

“Ah, well, it’s worth it,” he set out an appeal to the row of horsemen, he yelled loudly.

“Listen everyone! This wild creature needs to show from who she gave birth! With whom did she have sex! Now say, who among these men is the father of this child?”

Dogulang answered that none of them were. The alarm crash sounded them to order.

The hill moved with sotnik after sotnik, but the captain of the sotniki said, “I have a no-show! Maybe he is in your hundred?”

For a time, the deep-voiced sotnik again and again harassed the embroiderer, so that she would give some indication of who her lover was.

Here again the crowd pulled back from the mound to make way for another horseman, and again a question:

“Show us, whore, who did you conceive with?”

Just then, the head of the regime which stood closest the mound found he was next to the sotnik Erdene on his loving horse, Akjuluz. Dogulang and Erdene gazed at each other. A great uproar erupted from the crowd that neither one of them paid any attention to, it was difficult withdrawing their eyes from each other, as Dogulang started, reclining her head and sweeping back her hair, the moment flared color into her face. Only Erdene could save her. Dogulang stood and gave him a quick meeting with her eyes, such a joy and her sickness turned around for a moment. On this question of the deep-voiced nobleman, Dogulang collected herself and said: “Hear! Hear! Here is the man who is the father of my child!”

Again no one paid attention to the sotnik Erdene as he lowered his head, but here with the effort of an ox, he silenced himself and let fall an imperturbable air.

The executioners were already prepared. There were three of them, all dressed in black robes. Two were walking with a two-humped camel in-between, with the third leading the camel. The camel was so huge that the head of the leading executioner reached to only the middle of the hump. The absence of a forest in the open steppe caused it to be difficult to hang criminals with the free use of wood and trees, so that the convicted would have to hang from the hump of a camel. There was one cord, which hung from both sides of the hump. On one end of the cord hung the counterweight, and from the other would be the embroiderer, Dogulang.

With shouts and blows from a stick, the executioners forced the camel to bend its long front legs, lowering itself down and lying on the ground. The gallows were ready now.

The drummers came to life again, lightly drumming so that at the necessary moment they would rise to deafen the cry and beat back the dying spirit.

Then the deep-voiced noble again accost the embroiderer, going along for fun. “I ask you for the last time. You, stupid whore, will lose that degenerate life of yours all the same. I don’t understand how, but nevertheless, maybe you don’t know who you had the child with? Maybe, once you are raised up you will be able to recall?”

“I don’t remember with whom. This was a long time ago and far away,” answered the embroiderer.

Above the steppes there was a low, fetal, virile roar that was tumbling through the sky, and there was a malevolent shriek.

The noble did not calm her with his questions. “I am trying to understand. Did he appear in the bazaar where you were… adjusted?”

“Yes, in the bazaar!” Dogulang answered defiantly.

“A craftsman or a vagabond? Maybe a bazaar-thief?”

“I don’t know any craftsmen or vagabonds, or bazaar thieves,” Dogulang mocked him. Again an explosion rumbled and there was a shriek.

“Such were her odds, that a craftsman, a vagabond, or a thief occupied her for these
things at the bazaar!"

And there, all at once in a line of soldiers went off a voice, and everyone turned and went quiet. Someone yelled loudly and strongly: "It is I, the father of the child! Indeed, it was me, if you want to know!"

And all at once they were quiet, all at once they were petrified, who was this man? Who was this man screaming at the last moment, when the embroiderer would have carried her secret to the death?

Everyone staggered: Erdene spurred his horse to come forward out of the ranks. Holding Akjulduz in place, he again said loudly to the crowd: "Yes, it is I. This is my son! The name of my son is Conan! The mother of my son is Dogulang! And I am Sotnik Erdene!"

With these words and with everyone looking at him, he dismounted his horse. He swatted Akjulduz with the back of his hand on its rear. The horse was shy but went on. While walking, the sotnik threw his armor off, flinging it to his side. He went toward the embroiderer, who was already being held by the executioner. He walked the whole way in silence, and everyone was looking at him. Walking to his love, he made it to the place of the execution. The sotnik Erdene fell forward to his knees and he held her, and she laid her hands on his head, newly united at the face of death.

At that moment the drummers were striking their drums, they were striking at once and growing louder, above a roar, as the herdsman roused the bull. The drummers got louder, all common with rigorous obedience and the ecstasy of passion. They acted as one, they returned to the circle itself, becoming a team, all moving in preparation for the crusade. Duty was leading the drummers, everything was, as everything is. The executioners immediately approached the sotnik. To help the executioners, three imperial guards came in. They threw the sotnik down to the ground, quickly bringing his hands to his back, putting him in the same position as the embroiderer, and they brought them to the lying camel. They quickly brought out a single cord; at one end the sotnik would be strangled and at the other, with the camel's hump in-between, the embroiderer would be strangled. They did this in a terrible haste, underneath the incessant rumbling of the drums. They brought the camel up to its feet. The animal, not wishing to rise, resisted them. The camel bawled, snapping its teeth at them maliciously. However, under the beating of a stick, it got up all the way. The sides shook in a single convulsion; those two, who had loved each other had died at the same time.

In the drumming turmoil no one noticed that the cart of the Khan was moving to the other side of the mound, surrounded by his bodyguards. The Khan left the place of the execution, content: the punishment had achieved its goal, moreso, it did better than expected. It brought to light an unknown man, who was possessed by the embroiderer, and that the joy of bed had gone altogether too far. The sotnik had failed the other sotniks and had brought before their eyes his indulgence. And maybe from that, instead of the criminal being an unknown man, did better. That last embrace had brought to the Khan's mind his Borte, who had given birth to his first son, who was, with all the depth of his soul, not his favorite.

The drumming was booming heatedly and it rose, going along with their clash was the passage of the camel with the hanging bodies of the lovers, connected to each other by that single cord, divided from each other by the camel's hump. The sotnik and the embroiderer lifelessly swayed on the sides of the pack animal, as a sacrifice to the bloody pedestal of the future lord of the world.

The drums did not cease, freezing the spirit, holding everyone in a deafening stupefaction, and everyone on that day could see with their own eyes what happens when one acts contrary to the Khan, who moved steadily toward his goal...

The executioners and the imperial guards, who had aided them, marched alongside the camel — the moving gallows — near the army and the support and while they prepared a tomb in the ground the drums did not go silent; the drummers worked with perspiration on their faces.

During this time, the army began on their way, and again the armada of Genghis Khan moved to the West. The cavalry hordes, the wagon trains, the herds of oxen, the army wagons, and the other ancillary units on wheels, all returned on the crusade, all wereas one. They left and abandoned that place on the Sarozek steppe that was marked by blood. They did not linger in that forsaken place, as one whom they left did, one soul who remained where none other dared
to. It was the maidservant Altun with the child in her hands. Everyone had forgotten about her, they had left her to be in shame, they left her, alive, though they would make as if to not see her. They would flee her presence if she came near, as though she were a fire. She would not exist to them.

Soon all would be quiet again, there was no more drumming, there was no more flags, no more horsetails... There were hoof-prints, patties, and other things that were proof that the crusade had once passed by, but they were vanishing traces in the Sarozek steppe.

Giving everything up, in the deafening solitude, the servant Altun wandered about, staying around the fire-pits of the night before, picking up the scorched refuse and the leftover food. She put into her sheep-skin bag bones and other waste that she found. She threw a hide over her shoulder, so that she could use it also as a bed for her and the babe, of whom she was now the mother...

Altun did not know what to do, where to hold up, how to go on, where to find shelter, how to provide for the infant. While the sun shined in the clear sky above the steppes, she could still hope for a miracle — finding a lone yurta lost amongst the steppes. It seemed to her that she tried to hope, as a female slave, for freedom. And here she was, coming on to freedom by accident, and this fortune was a burden, she thought it to be a wretched thing. The newborn would soon be hungry, wanting milk, and it seemed she saw hunger in its eyes. This frightened her. She could not help the child.

Alone and improbable, Altun was able to calculate the possibilities. She thought about the chance of people living in the steppes, if such a thing happened in this desert land, and if they would bring them into slavery.

The woman wandered the steppes, walking at random first to the east, then to the west, and again back to the east... She walked with the child in her hands without rest. The hour approached noontime, when the child began to fidget, to whine, to cry, to cling to her breasts... The woman swaddled the babe and went on, cradling him as she walked. But soon the child wailed loudly and would not quiet, and then Altun stopped and cried in response: "Help! Help! What can I do?"

On the boundless steppes there was neither smoknor a small fire. It was deserted and quiet. She looked about the steppes again, her eyes did not stand still... The sky was extraordinarily clear, and the small white cloud whirled quietly overhead.

The child writhed in tears. Altun prayed and called out: "Well, what do you want from me, Misfortune?! It’s been seven days that I’ve been with you and not the clan. On this day you showed up, Misfortune... With what do I feed you, little orphan? Don’t you see, there is nothing left! There’s only you and me in this bare world, only you and me, and this little white cloud in the sky. Not even the birds are flying, only the little white cloud whirling around... Where do we go? What do I feed you with? We are abandoned, forsaken, and your father and mother have been hung and buried. The army has gone, for what their willpower gives them in strength, with their flags and drums, and where did they all go, newborn?!"

Altun again ran about the steppes, tightly clinging the child to her chest. She ran so that she was neither standing, nor was she being inactive, and by running she was tearing herself from grief... But the child did not understand, choking with tears, yearning for warm mother’s milk. In despair, Altun ran to the rocks, with tears and anger, the child was ripping the collar of her dress and she sat down on a little pile of stones. "Well, there, there! Make certain! What can I feed you? I can't give you milk to suck, little miserable orphan! Make certain! Maybe you could take me at my word and quite giving me grief! Though I say! To whom do I speak? What do my words mean to you? Oh, Nebo, what punishment have you made for me?!"

The child at once quieted, obsessing with her breasts, and grabbing them in entirety to receive a reward, biting them, and working them with his gums. Opening his mouth and then closing his mouth, his eyes shining gladly.

"So what?" she said, getting tired of rebuking the sucker. "Are you certain? Are you certain that you are not sucking in vain? And afterwards you will nap and what will I do with you then, in these accursed steppes? Can you tell it is a fraud, that I am really deceiving you? All of life I was a female slave, I never wanted to deceive anyone. Here I am, acting as a mother of a child... Our clan is in China, where no one deceives anyone. Well, well, you are sweating a little,
now you found out the bitter truth." So the servant Altun was saying, talking on without any
meaning. She spoke because of her inevitable concern, which frightened her out of her wits, that
she was ultimately alone — it was strange, that the sucker, it seemed, was not refusing her empty
breasts, but on the contrary, bliss gleamed on his tiny little face...

Holding her breath, Altun carefully loosed the mouth of the child from her nipple and
quietly cried, when suddenly she saw a trickle of white milk from his mouth. Smitten, she gave
her breast to the child again, then she robbed him of her nipple and she saw milk. She had
turned up milk! Now she felt the flow a certain power within her body.

“Oh, God!” the servant Altun unwittingly cried out. “I have milk! Real milk! You, listen,
my little one, I will be your mother. You won’t be lost now! Nebo heard us, He heard your
suffering, my child! Your name is Conan, so your parents named you, your father and your
mother, who loved each other, so that you would appear and receive such a miracle! Thank Him,
child, who gave us this miracle, my milk for you...”

Convulsing from the incidence, Altun became silent, she was becoming hot, and sweat
dripped down her brow. She looked around the field, not noticing anything, not seeing anything,
not a single soul, not a single beast, only the sun shining on that little white cloud that floated over
her head.

Settling down, the child fell asleep, satisfied and delighted with the milk, and in part he
relaxed, confidently letting his hands slip, his breath becoming even, and the woman, forgetting
everything, made it. She overcame all of which seemed like a merciless battle of drums, which
gave way to the unbeknownst sweet sensation of being a nursing mother. It opened a thanks to
the earth, the sky, milk...

The crusade was continued... The great steppe armada of the conqueror of the world
went on to the West. The army, the support, the wagons...

In the accompaniment of his guard and the retinue, with the fluttering of his flags, on
which were furious dragons, made with decorative silk and beads, which were breathing smoke
and fire, Genghis Khan moved at his immutable and tireless pace with a clear vision, on his horse
Khube. He was breathtaking, as though he were the master of fate itself, with a white mane and
black tail.

The earth swam backwards, booming under the hooves of the horses, the earth ran
backwards, but it did not turn down, and everything adhered, extending outward for eternity, to
the unattainable horizon with constantly new and newer land. There was no end or border to the
steppes. The army was like a grain of sand compared to the extreme of the infinite earth. The
Khan yearned to possess it all, all that was visible and not visible. For this reason his reach was
an acknowledgement of his being Overlord of the Four Corners of the Earth. For this reason he
went on his conquest, and he ordered his army on a crusade...

The Khan was hard and silent, such would be a man capable of his position. But no one
assumed that he had the spirit to make it happen. No one understood, and then, when suddenly
he turned, it was absolutely unexpected. The Khan suddenly and abruptly turned his horse,
turned abruptly around, so abruptly, that no one could follow his motion and his guards barely had
time to flank him. Anxiously and vainly, the Khan surveyed the sky, shielding his eyes with his
hands from the glare of the sun. No, he could not find it. No, the little white cloud did not fall
behind on its way, it was not ahead of him, or to his sides...

The little white cloud that had constantly followed him had suddenly disappeared.
Greater still was that it did not turn up later in the day, or the next day, or in ten days. The little
cloud had abandoned the Khan.

Going to Ilui, Genghis Khan understood that Nebo left him. He could not go further. He
pressed on to conquer Europe, with his sons and grandsons, but he believed before in Ordoc, so
that here he would die and the funeral would be in an unknown place...