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Hovhannes Toumanian

GIKOR



Translated from Armenian By:
Edic Baghdasarian
(Ed. Germanic)

Gikor

(ghee-core)

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Preface

This is the tragic story of an Armenian village boy named Gikor who meets his tragic fate when he is sent to the city (Tbilisi) by his father, Hambo to work for a rich trader, Bazzaz Artem. It is one of the most famous works of “All-Armenian Poet” Hovhannes Toumanian.

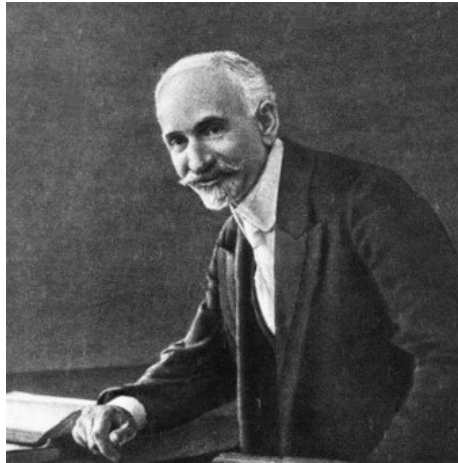
I translated this work in 1975, when I was a university student. During that time, I spent a few weeks with my English professor Ms. Carol Cunningham for reviewing and editing the text. It was completed when the Islamic revolution took place in Iran, and she, as an American, had to leave the country immediately, and unfortunately she took the edited text with her to the United States, I was unable to get in touch with her again.

Now after more than three decades, I decided to prepare a new edition of the story and publish it. I have added an article about Hovhannes Toumanian, by which the reader can be familiarized with this writer, his life and literature.

Finally, I need to thank Anita Siraki and Argishti Baghdasarian, both holding Master degrees from Canadian universities, for their sincere cooperation and very helpful comments and editing notes to this translation.

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Hovhannes Toumanian



Writers are destined to play a role in the history of their nation's literature. It is the rare few who play a special role, also, in their nation's spiritual life. Hovhannes Toumanian has played such a role in Armenian literature. He has portrayed the Armenian people's national character, their history, their dreams, and their most sacred ideals with depth and clarity through his writings. He was called the "pan-Armenian poet" during his lifetime and until today his popularity still remains great. His works are loved not only in Armenia, but also far from its borders. In every place where Armenians live, his words emit the aroma of his homeland.

In 1916, Valery Bryusov (1873-1924), an exceptional Russian poet who admired Armenian culture, said: "Toumanian's poetry is Armenia itself, ancient and new, resurrected and portrayed in poems by a great master." In the Northern

part of Armenia there is a land with extraordinary natural beauty known as the Lori region, which possesses an abundance of forest infested mountains with portentous peaks that attempt to meet the sky. These mountains host villages at their feet and a gaping gorge, where the river Debet flows, making faint musical reverberations.

Hovhannes Toumanian was born on February 19, 1869 in Dsegh, one of the villages of Lori Province in Armenia. His father Aslan (1839-1898), was the local parish priest (Ter-Tadevos). He was a descendant of an Armenian princely family of Toumanian, branch of the famous royal house of Mamikonian that settled in Lori in the 10-11-th centuries from their original feudal fief of Taron. Later Toumanian would write: “The most precious and the best thing that I had in life was my father. He was honest and the most noble man. Extremely altruistic and generous, witty, cheerful, sociable, at the same time he always maintained an air of deep seriousness.” The future writer inherited a priceless legacy from his father.



Toumanian's parents

His mother was Sona (1842-1936), an avid storyteller with a particular interest in fables. Young Toumanian was the oldest of eight children: His siblings were Rostom (1871-1915), Osan (1874-1926), Iskuhi (1878-1943), Vahan (1881-1937), Astghik (1885-1953), Arshavir (1888-1921), Artashes (1892-1916).

Since his early years Toumanian realized how bitter was the life of the Armenian peasant and understood his dreams and burdens. He grew up with the fairy tales, parables and legends of his people. The folklore and beauty of Lori became an integral part of his work and an inseparable part of his spiritual life which he was to later reflect in his writing.

This fruitful bond between the poet and his people persisted until the end of his life, despite the fact that almost his entire life (since 1883) Toumanian lived far from Lori in the city of Tbilisi, a political and cultural center in the Transcaucasia.

During 1877-1879, Toumanian attended the parochial school of Dsegh. Between 1879-1883 he went to a school in Jalaloghly (now renamed Stepanavan). Toumanian moved to Tbilisi in 1883, where he attended Nersisian School (College) between 1883-1887. Toumanian lived at his teacher's house for a while and was in love with teacher's daughter Vergineh.

At the age of 16, two years before graduation, he ended his formal education and returned to Dsegh to take care of his family. At the age of 19, Toumanian married and eventually fathered ten children. In need of finances to support his family, he was obliged to do work not fitting to his talents and intellect where the atmosphere stifled him to the point where he later remembered those days as “hell”. In the mid 1890’s Toumanian left that ‘hell’ in order to focus all his time to writing. Since 1893, Toumanian worked for *Aghbyur*, *Murtch*, *Hasker* and *Horizon* periodicals and also was engaged in public and community activities.

Toumanian was persistent in successfully educating himself through his avid reading. He revered Shakespeare’s works, as well as Byron, Pushkin, and Lermontov’s prose and poetry. He had a keen interest in world folklore, and with the sensitivity of a folklore writer, he retained the integrity of Armenian cultural

history, escaping foreign influences in his writing. “I always had a faithful and reliable guide: my intuition,” Toumanian said.

Toumanian started writing when he was 10 or 11 years old, but only became known as a poet in 1890, when his first poetry collection was published. Even in this early book one can clearly see all the freshness that Toumanian brought to Armenian literature with his poetry.



The house where Toumanian lived in Tbilisi

In 1888, at the age of 19, Hovhannes Toumanian got married to Olga Matchkalian. They had 10 children: Musegh (1889-1938), Ashkhen (1891-1968), Nvard (1892-1957), Artavazd (1894-1918), Hamlic (1896-1937), Anush (1898-1927), Arpic (1899-1981), Areg (1900-1939), Seda (1905-1988) and Tamar (1907-1989).



Toumanian family

In 1899, Toumanian came up with an idea of organizing meetings of Armenian intellectuals of the time at his house on 44 Bebutov Street in Tbilisi. Soon it became an influential literary group, which often gathered in the garret of Toumanian's house and was famous as *Vernatoun*. Vernatoun means garret in Armenian, which was the name the group was referred to. Prominent members of the collective were Avetic Isahakian, Derenic Demirchian, Levon Shant, Ghazaros Aghayan, Perch Proshian, Nikol Aghbalian, Alexander Shirvanzadeh, Nar-Dos, Vrtanes Papazian, Vahan Terian, Leo, Stepan Lisitsian, Mariam Toumanian, Gevorg Bashinjaghian and many other significant Armenian figures of early 20th century. With some pauses, it existed until 1908.



Vernatoun (garret) members in 1903. From left to right, Isahakian, Aghayan, Toumanian (sitting) and Shant, Demirchian (standing)

During the government-provoked Armenian–Tatar massacres of 1905–1907, Toumanian took the role of a peacemaker, for which he was arrested twice. Toumanian also deeply criticized the Georgian–Armenian War of 1918.



Toumanian and his wife

In October 1914 Toumanian joined the "Committee for Support of War Victims", which later helped Armenian Genocide refugees settled in Echmiadsin.

In 1912 Toumanian was elected president of the Association of the Caucasus Armenian Writers. Later, he was president of the Armenian Relief Committee (1921-1922).

By the beginning of the 20th century, Toumanian had rewritten and developed his earlier works and had written new poetry and prose. He emerged as an accomplished artist, who brought a fresh spirit and quality to Armenian literature.

This fresh spirit and quality came from his principal attitude towards poetry rather than external poetic form (where Toumanian was often quite traditional). He brought poetry closer to the people. This stage of development in Armenian literature justifiably is referred to as the "Toumanian phase."



Vernatoun – By D. Nalbandian

Toumanian's inspiration came from everyday ordinary activities of the people. The heroes of his works are simple villagers. He reveals such qualities as indestructible strength of thought, beauty and richness of feelings, wisdom and depth. Life was harsh for villagers who endured unwritten patriarchal laws and prejudice and the reign of unjust oppression. Facing these difficulties, Toumanian's heroes often die a tragic death. While depicting these sad realities, Toumanian, at the same time, discovers and exposes true poetry, purity of feelings, integrity, and inextinguishable determination towards justice among his heroes. The images created by Toumanian move the reader even today with their truthful reality to profound compassion for truth and beauty in the human experience.

Among the works that portray the times in which Toumanian lived, are his poem, "Anush" and the story "Gikor." These are celebrated works for the

contemporary reader. “Anush” is often called the pinnacle of Toumanian’s poetry, and “Gikor,” –of his prose.

“Anush” tells about the tragic love of a young shepherd boy (Saro) for a girl (Anush). The poem portrays the spiritual richness of heroes, their inner feelings, their endless devotion to one another, and their youthful selflessness and readiness to self-sacrifice. Toumanian, at the same time, while giving a spiritual picture, gives a broad picture of the cultural life of the people, depicting daily activities and customs, their joys and sorrows, and their vision of the world. In essence, he unveils the national character of the Armenian people. It is no wonder that V. Bryusov remarked that to the non-Armenian reader the acquaintance with Toumanian’s poetry (for example his “Anush”) renders more knowledge about Armenia and the life of her people, than times of special reference texts. “Gikor” is the tale of a 12-year-old peasant boy who goes to the city and succumbs to the cruelty of those that surround him there. The entire story is extremely dramatic, abounding in lyrical quality with simultaneous touches of happiness and sadness.

Before Toumanian, there was no one who could extract poetry from things seemingly not poetic and banal as he could. No one came forth with his kind of skill and talent to expose complex human characters in their entire tragedy and beauty.

Especially valuable is Toumanian’s contribution to Armenian epic poetry. Armenian poetry has a very rich ancient tradition, and its lyrical aspects are especially powerful. Among the luminary giants are the great poet of the 10th century, Grigor Narekatsi, wonderful poet Nahapet Kuchak of the Middle Ages, the great troubadour, Sayat-Nova (17th century) who sang of love, and last, but not least, extraordinary poets of the 19th century, who created before Toumanian (P. Duryan, H. Hovhannisian and others). Toumanian’s poetic talent is first of all seen in epic settings, in portrayal of sharp, dramatic situations and bold, strong characters. His numerous ballads and poems are among the best samples of the world’s epic poetry for perfect form and most especially due to the richness of the life and philosophical depth portrayed in them.

As a true artist Toumanian never preached, yet his works are etched with deep philosophical reasoning. He was constantly concerned with issues of life and death, the purpose of human life, and man's connection with Nature. Toumanian loved "straying into eternity" trying to find answers to questions that preoccupied him, trying to penetrate into the "secrets of the universe." His poem "Into Infinity" and his quatrains written during the last years of his life are of exceptional value in this regard. Toumanian's entire personal and artistic experience is concentrated in these quatrains. These miniatures eloquently express his emotions and his inner thoughts about people and their destiny. One of the main thoughts of this great poet-humanist is that human beings by their moral essence must deserve harmony and natural beauty as he expresses in the following lines:

*What else is needed if freedom and love we possess?
What are you looking for if you can't even make a step without suffering?
Oh fool! When will the time come when you will take all that
we're gifted with, even not for long, without suffering?*

Since Grigor Narekatsi no any Armenian poet created such rich a spiritual content as Toumanian. More than any one of his predecessors Toumanian opened the floodgates for Armenians to discover the folklore from different nations. He artfully used folk images, plots and motives from other cultures and introduced them into Armenian literature without imitation, without repetition. He selected material from various folk sources, reshaping it in his own way and created a completely new work of art. Toumanian always placed his principles of integrity and ideals into each of his literary adaptations of folk art. Based on several versions of the Armenian epos he wrote the "David of Sassoon" epic poem, which is still considered the best artistic adaptation of the Armenian national epos. Using the historical legend, Toumanian created one of his masterpieces – "The Capture of the Tmuk Fortress," a poem, about beauty and immortality. It lauds patriotism and the strength of love that is able to inspire an act of great achievement – an act of great courage.

Toumanian's ballad, "Parvana," is also a gem! Using the legendary plot, Toumanian asserts the idea of eternal human strife for perfection. Many of

Toumanian's ballads and tales originate from folk sources and it is generally accepted that Toumanian's best tale is "Brave Nazar" – a tale, which the poet wrote using about 20 versions of the same plot, including non-Armenian versions. This tale ridicules those people who idolize undeserving people and raise them into rulers. Later, these 'rulers' incite wars, spread violence and tyranny and make people suffer. The tale is remarkable for its sharp satire, keen and witty detailed observations, and its depth and wisdom. Toumanian himself, who always evaluated his creative work very modestly, said that he was ready to present this tale for judgment before the entire literary world! And indeed, "Brave Nazar" is one of the best examples of folktale genre worldwide.

Toumanian radically altered the ideas about the poetic world that prevailed in literature before him. He renounced the inconsequential and weak elements and conventionality. "The art must be clear and lucid like the eye, and as the eye complex as well," the poet said. And his entire work is a vivid representation of this thought. Toumanian's word is amazingly simple, natural and at the same time poetically inspired and beautiful, wise and deep; it comes from the energetic elements of native language. It is not by mere chance that dozens of phrases and expressions from Toumanian's works have become a natural part of people's everyday language, their sayings, adages, and maxims. This is what made Toumanian the greatest national poet of the Armenian nation. A renowned Armenian poet, Avetic Isahakian (1875-1957) wrote about his contemporary, "Like a stream he descended from the wild mountains of the legendary Lori, bringing along the entire world of nature – splendid and diverse, and the ancient nation with its songs and speech, feelings and imagination. And like the nature – the great designer – he opened before our soul a sincere and genuine poetry. In the beginning this torrent was spontaneous and wild, but with time it brightened, became crystal and flowed into those wonderful legends and poems that amount to eternal glory and elevate to the unsurpassed peak of our literature."

Toumanian had a fundamental understanding that in art, all mankind are closely related, and such thoughts and ideals, which are precious and understandable for all nations will be expressed only when the life and the national character of the native people are portrayed. The poet himself said: “The closer the writer is to his own nation and the deeper he digs into its folklore, the greater is his greatness and the meaning of his work for mankind.” Toumanian’s own literary heritage is a brilliant confirmation of these words. He created masterpieces, in which he immortalized noble human aspirations – sublime dreams of happiness and justice, of the beautiful and ideal. And if today Toumanian is not very well known to the worldwide reader, the only reason for that is the fact that his works did not find an appropriate literary realization in translations.

Toumanian does not belong to the poets, who are staying in the rooms all the time isolated from the community. He was always in the center of all the important events of his time. His time witnessed stormy upheavals: international conflicts in the Caucasus; World War I; the genocide of Armenians in Turkey; revolutions; and civil wars. Toumanian wouldn’t have been Toumanian if he had remained aloof and simply wrote poetry. Thousands upon thousands of voices of his people echoed their hopes and sufferings in his heart. “I live and agonize with everybody, I suffer for all,” he wrote. The following poem is another example of his enduring bond with his people and nation:

The Armenian Grief

*The Armenian grief is a shoreless sea,
An enormous abyss of water;
My soul swims mournfully
On this huge and black expanse.
It prances at times – enraged,
And looks for the shore – blue and serene,
Where sometimes, it wearily dives deeply
Looking for fathomless rest;
But it will never reach the bottom of this sea.
It will never reach the shore.*

In the Armenian grief – on the black expanse
My soul lives and mourns...

Lest it be found a more profound expression of the relationship between the artist and his nation. There are two images passing through this poem – the image of an endless, bottomless sea, which embodies the immeasurability of the nation's suffering, and the image of the poet, who grieves for his nation and feels the weight of the sorrow with his entire heart. The poet is an inseparable part of this sea of grief, the center of national suffering, expectations and hopes.

With full authority Toumanian can be called a crusader for universal human brotherhood. He considered aiding the establishment of peace among nations as his highest duty. Most of all he was concerned with the relations of the people of the Caucasus' nations – Armenians, Georgians and Azeris. He constantly called them to friendship, to peaceful life. When the Armenian-Turkish massacres started in the Caucasus in 1905-1907 and thousands of peaceful citizens became victims of the blind fanaticism that the nationalist governments waged, Toumanian actively involved himself in writing appeals. He risked his life visiting regions where the slaughter took place, convincing and proving that the bloodshed and hatred were in vain. Sometimes his voice was heard. In one of his letters Toumanian wrote: "Today I am not so satisfied with the fact that I did something in literature, but with the fact that I could bring to peace the nations who rose against one another and could save innocent people from a barbarous slaughter." Toumanian again was in the "thick of things" when WW I started and the unprecedented genocide was waged in Western Armenia. Twice he left for the Caucasian front and dealt with the problem of relocation for thousands of refugees and orphans. On numerous occasions he declared that neither sword nor blood, but principles of reason and justice should be means for conflict resolution among nations. Toumanian himself acted based on these principles in 1918 during the Armenian-Georgian clashes and in 1921 during the civil war (Sovietization) in Armenia. His pacifist mission helped hasten settlement of the conflicts.

Toumanian's humanitarian and literary works call forth for friendship and brotherhood among nations, and the condemnation of wars of annexation. The ballad "A Drop of Honey" is characteristic in this sense. It is based on an Armenian tale from the Middle Ages that tells how a spilled drop of honey caused bloodshed between two people who lived in neighboring villages, and then – between those two villages, and then between states. Toumanian used this fable to react to the most troubling issues of the 20th century. "A Drop of Honey" is an extraordinary satire on pointless and unjust wars that are instigated by belligerent monarchs and "patriotic" demagogues, who speak in the name of God and justice. The poet considered that the establishment of a long-lasting peace in the world should be based on the national outlook on the world, and on its accurate intuition. "The egotism of an office politician and sick nervousness of leaders is alien to nations. People live in nature, merged with it, and they are guided by life experience accumulated during the centuries," - Toumanian wrote in 1919. After a year he added: "And our great comfort is that not the common people, but their leaders are responsible for all these disasters and misfortune. And the faster their rule weakens, the faster the nations will become more conscious, and their contacts with each other – closer. The sooner the power and rights pass to the people, to the workers, the sooner the suffering will decrease, and with time will entirely stop." With this indestructible belief Toumanian waited for new times and welcomed them. Addressing the neighboring nations, he wrote:

*On the periphery of the past years,
The dawn of future days rises!
So let us sing as one
A hymn of splendor for the sunrise!
Let light that song be,
Let it rock the distance –
So that the voice of evil drowns
In all the corners of the world.*

Toumanian considered, that the highest mission of literature is to awaken friendly relations among nations. It is "in literature where the best feelings of a

nation, of its national genius and spirit are mirrored.” According to Toumanian’s beliefs, art is a great force which should help people to achieve perfection and to lead them “towards a high sense of altruism and brotherhood.”

In the fall of 1921, Toumanian went to Constantinople (Istanbul) to find support of Armenian refugees. After months spent there, he returned ill. After surgery in 1922, he started to get better. But in September, Toumanian’s disease started to progress again. Hovhannes Toumanian was hospitalized in Moscow during one of his humanitarian trips. During his illness, his thoughts constantly traveled back to his native land. He had passionately wanted to live long enough to finish all that he had started and to complete his unfinished poems, tales, legends, and stories. It was not to be. He passed away in March 23, 1923 far from his beloved Lori.

Toumanian’s works became a fundamental ingredient in the Armenian nation’s spiritual world. It is difficult to evaluate what influence his magnificent works will have on the further development of Armenian culture. The valuable and genuinely Armenian national literature that has been created during past decades is either directly or in some way related to Toumanian’s traditions. One of the most remarkable Soviet Armenian poets, Yegishe Charents (1897-1937), called Toumanian “the greatest of all the Armenian poets, a patriarch of new Armenian poetry.” Charents dedicated inspirational lines to Toumanian :

*While reading him I came to realize that Lori’s genius son
is a guest – equally welcomed – in conversation at a feast
With Homer, and with Goethe...*

Charents himself owes his literary growth to Toumanian, as do many other Armenian writers who stepped onto the literary path that Toumanian had enlightened with the rays of his genius, like a bright star guiding them throughout their entire literary lives.

Toumanian’s work gave inspiration and inexhaustible material for the Armenian theater stage and musical arts. His works have been staged on numerous occasions in various theatres and portrayed by painters. They inspired Armenian composers who wrote music of different genres based on the motives

of his works – from songs to opera to ballet. Two national operas have been staged based on Toumanian's "Anush" and "The Capture of the Fortress of Tmuk". Armen Tigranian's "Anoush" and Alexander Spendiarian's "Almast" (drawn from "The Capture of the Fortress of Tmuk") have become all time favorites.

"Each poet, first of all, should be the heart of his people," Toumanian wrote. His life's work attests to this virtue. The Armenian people forever carry in their hearts the image of Toumanian and his wise words. In Armenia everyone knows Hovhannes Toumanian, both the youth and the aged; with every new reader Toumanian shares the inexhaustible treasures of his soul and mind. Here in, rests his true immortality.

Works

Toumanian's literary language is simple, natural and poetically inspired in the same time. It is not merely by chance that dozens of phrases and expressions from Toumanian's works have become a natural part of people's everyday language, their sayings, adages, and maxims.

In Armenian circles, Toumanian is usually considered as "All-Armenian poet". He earned this title when the Catholicos of Armenia had ordered that Armenian refugees from the west not enter certain areas of his church and house, since he is considered to be "The Catholicos of all Armenians". Toumanian in response decried that decision claiming that the refugees could seek relief in the Catholicos' quarters under order of "The Poet of all Armenians".

He created lyrics, fables, epic poems and translations into Armenian of Byron, Goethe and Pushkin. Some of Toumanian's most famous works are as following:

Ballads and poems

- *The Dog and the Cat* (1886)
- *Maro* (1887)
- *Akhtamar* (1891)
- *Davit of Sasun* (1902)
- *The Capture of Tmkabert* (1902)
- *A Drop of Honey* (1909)
- *The End of Evil* (1908)
- *The Shah and the Peddler* (1917)
- *My friend Nesso*
- *Gikor*
- *Parvana*

Legacy



Tombstone of Toumanian in the Armenian Pantheon of Tbilisi

The following were named after Toumanian 's honor:

In Armenia

- Toumanian 's native village of Dsegh was renamed “Toumanian” in his honor from 1938-1969.
- The village of Dzagidzor of Lori Province was renamed “Toumanian” in 1951.

- Pedagogical University of Vanadzor
- Armenian State Puppet Theater in Yerevan
- Toumanian Street in central Yerevan
- Toumanian Park in Yerevan's Ajapnyak district



Toumanian's House Museum in Dsegh

Outside Armenia

- *Toumanian Square* (Площадь Туманяна) - in Northern Administrative Okrug of Moscow, Russia.

There are 2 museums of Toumanian in Armenia, one in his birthplace Dsegh and another one in Yerevan. Toumanian's museum in Yerevan was opened in 1953.

In Autumn of 2011, the government of Armenia purchased the house of Toumanian in Tbilisi from its Georgian owner. The keys of that house are currently kept at the Writers Union of Armenia. A museum will presumably establish in this house.



Tumanyan's statue in Dsegh, Armenia

Opera

The following operas and films were adapted from Hovhannes Toumanian 's works.

- *Anush* (1912) by Armen Tigranian, based on *Anush* novel (1902)^[13]
- *Almast* (1930) by Alexander Spendiarian, based on *The Capture of Tmkabert* (1902)

Films

List of films based on works of Toumanian .

- *Gikor* by A. Martirosian; silent (1934)
- *The Master and the Servant* by D. Keosayan; Armenfilm (1962)
- *Akhtamar* by E. Martirosian; Armenfilm (1969)
- *Honor of the Poor* by B. Hovhannisyan, A. Samvelian; Armenfilm (1969)
- *The Fat King* by D. Keosayan; Armenfilm (1969)
- *The Lying Hunter* by Aramayis Sargsian; Armenfilm (1969)
- *Since the Time of Hunger* by E. Martirosian; Armenfilm (1974)
- *Gikor* by S. Israeilian; Armenfilm (1982)
- *A Drop of Honey* by Henric Malian; in Russian; Armenfilm (1982)

Animated films

List of cartoons based on works of Toumanian .

- *A Drop of Honey* by V. Podpomogov (1968)
- *Parvana* by V. Podpomogov (1968)
- *Hunter the Liar* by E. Badalian (1969)

- *The Unlucky Panos* by S. Galstuiian (1980)
- *The Death of Kikos* by Robert Sahakiants (1986)
- *Nazar the Brave* by Robert Sahakiants (1986)

GIKOR

1

There was an argument in the house of a villager named Hambo.

Hambo had decided to take his twelve-year-old son to the city and find him a job, so that he could learn a craft, grow into a man and earn living. But Hambo's wife was not happy with that decision.

"I don't want you to take my poor son to that unjust world",- was crying the wife.

But Hambo didn't listen to her.

It was a quiet morning, a sad one. The family and the neighbors came up to the border of the village, they kissed Gikor goodbye.

Zanni, Gikor's sister was crying while his little brother Galo was yelling from his mother's arms: " Gikol, why are you going away, hey Gikol!".



Gikor often looked back seeing the guys on the village border and his mother who was wiping hers tears with her apron. He sometimes ran along his father and sometimes got ahead of him. After a while, he looked back, he saw the village disappeared behind a hill.

Later on, Gikor got noticeably behind.



Edic Baghdasarian

H. Toumanian-Gikor

“Come along! Dear Gikor, come faster, we are getting closer! – yelled Hambo, as walking with a sack on his shoulder, in which there were some bread, cheese and some tobacco.



In the afternoon, when they were passing by the mountains, the village again appeared among the far haze.

“Hey daddy, that is our home, hey”, showed Gikor with his index finger, but the house was not visible, so they passed.

In the first evening, they happened to be guests at a village. The landlord was Hambo’s old friend.

Water was boiling in a yellow samovar on a table. A young girl was washing the cups and pouring tea. She had a nice red dress on. Gikor decided to buy such a dress for Zanni, When he would earn money in the city.

After having dinner, the landlord and Hambo were talking, while leaning and smoking. They spoke about Gikor. The landlord praised Hambo for the troubles he had taken to put his son on a good job. Then they began talking about war, high price of bread, while Gikor fell asleep, as he was so tired.



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H. Toumanian-Gikor



The next day, they got to the city and went to an old stable keeper in the morning and visited the bazaar in the afternoon.

“Hey pal, are seeking a job for that child?” called a shop owner from inside his store.

“Yes, you are right”, answered Hambo and guided Gikor to the shop.

“Leave him with me, I will hire him”, suggested the shop owner.

He was called Artem the draper.

2



Hambo left Gikor in the city with Artem the draper's house as a servant. Gikor had responsibilities such as cleaning the house, washing the dishes, cleaning the shoes, taking lunch to the shop and do some other works like these, for a one year term.



After one year, the draper was supposed to take him to his store and give him errands to do, as a way for Gikor to progress.

“I won’t pay him salary up to five years”, said the draper while dictating his conditions, “As a matter of fact it is you, who should pay me, as your son will learn this job, because he does not know anything”.

“How could he know anything”, answered Hambo, “If he knew something, why would I bring him here, that’s why I brought him to the town to learn a career”.

“He will learn so well that...The guy by the name of Nicole from your region, who has a shop now, has been a businessman in my store. But he eventually stole a pair of teaspoon and some other things...”

“No dear brother, he will not do such a thing, because, if he does such a thing, I myself will throw him into the Kura river”.

“Oh, so if he is upright, he will progress”.

“My concern is his future, that he can become a gentleman, learn a polite language, writing, reading and have a city social life, good manners, know people, and not to be as wretched and devoid as I am. Of course, he

is a smart boy and has attended our village school and knows reading and writing, he can tell A from Z. But I want to ask you to take care of him, because he is a poor stranger...”

The draper assured Hambo and got out of the store and yelled out “bring tea and bread for these gentlemen...”

3

Both father and son were sitting in the draper Artem’s kitchen. – “Dear Gikor, now you know what to do, let me see what kind of son you become... You should try harder, so that...Oh my God...”, groaned Hambo and filled up his pipe.



Gikor was looking around.

“Daddy, don’t they have a fireplace?”

“No, they have a stove, there, it is the stove...”

“Don’t they have harvest either?”

“These people are townsmen and not villagers to have harvest.”

“So, How do they earn living? Or how do they provide bread.”

“They pay money to buy things to eat. They buy bread, oil, milk, yoghurt, wood, water...”

“Wow...”

“Here is called Tbilisi. You must be clever, you will get to know many things.”

“Do they have a church, daddy?”

“Of course they have. They are Christian Armenians, as we are. You need to be careful, do not touch anything. They may put money on the ground just to test you, don’t take it. If you take it, you must give it to the madam and say “Madam, what money is this? It was on the ground, Sir, I found it here”. Otherwise...”

“Is there a policeman here as well?”

“Don’t you think there is?...Don’t you ever spend uselessly and waste the money you earn. We have lots of needs. Take care of yourself too, don’t you be uncovered at night...try to send letters through visitors...” Hambo was giving some advice to his son, while he took his pipe off his lips, but Gikor was already fallen asleep.

“They will give you crumbs, and stale bread, leftover foods and it can often appear that they will eat without giving you anything, don’t worry, this is quite normal for a servant. These days, these gloomy days will pass on ...”

Father kept talking and giving advices to his son, but Gikor was already asleep.

During the first two days Gikor had seen so many things, and walked around so much, that he was enormously tired.

There were shops full of different fruits, shops with multiple-color clothes, various toys, groups of children who were going to school, noisy morning carriages, lines of camels, vegetable loaded donkeys, many fishmongers with fish buckets on their heads and... the noise and uproars of all these things mixed with each other, made Gikor dizzy. He had got tired and fallen asleep while leaning back his father.

At this time the draper Bazzaz Artem was arguing with his wife; she was grumbling that the boy was skill-less, newcomer from mountains and uncivilized, but her husband was happy to have a servant without pay.

“He will learn, he won’t remain so”, he kept saying to his wife.

“He will learn, my dear, don’t worry”, the draper’s old mother was advising too.

But madam Nato wasn’t convinced. She was cursing on her fate while weeping.

4

Gikor was sitting alone in the draper Artem’s kitchen. He just started his services.

Having a very old hat on his head, old shoes and a worn-out blouse, He was sitting in the kitchen and thinking of why he left his village, where he is and what he should do...



At this moment Mrs. Nato entered.

Gikor was sitting on his seat.

Madam said something. Gikor did not hear properly and did not understand her.

“Am I not speaking to you? Hey you!”

Gikor was embarrassed, sweated. Once he wanted to ask her what she needed, but didn't dare. The hot-tempered lady went out while she was angry.

“Oh, shame on you who are savages and create headache for us... When I order, he does not even make a move and speaks no words...”

“That’s it, I am through”, was thinking Gikor, “ But how soon it came to an end... How bad it ended... Now what should I do...? My father left too...”

While he was thinking every thing was finished and was talking to himself, the queen old woman, the draper’s mother who was wearing a black dress, came in.

“Why don’t you get on foot, when a lady comes in, my dear?”She gave Gikor advices, “You must answer the questions which your are being asked... How can this happen...?”

They called the old woman “deddy”.

The old lady was telling Gikor how to behave, what to do, how to use Samovar, how to clean shoes, how to use a brush and how to wash the dishes...

Everybody at home gave him hard time, except the old lady.

Even “the footboys of the draper’s store” made fun of him and called him “kicky”, pulled his nose, hit on his head, bump his hat.

But all of these were tolerable.

Only the hunger was not tolerable, as he was hungry all the time. In the village, in his home, when he was hungry, he got a piece of bread from the trough and a piece of cheese from the pitcher, and rushed out to play while he was eating, or he put the bread in rim of his blouse and went to the fields, and he ate it under a tree or by a spring whenever he wanted.

And now the situation was different. He had to wait for lunch time, regardless of how hungry he was, but he had to wait for others to finish their lunch, then he was allowed to eat. But lunch time was so late for him that he was about to faint.

After waiting for a while, he started looking around in the kitchen to find something to eat before lunch time.

At the beginning, he ate whatever he could find such as pieces of bread and so on. But afterwards, he decided to look inside the kitchen cupboards. Eventually he learned how to get a piece of half-cooked meat out of the copper pot...

But, if they could find it out...

What a disaster would it become!

If they could notice something...

But what should you do?

Leave it and run away...?

And so, Gikor started thinking about escape.

But, how to escape? Which direction? Alone? When you don't know the way, You don't know anybody... what about his father?

He took trouble to give advice: “It is life, these days will pass, will go away...”.

And the weak voice of Gikor's father was running through his head, giving him advices: “It is life, these days will pass, will go away...”.

5

The bell was rung.

Gikor jumped up. He was told to open the door when the bell was rung, to see who was ringing it and what he wanted. He went to balcony and noticed a gentleman and a few ladies waiting behind the door.

“Who are you, Hey?” Yelled Gikor.

They looked up at the balcony.

The ladies broke into laughter, but the gentleman while fixing his glasses asked a question.

“Is the lady landlord home?”

“What do you do?” Asked Gikor.

The people downstairs continued laughing louder.

“I am asking whether she is home or not. The man got angry.”

“Do you have anything?”

Hearing the noise and yelling, the lady came out of her room.

“Damn you, go, open the door, quickly”. She yelled and started cursing him and her husband. But the guests came in shortly and she welcomed them with a smile.

“Oh, hello, hello, what a surprise! How did you remember me...?”

“Where did you find him?” The man was looking at Gikor, from head to his toes. But the ladies kept on laughing.

Don't be jealous. Do you want him? She said jokingly while the guests were getting inside.



She sent Gikor away and Mrs. Nato entered the room after the guests.

They started chatting and spoke about their story behind the door, that led to a big discussion.

“Oh, I am fed up with him, if you know what troubles I have with him”, was nagging Nato. “I am suggesting to get rid of him, but you know Artem. He says he is a poor boy, a villager child, let him stay, he needs only a piece of bread, he will eat and will learn... But until when, how long should I tolerate it...?”

“Yes, yes. Yes, you don’t need to say anything about the servants”, the lady guests started grumbling.

They talked about different subjects, servants, city news, for half an hour. The same time when these talks were going on, Gikor entered the room.

“Lady, I brought the fruits”.

“All right, you can go, the lady ordered Gikor”, while other ladies kept on laughing.

“Lady! Mr. draper said that cheery is expensive, so there is no need to buy it”.

Some of the guests burst into laughter by hearing it and tried to cover their mouths with napkins, and some of them tried to cover for the lady landowner from embarrassment, so they attested that cherry was really expensive and no one would like to buy it. They kept saying that there were no need for fruits, they did not make that visit for eating, and they did not want to give the lady any trouble.

The lady was embarrassed and her face got red up to her ears, so she tried to find an excuse and make it right.

“He does not understand what he is saying, he is an idiot.”

“Let the liar die:, said Gikor, and that was it.



After saying goodbye to her guests, Mrs. Nato was talking to herself angrily and loudly, while clearing up the table. She was condemning Gikor, her destiny and husband.

“But he is inexperienced, he will learn, why are you losing your temper my dear?...Oh my God, why don’t you take my life”, was whispering and sighing the old mom.

“I wish you could understand what is going on in my mind... He does not have experience, so you go and fix it, I am not your slave”, the bride was grumbling loudly against the old woman and kept acting so, until her husband would come home.

She started crying when she heard her husband stepping in. She raised her voice and hit the dishes against each other.

“I am asking you to get rid of him. I will do the servant’s work, if you want to save money by not hiring qualified servant... It is much better to take over the servant’s responsibilities than suffer every day like this... Are you not my companion...?”

“What has happened?”asked the draper, while standing in the middle of the room.

“What should happen? Only it is remained not done, to be embarrassed before people, but you made it happen. What else is expected to happen?” jumped in the lady and told the story of the cherry.

“Really?”, yelled the draper.

“Oh my God”, was sighing the kind old woman, walking around.

The draper called Gikor. Gikor came in noisily.

“Come close”, said the draper.

Gikor was scared and got petrified in his spot.

“I am telling you to come closer...”

This time Gikor made a move, but still standing in his previous spot.





“Hey, you’ bear-cub, bumpkin, I am telling you to say to the house lady that cherry is expensive, but you say it to the guests!?”

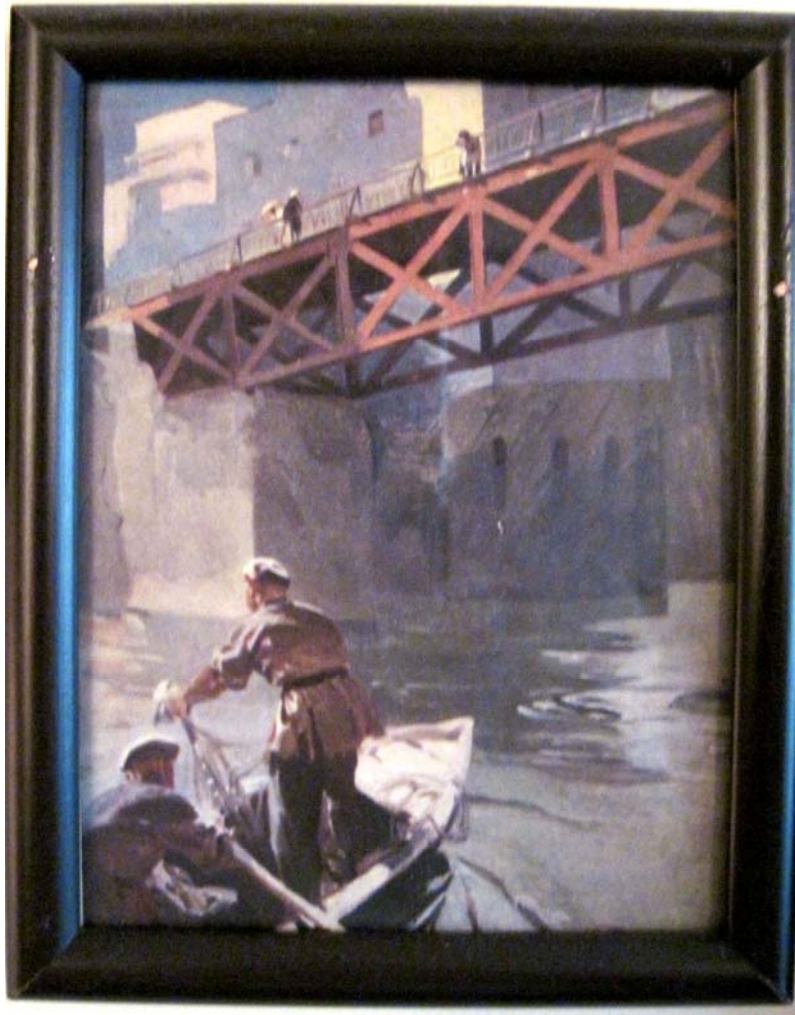
“I...I...house lady”...Gikor was trying to find an excuse, but when trying to say a word, he got a slap, got dizzy a hit his head against the wall and fell down. The draper started kicking him on the floor and kept saying: “Cherry is expensive yes?... Cherry is expensive yes?...”

The old woman tried to interfere and kept her angry son away from the boy, the lady also stepped in, the children also started yelling, finally the draper got away while panting heavily and repeating ”Cherry is expensive yes?...”. Gikor was cornered while his eyes were seemed to be jumping out as he was very scared, he was mumbling and sighing.

“Oh, my dear mom, oh...oh, dear mom, oh...”

7

When they noticed that Gikor was unable to do the servant's job at home, they sent him to the store. He was supposed to help the customers with delivery, also fold cloths, clean up the store, and call the customers to come in, when he did not have anything to do.



Edic Baghdasarian

H. Toumanian-Gikor

Once Gikor was taking food to the store, holding the food container and dragging his worn-out and discolored large shoes on the ground. When he was walking on the bridge, he took a look down the bridge. Kura river roaring, and water was like playing zig-zag and passing under the bridge.

A green boat was sailing close to the riverside. Two people were on the boat, one on them was throwing the net to the water and the other man was controlling the boat.

“Now, he will take out the net”, said Gikor, while he was standing on the bridge and watching the fishermen. The net was taken out empty.

“This one is testing my fortune”, said Gikor when the net was thrown again. But Gikor was not fortunate this time either.

“This one for Zanni”. But this time, again the net was empty.

“This one for Galo’s luck”. Galo was unfortunate as well.

“So this one for...”

But, at that time there was a hue-and-cry close to the gate of caravanserai. A Persian guy was playing a monkey and singing:

*Hey, come, come to the square
Take the stick , hey monkey,
Hump back like an old man,
Dance like a young man, hey monkey.*

The people had gathered around him and were running around. Gikor rushed to the square as well. He tried to pass through the gathered people to watch the scene, but he couldn’t. So he stretched his neck, stood on his toes so that he could watch the monkey.

“Why are you pushing, hey you ...”, said a man and bumped on his head.

Gikor came to himself at once and started running towards the store.



In the evening, Gikor was sitting at a corner in the kitchen. The tears on his face did not get dry yet, and his face was still burning because of the draper's slaps. Lady's yelling was just stopped when Vasso, the draper's helper came in while he was whistling. When he suddenly noticed Gikor in the kitchen, changed his funny face and got a serious gesture and threateningly asked:

“Did you get late from the club, hey you bumpkin, or maybe you had an urgent work with the governor!?”

Gikor did not try to look up.

“Hey, say a word, you...” Gikor was silent.

“Didn't you know? Where have you been? You kept me hungry today. I could die of hunger...”

He kept on talking and approaching Gikor, and suddenly bumped on his head. Gikor supported his head by his two hands and stuck against the wall. Vasso was trying to hit Gikor in a different angle, when footsteps of the draper were heard. He was approaching.

“You will see, how he will punish you”, threatened Vasso.

Gikor was thinking: “They will kill me now”. He was so scared.

The draper had beaten him more than enough, so this time, he ordered not to provide Gikor with food, so that he could understand the meaning of hunger.

The immediate danger was passed.

Gikor got some rest, even though he could hear the house lady's yelling : "Why are you keeping this bumpkin here, throw him out, get rid of him..."



Gikor slid under the blanket, hid his head quietly.

Vasso was eating his supper and singing:

*"It is moonlight, I have no sleep
Those who see me, think
I have no home
Oh I have no home..."*

Gikor once in while took his head out of the blanket and looked at him secretly. He had not eaten anything that day, was beaten and cried, and now was lying down hungry and could not sleep.

"Hey, how are you, can't you sleep hungry? Yes it is so", noticed Vasso and he gave a piece of bread and cheese to Gikor., "Take this and eat it under the blanket, so that the draper will not know ."

Gikor grabbed the bread and cheese, hid his head under the blanket. He was eating in secret and thinking. He was thinking about his home in the village, about those glorious days when he played on the fields freely and ate food as much as he would have liked. He remembered his parents fighting about sending him to the city... his mother was crying, she didn't want it to happen...

“Oh my dear mom, your heart knew it very well”, was sighing Gikor under the blanket while eating bread and cheese, and careful about draper, in case he would come in.

And in the morning he was standing in front of the store.

10

Gikor was standing at the store entrance and calling for new customers and propagandizing the goods of the store:

“Hey yell out, why are you silent? Can’t you open your mouth?”

“Please come on in, welcome here...” was calling Gikor.

They were laughing at him inside the store.

They trained him to attract the customers to come in and make purchases. He often grabbed the passerbys’ clothes and dragged them toward the store rudely and persistently. He did not get off of them until they lost their temper. Then he came to his spot and kept on calling.

During hot summer days, after standing long hours at the entrance, he got exhausted, so he fell asleep while sitting on the cloths rolls on front of the store.

At this time naughty friends or neighbors would tease him, holding tobacco under his nose.

He would sneeze and jump up suddenly.

Hot day sleepy merchants having fun by seeing it. And after having a full laughter the draper used to yell:

“Are are sleeping, hey you bumpkin, call the customers...”

“Please come on in, welcome here...” was calling Gikor.

1 1

One day when Gikor was calling for customers, two villagers appeared. He suddenly ran and hugged them.

“Hey boy, could you recognize him?”, yelled one on the villagers.



“What about you, could you recognize?”

“I could recognize from his eyes”, proudly said his friend. Gikor has really changed, got very skinny. He had changed, also his clothes were different. It was difficult to recognize him.

“Oh, you see he has become a real gentleman. Look at his wearing, his manners...” the villagers were surprised.

“Look what Hambo has done! How he brought up his son to this level, while our sons are grazing pigs ...”

But Gikor was asking questions one after the other:

“How is my mom...How are the children?... Why didn't my daddy come...? Has our cow given birth...? Who has died in our village?...”

“Everybody is alright, they are saying hi”, answered the villagers., only Lukas Souknian and the old Pouchourian died, but the rest are alright.

“Why didn't my dad come?”

“Your daddy is willing to come, but how? He is a lonely man who is responsible for the whole burden of the house.”

“Haven't they sent me anything?...”

“Do they have anything to send? You know it very well. This year they were short of bread, your poor father had a very hard time to deal with the situation. What do you want from them? You need to send them, if you have anything. They need money, they are broke.”

“Hasn't anybody in our house got sick?”

“No, but your “Flower” cow fell down and died.”

“Flower died?...”



“Poor man cried so much that his eyes got swollen.”

By saying this, one of the villagers took a letter out of his pocket and gave it to Gikor and said:

“What do you say now? You will not see us , we are going, if you have something for your sister, we can take it.”

“How can I send something? I don’t get paid yet...but...”

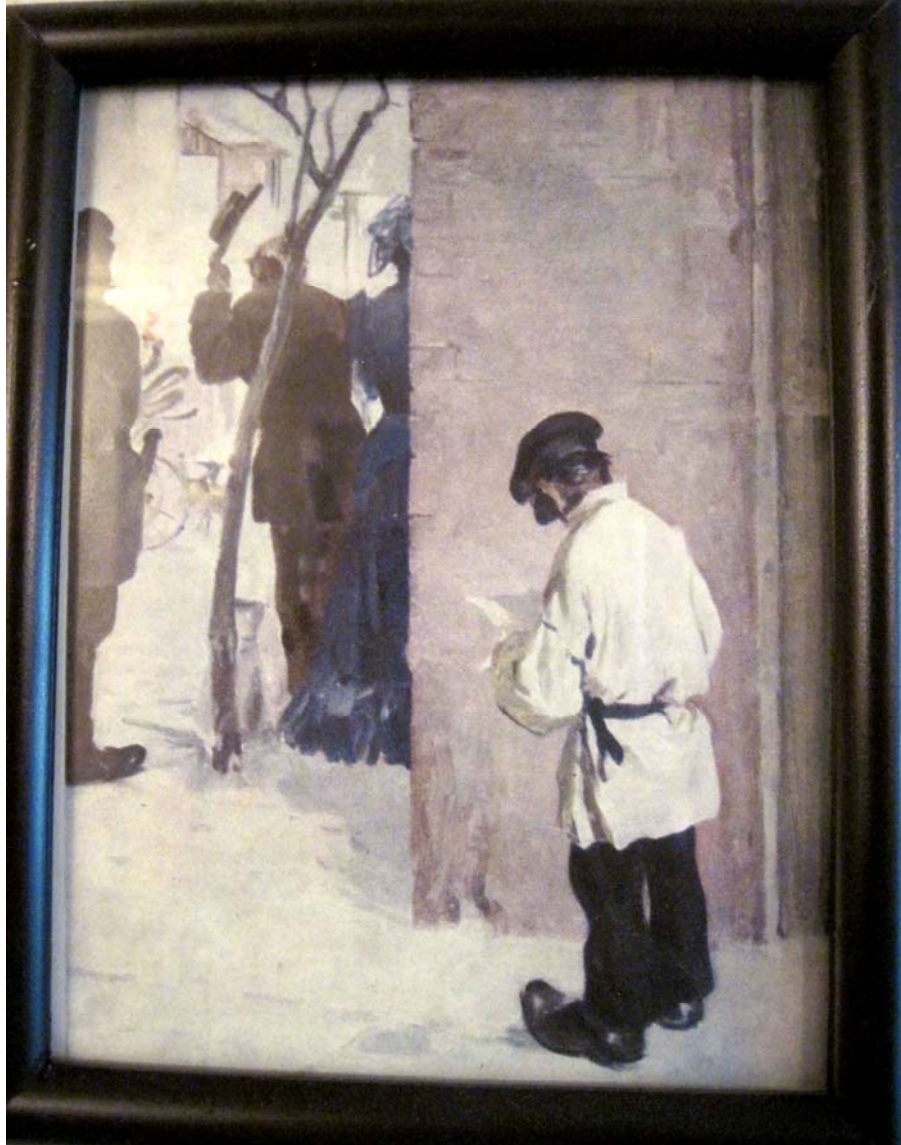
“But what?...”

“I want to come with you. I have missed both my village and my family, also...”

“Oh, oh, we thought you have become a gentleman, got wisdom...how could you say something like that? Here, you are living as a lord, new clothes, clean feet and hands... We were thinking to bring our children too, so you could help them establish, but you are saying this? Have you lost your mind?”

The villagers reproached and gave him some advice, said goodbye and left.

After they left, Gikor opened his father's letter:



“My dear son, dear Gikor,
City of Tbilisi,

Edic Baghdasarian

H. Toumanian-Gikor

We are well, We only wish you are well too. Everybody is saying hello, daddy, mommy, Zanni, Mosi, Mikich, Galo. Our dear son Gikor, You need to know that we are in difficulty, expenses are high and we can not earn money. Mom and Zanni don't have dress and our place is too small. Dear Gikor send us some money and a letter about your situation. You also need to know that "Flower" died, and mom and Zanni are deprived of dress".

Gikor read the letter. He was thinking about his home and was suffering in his heart. The word in the letter were burning his heart.

"Mom and Zanni don't have dress... our place is too small..."

"Hey why don't you call? Did you lose your mind", somebody yelled from inside the store.

"Please come here, welcome here..." was calling Gikor at the door.

12



Winter came, the sleet blew with a cold noise over the city. It ran and whistled on the streets. Chilly wind would penetrate into the clothes., looking for stranger orphans.

And now it could find Gikor.

He had a thin blouse on, standing at the store entrance and calling:

“Please come here, welcome here...”

That was it! The malevolent cold wind like invisible sword hit his bones and passed by. Gikor shivered.

He was so weak, even without all these things. And that wind strike was enough for putting him in the bed.

13



Gikor was sick and lying down in Artem the draper's kitchen. Draper's old mother gave him few visits everyday. She talked to herself:

"What do you need, my son, Gikor?"

"Water..."

The old woman gave him water. The sick boy would take it with his shivering hands, would drink it insatiably and ask for more.

"This is not cooling my heart, granny!... I want cold water from our spring, granny... I am going home... I want my mom..."

Draper Artem got into trouble. He searched and found someone from his village and through him sent a message to Hambo, in order to come, in the same time he transferred Gikor to the city hospital.

There were many patients out there, lying in rows. They were sighing sadly, and looking at the ceiling.

They put Gikor among them.

His father could find him there.



“What has happened to you, dear Gikor”, Hambo was crying bitterly.

Gikor had fever, so he did not notice his father’s arrival.

“Dear Gikor, I have come, I am here, dear Gikor...I am your daddy...”

The Patient could not recognize anything. He was raving, and calling: "Mikich, Zanni, daddy, mommy...".

"I am here, my dear Gikor, mommy has asked me to take you home...Don't you want to come?...Mikich and Zanni are standing in the roof and waiting for you. What would you say? Please say something, my dear Gikor..."

"Please come here, welcome here..." called the patient, whispering nonsense words. He was talking and laughing in high fever.

14

After two days, Hambo was returning to his village.

He had buried Gikor and was going home, holding his clothes in his arms so that his mother could mourn over them. They could find a handful of shining buttons, colored papers, pieces of cloths and a few pins in Gikor's pockets, perhaps he had gathered them for his sister Zanni...

Hambo was walking and thinking. It was not long ago, when he had passed the same road with Gikor toward the city. And it was out there, where he said:

"Daddy, my feet hurt..."

And now that tree, under which they got a rest...where he said:

"Daddy, I am thirsty..."

And it was that spring, where they drank water...

Everything is there, except him...

Next day, when Hambo was passing by the mountains, their village appeared at once.

There, out of the village were waiting, Zanni, Mikich, Mosi, and little Galo was calling from his mother's arms:

“Come back!, come back! hey Gikol...”

1895

The end

List of Published Books of Edic Baghdasarian on the Armenian Culture

Էդիկ Բաղդասարյանի (Էդ. Գերմանիկ) հրատարակված
Հայագիտական աշխատությունները

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