I am leafing through my travel notes and between the pages I find two leaves of marjoram, dry and gray like extinguished ash. I lean over the page and my nostrils flare at the scent of marjoram and I leaf the journal treulously... Then I take the whip, which is tight as a braid, off the wall. I stroke the whip and Tsolak looks at me with sagacious eyes. It looks at me and reproaches me. Why did you flog me? The whip turns into a black snake that sucked the smooth flank of the horse.

Farther up the road, on the slope of the hill, someone is watering dark green alfalfa. I listen to the way the heavy shovel clangs against the sand in the stream. And whenever he raises his shovel, the sun illuminates it and it looks as if there is a burning torch on the waterer’s shoulder.

‘Is this the road to Dzyanberd?’

The waterer neither lets out a ‘yes’ nor a ‘no.’ I repeat my question. The man plants the shovel in the sand of the stream and walks over to me. The closer he comes, the taller he looks. I look at his bare chest: it looks as if his voice should boom mightily.
The waterer extends his broad and heavy hand toward me, says 'bless you,' and moves his hand to his forehead.

His voice is not at all mighty. On the contrary, it is light and sweet. He is an old man: not only are his beard and eyebrows white, but so is his chest hair, which reminds one of a tousled thicket.

I repeat my question.

'Yes,' he says, 'it's our village... Turn over there...' and he takes a tobacco pouch out of his pocket. I offer him a cigarette. He smiles, as if to say that the thin cigarette is too fragile for him, but takes it anyway and slides it behind his ear. Then he rolls a thick 'smoke' the size of his finger.

'Is the alfalfa yours?'

He sucks on the smoke with relish and swells up his chest. His lungs squeak like dry leather. As he lets out a stream of smoke through his nostrils and mouth, he nods.

'A respectable chairman brought it last year. It's a sweet plant. Its seed (wheat) is also ours,' and with his head he points to the rocky mountain slope where tiny wheat fields give off a green color. I'm having a hard time discerning his field, but I know that the waterer can recognize even the red dots on his field from a distance.

'Our luck is tied to watering... Our fields are spread out. Ah, instead of bread we ate a lot of blood. Now that we sow seeds, the seeds grow, and we can live again.'

A sack with straws hangs from his shoulders. What does he need straw for at this time of year? And why is the sack hanging from his shoulders?

He tells me that he is the village waterer and that it is he who distributes stream water to the small and dispersed strips of land at night.

'What about the straw?'

The straw serves as a water meter. The waterer sprinkles the golden straw on the stream to measure the speed of the current and the volume of water.
We entered the courtyard with a white ox. The ox moved to the only door, above which dirt was pasted and, on the dirt, a cross made of painted eggshells. The ox went inside through the only door and we followed it. We walked through the dark passageway. A door opened to the left and the ox disappeared in the dark. Following the ox was my exhausted horse, which longed for the clean air of the mountains, but was unwillingly inhaling the pungent stench of the barn.

Then a door to the right of the passageway sang with the same tune and, in the light, through the smoke, a girl with golden tresses appeared: Azno, the daughter of my old acquaintance with whom my horse and I were to stay the night.

Azno, Azniv...[1] When I now browse through my travel notes in my journal, between whose pages I find dried flowers and marjoram leaves, I take a long, long look at the wings of the field butterfly, whose golden dust shines like that day when the butterfly sucked on the reed flowers in the meadow. On the wing of the little butterfly I read 'Azno'... And I think that Azno goes to school now and no longer sings with a high-pitched voice from the rooftops:

"Like the moon from behind a cloud
You fetch water with a pair of jugs."

And no longer will she respond in the way that she did on that day when we were sit-
Azno, have you ever seen a movie?

'Sure I have. A cloth was hung on the wall, it showed a horse, a girl, a miss, and a potato.'

'Have you heard of the Red Army?'

'The Red Army is a piece of cloth that has been put over the flag.'

'Azno, is there a god?'

'Of course. God is a green sparrow.'

'Then what about heaven?'

'Heaven is a chain tied around the horns of an ox.'

'Azno, what do you want to be when you grow up?'

'A teacher.'

Azno, Azniv...

Fire was rising from the deep fireplace, the air was walling through the chimney, and it seemed as if the ground was walling under the might of the fire, under the puffs of black smoke that twirled around the fiery walls and stretched all the way toward the cold stars of the mountainous sky.

My old acquaintance was sitting by the fire and telling about the fire and the waterer, about the rocky soil and the fields.

'What happened, happened, and passed. We turned into bulls and locked horns with each other. Black rain poured down and blood flowed in streams. We freed our steel collar from the land of Motkana, from our Talvorik grounds. Pain and suffering, day and night, naked, hungry, bare. Lenin gave us freedom. Only the border of our lands is too close and that bothers the people. There are rocks and cliffs on the borders of our lands. The rocks bother the people. Our souls belong to the government, and so do our bodies...'

He hoped that the lands of the inhabitants of Dzyanberd would be expanded, that the rocks and cliffs would be covered in green, and that they would be able to build reservoirs and mountain lakes on the mountain-top under the ice sheets so that the ice water
There is only one man in Dzyanberd before

My acquaintance told me such things about the highlanders that even now, when I leaf through my journal, my heart fills with sorrow and rancor. His generation has seen fire, war, massacre, migration. When they were driven to the south, they were battered from both the south and the north. A forest was ablaze, and they, like a flock of deer, hewed their way with horns through burning trees. They were driven to the west and then they turned the heads of their horses toward the north and settled on this high mountain.

He said that the two sides in the village, 'thin' and 'thick,' were reconciling little by little and a new generation was coming into existence that neither considered itself from Motkana, nor Talvorik, but from Dzyanberd. And when the elderly are by themselves, they remember their valleys and plains, where grass grew so high that it touched the cow's udders and so high that cows would give birth to calves in the middle of the grass, and it was only by following the trace of the cow that one could find the calf sitting in the grass.

'Yesterday was cloudy. Today is bright and sunny...'

My acquaintance told me that some of the members of the older generation refused to till the land of Dzyanberd, because Turks are buried on its borders. For many years already they have descended to the field villages from the mountains carrying their deceased on their shoulders in order to bury them within the walls of the old monastery. He told me that I would see a lot of crosses in Dzyanberd: above doors, hanging from the horns of oxen, on clay jugs, around the edge of fireplaces, and even on the chests of those mounted animals that are set up in fields to scare away sparrows. He also told me about mute Sevdon, who lives in Dzyanberd, puts on his fuzzy shoes, or 'kharuk' as they are called in the land of Motkana, and who 'has nailed a horseshoe over his mouth' and does not speak to those who are not from Motkana.
Nar his rooftop, I was looking at Dzyanberd and at the Ararat plain, where the verdant villages were slowly submerging in the darkness of the evening as city lights became brighter.

Whenever I remember that evening, the city lights, and the descending night on the plain, I see a man on a lower rooftop in Dzyanberd, his back toward me, toward the summit of the mountain, facing the plain, and I hear the best man-made music of the mountain villages.

His homeland had been rocky Sasun, that silent country's most silent corner, where the valleys become gorges and the peaks of mountains, cliffs. In the hot gorges, on the banks of mountain streams, the wild grape grew and its vine crept over the copper-colored cliffs. Wild cornel also grew, and sometimes even figs. And on the heights, where their poor hovels were scattered over the cliffs, they sowed millet and young wheat. When the millet had grown, beasts would ascend the valleys. The people lit bonfires on the edge of the fields so that bears would not destroy the millet.

He had played on those cliffs as a child. Like a faun, that young man played a flute in the shade of those caves and his simple songs echoed through the valleys. Sometimes it
was hail that crushed him, sometimes it was rocks that scorched his chest like they had the mountain slope. He fought against beasts and against those who drove cattle, sheep, kidnapped women and children by firing guns.

It seemed as though he would live on those cliffs until he died and, like his ancestors, sow millet, descend to the valley in the autumn, gather fruit and firewood, and listen to old stories in the winter about Vocal Ohan, Egyptian Melik, and Tongue-Tied Manuk.

But war broke out. There was conscription and violence. The field villages were burned down and the arsonists ascended the valleys to the peaks of mountains and to their poor hovels. Rifles rattled and swords glistened. Instead of clouds, the smoke of blazing villages perched on the cliffs. The fire reached the yellowed fields and guzzled both seed and sower.

Hazro took his wife and daughter and walked from mountain to mountain and cave to cave through crevices and over chamois tracks. He ate legumes, haws, and rosehip. Then, exhausted, with terror in his eyes, he turned south, acting sometimes as a Kurdish shepherd and sometimes as a hungry wolf. Finally he reached an unfamiliar world where there was neither mountain, nor clear mountain springs. It was a hot lowland with yellow rivers in whose waters those blue streamlets that flow down from the ice of mountains were not visible.

He took out his apricot flute - that reddish fife, on which the songs of the blue mountains had been played - and his fingers started to move over the apricot flute. Hazro enveloped the flute’s mouthpiece with his sunburned lips in the same way that people in the mountain villages drink water from clay pitchers. His music, a song from the highlands, gurgled like water on the hot lowland.

His wife cried. His young daughter fell asleep on her mother’s knees, and Hazro also cried. Then a sense of lightness drifted into his heart, just like the blue cloud that per-

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There are four little girls and one boy there. A tall man is keeping them busy. The girls attack the small boy. The boy pushes them and they mingle and roll about on the rooftop. The man laughs boisterously. The conversation of the others quiets down and the fiery eyes of the highlanders look at the children’s fight. One of the girls screams in pain and runs toward one of them sitting on the rooftop - in this case, her father’s lap. Her father laughs:

'But of course, my girl, it’s fighting and beating.'

The tall man separates the others and picks up the boy who fought like a cub against three girls his age.

'Dear me, enough,' the man says. But the boy continues to kick in the man’s grip as if he is about to jump on the dismayed girls.
Someone orders the girls to go home and they descend the wooden staircase. Silence falls. Only the tall man with the boisterous laugh soothes the boy:

'Dear me, it wasn't only the girls' fault, was it?'
'I didn't hit her until she started hitting me,' the boy protests.

'Hazro,' someone sitting in the shade calls out, 'play!'
So, this tall man is Hazro about whom my old acquaintance has told me so much.

'Mother-in-law, Mother-in-law...'
'Beloved Hustle...'
The boy quickly jumps off his lap and runs down. Hazro approaches me and extends his hand.

'Pleased to meet you.'
He has a broad forehead that has a copper shine in the moonlight, white hair, and a curved aquiline nose. His eyes sparkle with youthful vigor.

'Will you play?' He looks at the others.
I will never, never, forget that moonlit night in that mountain village, Hazro's rooftop, his music, and the giants' old dance.

The boy brought the fife from home - that apricot flute that was only a little longer than the usual fife of our shepherds. He stood on the edge of the rooftop, turned the flute's mouthpiece toward the village, and little by little, like sunrise in the mountains, 'Beloved Hustle' awoke. He began slowly and softly. Gradually the volume grew louder and the beat hit faster. Then, with a savage yelp, the waterer jumped up and stood in the middle of the rooftop. Another man followed suit and so did a third. Soon two rows were formed that stuck against each other like colossal cliffs with hands, knees, and chests. The music thuds louder. The beams of the rooftop shake. It's as if two ar-
They left.

Hazro and I stayed on the rooftop. The little boy, his grandson, also went home. I observed his reddish flute in the moonlight. It was heavy and looked as if it had been forged from heavy metal. I held the flute against the night breeze and it made a soft metallic sound.

And Hazro was telling that the biggest blow he had received in his life was the death of his wife. His daughter got married in the field village. The little boy, his first grandson, often stays with his grandfather.

The Ararat plain had sprawled under the stars and the moon. The reflections of the snowy white peaks of the Ararat cast their light into the depth of the sky. In the distance, the Armenian mountain range had stretched out like a camel caravan.

'Do you see that village on the left side of the fires?'

On the left side of the shepherds’ fires, in the field, a black dot was visible.

'My wife is buried there.'

Sometimes he goes down from the mountain village, takes dry firewood, and lights a fire at the head of his wife’s grave. He sits
The exhausted people are sleeping and the city houses and their black windows sway in the light of the street lanterns. A freshness descends from the mountains onto the city and the night breeze brings with it the fra-

'Hazro, did you live well in your village?'

'On our cliffs?' and he falls silent.

'Oh, dear youth, how you flew away...' And again he picks up his flute.

This time he plays not the song of the highlanders' courage that makes one's blood boil, but a distinct shepherd's song. There is both melancholy in that song, as if someone has gotten lost in deep valleys and is sobbing sadly, and spirited happiness, as when the sun shines on the mountains, smoke rises, and the farmer goes to work. Finally, it has strains of both homesickness and of return and final hopes.

'I would like to see our rocks, our valleys, our high Maruta mountain again; to take my apricot flute, gather the people, sit on the sweet grass, let the lamblike people sit around me, play those peaceful songs of mine, for the good and loving people to embrace each other like brothers, for there to be neither master, nor servant, nor sword, nor violence; to blow in my apricot flute, for smoke to rise out of chimneys again, to drink from our clear springs, for my sweat to drop on our rocks, for our high mountain cloud to lick my white bones...'

'And, Hazro, to whom will you give your apricot flute?'

'I'll give my flute to my brave grandson.'
grance of marjoram, the crisp air of the mountains, and the sound of clear water.

I close my journal with its two marjoram leaves, dry and gray like extinguished ash. My horse neighs on the mountains with unrestrained bliss, like a white waterfall that falls from the heights, slashing fields with a crash, merging with a turbid river, and flowing to a shoreless sea with other waters.

Dzyanberd, Dzyanberd...

You become an indestructible fortress. The peaks of your high mountains have awoken and the songs of victory reverberate on your slopes.

A mighty apricot flute, without old fears and with new revelry, gives voice to our fair songs.

1933

[1] Azniv is a person's first name, but it also means honest.

* AKSEL BAKUNTS (Alexander Stepani Tevosyan), born in Goris in 1899, was a writer, journalist, and agronomist. In the early days of the Soviet Union, he traveled around Armenia as an agronomist and journalist writing short stories that reflected the condition of the people at that time. One of the greater themes that runs through much of his writings is that of the hapless villager caught between powers beyond his or her control. Like many of his contemporaries, Bakunts was arrested and executed by the Stalinist regime in 1937. His works were banned in Soviet Armenia until the 1960s.

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