Abdulla Kahhor

Pomegranate

The houses are full of bread, but my child is hungry,

The waterways are full of water, but my child is thirsty.

A saying from the past

As Turobjon [1] was coming hurriedly through the door, the sleeve of his kalami [2] robe caught on safety chain. It tore up to his elbow. He sat down. His wife was grinding corn. When she saw him with a small bundle in his hands she left the pestle in the mortar and ran up to him. The mortar rocked slightly and fell. The unfinished corn spilled on the ground.

Turobjon flirted with her as he hid the bundle behind his back.

— Call me brother[3]!

— Brother, my dear brother!

— What will you give me?

— Half of my life!

Turobjon gave the bundle to his wife. She sat and opened the bundle right there, at the door. Suddenly her happiness disappeared; she raised her head and looked at her husband. Turobjon had put on airs because of his good work. Now he saw tears in her eyes.

— Do you know what this is?—he asked.—this is a vespiary! It's all honey! Look! If you squeeze it the honey flows out. It's paraffin and it's clean and fresh. You can suck or chew it.

His wife's eyes became hard, looking at one spot.

— Oh my god! Why don't you believe me? Take it, chew it! Chew it! If it's not tasty then you can tell me…—he said, fumbling in the bundle.

Turobjon got red in the face. He was in a state of confusion. Once he had felt such confusion when he'd brought a watermelon to his friend's house. Later he saw the watermelon in the crib of that family's cow. Maybe the watermelon had been tasteless.

A lame cat which was wandering through the courtyard went over to the spilled corn and smelled it. Apparently, it did not like the corn, and looking at Turobjon it mewed mournfully.

— Stand up! Pick up your corn. Look! The cat's touched it.

As she was standing up, she cried loudly.

— What kind of misfortune is this child? Why do I crave pomegranate? Why don't I crave for salt or soil?

Turobjon took his skullcap from his head. When he was about to beat the dust out of it he saw his torn elbow. He felt bad about it. The robe had been washed only three or four times. It was new.

— I know what it is, the craving of a pregnant woman. But let it be a craving for what is possible! Crave for something within measure!—he put on his skullcap. — Pomegranates… pomegranates! A pound of pomegranate is expensive. Every day I rise with the sun, carry water, split wood, set the fire --and I get eighteen kopecks in a month! To make matters worse, I don't have any brothers.

The husband and wife stalled.

The wife finished pounding the corn. When she was pouring it into a basin she grumbled:

— Evidently, you are thinking that I'm asking for pomegranates for my own selfish interests, aren't you?

— I know you aren't. But what should I do? Should I kill my boss and steal his money? Or should I leave myself as a deposit? I hope that you are not an odd fish.

The wife began to prepare the food. "Crave for something in measure!" Her husband's words hurt her. Tears came to her eyes.

The food was ready. The Goja [4] was dark from the cauldron's rust. Even sour milk could not change its color. Turobjon ate two helpings of goja. The wife was still eating the first one. While looking at her hesitance, for some reason Turobjon remembered the lame cat. The cat reminded him of his torn elbow. It put him in a bad mood. "Pitiful corn, pitiful sour milk, pitiful wood!" As if reading her husband's thoughts the wife reluctantly ate up the food. But as soon as she finished eating she went behind the house. She came back with reddened eyes, her temporal veins visible.

— You called the unborn child a misfortune, didn't you? — He was flying more and more into a passion.

The wife silently cleared off the table.

— You could have gotten a pomegranate instead of the vespiary, couldn't you?— she asked in a low voice, pouring water into the cauldron.

— Yes, I could have!—Turobjon said sarcastically. — But I bought honey instead of a pomegranate.

— Sure, you could have! Of course, so you've bought this honey instead of a pomegranate.

At times like this the tongue stalls in the mouth. It cannot move. If it moves it does what the feast does.

— What I did was good!—Turobjon said in a frenzy of rage. — May your liver ache! Only a pregnant woman can understand how this damnation affected the wife. Turobjon said it, and then looking at wife's condition he became quiet. If his pride had allowed it he would have embraced her and said sweet words.

— You exasperate me!—he said after a while. — So what if I bought honey? Even the rich are reluctant to buy honey! And we are the poor! One of my boss's friend's gave him the honey. Without noticing… I asked him if I could take some honey. He gave it to me. It's dainty thing. I thought it would make you happy. Or is it not dainty? How many times have you eaten honey in your life? I've eaten it once. When Shokirhoja[5] the candy-maker was preparing honey syrup and some of my aunt's chicken fell in it. I took out the chicken and licked it.

Turobjon’s words sounded to his wife like pointless mumbling. They had been married for three years and during this time her husband had done nothing but mumble. This mumble was a continuation of those mumbles. For some reason today he said one phrase clearly: “May your liver ache!” Her husband was only person she had to lean on. And the pomegranate was her only dream. Now she had lost both of them at the same time.

The wife went into the house. After some time a dim light penetrated through the small door. Turobjon went in too. His wife was sitting by the small door resting her head on her knees. She was watching the dark grey sky through the small door. Turobjon held himself upright. On the shelf the fifth lamp was flickering. A big night moth was flying around the lamp. Turobjon also sat down by the door. Then some part of the ceiling crunched. Somewhere a lizard chirred. There was a ringing in Turobjon’s ears. He also looked at the sky and watched the dim stars. Behind the black poplar by the mosque a reddish fire arose and drew a fiery track in the sky. The fire flew high and bumping against the sky broke up into smithereens with a loud noise.

— These are fireworks. — Turobjon said. — They’re being let off at Mullajon[6] cadi’s orchard. Mullajon cadi is holding a beshik toy[7].

The wife kept silent.

— The city lords are also attending the festival. — Turibjon said.

The wife again kept silent. She had never seen Mulajon cadi’s orchard. But she had heard of its fame. She tried to imagine this orchard. It was not just an orchard, it was a pomegranate orchard. Pomegranate plants full of pomegranates. So big, you can’t even hold one in your hand.

— A firework costs three miris[8].—Turobjon said. — If they let off a hundred fireworks it’ll cost more than a hundred miris.

The husband and wife lapsed into silence for a long time. Opening his mouth widely Turobjon yawned and gave a deep sigh.

— Take and sew it.—he took off his light robe and gave it to her.

The wife took the robe and put it to the side. Apparently she was not going to sew it immediately.

— Be quick, — Turobjon said after a while. — take it. I'm talking to you!

— Why are you talking to me like that? Don't push me … I'll sew it. Why are you trying to rush me?

Turobjon's hair stood on end.

— Hey! Who do you think you're talking to with that capricious attitude? So what can you say?

— Am I saying anything unnecessary? I'll sew it.

— If every problem breaks the family peace, it will be difficult to manage. — Turobjon said, putting on the robe. Poverty…

— Let poverty die!

The wife said it as a complaint. But the husband took it as a reproach.

— What did you say? Did I hide my poverty when I got married to you? You knew my condition, didn't you? Or did I go into the chimildik[9] wearing somebody else's robe or boots as Erkaboy[10] did? Did I hide my poorness? If you've still got this kind of unfulfilled dream go and marry some rich man!

— You are giving your wife to a rich man for a pomegranate. Shame on you!

This sentence touched his sense of his honor. It hurt his heart as mercilessly as his damnation had hurt the wife's soul.

— Hey you! Haven't I ever brought you a pomegranate? I've never brought you one, is that right?—he asked softly. But behind this softness there was a treat.

— No! –the wife answered suddenly.

Tuobjon's head was foggy and everything went dark before his eyes.

— The who brought that pomegranate last week? Did your lover bring it?

— Yes! My lover brought it!

In a jiffy he saw himself at the obrez[11]. He didn't know whether he stood up after kicking his wife on the shoulder or whether he kicked her after standing up. He didn't know how he got here. His wife was pale as a ghost. Opening her eyes widely she was staring at him with a fearful look.

— Don’t do it… stop it…— she was whispering, rocking her head.

Turobjon left the house. After a while the street door was opened and closed.

The wife cried for a long time. She regretted her sharp words. She cursed herself and wished she were dead. She got tired of crying and went out. It was dark. In the far and near the dogs were barking. Opening the street door she glanced here and there. There was nobody around. There was only a flashing light by the guzar—center of the village or society (**translator’s note**). The tea rooms were closed. She went back inside.

A hen gave a cry behind the roof. The street door opened. When she turned around she saw Turobjon there with a big bundle. He put the bundle down in the centre of the house. A shawl full of pomegranates fell out every which way. Some of them fell in the obrez. Turobjon looked at his wife. He was white as a sheet. The wife was scared. Turobjon sat and put his forehead in his hands. The wife hurriedly came over and put her hand on his shoulder.

— Where did you go? What did you do there? — She asked breathlessly.

Turobjon did not answer. His body was trembling.

1936.

Translated by Shuhrat Sattorov

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[1] **Turobjon** - is a man’s name.

[2] **Kalami** - cotton fabric

[3] **Call me brother** - wives call their husbands “brother”. This is the sign of respect.

[4] **Goja** - a food is made from white durra.

[5] **Shokirkhoja** - is a man’s name.

[6] **Mullajon** - is a man’s name.

[7] **Beshik toy** - a festival in connection with the birth of a new baby. According to this tradition the man whose son or daughter has become a father or mother brings a

cradle to the house where baby was born. In the Uzbek language “beshik” means cradle and “toy” means festival.

[8] **Miri** - a currency that was used in the past. A miri was 5 kopecks.

[9] **Chimildik** - a corner which is shut with a wide white cloth. Traditionally the bride and groom spend their wedding night behind this cloth.

[10] **Erkaboy** - is a man’s name.

[11] **Obrez** - a roofed well in the room. Ablution or washing water flows through it.