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*Adil Keishibayev
Zhanar Orazbekova*

Path of the Healer

*Returning to Yourself.
Serving the World.
A Story That Can Change
Your Life*

Adil Koishibayev

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to Yourself. Serving the World.
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«Издательские решения»

Koishibayev A.

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Path of the Healer is the true story of Zhanar — a woman who survived violence, loss, and betrayal, only to discover she carried an extraordinary healing gift passed down through her ancestral line. Born in the Kazakh steppe, she journeyed through the chaos of the post-Soviet years toward spiritual awakening — guided by dreams, visions, and forces beyond explanation. A story about finding purpose on the other side of pain.

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Path of the Healer

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Review of Path of the Healer

Reading this book was a genuine privilege.

Despite a demanding schedule, I found myself returning to it daily — sometimes for just a few pages — yet even in the spaces between reading, it never truly left me. The story lingered: in quiet moments, in the middle of ordinary days, in the way I began to see the world around me.

This is not a book you simply read. It is a book you carry.

From the first pages, it draws you into something rare — an intimate, unhurried space where you are not merely following a story, but living through one. The heroine's pain is rendered with such honesty that it becomes something larger than her own: it touches something universal, something most of us have felt but rarely had words for. There were moments when my body responded before my mind did — a quiet trembling, the sudden rise of goosebumps — as though the prose was reaching somewhere beneath the surface.

Each chapter opens with an aphorism — a still, grounding thought that sets the tone before the narrative begins. These moments of reflection create a gentle rhythm throughout the book, inviting not only understanding, but honest self-examination. You follow the heroine's journey, yes — but you find yourself quietly tracing your own as well.

What moved me most was the book's insistence on the present moment. Not as a concept, but as a felt reality. It slows you down. It reminds you to look at what is already here — the small, the quiet, the easily overlooked — and to find within it something worth honoring.

Path of the Healer has the rare quality of staying with you after the last page. It shifts something. Not loudly, not dramatically — but with the quiet certainty of something true. Each chapter leaves behind a thought, a realization, or simply a new way of sitting with yourself.

This is a book for anyone willing to be honest with themselves. It speaks to the heart without sentimentality. It awakens a desire to live with more intention — to appreciate, to connect, and above all, to be fully, unapologetically oneself.

Thank you, Zhanna khanym and Adil myrza, for the courage it takes to share work this personal. It has been a meaningful journey, and I look forward to witnessing whatever you create next.

With gratitude, Yulia Sitnikova

Chapter 1

*We unconsciously believe that the Almighty
sees us from above — yet He sees us from within*

Dear Reader,

If this book has found its way into your hands, it means that somewhere within you, questions have already begun to stir.

Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose? What does my future hold? When will I meet the person meant for me? Why do I face the difficulties I face? And why is it that someone who drinks every day can still build a business and drive a brand-new Toyota?

These questions don't simply live in the mind. They live *inside* us. They unsettle us. They surface at 3 a.m. and follow us through ordinary afternoons.

Am I on the right path? Or have I been walking in the wrong direction all along?

I know this feeling well.

My name is Zhanar — though most people call me Zhanna. I come from Karaganda, a mining city where life teaches you resilience before you are old enough to ask for it.

I am a psychic, a medium, a healer — or, more simply, someone who perceives what most people cannot.

What does that mean in practice?

I can tune into a person's energy and understand what is happening beneath the surface of their life. I help release what blocks them, what holds them in place. I can see patterns — in the past, in the present, and sometimes in what is yet to come.

My schedule is typically booked a week in advance. People reach out to me every day — from different cities, different countries, different lives. Some are searching for success. Others want to heal a relationship, find love, or find a way through illness.

Every story is different. Yet most people arrive with the same three desires:

Money. Relationships. Health.

From the outside, my work can seem almost unreal. People sometimes imagine something theatrical — a woman with extraordinary powers, surrounded by candles and shadows and ritual.

The reality is far quieter.

I work with energy — more precisely, with the way it moves.

Have you ever watched someone tune a piano? They listen carefully to each note, making small adjustments until everything falls into alignment.

That is what I do.

I begin by sensing a person's state. Then, gently, I adjust — releasing tension here, restoring flow there. Over time, their energy begins to move freely again, filling the spaces where it had gone still.

Inside, something shifts. Outside, life begins to change.

Illness softens. Finances begin to open. Opportunities appear where there seemed to be none. Relationships find their footing.

From the outside, it can look like magic.

People often say: *"You have the perfect work. You help people, and you have a gift."*

And yes — I can do many things.

But the greater the gift, the greater the weight of it.

Did I choose this path? Did I ask for this gift?

No one thinks to ask.

People see only the surface — the visible results — and assume it was always meant to be this way. Simple. Natural. Effortless.

But what did it cost me? What did I have to live through? What did I have to lose?
These are not easy questions.
But they deserve honest answers.
And I am ready to give them.

Chapter 2

*Childhood is when you are insanely
happy because a soap bubble
touched the ground and did not burst*

I don't know about you, but I had a wonderful childhood.

I was the middle child in the family — three years younger than my older brother Timur, and ten years older than my younger brother Damir.

I was born in a small settlement called Molodezhny, about seventy kilometers from Karaganda.

There were no mountains, no forests — just endless steppe, low rolling hills, and a shallow river that dried up almost completely in summer.

In summer, when the sun burns everything in its path, the steppe turns dry and brittle — like hay left too long in the sun.

But in spring, something magical happens.

The land comes alive. The grass turns a deep, vivid green. The river swells and overflows its banks. A vast yellow carpet of wildflowers stretches endlessly in every direction.

And then there are the hills — small ridges and mounds that seem to awaken, like the spine of a giant dragon stretching slowly across the horizon.

Even as a child, I had a vivid imagination.

My mother used to say that I began speaking when I was only a year and a half old. Very often, she would hear me talking while I was alone in the room.

“Zhanara, who are you talking to?” she would ask, surprised.

“Mom, can't you see?” I would reply, frowning slightly. “There's an old man standing here — my grandfather, Kadyrbay-ata. And over there is Altyn-apa.”

My mother would raise her hands in confusion. She didn't know anyone by those names.

After that, she began taking me to different emshi and baksy — traditional healers and shamans.

They tried, without success, to drive away what they believed were spirits, and to close off my visions. I was too young to remember any of it. I only know this part of my story from my mother.

Otherwise, I was a completely ordinary child.

I ran through puddles in rubber boots and came home dirtier than a little piglet. I loved playing with my cousins and the neighborhood girls.

At the time, I had no idea that just a century earlier, there had been nothing here but nomadic routes across the open steppe.

Everything changed after coal was discovered in the region in the mid-nineteenth century. The Ivanovsky open-pit mine was established, and people from across the Russian Empire were sent here — many of them for forced labor.

After the fall of the Tsar, the Bolsheviks came to power, and Lenin approved the creation of Karlag.

Karlag — the Karaganda Corrective Labor Camp — became one of the largest in the Soviet Union, operating from 1930 to 1959. It left behind hundreds of thousands of broken lives and shattered destinies.

And yet, life continued.

Karaganda and the surrounding region began to grow. People arrived — or stayed after serving their sentences.

Karaganda gradually became a major industrial center for coal and metal production. The blast furnaces of the Karaganda Metallurgical Plant forged not only steel, but an entirely new kind of community.

Kazakhs, Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Belarusians, Poles, Germans, Chechens, Koreans — each people brought something of their own: traditions, customs, cuisine, and ways of life. Together, they formed something remarkable.

I clearly remember the day I met Baba Galya.

She was a strong, broad-shouldered Ukrainian woman — solid as oak, built to endure.

A large nose. Piercing dark eyes. A long braid.

The first time I saw her, I was a little afraid.

But over time, I came to understand what kind of woman she truly was — remarkable, shaped by a life that had asked too much of her.

Before the war, she had been sentenced for stealing a single bucket of wheat. She only wanted to feed her starving children, Yasha and Nikolai.

I knew Yasha. Nikolai, as far as I remember, had stayed behind in Ukraine.

But that is not what matters.

What matters is this:

Baba Galya was not an ordinary woman.

People came to her from all across the settlement. She healed. She whispered prayers over those struggling with alcoholism. She rolled eggs over people's bodies to draw out negative energy. She spoke quietly over herbs, as if conversing with something unseen.

And it was through her that I first stepped into the world of the mystical.

Chapter 3

*They say we're "scary monsters,"
How does the earth bear us?
Give us cards in our hands
To tell fortunes for the king
Chorus:
Oy-lya-lya, oy-lya-lya,
To tell fortunes for the king,
Oy-lya-lya, oy-lya-lya,
Hey-ha!*

*Song from the cartoon
"The Bremen Town Musicians"*

"You carry sorrow in your heart, a new beginning in your mind... and under your feet, you're trampling the King of Spades," Baba Galya said, looking at me reproachfully.

"Zhanara, where did you drift off to?"

"Baba Galya, I was just lost in thought."

She rolled her eyes.

"The spread won't read itself. Go on now."

And I ran back to my friends.

School had ended just a week earlier.

I loved studying. I was the class leader, part of the editorial board, always active, always involved — a perfect little builder of the bright communist future.

A model October child. An exemplary Young Pioneer.

Once, as one of the most active and disciplined students, I was awarded a trip along the famous Golden Ring of Russia. For two weeks, surrounded by equally exemplary schoolchildren, we traveled across the Soviet Union aboard a train called Friendship.

It was the first time in my life I had seen Russia.

Smolensk. Kostroma. Leningrad. We visited Vilnius in the Baltics, and of course the capital of our Motherland — Moscow.

Golden domes. Cathedrals. Churches. Castles. Fortresses.

Red Square. GUM. Lenin's Mausoleum.

People — an endless, living sea of people.

It felt as though an entirely new world had opened inside my mind.

That was during my younger school years. I graduated from high school in 1994, almost with top honors — just a couple of B's kept me from a gold medal.

In my final year, I had allowed myself to relax. I gave in to laziness, drifted into procrastination, and simply enjoyed spending time with my friends.

Still, my reputation held. All my teachers knew me as a participant in mathematics and physics Olympiads.

At the same time, I had a deep love for Russian literature and poetry. I was constantly writing — experimenting with prose, scribbling verses.

Two-line poems. Three-line poems. Haiku. Rhymed and unrhymed.

But above all — I wrote about love.

Like every girl my age, I dreamed of a prince.

Everything just as it was in the books: he would come for me on a white horse, and we would ride off together into the sunset.

It didn't matter that boys at school had already asked me out several times.

I wasn't interested in small change.

How could they possibly understand the depth of my soul? They wanted something simple. Something ordinary.

I was looking for something else — something like a star to light the way.

After all, I was a star myself. Or at least a small one, shining somewhere in the depths of the unknown and the mystical.

It was no coincidence that Baba Galya had taught me to read cards when I was still a child.

And like all proper teenagers, we sometimes held séances — trying to summon the spirits of famous people.

Count Tolstoy. Lermontov. Pushkin. Dostoevsky.

They were probably turning in their graves.

But that didn't make it any less thrilling.

Spirit of the departed, come to us... appear before us!

Beyond summoning spirits, there was something even more fascinating — reading cards.

"Zhanara, please, tell our fortunes," Samal said one afternoon.

"Alright, girls, sit down."

I carefully shuffled the deck and began.

I don't remember exactly what I told them.

But later, they would say it all came true.

Aiman became a mother of four. Samal had two children. Ira moved to Russia — just as the cards had shown.

The most important thing, though, is this:

For me, it was never fortune-telling.

It was something closer to foresight.

"What's the difference?" you might ask.

Fortune-telling gives you a fixed, absolute answer.

"Miss, you will have three husbands, and the last one will beat you."

"But I'm not even married yet..."

"It doesn't matter — I said three!"

And from that moment on, the girl begins to believe it. To program herself around it. And eventually — it happens. Three failed marriages. The last one ends in suffering.

That is the danger.

Experienced practitioners who work with divination — beans, coffee grounds, tarot cards — will tell you something different: the future is not fixed. It is layered. It holds many possible paths.

Any reading is only a projection of the near future based on current conditions.

If a person begins to change — to grow, to develop, to move toward the light — a different path opens. One that is brighter.

But if they fall into depression, into alcohol, into despair — the outcome will likely be far darker than anything initially seen.

In the end, we are each responsible for our own lives.

For every action.

For every inaction.

For every thought.

Chapter 4

*Gold is tested by fire,
A woman is tested by gold,
And a man is tested by a woman*

The Chinese say the hardest thing is to live in times of change.

As for me, I was lucky enough — or unlucky enough — to grow up during Perestroika. A time when stores carried only one kind of sausage, and even that required ration coupons.

It was the time when a once unbreakable superpower collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions, shattering into pieces.

There was something bittersweet about it.

Because of the Soviet Union, I had the chance to travel — to see Russia, the Baltic states, to walk across Red Square, lay flowers at the Eternal Flame, buy ice cream at GUM, and stand before the preserved body of Lenin, the so-called leader of all peoples.

But to be honest, those historical shifts stayed with me only vaguely.

What I remember far more vividly were the early 1990s — independence, the arrival of our own currency, the tenge... and the sudden flood of things we had never seen before.

Snickers. Mars. Bounty.

“Love is...” chewing gum with little paper inserts about a boy and a girl.

An ocean of soda — Coca-Cola, Sprite, Fanta.

Frozen “Bush legs.”

Shuttle traders hauling enormous Chinese bags across the border.

Factories shutting down. Mines going silent.

Men in leather coats — the so-called bratki.

Back then, Ryzhiy Almaz was one of the most influential criminal figures in Kazakhstan. I recently read a book about him — *Ryzhiy Almaz: The Price of Betrayal*. It’s gripping. I highly recommend it.

And of course — the cherry-colored VAZ-2109. The undisputed peak of the Russian auto industry.

The early nineties were a time of sharp contrasts.

On one hand — fear. Collapsing production, mass unemployment, the loss of everything familiar.

On the other — a strange, electric sense of possibility. Open markets, imported goods, the feeling that the rules had changed and no one quite knew what came next.

Everything has two sides.

For me, it was one of the best times of my life.

I was a teenager, nearly a graduate. My whole life felt like it was just beginning. The old Soviet ruble disappeared, replaced by the tenge. In 1993, my older brother Timur got married.

Around that time, I loved visiting relatives — especially my mother’s hometown, the settlement of Bestobe in the Akmola region.

At first glance, Bestobe looked like any other working settlement: gray apartment blocks, small white houses, broken roads, sparse vegetation, the Selet River winding quietly through, and open pits along the outskirts.

But, just like in the Karaganda region, its real wealth lay underground.

Bestobe was rich in gold.

Mining there had begun in 1932, and the concentration was unusually high — twenty to thirty grams per ton. Sometimes people found nuggets weighing several kilograms.

Naturally, this gave rise to illegal prospecting. Tens of thousands of people were arrested trying to get rich that way. Many risked their lives for it.

And yet, life in the settlement was vibrant. Some earned good money. Others built the infrastructure. And some took on the dirtiest and most dangerous work.

But at that age, I didn't think about any of that.

At seventeen or eighteen, you are too full of life to worry about such things. Your thoughts revolve around something far simpler — fun, freedom, and friends.

Every visit to Bestobe felt like a celebration — for me, and for my cousins: Almagul, Nazgul, Aigul, and Raikhan.

We were like the Three Musketeers... and D'Artagnan.

I was especially close to Almagul.

At the time, she was seeing Gaziz — a man who was both respected and feared in the settlement. He was what people called a fixer, someone through whom all the gray flows passed.

Aigul and I were something like local celebrities. The boys were always around.

I was a devoted follower of fashion — a puffer jacket, Levi's jeans, stylish dresses. In the early nineties, that was a serious statement.

But everything has its price.

Life in that world moved like a roller coaster.

Gaziz was like a proud eagle — always watching over his nest, always aware. Sometimes he had to disappear, to hide from the police.

How many times did Almagul and I bring him food and water in the silence of the night?

It was exciting... and quietly sad at the same time.

Then came the moment I didn't expect.

Gaziz invited us to his house.

We arrived without suspecting anything. But instead of a quiet visit, we walked into a house full of people — his mother, his grandmother, other women gathered together.

The moment Almagul stepped inside, they placed a scarf over her head and began to sing.

Zhar-zhar.

That was when I understood.

I had just witnessed a traditional bride kidnapping.

Chapter 5

Memento mori (Latin)

Remember your mortality

And so, we slowly approached the end of school — and the beginning of something new.

It was 1993.

Factories worked only sporadically. Some had shut down completely. Crime was everywhere. It was the golden age of the bold — and the dangerous.

But I was still a schoolgirl. Or rather, a graduate.

My thoughts were elsewhere.

All I wanted was to break free — to leave my parents' home and step out into the wide, open world.

But before that, there was one moment I will never forget.

It was summer. Hot, suffocating heat. Only one month remained before university entrance exams. Our small settlement seemed to be melting under the sun.

And for some reason, all I could think about was a Snickers.

Today, it's just a chocolate bar you can buy anywhere.

Back then, it was something else entirely.

Kids were ready to do almost anything just to taste that combination of caramel, peanuts, and thick chocolate.

I don't remember exactly why it was so hard to get — maybe there simply wasn't enough money.

So there we were — our little group: me, Danka, Aizhan, Samal, Bibigul, Ira... and of course, the boys — my brother's friends.

We were sitting in the village park, talking about everything and nothing.

Somehow, the conversation drifted toward the cemetery.

"Girls, would you dare to walk through the cemetery?" Arman asked casually.

"Easy," Aizhan shot back.

"Right now?" Samal asked.

"No," Arman smiled. "That's too simple. Besides, it's still hot. Let's go at night... around midnight."

"You're not supposed to go to a cemetery at night," Ira said, going pale. "My mom and grandmother always said that. It's the world of the dead. You shouldn't disturb it... you might bring something back."

"Maybe we should change the subject," Bibigul said quietly.

But something in me snapped.

Instead of staying quiet, I raised the stakes.

"Alright, Arman..." I said. "What do I get if I walk through the cemetery at night?"

He cleared his throat.

"Hmm... one Snickers."

"Three," I shot back. "Three Snickers — and I'll do it tonight."

Silence fell.

The girls shifted uneasily. The boys suddenly found great interest in the people passing by.

"Deal?"

Arman held out his hand.

I shook it.

Serik sealed it.

Three Snickers bars, back then, were a small fortune.

And then the fear hit me.
What have I done?
Why would I go there... at night? What if I see something? Ghosts? What if they follow me home?
The girls said nothing. But their eyes said everything.
You're crazy.
A word spoken cannot be taken back.
At midnight, we stood in front of the cemetery.
No one dared to cross that invisible line — the boundary between the living and the dead.
“Zhanara, forget it,” Arman said, his voice quieter than usual. “Here — just take your Snickers.”
“No,” I said. “I have to do this.”
I said it out loud. But really, I was trying to convince myself.
It felt as though something unseen was pulling me forward.
We stood by the old fence. The cemetery was lit only by a full moon, enormous and pale overhead.
Let me tell you — a cemetery at night, under a full moon, is not exactly pleasant.
Wooden crosses. Stone crosses. Marble crosses.
They seemed to be watching me.
The faces in the photographs seemed to be waiting for an unexpected visitor.
My legs grew heavy. Every step took effort. My hair stood on end. My heart was pounding so hard it felt like it might escape my chest and run home without me.
Home... where a soft bed had been waiting for over an hour.
Home — where people are alive.
Even the sound of my brother snoring behind the wall suddenly felt like the most comforting thing in the world.
“Zhanara, stop... please,” the girls called out.
Even Arman joined in.
“Come on... enough. Let’s just go home.”
Home. I just want to go home. My warm bed. Safety.
But what will they say about me? That I’m a coward?
“Well,” I said, forcing confidence into my voice. “Here goes.”
And I took the first step.
I don’t know how to explain what happened next.
The moment I crossed that boundary, I entered a different reality.
The others seemed to recede — as if they were floating somewhere far away. I could still hear them, but their voices were blurred, softened by distance.
The world behind the fence faded.
They say a cemetery is a portal to another world.
In that moment, I felt it.
And strangely... I felt calm.
Even peaceful.
I sensed energy — streams of it moving between the graves. Some were cold. Others warm.
But the most surprising thing was this:
It felt like the safest place in the world.
Each step became lighter than the last.
By the time I reached the far edge, I was almost floating.
Step. Warmth. Lightness.
And then — I stepped out.
The world returned. Colors. Sounds. Voices.
My friends rushed toward me, touching my arms, asking if I was alright.

And inside, I felt something I hadn't expected.
Peaceful. Whole.
That was my first encounter with the world of the dead.
The first — but not the last.

Chapter 6

Three, Seven, Ace
From Alexander Pushkin's novella
"The Queen of Spades"

As you already know, I've always been drawn to the unknown — to everything mysterious and unseen.

Deep down, I always felt that the material world isn't all there is. There is something beyond it. Something hidden.

All you have to do is reach out... and you can touch the very foundations of existence.

To understand how karma works. To ask what is good, and what is evil. Why Yin and Yang are both black and white — yet each carries a piece of the other. Who created this universe. Why we are here. What is Alpha and Omega. Where humanity is heading.

These are the questions I search for answers to even now.

But at seventeen or eighteen... my head was full of nothing but wind.

I loved it when my parents left the house and my older brother Timur stayed over at a friend's. Because that's when I was alone.

And when I was alone... I would begin.

I would practice magic. Summon spirits. Call on the Queen of Spades.

In my parents' bedroom, there was a small three-panel vanity mirror. Whenever I had the house to myself, I turned it into a ritual space.

I would place the mirror on the floor. Light candles in the center. Say prayers over a small book I had found somewhere — I no longer remember where.

And then, after completing everything, I would whisper the final words:

"Queen of Spades... come."

I created a corridor of reflections — one mirror repeating endlessly into another, stretching back into some infinite darkness.

And something... really did begin to happen there.

One time, at the very peak of my concentration, everything was suddenly interrupted.

Timur came home early.

I had never seen his eyes like that before — wide, frozen.

He was genuinely afraid. Afraid even to come near the mirror, let alone look into it.

And me?

I was the younger sister — but not a stupid one.

I understood very quickly what kind of power that gave me.

Whenever Timur tried to lecture me or tell me off, I would widen my eyes and whisper:

"Do it again... and I'll call the Queen of Spades. She'll come for you."

That was enough.

He backed off instantly.

Of course, it was childish. Just a game.

But now — knowing what I know about the unseen — I would never recommend anyone try to summon anything.

Because you never really know who — or what — might answer.

A mirror, in its essence, is a portal.

And if you stare into the abyss long enough...

the abyss begins to stare back.

Some things are not toys.

Magic is one of them.

Today, you can find anything online — any ritual, any instruction. But what no one tells you is what stands behind it. And what it will ask for in return.

So just live your life.

And be grateful to the Creator for it.

And now — let's get back to my story.

Chapter 7

*Besides higher education, one needs
at least average common sense and,
at minimum, elementary upbringing*

I graduated from school in 1994.

I'd love to say I did it with honors... but I fell just a little short.

To be honest, that final year wasn't exactly about studying. All I could think about was getting out — leaving my parents' home and finally tasting freedom.

Choosing a profession didn't take long.

Why go all the way to Alma-Ata when Karaganda had plenty of universities? My relatives advised me to aim for a state-funded spot. So, following my father's suggestion, I became a student at Karaganda Technical University.

He used to speak about it with such conviction — that the future of Kazakhstan lay in oil and geophysics, in the search for black gold.

And just like that, I enrolled in the geophysics department, focused on the oil and gas industry.

Truth be told, I had only ever seen oil on television.

And the only real reason I chose geophysics... was because the competition was lower.

Think about it — where in the Karaganda region do you even find oil? Coal, metals, minerals — sure. But oil?

Naturally, most of my classmates came from Aktau and Zhanaozen — places where oil was a real part of life. We were taught how to explore, locate, and develop oil and gas fields.

Students on government grants were offered dorm rooms.

I actually wanted to move in.

But my family had other plans.

So I ended up living with my uncle on my mother's side — Uncle Olzhatay. His wife, Aunt Gulya, also had a niece — Indira. And so the two of us were placed in the same room.

Indira had also just arrived in Karaganda, admitted on a scholarship like me — though she studied IT.

We lived in a district called Mikhailovka, or as locals called it — Steklyashka.

Classes started on September 1st. Indira and I, like proper scholarship students, rode bus number 24 to the Polytechnic every single day.

Then October came.

Leaves fell across the city — yellow, red, gold — swirling slowly in the wind. Each morning, a cold, biting air cut through the streets. People stood silently at bus stops, shoulders hunched, waiting.

Unlike me, Indira only had her mother. And she loved her deeply.

One day in October, her mother sent her a hat.

Not just any hat.

A badger fur hat. Warm. Thick. Soft. Grey.

Today, you can walk into any store and buy whatever you want. Back then, in 1994, people were simply trying to survive. They sold whatever they could at the market.

And the strangest part? Indira didn't like the hat.

No matter how much I tried to convince her, she refused.

So we decided to go to the flea market — the barakholka — and sell it.

Back then, the market was the heart of the city.

Thousands of former factory workers and engineers sold everything imaginable — jeans, coats, frozen Bush legs... anything. Cardboard boxes and wooden pallets became display counters.

Grandmothers, grandfathers, young people — everyone unpacking goods from enormous Chinese bags.

If you've never changed jeans behind a curtain in freezing cold, standing on a piece of cardboard... you'll never understand what that place really was.

Thousands of buyers wandered through, searching for something cheap. Among them — well-dressed men and women, strolling calmly. And then there were others. Short-haired men in leather jackets. They didn't care about trade. They moved like hunting dogs, making their rounds, collecting their share.

People called them the roof.

Protection. Racketeers.

The day we went to the market, it was freezing.

The wind cut through us from all sides.

"Would you like to buy a hat?" Indira asked quietly, offering it to a young man passing by.

"Ugly style," he smirked. "How much?"

"One hundred tenge."

"Too much. Thirty?"

"At least seventy..."

No deal.

Two hours passed like that. We were cold, hungry, tired. People avoided us, probably assuming the hat was stolen.

Then a stocky man with a buzz cut appeared.

"Hey, little sister... what are you doing here? This is my territory. You have to pay."

"Can we just sell the hat and go?" Indira said softly. "My mom sent it... I'm a student..."

To make it more convincing, she started crying.

"Don't care," he said flatly. "Five tenge."

"But that's money for a whole week..." Indira went pale.

He didn't care.

His hand reached for the hat.

But another hand stopped him.

"Serik-aga, assalauma aleikum," said a man in a warm jacket, stepping forward. "She's with me. Just got lost — first time in the city."

"Is that so?" the racketeer narrowed his eyes.

"Absolutely," the man said calmly.

We nodded like little dolls.

When we walked away, he introduced himself.

"I'm Ybyrai."

"I'm Zhanara," I said. "This is my friend Indira."

"Come on, girls. I have a spot nearby."

We walked past a few rows of dairy stalls. He showed us his place — he sold margarine. Next to him stood his partner, Bakhytbek.

Bakhytbek, a large and unhurried man, took one look at us and understood everything. He threw coats over our shoulders and handed us hot tea with pigodi.

Half an hour later, we were laughing.

The guys felt sorry for us... and bought the hat for fifty tenge.

And just like that, our little adventure with the badger hat came to an end.

But something else had just begun.

We rode home warm and full.

What luck, I thought, to meet such kind, generous people.

I had no idea then how fateful that meeting would turn out to be.

Chapter 8

*...Love will visit unexpectedly
when you least expect it!
From the song "How Many Good Girls There Are"
Author: Leonid Utesov*

They say our thoughts shape reality — that we must think positively.
Otherwise, our fears take on a life of their own... and begin to manifest.
Believe it or not, it's true.

Each of us carries a certain kind of power. Potentially, anyone can influence their life — attract opportunities, success, happiness, abundance. This is exactly what vision boards and manifestation techniques are built on. The whole idea of a success mindset.

But we should never forget: there are always two sides.
Light... and darkness.

And depending on a person's inner state — their energy — one or the other begins to take form.
Most people, unfortunately, lean more toward fear than toward love.
And fear, just like love, is incredibly powerful.

In fact, there are only two fundamental emotions: love and fear. Everything else is just a variation. Fear gives rise to anger, hatred, pride, irritation. Love gives rise to compassion, care, warmth, connection.

And very often, it is our own fears that attract trouble into our lives.
My mother used to say:

"Daughter, don't get married too early. Finish your studies. Get a job. Live for yourself first. And only then think about relationships."

"And most importantly — don't marry a man from the south. They are different. They have a different mentality."

"Mom, why would you say that?" I would wrinkle my nose. "I have a head on my shoulders."
But life has its own plans.

Love arrives when you least expect it.
Guess what year of university I got married.
That's right — my first year.
And guess who I married?

Exactly.
A man from the south. From Taraz.

You might ask — how did our paths even cross?
But the ways of God are mysterious.

As I mentioned, Indira and I once had quite an adventure at the flea market. That story should have ended there. I had almost forgotten about it...

Until one winter day.
It was January. Freezing cold.

We were sitting in a large lecture hall — warm, crowded, and unbearably boring. The professor droned on in a monotone.

Suddenly, my classmate leaned over:

"Zhan, there's some guy asking for you at the entrance."

"Azamat, stop joking. What guy?" I said, turning back to the lecture.

"I'm serious," he said, going slightly red. "He's... big. Wearing a sheepskin coat."

A man in a sheepskin coat.

A hundred thoughts rushed through my head. I barely knew anyone in the city. I hadn't deceived anyone. I hadn't broken anyone's heart.

Still... I went.

Maybe it was just a mistake.

As I approached the entrance, I saw him.

A large man. Exactly as described.

Sheepskin coat. Fur boots. Wool mittens.

Dressed like that, he could have survived a Siberian winter.

And then it hit me.

I knew him.

"Bakhytbek?"

"Zha-na-ra!"

"If it's hard to say, just call me Bakha," he said with a smile.

"Alright," I laughed. "But how did you find me?"

"You told me you study at the Polytechnic... and your group number," he replied.

And suddenly, I remembered everything. The market. The cold. The hat. The man who had stepped in when no one else would.

"I'm glad to see you," I said. "How's your friend?"

"He's good..." He hesitated. "I actually came to invite you somewhere."

"Invite me?"

"We could go eat something."

"Well... alright. Let's go."

I gave him my home phone number.

Back then, in 1994, there were no mobile phones. No internet. No Instagram. No YouTube. [The book contains mentions of organizations banned on the territory of the Russian Federation: Instagram, YouTube]. You had to arrange everything in advance. And if someone didn't show up — you could only guess what had happened.

So, I had been asked out.

Most likely it was a date — he just didn't quite know how to say it.

I imagined a nice restaurant. After greasy cafeteria food, anything would have felt like a luxury.

So — can you guess where we went for our first date?

A restaurant? A café?

No.

We went to a buffet.

One of those places full of men, with tall round tables where you eat standing up.

Unexpected, to say the least.

And for dinner — dumplings.

Simple, right?

But you won't believe it — those were the most delicious dumplings I had ever tasted. Thin dough. Juicy broth. Perfect filling.

Our second date was at an ice cream café.

And just like that... everything began.

I was seventeen. He was eight years older.

I was small and thin — about 165 centimeters, barely fifty kilograms.

He was a real athlete. A boxer. Broad shoulders, strong build, about 185 centimeters tall.

Not just a man — a dream.

A real prince.

I was completely swept away.

A man like that... had chosen me.

And the following year — 1995 — he proposed.

Chapter 9

*Love is stronger than all passions,
because it attacks the head,
the heart, and the senses simultaneously
Lao Tzu*

As it turned out, my chosen one was from the ancient and proud city of Taraz.

He spoke only Kazakh.

I — a true daughter of the Karaganda steppes — spoke Russian, and understood Kazakh only partially.

When we talked, I tried my best in Kazakh. He would throw in Russian words, twisting them in the funniest ways. And my Kazakh wasn't much better.

Still... somehow, we understood each other.

At that time, Bakha was in his final years at the Karaganda Medical Institute. He had dreamed of becoming a surgeon since childhood — and he was determined to make it happen.

Coming from a simple family, he supported himself.

Together with his friends from Shymkent — Ybyrai, Abai, and Timur — they ran a small business. They sold margarine and cigarettes at the bazaar. That's where we met, as I mentioned. And that's where everything began.

Very soon, I realized that romantic dates weren't exactly his strength.

So instead, we started spending time at his place.

He lived in a small two-room apartment near the Eternal Flame, together with his friends. And I, carried on the wings of love, would fly over... and take care of everything.

I wanted to please them.

I cooked — learning recipes from magazines and friends. I cleaned, organized, washed laundry, ironed clothes. It was my second semester of the first year. To them, I became like a younger sister. They treated me with respect.

Bakha often left — traveling with friends, visiting his family in Taraz, or heading to Uzbekistan for goods.

And whenever he was away, I noticed things.

There were always sports bags in the apartment... filled with money. Mostly small bills — three, five, ten tenge.

And there was something else.

A sawed-off shotgun.

Thankfully, it was never used while I was there. It was more for intimidation. For protection.

"Zhanka, don't open the door for anyone," he told me before leaving.

"What if someone attacks?" I asked.

"Then shoot. You've got the shotgun, don't you?"

And there I was...

sitting on the bed like a fool, holding a shotgun, while under the bed lay two or three bags full of cash.

The strangest part? It never even crossed my mind to take anything.

That's just who I was.

When the guys were away, I often came to the apartment alone.

Living with relatives was fine... but sometimes I just needed to be by myself.

And then one night... it happened.

I saw her.

An old woman.

It was two in the morning. She was standing right next to my bed. A Russian grandmother — I thought I had seen her somewhere in the building before.

But what was she doing there?

To say I was scared would be an understatement.

And yet... it wasn't quite her. Not exactly.

It was like a projection. A phantom.

She didn't say a word. She just stood there... looking at me.

The next day, when Bakha came back, I told him everything.

He was surprised... but decided to check on her.

She didn't open the door.

We knocked for a long time. Maybe half an hour. Neighbors came out into the hallway. Someone called the police.

When they finally broke the door open... we were in shock.

The old woman — Baba Dasha — had been dead for three days.

Her gray cat had stayed with her the whole time... curled beside its lifeless owner.

The medical examiner confirmed it: she had died of old age, at eighty-five.

It took me several days to recover.

Only a week later did I begin to understand what had happened.

It wasn't just a vision.

Her soul had come to me.

She wanted to be found. To be buried properly.

Otherwise... she would have remained here.

Wandering. Restless.

Unable to find peace.

Глава 10

*No matter how you plan your course,
Never straying from your path,
Never striving against your will —
From fate, know, you cannot flee.*

*Remember the Lord's words,
Life is fate, the spinning wheel,
From above the lot is prepared
For each of us long ago.*

As I mentioned, I was a frequent guest at Bakha's place.

Following the well-known wisdom that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, I did my best to cook something delicious every time. I had a cookbook my mother had given me. After classes, I would rush — carried on the wings of love — straight to his apartment.

Pancakes. Baked chicken. Casseroles. Soups.

By the time Bakha and his friends returned from the market, the table was already set.

During that time, I grew close to his friends.

I had met Ybyrai at the market. Later came Azamat and Timur — though Timur didn't come around often, spending most of his time in Shymkent.

Ybyrai introduced me to his wife, Zhibek. There's an interesting story about her... but I'll tell it later. She, like the others, was from Taraz. They all spoke Kazakh among themselves.

At first, I felt like the ugly duckling from Andersen's tale.

But over time, everything changed. They accepted me warmly. I felt like a younger sister to the guys... and in Zhibek, I found an older friend. As a married woman, she shared things with me — little secrets, small feminine wisdom, things I had never been taught.

By the end of May, nearing June 1995, Bakha and I made a decision.

We were going to get married.

In June, my parents came to Karaganda to visit me. After dinner, we had a serious conversation.

"Mom, Dad... you know my birthday is coming soon."

"If I'm not mistaken, you'll be turning eighteen," my father said.

"That's right, Dad. I'll be an adult."

"Daughter..." my mother said quietly. "You're not telling us something."

"Well..." I cleared my throat. "I'm getting married."

"Married?!" My father went pale. "Do we know him?"

My mother leaned over me like a hawk.

"Is he from Karaganda?"

"He's not local," I said, taking a sip of water.

"Go on," she insisted.

"He's from the south... from Taraz," I said, barely breathing.

Silence fell over the room.

You could have heard a fly land on the table... sit on the beshbarmak... and rub its tiny legs together.

"Daughter... if this is a joke, it's a very bad one."

"Mom, I'm serious," I said quickly, seizing the moment while they were still in shock. "His name is Bakha. He's twenty-six. We met at the market."

My words hit like an explosion.

Everything my mother had imagined about my future collapsed in an instant. The fact that he was from the south — a flash of blinding light. That he was eight years older — a shockwave. And the news that he worked at the market... felt like radioactive fallout.

There were arguments. Tears. Accusations.

But in the end... my parents understood how important this was to me.

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