

# THE OUTCAST PRESIDENTS



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# **PART I: THE RISE**

*“A great revolution is never the fault of the people, but of the government.” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*



# PROLOGUE

*July 1992, Republic of Dalabistan, Central Asia*

Sergeant Bektemiss tells his fellow soldier, “A family of four must be searched or burned.”

Private Smagulov responds, “Why them specifically?”

Sergeant Bektemiss scoffs and looks into thin air as if conjuring something with his mind. He speaks with so much certainty, “I’ve watched their behaviors, I’ve listened to their conversations, and I tell you they’re the one to pillage.”

“Roger that, Sergeant Bektemiss.” The private says he trusts Sergeant Bektemiss with his life, and he is even sorry he questioned him in the first place. Either way, he falls to command.

Two soldiers in balaclavas and the Hovlyk Asker patches on their arms step out of the armored vehicle in the middle of the night. The patches on their arms show a golden horse silhouette with a sword drawn on a maroon shield. The soldiers carry assault

rifles, heavy backpacks, and ammunition with ease. The Hovlyk Asker are elite troops, specially trained, akin to SWAT or special forces. If it is not a sensitive mission, one could say it is peaceful, the full moon is out, and the crickets chirp in the distance, but this is not the night of peace, history is about to be made here, and it is not going to be pretty.

Right next to them stand two columns of fighters in black hats and Adidas tracksuits holding burning torches; they are clearly not from the police nor the army.

Sergeant Bektemiss looks around the small shack made from rusted iron sheets in a slum on the city's outskirts. He holds his rifle and turns on the laser sight's switch. He puts his hands on the trigger, ready to squeeze at the slightest provocation, and tells his fellow troops, "Private Smagulov, cover the lads and me. Proud boys, get them all!"

"Roger that, Sergeant Bektemiss."



The fighters surround the tiny shack and burn the bordering pieces of wood, and just as commanded. Fire razed like a hungry, possessed demon ready to devour all in its path.

“Send the gift to them, proud boys!” barks Sergeant Bektemiss.

The gang gets their clubs and knives from the vehicle. Private Smagulov shoots out the shanty’s windows. The staccato burst from his rifle echoes through the night and urges the others to follow in his destruction. Men in tracksuits start to yell loudly and swing with their clubs.

From inside the shack, the weeping and wailing of children could be heard. But the mission had to be carried out.

Sergeant Bektemiss remarks, “Ignore that annoying sound, comrades. It’ll make it easier for us to get what we want.” He would not have his men weakened and having second thoughts. They have a job to do.

The men in tracksuits immediately grab large black boxes. The men rush inside of the shack. One of them puts golden jewelry in a black bag. The family’s father stumbles around the corner, wiping

the sleep from his eyes; however, the look of exhaustion quickly turns to one of alarm. He is unprepared for a night like this as he is only in his gray socks and a white undershirt. His eyes are barely open, and he softly speaks, "What do you need in this late hour?"

Sergeant Bektemiss enters the house and screams, "In the name of Volkan Joldasuly Babayev of the Atasty Elite Tribe, The Great Khan of All Dalabs, the First President of the Republic of Dalabistan, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and the guarantor of the Constitution, I, citizen Sergeant Dinmukhamed Anvaruly Bektemiss of the Janbek Elite Tribe order you to comply with mandatory house searching accordingly with the Great Khan Volkan Babayev's Decree On Valuables' Apportionment from yesterday, July 15, 1992!"

Then the family's mother walks in, barefoot and in her nightclothes, she murmurs half-awake, "Valuables... Apportionment? Why don't you straight up tell me that you came to rob this house?"

That is a little too bold a statement for Sergeant Bektemiss to allow and permit. He signals to his troops, and on cue, the troops in tracksuits grab her hands. One of them throws his burning torch onto the floor, instantly sparking a fire in the room.

Sergeant Bektemiss gasps and shakes his finger with disapproval, “How can you be so ungrateful and unpatriotic? When your country needs you the most? We all need to contribute to saving our country from the West and from China. How dare *you* object to Our Great Khan Babayev or to us! Are you a Western spy in Dalabistan?”

The family’s mother laughs out loud, “Why don’t you and your superiors cut down on your caviar supplies, yacht fleets, and castles in Europe instead of sending thugs to rob the already-poor us. You already stole everything we had ages ago...” The father attempts to stop his wife from triggering the soldiers and grabs her arm. The children realize the gravity of the situation and start crying even louder in their room.

As soon as the soldiers hear these words, the troops surround the woman. The men in tracksuits push away the father from her, and

he falls to the ground. Sergeant Bektemiss comes to her and screams, “You have said enough, whore!” and slaps her face with his brass knuckles. Her face is bruised with purple shades and blood dripping. She collapses to the ground and cries, “Just don’t dare to rape me, I’ve had enough...”

Private Smagulov grabs her hair and pulls backward, “We wouldn’t rape you because you are too ugly and filthy to even deserve it.”

One of the men, a lowly gopnik, grabs her by the neck. Another man in a tracksuit with a bear gets his sword out. The gasping mother shouts to her husband, “Kaisar, get up from your ass and take the—” A blade of a sword slices her neck, and the words she hasn’t spoken yet drown with the blood that oozes out. The troops spill the veins of the hopeless woman, and Sergeant Bektemiss grabs the head. The remaining carcass immediately collapses onto the formerly gray floor.

This gopnik holds the blade in his right hand while he lifts the woman’s head like a trophy, the blood still dripping from what used

to be her neck. He shows the bloody head to the family's patriarch, "Give us your valuables, or we'll do the same to you and your pups!"

Kaisar murmurs, "One moment... I'll need to get into... my basement..." The father's heart races as he thinks about the events that had just happened, they are still fresh in his mind, and a part of him hurts so badly. He wishes he could just take his own life, but he cannot. He has to take care of his sons, for his murdered wife. He fights back his tears but knows that he has a mission to be done.

Private Smagulov barks, "Hurry up and shake your balls!"

After the father disappears from the soldiers' eyes, Private Smagulov gets his torch and throws it at the carpet on the wall. Instantly, the fabric catches fire and spreads across the house. Sergeant Bektemiss laughs to himself and leaves the house, "Scorch this earth, gentlemen. Leave this landfill as a reminder for these broke Commoner tribesmen to comply with our rule and laws."

"But what about the father and the kids?"

Sergeant Bektemiss raises his head up and looks at the troops' bags full of jewelry, "We already seized enough stuff from this place. The fire most likely will kill them all."

"But what if they will escape?"

"It doesn't matter. We can keep them alive so that others can know what we can do if they don't comply with us."

"Roger that, Sergeant Bektemiss!" The gopniks salute and rush into the armored vehicle.

Private Smagulov speaks softly, "Sergeant, may I speak freely?"

"Go ahead."

"Sergeant Bektemiss, are we done cleaning the city from threats for today?"

Sergeant Bektemiss looks around and shakes his head, "We are only getting warmed up, remember that. We have at least ten more houses tonight."

Before Bektemiss enters the vehicle, he throws a hand grenade at the burning house. The explosion shakes the nearby homes and rattles his chest.

Sergeant Bektemiss gets into the car, shows his hairy middle finger at the ruins, and cheers with joy, “Don’t mess with me, the Hovlyk Asker, and the Great Khan, or you’ll get what you fucking deserve!”

\* \* \*

The family’s widowed father holds an infant boy in his arms while his eldest son sits on the back of their brown horse. Through the burning fields, they zigzag the bonfires and ride across the night into the dust. To the left, smoke rises. To the right, a cacophony of wailing women and children, explosions, soldiers barking orders, and machine-gun fire echoes across the cloudy sky. After some time, the sounds quiet down, and it becomes still. Absolutely still. Only mountains, green fields, and the night. The father urges the horse towards the hills.

The six-year-old son looks up in confusion and asks his father, “What is this place with cute white tents?”

The father looks to where his son is pointing. Several white yurts dot the hillside. He stares at them and tears up. “Safety and shelter, son. Safety and shelter,” he says with a shaky voice.

The boy asks again, “Where is mommy?”

“Not with us anymore in this world...” The boy deserved to know the truth, the father thinks as he is fighting tears.

The horse sprints through the hills, faster and faster, slowing down from time to time as it reaches a slope. As soon as the horse gets over the top of the last hill, the father and the children rush down from its back. A small wooden gate stands before them, bearing a plaque that reads: “Chamyr Aul.”

The father is familiar with such camps; they are traditional Dalab settlements known as aul. Easy to breakdown and move should the need arise, but strong enough to offer comfortable living and shelter. He is even more familiar with this particular settlement. “My relatives and tribesmen will shelter us while we are hiding from the Hovlyk Asker, my children.”



He enters one of the yurts carrying the children, bows down his head, and gets down on his knees, “Please help us! This is not how I imagined we will meet again, but I’m really desperate for help! I’m sorry for not seeing you in a while. Just let us in!”

After the man’s relatives help him put the children to bed, they sit around the round table with meat and rice. The elderly relatives are next to Kaisar’s brothers. One of the brothers says quietly, “First time, Kaisar?”

“What do you mean?”

“The thugs... the ones who invade the houses...”

“Yes... They just killed my wife, Zhansaya! I don’t know what I will do with my beloved sons Alisher and Kuanysh!” he begins to cry again, and his heart feels like it is about to burst.

The old grandmother asks, “Who is Kuanysh? We only heard about your six-year-old Kaisar.”

“Yes, just six months ago, Kuanysh was born. Poor young boy to lose a mother at that age.” Kaisar is unable to hold back his tears.

The grandmother grabs the sleeping infant and places him in a besik—a traditional wooden Dalab crib. Then she kisses the baby’s forehead and calmly says, “Welcome to our family, Kuanysh—may you be a joy for our family like it says in your name!”

The rest of the family raises their palms, say “Amen,” and wipe their faces with their hands. After that, one of Kaisar’s brothers sadly remarks, “State-sponsored tyranny and chaos are ruling these days.”

“What do you mean?”

“Apart from your wife being dead, so many people lost their lives last month.” The brother stands up and walks out of the house with Kaisar. “You see, let me show you something.”

He leads Kaisar to the edge of the settlement, where an extensive array of white tall gravestones litters the grass near the nomadic village. The brother points his finger at them, “These are the graves of the victims of brutality from these state-sponsored thugs robbing and invading our houses. My colleague’s grave is over there, a songwriter critical of Babayev is lying over there, and the guy we

defended from the bullies back in high school is buried on the other end of the graveyard.”

The graveyard is on the highest hill of the village. Kaisar points his finger on some spots of red and yellow far away and says with fear in his eyes, “I see some fires. Hovlyk Asker better be away from us.”

“That must be our city of Alakala. When the fire dies out, I hope we can go back.”

Fire burns around thousands of corpses lying on the bloodstained dirt, around hundreds of destroyed and bombed houses. The graves are not yet full for the Hovlyk Asker troops.

# CHAPTER 1: EMPTINESS

*21 years later, California*

I lay on the chaise lounge by the elite resort pool near my giant villa in Dreamtown, California. Today, on April 18, 2013, I, Alisher Karabars, finally became a billionaire after years of hard work. Nine years ago, my best friend from Dreamhouse University, Bong Ju Kim and I started our company, “Karabars and Kim Industries,” in a garage. Now we are here—partying in the resort and celebrating our successful IPO last week that made us billionaires today.

The DJ turns on the loud techno music, and many of my employees start dancing or drinking cocktails by the pool in their swim attire. Bong Ju is lying on the opposite side of the pool, next to his girlfriend, Moonhee. She is a white girl with brown hair, shorter than Bong Ju but very supportive and compassionate. They seem to enjoy the sunshine of California in each other’s arms.

I should not disturb them from having fun, so instead, I search the crowd, looking for a woman to mingle with. Hooking up with women isn’t hard these days. After several plastic surgeries to make my nose look more masculine and sturdier, my confidence skyrocketed. Plus, I’m sure the money in my bank account doesn’t

hurt either. A young woman by the pool, wearing a white swimsuit and sporting long, blonde hair, catches my eye. She seems to have done a lot of plastic surgery for her face and inserted several implants to sculpt her body. I push a black waitress with a face of a pig out of my way to that girl.

The black waitress looks fiercely into my eyes and shouts, “Excuse me!”

I throw my plastic cup of tea at her and sincerely say, “Get out of my fucking way, whale!”

My flip-flops slap against the wet concrete as I walk towards the woman. She’s alone but dancing along to the music.

“Hi, you look quite interesting here, so I had to come up and say hello.”

Her face flushes as she gets a puzzled look. “Oh hey, you look great today.”

That’s the typical response these days. I know that they are after my money, but I still enjoy this fun.

I place my hand on her neck and say, “What’s your name, cutie?”

“Caroline, Caroline Gray.”

I am hypnotized by the mellow tone of her voice; however, I squeeze her neck a little harder. She smiles at me, and I wonder if she’s into that sort of play. Not only is her pale skin smooth, but

her eyes are like pieces of amber shining near the pool. Her voice becomes warm and soothes my heart.

I ask, “How’s it going?”

She responds, “Everything’s wonderful! Especially now” She winks at me and puts her warm hand on my shoulder. My mind races as I try to figure out what she’ll do next.

“So, where are you from?” I ask.

She responds, “I’m from Los Angeles, lived there my whole life—I’m an office accountant.”

I hold her hand while stroking her waist with my other hand and reply, “Hey, you’re my new girlfriend.”

Her eyes widen, her mouth slightly agape as she didn’t expect to hear those words. However, the gleam in her eyes tells me she is more than willing to play the part. Money and power definitely have their benefits.

She leans forward for a kiss, but I move away. “Wait. No, I changed my mind. I might just like you *too* much. We’re broken up now.”

She cocks her head to the side in confusion. Her eyes shine with a charming look, and she starts to squeak in a high-pitched voice, “Please, Alisher, let’s make this work!”

I still have it under control. That was a planned move to see if she cares about me. I still need to identify what she wants in me—

in an unlikely scenario that a girl would love me for my personality. The trigger worked perfectly—that strategy was successful just as I planned. Now it's my move. I hold my hand out to her. "Take my hand, take it like you're my girlfriend." She accepts it. I continue my sequence, "Give me a hug." Wonderful! She follows the orders like my employees do. Before the final step of taking her home, I whisper in her ear, "I would never break up with you."

Caroline giggles and kisses my lips. I wonder if she understands that this is all just a joke to me? Her kiss gives me physical pleasure, but that natural high ends quickly. There's no passion, almost as if I am kissing a piece of cold turkey. After she's done with her play, she whispers in a high-pitched voice, "Let's drive to your place for some drinks?"

I grab her ass and give it a hard squeeze. "Sure, why not?" Her body goes rigid, but I ignore her signals and move my hand towards her groin. She lets out a slight gasp and pushes my hand away.

When I am one of Forbes' Top Young Billionaires, women let me whatever I want. But she would not admit that, so instead, she says, "You're not entitled to my body."

"Of course," I say. But I know her type. Women like her enjoy power and the promise of power. I am both of those to her.

Her face is vibrating with a grimace. I've seen that face dozens of times before; sometimes from women wracked by an intense

orgasm and sometimes from women appalled by my nature. I can only assume she's disgusted by my actions, but apparently, her greed and lust for the top win over, as she still follows me out to my Ferrari.

We spend the rest of the evening at my mansion. By the time the sun sets, we're tearing each other's clothes off like wild animals. And like wild animals, we fuck. I'm pretty sure she already broke skin with her nails on my back, and her lips are full of passion. Yet, I don't feel any emotion from this piece of plastic embracing me. My heart is burning with emptiness. A hole is piercing through my chest.

When I usually bring such women home, I feel full of life, masculine and virile. I mean, this is what success is, right? It made me feel relieved and confident, no longer the virgin perpetually stuck in the friendzone. After all, I might be a lovable person, a person who could be seen as an attractive man who matters—not just a random mistake of nature. Yet, there's a problem of depending on women to validate my worth; perhaps these one-night stands are no longer what I genuinely need.

It wasn't always like this.

I close my eyes and remember the days long past. Once upon a time, I saw women not as trophies to match my Ferrari and riches, but as someone to give and share compassion and understanding. I



spent my childhood in my hometown of Alakala, the biggest city of my homeland Dalabistan. This country is located in Central Asia between Russia, Kazakhstan, China, and Mongolia. The name literally means “land of the steppe dwellers,” and our country is covered with vast steppes and valleys near the Tien Shan mountains. Our closest neighbors, the Kazakhs, are considered savages in my country, but I personally believe that Kazakhs are largely misunderstood by my people and are quite advanced and cultured. After all, how did they end up with a better economy and resources with a smaller amount of land than Dalabistan?

I dive deeper into my memories. Instead of Caroline, I see the dark hallways of my school, a Dalab-American School. Back then I considered a “good day” to be a day without being bullied. The thing is, for all of my eleven years at this school, I heard things like, “There, that broke dick comes again!” Even though my school was an international school with American teachers and many foreign students, most of the student population was Dalab.

The Dalab society is divided into two castes—the Three Elite Tribes and the Fourteen Commoners Tribes. Only members from the Three Elite Tribes could become President—or in the past, a Khan, a Sultan, or an Imam. The law has always favored the Elite Tribes. Even today, a Commoner who kills a member of the Elite Tribe will always get life in prison without parole. In contrast, a

member of the Elite Tribe would only get a nine thousand aldan fine, about three US dollars, for committing the same crime against a Commoner—if he would even get caught. The Commoners cannot enjoy many rights the elites do—it is even enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Dalabistan:

*Article 14, Part 3: We believe in equality for all.*

*Note: this does not apply to the members of the Fourteen Commoners Tribes. Legal discrimination on the basis of tribal origin and/or political views (including, but not limited to disagreeing with President's vision for progress) is allowed and embraced by the society and the government.*

Ten years ago, I honestly did not expect to be able to get to a great university like Dreamhouse University in Los Angeles. Since Dreamhouse University is one of the most selective and best in the world, there was no other option except failure. I remember my father, Kaiser, telling me, “Try your hardest. You *must* succeed. There is no option for failure because if you fail to get into Dreamhouse on a scholarship, you will get into a poor university for ‘savage tribe children.’ You’ll have no opportunities for the future. Work for your future now because Dalabistani society is cruel and unjust and cares only about your bribes and the tribe you are from.”

The day I got accepted to Dreamhouse Class of 2007 was the happiest day of my life. This enabled me to study with smart students, young men and women from other countries who did not judge by my tribe, and get to know legitimate professors, something that would be very unlikely for a man from a Chamyr tribe.

I desperately needed to escape the Dalabistani society where people judge me not for my abilities or moral character but for my tribe that I come from. If I wasn't accepted into this renowned American university, I would have perished in Dalabistan, seeing my abilities decay and stink like rotten meat lying around near a highway without any use.

The Chamyr tribe is one of the Fourteen Commoners Tribes that lives in the Right Wing of Dalabistan. This tribe is very conservative and nationalist, placing Dalabs above everything and Allah above all. However, my experiences at the international school helped me shape a more understanding view of the world. Even though my tribe controls Alakala and is one of the largest, the ultimate authority and most lucrative positions still belong to the Three Elite Tribes: Shyngys, Atasty, and Janbek. Shyngys is the tribe that used to have power during the Dalab Khanate's days in the Middle Ages, before the Russians came to conquer Dalabistan, Kazakhstan, and other Central Asian countries. Their power comes from the fact that all of its members are descendants of Genghis

Khan himself. Because of that, they enjoyed power until Russians and Soviets completely stripped their authority in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At that moment, the Janbek tribe was the most prominent tribe in Dalabistan politics. Since they were loyal supporters of the Bolsheviks, they eventually rose to controlling the Dalab land while obeying Moscow. Kairat Rakhimov, one of the greatest leaders of the Dalab Soviet Socialist Republic, was a Janbek. However, in December 1980, he was replaced by Volkan Babayev as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Dalabistan. People loved Rakhimov for many of the great things he did for the people during his tenure. He stood up for the Dalab SSR against ceding several lands to the Russian SFSR as the orders from the Kremlin stated. He voiced his disdain for his republic's low economic development compared to the other Central Asian Soviet republics. He built oil rigs and mining factories that still feed most of Dalabistan's GDP today. However, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union needed their loyal gullible member of nomenclature. As a result, they picked Babayev.

Kairat Rakhimov died of a heart attack soon after he was sacked. This was the final straw for the common Dalabs who saw their heroic elite leader they cared about die as a martyr from the Soviets' arms. These young students went to the streets and squares of

Alakala—my hometown and the former capital of Dalabistan. However, the response was quick.

The Soviet KGB agents and police brutally suppressed these peaceful protests. Thousands of young students were killed, raped, and arrested. Those protesters who didn't get arrested spent their entire lives facing misery and contempt from others. Even though I was born in 1986, six years after such events, the legacy still remains in the Dalabs' collective memory. These protests only helped Volkan Babayev, a member of the Atasty Elite Tribe, to rise to power and get access to Dalabistan's entire natural resources for himself, his family, and his tribesmen.

After Dalabistan became independent from the USSR in 1991, Volkan Babayev quickly became the President of Dalabistan. Some Shyngys tribesmen started to question Volkan Babayev's legitimacy to power and didn't believe in his propaganda. Despite being removed from power by the Soviets, Shyngys tribesmen remained an influential upper class during the USSR days as the advanced intelligentsia of the Dalab society, shaping its culture.

After Babayev's rise to power, they launched oppositionist political parties and newspapers to challenge the "usurping regime" of Dalabistan. Several of them went on the streets with urges to stimulate democratic reforms, protect human rights and liberties, and fight corruption and tribal inequality. A little bit more, and they

were in the making of a successful non-violent rebellion to drive Volkan Babayev out of power to reform Dalabistan into a progressive social democracy. As a result, Volkan Babayev started to purge so many Shyngys men and women. He jailed and executed them for treason. Moreover, he only hired loyal Atasty and Janbek tribesmen into the Parliament, Ministries, Embassies, and his party named the Democratic Party of Dalabistan. Spoiler alert, the party is not democratic because it wins the elections with 600 percent of votes for the Democratic Party of Dalabistan and for Volkan Babayev while eliminating virtually all competitors who either endorse the Democratic Party or get arrested for extremism.

In 1991 Volkan Babayev ordered the move of Dalabistan's capital from Alakala to a newly built city of Yeniorda, meaning "New City" in the Dalab language. That process was scheduled to be completed by 1996 and burdened many Dalabistanis, but it did not stop Volkan Babayev from accumulating even more power and wealth for himself and his parasitical family.

In 1992, Volkan Babayev decided to play with people's destinies and steal the revenues of lucrative oil fields, plentiful uranium mines, abundant coal mines, and rich iron ore reserves from the people were not enough. So, in similar fashion as Saparmurat Niyazov from the brotherly nation of Turkmenistan, Babayev proclaimed himself as "The Great Khan of All Dalabs," turned

Dalabistan into a de-facto monarchy that still calls itself “a republic,” renamed the capital after himself, Volkan, and spent a quarter of the country’s GDP on his lavish coronation as The Great Khan. In addition to that, Volkan Babayev’s biography was a compulsory separate subject to learn in schools and universities. Luckily, my school was exempt from that requirement since it was foreign-run. In every city, he ordered to place large golden statues of himself, rename all the main avenues, and put large portraits of Volkan Babayev on the streets and in every workplace. I still remember having him stare at me during my classes, walks outside, or soccer matches. Every moment his portraits stared at me, I felt threatened with him watching me and my actions. These were the moments when I realized on a daily basis that I need to escape Dalabistan. I could only escape Babayev’s watchful eyes by moving away from Dalabistan. For myself. For my family. For my late mother. And the only way I could do it is by getting accepted into a top university abroad. Otherwise, I would have perished in Dalabistan and in our dysfunctional society. If that was the case, I would prefer to perish an honorable death than live such a humiliating life like that.

Of course, all of these measures of cults of personality drained the resources so much that it took a ridiculous amount of enslaving

debts from China and other countries. Debts that had to be paid back.

Instead of forcing the Three Elite Tribes to cut down on their caviar supplies and yacht fleets, in 1992 our corrupt government resorted to increasing taxes from the Commoners Tribes. They sent state-sponsored racketeers to rob the Commoners' houses for any precious materials for sale. They stabbed my mother Zhansaya during that raid when I was only six years old. I know her only from a few photographs and my father's stories about her. My father remembers the scary times when he, my little brother Kuanysh, and I were hiding with our Chamyr-tribe relatives in Chamyr Aul village right after the raid, longing for safety and peace in the middle of the steppes and valleys under the tall mountains.

Losing my mom in such a way made me realize that Dalabistan is not a country for life. I needed to escape from this toxic environment before it would kill me and the rest of my family. I studied hard and started a business just to avoid returning to the same toxicity of my country. I was afraid for my life, and later I only had more reasons to add up to my fear.

The Commoners Tribes were expected to inherently be inferior to the members of the Three Elite Tribes in all spheres—occupations, education, income, pension size, achievements, life expectancy, and so on. The Commoners live in poverty or lower-



middle-class *at best*, while most of the Three Elite Tribes live in extravagant luxury. Mostly due to stealing the country's oil, gas, uranium, coal, copper, and zinc mines and selling them to foreigners.

Of course, these conditions are very unendurable. Many foreign peers at my school and university asked me the same question, "Alisher, if things are so bad and there is a serious tribal and class segregation in the twenty-first century, then why is nobody changing things?"

The answers are simple: fear and autocracy. Despite the inhumane life of the Dalabs from the Commoners Tribes, protesting the government could be even worse than living in these conditions. My mind shifts to 2001 when my classmate Bolat, a member of the Shyngys tribe, campaigned and urged others to resist tribal inequality at our school. He made bold statements like, "We shall overthrow this dictatorship and inequality now!" in the school hallways and hung promotional posters in the classrooms for recruiting new volunteers for his protests. He, just like I anticipated, was killed during the 2001 protests in Alakala by the police. That day Babayev ordered police and soldiers to violently suppress any protester in the city center by any means possible.

The government blocked the Western news outlets, and local TV stations did not cover the protests at all. I did not even hear

about any of these events. I learned about Bolat's death only three days later when our school's director delivered a eulogy over the loudspeakers at the beginning of the day and told us to stand up for a minute of silence in his loving memory. I did not feel safe. I felt that I am being watched 24/7 by Volkan and his regime. Whenever I wanted to share my true thoughts and anxieties and passions with others, I had to be always on the go to change conversation, hide my notes, and pretend that I am working or having apolitical conversations about sports or peaceful gossip. I was doing that so that I would not have any unnecessary suspicions and interrogations, because Babayev's men are skillful at using one minute piece of evidence against me after they successfully make mountains of violent claims out of a molehill of information they can find. The daily anxieties of keeping my mouth shut, my head down, flying under the radar in order to not be caught doing something that could raise questions drove me crazy. My throat contracted. My heart was sinking. My cheek muscles pushed tears from my eyes but there were no tears left. I must leave Dalabistan right after graduating.

Volkan Babayev has ruled our country since 1980. He is known to put his relatives in high-ranking positions and comes from the Atasty Elite Tribe. Nearly seventy percent of all government officials come from this tribe. However, in their policies and

actions, they are more concerned about filling their pockets than serving their people. Whenever Dalabs rebel against such inequities, they are always quickly and brutally suppressed. Fast forward to October 2003. I turned on the TV after arriving from my Dreamhouse University's freshmen dining hall. On the BBC, I witnessed the anchor announcing,

*“Let’s get to the breaking news of the hour: a large strike of workers in the mining and oil industry of a small town Munai in western Dalabistan is currently being purged by the police. Eyewitnesses claim that the police are firing at the striking laborers demanding better pay, improved working conditions, and resolving long-standing tribal issues. State officials report that the situation is already under control and that the riots are dissolved. As a result of the clashes, at least 70 workers of the mines and oil rigs were wounded. There are no reports of deaths as of now. We will keep you updated as the story develops.*

*“Local residents of Munai say that the authorities are trying to control the media reports, we are hearing that the internet and mobile communications are being jammed by the Dalabistani government to prevent the spread of information.*

*“The president of Dalabistan, long-time dictator Volkan Babayev, has swiftly declared the State of Emergency in Munai. A night-time*

*curfew and restriction of movement have been introduced with this act.*

*“It is important to note that protesting the President of Dalabistan and striking are prohibited under the Dalabistani law, and these crimes are punishable by lifetime imprisonment. International organizations have frequently noticed significant human rights violations in this country, ranking it as one of the world’s most repressive regimes next to Turkmenistan, Eritrea, and North Korea. “Dalabistan, a former Central Asian Soviet republic, is marred by a severe form of tribal segregation between the Three Elite Tribes and the Fourteen Commoners Tribes, as well as authoritarianism and corruption.”*

For a second, I thought that the revolution began. My heart started to race, my skin tingled. I took a deep breath, and inside I felt a light in my heart that was missing. A spark of hope, a ray of sunshine to shine over my mom’s old photos. I could barely conceal my delight when watching ordinary people stand up after all. This delight brought tears of joy into the eyes, realizing that maybe my mom and Bolat would be avenged! Maybe now Dalabistanis would finally unite their strengths as one single iron fist to drive out the tyranny, corruption, and stagnation? However, that thought turned

dark, as I knew how effectively Babayev was at suppressing protesters.

The brave miners and oilers from the Alysh tribe in the petroleum rich Munai province by the Caspian Sea campaigned to resist the tribal inequality, corruption in the government, and unpaid wages! I heard them making bold statements like, “We shall overthrow this dictatorship and inequality now!” They, just like I anticipated, were massacred by the police when they stood up in the city square, despite the citizens carrying only posters and their courage against the armed squads. That day our President Volkan Babayev ordered the police, the Armed Forces, and the Hovlyk Asker, to detain or to slaughter every man, woman, and child who was protesting against Babayev. According to our laws, protesting against Volkan Babayev and his family is equivalent to treason and officially is punishable with lifetime imprisonment. Still, the protesters are often killed by the police, the Hovlyk Asker, or the military on the spot. The 2003 protests were the last and most significant ones up to date. After that, the only prominent oppositionist, a corrupt oligarch, named Aibek Ospanov, previously involved in money laundering for the Babayev’s regime, has fled to the United Kingdom to escape inevitable purges from the Volkan Babayev government.