

Serik Asylbekuly

Let off Steam, Kazakh-Style

Play

18+

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«ЛитРес: Самиздат»

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Asylbekuly S.

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How has the life of ordinary people in the remote villages of the countries of the former Soviet Union changed, 30 years after the collapse of the communist system? In the play, “Let of steam, Kazakh style,” the story of a simple farmer who alone opposes the new nomenclature of power, the new economic order and reflects on the meaning of human existence as a whole is narrated. What came of this we have to find out. This play won the Grand Prix of the international literary contest "Ruh" in Astana in 2017.

A play in two acts and six scenes

Main characters:

Komekbay is a farmworker, 44 to 45 years old.

Rysty is Komekbay's wife, 42 to 43 years old.

Zibash is a young woman, saleswoman, about 35 years old.

Yermek is Komekbay's neighbor, about 45 to 46 years old.

Alaydar is Komekbay's classmate.

Zhanaydar is Alaydar's son, a student of the 4th grade.

The district police officer, about 32 to 33 years old.

Act first

Scene No. 1

Afternoon. Komekbay comes back home from work. He strides, enters the porch of his old house, built of mudbrick, with a gray slate roof, heavily corroded by the sun and wind and having holes in some places. While crossing the threshold of the corridor, he accidentally kicks the samovar pipe, which was behind the door, and nearly falls down. The pipe flies several meters aside with a tin roar. The corridor hasn't been tidied up today and it shows: there are two or three plastic washbasins of different sizes here and there, a crumpled water can with gobs of dirt on its sides, various shoes for going to the yard are scattered randomly. And the house that looks like this makes Komekbay, who is already irritated, even angrier. He can barely hold back from raging.

Komekbay. Why haven't you tidied up yet?! And it's always the same story. It's like mayhem here! Total mess! Yrysty! Yrysty! I'm talking to you!.. Yrysty!

Komekbay leaves his shoes in the corridor, enters the inside of the house. The God-given Komekbay's wife, Yrysty, lies on the sofa in the front room. Her face is slightly swollen, a colorful silk kerchief slid a little from the woman's head to her neck.

Rysty. What happened?

Komekbay. Where have you been?

Rysty. What do you mean? I've been at home. I've just lain down to take a nap...

Komekbay. Eee, you're always sleepy, you just can't get enough sleep! Sleep is all you need. It's already evening. When will have dinner?! Put the kettle on at least! Come over here, we need to talk...

Rysty. Alright, alright, say what you want to say...

Komekbay. Come closer, I said!..

Rysty. Oybay*, for God's sake, I'm here!..

*[*Oybay is an interjection of discontent.]*

Komekbay. That's it. We're moving! Start to pack up. I'm fed up with this Kentup- Shitsville... the devil take it!.. We won't stay here for another minute!..

Rysty. What are you talking about? Winter is coming, there will be frost soon!

Komekbay. What frost, a-a? It's only the second of November today!..

Rysty. So what?! December will come with blizzards before you know it. It's winter! Don't you think so?!

Komekbay, who was hanging his jacket on the coatrack at that time, gets wide-eyed and casts a meaningful look at the woman.

Komekbay. When will you quit this stupid habit you have? As soon as I start a serious conversation, you start opposing me at once. You simply can't act otherwise! Anyway!! Who is the man in this house – me or you?

Rysty. Oybay, you, of course, you are the man! What happened? Can you explain it so I could understand?!..

*Pause. Komekbay catches his breath, goes all limp a little, steps up to the korpe * on the tor, sits down tailor fashion, sticking out his chest.*

*[*Korpe is Kazakh style blanket]*

Komekbay. Is there any kozhe*?

*[*Kozhe is cooled rice soup with kefir]*

Rysty goes to the closet, pours rice kozhe from an enamel bucket into a bowl and brings it to her husband. When she gives a bowl to her husband, she keeps rolling her eyes, and carefully looks into her husband's pupils, as if trying to find out something.

Rysty. So, what's the point?

Komekbay. The point is that I got into a serious fight with this bastard Nietali, and I'm sure there is no turning back. The fact is that I delivered two vans of potatoes, 6 tons of pumpkins, 3 vans of watermelons and melons to the cooperative store the day before. And he gave me lame 120 thousand tenge, without the flicker of an eyelash. "That's it?..." I asked. "Yes!.. That's it!.. We spent the rest of the money to pay for transportation, to pay resellers, that is, illicit dealers, to pay taxes, to pay everyone else," – he said. Well, now you tell me. It's a real rip-off, isn't it? I couldn't stand it anymore and began to swear in dirty! Damn this cooperative society to hell! I'll quit it all! So, if we don't get out of this aul, we'll kick the bucket one fine day! We must leave! Do you get it?

Rysty. You should've threatened him that you would turn to the authorities, to akims*

*[*Akim is the head of the district administration]*

That you would make a complaint.

Komekbay. Do you think I didn't threaten him?.. He only grinned: "You can turn to whoever you want, even to the devil himself!" Or do you think that this rogue doesn't know that hawks will not pick out hawks' eyes. They are all in this together! Cut it short, this is my last word! We are moving!

Rysty. *(She smacked her lips confused)* But, darling, where will we move?! Where is this Wonderful world?!

Komekbay. Over the hills and far away!.. We should find some work to support our children. I'm speaking Kazakh to you! I explained everything in the simplest terms! We have to leave – otherwise, we'll starve to death.

Rysty. And... who and where is waiting for us with open arms?!

Komekbay. You do it again! You always oppose me! Who is the master of this house, you or me? Who?!..

Rysty. Oybay, of course, you are the master!... Just tell me: where are we going to wander around now, with five little children, after leaving a warm place... the frost is coming soon! And who will give us shelter, at least a building extension, there, in that land? Firewood, food, water? You can't find a common language with Nietali – quit the cooperative society. Go into business, or whatever... become a farmer again.

Komekbay. I've already tried everything, both private business and farming. It's not like I had a good life and decided to join this cooperative society to work for this rascal Nietali. Wherever you go – it's the same old situation everywhere – they'll rob you blind. Let's move to Maylybas. I'll get a job at the railway station. I think the head of the station is German. Let's ask him for protection. And our Kazakhs, who are ready to swallow a camel alive, will devour us with all our shit. You know, never seek justice from the Kazakhs!

Rysty. Do you think there is work at the railway station? Alaydar has recently said that job cut started there as well. Many people were left without work.

Komekbay. *(He recovered a little and started muttering in a strained voice)* Well... we'll work it out somehow...

Rysty. No, my darling!.. You can move by yourself, if you want. I won't move away from here. We moved from Ekpindi to Kentup seven years ago. Right? Then you wanted to get back on the road and promised: "Oybay, we'll move to Kentup, our hometown, our family is there, and there is work, production is ramping up." And there, in Ekpindi, you also had a fight with your bosses. Is it so hard for you to live in peace like all other normal people?

Komekbay. But I argued with them not because I had nothing else to do. They are the ones who don't let us live a normal life. Now you tell me. What is one hundred twenty thousand tenge, considering the current prices!? It will take us two months to spend them. And what's next? We'll starve for the next ten months, won't we?

Rysty. Well then, keep doing what you do – keep on fighting with your windmills. I've said enough, that's it!.. I will not leave this permanent place. Do you think that moving is easy? You simply can't live in peace. And you do the same thing again and again! – you dive into a problem and then you try to solve it like crazy. There are normal people who live in our aul, everything is on an even keel, they mind their own business.

Komekbay. So do you really think that we all need to turn a blind eye to the injustices, frauds and corruption that are happening in front of us? And where is humanity, where is conscience? Where?!! Does nobody need them anymore? If so, then one fine day, as you put it, everything will decay on an even keel and will rest in peace finally. You may have heard the expression: “The one who hides the disease is doomed to death.” You are an educated woman after all. You finished school.

Rysty. If I'm destined to die, then, yes, I will perish! Why would you care? In the end, you won't even let me die in peace. I guess you can do stuff like that! Fighter for justice!

Komekbay. Okay, say what you want. I won't keep my mouth shut anyway! I will tell them the truth in person! If we suffer silently, we will rot together with them and vanish into oblivion. And the whole society will decay and rot.

Rysty. (*Angry*) If it rots, let it rot! They say for a reason: “Misery loves company!”

Komekbay. This is the psychology of slaves. But the society of slaveholders has remained far in the darkness of history. Even the era of feudalism has gone in time immemorial. Well, tell me, what century do we live in? That's right: in the 21st century! They say, it's the age of humanism, when democracy and pluralism have stretched their wings widely throughout the world!

Rysty. Enough, stop messing me about with your phantasmagorias, democracy and stuff like that, which you learned from newspapers and magazines that are lying around in the corners of our house. These newspapers and magazines are like an infection. They stuck to the poor fellow. These journalists from the capital have nothing better to do, so they think up and write all kinds of nonsense. And I can't understand – why they don't get tired? Of course, if they have something to wear and something to eat, they can grow fussy for sure. They stir the pot for no apparent reason.

Rysty goes over to the offensive, putting pressure on a jaded Komekbay, who has lost confidence in his righteousness.

Rysty. What do you, a tractor driver who stinks of diesel fuel and solid oil, need, a? Newspapers and magazines? Let a bunch of writers, journalists, academicians, scientists in the capital read newspapers and magazines! They get money for this from the government. Why would you care at all? Do they pay you for this? Who the hell died and made you one of them?! “Pulymberism, pulymberism” – you can't stop talking about it from dawn till dusk, and you only enrage everyone. What are these words about? “Pulymdyber” – is that about money? Do they say “give me my money”?

[Pulymberism is the Kazakh ironic transliteration of the word “pluralism”]

(Pulymdyber means “give me my share”)

Komekbay. Indeed, you think only about money. And you don't care where they come from. Were they earned honestly or dirty? You don't give a damn. And pluralism means that different opinions are considered. Simply put, this means that both the simple worker Komekbay and the housewife Rysty have an equal right to express their disagreement with the words of the boss Nietali. And only when various opinions are considered, truth and justice will triumph in society and in the state.

Rysty. You know what? Fuck you!! Your ancestors would spin in their graves, if they heard it! Tell me! Where, at what times, in which country did truth and justice triumph and it was heaven on earth? I learned the story that you memorized at school too. The certificate of completion of

secondary education is gathering dust in the chest – it's no good. It's all because of you and your stupid stubbornness!..

“Oh, baby, baby!” – how you honeyfuggled me, you were after me all the time. And I was like a bird that was mesmerized by a snake. I followed you, I didn't dare to argue, start my own business, go my way. Poor me!.. And such great gentlemen were courting me, they were in love with me. It turns out that women are often stupid and naive, when we are young.

Komekbay. Are you serious?!

Rysty. Yes, I am!

Komekbay. Who was courting you? And who was in love with you?

Rysty. Why do you need this information?

Komekbay. We want to know as well. After all, we've been living together for twenty years.

Rysty. Come on, don't mess me about!

Komekbay. By the way, have you just mentioned my ancestors? Have you turned them over in their graves? So blaming me wasn't enough for you. And you got to my grandfathers. Tell me! What is their fault?

Rysty. The most direct.

Komekbay. And...

Rysty. And listen, carefully, if you ask! If they had walked with God, such a stubborn person like you, who likes newspapers and TV, a fucking dreamer wouldn't have appeared in this sinful world. And then neither me, nor your five children wouldn't wonder how to live on.

Komekbay. Did you say everything you wanted to say?

Rysty. Isn't that enough for you?

Komekbay. Well then give me 700-800 tenge.

Rysty. Why do you need them?

Komekbay. I'm burning inside, because of the shame and sadness, in which you and Nietali have immersed me today. I'll go to the store, buy vodka and drown my sorrow. I'll let off steam.

Rysty. I don't have a dime! How many months have passed since you stopped bringing home money? We've been barely surviving on children's allowance for the past three months. And you see, this poor man wants to heal his grief and sorrow!.. But as far as I understand, your sorrow will never end! You just need a reason, you're just dying to see this saleswoman, slut Zibash! If one day I see both of you having a good time together, I'll tear all the hair out and shove it you know where! You'll see, I'll name and shame you! And then we'll see, whether you have enough conscience to look people in the eye. I just can't track you down, unfortunately.

Komekbay. Wow, what a twist! You believed in the evil gossip of foolish people, and now you are mad. Ollakhi-billakhi, believe me, me and Zibash have never had an affair!

Rysty. Believe?! You?! Just look at this little angel! Believe me, he says! It turned out that you didn't spend the night at home the day I went to the matchmaking to Zharykbas in Kyzylkayrat. So where did you sleep that night? I don't even want to look at you, lustful goat!..

Komekbay. Who told you such nonsense?

Rysty. Who told me such nonsense? – you ask me! You are shameless! Does it really matter! Do you really think that everyone, apart from the two of you, is blinded around? Come on, go to your whore, pour out your heart. Put your head on her white thighs, shed your pathetic tears. Goat!..

Komekbay. Eeeh, easy, I don't complain to any women!

Rysty. You can go and pour out your heart to whoever you want. Just don't get drunk and come home in the middle of the night to drive me mad. Look at your senior children, one of them is a jiggit already, the other is a young woman, we can give her in marriage. Shame on you!

Komekbay doesn't know what and how to answer his God-given wife, so he jumps up. He stands completely clueless, then waves his hand in the heat of the moment, rips off his jacket from the coat rack,

slams the door, gropes for shoes in the corridor, puts them on crushing their heels, and immediately goes to the store, which is located in the center of the aul.

Scene No. 2

Komekbay enters the grocery store. An attractive young woman stands at the counter. She's all white, smooth, kempt. She greets him as an old acquaintance. She wears a white robe and snow-white, starched cap. This makes her look very elegantly.

Komekbay. *(He approaches the counter and talks in a slightly dull voice).* Salem*...

*[*Salem means hello]*

Zibash. *(She smiles sincerely)* Salem-salem!.. You seem to be in a bad mood. Perhaps, you got sick, didn't you?

Komekbay. No... I just have a headache...

Zibash. Aaa, did you drink too much yesterday?

Komekbay. No, I wish I did...

Zibash. *(She comes up to Komekbay, strokes his face with her beautiful, white fingers)* Look at you, you have stubble. Bristly... Shave. Because you start to look like an old man.

Komekbay. *(He livens up, recovers, glances at a large mirror hanging on the wall behind the store windows).* Really?.. Like an old man?

Zibash. Just kidding. You are the sultan of jigits, just like Brad Pitt. You know, Zibash doesn't eye up rustic men.

Komekbay. But still, actually, I'll become an old man in ten or fifteen years, and then you'll brush off me, won't you?

Zibash. Even if you become an exhausted old man, I will still love only you. Because you are kind, you have a bright soul. You have something that only I can see, something that your stupid Rysty will never see.

Komekbay. Rakhmet*, my darling. Thanks God you live in this world. Otherwise...

*[*Rakhmet means thanks]*

Zibash. What would be otherwise?

Komekbay. Otherwise... there would be no reason to live for me. Sometimes you don't even know why you exist in the world. On the whole, there is only infinite fuss and bustle. And it never ends.

Zibash. Don't say that! Live on, even if only for me. By the way, can you drop in tonight? Zheniszhan is on a holiday now, he went to visit his grandfather for a week.

Komekbay. I'm not sure whether I'll be able to do it today. If I can do it, I'll call you. Okay?

Zibash. Okay. So, tell me what you need.

Komekbay. *(He is embarrassed)* Give me a bottle of vodka... on loan... and a pack of cigarettes.

Zibash takes a bottle of vodka and a pack of cigarette from the shelf, wraps them up in a plastic bag and gives it to Komekbay.

Zibash. Do you need anything else? Don't be shy, tell me.

Komekbay. No, nothing more. Thank you, Zibash. I'll receive money from the cooperative store soon, and then I'll pay off all the debts. Deal?

Zibash. Oh, don't say another word! My darling, everything I have is yours!

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