



drama

The Tartar Pipe

A Lyric Drama
Time-348AD, Place-China
by Golam Ahmed Khan

Continued from last week

Scene III

Before the Tartar Camps — an open space before the tent of the Tartar Generals Mungus and Rabbat.

(Enter Mungus and Rabbat)

Mungus : O Rabbat, How long it is since
The Emperor Shakatan sent us on this venture?

Rabbat : Time has lost all count for me, O Mungus.
But I think it is nearing three seasons.

Mungus : So, I think. But see the stubborn city shows
As yet not sign of surrender. Who knows
If they can't resist for another three seasons
And foil all our efforts, for the Tartar
Army loves not to stray away from homes
Where the spring brings mirth and jollity
And pleasance beyond measure.

Rabbat : Yes, and our worthy rival Liu Kun,
Whom the city-folk adores like their very Tombs
Wherein are kept the Sacred Dusts of their Ancestors,
Will rather take his own life than
Submit into our hands. Though they
Get no supply, they would one and all
Starve to death rather than surrender.

Mungus : It is all true, our soldiers are excellent
So far; but who knows when the germ of
Discontent will burst forth?

Rabbat : Already there's some sign of that,
And thought our officers had no difficulty
To nip all dissents in the bud, yet, I fear-

Mungus : Say, O Rabbat, what is it though fearest.

Rabbat : That if by this moon the city-gates
Are not opened, they will declare themselves
The Master here.

Mungus : Indeed, I feared as much.
But hark! Can't thou hear? A flute!
*...I pine for sorrow
Missing you every morrow...*

Rabbat : Ho Abbas, Rifat, Ho Taus and Jamut.
(Enter Abbas, Rifat, Taus, Jamut)

Mungus : Did I not prohibit everyone, on pain of death
To pipe on a Tartar flute during this siege?

Abbas : O General, There's none in the army
Who would dare break thy stern command
It appears the sound comes from a far from the north,
Taus, go you, and inquire and bring word quickly.

(Exit Taus)

Mungus : Whoever, has-broken command shall die
You all know the meaning of my strange command.

Rabbat : Yes, Mungus, A Tartar pipe would evoke
Soft memories of the land of our birth
And make us wish for home.

Mungus : Yew, I much dread this Tartar Pipe.
Whoever has started this knows what he is about
For hark! Again the pipe...

*...The Lotus blooms in the lakes
The rose-bud from its slumber wakes
My little heart pants and heaves,
A Kiss my soldier no longer gives,
My bosom, alas, oh ever aches,
I pine for sorrow*

*Missing you every morrow...
(Enter Taus)*

Taus : O General, I had been to the south gate
But the sound comes from nowhere within
The Tartar Camps. It seems to me it comes
For within the City Walls the soldiers are restless
And many are listening to the song with rapt
Attention, while others are scowling and whispering.
The omen is serious.

Mungus : I know, I know.

The Tartar pipe has sung, and none can stop
The flood that runs down the mountain,
But hark!

*...The fleecy clouds with blue gaps,
Take on hills their transient naps,
The meadows green linen by streams,
With dancing water filled to the brims;
The Violet's head .. the water laps.*

*O, my soldier, come home,
Forget your shield and arrows, and spear,*

*O, come to my warm bosom,
O, take in your strong arms your only dear..*

Mungus : Abbas and Jumut and Rifat, -
You three must go to the three main posts
While myself shall guard the Central block.
You must try to check all plans for mutiny
Or desertion, and sipse all whispering groups
To their allotted camps. Impress upon all
The wily tricks of our besieged enemy,
And that none must listen to it, but drown
All its melody or alluring charm by shout.
G to your posts.

Abbas : We go, General.

(Exeunt Abbas, Jamut, Rifat)

Mungus : Taus — Go and guard my treasure room
Even with your life.

Taus : I go, General

(Exit Taus)

Mungus : Now they have all gone to their posts
And several duties. But O Rabbat, I feel
My confidence sinking, my will

Is taking leave of me, and I feel as a child
Who suddenly wakes and finds itself alone
In a strange land. Even as I heard the pipe,-
The Pipe that seemed to be pouring liquid moonbeams
I thought my Amina calling me from her dwelling
On the bank of a river fringed with flowery bushes.
She shed silvery tears on her golden cheeks!
When I left her near the Primrose bushes
This Tartar Pipe has called to my mind the lovely
Image of Amina on the purling brook.
Don't you, O Rabbat feel any such thing?

Rabbat : O General, I was ashamed to declare
The feelings which arose in my mind
When I heard the strange music floating
Over the plains. I have also a beloved girl,
Her name is Zuphela; she also shed many a
Tear for this rough and strong soldier. This
Music has all but torn my heart,-
And I..... hark, again the music.

*I pine for sorrow,
Missing you every morrow*

Mungus : O Rabbat, if we two Generals, The Valiant
Leaders of the Tartar hordes, are of this mind,
How must the common fighting men feel,
Who are infinitely less refined and less restrained
To whom impulse and instinct and act are all one
The piper has left no strain unsung, for hark

*In the market place of the city,
The fisher-women sit in a ring,
The flower-girls make garland-ditty
And join in a chorus to sing,
The dance in a circle round the fire,
The shouts of wild joy and pleasure
The work in the field, and the grand hire,
The harvest, and orchard their only treasure.*

*The men are away, and the fields bare,
The flowers are no longer put on the girl's hair*

*The days pass by gloomily
The night passes in melancholy,*

*The dew-drops untrodden glitter in the sun
The lovers no longer swifter than arrows run*

*O, the cloud-capped hills, the blue sky
The springs of freshest water running down the vale,
The crimson setting sun the whole world will dye
But my lover shall ever, for ever me fall.
He is flint and iron, he can thunder,
But he has forgotten softness, or to wonder
At strange beauty decaying on time's shore,
Or at beauty and lover knocking at death's door*

*The cuckoo calls on every tree
To be generous, loving and free
O My soldier, come to me,
My heart pines only for the...*

Mungus : O Rabbat, I can't stand it any more,
More will surfeit me to a death-swoon,
But what shall I do? Duty or love?
Glory or Love? Conquest or Love? Power or Love?

*... My soft bosom will nestle thee,
and give you all you want,
You will adore & fondle me,-
I shall imprtson thee, Oh my Truant...*

Rabbat : O Mungus, the wily Piper knows our heart's
Desires more than ourselves, and he has
Cleverly put fire into the veins of all.
I dread what news may come now. What's that?

(Enter Taus, breathless & disheveled with drawn swords)

Taus : O Generals, the army has broken
All commands, seized the treasure rooms,
And Abbas, Rifat and Jamut are trying
To bring order in the chaos, but they fail.
The Tartar Pipe has played havoc;
And our siege must now come to an end.
The army demands you to lead them back
To the land of Tartary. Otherwise blood may
Be shed, and the enemy might know it to our cost.
I advise you frankly to fall into their line,
We had our fill of plunder and treasure,
And it's vain to beat at these gates
Which seem able to resist our hordes
For years to come.

Mungus : O Rabbat and Taus,
I know when to be stern and when to yield
The Tartar Pipe has made me just as eager
To return into the land of our birth
But tell me, Taus, how took the common
Soldiers this strange music coming from
Nowhere?

Taus : O General, When the Piper began
No Soldier was idle but sat in groups,
Playing various games or sharpening weapons,
Or singing lusty songs. Only a few sat alone
Looking at the full moon over the hills.
But the Piper was like a snake charmer
Who at once made every man alert and attentive.
They became absorbed at the songs
That was poured out hour after hour;
Some sighed, some whispered, some murmured
Inaudible, incoherent words. Some got up
And held solitary communion with the self.
All were strangely affected, and gradually
A languor passed over the army.
Then some flickers of movements
And then plannings began,
For all were home-sick fellows,
Suffering cruelly in these barren places,
And memories of native plenitude
Floated up with each strand of music
The rest you know

Mungus : I thought as much,
For the piper has struck the basic
Strings of humankind and none

Can escape his strange eerie spell
For the touched all the depths of heart,
The various strata down to which
An individual man has been able to reach
His appeal was therefore universal

Go, and give orders for march back
Which must be carried out in absolute silence
For the enemy may hear. Go, the moon has set
And our best time to disperse is this.

(Exeunt Mungus, Taus and Rabbat.)

Scene IV.

The Palace Front — Morning.

(Enter Chin Yang, Lou Kun, Au Ling)

Chin Yang : O General, What strange vision
Is that which I see in the distance?
Do my eyes delude me? Can this be true?

Lou Kun : O, Majesty, The Sacred Dusts
Or your Ancestors have wrought this miracle.

Chin Yang: Strangest to behold the far-away
Plains all empty of their swarming, teeming
Thousands of the Tartars, their hundreds of big
White Tents are all vanished. Where for the last
Six months the morning resounded with their shouts,
Clashes of sword against sword of single combats-
Absolute stillness reigns supreme.
The morning dew remains untrodden by hoofs.
We have been saved from the brink of death,
And instead of surrendering to the cruel enemy,
We shall live in peace and security.

Liu Kun : O King, as I said before,
Praise be to the Sacred Ancestors.
Who have shown mercy on us at the last moment.
This miracle could be wrought by no humans
Only unfettered spirits could do it.

Au Ling : Give me leave, O Majesty, to say.

Chin Yang : Au Ling, Proceed.

Au Ling : O Majesty, this miracle has been wrought
By our valiant General Liu Kun. The cause
Or instrument is the Tartar Pipe on which he sang
The whole of the night past, now in high pitch,
Now low, now ranging the whole spheres to seek
Strange symphony, now gathering liquid melody
From whisperings of wind on the petals of roses.
Such music no human being has ever heard.
It sang of the Tartar land, their vales, hills and lakes.
It sang of the pining Tartar girls crying for their men.
It sang of the body and the spirit, of the earth and the sky
Making and weaving all into such delicate harmony
As to cast on all an irresistible spell.

Chin Yang : O General, you have wrought
This wondrous miracle and saved my kingdom
By virtue of your magic flute. Tell me all.

Liu Kun : O Majesty, I know nothing save this;
Heartbroken and sad last night, I thought to pipe
On my Tartar pipe for the last time in life,
For I was determined to kill myself today.
The snow-capped mountains sending the moonbeams
As messages of joy or fear to lands far and near
And then I remember nothing. Some spirit
Must have held me enchanted while it sang
Of the land of Tartary, of its vales and girls,
As Au Ling says he heard.

Chin Yang : O General, whoever might be
The invisible spirit, it could not do anything
Without your flute and rhythm. My kingdom
Owes you the greatest debt of honour
And I shall not fail to celebrate the day
With bestowing honour where it is due
Your soul has conquered the enemy.
Hark, the courtiers and the soldiers are in tumult
Of joy unending. See, there they come with
Radiant faces and look.

*(Enter in a bustle the Courtiers and the Soldiers,
shouting victory for the King and the Generals.)*

Chin Yang : You courtiers, you soldiers, know all
That our valiant General Liu Kun
Has wrought the greatest miracle
The Tartar army we could not budge
These Six months, has imply vanished
By a magic breath of the General on a Pipe
The Tartar Pipe — On which he sang all
Last night. The Sacred Dusts of the Ancestors
Helped him in the crisis to play such a tune
That all the Tartar hordes grew home-sick,
Desperate, and before the dawn, they have
Melted into the thin air, leaving our country
In peace and happiness and prosperity.
No more misery or starving shall there be anywhere
But tell me, O people, how shall I honour
Him who has saved the starving thousands?

The Courtiers : O Majesty, make him the Convenor
Of the whole of the southern provinces.

Chin Yang : Be it so, O people,
Liu Kun, I call upon you to do your duty,
Rule supreme but be just and strict and kind.

Liu Kun : O Majesty, I deserve much less
But your Majesty's command I accept.

Au Ling : Long live our Valiant Governor.

The Soldiers: Long live our Valiant Governor.

Liu Kun : Thanks to you all, my friends,
I am only one of you, and shall ever
Like to be so. Count me as your friend,
Not as a saviour. That would be my greatest reward.

Chin Yang : Let there be festivities in the kingdom.
We shall sumptuously entertain our new Governor.
We shall set up a high marble monument
And on it we shall set up a golden Tartar Pipe,
To commemorate this memorable day.
(The Curtain)