



From **FARIDE**  
by *Iren Rozdobudko*

Translated by Hanna Leliv

A calm like that only ever happened before the storm. Uneasy but perfect in its stillness. Even the birds were silent, feeling the slow rising of the waves that were starting to swell many kilometers away, soaking up the innocent landscape, surging up higher and higher, about to come down on the village like a violent force of nature.

And in that calm that reigned in that time without governance, strange things started to happen to Faride that hardly anyone else noticed; a

human community, once seemingly friendly, now looked at the “strangers” with suspicion and mistrust.

Stoyan, a Bulgarian baker, who could always give you a piece of banitsa, a cheese pie, on credit, or break off a piece of mekitsa, a delicious Bulgarian bread, “for nothing”, now covered the basket with a cloth as soon as he saw Sarah appear at the end of the street, her daughters hanging all over her.

“Spawning more beggars...” his wife, Maritsa, would grumble, shaking her head in reproach.

“And they say that Jews are rich,” some passerby would always comment. And people in the line would begin to nod like wind-up toys: “Let the Germans come, and all of a sudden they’ll have money, you’ll see!”

Silence would fall for a moment until in another line on another day another whisper grew louder, about the Muslims who “got too excited”, taking broken chairs and other trash out of the mosque (“must be hoping that the new government will allow them to pray Namaz!”), or about the Greeks who were “always looking toward the sea.” They cursed the Soviets, too, for leaving the people to fend for themselves. What would happen next? Who would they turn to? What grudges did their neighbors harbor? No one knew anything.

When she arrived at the nursery, Faride saw a big crowd—parents with children flocking in front of the gate. Başıra, baffled, dashed toward her friend.

“There you are! I have no clue what else to say. The director left. People are asking if the nursery is still going to be open if there’re only two of us here.”

Faride passed through the crowd and climbed up the stairs.

“Comrades, please calm down! The nursery will be open as usual!”

“But the Germans are on the way!” someone shouted from the crowd.

“The Germans? So what?” someone else yelled from the other side. “We still have to work!”

“Work for the Germans?!”

“How else are you going to feed your children?!”

“Open the nursery, Faride!” the crowd shouted.

“Let’s go home! What kind of teachers are they, anyway?!” The crowd boomed and swayed before Faride’s eyes. The children cried.

“Quiet! Keep calm, comrades!” Faride shouted. She scanned the hushed crowd, looking people in the eyes. “Dear parents...” She broke off, realizing how many different kinds of people were standing before her—some “dear,” some not so much, as well as those who’d soon steer clear of her

as if she were the biggest sinner on Earth. Climbing down the stairs, she picked children from their parents' hands like grapes from the vine without saying a word. They followed her without protest.

"Dear parents," Faride said again, getting hold of herself. "The nursery will be open in any case. You are free to go. Off to work, please. You're working for yourselves now. There's no more collective farm." And she whispered to Sarah: "Aunt Sarah, please ask your people to stay. I have something to tell them."

Faride turned to Başıra, who was just standing there, numb.

"Take the children inside. We're working as usual."

When only families from the Jewish neighborhood were left in the courtyard, she said to them:

"They say that the Germans expel Jews from everywhere."

The crowd boomed with indignation.

"These are rumors, Faride Enverivna!"

"That's not true, Faride!"

"How do you know that?"

"Why spread panic?"

Faride waved her hand with a shushing noise.

"I have an idea. While the Germans are still on the way, I can re-register the nursery as an orphanage."

"What for?"

"But our children are not orphans!"

"What are you up to, girl?"

Faride waved her hand again to keep down the clatter.

"Listen to me! If the news about people being expelled is true, children won't survive the trip! But if we make an orphanage here, I'll issue new birth certificates to all of your children." For greater certainty, Faride took the papers she'd picked up at the village council out of her basket. "I'll write in new, Tatar, names here! And then we'll see."

The crowd went numb, trying to make sense of what that young woman in the white mourning scarf had said.

"But they aren't Tatars," Riva, Sarah's neighbor, breathed out.

"How can I make my own child an orphan?" another woman lamented. "What are you talking about, Faride?!"

"And you what—want the Germans to take her away?" one of the men said, really coming down on her.

"Tatars are shrewd," someone from the crowd hissed. "She'll give them away and get money for it."

Faride shuddered at her own inexperience in human psychology. Where could she find the wisdom to get a quick insight into the future, to have her cold-blooded intellect check her intuitive decision?

"Faride is educated. Maybe she knows more than we do," Sarah said in a reproachful voice, then turned to the crowd: "You can do what you please, but I'm leaving my little Rosa here! Period. Thank you, Faride-hanım."

She had broken the tension. Others started to talk, too, in trusting, friendly voices.

“What should we do, Faride-hanim? Tell us!”

Faride felt a bitter wave surging up in her throat again. She wanted to sit down. To drink a cup of hot sweet tea and lie down for half an hour, under a woolen blanket. Looking into the crowd, she said:

“Leave the children here. I will look after them. I swear. Even if this decision is wrong, at least we can still feed the children.”

She turned and went inside.

\* \* \*

The Germans were in a cheerful mood when they arrived.

With their mouth harps and colorful beefstew cans scattered along the road and cutting the tongues of hungry puppies with their sharp edges, with their banners and aimless bullets fired into the air.

With candy in bright wrappers and bitter chocolate bars.

With cameras that snapped at anything that caught their eyes: ancient saklias, abandoned government buildings, women in long black dresses, herds of homeless goats hiding in the low-hanging crowns of trees twisting in the wind.

They chased chickens. Drank goat milk out of jugs, spilling it down their shirts, and then smashed the jugs against the slanted fences. Gabbled and cackled in their native language. Peered into the almond-shaped eyes of girls and young women, clicking their tongues. Settled down in the abandoned houses. At the same time, they preferred someplace where the lady of the house could cook for them and do their laundry.

As İbrahim the engraver said, life became better than under the Soviets, happier, even. From morning till night, bold marches blared out of loudspeakers that had finally been fixed. Posters announcing the resettlement of “all Jews” fluttered on all the fences and buildings.

Panic slowly spread through the Jewish neighborhood. Many of the Jews had only arrived there recently—where were they supposed to go next? To a new place? But where? The Germans promised them housing and cattle.

Faride no longer left the nursery building for fear that it would be taken away and turned into a hospital. She rarely went home to check on her mother. She didn't visit Rustem's parents either, afraid of her mother-in-law's meticulous eyes. She had more important things to do—make new birth certificates as soon as possible, come up with new names for the children in her care.

She took advantage of Başıra's absences: a German officer settled in her friend's house and had all kinds of needs that barred her from going to work every day.

Night fell on the village early. It dropped down the hills and wrapped the narrow streets in a dense fabric of darkness.

Faride filled in the birth certificates at night, when no one could see her, and the children were sleeping. She was done with the names in two nights. After that came the hard part—getting the children used to them. And teaching them the most common phrases used in everyday life.

Running her fingers over the certificates, Faride slowly walked past the wooden beds where the children were sleeping. She peered into their sleepy faces. She said their new names aloud, checking her own memory so she wouldn't make a mistake if the time came to say them in front of everyone.

“İbrahim Mambet. Sayde Abdulla. Reşat. Rafiy. Çubar.”

She reached Rosa's bed and saw that the girl was not asleep.

"When will my mother come and get me?"

"Soon. Be patient."

"When?" Rosa persisted.

"When the war ends."

"Tomorrow?"

"Perhaps. Sleep now."

Rosa sat up on her bed, angry.

"That's not true. You're our mother now, I know it."

"That's why you have to listen to me. Like your mother," Faride said with a sigh, putting the little girl to bed. "Your mother allowed me to give you a new name. You have to answer to it, no matter what. Is that clear?"

"What's the name?" the girl lifted her head from her pillow again.

"Tamila. Do you like it?"

"Yes, very much!" the girl locked her arms around Faride's neck and clung to her collar bone like wild ivy. "You're so kind, Faride-hanim. But what about the others? Will they get new names, too?"

Faride gave a serious nod.

"They will. And I have a job for you, since you're one of the older girls. I would like to ask you to teach the other children to say their new names nice and clear. Will you help me?"

"Sure!" she said with pride.

"Good. In the morning, I will teach all of you to say your new names. And if someone asks you who you are, say, 'Tatars.'"

"But who would ask us that?"

"Bad people."

"Dervishes? Like in a fairy tale?"

"Yes, like in a fairy tale. You know that you can't tell your real name to evil dervishes. It's like a game. You have to outwit them! Will you play along?"

Rosa's eyes flashed with curiosity and excitement.

"I will!" She pressed herself to Faride's bosom, and Faride felt her cold nose and warm lips breathing straight into her heart. "I love you, Faride-hanim!"

"I love you, too, Tamila. And now go to sleep. We'll have a difficult day tomorrow. We'll be learning how to play a new game."

\* \* \*

The difficult day arrived the day after tomorrow when the children had just barely learned their new names. They started to play a game called "Bravehearts vs. evil dervishes": Faride would do roll call, and the children who mixed up their own names or the names of others would end up in the dervishes' hands and have to sit under a blanket so the dervishes couldn't find them and punish them.

The children were thrilled. In the evening, they answered to their new names quite easily. Başır was strongly against it. She shivered like a goat on a winter day, terrified of the strangers, their black uniforms with golden chevrons on the lapels, and the scent of the cologne the senior officers wore.

Faride hoped that the Germans would stay away from the orphanage, as they were usually kind to children. But in the end, the inspection team arrived: five men headed by Obersturbannführer Zalke. Herr Zalke told them to line the children up in the garden and spent five minutes staring into their grubby (another idea of Faride's) faces. Then he took a handful of candy out of his pocket and started to walk along the line. He offered candy to Mikhael.

"What's your name?" The boy took candy and started to unwrap it as swiftly as a monkey. The officer covered the boy's hand with his own.

"Don't be afraid. Tell me."

"En...Enver," the boy spelled out, looking at Faride.

Faride lowered her eyes and knitted her brows, letting the other children know that Mikhael didn't do a great job at the most important stage of the new game. Rosa caught her stern look and jumped out:

"And my name is Tamila! Tamila! Give me candy, too, mister!"

The interpreter smiled and explained what the little girl wanted. Herr Zalke laughed and handed out the rest of the candy to the children who started to shout their names, interrupting each other. He said to Faride:

"So, you're saying these are orphans?"

"That's right, sir. They're orphans."

"Are there any Jews among them?"

"No, sir. Here are their birth certificates."

Faride handed a sheaf of papers to Herr Zalke. He frowned, glanced down at the first page, then passed the papers to his interpreter and peered at the children again.

"They don't really look like Tatars."

Faride's eyes flashed defiantly.

"Herr Officer is well-versed in ethnography?"

"Ethnography, much like geography, is the same everywhere now," he said. "Greater Germany! Here, there, and everywhere!"

Faride nodded vaguely and, to avoid further conversation, suddenly started to yell at the children who had gotten bored standing next to grownups.

"İrakliyi, stop fussing around! Ahmet! Tamila! Ayşe! Stand still. Herr officer wants to see if you know how to behave. Tınçoluñız !"

The children understood what she had said and went quiet. Faride waved her hand, and they scattered around the garden.

"Aşırmañız !" Faride called to them, and the children stopped in their tracks and looked back at her. Faride threw a triumphant look at the officer. He coughed into his fist and nodded.

"Alright. I'll talk to you later."

When the group left the courtyard, Faride noticed Başıra. She was sitting on a lopsided bench, her hands gripping her shoulders, rocking back and forth like a drunk.

**NORA-DRUK Publishers**

“They’ll shoot us... They’ll shoot us,” she whispered.

“Go home,” Faride said. “I’ll deal with it myself.”

She sagged wearily on the bench. She only had five more words she could have said to the children. Only five words they could’ve understood.