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On and Off the Trans-Siberian Train: The Taxi Driver

Life and love behind the wheel of a taxi.

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Ilbrus, 59 years old

I was born in Azerbaijan and I studied in Baku. During the Soviet period I went to study in Nizhny Novgorod at the Institute of Water Transportation. And I've lived here since then. Today I am driving a taxi, but in the 1990s and 2000s, I had my own business and made good money. But I sent 80% of what I made to my family. The Caucasus is the Caucasus. There we are raised completely differently. There you have respect for the elderly and for women.

My first wife – a journalist and TV host, was the head of a department in the university, a smart woman. She wrote a book about me. We are from the same village, studied together in school. We are divorced. The foundation for the collapse of our marriage was laid by her

father, my father-in-law. When we got married, I said “We are going to Nizhny Novgorod. I won’t be living in Baku”. And her father did not allow it: “No, she is a journalist and she will work in Baku.” I bought her a 4-room apartment there. But what kind of family life can you have long-distance? We got divorced after four years.

She loved and still loves me madly. She still calls me five times a day. When we divorced, she was 32 years old, a young woman. Her dad (through her sister) said, “There are many young eligible bachelors, she should remarry.” After that she didn’t speak with her dad for eight months. She said, there was only one man, there won’t be another. "I love that man and I will love always love him, for all my life." We have a daughter together.

After the divorce I didn’t speak with them for 10 years. I gavea them the apartment and left. All these years I never saw my daughter. First I sent them money, and then my daughter began to speak up. "I want a dad, not the money." In 2016 I went there and my niece organized a meeting with my daughter for me. Ten years later. I went and sat in the car of my ex-wife, and my daughter started talking about childhood grievances, that’s all she held onto for all these years. She told me everything and began to cry. I told her “That's enough, daughter, are you finished? Good-bye.” I can't handle it when they attack me like that. That's just the way I am.

I met my second wife in the hospital in Nizhny, when I had an ulcer. She was also a patient. She was a good woman, she loved me very much. She forgot her own diseases and cured my ulcer with her food.

I lived with her in a 2-bedroom apartment, there was a dacha (summer house), the Volga, a Zhiguli *(Editor's note: Zhiguli was a common brand of car popular during the Soviet Union.)* I earned money, she had a Group II disability, rheumatoid arthritis. She put me in her will. Her aunt persuaded her. She said, "You know what your mother is like." In reality my mother-in-law is a rotten person. So my wife decided to give the house that her father had left her to me on the condition that I buy her sister and niece an apartment.

Then my mother-in-law took me to court. The judge began the hearing with the statement, "This nasty black man from the Caucasus cheated a 70-year-old grandmother." I immediately told the judge not to speak to me that way. But when the judge found out the my wife's doctor, relatives, neighbors, and everybody supported me, everything changed. After half a year we reached an agreement. You wouldn’t believe how my dead wife came to me in my dreams after that and asked me what happened. Why did I fight with her mom? I would go to her and she'd run away.

After her death I met my third wife. I'd seen her before, when I was in the hospital. I went to the cafe to eat and saw her. She was Asian, a pretty young girl, working as a waitress. I saw her and suddenly thought she could be my wife. Then I forgot about it.

After the death of my wife, a year and a half later, I ended up in the cafe again and saw her. I decided to introduce myself, so I sat down at the table she was cleaning. She said, "Sit down at a clean table, why did you sit here?" I said, “I sat here to meet you. I want you to serve me.”

I gave her my number, but she didn’t call me. When I went the next day, I asked her where she lived, and after work I waited for her near her home in my car. I told her not to go to work

anymore, that I had serious intentions. The next day I arrived with roses and didn't let her go to work. We drove to my apartment. I showed her everything and said, “Will you marry me? Don’t think too long.”

After a month we filed an application and got married. And now we have been together for seventeen years. The relationship with her is very difficult. I’m 59 and she is 38 it's a 21-year difference. She's so jealous, she thinks I'm cheating on her with everyone in a skirt.

I’m a bastard. For four years I didn’t cheat on her at all, but she was still jealous. It’s as if I was cheating on her. It’s like I’m guilty without actually being guilty. That is when I started cheating on her. I told her I love her, I want to be with her, she needs to understand that I do everything for my family. I’m a big family man, I work every day to provide for my family. Several times we almost got divorced, but I can’t leave the children. They'd be so hurt, especially my daughter. I already hurt one, I don’t want to hurt these children, too.

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