

BLOOD ON THE SNOW

genre: drama

The story focuses on a Daghestanian family from Moscow in the mid 1990s. (Daghestan is a province of Southern Russia, near Chechnya. It is a mountainous country inhabited by small Muslim tribes.) Karim, the father and head of the family, is a tough businessman, religious Muslim and loving father. He lives with his wife, three daughters and 14-year-old son, Amir, the main character of the story. Amir is similar to his father in his youth in every way, except that something new gleams in Amir's soul, something that is unusual for all those around him.

And all that surrounds Amir is violence. It surrounds him from all sides. American action movies on TV, gangsters who finance his father's business, the tough patriarchal lifestyle inside his home, interpersonal relationships between classmates, xenophobia of the aboriginal Russian population. Succumbing to the influence of his more aggressive friends, Amir becomes a witness to a crime – a gang-rape of a teenager perpetrated by Rustam, the 15-year-old son of a mafia boss. The fear and secret laws that people around Amir follow force him to keep silent, although a protest grows on inside him.

At the same time Amir becomes acquainted with Anton, a 30-year-old talented lonely computer programmer, who lives next door. Anton introduces him to the enigmatic world of Internet technologies. Amir is immediately attracted to the world of IT and decides to become a programmer too. It's not just a new technology, it's a window to another world. Karim is not particularly enthusiastic about his son's choice, as he expected that Amir would continue to develop the family business. However a parent's love overcomes any objections, and Karim buys a computer, hoping that it's just a child's passing phase.

But besides introducing Amir to the world of IT Anton instills in him new ideas that find a fertile ground inside the young soul. Anton demonstrates the model of relations between men and women and a model of family that are new for Amir, and gives him a chance to feel the difference between cultures in everyday life: modern Russian, traditional highlander Muslim and modern European-American. Now Amir understands that humans can be free and happy without humiliating and killing other people, and without leaning on fellow tribesmen's support.

But the world around Amir hits him with another blow. The teenager who Amir saw getting raped, can't handle the mass persecution and commits suicide at school, for all to see.

Everything inside of Amir turns upside down. Trying to find an escape from it, Amir comes to Anton to share his thoughts. Two friends get drunk, go for a walk through the city at night and are stopped by police. There is no clear distinction between criminals and some policemen. And those policemen who stop Amir and Anton are ordinary bandits. Having just spent what little they had, Amir and Anton are not in a position to give the policemen anything. In retribution, they are severely beaten. Anton dies.

Amir survives but other policemen demand that he provide false evidence vindicating the murderers. Karim, afraid of losing his only son, steps in and orders Amir to comply. Amir acquiesces and does it. But the death of his older friend leaves a deep gash in his soul. And the behavior of his father in the critical situation destroys his entire picture of the world, which was drummed into his head from childhood. From this moment Amir chooses his own way in life.

Ten years later. Amir's teenage dreams have come true. He is now a top software developer at a leading IT company that works on the IT-industry "frontier". Amir left his parents' house and lives in Moscow alone now, visiting his father and mother only from time to time. He lives by an ordinary life of a young Moscovite from a well-to-do family. One of his American friends offers him a job in the USA. Amir thinks about his next step in life.

But one day a ghost from the past appears before him. At a night club party he meets Rustam, who has become an established criminal by this time. Instead of becoming a banker or a lawyer as children of some big mafia bosses, he walked the way of a petty gangster. And this does not garner

him the respect of his father nor of his tribesmen. This meeting seems accidental and not filled with consequences to Amir, so he leaves after telling Rustam what he thinks about him.

Rustam, who was schooled in jail, is just an animal, and is very rancorous. He nurses a grievance against Amir.

Suddenly Amir becomes acquainted with Vika, a modern emancipated Russian girl with a European-American flare. A spark ignites between them and their relationship blossoms fast toward marriage. Amir is in love with Vika. Being a girl from a well-to-do Moscow family, and a bit of a racist as is fashionable in modern young Russian intellectuals circle, she never communicated with people like Amir. She is attracted by the combination of savage strength, inherited from Karim, and sensitive intellect, developed with the influence of Anton.

Being tired of feeling like an enemy on other people's land and following a juvenile thirst for the future, Amir decides to accept the offer to emigrate to the USA. Vika supports his decision, and plans to become Amir's wife to start their life together.

Both of these – marriage to a Russian girl and emigration to the USA – are utter shock for Karim. Unsuccessfully he tries to keep Amir from doing them, but the rift in father and son relations only widens.

It seems that all is going wonderfully except the tiff between Amir and his parents. But fate delivers a sudden blow. Rustam and his gangster friends meet Amir and Vika on the street, wait until they leave, follow Vika, kidnap and rape her.

It's a terrible shock for Vika in her quiet peaceful life as a smart girl from Moscow middle class. She clashes with a dark side of the strength that instinctively attracted her to Amir, and this collision drives their relationship to catastrophe. Vika breaks up with Amir.

Amir becomes furious after getting news about the rape and Vika's denial to talk to him. He tries to deal with his aggression and pain after a phone call with Vika and smashes a street cafe window.

That results in him being taken in by the police again. His talk with a detective, who is also an immigrant from Daghestan, removes all barriers that prevented Amir from giving vent to his anger.

The detective explains the simple rules of life, according to which there are no formal laws, but only relationships between people: a weak obeys a strong, and a fight is the only way to demand justice in such situations. After explaining that to Amir the detective releases him – he just wants to help a fellow tribesman avoid punishment for breaking a window in cafe. He can't ever imagine that Amir is not a simple Daghestanian guy. Amir is a man who has highlander ideas about honor connected with a model of the world picked up from American action movies, which say "if there is no sheriff in the town you can become the sheriff and solve all the problems with bad guys".

Amir finds Rustam and his accomplices and kills all of them in a bloody slaughter. He then leaves for the USA. Alone. Without Vika.

There Amir takes up life in a large American city as a simple immigrant worker. But he can't find himself in the new surroundings. Loneliness presses him down. The nightmare of what happened haunts him again and again. And the ordinary life in the free country does not give him an exit for his energy. This energy turned inside pushes Amir to the edge of suicide.

But at the critical moment Amir hears a muezzin's call to prayer. He follows the voice and comes to a mosque where American Muslims celebrate Kurban Bayram. The atmosphere of the holy day rekindles his childhood memories leading Amir to phone his father. The call ends with all ties between them severed for good. But it gives him the possibility to divide religious values given to him by his father from family relations. Amir comes to an understanding that freedom after losing everything is not real freedom, and it's only possible to become free by keeping the belief in God in such situations.

And after understanding that, Amir begins his new life as a free man in a free world.

Kamil Rafik

Phone: +1 718 395 9826

E-mail: mailbox@kamil-rafik.com