

## FOUR DECADES OF EXILE

\*\*\*PLUS REVISED ADDITIONS OF: NIGHT OF WINE AND INSOMNIA 1997 AND SHADES AND SHADOWS 1998\*\*\*

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*Rice Bread I was a poor, hungry boy, going to school, on an early morning, of a chilly winter day, needing to grab a bite. You sat on your legs, on the bare kitchen floor, to build a fire with a few stagnant, wet twigs and damp roots, to heat the iron pan to bake a rice-bread for me. You vehemently fought with the heavy smoke for a long while until your eyes moistened; you failed to light the wood, and gave up. The steel pan didn't heat; the rice dough remained untouched. I went to school empty-stomached, shivering, without a bite. I never minded hunger if I only had a dinner last night. I didn't know building a fire was that hard or impossible in a country floating on a lake of oil and gas. Five long and hard decades had passed; with all the riches, plenty milk and honey America can afford, my silk shirts and ties, overseas travels, imported wine, my alms to the needy and exiled, my open house, I still keen for your naked rice bread, for your redolent hugs' warmth in the chilly winter days, under the generous eyes of the immortal sun. I was a tattered, poverty-stricken, half-naked, half-starved, bare-footed lad, yet far away from the savage clash of adamant, civilized swords, the aches of horrendous calamities and atrocities, the evil and hatred of my malevolent, villainous world. In the waterfall of waned memories, I often drown and weep like a hungry, orphan child keening to your cardamom, compassion, and rice-bread. In retrospect, that hunger, poverty, and deprivation taught me tolerance, endurance, to be human after all. I learned never to live for food; "Not only by bread a man lives." I rarely slept without nostalgically and pensively recalling your misfortunate, sorrowful face, your smoke-stifled, withered, tearful eyes, as you vehemently struggled to build a fire.*

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