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SELECTED STORIES

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Translated from Georgian into English by Ninutsa Nadirashvili

FOREWORD

It has already been 12 years since the literary contest “Lile” began bringing together people who write and reflect on how we can better care for our planet. Both professional writers and amateur authors participate in the contest, creating fascinating stories about energy efficiency, renewable energy, energy poverty, and adaptation to climate change.

“Lile” — the name itself is inspired by Svan mythology and is associated with the sun deity, a symbol of life and light. This very symbol expresses the motto of our literary contest: to transfer the green ideas into a creative inspiration and spread them through literature.

These stories are based on real-life experiences and emotions — sometimes sad, sometimes humorous, but always sincere. The themes they explore have become everyday realities for many Georgians: how to manage energy expenses, how to protect our homes from heat and cold, and how to take small but meaningful steps to reduce climate risks.

This brochure presents 8 selected stories that were recognized as winners of the “Lile” contest in 2022–2023 and published in both Georgian and English.

It is intended for anyone interested in how energy efficiency and renewable energy practices can be integrated into daily life and how we can build a more sustainable future in the face of climate change.

“Lile” begins with words but continues through action — where car-

ing for the environment becomes an ordinary, yet essential part of everyday life. These stories reflect just that, giving green ideas a literary spirit.

And here are our winning “Lile” stories

„Lile” 2022

- “I Was in the Sky, I Saw the Sky” – by Mikho Mosulishvili
- „Three Boys, Three Fathers“ – by Tamar Phkhakadze
- “A Straw Barn, Red Dress, and Black Pants” - by Tamar Bolkvadze
- “A Man of God”- by Natia Rostiashvili
- „Even Gods Cry Sometimes“ by Levan Loria

„Lile 2023“

- „Oxygen“ - by Natia Rostiashvili
- “Pamparula of Javakheti, Mine ” - by Mikho Mosulishvili
- „My Ex” by Gocha Gviniahsvili

Mikho Mosulishvili

I WAS IN THE SKY, I SAW THE SKY (A Dead Man's Story)

1

Get up, man, Levan, get up, I said. Here, they rolled red eggs on our graves. Yes, yes, it's Easter morning, by the grace of God. The old woman standing here, that's the head of the monastery of the Virgin Mary, Mother Kvirila. And these ones, the ones that rolled us the red eggs and are cleaning our graves, they're not angels yet; they are the nuns here: Philothea, Sophia, Thaisia, and Evanthia...

What should I tell you, I don't know... I will tell you little by little what comes to my mind so that it won't be too lengthy of a tale later. I haven't seen you in a long time, otherwise, it's not like I'm greedy for conversation.

Here, below the Caucasus mountain range, where the two ridges rise from here and there and join in the middle, in the lowlands, there comes the Liakhvi River.

That green forest is the sustenance of the Earth, the one that descends from these hills here and there. Then there is this vast range, here and there with bushes and all green fields, full of meadows and flowers. That one comes down to Liakhvi too.

Here, again, on the wooded slope of the Khani Mountain, is this the monastery of our Holy Virgin Mary, with its green yard, your and my gravestones by the wall, at the foot of the oak trees... I wanted to move



your mother here too, then I changed my mind, let her lie there, at the foot of the walnut tree in our yard; after all, one day we will get there...

Right here, that's where this small and fast Khanishkevi River flows. See, it descends from the lap of the Khani Mountain to run down here, glugging merrily, and then brings our story to Liakhvi below, where they join...

Which way are you looking, child? You know these places from afar, now you see them up close...

Oh, curse their descendants, those...

They roll up with their wobbling cars, nine or ten. First, they destroy the old border, and rip out the iron fences. Then they'll come, come and stick it in here, they'll stretch the barbed-wire defences and fix an iron sign saying the border is here and not to come close.

In Atotsi, Khurvaleti, Zemo Nikozi, and I don't even know, God knows where else they push the border like that. Then whoever is accidentally left on the other side there, they kidnap them and demand a ransom. You know the guy who drives the herd in our village, nicknamed "Peaceful", they abducted him with the cattle. Then they barely somehow collected the money and that's how they rescued him.

A year will run off and they'll push the barbed wire again. More and more, they come and come, closer and closer.

Several households in the Gugutiantkari village ended up on their side like that. Zardianthkari, Ghogheti, Dvani, Ditsi, Tsitsagiantkari, Adzvi, and Kveshi were divided like that too. Then, now Jariasheni is almost completely surrounded by those wires and it also ended up across the border...

They have taken thirty-five hectares like this, they say, land equal to twelve thousand football stadiums.

Who are you, you good-for-nothing, sleazy bastard, who?!

You're a shameless embarrassment, you're greedy and pushy, go and lie in those steppes, what do you want here, what did you lose here, what's yours here?



You'll get what you're looking for...

There will be one time, I will collect myself, and as I stand here, Sosipatre Mariamidze, the beekeeper Filimona's boy, I will surely make you reap everything you've sowed here for me...

2

This is a high place and here, look how you can see it from here. Here, when following this Liakhvi, first, there's Kvemo Khviti, then Zemo Nikozi, Tskhinvali and higher than Tskhinvali there's Prisi and then Tamarasheni. It was, more like. Nothing's left of that now. That or Kekhvi, or Avnevi, or Nuli...

All the villages from Achabeti to Tamarasheni were wrapped in flames...

I was at home and it exploded suddenly. Your mother was working around the yard, feeding the chickens, and I ran out right away. She was lying next to the cart. Her intestines were ripped out of her stomach, and the fingers on both her hands were torn off. There were wounds all up and down her arms and her left arm was barely hanging with a little bit of flesh, barely, it was almost entirely torn off.

She spent her last seconds in these hands...

Did I even have time to think of myself?

When I tried to kneel next to your dying mother, it hurt a lot, I couldn't bend my leg anymore. Pieces of shrapnel had hit my left thigh and my left arm and four toes of my right foot were torn off. I banded these wounds and the house was burning so fast, I could not have saved anything.

I dug a grave, struggling, said I'd let her be there for a little bit, then I would come back and move her...

I'm walking and the whole village is burning. It's blazing. Their planes were flying, surrounding us from above and bombing us all the same.



Fortunately, you know “righty” from Variani, who drives a taxi? He met me on the way. He used to say drive a taxi and said to me, “Sit down, I’m helping people for free right now to get them out of here.”

There were two people sitting in the car, elderly women, and he let me sit too, told me he would take me to Variani.

And — rat-a-tat-a-tat-a-tata... - when it started on the Tedotsminda hill, wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemy... they were shooting from the ash trees on the side of the road. “Righty” tried to turn his Opel to the left, but he was already wounded in the shoulder too, he didn’t have enough strength and crashed into the cliff. One bullet hit the side of his heart, the second flew into his right shoulder, spun around and sprayed the entire right side of his face with blood. It turns out that there are bullets like that, that spin into the bones... I did manage to kick the door off by hitting it and as soon as I crawled to the ground, they fired a mortar at the car, it hit the front door, on the right. The explosion threw the car into the air and this “Righty”, already dead, flew into the cliff.

Shrapnel fragments hit me again, in the face, in my left hand, and the wave from the blast threw me down on the ground with all its force...

When the shootings stopped, I hardly managed to raise my head, my vision was very blurry. I saw the soldiers, with their leafy uniforms and machine guns. The car was completely shot up and there was no sound from there. I’m crashed on the road like that, I’m crashed and where I’m hurt, I can’t even tell anymore...

At that moment, one of their soldiers walked up, he is also wearing that leafy uniform, but he has a cut leather strap on his shoulder, a Sam Browne belt you know. He is holding a machine gun in his hands and a Makarov pistol is hanging on his belt too.

He would be your age, no, older than you. Since I saw one big star on his collar, means he’s a major. He’s looking around, as our neighbor “Bloody” used to do when he was drunk, mockingly and like he doesn’t care. You know “Bloody”, right? He was not lazy for man-



slaughter or scrubbing the slammer floors. I raised my head again and am looking into his colorless eyes. First, he pointed the machine gun at me. Then he changed his mind, turned around and shouted towards from where they were shooting, shouted in a tired and loud voice that he had found a live one and went over there. He came back with three soldiers, smoking an almost-finished cigarette and looking someplace else. Finally, he asked me if I could crawl.

I said I would somehow, as long as they didn't shoot me.

He told me to hurry up before he changed his mind.

With one healthy hand, I leaned on the car and lifted myself with a struggle, lifted myself and finally stood up. I am wondering what's going on with those women. I looked inside. Both are fully swimming in blood. You can't hear their breathing or moaning.

Fear overtook me. I turned around and when I was leaving, his soldiers, all of them rascals, tykes and weasels, with twisted lashes and shrill voices, those bastards called after me, "You should be grateful to comrade Major Gleb Usmanov, otherwise you wouldn't have survived us either..."

What do I know, well, that's what they told me, but what did they have in mind, what were they going to do, did I know?

Out of despondency, I looked up at the sun in the shadow mixed with the black clouds, and no, it was not looking badly at me at all...

Someone might have hesitated, might have not moved from there for a long time, afraid that they would shoot after him. There were many cases like that, you know, they'd pretend to let people go and then would fire round after round at their backs.

I left anyway, I said whatever, I thought I wouldn't get far from a coffin either way... I don't remember how I got to our people, but that Major Gleb Usmanov, that rogue of a man, him and "Bloody" I will never forget.



3

Turns out our guys found me on the road, unconscious, and since I was still breathing, they put me in an ambulance car and took me to Gori.

They amputated this left hand in the Gori hospital too, gangrene had started.

What can I tell you about the rest, it was not too bad, they fixed me up...

In the end, I was left like this, I limp with my right leg and my left arm is gone nearly up to my shoulder.

One day, I come out of the hospital and I'm smoking for myself. I'm thinking, thinking, I can't let go of my worries, I've already split up with life and I don't even think of myself as being alive anymore.

No more you, no more wife, no more house... me either...

That's when the nuns dressed in black came. Not even women, what's what, they looked like angels. They weren't there yet, but they didn't seem that far from it either.

Well, what did I know then, that the one with a big cross on her chest, that old and frail was the leader of this monastery, Mother Kvirila. Her white hair was visible under the nun's headdress, and she looked very virtuous and kind. I didn't know this yet but it turns out that she didn't wear shoes and would always walk around like that, in slippers, in winter and summer. These diligent followers were accompanying her, more or less younger women: Mother Evanthia, Mother Philothea, Mother Thaisia and Mother Sophia.

The surgeon at the hospital who treated me was a very famous and great man, Professor Maisuradze, Mr. Misha. He had apparently asked the nuns to take me to the monastery so that I would not commit some sin...

It was that day that I felt close to God too. How many years have passed since that war, twelve or more already and that's still how I am.



It's not that I didn't worry anymore, but slowly I realized that what is happening is the Lord's will, not ours. These are worldly tests, and the way He sends them to you, he also helps you overcome them. This is in this temporary place and then there too, in that eternal place, in Heaven, he will have mercy on you, if you live properly until then.

Well, so, I tried to. In the monastery, I was a watchman, a gardener, a beekeeper, and a listener to their chants of obedience; I was obedient to our leader, Mother Kvirila. The nuns, they have their work split up among themselves. Mother Evanthia always paints icons with prayer, she says it won't work otherwise. Mother Philothea obediently makes candles, says that if you are not obedient, you will not be humble, and without humility, there will be no love of the Lord. Mother Thaisia is a singer, she also teaches singing hymns, and on Sundays, the children come from the school in the other village to learn too. Mother Sophia still writes the Gospels with an ink pen and with such letters that you'd think they were the Lord's little birds.

Mother Kvirila, our leader, teaches us obedience, whatever we do, it should be for the glory of God and the betterment of the soul. She says if the grapevines did not have support, they would have fallen and gone bad. The same applies to the nation; if it did not have monks and nuns as its saviors, it would have spoiled and become extinct.

We are like this, in prayer and toil. At the meal, we read the Gospel, the lives of the holy fathers, and explanations. This monastery has its own schedule, dawn prayer starts at seven o'clock, evening prayer at eight o'clock. In between, there is a church service in the name of the Holy Virgin Mary.

There is an icon-painting room, a copying room, a dining room, a chapel... there is a vegetable garden, a beehive, and what do I know... Well, then, how else? Would the beekeeper Philimona's boy not take care of the bees? I added and added to the hives. For dinner, I also grew vegetables, holding a spade in one hand and a hoe in another. Here, you can see the corn has already grown, and mine was also like that.



The nuns were not lazy to work either and we had a well-maintained monastery through the Lord's grace and love, we had it, we have it and we will have it always.

Now, what kind of chanting do these nuns know, Mother Kvirila and I listen to it with bated breath.

"God, by yours and not by us..." That's how it is here and in truth, everywhere...

4

People come up here during the feast of Dormition and once my soldier boys came up too, all strapping young men, bless them, they were the ones who helped me bring you up and bury you here... That time they showed me a video. Yes, with a phone that they have nowadays...

I look, I look, and wow, how bad I am feeling seeing all this...

A captured Georgian soldier is being tortured by Ossetian "militants" and Russian occupiers. Seven or eight are military. There are two men in Russian field uniforms, and these Ossetian "militants" are wearing whatever uniforms they could get their hands on. One is even in jeans. This poor captive is chained to the fence and is being kicked constantly. Then they drag him away...

The captive is seated on the ground, wearing a light gray desert-colored American spotted uniform and light-colored high-top boots. They've taken his military coat half off, his shoulders and waist are visible. His face is black from many beatings and blood is spilling from his mouth. It's hard to recognize him, it's hard...

"Who is your president? He's a bitch. What? Isn't he?.. He is, he is, he is!.. kiss. Kiss, kiss now, kiss the ground, motherfucker, kiss, you bastard!" someone shouts in a weak and tasteless Georgian, and there's no mistaking it, Ossetians speak Georgian like that here.

Someone with black boots stands on the captive's back, his face is not visible in the shot. He goes up and comes down, thrusting with all his might, pushing the Georgian's spine to the ground so he can kiss it.



This prisoner is still trying to get up and throws off the torturer.

They speak both Ossetian and Russian from time to time.

From the right, a Russian boot pushes on the prisoner's neck again to make him kiss the ground. They'll bend his head, but this disobedient head moves, pulls and straightens again, throwing the foot off his neck. Now another from the left tries the same thing. Now another and the tortured soldier always straightens. He's like a stone, I don't know who he is, I can't tell. The blackened and bloodied face is not easy to make out.

Ossetian can be heard. Russian orders mix in. And again someone asks in loose Georgian:

"Where were you yesterday, Levan?"

"I don't know... I have no idea..." - the prisoner blurts out and...

I would not mistake that voice, no... It was you, Levan, my son...

"When will you have an idea?" some tyrant asks you again in Ossetian Georgian.

They pour water from a plastic bottle on your head and neck. Water falls on your face, nose, mouth and reaches the ground all bloodied.

"Levan, where were you yesterday, yesterday?" that sly voice repeats to you again, the same one...

These tormentors take turns jumping on your back, Levan, my son... they go up and down and squat on your back, so that they can somehow make you kiss the ground.

You know how bad of a situation you are in, Levan, blood is spilling from your mouth, and your speech is slurred, but they can't make you obey, they can't! You don't bend to the ground till the end...

And here you can hear the voice of braggish and conceited Major, Gleb Usmanov's bruised Russian voice, "Ask him again, where he was bumming yesterday...?"

Well, what could make me forget that voice...



5

Come, come, now I'll tell you about this river of ours.

A river is just water, but flowing.

If it does not flow, then it is a swamp and a nest for snakes and frogs.

And when it does flow, it is a river.

It will go, go, with the sun, it will go to the earth and make it happy with grass and flowers, bushes and trees and fruits.

It will go, go, again with the sun, it will go up in the sky, come to a cloud and it will come down here again, as rain or snow.

This is how the sun carries around the river.

Well, it was the something warming people who came here three years ago, the people from the center of energy something, to benefit something, those people told us things, and I will tell you this in my own words: With this temperature rising and the drought eating the earth, we can no longer even harvest apples properly, you know why?

It's because we use oil, coal and firewood. That burning gives off gas, it goes up into the sky and thins the ozone layer there. This ozone is the kind of thing that should catch the bad sun rays and let the good ones through here, but it can't do it anymore and here, we have the torrents, forest fires, floods, droughts and such strange changes on this tiny Earth.

Look now, here's what they taught me:

The water in this Khaniskhevi sometimes goes up, sometimes goes down, but it is enough to operate a one-and-a-half kilowatt micro-hydroelectric power plant and give us free electricity. I also had a brochure they gifted me, somewhere here, and in it was written that one liter of water falling from a height of one meter every one second can be used in a micro-hydroelectric power plant to generate twenty to thirty-kilowatt hours of electricity per year.

Well, three years ago we organized this micro-hydroelectric plant "Le-



vano.” “Levano,” because Mother Kvirila named it after you, son. With the consent of other nuns, of course...

Its capacity is one and a half kilowatts and it's perfectly enough for our entire monastery. It is about a hundred meters from here, and the electricity is connected by a cable stretched over ten poles. These poles and cable were made by students from the University of Gori, with their funding and labor.

To use this electricity sparingly, we have twelve economical lamps in the monastery, and we have electricity for other things as well, fridge, ironing, everything you could think of.

Mother Sophia will sometimes say, “If there was no lighting before, we had to use a flashlight or a lighter and stumble about like that”

Mother Philothea adds, “Before the power plant, we used to light the rooms with firewood or electricity coming from a diesel generator.”

Mother Thaisia says, “Those exhausts were polluting the environment and harming our health too...”

“And it burdened the monastery budget too,” Mother Evanthia, who tries to plan out expenses correctly, complains...

Leader Mother Kvirila summarizes, “The air is being poisoned so much that it becomes very dangerous.”

In the very end, I would dare and say a little too, “The number of people suffering from cancer is increasing and increasing, why? Because they are always breathing in poisoned air. Should it be allowed that some people, many of them, remove catalytic converters from cars and sell them back and forth? If not caught and filtered by the catalytic converter, the exhaust from the car's muffler contains very dangerous gases, and how many people, children and women have to breathe it? Then they wonder where cancer comes from. From the poisoned air, I say...

Here, let's go to this micro-hydroelectric power station “Levano.” Here's how it works, the water coming out of the pressure pipe of the micro-hydroelectric power plant rotates the Pelton turbine, this tur-



bine transmits to the generator... and the generator creates electricity. Pelton-type turbines are also used on large hydroelectric power stations, Khramhesi, Shaori, Bzhuzha and so on.

“Bzzz-bz-bzzz...” - See how this turbine sounds, what's its name, man... Yes, Pelton... Pelton turbine... Bless that sound...

Come on, I might as well tell you how it is: at high pressure, water has high velocity. This pressure line connects here to this nozzle. It has a thin section on one side and the speed of water in this thin section is very high.

Also attached to this Pelton turbine disc are ladle-like wings. Here, just like my cupped hands, they are all the same. When you direct the water to it, it spins around...

Before starting the construction of this hydroelectric power plant, I measured the water consumption once. I measured it the way the energy center people taught me...

See, this must be done in the summer for sure, when the least amount of water is flowing, not at any other time, or the calculation won't be accurate. The water consumption report is the amount of water coming into the river.

Here, I set a timer on the clock, how many seconds it will take to fill this red plastic bucket. Seven seconds, yeah? Now we have to convert the bucket to liters of water - one, two, two and a half, three, four, five, and that's half a liter. Five and a half.

Now we divide the capacity of this bucket, five and a half liters, by those seven seconds, and, of course, we will get what we are interested in - zero point nine-tenths of a liter per second.

This is easy, but then you need more difficult calculations to accurately determine each detail needed for the construction of the HPP - whether you want a turbine, the length of the pipeline, or its cross-section...

The people of that energy center helped us with this too. They came, drew up plans and plans, wrote some documents, measured like this



and that, calculated and it turned out that the construction of such an easy-to-build small hydroelectric power plant would cost a thousand and five hundred dollars at most...

For years now we had our bees, the year would go by and hives would be added and added, the honey would become honey and our nuns would make candles with the wax. We used it here and we took it to be sold at the bishop's too. Sometimes even vegetables, sometimes this and sometimes that. Well this money was always put away, and there was not that much, but our leader, mother Kvirila, was with the bishop, Reverend Isaia, he added to our savings, and with that money and with the Reverend's prayers and blessings... and, with the Lord's will, not ours, we made this micro power plant.

The people of that energy center came again, calculated and it came out that the amount of energy we are currently spending in this monastery, if we were to buy it, it would cost us two thousand lari per year. This micro-hydroelectric power plant has been working for three years, and six thousand lari has already been saved, and it has paid off the one thousand and five hundred dollars that we needed for these devices, and has already made us a profit.

Mother Philothea will look at her financial report sheets for expenses and say, "Here's exactly how much the monastery's expenses would be if we continued to use the diesel generator and oil lamps."

Mother Sophia goes even further, "If we take into account that the price of fuel and, in general, energy devices is increasing more and more, the savings of the monastery are also increasing more and more."

Mother Thaisia is still happy, "The environment will no longer be polluted with harmful emissions, and there's air in the rooms."

Mother Evanthia sings along, "The lighting is so good, I paint the icons even at night."

And our leader, Mother Kvirila sometimes concludes, "This is a Godly good deed, it protects life and we should say thanks to everyone who helped us in arranging this micro-hydroelectric power plant and who



built it. Lord, by your will, not ours.”

Well, you see how it turned out...

Our country is very rich with such small streams and rivers, and the water, if you let it flow, it will not lose its way, and if not, you will turn it into free electricity and that's it. It doesn't stop either, it's always there. Well, as my father used to say, beekeeper Philimonai, “Let go of your worries”...

Now, like the people of that energy center, I will say to those who walk about here:

“Use the free energy of water! Take care of the environment and you will take care of life and you will take care of your health too!”

Our earth is one tiny planet and why can't we take care of it, why?

6

You will get what you are looking for, I said and...

It came to be as I spoke.

Once, I came here and where is my generator? They removed the Pelton turbine, tore it from the bracket and threw it on the ground. This hut is also completely in tatters, the cables are cut and the receiving-distributing board is broken, there is not one switch left on it.

I ran out, I climbed this hill, and I'm looking through my binoculars. The border was right here at the time, at the foot of this hill, and there are two soldiers hauling our generator, then seven or eight people are following them, and an officer is strolling behind them, all conceited. They are going to the Russian block post. I look in these binoculars and that officer looks like Major Gleb Usmanov from a few years ago.

Well, I ran to the monastery, told them this news, and Mother Kviri-la did not let anyone follow. First, she told our bishop, then the Patriarchate, everyone was involved, but we could not get our generator back. They left us without electricity...

We went around everywhere, somehow collected the money, bought



everything that was ripped from us and started another micro-HPP from scratch.

I thought I needed to get revenge on that officer. First I got a weapon from our soldiers, which was necessary, and I walked around that block post like a wolf for a few days, watching it with my binoculars. It's true, it's Gleb Usmanov, but he's no longer a major, he's been demoted to captain.

One day I was gone, we took honey to our buyer, he was unable to come up to the monastery. When I came back, it was already evening and what do I see, what?!

Those barbed-wire defences, which used to pass through over there, at the bottom of the hill have now been brought here and passed straight over the micro-hydroelectric power station. So that on this side, there is only the hydroelectric power station dam, while the pressure tank and the rest of the hydroelectric power plant - the water intake device, the diversion channel, the pressure pipeline, the station building, the hydro unit, with its turbine generator and this water channel - all of them are on the other side of the border, in the conquered Samachablo.

I got up and tore up my good hand on these barbed wires, but I still managed to move the border, putting the micro power plant on our side again.

I know that they will come. But it's over. I am not afraid of them anymore. Not anymore.

When they did come, well, my love, I threw and threw these hand grenades with a single arm. Well, from here and well, from there! Well, puffed up here! And well, a punch there! Those who survived are running away with their heads on fire, and those who didn't make it, are lying about, next to the barbed wire, and shouting pleas.

I took this Makarov pistol of mine and ran to Major Gleb Usmanov, but with the four small stars of the captain!.. He was wounded in the leg and is writhing in pain, bleeding, but he has already untied his belt



and is tightening it above the wound...

"When you killed those women in front of me in the taxi, with the driver too, I remember that and when you let me go, I am still surprised by that."

"I was doing you a kindness and that's why I let you go," he says.

"Then first steal our generator and sell it or exchange it for a drink..." I said.

"No, no, it was not my fault, the boss instructed me."

"Now you've made our micro-hydroelectric power station be on the other side of the border and taken away electricity from the monastery. Aren't you at least scared of God?"

"I'm afraid, but I followed the order again. I'm a little man, what could I do?"

"They stood up on my son's neck at your command, breaking his spine and yelling at him to kiss the ground. When you killed him with torture like that, what about then?"

"It was also an order, an order..."

"What do we do now? You are the murderer of my son and you tell me, well, what should we do?"

I aim the pistol at his forehead.

I aim, I aim and my mind, heart and hand have melted. Before my eyes appeared the head of the monastery, Mother Kvirila and the other nuns: Philothea, Sophia, Thaisia, Evanthia... God, by your will and not by ours. They sang this to me. They sang to me and...

"Major, can you crawl? Crawl?" I asked.

"Don't shoot me and I can," he replied.

I said, "Then go before I change my mind."

Well, he started and started to crawl, leaving a trail of blood as he went...



Then I thought, how long can I look at this fucking bastard. When I turned back, I hadn't taken two steps and first, my back started burning, then I heard the sound of shooting. I put my hand on my chest and it's all bloody...

I turned around and Usmanov shot me the second time, the third time... The words dried up on my lips, "You killed me, you bastard?"

I tried to reach for the pistol, but I couldn't...

Like the sound a big oak tree makes when cut at the bottom, turns around a little with a sigh and then plummets back on its native land, that's what I did...

Well, as we used to sing during our childhood, I heard that song again at the very end:

"I was in the sky, I saw the sky, and saw what stars do,

The moon sent a man: "If you were here, why not see me too?"

7

It was the 18th of March this year, Ukrainian newspapers wrote, then they translated it here too, that Major Gleb Usmanov was killed in the Russo-Ukrainian war and that he was awarded the title of Hero in Russia. Seems that he became a major there again, his crew was part of taking of Kyiv, and other cities in Ukraine: Bucha, Irpen and Gostomel. There he tortured, raped and shot innocent women and children. It was he who commanded the Kostroma airborne regiment in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and among others, he took part in the torture of Corporal Levan - Sosipatre's son - Mariamidze.

Look, Georgians say he walks with a cart and still finds you - justice. I also repeat to myself, my son, Levan, that "God, with your will and not with ours..."

This confused story of mine is all about that too...



PAMPARULA OF JAVAKHETI, MINE...

"Skies and lands were clouded, and the Earth was drenched..."

Georgian proverb

In that unimaginable and entirely fantastical Javakheti¹, in particular, by the house of the rangers working at the Tetrobi Managed Reserve, on the roof of which we installed an autonomous solar photoelectric station, there was a flower that looked like a bush. I was struck by it and one of the rangers explained, "This is Pamparula of Javakheti, a type of viper's grass, also called *Scorzonera dzhawakhetica*." There were at least thirty yellow flowers on the bush, with their delightfully bright, tangled, elongated, and light green leaves — my wife and daughter have eyes that are exactly the color of those leaves. Well, I got permission, dug it up, wrapped the roots with wet soil and cellophane, so that it wouldn't shrivel on the way, and took it home; I hoped it would thrive. I was planting this very Pamparula in a ginormous pot when I got a call from the office. "The second technician — Sandro — had to go to his village immediately since his mother had to be hospitalized. We need your help. We are installing the same station on one of the cottages in Shovi² to-

1. Samtskhe-Javakheti is a region in southern Georgia, which unites the historical Georgian provinces of Meskheta, Javakheti and Tori.

2. This is a village in the Oni Municipality of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti in Georgia. It is a mountain climatic and health resort known for its carbonated water, situated on the confluence of the Buba and Chanchakhi Rivers, left tributaries of the Rioni River. The village faces the main ridge of the Greater Caucasus to the north, and the Shoda-Kedela Range to the south. A mudslide on August 3, 2023, coming down the Buba River destroyed much of the settlement, causing more than 200 people to be evacuated via airlift with 31 confirmed deaths and 2 people missing.



day as we did on the ranger house in Tetrobi Managed Reserve. Come with your car and we'll pay for gas later."

I said, "I'm going to plant this Pamparula flower and head right out, I will be there in about three to four hours, so you have to wait for me."

My wife, Marika, and our five-year-old Nato heard that I was going to Shovi and decided they would come along too, get a little rest, and have a picnic.

In short, it was about nine o'clock when we finished packing our luggage into my Suzuki Grand Vitara 2008 SUV and drove off.

Somewhere around one in the afternoon, we arrived in Shovi, where a festival was being held, and stopped there — This is the Chanchakhi River valley, a lush green forest looks down on us from the slopes, the air is sparkling in blue, birds are singing hymns in their own ways, here and there we hear people shouting.

White clouds can also be seen way up, on the tip of the Shoda-Kedela mountain range, otherwise, the sky is painted over in blue and the sun is cheerfully shining; it is even hot and the air is miraculously clean. A person who goes up there can feel it immediately.

Marika and Nato listened to music, took photos, and had a generally good time.

In the meantime, I installed two 1380-watt solar photovoltaic panels on that cottage, with its two-kilowatt sine wave inverter, a two-and-a-half kilowatt/hour jelly battery, and a thirty-amp solar charge controller. In short, I set up the system, turned it on, and we have power, — it's sunny outside and it works well, although this equipment can also work just on daylight, in cloudy weather. The hosts asked me why it needed a backup battery, and I explained that this battery collects electricity during the day and should be turned on at night. A twelve-volt, kilowatt/hour battery will charge one forty-watt light bulb, a refrigerator, a computer, a TV, and a phone for two days in cloudy weather, and this two-and-a-half kilowatt-hour battery I've put in here should last five days for all the things I listed before. I explained this to the



customers... Then I explained other things too and, finally, when they accepted the work of our three-man brigade, our hosts set a small table. I said, "I'm sorry, I can't stay, I have my wife and kid with me," and I left.

Then we went around all of Shovi; at one spot, close to the forest, we even had a delicious picnic, and it was about four o'clock when we came down to a mineral spring, called the 'calcium spring' by the locals.

Clouds are increasing in number, the kind that are surrounded by white but have a dark, leaden color that prevails inside. The birds can't be heard anymore either, even the sun is squinting from the clouds and there's a silence all around.

After we drank mineral water, Marika said to me, "Let's buy mountain honey."

There are a dozen vendors sitting by the spring, behind tables full of products for sale.

"Here, Dad, let's go up to that beeman," Nato stretches out her hand towards one of them. It's a man with fully gray hair and beard who has a liter or half-liter jars of honey, bee pollen balls, and spruce honey on the hood of his car. The prices are written on pieces of paper underneath the products. They cost twenty-thirty GEL per jar and I ask him, "Good morning, beeman, how come these jars of yours are skimmed on the top a bit?"

"God bless you," he smiles imperceptibly into his white beard, "they say here's mile is there's liter and there's liter is here's mile. Here's sterling is there's gold and there's gold is here's sterling."

"Excuse me, sir?" I did not understand anything.

He said here's one liter is there's one kilogram and that was why.

"Boy, how did you not understand that?" — the beekeeper is now openly laughing. "My grandfather Isidore used to talk like that, and before him, it was his grandfather, Kondrate, and before him, his



grandfather's grandfather, I don't know his name, but it went on... a long way down."

"Then," I said, "if I gave you twenty-five GEL of here, instead of the thirty GEL of there, would that work?"

"You give that to the lady from the valley," he pointed to an elderly woman with glasses, "she has honey from the lower plains. This honey is from the mountains; my bees have fed on alpine flowers and I can't give any discounts."

Marika and Nato didn't let me go to the lady from the valley; they made me buy this man's honey instead.

In the meantime, the sky and land had become cloudier, but the sun is still there, and my heartbeat is a little irregular, but I don't pay it any attention...

A bridge can be seen higher up from here, and a man has gotten out of a car parked on it, he's waving his hands and shouts at me like they do in Kutaisi, "Hurry up, buddy-boy, hurry over here..."

I wondered what was going on and who the hell was calling me 'buddy-boy', and I also started in a hurry. "Well, Mrs. Marika and Ms. Nato, finish taking pictures with the bee man and get into here's car there, please."

And I went off immediately. I approached and got on the bridge, and when I got out of the car, I also looked across the bridge and forgot all about the 'buddy-boy.'

The front side, Shovi, half of Shovi, where these cottages are, is being taken, destroyed, dragged deep and stripped of everything by a stone-filled mud river.

At certain moments, dust clouds form in the upper valley, then there are some terrible sounds and noises, would not wish it on my worst enemy; they are foreign and destructive. There is a hum, a roar, a shriek, a shrill sound, the clatter of boulders hitting boulders in a terrifying way. Big trees are torn up by the roots, they are being carried by the



torrent and sometimes collide with a deafening thud.

This horrible noise alone would make a man ill, a kind of disaster is taking place.

Suddenly, we panicked, “What should we do? We can’t go forward, towards home.”

When I look back, all this mud is hurling from that direction too, it brings slabs of stone, uprooted trees and bushes...

First, the mudflow hit the cottages, now it has gone around us and moved further towards the forest. After it cleared everything there, it suddenly sloshed to the place where we were buying honey a few minutes ago and leveled everything to the ground in seconds.

But there are many people there, near the ‘calcium spring.’ From the bridge, I watch on dumbfounded as they struggle to survive.

“My God, what am I seeing,” Marika cries, hugging Nato to her chest. And Nato is wailing, “God, save me and I’ll even get that operation.” She used to be afraid of getting her tonsils taken out, but this is so terrifying that she’s willing to do it.

And I was the one most afraid. Not for me but for them. It was the fear of their death that consumed and put an end to me.

So, we are in utter panic. We are sitting in the car and can’t do anything, absolutely nothing...

And suddenly I realize — if it takes us in this car, it won’t let us move a finger, it will immediately bury us forever.

“Hurry, get out! hurry!” — I shout at Marika...

We manage to get out of the car and are now stranded on the bridge. We can’t go forward or back, and now we can’t get down to the mineral water.

A terrible rumble — It’s like the sound of the Earth collapsing, that’s it...

Three cars got stuck on this bridge: the three of us with my Suzuki, a family with a Mercedes — also a wife, husband, and a small child, and



two more young people in a black Nissan jeep, — a Georgian boy and a Slavic girl who's screaming in her own way, "Oy mamochki, oy!"¹

By and by others also run onto the bridge, and these new women don't hold back either — they scream, wail, and cry loudly. We, men are quiet, but we are also grief-stricken.

A devastating, powerful noise comes from above again. A noise such that, such that... it will drive you out of your mind.

And we see a high wave of mud coming, nearly the whole mountain, a sickly wet and mercilessly murderous mountain. It's coming, swinging with a purpose and aiming directly at those of us standing on the bridge.

And we have nowhere to run. We're at God's mercy now, but I can't understand what God can do in this situation either...

In short, we are doomed and shouting at each other to get away from the bridge, otherwise, it will be taken down.

"Let's get away, let's get away from the bridge," we repeat because it is so loud and miserable that our screams can't be heard.

This river of mud, trees, and boulders was bringing an intense cold with it.

And again we shout about getting away from the bridge, running away, but we don't know where to run.

In an instant, this big wave came, invaded, and when it washed over this 'calcium spring', first it made everything groan and...

The bridge detached from end to end, shook in the air, and swayed with misery — this enormous bridge, carefully built with concrete and iron, loosened and softened. Now you can imagine how much power this mudflow has...

The people down by the mineral water, some of them abandoned what they had put out for sale, ran and found shelter up the slope, in the forest. Those who remained on the ground ended up in this flood...

1. in Russian means: "Oh mommies, oh!"



I saw with my own eyes how an elderly woman who remained on the bridge was running from side to side, then how the flow of mud carried her away along with the woman, man, and small child who were clinging to each other, dragged them down and threw out the man's arm or the woman's bare foot here and there, before enveloping them again, disappearing them into its destructive depths.

Before that, I saw a girl and a boy climbing a spruce tree, the mud-flow ripped out that tree with them on it and took it away...

I couldn't find our beeman and wondered, for a second, if he had survived.

This all happens in seconds and I don't have time to notice everything.

And this rushing wave threw all three cars into the air, spun them off the bridge, and is dragging them into a great flow of mud full of stones and boulders.

Those two, the Georgian boy and the Slavic girl, couldn't save themselves — they stayed in the Nissan jeep out of fear... and I imagined how the car sinks into the mud and you can't open the door, you can't even break the windows to get out somehow... we can hear muffled screams from the place where that couple's jeep sank for a long time, but we can't help them. The mudflow here is pretty deep at least — before it took away their jeep, only the tips of uprooted trees could be seen above.

God, keep everyone from that kind of horrible death...

Then it grabbed this rickety bridge too and carried it, like a river might carry a feather, like that.

Destroyed everything there, everything, and now this stream is also taking us along.

I have my Nato in my hands and I wonder who it is I am holding...

When did I manage, when and how did I pick her up, I can't remember...



“Marika! Marika!” — I shout and can only see Marika’s hand in the distance, behind the saved spruce trees; she has an emerald ring on her ring finger and it is barely visible...

I struggle, but I can’t put my foot down anywhere and I can’t move my hand; I’m being led away by the mudflow, and I can’t do anything, nothing at all...

And my Marika’s hand has also disappeared...

God, why should I survive, God...

“Look out for that girl, boy, the girl!” — the beeman, with his face muddied and bloodied shouts at me, throwing his arms and legs out, following the stream and almost swimming; then he also sinks into the swirling mass of mud...

We were carried by that current, then it took us somewhere to the side, it took us away, it spread a little, lost its depth and I was able to stand on my feet.

Of the fifteen people who were standing on the bridge, seven of us remained in this open and thinner flood.

We are together but a little bit apart, up to the waist in mud. We cannot move, we cannot walk.

I am holding my Nato. I look at her and see she’s grasping the jar of honey we just bought, is not letting it go.

And in front of us, about ten meters away... Yes, those trees are nearby, there are five or six spruce trees.

And I said, “Nato, if we want to survive, we have to get to those trees somehow.”

At first, she was afraid. “We can’t, we won’t make it. I can’t. I want Mom, where is Mom?”

I said, “It probably took Mom a bit farther away and she will show up; don’t be afraid.” I said this and breathed a little sigh of relief, guessing that she didn’t see Marika’s hand sink...



I repeated and repeated that we must survive, we must survive, and we must reach that tree. And I said, "Girl, throw away that jar of honey, what's it good for now?"

And finally, I got her to agree to my plan to get to the trees, but on the condition that she would bring the mountain honey. "Mother and I love it..."

We are going, with Nato sitting on my shoulders, holding the jar of honey, and it can't happen, I can't die. I have to save this kid...

I walk, I walk and I can't walk anymore. If I take one step forward, this mudflow pushes me five steps back.

"God, listen, just let me get this kid to safety and then I will go wherever you want," I say to the bubbling mud and rocks...

I'm going toward those trees, I walk, I walk, and finally I get midway...

And I thought, "Please, God, please."

And when I passed the midpoint, I thought maybe God was actually listening or something...

As soon as I consider this, a devastating noise comes down again from above. I hear some kind of humming, roaring or rumbling, I don't know... Some kind of dismaying noise that brings a deadly frost, an unbelievable cold.

It's coming right towards us, headed for us again...

And I can't do anything.

All I think is, "We can't survive here, it's over. This is my ending, and before I go to Marika, I will probably spend the last moments of my life here, maybe I can save this kid at least..."

I hugged Nato and turned my back to this mudflow, begging God that I don't see the death of this kid, that I'm first, let me go first...

And when it attacked us like a raging bull... It attacked us and threw us aside, threw us very far and with great speed...

At the moment of impact, Nato and I were scattered with a bit of dis-



tance between each other... It ripped her from me, it snatched the kid right out of my hands...

But she didn't go far, just a little ahead of me...

I'm going, I'm struggling towards Nato, thinking, "I have to grab her, I have to grab her or I'll never see her again..."

And by this time, during this think-shouting, I also come to my senses.

At the same time, this moving mass has slowed down a bit, and when I look at Nato, her hand is holding mine tightly, and the child's whole body is in the mud. Only her pale face can be seen, with her white nose poking up, nothing else, and on that face, wide and the color of Pamparula leaves, her clear eyes are looking at me pleadingly. This kid has her mother's expression, my Marika's expression...

And what should I do, what can I do... The mudflow is still taking me along, hitting me with broken stones, squeezing my legs and body painfully. But now the current is a little slower, not as forceful.

I say, "We have to survive somehow, Nato; say something, Nato..."

And she says to me, "Get me out of this disgusting mud."

I mustered all my strength and smacked my hand under her. I reached into the mud to put my hand on her back and maybe pull her out of this mud. Maybe I'll pull her out, maybe...

I think this, simultaneously yelling, trying to drag the kid up, and on the third or fourth try, I'm holding her in my hands.

This Nato of mine is usually light as a bird and now she is very heavy, so heavy that the weight sinks me too.

Basically, we are both drowning...

And I'm thinking, what do I do, what do I do, what do I do...

I finally realized that she was being weighed down by the mud.

And I scream that I have to clean her up, clean her up, clean her up,



and I'm trying to wipe the mud off...

I wipe, wipe, wipe and Nato becomes a little lighter. The surprising thing is that she is still holding the jar of honey in her hand...

This gigantic wave did throw us far away and is still taking us along, but we have found ourselves in the very place that I wanted us to get to. It brought us very close to those remaining trees...

I struggled, struggled, and finally, I brought Nato there and put her on a tree branch with her jar of honey.

I'm still submerged in the mud from the waist down. I can't get out. I'm still being led by this current, and I'm scared that it will hit us again, it could hit us again.

And I want to lift my legs, but I don't have anything to hold onto. There's mud all around me. There is nothing solid to grasp or step on.

Then I finally lift one leg, I lift the other leg as well and I wave my hands, struggling to get to Nato.

And finally, I make it there after a while.

I also climb that tree and realize that the kid is telling me something.

I can finally hear her saying, "I'm very cold," — she's all wet and muddy — "I'm cold, cold..."

Yet, we are both sitting on a tree in a safe place and it's as if nothing is threatening us here anymore. I'm thinking that logically, another big wave will not come because when the bridge was destroyed and carried away, the entire mass of the mud went that way too.

Basically, I'm trying to convince myself that we're safe.

Now I'm worried about Nato being so cold, she's already shivering and I don't want her to get sick. I take her jar of honey, put it securely on that tree, and massage her hands and feet to get her blood circulation going. A little color returned to her face.

I said, "Wait here."



I want to know what is going on up the valley. I can't see what's happening there at all.

"Ok," she responds, "I will wait for you here, but give me my honey."

I returned the jar of honey, came down from that part of the tree and climbed up one that was slanting on the side. I climbed, clambered, and I had already lost my shoes, and sharp stones were stabbing into my feet. I straightened up when I got high enough and what did I see?!

Nothing! Nothing at all!

The whole of Shovi, all the cottages are covered in this mud.

There is nothing left at all.

Everything, absolutely everything is destroyed.

There's not one cottage left standing, not one tree, no fields either.

There is nothing left but this flood.

Nothing at all...

Everything has been razed to the ground...

And I'm thinking what to do, what to do, what to do.

I think. I think. I think

I look to the right; I look to the left.

I can't see anything. Nothing at all.

Only the forest can be seen very far away. There is no way I can get to it.

Then I looked a little down to the side. I saw that the hotel "Sunset Shovi" has survived and another cottage is visible higher up. But it's already leaning, there is not much left until it crumbles. It seems that one big wave hit this cottage and hotel, but it didn't destroy them... And I see people there, milling about, but it's impossible to go up there, it's uphill and this mass of mud will be dragging me down. Plus, I would have to carry Nato.



Then I looked down towards Oni¹. And beyond this vast ravine, on the slope, I saw a three-story hotel, and near that hotel — we were very far away, — I saw that some people were walking around there too, they looked like dots...

And I thought, “What if a bigger wave hits us again and this tree can’t save us anymore? I have to get to that hotel somehow,” I say to myself, “I have to get this kid there to really save her.”

I have to go barefoot in this mud among the slabs of stone and trees, barely able to walk, with bleeding feet, and if I come across a deeper stretch somewhere, I’ll have to risk drowning. Forget about me, will Nato be safe?

The sky and land are already clouded, it’s going to rain, maybe it’s already raining high in the mountains, and what if a new wave follows this downpour? Basically, Nato and I must take this hellish path...

It is a very long way to that hotel, probably at least a few hundred meters, but there is no other way...

I put Nato, along with her jar of honey, on my shoulders and I went, went, went. I’m carrying her, carrying her and these sharp stones are marring my feet.

I have probably gone forward just a little. It’s too little and I already can’t walk anymore, I’m completely exhausted. I want water, my mouth is dry. My lips are cracked, I’m completely in the mud, very weighed down. The kid is sitting on my shoulders, and I still do not stop; I don’t stop.

“I have to walk, walk, walk, walk!” I shout.

I shout at myself, “I have to walk!”

And I keep looking up, thinking, “If a new wave comes, we are done for. The earth is razed now, nothing can stop it.”

1. Oni is a town in Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti region, Georgia. Historically and ethnographically, it is part of Racha, a historic highland province in western Georgia. The town also serves as an administrative center of the Oni district.



I can't walk anymore and I turn to Nato...

I see a big tree in front of me, brought by the flood, completely blackened, and when I realized that it was a tree, I said, "Do you see that fallen tree?"

"I see it, darling," she tells me.

This "darling" nearly killed me right there. Marika used to teach her words like that. I bit down on my tongue with anger.

"I see that tree, Dad, I see it," she repeated.

"Well," I said, "you have to get to that tree by yourself."

She was very taken aback. "I can't get to that, Mr. Nikoloz," she tells me. Where did this kid get the energy to joke in this situation, I'll never know.

I said, "You are a smart girl, aren't you? And you have to get there, because I can't go on anymore, you have to get there somehow by yourself."

I finally get her to agree. She says, "Well, that's a pickle. I guess I'll go"

Now she comes up with this saying and immediately I think, "Poor you, kid, where did you idiot dad bring you to..."

"Girl, throw away that jar of honey. It will weigh you down. I'll buy you better honey after.

"No, no," she stubbornly shook her head and went off like that, struggling, sometimes she sat down, sometimes she lay down, and she even tried to swim with one hand in that mud of misfortune. All the while, she doesn't let go of that jar and then calls out to me that the current has taken her shoes away.

"That's okay, Nato! Just a little bit to go, just a little!" — I shout from here.

I'm done for but maybe she can survive. I can't do it anymore; I'm stuck up to my waist in mud like a buffalo.



"A little bit left, Nato, just a little, just a little," I shout but I can barely look at it anymore, as this little girl struggles to walk and is hit the sharp stones. Yet, she doesn't cry, she endures still...

At the same time, I keep looking up to make sure a new wave is not coming...

"There's a little bit to go, Nato, just a little left," I yell and suddenly I hear her voice from afar, "I've already made it, darling, I've made it..."

I look and she has already climbed the fallen tree and the jar of honey is still safely clutched in her hand...

Then I go towards her slowly too, and tears stream down my face. I thank God for saving my child...

I get to that tree too and sit next to Nato. I calm down a little, look around, and see that we have made it halfway. You can see the people from the hotel on the other side of the slope clearly, and they are looking back at us. No one dares to enter the current and help yet, we are still very far away.

Nato's hair, blonde like her mother's, is sticky with mud and darkened now. And her legs are bleeding. Seeing this is killing me even more...

We don't look like humans anymore, covered in blood and mud.

"Pointy stones were hitting my feet," she complains to me.

I say that it's okay, that I've already rested and I'll carry her again. "We'll get to that hotel together."

This tree on which we are standing is a bit long and since I know that I will have to cross the puddle again, I think to myself, "I have to run along this tree and jump as far as I can to at least get some distance."

I gather my last bit of strength, put Nato on my shoulders, run, run, hop, and land in the middle of the mud.

I jump in and first, a boulder hits me. I try to push it away and in this struggle, a bit of mud comes off and what do I see — it's ice, it's a block of ice. It seems that a glacier broke down, the mudflow took



these fragments and that's why it's freezing...

I get rid of this block of ice, but now I'm sinking. I'm submerged to my waist, and Nato, sitting on my shoulders, has her feet in the mud.

I'm slowly sinking into the mud and tell her, "Nato, I can't get my footing, you have to get off my shoulders or I'll sink."

I put Nato down on my side and she also sinks, but I let her down slowly and she doesn't sink so easily.

Then I throw my arms and legs out as much as I can, I finally get out, I get out of the depth of this sticky stream and I pull Nato out too. We get across that deep section of the mud with a struggle. We get past it; I find my footing and walking becomes a bit easier.

I put Nato on my shoulders again and we get to another tree like that. There is not much left to go and I see a boy coming, wading through the mud to help us.

I say, "Well, hope is coming, Nato, don't be scared anymore."

"Hope is that boy with a shaved head?" — she asks me.

I looked more closely and saw that he did have his head shaved. I said, "Yes, that's hope and what do I know, maybe even God..."

"That means even God gets hot sometimes and shaves his hair," Nato says...

We walked a little further, there were many trees brought there by the mudflow and these kept us from sinking too deep.

I take Nato from one tree to another, from the second to the third... I have her on my back, and the buzzcut boy is coming toward us too, and this calms me even more, knowing that even if I can't go on, at least this boy will save my kid.

And indeed, he makes it over to us, takes Nato off my back, and gets her, along with the jar of honey, to safety.

I gather my strength, finally get to the meadow, and near the shore I



see that my installed two-kilowatt sinusoidal inverter was torn from the cottage across the river. The mudflow ripped out all the wires, covered it in mud, and brought it down all the way to here. I take that inverter in my hands, sit down on a large stone, look at it with regret, and think, "Alas, my dear solar panel station..."

An old woman, frail like a bird, met us there, crying and saying to Nato, "Oh my child, my child, my child!" Then she called the other women, and they immediately took Nato away, bathed her, cleaned up her legs, and applied some ointments so that the infection wouldn't spread.

Now Nato is sitting on a chair, holding a jar of honey in her hands and looking across the mudflow...

I also got up, finally realizing I should. I put this inverter on that stone and asked for water, — they brought me a tall glass and a large pitcher, and when I drank the third glass, I seemed to calm down a little.

I thought, "Since it lasted so long and no new wave came, I'm safe now and I hope nothing else will come. This is not the time for inverters and controllers..."

I look at this flood and wonder how I got here, how...

Nato is looking at me, looking at me, and asking me, "Where do you think Mom will be?"

And suddenly I see my Marika's hand with her emerald ring, sinking into the roaring mud and I'm trying to hide my tears...

God, how did I lose my Marika, why couldn't I help her, why...

"How could you be so scared?!" — I scold myself, but I also find a reason, "I had to walk this long way to save Nato... I walked for at least three or four hours, if not more..."

I think, I think, and...

Suddenly I remember that I left people back there, small children among them...



“Nato, I’ll go look for Marika. You stay here and you keep that honey safe for her, you know how she loves it.”

“Yes, okay,” she agrees, looking at me with hopeful eyes...

I told the one with a buzzcut, I don’t remember his name anymore, I said, “When the helicopter comes, keep Nato with you, you get her to safety.”

“Why not you, aren’t you the father?”

Before, I had said that I was her father and that’s how he knew.

I said, “Yes, I am her father, but I have to go back again. There are people there and there are also children...”

“Yours?”

“Yes, of course, mine...”

Maybe not my blood but every child is my kin...

And they all lost it. That bird-like old woman, apparently his mother, others too, they wouldn’t let me go. “This mudslide will drag you and bury you somewhere and no one will be able to find you again.”

I have already gone off, their yells can barely reach me, and then I realize where I am; I’ve entered the mudflow again.

And I go, I go. I’m not stopping still. And I’m afraid something else will happen...

I went through the entire current a second time, but I was alone now; I had rested and drank water, and it seemed that my strength was back again.

In approximately an hour, I reached the place from where Nato and I left. People, with faces twisted in shock, are still sitting there, buried up to their knees in mud.

And here we are, in the midst of this wretched swamp. At any time, it can hit us again, a new wave can come and it will not miss us.

I wonder what I should do now, what should I do?...



The ones who meet me there say that they've called rescue services, the rescuers are coming and so are the helicopters.

Yes, sure, a helicopter is on the way, probably some kind of a Russian chopper, old and nearly ready for a museum. Since when do we have any other foreign helicopters? On the way, on the way, on the way, and it's nearly night. We've been waiting for a long time. And this damn time doesn't even pass like it should, every minute stretches into an hour.

I tell them, "Let me take at least one kid so that I can get them to safety."

"What are you talking about? What you did was crazy. Why did you go there or how did you even survive?" — one of the women screams at me with a crazed face, clutching her little girl to her chest.

These babies are also in a state of panic and do not leave their parents' side for even a second.

After some time passes, an old man hands me a little boy, "Here, this is my Gio, get him to safety for me."

I picked up the child and said, "You and I have to go across now, brave young man..."

"No, no!" — he refuses to follow me.

"My daughter is your age and I have to take you to her, by that hotel, on the other side. I will take you there and you'll get cleaned up. They will feed you candy and cake too; you like those right?"

I talk to him, talk to him, and finally make him believe that it'll be better over there, that there are cool things happening there.

I picked Gio up and probably walked a few meters before I fell. I can't go on — I can't feel my legs anymore.

I sit in the puddle and there's nothing to do; I can't move anymore.

Gio's grandfather finally gets to me, takes the boy from my arms, and goes away again. He leaves and...



Suddenly, the image of Marika's emerald-ringed hand hits me with all its force, how it sank beyond those trees...

I think about how I saved Nato and her jar of honey.

And I need to have an answer when she asks where her mom is.

So, I must go, and whether she's alive or dead, I have to get Marika out! Whatever it costs me, I have to get her out!...

I move toward there, to the other side of the trees, and hear the people shouting at me, "It's deeper over there, where are you going?!"

I don't listen, I go and go, I go to my Marika...

A light, soft rain is falling from the pink-lit sky, — warm, kind rain is pouring down, and on a green meadow, at the foot of a Pamparula flower that is as big as a tree, a little more than thirty people are slowly gathering. First, they bathe the littles in this rain, then they bathe themselves, and when they enter between the stems of the flower, they are met with smiling and transparent figures, who do not walk, but fly in the air. They distribute dry towels and then even provide white robes afterward.

And so, at the base of that Javakheti Pamparula flower, people sit, enveloped with white light.

"Do you see that?" — one of the transparent people flies over to me and asks. "He's the beekeeper, the one who sold you honey."

And I say, "Yes, of course I know."

That beeman, with his white hair and beard and now a white cloak, waves at me and repeats his signature phrase, "Here's gold is there's gold. There's gold is here's gold."

"Man, I didn't understand anything again..."

"How could an educated man like you not understand this now?!" —



he smiles at that. “Here is joy and relief, and there is trouble and pain; come this way, boy.”

I smile too and then I look, I look, I look closely at the people clothed in white. There is that lady with glasses who sells honey from the valley. There is that father, mother, and son who have a Mercedes. There is that young boy and the Slavic girl with a Nissan SUV. There are the girl and boy who were carried away on a tree, and others, who I did not see during the flood...

And finally, I find my Marika...

Yes, yes, I see her, that's her, she's leaning against the stem of the Pamparula.

I kneel crying and shout, “Marika, it's me, me! I saved Nato! Our Natuka! And she saved the jar of honey!”

Marika waves at me from a distance and calls back, “I know, Niko, I know... but why did you leave Nato, why?”

“Come on, Marika, first that boy with a buzzcut and his mother who looks like a bird will take care of her, and then her aunts and uncles; I haven't left her unattended...”

Then I close my teary eyes and first I remember those waves of mud, trees and stones, the screams and cries, people who were dragged in to the mudflow, the wailing of the survivors. Those screams from the depth of the mud that we could hear too... that sound of breaking, the humming, and the thud...

Then all this recedes, blurs, and I listen to that terrible and amazing silence, which was there before the flood, when the sky and land were clouded and the whole Earth was drenched, — when the birds didn't sing anymore, and the trees didn't rustle, — when all of nature was silent and only the voices of people could be heard...

This was an unbearable, completely unbearable silence, and people should have felt it, all of us should have felt that global warming, i.e., a temperature increase of one and a half degrees, has already caused



climate change, melting glaciers, landslides, and many other disasters around the world. And more will happen if we do not take care of nature, if we keep using oil, gas, and coal, and if we don't learn to use solar, water, and wind energies...

And I thought, "Well, what can I do, I have nothing left to do but think... Still, I was able to save Nato..."

And how did I save her? I am also very surprised, but these transparent and smiling people are more surprised than me. They say, "We hear all your thoughts and understand everything, except for one point."

"Which one?" — I ask.

"We have heard of mountain hikers and now we've heard of a mud-flow hiker." They laugh and, as I have already washed myself in the warm rain, they hand me a towel to dry, along with the white clothing.

Then I stand next to Marika, I hold her small, fluttering hand. I'm looking into the distance and realize that this huge Pamparula of Javakheti is hanging in the air, along with this meadow and all these people.

Marika points down. I look and see the Caucasus Mountains, and the Shoda-Kedela Ridge. Then I find the winding valley of the Chanchakhi River coming out of the Chanchakhi Glacier at a peak of 4,462 meters above sea level. I see the Buba River and how it joins the Chanchakhi from the right. And in that meeting point, we can see Shovi — illuminated beautifully, littered with cottages, hotels, and houses on the roofs of which solar photovoltaic panels are installed...

Near one of the illuminated cottages, the very one where I installed the solar panel, stands my Nato, smiling and waving at us with one hand, still holding a jar of honey in the other...

Pamparula of Javakheti, mine, — mine and Marika's...

Tamar Pkhakadze

THREE BOYS, THREE FATHERS (A Short Story)

Three boys are strolling up the village hill. Eleven-twelve-year-olds. Each of them is scrawny, long-legged, firm and polished like waves of the Supsa River, similarly tanned by the Guria sun. They ably, expertly jump over creaking creeks, skillfully keeping thorns away from naked shins. Here they snag barely-ripened blackberries; there, they pluck wild plums from branches bent over someone's fence. Having dressed when still wet, faded pants and tee-shirts dry straight onto their bodies. Tired and drained from splashing in the river, they greedily sniff the aroma of newly-made bread coming from the village bakery with sun-beaten, freckled noses. They're hungry, of course! The river makes you hungry. The river makes you want hot corn cakes, cheese, beans and cucumbers! The river has good taste! It won't make you say no to chicken drumsticks and pygostyle in garlic sauce either! At a minimum, it will make you tear the newly-baked, hot bread in half and bury your starving nose in its steam! And if there's water from a well nearby, then, - bless everyone with the grace of a river, hot bread and pure water from a well!

Boys are coming, following the heated grassy path scorched by the sun. One of them, Rezikie has broken off a stick and is walking, poking at the grass; maybe a snake is waiting for him somewhere, comfortably curled up and drowsy! He won't kill it, will play with it a little and then send it on its way. It's not good to kill a snake, - he knows that - its curse won't let you be, will find you. Rezikie knows this and calmly whistles as he



pokes at the grass. Two of them are walking in silence, deep in thought like grown men.

“Let’s gather mushrooms on Saturday,” says Rezikie, “Nazikie says there’s a lot of honey fungus. She was out yesterday.”

“Saturday is no good,” says Datuni, the one most freckled and most scraggy, “My dad is leaving on Saturday. As if you don’t know.”

“That I know,” says Rezikie, “but I forgot... He’s going to Turkey, that I know.”

“To Rize. To plantations,” says Datuni, “to pick tea!” — he says with some sort of anger.

“Why are you so sullen then, man, it’s good, he’ll bring back a lot of money! Dollars!,” says Rezikie.

“I don’t want his dollars!” — says Datuni, “For him to stay here, that’s what I want! I want my dad here!”

“I want that too, but what are you gonna do.” — says the third, Zuriko-lippy (he has a slightly fatty upper lip, like a bee sting. Looks good, suits him), “My dad is going too, to Spain on Tuesday, as you know. There’ll be construction, woodwork, something, he says he’ll work. I tell him I won’t get one low mark in sixth grade, they won’t call my mom for one complaint, that’s how decent I’ll be - I said, but he’s still going. He’s so happy, you’d think Spain is better than Guria! He said he’ll send money. He said I’ll buy good sneakers. Let me wear the torn-up ones and let my dad be here!”

Silence has fallen. Heat-struck birds whistle joylessly, tweeting. The breeze brings aromas and steam from the mountain. They turn towards the village from the winding path.

“Then you come for mushrooms,” said Rezikie to Zuriko-lippy, “If he’s leaving on Tuesday.”

“I don’t wanna. I’m not in the mood,” said Zuriko-lippy, taking the stick from Rezikie and throwing it.

“Why’d you do that?!” — the boy was surprised.



“Why? Cause because! Your dad is going to Greece too. He’s going too, yeah?!”

“Not anymore,” said Rezikie, “he’s staying.”

For a second, silence fell, charged with amazement.

“Why isn’t he going anymore, man?!” — finally, Datuni threw the question like slinging a pebble.

“Why is he staying?!” — Zuriko-lippy sent off a second pebble.

“Why? Cause because!” — Rezikie spun back at his friend, “He’s becoming a businessman!”

They had come to a spring.

They stopped.

In the evenings, there’s a gathering near the spring. Kids and teenagers meet up here. But now it’s hot, has not cooled down yet, and everyone’s hiding in the shade.

“What businessman, man?!” — Datuni splashed water on his face with both hands and sat on a rock.

“Did they not take him? be honest!” — Zuriko-lippy screwed up his eyes devilishly.

“Not take him? They’re begging from over there! But he doesn’t want to, he’s staying-he said! Starting a business.”

“What business, man, spit it out!”

Rezikie put his palm under the spring, drank water, ran the wet hand through his hair and said:

“He was in Lanchkhuti for some big gathering. He was there with uncle Lado and when the meeting was starting, Lado brought dad with him. He said some important people were there, were gonna talk about interesting things and he should join. My dad joined. It turned out to be a cool thing. When he came home later, he said he wouldn’t leave anywhere anymore. He said he’s gonna sell a plot of land, the cows too, take out some credit and start three businesses. He said at least one will work out.”



“Three?” — the boys asked with eyes wide.

“Yep, three.”

“What did they say there like that?” — Datuni is surprised.

“I don’t understand yet either, but they said we have to fight global warming.”

“How do we do that?”

“How, well... Why are icebergs melting in the Arctic?”

“Why? cause it’s hotter with the sun, probably,” says Zuriko-lippy, “cause a polar bear wouldn’t have lit the fireplace over there...”

They laughed.

“What burned the Brazillian forest? What burned the Australian woods?”

“Sun, dude, sun,” now says Datuni, “Not like the Brazillian president left the iron on!”

They laughed again.

“Yeah, so they talked there, about why it’s so hot now, that the ice is melting and what starts the fires! Global warming, this, that... Said oil is no good. Said the exhaust kills. Said the air got polluted and nature isn’t worth anything anymore.”

“Our biology teacher told us that too, ms. Natie. You tell us how your dad is starting a business!” — said Datuni, taking a black plum he had plucked somewhere on the way and throwing it in his mouth.

“They said there that we humans have to use sun, water and wind from now on. Said they are here and if we start, they’ll give us a hand.”

“And?”

“My dad is planning on all three.”

“How, dude?”

“He said he’ll put in a small hydroelectric station on the branch of the Supsa, put a wind station on Katsigora and make the sun thing too...”



corrector... or convertor... or something, I don't remember! Said sun will heat the village water."

"Even in winter, man?!" - Zuriko-lippy squinted his eyes like usual again.

"Yep, even in winter," - said Rezikie, "Said that's what solar energy is."

Silence fell.

"That's good..." Datuni said finally, "you'll have your dad here."

"Yeah, it's good," said Zuriko-lippy, "when dad is here, that's better than anything."

There were glimpses of disappointment in the boys' voices.

Rezikie's mood was spoiled. He became ashamed, somehow. His face turned red and something got caught in his throat... the boy became tense, a vein popped up on his forehead. He even balled up his fists in a strange, child-man-like fervor and suddenly light returned to his face.

"I've got it!" - he exclaimed.

"What are you on about, man?!" - his friends asked in surprise.

"I've got it! I'll talk to my dad. I'll tell him, 'what do you want three businesses for? Zurikie and Datuni's dads are here too! They're getting ready to leave! One is going to Spain, the other - to Turkey. Datuni and Zurikie are worrying about their fathers leaving, don't want new sneakers and their dollars either!' I'll say, 'they want their fathers at home, the way you stayed. So, if you are my good dad, become friends with them; if it's a pity for a man to eat alone, it's even worse to be like that in business! Keep one business for yourself, let the other go to Datuni's dad and the third to Zurikie's father. They'll become businessmen and rich, and they'll pay you back! They'll stay here!'"

"You'll really tell him like that, Rezikie?" - Datuni sent a solid punch to his friend's shoulder out of delight, "You'll really tell him, man?!"

"Really! As soon as he's home!"



“Really, man?!” — now Zurikie-lippy stared into his face with impatience.

“Really, I said, really!”

“Will he say yes though?!”

“He will!”

“Your dad won’t say no to you!”

“He won’t!”

“Wow, how great will that be, man!”

“Wind, sun and water belongs to everyone, not just to my dad,” says Rezikie.

They cheerfully start on their way home.

Hopefully.

With kind hopes.

They played around with a puppy. Hissed at a cat. Made a pig squeel...

On the crossroads, they stopped by Rezikie’s house.

“You’ll tell him?”

“I’ll tell him.”

“Tell him.”

And all three went on their own path, their own small, big path.

2022

Tamar Bolkvadze

A STRAW BARN, RED DRESS, AND BLACK PANTS

The shoot was already scheduled! Topic, location, and respondent - selected! The host's outfit remained a major problem. It had to be not too dressed up and not too casual. The director couldn't recommend anything useful; styling was not his strong suit... After giving it some thought, Tamta decided to wear what she liked: a red sundress, a straw hat with white ribbons and thick-soled boots...

The August heat was thick in Kakheti, boiling. A Velistsikhe farmer was waiting for the camera crew from Tbilisi with his heart pounding. Beside Gogi stood a band of other farmers. Their main reason was curiosity, then the support of a friend. It was no joke to have their friend be presented on TV for all of Georgia to see and hear. Gogi's fancies had a big screen turned on all night and with the most beautiful colors, his brush of imagination was painting that journalist with the pleasant voice that he had spoken to on the phone.

"Golden" Gogia was a diligent, hard-working, nature-loving boy who dreamt of creating a good farm. His father died early and Gogia took on the burden of manhood from an young age. He worked day and night, even graduated from the agricultural college in Telavi, often attended agro-trainings held in the region, gathered the necessary knowledge, and asked experienced farmers for advice. Soon, he turned the sizeable land left by his ancestors into a profitable farm.

After the first abundant harvest, instead of rushing out to buy a Mer-



cedes, he bought a small tractor, so he wouldn't have to constantly ask someone else. In short, he gained a reputation as a good farmer in Velistsikhe. In Kakheti, they won't give you a nickname if you don't deserve it! Gogia was really golden both at heart and at work. He was handy at everything, from building a house to carving wood. His Grandfather was a master woodworker and Gogia fell in love with the work as a child.

A car painted with the channel and program logos stopped in the middle of the field. Tamta got out first, with her red dress, model legs and a Hollywood smile, directly greeting the host. Gogi was so taken aback, first he took a step forward, then retreated, and staring at the top of his shoes, he said, "Hello, welcome!" The camera crew got out too, unloading their TV equipment. The drone attracted a lot of attention from the hosts. "That thing that looks like an iron grasshopper, what can it do?" they asked. "What kind of a silly question is that? Haven't you all heard of a drone? Wait and see. It will fly into the sky, start buzzing like a bee and take pictures of my farm from there," Gogi replied like a man in the know. "Can't it take pictures from a little closer? How will they make us out from that far?" Kakhetians asked with interest. "That 'grasshopper' won't miss a single one of you. If you have a mole on your ear, it will show that too," joked the operators.

In the meantime, Tamta began to look around the surrounding area. The boys gave Gogi — who had turned into stone — a shove. "Go, man! Follow that strawberry-looking girl. Make sure your bull doesn't come at her, seeing that red dress. Don't let her get in trouble." Gogi quickly recovered, returned to the proper state of a host and hurried over to Tamta.

Well, he did have a big farm, something they call a multi-purpose land in agro-language. You could find everything there: a well-kept vineyard, with red and white Rkatsiteli and Saperavi grapes lined up like Spartans, a lake full of geese, ducks and fish, plantations of nuts, a garden full of watermelons, a vegetable garden, sheep, cows, horses



and, most importantly, a straw barn! This farming wealth was guarded by shaggy Caucasian shepherd dogs. It took a long time to explore such a large territory. Gogi, at last, managed to gather his confused self and became a little more comfortable with the unfamiliar bird that had flown into his farm... He explained everything, even showed her the line of trees reaching towards the sky that he used to block the wind. He told her how, years ago, he and his friends planted pine trees that did not need watering, were not harmed by pets, did not let the wind roam about in his garden and vineyard, and also protected the soil from erosion.

“As far as I know, all your pine trees have dried up in the city; but here, by God’s grace, they stand as a green wall and as the old men say around here, they will stand for another two centuries!” Gogi said and adjusted his cowboy hat, which was worn in a certain Kakhétian way... In Tamta’s eyes, the respondent’s rating was gradually going up...

After their lengthy walk, he even had the exhausted journalist taste a ripe watermelon, split the heart of a nut (his own heart too...), gave it to her, and finally blurted out, “This is the first time I have to be in front of the camera and I’m a little nervous. If I can’t say and do things as needed, what can be done about that?” Tamta reassured him like a good psychologist would, explaining that this was not a live broadcast and that if something went wrong, they would record another take. She added, “I will stand close to you and help you as much as possible.” What did Tamta know that it was her “standing close” that made respondent Gogi nervous the most...

It was decided - filming should start at the barn! The main purpose of the filming crew’s arrival in Velistsikhe was first this house, and then the farm. Gogi had built the house with his own hands, with just two of his friends helping.

As soon as the camera was on, Gogi’s tension disappeared somewhere and he told them about what, when and how he did in such a silver-tongued way that Tamta could not hide her amazement... After



recording the first take, she even praised the respondent, saying “I really did not expect this...”

“Wait, you know, you didn’t ask me why I built it,” Gogi answered with a little more boldness. “Then, let’s continue recording and you can tell me the story of the barn in detail,” answered the journalist.

Now encouraged, Gogi was not waiting for operators to turn on the cameras. He explained in detail why the barn was environmentally friendly and energy efficient, how much reed, straw, and wool, what amount of clay and lime it took to build it, how he chose a flat place, a little far from the forest, how he heard the howling of wolves at night and how the three friends, like three little pigs, diligently built this magical house. Then he talked about how this house became something to joke and gossip about in Velistsikhe. Although, one or two young farmers took an example from him and built a similar barn. They could not do it quite like Gogi, but still, he did gain a couple of followers and imitators doing good work...

“Well, look how freely you can breathe here. It’s cool in summer and warm in winter. Friends tell me my house is like a thermos. The straw and other natural materials that I used maintain the heat well, I have good thermal insulation, and you won’t see a single crack anywhere. I light the furnace too, but instead of using wood, I use trimmed vines from my vineyard. I have enough for mtsvadi and to keep the furnace blazing too. Friends also like to come here, there are always guests in this house. And in Velistsikhe we have such good nature that my house and I have become a part of it too. Nature will treat you the way you treat it. I never harm it, and it also responds with kindness. Doesn’t it show when you look at my farm? They say if you want to feel happy, you should go on a date with nature once a week,” he said and felt how his face became red after adding that last sentence...

The film crew moved from the house to the lake. In the lake stood a rusty boat from before Christ’s time with a single oar. Geese and ducks floated in a parade line. The cameramen filmed each duck or



goose taking off, shouting “Woah, what a shot!” The drone buzzed in the sky...

The *mise-en-scène* was as follows: Tamta had to sail alone in the boat, stand up, take a selfie with her phone (for the website), suddenly turn to the camera and record the introduction to the program, a so called “Standup.” Tamta hesitated a little, thinking about sailing out alone with one oar, but she didn’t let the fear show. Instead, she folded the skirt of her red dress and jumped into the boat like a doe. Struggling, she reached the middle of the lake, took a selfie with the blue sky and green lake as her background, stoop up in the boat and turned so sharply that she lost her footing and fell overboard... Tamta’s straw hat with a white ribbon floated beautifully up to the surface. Gogi jumped into the water without thinking, what lake could get in the way of someone who had grown up on the banks of the Alazani River? He threw his strong arms forward and appeared next to Tamta in a minute. When he brought her back to the shore, she had lake water in her stomach and was nearly unconscious.

“And there’s our ‘bloop’ too, a funny shot,” said one of the operators. Gogi’s friends expressed their indignation loudly, “Hey, man, are you out of your mind? What blooper-shmooper are you talking about? We barely saved a woman from drowning and you’re holding the cameras and watching the spectacle. If I were in that girl’s place, I wouldn’t go anywhere with you anymore!”

Either way, that night, the barn furnace was fired up to get Tamta dry and warm, vines were used to fry *mtsvadi*, *Rkatsiteli* wine blessed the guests and hosts, Tamta’s survival was toasted with a chalice, and the TV presenter’s red dress was hung on a washing line next to the farmer’s black pants.

Gogi let the film crew stay in the barn. Tamta, already revived and in a good mood, was looking at the ginormous moon from the window and telling her friend about the incident on the phone. Gogi sat down on the barn stairs, played a little with the tail-wagging shepherd that ran up to him, and lost himself in dreams...



A full moon stood over Velistsikhe. All living things on Gogi's farm had already settled. The shaggy shepherds had come out to do their roundabouts and a chorus of dragonflies joined their barking. From time to time, you could even hear horses neighing. The water in a small spring that had appeared from somewhere on Gogi's land would not give into sleep. A cloud pleated in purple and pink lay on the smoke rising from the barn toward the sky. Barn windows were barely keeping their eyes open but in Gogi's eyes, the full moon was the color of Tamta's dress...

Natia Rostiashvili

A MAN OF GOD

1

“The parrot is smoking, woman!”

This phrase was Batu’s pass to a new life. It’s where he started counting from. Though, he does not know yet that in this second, God started the timer of a completely different life, and opened his eyes in an entirely new way.

Horror-stricken Batu nudged his wife, who had become used to nightmares lately, and now, finally, was in the midst of seeing a pleasant dream. They have been in Tbilisi with their son for two days. It’s been two days that, before going to bed, while his wife takes off her ankle-length black dress and puts on a white ankle-length nightgown over her withered body, Batu’s heart aches. Does it ache because his wife is aging? No, it aches because now she will let her hair down and start reciting her new “bedtime ritual text.” It was the same last night, she let her hair down and started:

“Don’t fill their ears with your stupid talk! Don’t you realize that you are talking silly?!”

In the past two days, Batu has also gained a new bedtime ritual: he observes the parrot, and does not take his eyes off it. He does not like or love it. What is there to love about a parrot?! He simply diverts his attention so that he does not attach any importance to his wife’s words, so he does not get offended or angry.



By the way, Batu really loves to talk about seemingly absurd topics. But before that, he calculates, thinks, and observes. When they had a grandson, he said to his wife:

“Our daughter-in-law is not one to have a second child, if you want, we can bet on it!”

“Why do you like to jinx things, man, sweeten your words a little!” angrily replied his wife, who, by the way, got stuck with the name “woman” because of Batu’s not-so-sugary tongue. From the day they got married, he addressed her as “woman”, and today no one remembers the woman’s real name anymore.

“You know, I don’t talk about anything thoughtlessly!” proudly answered the newly-turned grandpa, “They love everything in singles, that’s their destiny. He’s an only child and she is too. They bought a one-room house too. Our boy does not drink more than one bottle of beer at a time. Plums, even plums, our daughter-in-law buys a kilo of them, no more. Why would they have two children? I’ve observed everything, I am not plucking things out of the air!”

“I’ll gladly throw dirt on your coffin,” said the woman calmly, with a smile.

She said it calmly and with a smile so the in-laws would not overhear, so they would not question what kind of people Batu and his wife were, cursing each other instead of being happy about the birth of their grandson.

What’s more, it’s not like Batu was unhappy about his grandson being born. He was simply a different kind of man, he liked to follow thoughts in ways untraced by others. Unfortunately for him, his heart was also wishing for someone who would share Batu’s strange thoughts. If there had been a choice, who would choose the woman to open their heart to? Who the hell?!

Well, Batuna — named after his gramps — has turned five years old and his mother has really not given birth to a second child. Instead, they bought a parrot, of course — a single parrot. Batu’s calculations



based on seemingly stupid logic always turn out to be true, the woman just doesn't want to hear him out.

On this visit to their son, the husband and wife are sleeping in a hallway-like room that would fit exactly one couch. The wife is lying on the side close to the wall (her face turned towards the wall too). Batu, as payback, has also turned his back on her.

The door separating the hallway and kitchen has been removed. When he wakes up, the first thing Batu sees is a cage on the kitchen table with the parrot locked inside.

"The parrot is smoking, woman!"

The woman turned towards Batu grumbling and looked at the cage, at first with sleepy, narrowed eyes; then, with both wide open. Finally, she moved forward and stayed like that for two or three seconds, staring at the parrot.

"Your brain is the one on fire!" she said finally and turned back to the wall.

She turned her back, yes, but she wasn't able to go back to sleep. Batu jumped up like a madman, ran to the parrot, and started blowing on it while screaming for help. The son and daughter-in-law ran in, frightened. Boy in shorts, daughter-in-law in a thin, airy nightgown.

"Well, look, won't even wear a bathrobe in front of her father-in-law!" the woman got a ping of anger in her heart, and to show her daughter-in-law the proper way of behaving around family, she ceremoniously, while still in bed, put on her black dress that rolled down to the ankles, but the daughter-in-law did not even look toward her.

"What's smoking, father? What are you seeing? This is too much already, really!" The boy kicked his leg toward the part between the kitchen and hallway where a door should have been. Of course, it didn't hurt. Maybe it had hurt him earlier and that's why he had taken it off. Batu definitely would have thought of this at another time, but now he's busy trying to save the parrot. He's also confused about how they can not see this much smoke.



Nobody spoke to Batu for the rest of that day. Only little Batuna spoke to him just once (the apple didn't fall far). Spoke to him is an exaggeration, more like asked:

"Who set fire to my bird?!"

This gave Batu hope that he didn't imagine it. Otherwise, he would have started to worry about how this was no time to become crazy. He still had the roof of his chicken coop to tile.

The parrot died the next day. The daughter-in-law became hysterical and her husband took her into the bedroom so that his father would not hear her say "It's that asshole's fault." He still heard it.

Looking at Batu's eyes, the woman's heart sank. Without a word, she packed both of their clothes in a large, empty bag, which they had brought full of produce from the village. They left the house like that too, saying nothing. They lived on the first floor, of course. Didn't take the couple long to get out of the apartment building.

They halted at the bus stop and Batu looked up to see a thick black fog stretching over the sky along the highway. He sees it as clearly as he sees the woman's downturned face next to him.

"Woman... there is black fog everywhere."

He said it in such a broken, spineless voice that the woman did not even have the will to curse him. She realized that instead of imagining them, her strange husband is really seeing these things.

This new talent was a heavy cross to bear. The invisible poisonous waves of the exhaust had only become clear to Batu. The unhealthy side of the world, which is usually masked by transparency, was sharpening for Batu to see, taking shape. It was difficult to open the door of clarity to the flow of an informational sea all at once.

Only Batu could see the dark color of a rotting organ inside some smiling person. At first, he could not convince anyone that it was not because of this bitter language that the village celebrity Ioseb died (Batu had said that he didn't have many days left). He was sick, sick,



and Batu just saw the invisible stench of this illness. Ioseb's story will be after their return to Sagarejo. For now, they are standing at the bus stop, waiting for the one going to the station, listening closely to the signature wind of Didi Dighomi.

Batu is listening to the wind; Batu is watching the wind and he's turning pale. It is as if someone brawny is standing over him. He feels the force of the wind so tangibly, it's like Batu is checking its muscles that are heavy like stones. When the woman looked at her husband's pale face, her throat became so dry from fear, as if this dry wind blew in to her mouth and dried it up in a second.

Standing here at this stop, Batu realized that nothing is the same anymore. Even breathing... He doesn't breathe like he used to; instead, it is as if he is tasting a dish for salt. He tastes the air like that, and aha! It's gone sour, bitter, poisonous.

"Grandpa!" a random child smiles at Batu, taking his mother's hand and getting on the bus.

The child has ruddy cheeks as if he is healthy, but Batu sees how two narrow lines of black smoke enter his tiny nostrils, how air poisoned by exhaust fills his tiny lungs and clings to it, leaving stains even after he exhales. The bus is full of people with blackened lungs.

"Why are you crying, man? Don't scare me!" the woman says and starts crying herself. And is it silent like Batu's cries? Is it dry like her mouth? No. It is loud, real, and tearful.

2

The word spread in Sagarejo that Batu has become a man of God. At first, everyone was laughing at this, then they were amazed; finally, acquaintances and strangers spoke to him with such reverence that the woman gave up her habit of turning towards the wall and sleeping with her back to Batu, and instead, fell asleep on her husband's bony chest every night. The thing is none of it mattered for Batu anymore. It did not matter if he listened to his daughter-in-law's apolo-



gies on the phone. Everything became trivial. Batu was elsewhere. He was not even interested in sleeping, sharing his strange thoughts with anyone, or eating anymore. He only tasted the air, talked to the trees, and wherever he looked, he saw dream-like truths.

“There will be a drought! We’ll have to search for irrigation water with a candle,” he would say, and the entire village would throw their hands in the air. They knew that if Batu said something, he would never miss the mark.

Lately, the man of God hardly spoke at all. What has one to say after seeing such great secrets of nature, deciphering the minor and major chords of rustling trees, and witnessing the birth of ozone from thunder? “I have been a moth, moth,” he would say to himself as often and heartily as he used to say “God help us.” But sometimes it happened that he would go out to the cemetery road and began to preach. The villagers would get the news of Batu speaking and gather around him in a second. For example, today, Batu came out, hugged a hundred-something-year-old tree, spoke to it, and sat down on a stone nearby. The woman also followed behind, pleasantly greeted the gathered people, and came to Batu intending to sit next to him proudly, but Batu did not even notice her, he did not scoot over, and instead, left the woman standing and furious.

“The air is sick, people,” he said, and everyone became silent. “Will you go and stab your friend? So why are you cutting down the trees?! If you could see how black the air is that goes in like a funnel when they inhale, and how pristine it is when they breathe back out, you wouldn’t even tear a leaf! Go ahead, look how the poisons rise to the sky! Smell the air! Can’t you smell fuel, man? Can’t you taste kerosene and gasoline?!”

Sometimes he would forget like this that he is alone in perceiving and feeling the great secrets of the universe. He would look at the people with their jaws on the ground, let out a sigh, let the pain of loneliness pinch his heart a little, and speak again:

“I am not a learned man, I will put it simply that this fuel, emissions,



and nastiness rise to the top, poison everything. That's what brings drought, dries up rivers, and messes nature up. And with nature being messed up, our harvests will follow, and humans will too.

The sound of car breaks made everyone look toward the road for a second. A short man, newly appointed to a high position, got out of the car and went to greet Batu.

"You've bought a car, congratulations," said Batu, shaking the man's hand with his right one and patting him on his shoulder with the left, "From today you will also add to the work of poisoning the air."

The man's smile froze on his face. Offended, he removed Batu's hand with a shrug.

"What do you want? I don't get it! Should we ride a horse in the twenty-first century?! Should we not turn on the gas? Should we never light a fire again? Well, then let's freeze and die!"

"Nature itself gives us everything, child. And all for free. If we don't cut down the trees, if we don't dizzy ourselves with gas... don't you see how much wood is left over after pruning the vineyard! The heat from that is like medicine. Our region has the vines, another has corn husks, and someone else has hazelnut shells. Well, we have our own Tvaltkhevi, someone else has a bigger river. If one builds a water mill, the other a wind one..." he fell silent, "When my eyes were opened to the full force of the wind, do you know how scared I was? Do you know how much power it has?"

"I heard that your boy also bought a car, what, it's ok for him?" the man chuckled ironically and looked over the people. He smiled at each person, one by one. Everyone except the woman.

"The car my boy bought uses electricity," said Batu, and he was right. "He puts one brick on the wall of public good by not sending poisons from the back of the car to the sky! Even this electricity, child..." Here Batu's voice trembled and his eyes filled with tears. He looked up and squinted at the sun. "Look how big the sun is!"

The sun really was big and strong. Both the sun and Batu knew, and



felt that this official was not a bad person deep down. This man will soon buy solar panels and will pleasantly surprise these people who are tired of listening to them both with the gift of the sun - free electricity.

3

All sorts of people came to Batu for advice. They followed his advice too. It was as if the air became cleaner, the people became brighter, and the weather became friends with the people. One thing was that nothing helped the woman's nightmares. She would wake up terror-struck and while keeping her cheek on Batu's bony chest, anger swirled in her head and heart until the morning. "He saves everyone, he helps everyone but watch him do nothing about my nightmares," she thought.

"Grandpa! It's me, Batuna, your grandson. Can you hear me? I know you hear my voice. When you saw the parrot smoking, I realized that too then. Only you and I could see. Us, Batus are cool. Aren't we cool, grandpa?"

Batu has been lying down for a long time. He lies with his eyes closed, and does not make a sound. There are no words left to say. He only opens his eyes when Batuna comes and looks at him as if to say "Grandpa loves you". And Batuna too, as soon as he hears any news that would make his grandpa happy, he begs his father to take him to Sagarejo. As soon as they arrive, he runs over to the bed.

"Grandpa! Did you know that they built a wind turbine in Gori? When I grow up, I will put one like that in Didi Dighomi. Do you know how cool our wind is? It would beat one in Gori, America too!"

"Grandpa! When they took dad and me to Telavi, do you know what I saw? They drove a red tractor into the vineyard, it goes back and forth and collects the vine branches. It has a thread inside, and when it collects these branches, it wraps the thread around them and throws it out like a ball. They are going to use those to keep the little children warm. They said they won't pollute the air and will save money for heating too. Then they gave me candies too, and said I was the



grandson of the man of God. Isn't that cool, grandpa? You hear my voice, right? I know you hear me."

Batu hears, of course! The man of God understands. He smiles, looks down at his grandson's head as the boy kneels near the bed. Then, in the yard, he looks out at the woman standing by the tiled chicken coop. He lifts a black transparent strand from her gray hair, pulls it out, twists it on his finger, twirls it out with a smile. Nearby, at the gate, their boy is explaining something to a neighbor about the inner workings of his car. Batu rises higher, looks down on the village. The official, whom Batu inadvertently offended, proudly supervises the unloading of newly purchased solar panels. Even from here, Batu sees the shining smoke coming from the panels. He also knows that when that man turns around and walks up the road, he is walking to Batu to tell him the good news.

If he looked down from this height at the beginning of his new life, he wouldn't have been able to see anything, instead, now, the air has been cleared. Along the road, he smiles at the tops of newly planted trees the same way he smiled at Batuna. Batu goes up and up, floating. The smoky sphere of the woman's bad dreams gradually melts in his hand, dissipates. He is only thinking about one thing, will he see God as clearly and easily as he saw the other invisible things down there, among the people?...



OXYGEN

Gena is already forty and many years old (like his wife, Sopho would say, who is also forty and many) and to this day, one thought does not let him rest: why did his grandpa Giorgi name him what he named him, who was he trying to get even with? If he had named him Giorgi, maybe Gena would be more self-confident, happy, rich, and muscular now.

When Gena, who was used to being teased because of his name in pre-school, entered first grade, he fearfully awaited attendance checks and his classmate's reactions, but the teacher mumbled something incomprehensible after his last name instead. Gena did not make a sound. He was sitting at the desk up front, and the teacher easily leaned over with a new wooden stick, tapping it on the desk with the joy one has when using a new item for the first time.

"O-xy-geen..." — the teacher sang, "Pay attention! When I read your name out, you should say: 'here.'"

This was the first and biggest horror in Gena's life. The name he was worried about, a name that could not be shortened into a flattering one or made into a pet name turned out to be already a shorter and cuter version of what he was actually called.

"Oxygen... Oxygen... Oxygen." In the evenings, before memorizing his Georgian homework, Gena worked on memorizing his own name.

"Change your name legally, call yourself Giorgi for God's sake!"



Sopho used to chirp this at him even back when they were dating. "There are probably 171,490 official Georges in this one tiny country, there may as well be 171,491!"

By the way, Gena's wife Sopho was not named Sopho by her Grandmother Iamze either. She was named Iamze, but since Sopho was not lazy, she changed it legally and became Sopho. And if any of her supposedly nanve — in reality, venomous — childhood friends commented on Facebook: 'I miss you, Iamzeeee', she would delete without remorse. First the comment, then the friend. First from Facebook 'friends' and then from real life.

"You women know how to uproot easily," the man — Gena — explained with a feeling of superiority, "You'll see, when I marry you and you will change your last name without any qualms, take on mine, but I am a man. Whatever name I got from my family — I can't throw it away!"

By the way, Sopho didn't change her last name, said it sounds better than his, and Gena got a last name complex packaged along with this first name troubles.

The day they started studying chemistry at school, Gena was late for class. As soon as he got there, all the classmates shouted together: "He's here!"

They were so happy that Gena doubted if it was his birthday, but then he remembered that he had never seen his classmates excited about his birthday. "It's about something else," he concluded and sat down at his desk, a little happy, a little tense, and very surprised.

"Well, what is written on the board?" — joyfully asked the chemistry teacher, who had never betrayed his nickname 'The Unsmiling Ruler' before, now smiling from ear to ear,

Gena looked closely at the board.

"Oxygen." — he said disappointed. At the least, he expected — 'Gena, we love you!'



“And in Latin?!” — asked the chemistry teacher.

And here was the moment when Gena found himself: ‘Oxygenium’ was written on the board.

“Oxygen! Oxygen!” — Children were yelling on top of each other, “Your name!”

Gena felt how the stone on his heart softened and rose. How the warm blood trickled from this inflated heart to the veins and rushed through the whole body like a tingle. It turned out that his grandpa had not named him a silly name at all, there was meaning behind it! And how big of a meaning, a meaning necessary for life — Oxygen!

“Gena has gone off to Kathmandu!” — The word spread around the village, and everywhere it ran into — between the shutters of local houses — it was met with a softer “Wow!”

“Call him Oxygena all you want.” One of Gena’s classmates, Giorgi, whose hair was already gray, joylessly handed a cigarette to another.

“Not that he went with his own money. His job sent him.” Gena’s second, already balding classmate Giorgi said reassuringly and cheerfully took the cigarette.

“And? At least he has a job.”

They kept smoking wordlessly.

Gena was considered a successful man in the village, and he was, but he could not bear this status. All his successes came from attempts to escape from self-doubts and fears. According to Gena, real success should have been different, “grown from a more carefree root, not fear?!”

Indeed, he had a job, at the Environmental Protection Agency, but he was just an office worker, without rank and invisible. To fight his fears, he traveled to Kathmandu at his own expense with the money he



had saved up over the years. He had two battles to win: to be alone, away from loved ones, and to come face to face with mysticism, the unknown. It seemed the second surrendered without a fight. Nothing mystical was happening there.

And yet, the main, magical story of Gena's life began on a darkened street in Kathmandu.

The day before he left Kathmandu, he went for a leisurely walk. People were gathered in the square, staring at something, their eyes waiting for enlightenment. "You people..." he thought and passed by. On the way back, having been met with the same people in the same position, he wondered what the matter was. He looked at the window everyone was staring at. As soon as he looked up, a strangely, scarily painted girl looked out with a sharp gaze. She looked and for some reason, met Gena's eyes directly.

"Damn the devil," thought Gena, alarmed, and to better protect himself, even decided to sign a cross, but when everyone turned to him with 'white envy', he realized that the painted girl was a local goddess, and catching her gaze was considered a sign of happiness. With his fingers prepared to sign the cross, Gena just scratched his forehead, wiped his sweat, and continued his way.

Until nightfall, he waited tensely for 'happiness to happen', but nothing happened. When it came to mysticism, only Gena could feel joy instead of disappointment if he 'didn't get the promised candy.'

As soon as night fell, Gena decided to walk through the mysterious streets of Kathmandu. Someone else would have thought that Gena was brave. In reality, he was going out to fight his fear of the dark. Much like success, this boldness also did not have a 'carefree root.'

He took the first darkened bend. The local heavy air lightly pushed its fingers into the nostrils, leaving a specific smell and fear.



Suddenly the darkness grabbed his shoulder and Gena jumped in fear so violently that the darkness laughed. The white teeth gave away that it was not actually darkness, but simply a black man. The man offered something, Gena realized that it must have been some sort of grass for smoking. Gena, who had never smoked anything, took out the money he had for Sopho's bracelet and gave it to him, worrying the man would think him a loser. Then he got angry at his own lack of self-confidence and immediately returned the drugs. Gena returned the drugs, but the man did not return the money. He spread his hands in a way that, if translated into Georgian, would mean: "That's not how things go, brother!.."

Gena's face got so red, the man felt sorry for him and he fumbled his hands in his bag for a long time. Finally, he took out black glasses and handed them to him, and with his hands, facial expressions, and winks, he made it easy to understand what he was saying: "If you wear this, you will see women naked. I can't see them anymore, I'm too old. Haha."

Gena dared to put on his glasses only after returning to Tbilisi. He was alone at home. He put on the glasses, ran to the window with a pounding heart, and!.. They all looked the same as without glasses, dressed. Maybe with even more layers.

"How naive I am, God!" — thought Gena, chronically dissatisfied with himself, and looked up at the sky. He looked up and ha! A layer of black sludge was covering the sky.

He took the glasses off — it was gone, put them on — it was back. Off, gone; on, there!

Not naked women, unfortunately, but Gena could really see 'naked air.' This 'clear air' had actually wrapped itself around the atmosphere like a satin robe draped over a dirty body. Gena, thanks to his magic glasses, could see through this cover. He even saw air pollutants 'packed inside the robe,' which, ironically, were very poeti-



cally entangled with each other:

(Carbon) monoxide and (sulfur) dioxide.

(Ground-level) ozone and nitrogen (dioxide).

From that day on, Gena would often disappear from the house, go up to the roof of the building, and observe the clouds. Sopho melted from jealousy, but God, to balance her husband's character, had made her into a positive person, and Sopho was happy to shed these kilos on the grounds of jealousy, especially since one of her favorite pairs of jeans fit again! "I hope he continues cheating for a little while longer," wished Sopho, hugging the second, tighter pair of jeans.

Gena expanded his area of observation: he went around villages and cities. He has not revealed his secret to anyone. Not even to Sopho. Especially not to Sopho.

From these shamanic glasses, the degree of air pollution invisible not only to the human eye but also to scientific tools, was clearly visible. Soon numbers also appeared, with accurate percentage calculations. Gena could hardly handle writing it all down on paper. He started leading a new project at work. An ordinary Gena soon became Mr. Oxygen. This hit two birds with one stone: his name complex was beaten and his lack of rank was gone. He seemed to finally be able to breathe, but once, while observing the process of repairing the city's dug-up road, when he followed the scattered dust particles up to the clouds, suddenly a new doubt appeared:

"...And why can't I see naked women? Am I getting old? Didn't the shaman say that he was old and that's why he couldn't see them?"

Gena, the general of battles against fears and doubts, hastened to rip out the bottom of the newly hatched fear and continued to look at the cloud that had shriveled like an apple that had been bitten on one side.



“Gena has gone far; he is on TV,” Giorgi, one of Gena’s classmates, who was now very gray, said to the other, who was half-bald, but since he didn’t give him a cigarette this time, the second was too lazy to reassure.

You could see Gena not only on Georgian TV, but also on foreign environmental protection TV channels, in the press, and on websites. The accuracy of his calculations and his ability to predict events in advance caused worldwide admiration. In addition to overcoming his own doubts and fears, Gena found another real dream: to build an eco-village. A village, where household needs would be solved only in an ecologically clean, natural way, with the energy of the sun, wind, and water.

This was Gena’s way of thanking the universe for choosing him — one ordinary individual with a strange name — out of seven billion others. A thought suddenly flashed in his mind: “Maybe that shaman was God? Maybe I saw God in Kathmandu?” He decided that if he managed to fulfill this dream of founding the village, he would name the place “Shaman.”

Gena spent all his time at home working on his dream project. No one and nothing else were relevant to him. “At least he’s home,” his wife Sopho would reassure herself, but to keep in shape, she kept the jealousy around.

Mr. Oxygen’s dream, made into a project, was financed without any problems.

“Boys,” Gena, who had returned to the village in a rush, gathered his classmates, “ecology is in a bad situation, the air we breathe is filled with a thousand harmful substances. This much car exhaust, construction dust, soot, smoke from fires lit at landfills pollute the air. And breathing polluted air is shitting on human health! I want to build a new eco-village there on the hill, I invite you. No car exhaust, no elec-



tricity, no smoke, we won't have it there. We will have more health and less expenses..."

"Wait," the grayest of the classmates, Giorgi, interrupted, "Would we live in the dark?"

"No, why? The project is financed, we will install solar eco-panels and we will have electricity, and for free!"

"And food?!" — asked the baldest Giorgi among the classmates, who in the meantime also combined the title of the chubbiest.

"We will sow, plant, cultivate, grind wheat, bake bread..."

"If there is no electricity, do you grind by hand?" — the grey-haired one looked at the others as if to say, 'See, I just beat him.'

"We will install a windmill or a water turbine." It was not so easy to beat Gena.

"Life will not work without cars," the grey-haired one would not give up, "We need transport."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Gena, "Electric cars also exist."

They tried to argue, but when Gena showed them data from the Internet, telling them that 7 million people die worldwide every year due to air pollution, they gave in.

"Forgive me, God. You are God after all and one unfulfilled promise shouldn't upset you too much," Gena thought, guiltily God and naming the village after himself.

A small eco-village called Oxygen soon became the center of world attention. Imitators appeared, and eco-villages increased in number. Many people in the city also replaced their gasoline-powered cars with electric ones. The sky seen through Gena's glasses changed and cleared every year. Only Gena's confession was unchanged: "God, forgive me for hating my name. That name made me a self-doubt-



ing person, and I became successful because of my struggle with these doubts. If my name was Giorgi, would I choose this profession? If I had been fearless, would I have gone to Kathmandu?"

One day, when Gena was returning home from the mill, when he had finally believed that he was a self-confident, "happy man made from a carefree root" and no longer had any doubts, he saw the grey-haired Giorgi had entered his yard without asking. Giorgi looked from the other side of the fence and called out:

"Dude! Your wife has gone mad! She took off all her clothes and is running around!"

Terrified, Gena looked around. Sopho, wearing a blue t-shirt and her favorite skinny jeans, was chasing a butterfly with a net.

And Gena's grey-haired classmate Giorgi was wearing the black, magical glasses, unable to take his eyes off the naked Sopho.

Levan Loria

EVEN GODS CRY SOMETIMES

“Talk so I can see you!”

“Teacher, are you blind?”

“No, I’m not blind! I can see the sky, I can see the trees, this green grass, they said what they had to say. You, I can’t see!”

“I am Alexander, King Philip is my father!”

“I can see your father, but not you!”

“My father is not here now and how can you see him?!”

“Did you say my father is Philip?!”

“I did!”

“Then, I see your father. To see you, you have to answer my question!”

“And if I can’t answer?”

“Today will be our last lesson!”

“You’re the one who has to teach me the answers to the questions! My father told me that Aristotle knows everything!”

“Even the gods don’t know everything, Alexander!”

“Why are they gods then?”

“You have appeared now,” Aristotle smiled, “I liked the question. How old are you, Alexander?”



“Thirteen!”

“A thirteen-year-old should know a lot of things!”

“I know some, but not everything like you!”

“You’ve disappeared again, Alexander! Didn’t I say that not even the gods know everything?”

“So, my father is lying to me?”

“He’s not lying to you. Your father has his own truth!”

“How many truths are there in the world?”

“There are as many truths in the world as there are people. Every man has his measure, but there is one reality. Alexander, what do you think is the greatest thing in the smallest thing?”

“Common sense in a human body!”

“Did you know the answer, or did you think of it now?”

“I knew it.”

“How did you know?”

“My father loves these words and I also know that he learned them from you!”

“Congratulations, Alexander, I really see you now!”

Thus began the first lesson. Aristotle was talking and walking in the palace garden with Alexander, and he was reminded of his childhood when he played a thousand games — more often invented by Aristotle himself - with Prince Philip at the royal court of the Macedonian king Amyntas. Stubborn Philip wanted to win in every game and used all tricks necessary, allowed and not. Alexander’s gaze also showed stubbornness, but it was not an animal-like stubbornness — the kind that says “That’s how I want it and that’s how it is.” Alexander had the looks, even the mannerisms of Philip, but there was a difference - a determination that was greater in Alexander. Aristotle realized this



during the first lesson, “He is clearly the future king,” he thought, “although neither Macedonia nor Greece will be enough of a kingdom for this one.”

He was going to the royal palace for their second lesson. He had to test Alexander in mathematics today. On the way, he remembered the twenty years spent at Plato’s Academy — going from student to teacher. He remembered the inscription at the entrance of the academy, “Knowledge of mathematics is necessary.” He easily passed the entrance exam for the academy - mathematics was his favorite subject after all. “Mathematics organizes the mind. To feel the beauty of nature, you need to know mathematics, and to understand nature, you need to know physics!” — he said goodbye to Alexander after their previous lesson with these words. For the future king, who is going to take over the fate of the people and the country, knowledge of mathematics will be of utmost importance. After that, they will move on to physics. He decided to take a shortcut to the royal palace. Everyone avoided walking here even during the day. It was a dark, narrow street. Only thieves and prostitutes walked here. He noticed a man coming towards him. He didn’t even look at him, silently trying to pass him by.

“Aristotle?!”

He suddenly heard. He recognized the voice.

“Aristocles is that you?!” answered Aristotle. He and Aristocles studied together in Plato’s Academy. Aristocles was one of the blind followers of Plato. He could repeat Plato’s theses and aporias for hours, and he considered anyone who doubted the ideas of his beloved teacher even a tiny bit to be a personal enemy. Aristocles loved to speak, yes indeed. He could talk from morning till night, but without saying anything.

“In other words, Plato is a friend and truth is a greater friend, isn’t that true, Stagirian?”

“How are you, Aristocles?!” Aristotle smiled, trying to avoid an argument.

“Good, good... and you are still dressed as pristinely as you were in



the academy, with rings on all your fingers, a luxurious cloak and the most expensive sandals!”

“I’m in a hurry now Aristocles, but I’m glad to have seen you!”

“I am not glad! You did not respect our great teacher! Even though, he loved you the most - exceptionally! It’s a good thing that Speusippus became the head of his established academy, and not you!”

“Plato’s nephew is a good person. I hope he will be as successful in leading the academy as Plato was. Tell him congratulation from me! Gods protect you Aristocles!”

Aristotle said this, and before his classmate could say anything, he continued on his way. He managed to take a few steps and suddenly a light fell from the sky. Then a voice was heard, which seemed to come from the sky:

“Come, Aristotle!”

“Who are you?” asked Aristotle.

“Let’s go, I’ll tell you on the way!”

“Where?”

“Aren’t you interested to see what the physicists, that is, the scientists you laid the foundation for, will do to the earth in several centuries?”

“I’m interested, but I have a lesson with the king’s firstborn today, how can I miss it?”

“Alexander can rest for a while, or train in swordsmanship and riding – he’s obviously better at these than physics or metaphysics!”

“So, you know my works?”

“I do know, and although your physics will change a lot, you will still remain in the minds of mankind as the father of physics!”

“That is, as a terrible father?”

“Oh, I’ll show you terror. If you know what sort of situation our poor Earth is in! You dreamed of a better city, a better country, so that



people would be happy, now you have to think about a better Earth so that both the Earth and its people can survive! You are Asclepius' descendent! Wasn't your father Nicomachus a doctor, like your grandfather or great-grandfather? Now you have the opportunity, even for a short time, to return to the profession of your ancestors, to become a healer!

"Who needs healing?"

"The Earth! You are given the option to treat it or at least give it a prescription so it can survive!"

"And how do I come with you?"

"Just follow the light."

"How amazing and surprising all this is, yet every lesson begins with surprise!" Aristotle thought and stepped into the light.

When his eyes got used to the light, he found that he was in a not-too-narrow cell with the shape of a large egg, in which there were two armchairs side by side, set at a slight distance. For some reason he remembered Diogenes of Sinope, sitting in a barrel, but the one he met in this barrel was definitely not Diogenes, and this small abode was not Diogenes' barrel either, in which light entered only from one side. On the contrary, Aristotle had such a feeling as if this rounded cell was built with light entirely, but a light that does not hurt your eyes and does not blind you, instead, a light that gives you energy and increases your strength. In one chair sat a man of about Aristotle's age, with white hair and a mustache. There were round glass windows on the walls of the cell, and in front of the seats, there was an oval table, on the surface of which different moving pictures appeared one by one.

"Well, get ready, we have a long way to go! I knew you would not refuse me, Aristotle of Stagira! - said the man in the same voice that was heard just a little while ago.

"Can you tell me who I'm talking to?" Aristotle said as he sat down in the second armchair.



“Assume I am from metaphysics!” the man laughed, “Although this is not important, where we are going and what we are going to do is what’s important!”

“Where are we going?!”

“In the land of Aeetes. Do you remember the story of the Argonauts?”

“Aeetes, the Golden Fleece, Jason, Medea. Asclepius is the god of medicine, and some people consider Medea to be the goddess of medicine!”

“Yes, even temples were built in her name. You will have to visit one of the municipalities of this country, where the leaders of different cities are meeting now. There will be guests from different countries with them!”

“For what reason?”

“To discuss how to save the Earth!”

“What happened to the Earth?”

“The earth has a fever, it is sick! You have to come up with a prescription, so you’ll have to give a speech at this gathering.”

“Will they know Greek in the country of Aeetes?”

“No, you’ll speak the language of Aeetes’ country, that is, Georgian, which you already know.”

“How do I know it?”

“You know, you know! Wait, this will convince you! Pick up the book that is on the shelf next to you, this is “The Knight in the Panther’s Skin.” Its author is Shota Rustaveli, a son of the country we are going to. Well, open it and read the second stanza on whichever page you land on:

Aristotle, before opening the book, noticed other works nearby: one was titled “Aristotle - Physics,” and the other “Aristotle - Metaphysics.” Then he read the specified verse:



“Entreat God for me; it may be He will deliver me from the travail of the world and from union with fire, water, earth and air.’... that is, all four elements are in one line!” he said suddenly and then realized that he was reading and speaking in Georgian.

“You see?” the man also answered in Georgian and continued the conversation like that, “before you give your speech, let’s have a small field trip. First, you will learn what situation the Earth is in because of physicists! Look at this board, years from now people will call it a screen. You see an iron bird flying in the sky, now it will drop a terrible cargo called “Little Boy” on top of one of the eastern cities. Don’t really think he’s an innocent little boy, it’s an atomic bomb that easily will turn the whole city to dust. This will be followed in a few days by another similar bomb and another destroyed city.

The screen really showed a huge pile of smoke and dust rising over the city.

“Terrible. Is this really physicists’ fault?”

“I agree with you, Aristotle, it’s terrible, but some will even justify this behavior, saying that this weapon ended the war and fewer people died because of it! Didn’t you tell Alexander yesterday that every person has his own truth?! People are less interested in reality, they still measure it with their own yardstick! Countries are like that too, their ruling tyrants mostly single-handedly determine their politics!”

“If I get a chance to go back, I need to burn all my works on physics and metaphysics!”

“This will not help anything, it will be in vain, Aristotle! You will only hurt the situation with this, you won’t change anything for the better!”

“Do you want to say that physicists also did something good?”

“Of course, and a myriad of things. These are new technologies that have eased human labor and made it more productive. People move without horses in iron boxes called automobiles, they also fly in iron boxes called airplanes! Man has gone into space, what you call ether, but unfortunately, new technologies are often introduced at the expense



of the Earth's health. Forests are ruthlessly cut down, the greenery is destroyed, which is needed to ensure a specific concentration of oxygen in the air, one of the components necessary for life. It is air pollution and the greenhouse effect that are the cause of the increase in the Earth's temperature, which in turn causes torrents, droughts, desertification, forest fires, floods...

The screen already showed a barren, cracked Earth; fires and floods replaced each other. Aristotle saw on the screen how the wealth accumulated by generations was being destroyed...

Aristotle was in Ozurgeti, one of the municipalities in Aetes' county. He carefully looked at everything. Most of the citizens walked briskly along the street, some were surprised by his strange attire and laughed ironically. He spoke to two young men:

"Citizens, can you tell me where the symposium on "European Sustainable Energy Week 2022" is being held?"

"Where is what held?" one asked.

"He's probably an actor, they are playing a prank on us!" answered the other.

"Are you trying to play a joke on us Cossack?"

"What did you say, sir?"

"Who are you, my man?" the first one became interested again.

"I am Aristotle of Stagira! I came here to heal the Earth!"

"Who did he say he is?!" the first boy turned to the second.

"Did you go deaf, man? He said he's Aristotle and has to heal the Earth!" answered the other.

"I'd say, he's no actor but has smoked something real strong. He probably has some good grass on him."

"He doesn't have a pocket, where would he have put it? He doesn't look high!"



“Well, he definitely doesn’t look like a drunk! He’s greying a little bit but is stands strong! And you know what sharp sense of smell I have, if he was drunk, I would know!”

“Look what sort of rings he has on. Shit, should we take them?”

“That’s just asking for trouble, man, there are cameras everywhere!”

“Dude, I think there’s an event in the theater, people flew down by helicopter today, maybe he’s blabbering about that?”

“Probably! I saw a poster too!”

“Ok good man, you can be Aristotle and you can be Plato, no problem. Now I will tell you how to get there. In short, you will follow this road now, you will see a small bakery and a small bodega, they sell fruit. You’ll turn left there and then you will see the theater, and there is some kind of a symposium there, for sure.

“Plato here too!” Aristotle thought, thanked the boys by bowing his head, and set off on the way he was told. Though he did not understand what a bodega was, he found the bakery easily - the boat-shaped Georgian bread smelled tasty. Then he saw boxes of fruit stacked on the shelves, and on the left, at the end of the road, a large building could be seen. This was probably the theater...

He was met by a clean-shaven young man at the door.

“Is the symposium being held here?” he asked.

“Your invite?”

“I am Aristotle!”

“And I’m Plato, but I need your invite!”

“Plato again” Aristotle laughed on the inside.

“What’s going on, Giorgi?”

“Mr. Gocha, there is a man here, I asked for an invite, and he said he’s Aristotle!”

“If he’s Aristotle, what does he need an invite for? Come, sir! Mr.



Aristotle, if you could tell me your city so that I can let the organizer know!"

"Aristotle from Stagira! I plan to speak at the meeting!"

"I will write that down, Aristotle from Stagira. The last word is yours!"

...Aristotle sat in the hall and listened to the speakers who adhered to all the norms of dialectics, and it seemed as if these people were spending their days and nights taking care of the Earth. One thought was bothering him, if everyone knows everything so well, everyone is worried about the fate of the Earth, then why is the Earth sick? After some time, the host said his name too. Aristotle stood up and walked to the tribune with slow, dignified steps.

"Hello, citizens of Aeetes' land, governors of municipalities, and guests of this country. I, Aristotle of Stagira, coming from a distant city and a more distant time, listened to you carefully and I want to tell you that I could not hide my admiration - how you love the Earth! I definitely don't know all the languages, although I can't think of any other language in which the word mother is included in the name of our planet, and it is a welcome sight that just as every dignified modern citizen is obliged to take care of his elderly mother, so you who speak here consider yourself obliged to take care of the Earth. And you know everything very well. You know how important it is to use renewable energy sources: using water, sun, wind, biomass as effectively as possible, introducing energy-efficient technologies. At the same time, reducing the consumption of coal, oil, and gas in order to reduce the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Let me pose a question: then why do you not do it, or do it only in small amounts? I saw wind turbines near Gori, I saw houses with solar panels in Tbilisi, I saw electric cars that don't use gasoline. But the amount of these is so small that it's really funny what you say compared to what you do. Another thing that surprised me and hurt my heart was roads full of garbage - this is probably done by enemies who sneak quietly into this country - beware of enemies! Also, what was deeply imprinted in my mind was the asphalt keeping away green grass! What are you doing, city leaders? Of course, where the iron carts go by or there is a bi-



cycle path, there should be asphalt or cobblestones, but where there can be land, where green grass can rejoice, why do you cover it with asphalt or stones? How can the Earth breathe? Other lifeless planets are full of stones and rocks, so you can't surprise anyone with that. Instead, you will really surprise everyone with green grass. Then why are you amazed by floods, torrents, tsunamis? Another issue is the nuclear weapons that some countries possess. Has humanity turned into a soulless vessel? Instead of sitting down and talking together if there is a dispute, are you ready to turn each other and the whole Earth to ashes with nuclear weapons? As a descendant of doctors, I was asked to write a prescription on how to save the Earth! Not only the Earth, you humans need help, because you are sick! The prescription and the medicine are the same, come to your senses, love not with words, but with deeds and take care of the Earth together! This is the end of my speech, goodbye! May all gods protect you, those in this hall, this country and the whole Earth!

"What a performance!"

"Good job to the Gurians!"

"He is probably an actor at the local theater!"

These voices and applause saw Aristotle off. As soon as he came out of the building, he noticed a light nearby. Now he stepped into it without saying a word. The man in the light cell was looking at something on the screen. Suddenly it seemed that not only the cell was made of light, but the man was also made of it. Then Aristotle looked at the screen. First, he recognized the voice, then himself - he was finishing his speech. "What the hell are they clapping for, I must have made a terrible speech," he thought.

"No, Why? I liked the speech! The prescription too! Let's see Aristotle! Let's wait for the results of the treatment, and now we are going back!" said the man and smiled, although tears were in his eyes.

In an instant, Aristotle found himself in the exact place where he was before. The light could not be seen anywhere. He looked at the dark street. Aristocles had only managed to take a couple of steps, which means almost no time had passed. "It turns out, even gods cry some-



times!” Aristotle thought and now he really wanted to hear Aristocle’s voice.

“Aristocles!” he called out suddenly.

Aristocles turned. Surprise appeared on his face.

“I’m listening, Aristotle!”

“Nothing... nothing...” Aristotle said, turned, and continued his path to the king’s palace.

Gocha Gviniashvili

MY EX

The company I work at assembles, sells, and installs solar panels. I am the foreman of the installation brigade.

It was hot. Exhausted from the sun, I was sick of working and wanted to ask the director for a vacation, but since it was our busiest season, I was dragging my feet; I was sure that the boss would refuse me and push my vacation far into autumn. I expected that we would have an unpleasant conversation, but on Tuesday evening I firmly decided that I would report my request to Giorgi on Wednesday.

My director, this thin, pedantic man, came to work exactly at nine o'clock, was digging through legal papers until half past ten, and then held a meeting with the sales managers and foremen of the installation brigade, delegating our tasks. I had to get it done until half past ten, and on Wednesday, as soon as he entered his office, I followed him in and began:

“Sir...”

He suddenly cut me off:

“You always call me Gio and now I have become ‘Sir’? Do you want me to guess what you want? - He frowned and looked up at me, - You came to ask for leave, what else could you want? You’re going to ask me for vacation time... Gela, right now, we can barely deal with the number of orders, so ask me anything but that, brother...” - he thought for a while and continued. “Finish that job for me today and



tomorrow I will send you to Racha for the installation. Cooler weather, amazing nature. You'll love it."

Giorgi is both the director and founder of the firm. Seven years ago, when he started this business, there were only four of us employees. He struggled to pay us a salary. I didn't believe in the prospects of this job, and I would have found another position if it wasn't for Giorgi's ability to convince people.

The forest-covered mountains and hills of Racha stood before my eyes. I shrugged my shoulders. "Okay, Gio, okay," I muttered and left the office.

That same evening, I loaded the truck with materials and the next day, at the crack of dawn, along with two other employees, started on the road to Racha.

I am both the foreman and the driver; I get double the salary and I am grateful to Giorgi for that.

I have been to Racha several times, but this was the first time I had to go there since the building of a new road from Zemo Imereti. The winding path follows the wooded landscape up from Sachkhere, the chestnut forest is replaced by hornbeam trees, the hornbeams by azaleas; then there are meadows interwoven with flowers, and after the road descends into the Rioni valley. Nature is celebrating all around and, most importantly, the air is cool.

We were already there at eleven o'clock. I asked the first person we met where Mumladze's house was. He seemed to be a local and I turned out to be right.

"Which Mumladze, the diplomat?" — the local answered with a question and pointed out a wooden house on the slope beyond the water.

We got closer to the house, honked and the host came out.

He was a plump man, about my age... He wore short pants and a sleeveless shirt. He opened the gate pointed to a parking spot and introduced himself to us:



"My name is Akaki. As I understand, you are from "Mzekabadoni".

He shook our hands one by one, as I have only seen diplomats do on TV when they meet each other, holding each other's hands for a long time so that the photojournalists have time to take pictures.

In my work, I know perfectly well what, where, and how is best, but I go over all the details with the owner of the house.

"Mr. Akaki, solar panels are usually placed on the roof. It is preferable that they face south. The slope of your roof allows this. Now, as for the accumulators, you must decide where to place them. One and a half square meters is needed for this," I went through the memorized text with speed, looked at the host, and realized that he did not understand something, he was not expecting something.

"These are solar batteries, what is the point of an accumulator?" he said in a displeased manner.

"Mr. Akaki, with solar panels, thermal energy is transformed into electrical energy, which is stored in the form of a direct current in an accumulator, direct current is transformed into alternating current using a transformer, and then we get electrical energy for ordinary household use," I responded with another memorized sentence and once again observed my host.

He turned out to be an intelligent man, "Understood, understood," he mumbled, thought for a little, and said, "Maybe we can choose the place for the accumulators together." He didn't wait for my answer and instead led me into the house.

We passed through the balcony and entered the living room through a glass door. I was struck with a sensation as if I had been here before and felt a nostalgic warmth in my soul. At the end of the room, there was a sofa covered with tapestry. Various glazed vases and a reproduction of Pirosmeni's 'The Fisherman' hung on the wooden wall. To the right was an old-fashioned chest of drawers, probably restored. On the dresser, I noticed two silver chandeliers with pink candles and a picture in a golden frame between them.



I don't have a sharp eye; I think more with emotions and impulses than with images. Only when Mr. Akaki led me through the kitchen to the pantry and asked me if we could put the batteries there, did the reflection of the picture on the chest of drawers leave my retinas.

"Yes," I agreed without much thought, turned back to the living room, stood in front of the dresser, and looked at the picture. My eyes had not lied to me - it was a wedding picture of Mr. Akaki and 'my ex'.

Eka was wearing a white frilled dress that cinched her waist like a corset. It suited her. Mr. Akaki was dressed in a black suit with a black bow tie over a white shirt and a satisfied look on his face. The couple was leaning against the railing of a footbridge, beyond which a forest park riddled with canals could be seen, and in the distance were white yachts perched like swans.

Akaki noticed that I stopped by the picture for a long time and started:

"This is a picture of my wedding, then I was working as a deputy ambassador. Amsterdam is a beautiful city; you must like the scenery?"

"Yes, yes, it's beautiful," I mumbled and went out to the balcony.

The boys were unloading materials from the car. I leaned on the railing and looked across the river at the mountainous landscape. The beauty of the pine forest, free of men, was staring back at me. Many gradations of green dotted the hills like freckles. Then it all melted together, darkened, turned into a black hole, and threw me into the past.

I met Eka at work. She worked as a consultant for two months, didn't like something, and left. In general, she belonged to the category of people who cannot stay in one place for a long time.

The day of our meeting, our first date, her amazing openness in relationships, a year of living together, and that last night all stood before my eyes: "Look at yourself! Shave your face, brush your teeth, you smell of garlic and vodka. This is our last night and maybe we can remember each other well."



I thought it was a joke, but I still asked, “What do you mean by last night?”

“We have already exhausted each other. Don’t you see? We have nothing in common, we both live our own lives. We only meet each other at night; how many times have I come home in the middle of the night, and you didn’t mind.”

“So what? This is trust, this is understanding.”

“No, it’s indifference! It’s disinterest! I’m leaving you tomorrow!”

That last night made an impression on my mind.

When I went to work the next day, I left her in bed. I returned home late, and she wasn’t there. She had removed the glazed vases from the wall, taken the silver chandeliers from the chest of drawers, collected her bits and bobs, and left. I picked up the phone, went to the list of contacts, searched for ‘my Keke’, was going to call, then changed my mind and changed the name to ‘my ex’.

For three whole years, we wrote greetings to each other over the phone. Finally, two years ago, she wrote me a single sentence: “I’m getting married.” I wanted to write, “May God bring you happiness”, but I couldn’t. A week later I lost access to her phone, her email, and Facebook... In short, she blocked me everywhere.

I probably stood there, frozen, for a few seconds. Then I turned around and asked Akaki, “Your wife does not like Racha?”

“No, on the contrary, she really likes it, she designed the house from top to bottom. These so-called solar panels are also her whim. Now, she’s gone to Oni to fetch some groceries.”

“Can you point me to the restroom?” I asked but didn’t wait for the response and went toward the bathroom.

‘Eka will be here soon. Damn! I could have washed my dirty overalls and shaved my face before leaving. I look horrible.’ I checked myself in the mirror, unsatisfied.



My boys know their job well. They quickly unloaded the materials and started working. My title is that of a foreman, but I do the physical work with them, I just manage the job and my salary is slightly higher.

I really didn't want Eka to see me and all I could think was that maybe we would finish the job before her arrival. I worked quickly, but fitting the panel brackets was a hassle, the tile made it difficult, and we had to put poles on the roof.

It was past noon, when we installed the panel, went down, and started to connect the wires and install the batteries. All this time, Akaki stood on the balcony and looked at the road.

A thought crossed my heart - 'dear wife is late'. So, I approached and asked:

"Mr. Akaki, where should we put the switch?"

"What switch?" — he returned the question

"For switching from conventional electricity to solar energy and vice versa... I think it will be most convenient in the kitchen."

"Kitchen is fine," he said, looked down at the grove, and took a deep breath as if he had removed a brick from his chest.

'It's her,' I thought as my heart sank, looking at the grove.

A white SUV crossed the bridge and drove towards us.

'What can I do, I'll have to meet my ex,' I thought, and greeting texts began to be arranged and then mixed, 'Damn it, if she recognizes me, I recognize her... she doesn't recognize me, I don't either... whatever happens, happens... I will not embarrass her in front of her husband; whatever game she plays, I will follow.'

I thought this and it all crashed down, as if a mountain had collapsed, there was a rumble and a thunder, and a roar came out like the sound of a wounded bear. I jumped, shaken by the confusion, and I ran to the balcony. A river of mud crawled across the grove like a black dragon, tearing and swallowing everything on its way. Then the mud

gradually loosened and slid across the grove. The white car stopped for a second and then was pulled away with all its might.

“Dear God,” Akaki gasped, and I instinctively ran down the stairs. I didn’t think about anything, I didn’t hear the screams of people, nor the sound of the flood. I ran recklessly and thoughtlessly.

I was a few meters away from safety when the tentacles of the mud monster reached the car and wrapped around it. Eka tried to open the door, but the slush had thickly covered the left door. “Get out from the right,” I shouted and pointed with my hand. All four wheels of the car were spinning in vain. Finally, I ran into the mud. First up to my ankles, then up to my knees... I reached it quickly. I wanted to open the right door, but the car turned, and a wave of mud blocked the right side too. I jumped on the car and sat on its roof. “Open the hatch! The hatch!” I was shouting and hitting it with my elbow and had nearly decided to break it when the hatch started to open.

Eka looked at me with mad, desperate eyes.

“Give me your hand, love, your hand!”

The word ‘love’ slipped out.

As I pulled Eka out of the hatch, the car jerked, and we both slid from the roof onto the hood. I sat on the bumper, jumped into the mud, and took her with me. I felt unusual courage and strength. I made her lean onto my shoulder, wrapped my arm around her waist and vaguely followed the direction of the current towards the shore.

Only when we reached dry land and I felt safe, did I get hit by tiredness and finally hear the muddy wolf-like howling of the mudflow. I went a few steps higher, and a new wave came, I turned around and saw how the white car was being swallowed by the mud.

I sat Eka down on the grass. She asked what I was doing there as if she had just noticed me.

It seemed to me that a person in such a situation should not have the energy. I noticed cynicism on Eka’s face.



“Your guardian angel sent me here,” I mumbled, not being able to think of anything else.

She tried to smile. “Yeah... right... a guardian angel... I placed the order to Giorgi and asked him to send your brigade.”

I raised my head. Akaki was stumbling towards us.

“Then what was the point of that, love?” I left the woman with her husband and trodden up the path.

And yes, the word ‘love’ was an accident this time too.