

The Third Shore

*Translated by Ekaterine Machitidze
Edited by Lara Sigwart*

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There's nothing like opening your eyes, waking up and, for a while, being unaware of where you are... Yes, awakening this way is my life purpose, the purpose of my life and the life of everyone around me.

And when you wake up this way it doesn't matter whether you have a splitting headache caused by a hangover or whatever it is, feeling chilly or just burning alive. You feel good, because you realize that yesterday you've lived one of your best days, visiting every single place which you could visit, eating and drinking and smoking everything salubrious or decadent, meeting thousands of rats and really nice guys to have a quick one or to smoke with them, playing music with those with whom you like to play it, talking with those you like to talk to and fucking those fucking whom is in your power. So today, again, you'll do your best to get everything you want. When you lie on such a plane, in a dimension like mine, you can fall to fall across the best and most interesting, ridiculous and even dangerous manifestations of the complex of inferiority marked by hysterics, in its highest degree, and liberty, in its lowest degree, and it's the same almost everywhere.

Oh, I've forgotten to mention the most important thing, the center, the Fane of ours, with the world's coolest man, a man of the right stamp dwells. Once a priest, in addition to the duties of the club owner, he's a charismatic doorman, the enemy number one of the honorable ones who keep a healthy lifestyle, an enormous single-eyed red beard, an old drummer filibuster, our patron and protector. That priest taught me the harmonica and since that time I went from home, I've been earning my daily bread - lemons, vodka, cigarettes - playing the mouth organ together with Alexander, a heaven-born guitarist and a Greek head-shaved girl, our keyboardist, who can tattoo anything. She had worked at a tattoo booth earlier, but then fell in love with a certain immuno-compromised Marcus and was fired from there, though she had many clients. Nea is very special to our priest. She's tattooed a centaur on his back too, a rearing up centaur, tattooed himself, earrings in his ears and an electric guitar like a cudgel in his hand, a quadrupled image of the priest, a chiron of the twenty-first century, a master and a bosom friend of the heroes and the have-nots of the underground.

And that boy, Marcus, Nea's boyfriend, used to play with us before he died...

When we got acquainted with them it puzzled me how Nea could fall in love with Marcus. They were absolutely different: Marcus was silent and quiet, endlessly blushing like a child. He was really childish: A short stature and thin like a cigarette. As for Nea, she was rude and rowdy, a head taller than the boy.

I was sitting together with Alexander in an underground passage, trying to play a new theme. That day, we'd failed to earn anything but some small change which was enough only for vodka and a lemon. Starving... We were thinking where to spend the night. I preferred to go to a merry-go-round in the park. It was like a cradle: Once you pushed it, it went round and wouldn't stop until you fell asleep on one of its double seats. It was great to sit there even if you weren't asleep, especially when you'd chased the dragon... From time to time a policeman on a horseback used to appear, a lonely man with his head always drooped down and trotting his horse among the rusty carousels like a headless horseman. I've no idea who the hell had sent him to this god-forsaken park to protect whoever he was meant to protect, but he never touched us. Sometimes he pulled his racer and they both looked at us from a distance, never coming closer.

We really cut loose when we were together with Marcus and Nea. Pushing together the merry-go-round, we used to make it go and whirled around for about half an hour. And loved Marcus' pooches more than the merry-go-rounds. The creaking sounds made them creep out and they frisked about with Marcus while we were sitting on the benches and playing some great things. Those dogs were fond of Marcus. The merry-go-round, the mute policeman and Alex, Nea, vodka and tipsy Marcus rolling on the ground together with the scabby pooches...

So, I was sitting together with Alexander and dreaming of my merry-go-round, when I got acquainted with Nea and Marcus. We'd no money to travel by subway and decided to spend the night where we were. It's warm in the underground passages at night and the benches are also OK. In summer, it's always parky in such passages and I marveled how warm it was at night there, as though someone had turned on heaters. Passers-by appeared once in a while. Coming from the subway, loaded with provisions, they disdainfully or apprehensively glanced at us and hurriedly passed by.

No one loves underground passages but me and the people who surround me. I love them, and Alex loves them, too. I believe they were designed by a former vagabond who decided to place benches in niches and let people lie down there.

After two, they used to turn off the lights to save electricity, I think. It's the best time there. Lying cozily on a foam mat, you can hear some rattling and squeaky sounds and those mysterious echoes. That's when we compose the best themes for guitar and harmonica and no matter if the place is littered and stinking. People leave litter everywhere.

So, we're sitting and the head-shaved girl and a thin kiddo of a short stature appear in the underground passage. Later, he turned out to be older than we were back then. Those extraterrestrial eyes resembling saucers and that enormous guitar case on his back..., nothing in common with a guitarist, though. They stopped and listened to us.

Alexander asked him for a cigarette. You know, we had enough cigarettes to smoke that night, enough to smoke while drinking vodka. The boy didn't move, but the girl took out a pack of Camels from her knapsack and put a handful of cigarettes into the box in which people used to put money. I like such girls: Small-busted and thin, with a somewhat austere face. I took an instant dislike to the boy and thought that his guitar would much fit Alex. There was not a soul in the passage and the boy wouldn't beat about the bushes. Oh, I liked the girl so much. Yes, I was tipsy and I begrudged the boy because it was obvious that they were Jack and Gill: Hand-in-hand, you see. Alex, as if nothing had happened, took a pack half full of different cigarettes out of his pocket, and put the girl's ones into it. Then he lit one and turned to the guitar again. The girl began to laugh, took two more cigarettes from her knapsack, lit one and gave the other to the boy. He didn't light the cigarette, just looking at us, spinning it between his fingers.

And suddenly he says:

"Guys, may I play with you?"

That childish voice.

"A bass guitar?" I asked.

It had been really fine to see a bass guitar then and we'd been keeping an amplifier and a battery at the vendor's underground room who usually sold sunflower seeds.

Alex was still messing about with his guitar, even more drunk than me.

The boy put the guitar case down and, sitting cross-legged on the floor, carefully opened it. There was a glittering flute in the case instead of a guitar.

I looked at him slack-jawed.

"Just a flute?" I asked, peeping into the case once again. Oh, boy! A flute in a huge case... No, he was either brain-sick or it was simply his choice. Generally, I hold the freaking unpredictable in high respect, the genuinely unpredictable ones. Way too many people are ready to bet everything to pretend to be freaking unpredictable. I felt a kind of respect for the flutist and realized that I disliked him because of that girl. What

actually had happened was that I liked him from the very beginning, that childishly saucer-eyed and modest Marcus, with whom we'd hang together and who'd already contracted AIDS.

Alex lifted his dim eyes and glanced at the flute and murmured:

"Hell with all thatpop music".

The boy blushed.

"He's tipsy", I said.

"I see".

The girl squatted beside the boy, but she still seemed to be taller.

"What do you play, guys?" she asked.

"Whatever happens... Do you play?"

"A little... I prefer drawing", said the girl lighting a new cigarette and saying: "This is Marcus and I'm Nea".

Then she looked at the boy and added that they were partners.

It was obvious that she was deeply in love with him.

I jogged Alex.

"This is Alex and I'm Gio and we're partners". She could have thought that we were gays, but if she had, she'd necessarily inquired. Yes, she was a tough girl, she is a tough girl. And that shaven head...

Marcus was sitting quietly, looking down at his flute.

"Yes or no?" he asked impatiently.

An old man used to play the flute in the morning in the underground passage. His music sounded absurd there. I think acoustics and echo are needless when you play the flute. I prefer when it can be heard above the street noise.

"Go on, I'll vamp", I said and reluctantly rubbed the harmonica against my sleeve.

"What note to strike?" asked Marcus.

"Strike it or...", struck Alex and a severe spasm made him hiccough strongly.

"Play, please", said Nea. If such a voice had ever asked me I'd even have played the surnay.

And he began to play and I tried to accompany his flute with my Hohner but either because of the vodka or because of the hunger I felt dizzy and took it away. Marcus enjoyed playing and a fat lot he cared if anyone failed to vamp him. He stood up and shattered the underground passage with those intellectual improvisations, making Alexander sober up.

"How am I doing?" he finally asked, short-breathed.

"Good", said Alex and put a cigarette in the guitar case.

And we all slept together. In the passage.

Together with Alex and a bassist who had not a spark of talent, I was at the rehearsal room. We'd found that bassist at a public garden the night before. There was a statue of some turd in the public garden and pipsqueaks, dilettante punks and Goths and whoever the naughty girls were, used to gather there, telling lies to their parents about all-nighters together with their friends and then fucking about with anyone who had a guitar or was wearing earrings all night in the murk of the city. Then they scraped the nicknames of those fuckers with a razor and were happy, comparing the cuts. There was nothing strange in that the public garden attracted the guitarists, too. I knew a pimply madcap, who had his own treatment mode. Every night he'd sling a brand-new Fender guitar over his shoulder, put a wire earring on and come to the statue to fuck a couple of silly creatures. Then the pimples disappeared and the guy felt at ease, but everything was nosed out and the girls gave him a whopping, breaking beer bottles on his head. That idiot could at least have mastered the guitar... So, for that kind of girls I and Alex, veteran punks – we didn't consider ourselves to be punks at all – were the knights in shining armors, the tippler horsemen of the underground and the most exotic material for masturbation... So, when together with Alex, I managed to earn some money to hire the rehearsal room, for the sake of those damned girls, we pretended to be punks or whatever the hell it was... And unlike my past experience it was practical: No washing and shaving, no pocket money for a rendezvous. And they willingly paid for the rehearsal room, too. It was great to twang Tomazinho's, he was the owner, black electric guitar under the Kenwood amplifier and the thrash effect and the unearthly silhouettes of the gals on heat in the smoke of cigarettes and marijuana...

So, we've got no money and decided to go down to the public square. There is someone lying at the statue surrounded by a small fry, rifling through his pockets. He was reeking of vodka. We drove the boys away and Alex, as he sometimes does, turned into a Mother Teresa, slapping the drunk in the face. As the man didn't open his eyes, Alex pulled him onto the bench. He seemed to be of the same age as we were, leather pants and a funny tattoo on his neck, a sign of zodiac or whatever it was. I didn't care a straw for the stranger: We'd seen too many in the same condition, but Alex insisted on taking care for him and fucking gals afterwards. We took the drunk to the rehearsal room. If the priest's club hadn't been so far away from that place, that centaur would look after him by all means.

We knew the ones who'd already occupied the rehearsal room. They let us in. The drummer had been taken ill and in case of need I could drum. Besides, thanks to Alex I'd mastered several guitar chords. There were very few good drummers around and sometimes different bands shared one and the same drummer. From time to time the priest would succor us, when we played in his club. The guys in the rehearsal room played heavy metal and could draw big crowd. They had no problems with the rent: Just put out a bill on the door of the club and made the visitors pay some money... The club accommodated thirty. Those guys usually had money for some booze and sometimes paid the rent for us, too. Yes, they weren't strangers.

So, we stepped into the rehearsal room, pulling the live load into it. Quickly enough, two or three men jumped to their feet in the corner and dashed to the drunk. Roaring and triumphing, they laid him on a couch and stripped him off hastily, like lousy sodomites and left me and Alexander open-mouthed and unable to budge an inch.

Then they told us everything. Heavy metal players were going to gather the next day. Some five or six rockers had heard about the get-together and got on a train to join others. I don't remember the town or townlet they'd come from. So, they drank themselves silly and lost the one we'd found at the statue. The others, unable to find their lost pal, headed to Tomazinho's. One of them had once been there. Sitting at Tomazinho's, moaning and sobbing, they thought about the food and twenty joints that the lost one had taken with him... And Alexander's lungs had sensed the joints, I guess: We had seen such drunkards hundreds of times, but we'd never wet-nursed them before.

It was three or four when we woke up at the rehearsal room. The man we'd found was still lying on the same couch and Tomazinho, the owner of the rehearsal room, was snorting under the drum. Others had sneaked off. The fucknut sobered up for a moment and thumped his chest, swearing all the good bassists in the world. When he took a guitar and everything became clear about his chops. Then he smoked one to take the hair of the dog that bit him and spaced out. His buddies said it was a usual thing with him and they also said he was a good bass.

I'd already attended a few of metalhead get-togethers and knew for sure that their music could make my head ache even more than the music played by satanists, Goths and sadomasochists. Alex announced that Alina was going there and I suggested we could go there too. He'd met Alina there and that was his end.

Alina, a creature of undefined sexuality, an undefined world-view and nationality, could be almost everywhere, under a metro bridge in a company of unwashed lesbians and punks, taking Trigana with vodka, dressed in ripped jeans, or coming out of a fashionable restaurant together with a necktied adult male, wearing a nice dress.

Alina used to take her six-year-old sister along everywhere. Lada had a nose ring and a tattoo on the shoulder, a feather in some barbed wire, deformed, because the girl had been growing up.

Alina was fond of pot and her sister sniffed glue. Once the girl was stoned and told us that they were Russkis, that it was always snowy there and in spring their granddad fished together with white bears. She said she'd seen herself the old man standing on one shore and the bears on another. I know nothing about bears, but I know for sure that Alexander, my brother and a great guitarist, loved Alina, Lada's sister, to bits.

As soon as we got to know each other, we got drunk and he told me about his love. I told him about myself and then, for a good while, we both tried not to cross each other's path: We both hate those damned heart-to-heart talks.

Theygotacquainted at Rashid's place. I didn't know Rashid then. He told the girl to take Alex upstairs and turn a good trick there. Alex liked the girl. He said he didn't take her for a whore then and contended that she liked him, too. Alina cast a quick look at the shaggy-haired man and took him to a blind boxroom. And they sat in silence there, no sex... As Alexander said, he'd never experience anything better in his life. In the beginning, I thought he was going to tell some porn and felt ill at ease. And it turned out that Alexander had fallen ill deliberately at the blind place because he believed he couldn't do without porn... And that was his end because thinking is the worst thing in moments like the moment they both had in the boxroom. In such moments one must do whatever he feels like doing and if he feels like doing nothing, he must do nothing but go his own way.

And he tried to grope her body, but Alina said he didn't need to. She said she preferred sitting like they were sitting and took his hand like kids usually do. And they sat there, the charivari of Rashid's place wafted to their ears and when they came out he'd already fallen in a big way for her.