

## A Calm Swim

This text (the word nauseously banal, created by the writers suffering from an inferiority complex, made of rubber as thin as a condom) definitely doesn't fit the elated mood I, King Irakli, meant to guide me while writing a short book which wouldn't in the least look like an ordinary one, because it isn't my aim to entertain you, while books, as a rule, are written if not to cheer several Marys or Janes, to at least spoil their mood. However sternly some intellectuals try to convince us that they don't care at all for Mary and Jane, I'm absolutely sure that even James Joyce wanted to impress Irish Marys, which he managed, but a little later.

In short, the great writers eventually succeed in this, while their majority die without impressing a single Mary or Jane by the heroic deeds of their machos, laboriously born out of their minds. In other words, the writers are not that lucky, especially those writing prose professionally, exercising their muscles more vigorously than poets do. According to the latest research, women don't like muscled men, muscled prose writers in particular.

Anyway, I'm not going to entertain you and if you still toy with the idea, please put my opus aside, immediately, as, unlike a strong-muscled prose writer, I won't be offended if you give up on me at this stage. Quite the contrary, I'll be ecstatic to know that I've revealed the truth to fewer people. It's always better when very few know the truth! It's like a disgusting pimple on your nose, springing up exactly at the time you're about to go to a party. My book is more of a pimple rather than a posh party. So, those who love lies and fun are humbly asked to leave me alone, at home, facing a mirror.

The second reason I've undertaken this hard task is a bunch of absurd rumours that swarm my exhausted, severely-wounded eagle-like essence like ravenous vultures. Thirdly, I've reverted to writing the truth as this November, Lord made me look briefly through the door with only silence beyond it. Shakespeare would have said: *The rest is silence*. Strange as it might sound, for the reasons completely unknown to me, I've become part of that silence, true, for a minute or two, but still. It might have been this brief, unexpected encounter with the other world that made me decide to tell the truth.

I'm also pretty sure the moment I die, plenty of idiots will pop up claiming they knew me better than others, that only they and a couple of creatures like them were able to perceive the true essence of King Irakli. They'll come up with a lot of nonsense, which many Marys and Janes might even buy – something that is going to deeply upset me in the other world. Unlike many others, it's only logical that my life should continue in discussions and speculations after my death. Precisely for this reason, I believe it's my duty not to strain the public and to safeguard it from the incorrect information about myself.

It's not long ago that I've turned 40 and, I've got to admit, like some spiritual and religious preachers of my age, I began to see the light one fine day! Just like that. It all

happened that November evening when a couple of sturdy guys miraculously managed to bring me back to life. One of them held my half-swallowed tongue and, as he told me later, it took a whole month for his badly bitten fingers to heal, in Paris. In the meanwhile, having come back, I feel an oceanic surge of joy, rising like a tidal wave in me, luckily, not showing any signs of receding yet.

Among all the listed, comparatively commonplace reasons, the enlightening was the major incentive that drove me to my Pentium, panting from the summer heat, to set to work with an Olympian calm of a Georgian judo wrestler resolute to bring if not a gold, at least a silver medal to the new, non-Olympianly wound-up, cheering generation of the new state. And don't be surprised to find these tiny airplanes drawn to mark paragraphs, because, when I've finished the book, I might be obliged to take one and leave (for a short time) my very old country, now wrapped in a fresh, brand-new bed-sheet. We are about to build a democratic oasis, so I don't suppose I'll be exiled to windy Britain like Salman Rushdie for my little harmless book.

I believe many of you need to know about the new Georgia, which Roomy, the protagonist of my novel, hasn't heard about until now. That's why I'm starting the narration with an Olympian serenity, hoping you won't be offended if I introduce Georgia flourishing a new flag, and newly enlightened King Irakli simultaneously. I'll begin with myself, occasionally mentioning Georgia as God has given us, humans, much less time for fooling around than countries.

I'm not entirely sure why, but when I thought of the Olympian calm, for some reason, I pictured the beach in Lidzava, lost and gone for us at the moment, and our first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, riding his old-fashioned bicycle with a radio in his hand in search of the places with an adequate reception of his favourite *Radio Freedom*. In those days, all anti-Soviet programmes were suppressed, which the overwhelming majority took with the Olympian calm, with an exception of very few, one of them being Zviad Gamsakhurdia. All nights through, he would doggedly look for temporary islands of freedom where he could clearly hear the words as common as hamburgers today, but so much craved for at the time. Bursting with the new information, he would proudly paddle past the beach houses of the Georgian writers and public figures, pleased he'd caught hopeful phases tossed from Washington.

Every time we saw him, we'd burst out laughing, especially Irakli Kostava. Though he never told Gega and me directly, we felt he regretted the fact that his dad was in prison in Siberia, while Zviad was free to ride up and down Lidzava. We used to hold marijuana responsible for our hysterical laughter, but I knew the reason of Irakli's tearful joy and he knew that I knew. As a rule, he would travel to visit Merab, his exiled dad, via Tashkent, just to get some grass. We used to discuss the possible sovereignty of Georgia only when Zviad would ride past us and that was in the evenings.

'Your dad's been in Siberia so long and you've got this Asian pot with you, do you ever offer him a joint?'

'I did a couple of times, but he didn't fancy it.'

'Are you kidding?'

'I said I could leave him some, but he refused.'

'What's he doing there?'

'Reads Steiner.'

'One can't read Steiner without a good joint.'

'He reads the Bible too.'

'Yeah, the Bible's different. Your dad's really cool, man, but we need to escape somehow, as they're going to rot him in prison first and then it's our turn.'

'How are you going to do that, Gega?'

'What if you swim? That guy tried, didn't he? Zviad was saying he was put to prison for 15 years, don't remember his name.'

This period of my life pushed its way in my memories because there we were, three romantic lads, stretched on the warm beach, caressed by the gentle Abkhazian waves, never even suspecting that one of us would be executed for hijacking a plane, another would hang himself on his woolen scarf. The third, me, would have died three times before he reached 42, only to return with probably the sole reason of writing this truthful book for you.