

Mosquito in the City

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You see, I've spent my whole life hanging around in the pitch-black night. Every now and then I see a spark of light in the distance and rush towards it like a gnat to a streetlamp, but then the darkness consumes even that small speck of light and there I am again, wandering around in the pitch-black night.

/Story/

My writing desk is bewitched. No matter how often I tidy it, in no time at all it fills up again with things I don't need.

That's why I stopped bothering ages ago.

I suppose that at some point I must have needed all those things for something, but I can't for the life of me remember what that something was.

It would be so good to look at my writing desk and see just a single sheet of white paper lying in front of me, a sheet of paper on which I am actually writing!

My writing desk also needs the following things on it: a pen, a full pack of cigarettes, an old set of pharmaceutical scales (pharmaceutical scales on which I weigh everything, ash and elephants, people I know and the night, dreams and memories, things like that), an hourglass filled with sand, a desk lamp and, most importantly, a magnifying glass. The magnifying glass is essential; at night a whole host of gnats and flying things come flocking towards the light of my desk lamp. Sometimes in the quiet of night I hear a tiny pitter-patter – some little gnat is jumping around on my sheet of paper – and it's then that I pick up my magnifying glass and use it to peer at the gnat.

Strange little creatures that they are, gnats evoke all sorts of thoughts and feelings in me! When there are none around it causes me immense sadness. Sometimes I feel as if gnats are just humans in another incarnation, humans trapped inside a tiny body. We are just as helpless, exposed and loathsome, just as wretched, annoying and unnecessary as they are. Maybe theirs is a more honest expression of our real existence.

And all that aside, the gnats around my writing desk are the only living things in a sea of useless, dead objects. They are all I have to bring relief from the monotony of my solitude.

Prologue

Queer, how you stalk and prowl the air
In circles and evasions, enveloping me,
Ghoul on wings
Winged Victory.
- D.H. Lawrence

When, in the lowlands of Kolkheti, they planted eucalypti and drained the marshes, the mosquitoes took a collective decision to perish, and without so much as a by your leave, every one of them upped and died.

Death is not life – everyone knows as much. And anyone who doesn't will find out soon enough.

Mosquitoes die so quietly. You make less noise snuffing out the life of a mosquito than you do stubbing out a cigarette in a pool of water.

Every last mosquito perished. Every one of them died alone. Anyone who thinks that just because the mosquitoes died together they didn't die alone is sorely mistaken.

But wait – one lone mosquito survived. (They say that he has blue eyes, like everyone from Kolkheti. I don't believe that, of course, and I'm sure you don't either. But if you want to believe it, go ahead; I won't stop you.) He managed to save himself. It's a very hard thing to do, saving yourself. In fact, saving yourself is the hardest thing there is, and even though saving yourself is the hardest thing there is, the blue-eyed mosquito managed to do it.

The blue-eyed mosquito saved himself so that he might have a different death, a crueller, more humiliating death.

My mosquito chose not to die with all the others for one reason only; he had accepted a greater mission. He was to meet his killer face to face and pay the ultimate price.

Even though death is not life, he was not in the least afraid to die. Some people asked why on earth a mosquito's death should mean anything when its life meant so little; a mosquito was too insignificant even for death, they said; just as life never really notices the mosquito come into existence, they said, so death perceives mere absence as sign enough that the mosquito's tiny soul, trapped in a few little hairs, is no more; a mosquito's death is as imperceptible as its thin droning against the roar of an erupting crater.

I disagree. I mean, what do they know about how much a mosquito's life is worth or what we lose when one dies? Maybe the mosquito has a better understanding than we do of the value of life; in fact, maybe we exaggerate the awfulness of death and downplay life's worth.

But for one reason or another, the mosquito forewent a sweet, noble death alongside its fellow mosquitos (Oh, how easy it is to die with everyone else!) in favour of another death, a cruel and humiliating death – he planned to seek out the two hands of his killer, the two hands which would crush him.

But things were not to work out quite as he wished.

He could have gotten himself killed by anyone, of course; but there would have been nothing special about that death. It would have been a senseless suicide.

His great mission would have been left unaccomplished.

Nobody really knew what would happen when the mosquito found his killer and got himself killed. Only the mosquito knew for sure, and he was telling no one.

It's no easy matter, finding your killer. You need to know where to go, where to look. But our mosquito trusted nature, trusted its breathing, its secret pathways, its constant flow. He truly believed that no matter he went, no matter where his mission took him, he would find his killer.

As soon as he formed this conviction, he stopped thinking and jumped on the very first breeze.

It was the most wonderful breeze, a gentle breeze with gossamer wings. The mosquito fell head over heels in love.

The breeze carried the mosquito to the city, and once there, it turned into a myriad of tiny breezes: the breezes that come from waving a fan, opening and closing a door, fanning a fire, breathing... Our mosquito sank into despair.

The mosquito felt saddened, but then he remembered his mission; he fought off his dejection and took courage once again.

When he reached the city at first, he did nothing but gaze at the mansions and drift through the wide streets, but soon he found himself moving in time with the city's pulse – he even found himself a job, and carried out his duties conscientiously.

His job was this: he was responsible for deciding whom each star belonged to. Nobody paid him for his work, because nobody needed it done. The only real purpose it served was to help the mosquito kill what time he had left. After all, until he was killed he had to stay alive; as long as he was alive he had to live; as long as he lived he had to love...

Some people said he had built himself a house and was storing up love in it. Some even said he was storing up hatred, too, because he felt that, most of the time, hatred was actually just poisoned love. We know for a fact, they said, that on several occasion she has sucked the poison out of hatred and turned it back

into love again. (From this, some came to the conclusion that he was storing that poison within him.)

Others argued the complete opposite. They tried to reassure us that he had not, in fact, been entrusted with any great mission at all; he had made the whole thing up. And he had made it up as justification for his audacious and unruly behavior – because, after all, death lay in wait for him (As if death does not lie

in wait for us all!) – and while he was waiting to be killed he could not possibly endure a single moment without love. In fact he trailed around all those things that can lead you astray in the big city and even brought them home with him: discarded gazes and brief flashes of light found piled up with the rubbish, dragged through the dust and mud of the city's streets and squares, gardens and parks; dewdrops and raindrops; snowflakes; the rustling of leaves; the scent of wild flowers; the gentle blowing of the breeze; the colour of the setting sun; the moon's pallor; the twinkling of distant stars; musical notes that had gone astray and other kinds of rule infractions; groans; sighs; misplaced punctuation marks. He brought them all home, and every night he held unspeakable orgies and called this debauchery love...So they said.

But trust me, all of that was unsubstantiated rumour. In reality, the blue-eyed mosquito was doggedly seeking his killer, but could not find him. And if during that time he fell in love more often than we can count – so what? Love would not stop him from dying. He was ready for death at any time. And anyway, all his loves and infatuations combined could not outweigh his love of death (I weighed them all especially, with those pharmaceutical scales). All forms of love were but rungs on the ladder leading him towards the death he so longed for...

The blue-eyed mosquito was seeking his killer...

As I thought about the blue-eyed mosquito, I suddenly remembered an old song from Kolkheti:

*The sun is my mother,
the moon is my father,
the twinkling stars
are my sister and brother.*

The story

I turned over my five minute egg-timer and the story began: the story of the blue-eyed mosquito, poor doomed Jimsher, Lia from Year 10, the graphomaniac writer, Lia's brother Gia, Manana, the breeze, malaria, the sky and the earth, the little side street, the window and grille, those who appear in this story and those who do not...

The story itself is so straightforward it could easily confuse. And that is why I am in a hurry to put it down on paper, start to finish. I'm always in a hurry, because I'm rash and impetuous. I want to start everything right now, and finish it right now, too. The story begins like this: the blue-eyed mosquito is seeking his killer; the breeze has transformed into the wave of a fan; the sky is a square and the sun a plaything; the moon is no ordinary streetlight; and soon the mosquito will see his killer, Jimsher. The mosquito tries to make Jimsher understand, tries to make Jimsher kill him, but Jimsher does not kill the mosquito, because Jimsher is confused; the angry mosquito bites Jimsher, infecting him with malaria; the mosquito bites Lia, too. Soon Lia and Jimsher will fall in love; the disease brings Jimsher back to his senses but it is already too late – Jimsher can no longer see his victim; it will be someone else entirely who kills the mosquito, someone who will never know he has committed this dreadful murder. That is why even we do not know yet who killed the mosquito. That is for the courts to decide...

One of the people writing this story succumbed to malaria, a second disappeared without trace, a third had his death sentence transposed to life imprisonment, a fourth and fifth were persuaded by their own free will to deny their involvement in the writing process, and the others attended the premiers and won all the prizes.

Jimsher and Lia will part, still clinging to the hope that they will meet – and recognize – each other in their new lives.

And finally, the wind will pick up and make the sun rise.

And that misplaced full stop will find its feet and make a dash for the finish.

P.S. The identity of the author has finally been revealed. Apparently it's me. What I need to work out next is this: who has been gathering all this material for me? No doubt I'll find out in my next life.

But suppose I'm the author who contracts malaria? It would serve me right.

This time I got off quite lightly – with the confiscation of my private property – , because I publicly confessed that I was not the writer of this story but had merely collected materials for the real authors.

They allowed me this concession because I surrendered the title of “writer” once and for all.

They took away my fridge (which never stayed cold), my kerosene stove (which wouldn't heat up), my typewriter (which didn't type), my colour and black-and white televisions (no picture), all of my pens (not one of them wrote), my unsharpened colour pencils (the sharpener didn't sharpen), and two large sheets of

paper with writing on both sides (the rain had washed away what I had written). They took more than I had. They even curtailed my right to breathe deeply, and only allowed me to look straight ahead.

They also left me a single sheet of paper, covered in inky scribbles.

And now I sit at my desk, my head buried in my hands and stare down at this single sheet.

2.

The square sky

But now it is time to start telling the story in detail, on a fresh sheet of paper.

The sky is blue. Why the sky is blue, though, nobody knows for sure; only the sky itself knows.

“Why is the sky blue?” I ask myself. I ask myself, because – well, I'm not going to ask you, am I? If I asked you, then where would I look for the answer, and which answer should I look for? It is always easier to ask yourself questions; you're right here and you'll answer straight away if you can, and if you can't answer, then you're right here to tell yourself you don't know, and even though you feel a bit ashamed it won't matter, because nobody need know, and then you'll ask yourself a different question, an easier one and you'll answer that one, too, and everyone will be happy. There's just one thing though: I don't ask myself difficult questions anymore, because I'm scared that I won't be able to answer. So I try to ask myself easy questions. But then I'll get used to easy questions, and I'll get lazy, and eventually I might not be able to answer anything but the easiest questions that require no thought at all.

When you think about it carefully, there are two people in every person. Or maybe even three. And if there are three – and we have no proof as yet – then effectively each person is unquantifiable. I know for a fact that each person is two people from the example I've given above. The first asks the questions, the second answers them (or is unable to answer). But the one who is unable to answer is still a person, surely? In fact the one who is unable to answer is even more of a person, and here's why: because the question is the easy part. The question comes easily; it's the answer that's hard. It is possible for a really straightforward question to be so confusing you stop understanding it. For example: What's two times two? I ask. You know it's four, of course. But then why did I ask, if it's so straightforward? Maybe by “two” I meant something different. Maybe, on this occasion, “two times two” does not refer to a mathematical concept but a biological one. Now consider the following question: a hundred take away one makes..? Hm! You're laughing. It's 99, of course. But then you clarify: a hundred camels take away one donkey makes...?

Or this: Is a mosquito more or less intelligent than a camel? Nobody knows for sure. I don't think anyone will ever come up with a definitive answer. Personally, I have given much thought to the question of whether a bee is more or less intelligent than an apple tree. At one time I even turned to my scales for help answering

this. I did a lot of weighing and a lot of fretting, but I still couldn't establish which was more intelligent. I just couldn't explain it. Obviously I have the results of my tests, but...

I digress. Let's get back to the question at hand: Why is the sky blue? It really is a stupid question. If I could only get my hands on the person who came up with this stupid question in the first place... Because if we start on this one we'll end up going so far that we'll never be able to get back again and we'll have to stay there forever.

"But why IS the sky blue?" they ask.

If you're going to ask that you might as well ask why blackbirds are black, oranges are orange and violets are violet! To say nothing of roads, which are quite clearly road-coloured. It's as simple as this: when the time came for the sky to choose a colour, it preferred its own colour to the other colours on offer! (There's one school of thought which says that the sky is blue because our mosquito looks at it through blue eyes.) And in fact, when I think about it, everything under the

sky that comes in large quantities chooses that colour. And understandably, too - things like that want to express their size, they want to look infinite (although I'm sure it won't work). Take the seas, for example: every sea I've ever seen is blue, and they tell me the oceans are blue, too. At least, they're blue on my map.

How strange, though, that the colour of the sky also is the colour of melancholy. I went to see the mosquito; I wanted to get his thoughts on the matter. I took him a gift: a long tail-hair from a blue-grey horse wrapped up in a few unfulfilled wishes. He already knew why I'd come. He ran his eye over my gift, gave a slight nod of thanks and then launched unbidden into his speech: "This question does not crush me; au contraire, it encourages me and spurs me on to battle. I will don my helmet and chainmail, put on my armour, fling my bow over my shoulder, arm myself with a double-edged sword and battle all other meanings this colour might have, so that I might return to it its original innocence. As a certain lost poet once said:

Ever since my youth I've loved you:
Sky blue, deep blue,
Primeval blue,
Otherworldly blue".

I came away reassured (because I believe that an insect's word is his deed).

I digress. I'm the first to admit it. I was trying to say something else entirely. Everyone knows that the sky is blue. But then again everyone also knows that when you peel an onion it makes your eyes sting and you start to cry.

No, I was trying to say something else entirely.

It's winter and it's not snowing. There's not a cloud in the sky. It's cold.

Lia is going home. She's in Year 10 at school. The whole time she's walking she stares up at the sky. She's a strange girl. She stares at everything as if she's seeing it for the very first time. (When you look at the world like that, everything seems new, as if it's only just been created.) But really, what is there to see in a cold, cloudless sky? You can't understand it. If it was nearly spring and you were looking for a swallow - okay. Or if you were looking at the sunset, or sunrise, then okay. But looking at the sky in winter? What's the point?

Lia turned off the main road into a narrow side street. This street is paved with cobbles. At the end of the street there's a tall building with an archway leading underneath. The archway is still quite far away. Lia has only just turned off the main road. On one side stands an old-fashioned three-storey house. A high brick wall rises up on the opposite side of the street, a bleak, bare wall, although not completely bare; tucked away in the top corner sits a window, covered by a grille. Nobody knew for sure whether anyone lived on the other side of that window. There was just that one time, when the watchman reported: "Someone threw some orange peel out!" They say that the window was originally

built at cellar level and had no grille. Over time the little window moved higher and higher up the wall until finally it reached the roof. That was when they put the grille on: "Just in case the window falls out, you see, and lands on the pavement and shatters into tiny pieces". I don't believe that, of course, and I'm sure you don't either. But if you want to believe it, go ahead; I won't stop you.

In our side-street there also stands an enormous plane tree which fills the whole street when its leaves are off; but now it's winter and its branches are bare. (Strange, isn't it: in winter trees shed their coverings, while humans seek out more.)

The arch is still some distance away. Lia hasn't even reached the tree yet. Lia walks along slowly and stares up at the sky. Lia walks along slowly and smiles. She wasn't smiling before. She's smiling now. She smiles as if only she knows how. There's a boy in Lia's class who's in love with her. He wears glasses, too. But this boy won't be appearing in our story. That's how he wants it. He might make one appearance, I suppose, just sitting at his desk.

(Incidentally, Lia is short-sighted, but she never wears her glasses.)

"Lia!" Lia heard someone shout.

Lia turned round, squinted hard and saw her brother Gia standing there, a plotting board in his hands and his glasses on his nose. Gia knew everything.

Gia was studying at the Institute.

Lia looked up at the sky and waited for her brother. Gia went over to his sister, looked up at the sky, and then looked at Lia.

"Why are you staring up into space like some kind of astronaut?" Lia smiled. She was pleased that Gia was showing some interest.

"I'll tell you in a minute," said Lia and looked up at the sky again.

"It's going to be something stupid, isn't it?" Gia did not look at the sky.

"Hold on, Gia. Have you noticed that every place has its own sky? You have, right?"

"I told you it'd be something stupid."

"Just look at the sky, will you? It's long and narrow, just like this alley! Oh, just look at it, will you!"

Gia did not look at the sky.

"Just come home and keep your stupid discoveries to yourself."

"What, you don't believe me?! A wide street has a wide sky, a narrow street has a narrow sky."

"And?"

"And nothing. If you don't believe me look at the sky. I'd recognise this alley's sky anywhere..."

"What are you going on about? Don't let anyone else hear you talking like this. The nonsense you've already come up with is bad enough; why you need to make up any more I don't know."

Lia wanted to tell her brother that he just didn't get it, but she managed to hold her tongue. Gia never believed a thing she said. He was always making fun of her.

They walked the rest of the distance to the high, arched entrance in silence. Although on the way Gia said hi to three people he knew. He even asked how one of them was. Lia just nodded goodbye to the plane tree.

Lia walked by her brother's side and every now and then she looked up at the sky. The sky was clear, like an unblemished fig leaf.

Lia paused for a moment in front of the archway, looked round at the side street with its long, narrow sky one last time and then went into the courtyard.

Then she looked up again and cried:

"Look, Gia! Now the sky's square like the courtyard!"

Gia had had enough. He went inside the building.

Outside in the courtyard Lia looked up. The sky, the bounded, cold winter sky, really was square.

*"Every healthy man (and woman) has five senses:
sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch."
I. Gogebashvili)*

Smell is a strange thing – it actually exists.

Kerosene has its own smell, as do petrol and vinegar. Soap has a smell, and so does acetone. Many other things have their own smell, too.

Spring has a special smell.

True, the smell of spring is not as obvious as the smell of moth balls, for example, but if you pay close attention you'll see that spring does indeed have a smell. Not in the metaphorical sense, as when people say that the smell of cut grass is the smell of spring. No. Spring has its very own smell which acts on our sense of smell.

(All this talk of the sense of smell reminds me: bloodhounds have the keenest sense of smell of any dog.)

The flowers are still in the earth, their fragrance hasn't filled the air yet. But you can already pick up something in the air, something from which all the other smells will come. That something is the smell of spring itself.

It's the middle of February and you'd think no one is allowed to mention the spring. If you're foolish enough to remark that the smell of spring is in the air, someone is bound to make fun of you, saying: "It's the middle of winter, but just because the sun's in the sky and there's no snow on the ground you think spring's on its way!"

Of course I am not so naive as to argue with them that if you subtract the smell of petrol from the smell of kerosene, the smell of acetone from the smell of petrol, the smell of soap from the smell of acetone,

the smell of vinegar from the smell of soap, and a whole load of other smells from the smell of vinegar, then what you're left with is the smell of spring. No. I'm not that stupid! If they can't smell it, so be it; spring's on its way regardless. And I get very upset if some thick-skinned so and- so then comes along and says: "Look, the swallows are here," or "The lilac's in bloom!"

Our sense of sight tells us nothing about the approach of spring until very late in the day.

Sight reminds me of eyes, and eyes remind me of an expression that's of no use to us at all: "I'll believe it when I see it".

And thick skin reminds me of skin, and skin reminds me of touch, another of the five senses. Our skin has the amazing ability, dotted all over it, to let us to feel warmth and cold, smoothness and roughness, even tenderness.

You can't touch spring, because it's not a concrete object. It's spring. Time will pass, though, and soon spring will reach out to you with its colourful antennae, its chattering and cheer, its intoxicating fragrances and verdancy. It will revive you, no matter how dead you are.

Our sense of taste does nothing to help us decide whether or not spring is on its way. Sweet is always sweet, and bitter is always bitter. Although taste reminds me of another expression: if you're hungry enough, even stale crust tastes like cake...

Of course, warm fresh bread is better than cold stale crust. Warmth is a strange thing. It actually exists. The sun emits warmth, as do fire, blood, ovens, radiators, irons, and broody hens. Broody hens emit a rather strange warmth. What broody hens emit is the warmth of motherhood. In reality, the warmth emitted by broody hens is just ordinary warmth, but when needed, the hen's warmth performs a special miracle. It creates a chick from an ordinary egg, a chick that runs, jumps and struts. Meanwhile, humans keep that same egg in the fridge so that it never becomes a chick. Oh, how the egg longs to be a chick! But no, we chill it, freeze it, kill it. All we want that egg to become is an omelette, or, if it's really lucky, a cake.

So yes, the broody hen emits warmth, but so much of it is lost, given off in vain, for nothing. Human warmth is the source of so many creative works, and yet we keep our warmth in the fridge, too, so that it never creates anything. Cultivate your warmth, and see the fire of love begin to spark!

What would happen, I wonder, if a mosquito could hatch lions from its eggs?

But I digress again. I admit it.

Let's get back to the five senses. Our sense of hearing, that most noble of senses (although, in fact, if humans themselves are noble, then every sense is noble), is, like sight, very late to detect the arrival of spring. But once spring has arrived we hear the twittering of the birds in the sky where only a few weeks before all we heard was people whining about the cold.

We've already discussed sight, and at some length, but I'm going to come back to it anyway. "I'll believe it when I see it," they say. Why even argue? I mean, what are they going to do if they don't see it?!

In the time it would take us to argue that one, spring would probably have not only arrived, but gone again, too. Shall we look out of the window and see?! No, spring hasn't been and gone yet.

Spring is on the way! Spring is coming!

Here's to all five of our senses!

We'd be lost without them. All five are lying in wait round the corner, and there's nowhere for spring to hide!...

All this talk of spring reminds me: In the middle of nowhere, on bare, barren land, there stood a lonely old plane tree, completely forgotten by everyone. Nobody knew – not even the plane tree itself – whether it was alive or not.

Spring came and with it, it brought new life.

The old plane tree awaited the advent of spring with dread...

Soon, the old plane tree on that bare, barren land would find out whether it was alive or not...

The old plane tree and the bare, barren land remind me of the desert: I managed to picture the desert, but try as I might I could not imagine the desert in spring. After all, what would spring want in the desert, in that vast, empty, lifeless expanse of sand...

If there were a tree, even a single tree, then spring's arrival would be justified because of it; spring would surround it, embrace it. But there is no tree...

Spring visits the desert entirely in vain.

Every smell that exists in the world is present in that one small room. Fearful of the cold, the body lies in the bed covered by three blankets. The body has woken up. The body is very hot. The body had to carry out some complicated mathematical calculations to pick out the smell of spring among all the other smells that

are present in the room. The body stuck its arms out from under the blanket and stretched. Feeling cold, it stuck its arms straight back under the blanket again. The freezing cold and the suffocating heat – both are unbearable. What should the body do? Even as the body felt afraid of the cold it was tortured by the heat.

Let's not even think about getting up. In other words, the body was having a bad day. The body was having a bad day. The body fumbled around, slipped its hand under the pillow. Under the pillow the hand fell still. Under the pillow it was cool. It was as if the hand had breathed in fresh air. It was as if the parched hand had drunk cool water from a spring. It was as if the hand had crossed over to the shady side of the street on a scorching hot day... And from the hand there poured forth a powerful torrent of enthusiasm which spread throughout the body. The body got up, threw on some clothes, had a quick wash and went out into the street...

The body turned into Jimsher.