

## Me and my Kusturica

*Dedicated to those who offered support during the days of war*

A film director is a human being who creates mirages out of people. He tries to shape the mirages which you like, for example, or those liked by me into mirages which will be liked by somebody else.

A friend is a human being too. She knows much better which mirages I like, in other words, what somebody like me needs, in other words, what I like.

I don't know how much you like me, but imagine that I am a human being, who according to her own point of view, needs a film director, but from her girlfriend's point of view, needs a holiday in the mountains of Racha, and get married to a Rachvelian man. As for the film director, he keeps his thoughts to himself.

My girlfriend is an idealist, I am a super-idealist, the film director is realistic. He doesn't know who I am, and he has no idea what kind of mirage he could create from me. At least, he's never mentioned it to me or my friend.

The girlfriend is an idealist because she doesn't understand that there's not a single Rachvelian man on the planet who would like me and one who would actually marry me, is unlikely ever to be born. I'd need to be at least thirty five kilos heavier to satisfy the typical Rachvelian man's taste in women. It's not possible for me to become fair if I was born from my mother's womb with wheat-coloured skin with a permanent tan on top of it. Also, would an honourable Rachvelian man ever condescend to marry a 'coal-darkey', a 'Chiatura darling' or a 'monsterette'?

But as for the film director, who intends to shoot a psychological thriller, I wouldn't disappoint him at all with my expression, stretching out my neck, staring nervously.

My idealist girlfriend is an optimist as well. She believed that the area of Racha was my love, my rescuer and saviour.

Optimism is contagious. A human being is a human being.

Looking for a film director though is like looking for a needle in a haystack.

It would take a small bus load of food, filled up to the top, to host two families in Racha and feed them honourably on Rachvelian speciality ham, Kvanchkara wine and bean pies. A bowl, wooden kneading trough, child's walking harness, hammock.

Folding beds, shelves, mattresses and wooden bowls, badminton racquets, a guitar, a stiff brush.

See-saw, a pan for boiling linen, a wooden laden for polenta, skewers, rush matting, rugs.

Tarpaulin, folding stools. If there is a table, dear, to your liking...

You pack all these stuff into the trailer and the remainder, you will stick on the roof. You'll drag your family to the motor, and head off in the old banger along the zig-zaggy roads. At the roadside, you will buy mushrooms, Shoti bread, and wine too, some fruit ... and at last, the end of journey. You will go where you have to go and you will get out of the car and settle down. You will open your eyes, but what's the use, you cannot utter a word. You will swallow your tongue when you see all the beauty around.

That's how it is.

The area you found yourself in began with the sky. Nine mountains appeared to descend from the sky, and from the mountains, an old castle and a church the colour of milk. The river carried branches and leaves down from the castle. Houses grew out the foliage, the houses followed the edge of the gorge, they ascended the hills and our admiring eyes were looking from the house with the balcony. We were standing on the balcony and I could not tear my eyes away from the scenery that we both liked so much. The scenery. It began with the sky and nine mountains were descending from the sky...

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Night. Mountains, forests, skies, shadows, a river of blue, indigo and purple, which has passed over stones and splashed embankments, foaming, in pools, looking lighter over the ford, full of earth. The underwater movement of the riverbed turning the water many shades of blue.

The moon, roads, the ford and the church, shadows, different skies, flocks of birds, caves, small houses, the view with its many shades of white, the screwed-up white eyes of flowers in the meadow. The spilled milk white of the paths, the sky with its white, white, white pillows...snuffle, snuffle. Noses stuck out from the pillows, producing peaceful snoring sounds. Coolness pouring from the window.

Let's breathe in fairy tales and exhale the warmth of the palms of our hands tucked under our cheeks.

Noses are tanned from one day out in the mountains.

'No, I don't want to marry even a Rachvelian man, thank you very much.' I cast a glance at my children.

Snuffle, snuffle, four tangled plaits.

The happiness which followed the coolness.

A heat haze from the warm maize bread crept into the kitchen like mist stealing into the forest. Milk turns to cream, mushrooms seep into the water washing them for the third time ...

Then the water that washed them fell asleep.

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Sunshine! Daytime. Village. Strength.

Milk, fresh from the cow, a chicken and eggs, and the most important, sour cream, organic and liked by everyone.

Two happy mothers are having a holiday with their city children in this ecologically pristine area. After the day spent sorting out the house, they all swallow the ecologically clean air, they make blancmange from the ecologically clean cream and they enjoy the merry chirruping of the children playing on ecologically clean fields.

The children sway in the field in the colours of flowers. They climb like squirrels on the lonely old walnut tree and banish the possibility of sleep from the grandfather in the walnut tree's shadow.

A herd of cows, their udders milk-filled, were driven through the village hedgerows with their metal bell ringing.

'Let's go and do 'kusturica', let's go to Little Meadow,' said my girlfriend.

I puffed on my 'ecologically clean' cigarette.

I should say that I was behind the time, and they often caught me out in my ignorance of Rachvelian things. Little Meadow was the name of a waterside area with benches and a table for village gatherings. And what about 'to do Kusturitca'? I thought it must have been something posh and I agreed to go there without saying anything, in order not to get feel ashamed.

My guess was apparently not that far from the truth. A lot of new stars had passed unnoticed across my sphere of interests in the back ground of my extreme, prolonged but already passed depression. Not one but many filmmaker passed by while my intellect was on holiday. Not one, but many events passed me by while I was half asleep... as for Kustarica, the idol of all Tbilisi, Georgia and the beauties of the world, lived and created without me. Apparently to display himself to us and to the upper classes, my God, what kind of level was I at that I had not seen his films?

The raising my level began when my heart sank. Lolling on a wicker chair all I could do was quietly watch the titles. After the titles, there followed a portrait of the film maker.

Nothing special, but ... those eyes!

The power of his eyes had such force, I was thrown backwards. The eyes were full of past pain, they were clever, bitter and sad, and looked at me, seeing me as something either suitable or unsuitable for creating a new mirage. His eyes made me non-existent, they saw what existed in existence, and I had nothing better to than to see what was seen by these eyes.

A week-long cinema retrospective completely and uncompromisingly drove me fully away from depression. It's likely that the filmmaker had never thought about the healing properties of his masterpieces. Who knows, perhaps he hesitated and wondered whether his inner motivations would make somebody's life a misery, or else encourage them to come back to life.

My life began with sun bathing.

As soon as I put my bikini on, my girlfriend threatened me with the stiff brush I mentioned above. You think she's your friend but she appears to be the moral guardian of Rachvelian men's nervous systems. I sulked and went behind the house on my own. Only the eye of the sun could reach into that hole. There was a house in front and a hill behind it.

The sun not only touched me but beat me up as well. As soon as I became thirsty for life again at last, I was thrown back into bed. I had too much sun, I was swollen, I was burned. I turned into a crab so that not a single Rachvelian could see how I was burning at the hands of the incandescent, heavenly body, the sun. First, I was burned but they could not burn me, second, I was burnt but they could not burn me...

I kept the film, 'White Cat, Black Hat' till last. Perhaps even 'Time of the Gypsies' was better than that, and also 'When Father was Away on Business', but when I was struck by a thunderstorm and I was shaken, it took me some time to recover. I should have watched the film before; I should have watched it before! I would have been the first to fall in love with him, to marry him, to jump up and jump down into the boat of elopement.

I went down the stairs dancing, I passed the balcony singing, I crossed the yard happily too. Who could get in first, who? To fall in love with Emir! Let the Tbilisi beauties turn green with envy. Tra-la-la, tra-la-la...

'Let me introduce you to Mr Emir!' A presentable Rachvelian was fixing his fence, he was suntanned and he was working skilfully and taking his time in a dignified manner. In general, skilful suntanned Rachvelians work with dignity. So do those without suntans.

'What's wrong with him?' My girlfriend scolded me. 'He fixed your window, the lock and the latch too.'

There was nothing wrong with Mr Emir to justify me rejecting him, but he looked at me and decided he didn't want to start a family with a woman who looks like a Red Indian. But I love another Emir. I opened my heart to my girlfriend, and when she gave me a withering look, I started to whine miserably.

'Okay, okay, I'll go and put some yogurt on my body, perhaps then I will look more white and luscious.'

Gradually, my shaking and the chattering of my teeth increased. I shivered, even under a warm blanket and it's not a secret to anyone that fever is very good for love.

Eh, Mr Rachvelian Emir, as God is my witness, you did not even secretly look in my direction. What will I do? I'm at 2900 metres above sea level and I've decided to raise my consciousness to forty degrees of mercury. Is such a degree of love possible? I love him with limitless, unconditional and unrequited love.

Those eyes? Do you get it, people? Can't you understand? Those eyes!

I have hallucinations about him.

A blanket made of cotton wool, a feather pillow ... snuffle, snuffle.

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'Let me introduce the master of cinematography, Mr Emir Kustarica.' Somebody pushed me in my sleep.

My heart skipped a beat.

I could barely open one eye.

'I am sorry but I will only be able to receive you in half an hour.' It's not as if I had massive experience of grand receptions, but I would not shrink in an undignified manner, would I? What an honour! What shall I serve him? What shall I wear?

I tried on a t-shirt with a Georgian map and flag. I tried on a dress with a pacifist logo on it too, my best shorts and a top as well. Nothing was any good! I also tried on an evening dress from a local couture. I was burning from the inside out whatever I put on, whether it was wearable or unwearable.

‘Tell him that he’s invited to come and eat an ecologically clean blancmange on the balcony. There’s a magnificent view from there. The dress code is casual.’

Even so, he turned up in a dinner jacket. And because getting dressed and undressed was a hellish torture, I put on clothes that would touch my burning flesh as little as possible. I wore high heels, bought for who knows for what event, as I had plenty of pairs already, very high as if anyone could reach the height of his grandeur. They were totally inappropriate for that occasion, like some strange drink.

I came out to the balcony.

The rendezvous began auspiciously.

‘In our country, we achieve such effects without special masks.’ He meant me.

I crossed my legs proudly. God only knows what it was like to perform this heroic gesture. I raised my eyebrows mockingly and levelled my gaze to the gaze of my guest.

‘I’d like to tell you that in our country, Your Grandness, everything is natural.’ I celebrated my national self-consciousness.

‘Help yourself to this natural, organic, ancient, ancestral blancmange.’