

## The Killer

*Only one sentence awaits all us - death - Joseph Brodsky*  
*We are all killers, all on this side and on that side, it won't lead to anything good -*  
*Islands in the Stream - Ernest Hemingway*

*God wrote my grief*  
*On my sword*  
*I killed my sworn brother,*  
*I used a sword on my brother*  
*They chase me to kill me*  
*They put the trap for me on the road - Folk song*

The sea was calm. It stretched far away to the horizon and cautiously touched the shore with a swishing sound. It glimmered calmly under the open, blue, deep and alien sky. A huge cluster of clouds sailed on the clear sky like a space shuttle, reflected in the swelling sea.

He was swimming in warm, slightly ruffled waves. Then he dived, opened his eyes and saw the white rays of the sun, fragmented, descending into the greenish, yellowish and dark sea water. It was making its way to the bottom of the sea.

And he immediately felt how something long, and thin as a thread, pierced him under his left shoulder blade. Once, twice and a third time and the sun fell and spread its white rays at lightning speed across the sea and it struck for the fourth time under his shoulder blade. His heart stopped. 'Oh, I'm dying,' he thought and started to sink down to the bottom of the white, illuminated, unpleasantly white sea, like a white harpooned shark. He tried to come back up to the surface. 'No, I can't. Oh, I am dying!' he thought a second time and began to panic frantically. He couldn't move, he couldn't even move his arm. 'I've died, you mother fucker, I've died!'... His whole body writhed, he moved his shoulders and immediately an unbearable pain went through his entire body like fire. He had never been afraid of pain, but

he certainly didn't want to die, especially in a thick, sticky, treacherous white sea, which had stuck a needle in his back, under his left shoulder blade. 'You mother fucker,' he said to the pain, to the whiteness, which was strangely illuminated from inside, and to the treacherous sea and to his own pierced heart. He struggled again, then paddled with his legs too.

The surface of the sea was visible far above. It was a long way away, but it was there. It was definitely there. He started moving slowly and after a while he leaped out of the sea, shook his head and immediately his wide-open eyes, crazy with terror, encountered the hot sun.

He swam towards the shore. He swam through the thick white sea and he couldn't feel his heart any more. The shore was black and it wasn't expecting anyone.

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Gia Ezukhbaia, a six foot tall, former partisan from Nabakevi, nicknamed Phshaveti sat on the first floor of the two storey, long, faceless, former House of Culture in the village of Akhalkakhati near Zugdidi, on a seat ripped out of a Ford minibus. He averted his face from heat coming from the red-hot stove and listened to his wife complaining.

Gia Ezukhbaia's wife was kneading dough in an enamel bowl, on the long table near the tap. She cooked maize bread in an iron pan. She timed her complaints with the thudding sounds of the dough.

-I curse you because you didn't make me happy, you made me unhappy, me and my children, you idiot, you idiot ...if you wanted a life like this, why did you marry if you were going to make us miserable? Who will defend you, you wretched fool, who is your patron and who is grateful to you? Here's your Georgia, let it help you now. I'm baking the last of the bread, look at my hands, I'm peeling every last bit of dough from my fingers. You made Abkhazians your enemies, you made Georgians your enemies, and everyone's after you to

kill you. The whole family has to sleep behind three iron gates and our hearts burst from fear at every movement. Anytime someone may pour some petrol and set us and the children on fire. Is this any kind of life? We're half a kilometre from the Enguri River, the Abkhazians can be here in two minutes. How did you fight in the war? Who needed your war and whom did you harm by fighting?

Gia Ezukhbaia wasn't nicknamed Pshaveti because he was one of the coolest Georgian partisans on the Enguri embankment and drank the blood of Abkhazians and Russians. It was more because, he was very witty and he swore a lot, unlike Mengrelians. Now, though, he sat quietly, fiddling aimlessly with a piece of wood listened to his wife's complaining.

'You should have stayed behind to mind your own business, in which case you could have gone to Nabakevi, picked a few oranges, some hazelnuts, you could have given them, grudgingly with bad grace. The whole village of Gali goes there, and they don't touch the villagers. People work, they earn some pennies. The Kishmaris even got a kettle.

'Yes, sure, I would slave for those bastards!'

Gia stoked up the stove with some wood and closed its door with a bang.

'They aren't slaves at all. No, you're the only one who's here! It is beneath your dignity. You say you're a partisan, but I am afraid to go out because you owe money at the kiosk. The whole of the Gali region returns home and apparently they're all slaves. They return to their land, they build houses, they begin their lives again, they don't do it for nothing. They're neither for Russians nor Abkhazians. They move freely. As for you, stay here and kill people...'

'Stop nagging! Shut up, I'm telling you I won't return there carrying Russian papers, and that's the end of it.'

‘Oh, yes, as if you’re Prince Tsothe Dadiani, saint and martyr. Even if you wanted to, who would let you return, you miserable creature, with blood all over your hands. How many sins have you committed? Your children will be answerable for them. Do you know that?’

‘Stop talking like that, I’m telling you.’

‘What shall I stop doing? What? Kill me too and that’s the end of it. I’m not afraid of anything anymore, I can’t take any more, I’ve already lost my mind. This bloody war is over for everyone, apart from for you and your drug addict and bandit mates. The whole of Abkhazeti and Samegrelo are after you, you’ll never be able to go back home now.’

‘What do you want, woman? What?’

‘I’ve been telling you since the morning what I want. Don’t you hear anything? You only want to do what you want and you aren’t interested in anything else. But we both see what happens when you act according to your ideas.’

‘Bake your bread and shut up. Don’t speak when it is not your business.’

‘I bore four children for you, and you say it’s not my business? The eldest is twenty two already, if you remember? The children have seen nothing but the war and trouble. Don’t they need to study, set up home, start a family? Never mind studying and setting up a home, your children are hungry, they don’t have clothes. He’s a warrior so he can’t help himself .. I wonder who are you fighting with apart from yourself?’

Gia took out some wood from under the stove, looked at it, fiddled with it, then threw it back. He lit up a cheap Astra cigarette and inhaled deeply.

‘You’ve nothing to complain about, you live as you wish. I’m the one crying bitter tears living with you. Why did I marry you, what was I looking for? My father was beside himself, don’t marry him, he kept saying.’

‘Come off it, it’s not as if he was killing himself!’

‘If he wasn’t killing himself, I will kill myself if I’m not able to go to my own cousin’s funeral. You can bury me alive and that will be that. You wouldn’t let me mourn my own flesh and blood, you Gia Ezukhbaia, may God deprive you of any mourners because of your sins towards me.’

‘Don’t put me in the grave with your nagging, woman. Uff!’

‘Who would put you into the grave and who will kill you, you idiot’

‘I’m sincerely sorry that I didn’t die, what can I do now?’

He was very ashamed in front of his wife. He knew she was right, but he couldn’t say a word. His wife’s cousin had died and she lived close by, a few houses away, but his wife couldn’t go to express her condolences because she didn’t have any shoes. She couldn’t go there to express condolences when she only had her red and blue striped slippers. Gia racked his brains over where and how he could get some shoes but he couldn’t think of anything.