

Turning Moscow into a Radioactive Desert, or Demise of an Hourglass

(From the Cicle 'All Roads Lead to Bedlam')

...Hense, I drain piece by piece _ true, very slowly, but sooner or later I will be emptied, won't I?!

I am an hourglass.

And who will invert me then?

I look around. Everybody is in deep sleep. Kofi Annan-Iashvili heavily sibilant in sleep _ like beats of tomtom. Only *Buratino* * was awake. But I do not rely on him. He will not turn me over. He will not take this trouble. He is kind of a wooden... Not ade,..*quate*. Quite not ade,..*goose!*** Ha-ha-ha!

Window pane placed in iron-barred frame was half painted in white. Bright moon light bursting from the window shamelessly mingled with a hardly flickering colorless feedback of twenty-five-watt electric bulb that sired fairly thin light. Instead of regular wooden door in the ward there was a grating concocted and welded of iron rods, painted in white and embedded in the solid iron frame _ deadbolted with shining Chinese door lock.

'Is there anybody on earth more serene and innocuous than we are? What's the use of these iron rods and latches?!' _ I stare, wonder and ponder to boot as to how many granules are there left.

Suddenly, my mind widely opened – we are under protection! Not to be kidnapped! Dark forces! That is exactly these metal rods and latches are for. We are rare creatures stuck together. Most unique. The last hope and buttress of the world.

* Wooden puppet, the main character of the book *The Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino* (1936) by Aleksey Tolstoy.

** Pun involving the Georgian words *kvati* (quate – goose) and *bati* (duck) and last syllables of the English word *ade-quate*.

Besides dim light from the hallway, the chlorine smell was lavishly and indefatigably grinding.

Now I gaze at *Buratino* against the backdrop of moon (his bed is just in front of me against the window, or at the angle, rather), and I think again, how many granules are there left until being discharged? The point is, that sand is pouring into me not with the same speed, every now and then accelerating and at the same time spending the whole hour on one single granule to drop. On top of that, this single granule is the whole Galaxy, single Universe.

Buratino sat on the bed in 'Turkish way', with closed eyes and legs tucked up beneath him. With one hand he tightly kept headrod of the bed, painted in white, as a skipper holding the wheel of a rambling ship in rough seas, and with the other hand's forefinger he tenderly tested the tip of his nose like anybody may check the tip of the newly sharpened pencil when one wants to taste whether its sharpened.

I believe that his nose is pretty much sharpened. All of a sudden he opened his eye and asked me:

_ Are you wondering why my name is *Buratino*?

_ That's rubbish? _ I was a bit perplexed, _ you have this monicker because of what you are! It is the same as if enema asked why I am called enema? What else should it be called? Synchrophasotron?

All at once *Buratino's* mien changed and,...he smiled! I could expect everything but this. I am amazed and I think about granules left before discharge.

_ You know, I'll tell you just between us, _ he tells me in voiced murmur but very serious expression, _ however, you will discharge soon and will not sell me out. Earlier I was not *Buratino*!

_ Who you were then? _ I am surprised and I think about granules left before discharge.

_ I was a human being. But since childhood I was nicknamed *Buratino*. You know why?

_ You were a wooden dummy, _ I expressed my theory but unexpectedly he didn't take umbrage. He proceeded as if not to have understood it:

_ Because since childhood I used to poke my nose in everything that was none of my business, as the elders explained me, first crowing it,..

_ Then raven-ing it? _ I interrupted him.

_ Then milvus-ing, then hawk-ing, then eagl-ing, then,.. _ went on *Buratino* without even thinking a bit.

_ Wait, wait, _ I interrupted him again, _ why beating around the bush?! Get down to business!

‘Definitely, this guy is a woodenhead!’ swept through my head, then I remembered once and somewhere heard phrase: ‘Mentally ill have no sense of humour’.

And *Buratino* continues with nearly passionate articulation:

_ What could I do, I was interested in everything. May be that’s why I became a physicist. I worked in nuclear physics. I was just wondering how this world, substance were structured,..
_ For a moment he relieved his grip on the headrod of the bed and barely gave two light fillips on the bedrod with his forefinger, then gripped it again and continued his word, _ Universe, yes! By the way, I was the youngest PhD holder in Georgia in my speciality. I worked at Protvino on accelerator. Before that I graduated from Tbilisi University. With crimson diploma.* Do not believe me?

_ No. – I said abruptly. Though I did.

All of a sudden he removed his worldknown pompom cap and started to put out some paperwork and booklets from there like a magician. He searched for it quite a time, then passed

on to me _ it happened to be a TSU diploma. It really had a crimson cover.

_ Keeping for what? _ It was absolutely legitimate question, _ somebody may think that you cannot part with your past and lost human nature and, oh, shame on you, even appreciate it!

*Crimson-colored diploma certificates were handed over to the graduates with distinction in Georgia’s universities.

_ That’s true, this is my mistery, _ he murmurs, _ but I know you can’t disclose it since you will be soon drained.

_ Soon in this case may be even thousand years, _ I pandered to myself keeping in mind granules left till discharge.

_ Or thousand seconds. _ *Buratino* overtook me as if seeking benefit and abruptly took out a pencil sharpener, neared it to the tip of his nose, closed one eye as a sniper, took a mark, comforted himself, put it on, and turned it swiftly twice over his axle as if he tried to set out blowing device of the explosive. Then he slowly took off the sharpener, knocked on the bedrail in a businesslike manner, threw out chips, put the sharpener into his pocket and after that checked his newly sharpened nose.

_ Your nose needed more sharpening? _ I ask him, nonplussed, _ Its tip is like a needle!

_ If I do not sharpen it every day, it loses shape and looks like a human nose.

_ Yes, but just a moment ago you said you appreciated lost human nature? Deep down in your bosom, in secret?.. Come on, do not sharpen your nose and let us see if you morph into a human being again, _ I tell him and think on granules left before discharge.

_ Are you mad?! _ screamed suddenly *Buratino* as if I offered him to jump into a red-hot fireplace.

Rising noise made medical attendant with a Schwarzenegger-style bodybuilder looks to peep through the rod-made door who flashed his single, huge, strictly centered eye and menacingly thundered:

_ What's goin' on here?!

Buratino was ossified on the bed, we both were dead silent.

However, nobody woke up.

Attendant was about to unlock the door, he even drew out a key from the pocket, but then shrank from pursuing punish operation and returned back. What a bliss that you, humans, predominantly are slothful!

For a span of time we lie holding our breath. I listen to the barely audible stir of pouring tiny, airy sand stream into my entrails, and I wonder how many granules are there left until discharge?

Suddenly it struck me to enrage *Buratino*, so I told him:

_ I do not believe that you ever were a human. I can buy plethora of diplomas at the Dry Bridge.* That does not prove anything. If you were Pinocchio, I could believe you...

Finally Pinocchio became a man again, and you found yourself in your puppet communism, that's it. If you were a human being could you tell me how you became *Buratino*?

Buratino again moved forward, again tucked up his legs under him, again checked the tip of his nose.

_ Those days I usually stood on the side of the School #1 with my friends.... But that night it turned out that we happened to be in front of the House of Artists, – he commenced in a monotonous way, but evenly with crooning, as if he were reading a mantra.** He seemed even to sway to and fro that was hardly visible.

_ Yep, so you knew it in advance what gonna happen! _ I interrupted him as acrimoniously as I could, _ I always had doubts that you were somehow engaged. Who else could be a KGB mole but a wooden brain-and-heart futuro dummy?

But it was clear that he wouldn't listen to me. He accelerated swaying movements on the spot, now he sat in the pose of a lotos, as if he really fell into a transe. He left his nose alone at last, his hands on the knees. He cut quite a funny figure _ *Buratino*-yoga during meditation. First he kept silence, only swayed. Then he started talking in a somewhat subdued way, no, he did not talk, it looked like words being spoken from the gravesite:

* A location in Tbilisi where people sell second-hand kitchen utensils and other personal articles of various kind.

** In Hinduism and Buddhism, any sacred word or syllable used as an object of concentration and embodying some aspect of spiritual power.

_ When Juggernaut* chariots started in our direction, crowd was divided in two and yielded a road... Then Urfin Juce** soldiers hit us with double-whetted daggers, but to no avail,..

_ May be you were unharmed because you rushed into the House of Artists, stood at the easel and started immediately to paint the portrait of Papa Carlo, _ I interrupted him again. I wanted to abuse him somehow. But to no avail! He didn't even pay attention to me.

He continued as if he were praying:

_ We were beaten, killed, beaten, killed, we did not die, did not die, did not die... We were beaten, killed, beaten, killed, we did not die, did not die, did not die... We were beaten, killed, beaten, killed, we did not die, did not die, did not die...

I threw a pillow at him. He came to his senses. He asked me dumbfounded:

_ Where am I?

_ In a land of cra...settled minders.

_ Come on, really?

_ Certainly... Then, if you all did not die, who killed those twenty people that died?! Women and children?!

Buratino suddenly smiled. And, besides, so naturally, cheerfully, easily that it earnestly struck me: 'Oh...Now, attaboy buddy!' It came to my mind for the first time that in this institution full

board and meals belong to him deservedly. Or, he did not take other's place. Unlike me.

At last he ceased laughing, calmed down and told me:

_ Then I also believed that they were decimated! But on the spot I did not see anybody dead, but later I saw pictures.

* Crude idol of Krishna worshipped at Puri and throughout Orissa and Bengal.

** One of the protagonists of fairy tales series by Russian author Aleksandr Volkov.

_ And what? Why you smiling?! You are *Buratino* and not *Karabas-Barabas*?!*

_ They are alive!

_ What?!

_ Yes! They all are at Hawaii islands! Alive! Safe and sound! Laughing! In Honolulu! At Waikiki sandbeach!

Now I was about to smile but restrained myself. Peacefully, ravenish-turtle-dovishly I tell him:

_ Well, mull a bit what you are talking about, my dear *Buratino*...

_ I know what, _ he answers with crystal-clear reasonable voice, _ those twenty people who allegedly were killed were transferred to Hawaii islands in secret. Everything was a play, KGB itself wanted to dissolve the Union since it was like a mill-stone on their neck, so many bloodsucker republics. They put also America, CIA on board. But how could they explain it to their people, the Russians?! That's is why they made up such a destructive scenario. However, how could they annihilate Georgians?! They are no predators, are they? Beasts? Well, they performed a show!

_ What do you know? _ I ask him and try to show that a little bit and I am about to believe this unheard-off fairy tale.

_ Do you know what is a web-camera, live camera? In Internet.

_ Yes, I do. Permanently connected at one spot and broadcasting 24 hours.

_ Yep! Well, once I turned it on by chance. In Honolulu, on the Ocean side, on Waikiki beach, under palms, the one installed near statue of Duke Kahanamoku, many times Olympic champion in swimming and inventor of modern surfing, and what I see – our allegedly perished Georgians just walking?!

* Evil puppetmaster who wants to destroy *Buratino* because he disrupted *Karabas-Baranas's* puppet show.

_ Well, paradise seems to be in Honolulu,.. localized. – I pattered being kind of inspired. *Buratino* did not catch irony.

_ Oh, paradise is not the point!.. They are alive! _ He says seriously. _ Their address is always with me, _ he took off his skullcap again, took some card out of it and gave it to me, _ it's on this site: <http://www.honolulu.gov/multimed/waikiki.asp> Check it in the Internet and you will make sure yourself! They are alive. I say it!

_ Definitely they are alive in the paradise. For good. Do you think that there are corpses stacked there?

_ No, but there,..mmm,.. there is what's left of corpses there.

_ *Buratino*, you are genuine *Buratino*! Human being is truly alive in paradise, not here! You call it life here?!

_ And hourglass? _ he told me as if trying to tell me something pleasant, _ hourglass is the most alive in the paradise of hourglasses, isn't it?

_ There is no paradise of hourglasses, darling, paradise is for souls, not for shapes, and hourglass is only a shape.

_ Similar to,..mm,..*Buratino*?

_ No, buddy, _ I tell him in a heartscalded tone, _ in this case, unfortunately, the shape coincides with the substance...woodpith in cubic meters.

He pelted a pillow. My own. I thanked him. Glass enjoys lying on the soft.

Some time he cuddled the sheep's spike, then he continued conversation as if nothing had happened.

_ I turned into a genuine *Buratino* in that moment, when double-whetted dagger of Urfin Juce's magic soldiers hit me.

_ I guess, in the back, at the House of Artists when you were rushing in as a rabbit, at that moment! _ I tell him frowning.

He wouldn't answer. So, I hit the mark. I was about to say something else, but he outpaced me.

_ No, not then,.. he sprinkled with magic, airy remedy into my nose, and my nose started growing immediately, lengthened and extended,..

I cut him short and say:

_ Wait a minute, wait a minute, this your...airy never lengthened any nose. Look at me, I have no nose at all!

_ What? Were you also there?!

_ Yes, I did, and contrary to somebody, I never deluded anybody that I was an artist! As if he were Botticelli!.. I stood there to the end, never moved away. Until I was really sprinkled. And until they turned me into an hourglass!

_ On the other hand, do you know what I made?! Nuclear bomb! To blast Moscow!

I smiled. Again he ignored me. Again he fell into a transe, and went on:

_ It is a *Kokrochina** bomb, waiting for a signal, buried in the ground, in mid-Moscow.

_ And why did not you trigger your *Kokrochina*? _ I ask matter-of-factly.

_ Because... I cannot impose Lenin upon the whole world!

_ Lenin? What has he to do with this?

_ Why?! He is right to the point,.. in the heart of Moscow! Had Moscow gone to ashes, Lenin would have dissolved to nuclei and disseminated to the whole world... would make the rot to permeate it!

_ Then what?! _ I ask him nonchalantly. I do not like these physical and lyrical sentiments, I can't help it.

_ How do you ask what? – *Buratino* was clearly amazed of my lack of understanding. He made a profound lull. For a moment he even ceased checking his nose.

* Tiny (Georgian)

_ How do you ask what? _ he repeated and continued, _ Lenincrammed, Leninstuffed world cannot be saved. Cannot.

_ I do not like these metaphysical sentiments! _ I couldn't help restraining myself, _ If cannot, then let it be that way!

Buratino lapsed into silence and then threw at me a somewhat see-through glance. Murmuringly and piercingly, he asked me:

_ T h e n w h o w i l l u p e n d y o u ?

_ This is not linked?

_ The link is my honorable former Young Communist leaguer, that in the overLenined world, it will never occur to anybody to trouble oneself and upend an hourglass, but if you not upend, The Time, _ here *Buratino* exposed his eyeballs and uttered in single letters with barely audible, menaceauguring, goosebumping voice _ w-i-l-l-s-t-o-p!

_ No, my woodstuffed friend, will not stop, since I lerned how to upend. No sooner I discharge that I jump into the air, make one somersault and take my place, anchored. Snooty. Then starts a new cicle. In the Universe. New Time! _ I say to him simultaneously mulling in my bosom, if he tells me, hey, go ahead, make your magic trick after all this swank and swagger! What can I do? What somersaulter am I?! So, I swiftly change the topic of our conversation and tell him explicitly:

_ No, I do not believe that you can assemble a nuclear bomb!

_ Cannot?! _ Due to the rage *Buratino's* wooden bristles went up. He removed again his cap and took some black tiny thing out of it.

_ What is this?

_ It is a remote control unit. _ He does not even murmur but hiss, apparently he wants me to feel that it is some supersecret item.

_ What unit? _ I ask him and also think, how many granules are there left until discharge?

Buratino lifted something he held in his hand and showed it to me from some distance. It was really a remote control unit, a regular unit for remote control of a TV set. Rather old and shabby.

_ Then what? _ I ask him and think, how many granules are there left until discharge?

_ If you press a red button on this unit, Moscow will blow up!

_ ?

_ This is a unit triggering atomic bomb! As I told you I assembled a *Kokrochina*, handy, 10-kWt A-bomb, put it into the case, took it to Moscow and buried it in the basement of the house where I rented an apartment for years. That apartment is on the first level and one can get to the basement right from the room.

I pined for taking this unit in my hand. And pressing that red button with my finger. What can I do? How to act? To win time I tell him:

_ No, you should have blasted Moscow. You know how the fire in the oilwell can be extinguished?

_ How?

_ Blowing it up! Russia is the same as fire originating in the well of civilization. Unextinguished. Fire not to be conquered until burned down the hatch,.. burned out its resource totally. The whole world... No, you should've blown up!

_ And Lenin?

_ I do not know Lenin!

_ But the are alive whom we deem to be dead, aren't they,.. I wanted to avenge them. I made A-bomb because of them! And they are alive! Alive!!

I understood that it made no sense to talk to *Buratino*. *He is Buratino!* I had no choice. What had I to do? I stared. I wanted to take away the unit but he had gripped it with both hands so tightly that I couldn't wrest it from him. Then a wonderful idea hit me – there is no need to pull the unit out, the point is to press the red button or to force him press the button... I pushed him with all my strength. Now I did not try to wrest the unit, but to weigh upon him from above in a way that would make him press the button himself against his will. It looks like he understood it and started hopping, carried out one Zinedin-esque headbutt, or wanted to, rather, but it was feeble, he failed to do it with full strength, but, you are aware that his nose is too long and spiked, and,.. he smashed me.

I was broken. I was scattered on the floor and the bed in the form of the chips of a broken glass and microscopic crumbs of holy sand.

Medical attendant peeped into the room reacting on the noise, then unlocked the rod-made door and entered the ward.

_ What's goin' on here, what's up?! – he sternly asked and clapped his hand on the bed.

_ Beware, there are fragments of broken glass, do not cut your hand, _ *Buratino* was absolutely calm while conveying this.

'When did he come to his senses?' I was surprised, besides I think how many granules are there left until dis... and all of a sudden I was hit – I am already discharged! Finish! Over!!!!!!

_ I have broken hourglass,.. by chance. – Buratino lied shamelessly.

_ Hourglass? _ Attendant seemed to be wondering, _ Is there a room for hourglass in the XXI century? Damn him! We will write it off!

He went out and soon brought a sweep, a scoop and a trash bucket, _ he broomed and threw me in it.

You will also be broomed, do not worry!.. In due time. Therefore, do not be too sorry. (By the way, I send you this message from Honolulu).

At the same time another medical attendant peeped and cried with a doomed voice:

_ Where are you?! Nuclear bomb has blown up in Moscow! The Third World War has started!!!