POETRY DESK

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Poems

Giorgi Lobzhanidze Translated by Manana Matiashvili Edited by Elizabeth Scott Tervo

People standing in the shadow and people standing in the light,—I saw them both.

- Sohrab Sepehri

I don't remember exactly when but I remember it did happen: I saw people happy together, they strode so archly you would think they were happy balloons filled with gas. I saw people in gas chambers before those chambers were filled with gas. I saw two fellows on gibbets with their heads in nooses. They were looking into each other's eyes as if looking at other parts of the body (which is usually called love) would lead to the death penalty, because in their country that kind of love is punishable. And they were hanging there full of death after love or-call it what you wantlove leading to death. Hanging stiff, they continued to look into each other's eyes.

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People in the dark looking toward the light with beseeching eyes. People in the light with shadows of their elongated bodies. People in side-view, people seen in direct view. People with clothing and people without clothesnaked as they were at the moment of birth. I saw all of them and the naked people said: know that even nakedness can turn out to be the best clothing ever worn only if you wrap in it (as in a monk's robe) your innocent heart! I saw people bathing in money and bathing in shit. I saw people sleeping and I saw them in sober vigilance. I saw people in sorrow and in joy. I saw people in wealth and in poverty. I saw people singing mirthfully and I heard their songs of lamentation. I saw people in their faith, I saw them in their unbelief and got to know the skepticism of some people usually works better than other people's faith as it happens when the death of certain people is livelier than other people's life. I saw people when it was cold and I saw them in warmth. I saw people when it rained and I saw them when it was stormy. Yes, people I saw . . . I mean . . . I remember I saw human beings. I remember that it did happen but, unfortunately, I can't remember when it happened

* * *

I saw people

last.



Dad the Santa Claus

Snow-covered trees at Mtatsminda Park, Tbilisi. DDohler / CC BY 2.0.

Dad, now I know: when the New Year's celebrations are over, when the holidays are already a long time past, when I have taken down the New Year's tree from its usual place to keep it in my chest of memories.

Don't think that those trees were not sparkling, no, they were pretty, but one day, when you were already gone and I couldn't find my presents under the pillow I looked up at the sky and said: You, Santa Claus, you are a liar! It seems that my Dad was bringing those presents every year on New Year's Eve.

Oh, Dad, my Santa Claus, as a kid I was so happy waiting for you to come. . . . It seemed then you were always near carrying a sack full of life concerns and heavy burdens not presents.

You did not have time to grow a beard.

It was because of us: we had taken your time, you had to take care of all six including me—the youngest one.

It was because of me—I did not let you get old with grey hair.

Dad, now I know where Santa Clauses melt.

That place is near—it's the cemetery of our village. They go there to dissolve and in spring they turn into grass to make us feel remorse to scratch our souls with thorns and prickles.

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My poor Dad, my Santa Claus, you melted there in that cemetery like others but while living you always wore the frost as a robe. This costume turned out to be as cold as a cell in prison.

After the glittering snow made you close your eyes you fell on your face in the snow and the fir trees you were carrying home had been cut like wings.

Dad, now I know:
I am a Santa Claus too
and my children think I am a wise Santa.
In order to make their bluest dreams shine,
like you did,
I carry my life burden all through the year
as if it was a sack
full of colorful presents.

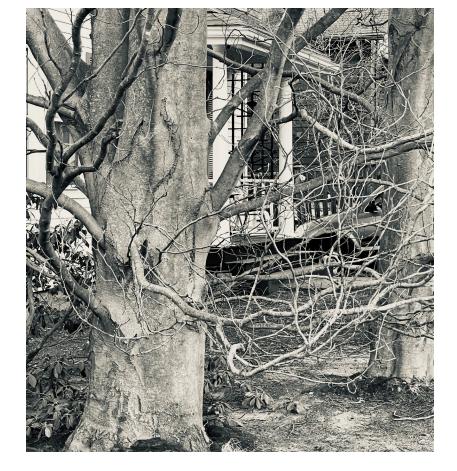
One day in future they too will not find their presents hidden under the New Year's tree. Then they will look up into the sky bewildered as if they had lost their wallet in a foreign city.

A foreign city which is full of snow and the remnants left over from New Year's celebrations. That will be the time when the holidays are over and only frost is sparkling on the firs.

Only then they will know: Santa Clauses really come into our lives!

Then it will be my children's turn to carry the sacks and before starting on their own way home they will look up into the sky to find me, to wink and smile.





Here on this piece of land that I call my homeland, workers usually fall from the scaffolds like leaves—pale yellow from hunger.

After falling, before they land they try to grasp the air since it is the only thing left for free that everyone can grasp before falling down on the ground.

* * *

Poetry

An angry old woman (she is really full of energy, enough for a hundred youngsters) is looking enraged at me (we are travelling on a minibus together). She is upset, she is annoyed, she seems to think

I have taken her seat. Sometimes we look at each other the same way, me and poetry: I am tired, no power to move.

* * *



To Tazo Vachnadze

My friend is so nice, so peaceful, he is almost unearthly like the words the happiest love. If something like that (like the happiest love) existed somewhere on earth, it would certainly look like my friend. Once he became senseless and sensible people locked him in a ward for medical treatment. While living there he looked like a hurricane that was calm soon after attacking his own springtime with a relentless thunderstorm. . . . Now he is out, but again in a ward of his own, the violets and cyclamens flourish inside him, rarely leaking from his lips when he smiles at us—the sensible ones as if throwing flowers to say: yes, it really exists (he means the happiest love). It becomes real only in a closed space, surrounded with madness. with flowers....

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Giorgi Lobzhanidze is an author of modern Georgian literature, a poet, and a translator. Upon publishing his first poetry collection in 1987 at age thirteen, he immediately became popular among a wide range of readers. Lobzhanidze takes great care in selecting his poems, only publishing what reflects the most important workings of his inner world. His translations of Arabic and Persian masterpieces are also widely acclaimed.