

## Poems

**Giorgi Lobzhanidze**

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*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 want—  
love leading to death.  
Hanging stiff, they continued to look  
into each other's eyes.

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 clothes—  
naked 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  
that  
I saw people  
last.

\* \* \*



Snow-covered trees  
at Mtatsminda Park,  
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### Dad the Santa Claus

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.

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.