

Unsent Letters from Rhodes

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I always wanted to write a book of my impressions of Rhodes, but somehow I could never manage it. I do not know whether it was not having the time or whether it simple not being in the mood to write. In 1997, I devoted two large essays to creation of the “Three Seas Writers and Translators Council” (TSWTC) in Rhodes (Greece) and establishment of the International Rhodes Centre for Writers and Translators. However since then I have not written anything about Rhodes, despite the fact that I go there at least twice a year to work. At least thousand times I intended, even sitting down and starting to write – but nothing resulted. In these eleven years of this blessed island turned to be a place like the homeland for me, and writing impressions of the homeland is immorality, if not the absurd for me.

“Rhodes became the homeland but all the same I cannot write about Rhodes any more”? - this is my first real effort record the eleven years, March 24, 2011 on the Three Seas Writers and Translators International Council letterhead sheet.

However, I am starting to write unsent letters from Rhodes, and I do not send them to anybody; I just collect them in the red folder with two compartments, with the logo of the Center on the cover in Greek and English and inscription Waves of Three Seas – International Writers & Translators Center of Rhodes.

This year we are founding the famous Rhodes writer Nikos Kazdaglis prize and I am designated to Rhodes as a member of the working group. It is already late March and I am working and resting at the same time, and, as soon as there is a free moment making recordings.

I caught the writing passion from the American and German women writers living in my neighborhood in the Center. After they go about food hunting in the morning they then lock

themselves up in their rooms and write till evening. The three of us go to a Greek restaurant together for dinner and upon returning they go on writing again.

I came here for other reason, but, unwillingly, unwittingly and step-by-step was become successfully involved in the festival. Soon we were able to share the fruits of our labor and based on by the number of written papers; I was in the lead. However, I do not speak about quality over quantity. Compared to me they are the well-known, professional writers. And I'd like to begin the Rhodes sketches and by giving an introduction of them.

Letter 1

Anja Tuckerman is a German writer and author of twelve books.

- I have more time now, my son is grown up; he live separately and takes care of himself, - Anja says. She is divorced and for fifteen years has been living with her boyfriend.

I was interested as a typical Georgian mother, how old is the child who lives alone and can take care of himself? He was twenty one. On hearing this I nodded, which means – Of course, it should be this way; it is even a little bit late. But you understand what I thought deep in my heart: She has basically turned the child out of the house into the cruel world, this is what she did! However parents of my generation only would think this way, it's a long time, and as we also have an increased trend of separation of adult "children" eager for independence from the families. The trend continues but the separation of the Georgian "children" from their mothers' skirts still is a difficult and painful process for use to bear.

Jessica Lott is an American writer; 36 years old, lives in Brooklyn, New York City, unmarried. Just now she has come to realize that she wants a child and a husband is needed for this purpose. She is of a traditional family. Her mother is a daughter of Ukrainians who escaped from the Soviet Union during the World War II, but Jessica does not remember, or rather, does not know her mother's Ukrainian name. She even was surprised when I asked about it and started to force her brain to – question and think; I do know but just cannot recollect. Then she remembered that nobody had ever asked her mother's maiden name, and her mother did not ever mention it either. However, as I understood from her talk, there is mostly Ukrainian cuisine recognized in their family: borsch (vegetable soup on a meat bouillon), salo (cured fatback. lard), meatballs, varenyki (dumplings) with sour cream, vegetable "shuba" (vegetable salad with sour fish), etc.

Jessica is a typical American woman. Open-hearted, communicative, polymathic; she studied at several prestigious universities in the US. Now she teaches creative writing (the art of fiction writing) and English literature at one of them. Jessica is easy to communicate with; time quickly passes with her: she is lively, intelligent and full of humor and love of life. Jessica is crazy with wanting to travel to Africa.

- All my serious love stories ended in catastrophe, which was followed by a great despair and frustration. I have collected the best life experience and artistic material. I do not regret it, but I am grateful for all my disappointments, they supported my novels so much, - she laughs.

- Yes, every cloud has a silver lining, Anja and I agreed.

Anja does not lack for sense of humor either, even more so. Her humor is more European refined. Recently, she has been preoccupied with thinking about the crime of Germans “Nazism” – crimes against humanity and, based on the topic, she is not at all in a joking mood. How could I imagine that in the 21st century, on Rhodes – the God’s place, in the area of the sun and the life, at the ceremony of establishment of Nikos Kazdaglis Prize, a Georgian philologist would have to analyze the crime of the German Nazis against humanity? No, I could never make this stuff up!

Anja received two letters this morning. We are now sitting in the dining room; she is twisting these letters in her hands and suddenly asks me

- Do you have centers like Rhodes in Georgia, for a writer that wants to come and work?

- I reply, “No, there are no such centers but there definitely is a possibility for a foreign writer to come and do their thing in Georgia. If anyone is truly interested, I can think about it and find ways.”

Anja told me that these letters are by a German poet, very talented and once very popular

- Now he is somewhat forgotten, from time to time he picks a country and starts to study it thoroughly. This time he has chosen Georgia and already collected a lot of material; the entire Georgian literature published abroad, and now the only thing left is to step foot on the Georgian land. The poet has been dreaming of it for a long time, he wants to write his actual live impressions about Georgia and Georgians... - Anja says.

- I respond, so what is the obstacle? – I am surprised with her response – Who will refuse to invite home such a man! – I interrupt Anja, but it is not all, the main thing is still to come... what holds him back?

- But he has no phone and has never had one, not to mention a computer and Internet access, the only way of communication which him by post. He writes letters to friends, acquaintances and completely unfamiliar people throughout the world. He writes on the ancient typewriter that is on its last legs, and sends letters out endlessly (I myself am a witness, from the time I arrived, as Anja receives two letters from him every day)...

- I interrupt Anja again... He loves you! –

- If I give him your address, he will send you as many letters, - she scares me, but she does not know that the Georgian mail is much slower than either the German and Greek post. It takes at least 20 day for a letter to arrive to Georgia. – Just imagine, I came to Rhodes, and when I opened the door of my room, there was a letter on the floor, like it happened in the nineteenth century, the letter was pushed in a chink under the door; a wonderful feeling.

- Perhaps, – I tell her and I think, yes, if these were love letters and not the product of a scribbler, for who does not care about whom he writes, he just writes. And about thirty years ago all Germany pressed his manuscripts to the heart.

- His popularity was followed by a big pause. As in Germany it is impossible to make a living with poetry alone. You have to have a patron (same way in Georgia!), you must have another job on the side. That's why he started working in a metallurgical factory as a worker, polishing steel surfaces. In recent years he made much physical working and a little bit of writing. Then he specialized in what turned into hobby – writing about different countries. Money is not his motivation and he does not make money with this either. But he is very interested in this work. Now, as I told you, he dreams on about Georgia and seeks ways to go there for writing.

One discouraging thought came to mind about bring him to my home in Georgia, as I had already brought once Chris Stead, an American from Oxford, Mississippi. However, Chris was a carpenter, a simple, unpretentious person. And having such a man at home seemed a little bit risky for me, as you never know and what might be spinning in his mind, especially in a place like Georgia, as our land full of surprises. In short, I may not be the one to make a good caregiver for such a man. But if anyone of you, the readers of these records are willing to invite him – no problem; I'll give your address and I guarantee that your mailbox (if you have any) will always be full of letters posted from Germany.

Recently I received the email message from Anja:

Dear Manana,

My assignment to Rhodes comes to the end, I hope you are well, healthy and in good spirits, a poet who writes of nature and poetry of Georgia (I told you about him in Rhodes) says Hello and recollects Vazha-Pshavela (this is what she wrote). Recently he has been in the South Germany, in the city where Grigol Robakidze lived before moving to Switzerland.

The weather is still changeable on Rhodes, it rains, and the house is full of invisible people.

Your Anja.

April 15, 2011, 1:47

P.S.

I talk to Gio Mgeladze at the Literature-Café in Vake. Whenever fits the surrounding so much that I cannot even imagine, what a person can do at this place without him. We speak about Tornike Gurjintakhi, a beginner writer that we both like very much.

- To tell the truth, I am surprised how it could happen that he wrote a six hundred-page novel in the era of digital technology... Who is going to read it?!

Ah, my dear Gio, I have not even heard about that German, who writes more than six hundred letters a day and does not recognize digital devices. So he lives calmly and without a hurry, writes letters on the meaning of universal values for common people, puts them into white envelopes, sticks stamps and sends them to the most inaccessible places of the Earth, where there are still no digital or mechanical devices. Now, thanks to Anja, I am waiting for cards from him, if he sends them in April, I hope I'll get them till September.

Letter 2

I am on Rhodes and cannot recall the name of the writer **Burtchuladze**. That is Burtchuladze, who played Teimuraz Tsikhistavi in the remake of Mikheil Javakhishvili's "Jaqo's Dispossessed" (Jakos Khiznebi), and who is said to very much look like the author.

I saw on TV that the "young" writers of Georgia made something like biennale in Kutaisi before leaving for Rhodes. The audience was so bored that Burtchuladze had to stir up a small incident to wake up the attendants, but this small one turned into to such a scandal that it

even made our President angry who himself is especially fond of scandals. In particular, Burtchuladze offered a message without exception to all the Kutaisians who were sitting and standing in the hall, and before starting he shot the Kutaisian phrase – “Welcome to thieves, death to whores!” Half of the audience started up on saying this. Luckily, the people began to leave the hall in protest, but who would have done so many messages, Burtchuladze? I do not think he would manage it. He gladly pointed out: There was a reaction like I expected, i.e., we, the thieves have stayed and they, the whores departed.

In short, some people who heard it were glad in their hearts, some people felt offended and among them – the President of Georgia, who was particularly anxious that some of the artists, deepened in self-admiration did not appreciate his contribution, they did not even take the effort to look around and attach importance to the now renovated Kutaisi. Saakashvili called Burtchuladze and “everyone like him” retards and ungrateful. But Burtchuladze have said whilom “I gave Saakashvili my vote as well as my ass”. So who is ungrateful now – the artist or the President? What else could the writer do – he declared on television – I made a joke, and the minority did not understand it, and the President did a real democrat president should do – he protected the minority.

So who now is a thief and who is the whore whose descendants will now take care of this. If you ask me, writers are worried in vain, Burtchuladze will grow old too, and he too will be share the same fate and be attacked by youngsters, but I cannot say what will the synonym for the word whore at that time to come.

This is the homeland! Were from I started – Rhodes, the German writer, the American one, German poet – admirer of Georgia, and yet, after all, through the Lit-Café I found myself in “MayKutaisi” where, thanks to our reformist law enforcement structures, not a single thief remain; the country is now inundated by whores!

Letter 3

Sandro is also Georgian writer. I learned about his becoming a writer recently, when he appeared as an expert in social media networks on one of the youth- educational programs. Ten years ago, before the Rose Revolution, we worked together in the Non-Governmental Organizations Foundation “Horizon”, I was the head of the Public Outreach Program, and he was the video studio manager, designer and operator of the same program. At that time he was one of the best “IT-guys”, i.e., IT experts in Tbilisi, to be even clearer, he was considered

to be the master of telecommunications. Therefore, as all Masters, he consistently and persistently sucked my blood, but I have to admit that in the end he made everything perfectly, and as the Master, I took thorough care to prevent Sandro from being bothered or anxious – the studio and the general public needed him. However, it should be said that my studio somehow contributed to his formation, progress and continued professional development.

All developed as a tale: once, Sandro brought a small that self-made up and self-illustrated book of a special black and white graphic design. There was a very clumsy, worm-like man on the cover who looked very much like the author himself. The book was titled “The story of the sad dick” or something like this. I did not know honestly what to do – either to laugh or take the author’s trouble serious or even to congratulate him with the first book published! In short, I became very anxious, but I realized that this fruit of creativity was self-made, the only copy, i. e. as it is called – exclusive and at least in the nearest future there was prospective of distribution, especially taking into consideration the sense – feelings – possibilities of the main character.

Sandro is tall, very thin and modest young man, the intelligent from head to foot. He has a perfect sense of humor. Indeed, he was in the process of creative search and tried to create his own literary genre, possessed vast information and sought, tried and examined his talent and ability. Was this genre in the process of being formed, like a good wine, developed as an artist... and I understood it in theory, but only in theory; since that “fateful” day, and because of that book and due to its title, I could not look into the eyes of our colleague Sandro. When I saw him, his sad graphic character came to my mind immediately and I felt ashamed very first of Sandro and then of myself. Luckily, Sandro soon went to study in Italy. We hired a new designer. I have not seen Sandro since.

Time passed. The opposition made the famous “corridor of shame” at the entrance of the Georgian Public Broadcaster. No employee could enter the building of the television without having to pass through this corridor. However, “those needed”, the big fish, somehow still managed to get into the television building bypassing the corridor all together. Now the small-fry would be subjected the flood of mud and dirt, recriminations. So, as I stood there, I saw my former designer coming – thin, tall, very humble but courageous and not afraid at all to pass the corridor. He was stopped and asked for the document, replied with a smile and pulled out a document; the back rows sounded the mocking “uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu...” and some exclamations. Despite the fact that no one of the mockers knew who was this man, what was he doing, what was his duty, what was he supposed to decide and whether he was to decide anything in that television state. His ID was twisted for some time and then was returned to

him and he passed the way. Sandro was not anxious by any single nerve of his ordeal. He calmly made his way to the entrance.

I stood in the ranks of the opposition at the “corridor of shame” and looked at Sandro with the bag over the shoulder on his way to the entrance of the television building. Again I felt ashamed of him and was very angry with myself for this. Then I burst into laughter unintentionally, I laughed very loudly and no one was surprised, because it was such a mess and fuss about and that no-one could realize who and why were angry or cursing or laughing. The reason of my laughter was that I never have felt ashamed for anybody so many times and so sharply, as for my former co-workers, which, in principle, having no role in my life, lived elsewhere, on another plane, in another world, and wrote stories of “sad dicks” for himself.

Funny thing is that thousands of years later, one fine, sunny day, in this beautiful little country me and my old comrade turned to be on the opposite sides of the “corridor of shame” However, both of us were “the children of this little and unfortunate Georgia”!

Letter 4

Zurab Lezhava is a Georgian writer – not young, but he has just come on the scene, more precisely – and recently became popular; he is the author of a number of bestsellers – a former prisoner, who made living by trading at the “Dry Bridge” for years. He had no house and lived at the Dry Bridge in a self-made hut as a hermit, interested neither with the Government nor with the Writers’ Association (intriguing already, is not it?).

Nobody gave the writer possibility to remain aloof as a hermit. The Minister of Culture himself was interested in him: to prevent another fatal mistake of the people of Georgia and not to lose another artist under a staircase like Nikala Pirosmani, the Minister took special care of him. Excellent, noble approach, but it, as happens, was overdone, eventually some mystical, classical-exotic, avant-gardist, and absurd-realistic artist’s icon was made of the hermit writer, and as expected, this discovery of culturology was attributed to the current Georgian Minister of Culture. However, did there exist Zurab Lezhava with his club books? Yes, he did exist, but before the “peer writers” started speaking about him, the Rose Revolution Minister exploited his brains, was on the scene earlier than everyone (As far as I know), and he appointed Lezhava as the head of one of the departments at the Ministry of Culture).

Lezhava tried a lot not to lose his identity and mysterious image, but when the regime needs your icon and your creativity for its own purposes, it is very difficult to resist, even the experience gained during the harsh regime cannot be effectively addressed. I knew nothing about him, neither about his work. I was very angry with myself for my lack of knowledge – how I could have missed out on such a writer. Definitely he a man of my generation, a generation that I know rather generation, which includes writers and others who are generally artistic and scientific; they are part of a larger club that even includes criminal circles.

What is interesting is that Zurab Lezhava was discovered by the Georgia's Minister of Culture, as the alternative to today's and yesterday's dismal (not to say untalented) writers. It appears that he had to go to great lengths to tame him. As a representative sample of Georgia, it was the very story of Zurab Lezhava that was picked for the Anthology of the World Literature, the first and hopefully not the last one. So we are to the point where I said that was very happy that at last the creator, master, the same one who will ultimately crown the lost his 70s generation of behalf of the generation: the biography which is the most suitable for a writer, the name – splendid, works – controversial and scandalous as well; now briefly and fully decorated – a formed and established writer. Is this for the sake of appearance? The topic of appearance is not something to be spoken about here, when there are so many of necessary attributes present, albeit, appearance is also something different, provided you make an effort and then broaden it: genius inherent naivety, confusion, slight naughtiness, significant smile, a little bit bent and swinging like a reed, in short, a typical Nobel prize winner. I am now waiting for his premium speech at some Gala Award Ceremony.

And the speech was given. My apologies, as I did not thoroughly maintain the vocabulary, as I am here on Rhodes/ I do not remember exactly what words were used, but the style and content are maintained:

- Let me thank the Parliament ... for this and that! Let me thank the Ministry of Culture and personally to Nika Rurua ! Thanks to our father and bread-winner, Zaliko Samadashvili and thanks (no, he did not say the Party and the Government...) to our irrepressible, or insuperable, or courageous; I do not remember what epithet he used from among these three, the President, he said, and thus crowned his premium speech of gratitude.

What was a period of the modern history of Georgia that I have not passed – being a October Children, a member of the Pioneers and then Komsomol ... I am a witness to the fight against the Social Realism of the Georgian 60s representatives and they never witnessed such personal

(in mass – yes; I did) and expressed ecstasy even from the most partocratic writers. No, I cannot recollect it, and if there was, let the Minister remind me.

I was watching on TV, how the addressees of this endless gratitude flushed red and bad mannered laughed due to inconvenience, other than the President, who did not attend the Gala award ceremony. Someone told me that he joked and I was calmed. Then I become angry again – I cannot understand jokes well any more. I do not know, it might even be true; we were made to listen and watch such a humor for the last decades that I am not longer able to recognize a real joke. However, someone said that in every joke there is but part joke, the rest of it is the total truth.

P.S. I did not read anything of Zurab Lezhava's yet; I am still on Rhodes, but I eager to go to Georgia and enjoy the pleasure of the first reading. May be each of the above will turn out to be upside down!

Letter 5

“I am a little Georgian and, therefore, the son of the Caucasus Mountains”. But the matter is that the life goes on and the “progress” involved the world that I needed just about ten hours to fly from the Caucasus Mountains to the Himalayas and to cry there from my heart – here I want to die. To say in Shanghai that nothing could make me step in there any more, in Madrid I needed even less time to say – this is my country, go along the path of Christ in Jerusalem and to lose behavior, smoke a pipe at the bank of the Mississippi River with Huckleberry Finn, to be lost in the hurricane and downpour in Pompeii labyrinth, jumping in a tiny boat named “Latvia” on nine-point waves in stormy Gibraltar, waving the flag on Switzerland as part of some anti-globalist action, be at the epicenter of the terrorist attacks in London. I still do not know just how many more misunderstandings I can find myself in and out of – I guess as many as possible.

Now I am on Rhodes, one of the most historically important Greek islands, at the land of one of the world's miracles – Colossus of Rhodes and together with my none Georgian friends work on the establishment of prize of the prominent Rhodes writer Nikos Kazdaglis (yet another misunderstanding, but it's a long story, and another time and separately about it, besides, I have described the story of my connection with Rhodes in the two long essays in the 90s. Here I would like just to note, that this miracle island emerged in the waters of the Aegean and Mediterranean seas became my safe harbor, when I was turned out from my “own” Heaven on the Black Sea Coast).

What a man took me away with a firm hand – the God in his boundless abundance gave me the opportunity, together with the people, who have come from the different countries of the World to do small good deeds on this God blessed land, at least, plant one olive tree. My house on Rhodes is the Rhodes International Center for Writers and Translators called Waves of Three Seas is located on the beach, on the mountain cliff, in the former palace of the Turkish Pasha and looks over the beach like a beacon.

It is March 2011, wonderful warm, sunny days here. By the way, they do not know here the expression “Crazy March” - March and April are velvet... If we do not consider the overall economic crisis that has hard hit Greece, this is the only place where there still is universal peace and solidarity. As for the crisis, Rhodes inhabitants’ conviction is that it is the result of envy by the rest of the world – “they called us so often that we are in the heaven until they put the evil eye upon us” - they say.

I can see the beach from my window. Today the beach will start to be cleaned. Preparations have begun for the tourist season. I saw one or two men, the brave ones entering the water and enjoying its pure blue freedom. The sea is the calmest today and glitters like a mirror. I can see the reddish stones dispersed in the bottom even from my window. I am in the heaven, where else? And there is no such power, which could force me to bite into an apple and be kicked out from the paradise. Although there is a plenty of other wonderful fruit on Rhodes, and such a wonderful fruit!

Letter 6

“It’s good for the soul and the successors, if you live in plus, it is not good if you are in minus, it is a disaster when you are zero! Flavius” (extract from the Facebook).

Nikko Savas is the most expensive restaurants owner in the “Old Town” of Rhodes, but now he has grown a little bit older and as the “wedding party general” he appears out of his office in the depth of the restaurant only when pursuing cases.

- Let us enter, and if he is there, I’ll just say Hello, - Peter Curman said.

I followed him and we passed a very rich golden laid red wooden corridor with black wooden tables and massive chairs of the same color. There were some enormous mirrors and crystal glasses sparkling in the light and impressive candle-holders. At the end of the corridor, almost in the dark, an old man sitting by the card table was smoking a cigar. When he saw Peter Curman on the way, he rolled up his eyes, quickly looked at him up and down, giving him the

one go over, as if trying to remember him at first sign and smiled politely. It seemed to me that he could not recognize, Peter although he thought this he said I am 'Peter Curman from Sweden.' The host sighed deeply. I am sure he was not fully aware of who he was; it seemed like the version and cheerfully shouted, I recognized you, how could I not recognize you, Petro, Petro, you old chump! And he made a sign to his employees to provide service. Then we were invited to a very nicely decorated table and asked – What will you drink. Peter ordered Ouzo, I ordered Greek coffee. Nikko smiled gently; by now he seemed able to gradually start recalling who was Peter, having spent time with him and sometimes repeated, Oh, Petro, Petro! Then Peter said, “Bambula”, and then bursting into hysterical laughter. Nikko, as if he was waiting for this, started telling thousands of fairy tales and real stories one after another, enjoying himself and we enjoyed with him.

- Oh Petro Petro, where have you been till now? I completed two heart surgeries– said Nikko and inhaled such a smoke that I was scared almost to undergo the surgery. Then he twisted the cigar between his fingers and said, what can I do, I am not smart enough to give up smoking.

The waiters served us and Nikko smiled then with squinted eyes and recalled stories of mountains and plains. It turned out that during the good times, Levis came to Rhodes and walked in the Old Town. He liked Nikko's restaurant, and said he wanted to have dinner here to his bodyguards. They immediately burst in into the restaurant, looked over the place, ordered the administrator – “Mr. Levis is going to have dinner here and get the place prepared.” Administrators in panic ran to Nikko, and reported Levis is visiting us and please go and meet him.

- Poor administrator! He was so confused, he could not even think. He forgot that I was the captain of this ship, Nikko Salas, had made a big mistake, poor thing; I do not remember where I have the blue jeans of that Levis, on which of my attics! – Then he told about Onassis:

- He was very smart, but egoist, and was not satisfied with what Big Papa (tracked his finger to the sky) gave him. He filled his head with numbers. He asked God one and many zeros after it and the God gave it to him. Gave him some time, and when the time came to settle it, he added several more zeros to the new demand. The God said, let it be yours but I'll cut a number. And he cut one and just many zeros were left. And zero is zero, even if you have a million of them, - said Nikko and showed us zero with the index finger and the thumb.

- Onassis had nothing left, neither son nor daughter, nor Kennedy's wife. He told Americans, I am going to make my son the President of America and Americans will be responsible for making what happens to him afterwards. This very smart business had not enough brains, he

wanted to reign over the world, wanted too much, sacrificed everything for the popularity. We do not like it, popularity brought nothing good to anybody, it is nothing – zero! I love embezzling money; I cannot stand the ciphers, Big Papa (index finger up again) knows! It will be the way he decides! Papa does not like the slaves of the ciphers, you should follow the voice of the heart and the mind will not betray you.

In short, our Nikko became a real Aristotle in the age of seventy years, sits there and full with experience, now has time for the God and philosophy. He can give a master class on the questions of life to a stranger or a businessmen who has lost his way.

- Oh, Petro, Petro, I remember Bambula, how can I forget? He added at last, where is you Bambula, where is old Rhodes... - he sighed, and inhaled deeply to burst my heart. Bambula turned to be the restaurant in the sea, with the drinks, bazooka and “nymphs”. - Young people do not care of anything except ciphers. Money! Money is nothing, zero! He was saying and looking through zero made of his fingers.

Letter 7

Lika, I cannot tell you what kind of a journalist she is but she is successful and almost respected by the Government and its international partner organizations. It is true that she knows everything about journalism. She is especially good in the theory of journalism and what is particularly important in today’s journalism – its “management and administration”.

Lika’s writing and speaking style is relevant for the field; however, she does not appreciate the active and practical forms of the art.

She is extremely “honest” and law-abiding, and in proving it, please allow me to share with you a small introduction and some humble comments, including real facts:

I do not know exactly what motivated me to remember Georgian journalism or its apologist, Lika, with her honesty law-abiding self, in the cradle of civilization, on Rhodes, in this personified paradise? Nonetheless, what can I do you if it happened here, a venue where the thought boundaries are indefinite, the mind blessed with enjoyment and which at times sometimes throws you into a state of undesirable judgment and even more undesirable memoirs?

After this prelude you surely have guessed that there is a large gap between Lika and me. She is the ideal product of the today’s reality and especially close to the mentality of the ruling class, thoroughly knowing and executing its policy; she is more or less a person of principle,

necessarily untalented and if needed – even immoral. Such people are also much appreciated by the international organizations and the “experts” thereof, who are not well familiar with the local circumstances.

Lika, is not a single person for me, she is a collective noun and represents the caste, which emerged in the bosom of the NGO civil sector of Georgia in of the 90s, developed, rapidly reproduced and strengthened.

It happened that this collective “Lika” managed to leave her mark along with the various current events on the different stages of my life. And since this image is still topical and current in our reality, it is very hard to ignore and delete her out of my life.

To make it short, Lika, with her modest smile and the best regards once almost made me lose my job, but attentive colleagues and hot-hearted NGO personnel revealed her “naive” mistake and made it a subject for public review. For the second time she almost made me arrested (with the same modest smile and the best regards). This story is so original that it is really worthwhile telling:

One day I was called from the United Nations Office for Democratic Development (this organization published a book with my authorship on the media development issues in Georgia, titled: “We live in the age of information”) and they asked me to temporarily stop the distribution my book. What’s going on, I asked and they said, the international organization ITRAK employee reported that the questionnaire used in your book belongs to them and you illegally used it. Suddenly I did not understand what program or what misappropriated questionnaire they were talking about, because I could imagine misappropriation of anything in this strange society, but the questionnaire? No, I could not; I asked the person who notified me again of what this was about; please repeat who is complaining and what the complaint is about. They repeated and added that I had presented the book to that person with the commemorative inscription. (Do not ask me the contents of the inscription, I do not remember, and even if I did, I would not recollect it, as I am ashamed). This complainant was neither more nor less any other than the above-mentioned Lika.

The point is that years ago, I was invited by ITRAK to take part in the survey to establish the index of media development and a questionnaire was provided to me and other participants working on it. I collected a large amount of material that I passed to ITRAK as agreed; a year later I wrote a book on the processes reflecting the development of the newest Georgian media based on this material and using the same questionnaire. United Nations funding was obtained for this book and many copies were published in Georgian and English languages.

More importantly, in the foreword of the book I stressed that the publication used the International Organization ITRAK questionnaire.

The UN Office and the publishing house stopped distribution of the book until the case was settled. The ITRAK lawyer contacted me to clarify the issue. The case took on the criminal twist, but fortunately, they read it thoroughly, asked around, made sure, and in some days the book distribution went on. I escaped being arrested and the ITRAK lawyer gave me some professional advice – before you give away a book as a present make inscription on the title page, think a hundred times!

After this story, by the way, one of the Itrack lead employees was proved to be have been involved in bribery and he was imprisoned for 8 years.

I know! I remember one of my friends in his hall of residence in Moscow entertained his roommate with khatchapuri that his mother had sent him and the roommate told the administration – his parents are teachers and where from do they have such opportunities?

Since then I have many times met this Lika on journalism competitions (at least as a member of the jury), or photo exhibitions, or conferences, and she smiled to me with a humble, modest smile, as if nothing happened between us. As the Americans would say: nothing personal – just business! – She smiled and sometimes asked about my family. Once I heard on TV that she was elected as a member of the renewed Board of the Public Television at the time when the “dogs” were turned out and the “cats” were made to bark. A few months ago I saw her on TV. She was speaking about one of the ITRAK media projects. ITRAK has now appointed the irreplaceable Lika as the director of the project.

P.S. ITRAK is the invented name. No, but why did I remember Georgian media and its supporters in the middle of Europe, the cradle of civilization, on this beautiful spring day? How can I understand? Such is a human nature, ungrateful, the devil comes, and then... Come along; time to get out of Paradise!

Letter 8

On our way from Gulripsh (Black Sea village in Abkhazia) to Tbilisi we – my son, Soso Nizharadze and me were involved in a terrible accident in Khobi (Samegrelo Region, West Georgia). “Niva” was in such a state that Zurab Tsereteli, its owner, who was following us in his Jeep, left the crashed vehicle alongside the roadside like Magdana’s Lurja (the story of the Georgian writer Ekaterine Gabashvili: a sick and dying donkey was left on a roadside by its owner; a poor woman Magadana healed it back to health and named it Lurja). The three of us survived the ordeal without a single scratch and upon arriving to Tbilisi my parents were none the wiser of what had just happened.

It was at a time the Soviet Union period of stagnation was in full swing. Few people went to church during this period and my colleague Chito Nemsadze was no exception. We wanted to ask Chito for advice: explaining what had happened, how God had saved us, and now we wanted to sacrifice a sheep and how to go about properly carrying out the ritual, - I asked. "Keep the fast" she said, "one fast is more than sacrificing a whole flock."

Soso could not fully trust Chito's advice and anyway sacrificed a sheep at the Didube church and made a big feast to celebrate our survival. And I kept fast for the first time in my life – for good measure.

I accompanied my mother to Moscow. She treated in Kuntsevo, in the Kremlin hospital, with a very heavy diagnosis. I was with her during a day and spent nights in hotel "Moscow". It took me 45 minutes by taxi from the city to Kuntsevo.

At one o'clock in the morning the phone call woke me up. Half sleeping I heard a woman who told me in Russian: "Ваша мама умирает, скорей приезжайте! (Your mother is dying come soon)". I cannot remember what was going on in my mind after this phrase. After I recovered, "Алло, алло, вы меня слышите? (Hello, hello, do you hear me?)," - sounded from the phone. I asked an absolutely stupid question "Она жива? (Is she alive?)". Yes, she is alive, but she is dying and asks you to come, she said.

Taxis were on duty twenty-four hours by the main entrance of the hotel. I took the first one.

- Давай брат, гони в Кунцево, мама умирает! (Now, bro, we need to fly to Kuntsevo, my mother is dying) – I told the driver as fast as possible and started to take care of my unlaced boots, unbuttoned fur coat and awry "ushanka" (fur cap). The driver turned to me and saw that it was a woman – a beautiful Russian woman. I was not surprised, as I sometimes met women-taxi drivers in Moscow, she was very beautiful. I apologized, I said, my mind is confused, I do not even know if my mother is alive, I was told that she is alive, but they may have deceived me.

- Do not be afraid no one would have deceived you, - she said and drove off.

She took an amazing speed. All the way I was sorry that I did not know how to pray and prayed to God with my own words to see my mother alive, I promised, do not make me take her dead from here and I'll keep all the fasts. We drove in the Kuntsevo forest. The road had no end, the beautiful driver asked me what entrance did I need, the second, I replied. She turned the car and gave the signal to the watchman, the gates opened and she stopped by the building. I had the money in my hand and when I tried to put it on the front seat she put her hand over mine and told me: No need to go now and see your mother. Just then I looked at her closely and realized that neither she was a taxi driver nor the "foreign" car in which I was sitting, was a taxi. The woman was dressed very richly and tastefully. She had caring, wise eyes. There was neither time for verbal expression of emotions and gratitude, and as I noticed, nor a necessity, everything was said between the two of us just by our eyes. Now the main thing was to get to my mother's ward soon very soon. It was snowing amazingly, with beautiful, big flakes.

- If I jump up the three stairs together, my mother will be alive, if I did run that corridor in 20 steps, my mother will be alive, I counted the same way as Sosoia did in the “I see the sun”: If I count fifty Khatia will be capable of seeing, if I jump over this pit, Khatia will be capable of seeing... I burst the door of the 8th ward open and... My mother – white, clean and groomed, like a small child, was sitting on the bed, looked at me with her big blue eyes with long eyelashes. Then she started weeping – I have scared you so much, but I was really too bad, now how will you go back?

In September 1984, my sister and I were in Gulripsh with our families. Our parents were in Saguramo. In the morning Aunt Nelly came and told us to get ready, as you have to go to Tbilisi, Nodar has been taken to the hospital. Ketino was five months pregnant. Nodariko was nine years old, Levaniko – five.... None of us said a word in the plane. We flew the endless 45 minutes from Gulripsh to Tbilisi. I wanted to pray again, and again I did not know any prayer. I asked the God in my own words all the way – let my father be alive and I’ll keep fast.

We went directly to the “Lechkombinat” Hospital from the airport. Ketino ran into the ward, Nodariko followed her; I was weeping by the window but could not enter. My Father was alive, but I felt that I had very little time, soon I would lose him. My father was sitting on the bed when I entered the ward. He hugged my son and mumbled with sweet voice – “Come into my heart your majesty!”

Letter 9

Rhodes again, in May 2008, for the tenth anniversary of the Three Seas Writers and Translators Council (TSWTC) one elderly couple from amongst the noble citizens of Rhodes presented the first floor of their own “modest” palace with several halls to be used as the Writers and Translators International Center of Rhodes. It was decided that this area would be entirely devoted to the children’s literature sector and the Opening Ceremony would be the first event of the 10th anniversary of TSWTC.

All this, fortunately to me, happened when the President of TSWTC was I, Manana Dumbadze at your service. A small palace, which was so generously donated to enrich the city’s cultural heritage, was hidden in the Garden of Eden that a real Greek palace deserves. The yard was paved in a mosaic like traditional Rhodes stones circle. There was nothing to be done or added. We broke our brains how to step in this God given premises to make it symbolic and eternal, modest and of “genius”.

The point is that whatever developed country are guests from, the Greeks are still some suspicious about their taste and judgment. Our Council was composed of nine members: they were Swedish, Danish, Russian, Bulgarian, Turkish, German, Finnish, Greek and Georgian. The hosts very kind and polite and they urged us to not worry about anything, we undertake all the organizational issues, and if you still want to make a gift, bring a dictionary from your countries as a gift in honoring the library. The Council, of course, gladly accepted the offer, but thought that it was a very small contribution from the proud group of such international importance. So, until the Council would think of

something “grander”, I decided to my best to save Rhodians from new “invaders”. Let us plant a tree, I exclaimed.

- Nothing else except the olive tree is missing in this garden – the olive sapling from the writers and translators is the only and the most convenient chance for our perpetuation and we must not miss the opportunity of the moment.

The Council looked at me with doubt, Rhodes administration – with hope, maybe they will trust her and there will be nothing more substantial than that. Then they promised to choose the best sapling, bring shovels with the bows tied, prepare a hole and let us plant this tree with the tunes of Sirtaki. In short, the both sides were satisfied with the idea of planting an olive tree.

On the Ceremony day the Rhodians did exactly as they promised. Moreover, they made an illumination around the hole. After the ceremony of tree planting, all of us put the dictionaries, brought from our countries by the sapling and recited a poem in our language.

This way in the center of Rhodes, in the most beautiful courtyard of the most beautiful red palace, of the hands of the writers and translators of the three seas countries as a symbol of the world’s cultural cooperation and solidarity an olive tree sapling was born which is five years old today, with the stretched out branches, flourishing and decorated with fruit.

Every year I go there and speak with it. What are you doing, how are you, is everything OK, I asked? The first year it seemed a bit weak and pale, Rhodians and others calmed me, it will grow up and become stronger. I did not like it in the second year either, it was leaning so much with each gust of wind that my heart burst with fear that it would be broken. Then it recovered and put on flesh and it became clear that it was a girl, a gentle, beautiful maiden, sun burnt, disheveled with the eternal breeze of the island.

I am sitting in front of her and my heart fills with pride. My lady Olive has developed so much. Filled with greenish-silver leaves and it has also developed fruit for the first time which has made me extremely happy. Her trunk is as thick as my wrist already, and she turns up her nose at me so much that I cannot even ask – How are you?.. Everything tells me that she feels very, very well.

As to me, I am also very well because I have discovered that it was in vain that I envied my compatriots, who have also planted gardens and a forest in co-operation with the Government or the Church. Yes, I envied them because here I am here today, on Rhodes, and my own eyes looking at the fruit of my thought and deed.

Yes, here, on the holy land of ancient Hellas, planted with my own hands, cared for and the lullaby sung olive queen, beautiful Demetra (that is what I called her) grows up and she is a Georgian by mother, she cannot escape it – Manana’s daughter!

Letter 10

Julius Caesar was very young when he was captured by pirates and a big ransom was demanded. The supporters of the future Caesar were collecting money to rescue him, Worrying about His Homeland to save money collected until the next Caesar, Julius did not lose time and started to test his declamatory talents on the pirates. Pirates were taken with the speeches of the young Roman and did not hide their delight. Once Julius told them – I'll come back and destroy you. The pirates laughed at the young Roman's impudence and they forgave him. Meanwhile the Romans had collected the ransom, and saved Caesar of captivity. And he faithfully fulfilled the promise: returned and killed all the pirates.

This and several other similar "juicy" stories of the Roman history told me **Vasos Minaidis**. He is one of the most prominent citizens of Rhodes – the owner of the network of the largest banks and luxury hotels. In addition, he is so thoroughly familiar with the ancient period, as if he lived in that era. In low tone, almost whispering, with screwed-up eyes and significant and ironical, I would say, cunning, Greek smile he contemplates all the modern historical events from the point of view of the ancient history and philosophy. He precisely prescribes and estimates what will happen in the near and distant future. When Peter Curman and I expressed anxiety in response of one of his disturbing hypotheses, Peter even tried to argue – it will not happen this way, Vasos calmed him with forgiving a smile: "Do not worry about it, by this time no single bone of you will be in this world."

The interesting thing as well is that Vasos undoubtedly best of all knows where and how the money can be made on Rhodes, he blindly finds all the open and closed doors, all the keyholes. He is incredibly knowledgeable about classical and contemporary music, and still, and speaks of nothing with such a confidence, as of history. He smiles at you with the screwed up examiner's eyes, and listens, listens... He is listening in order to fit the little-known or "unpublicized" story of the old or new history of Greece and Italy to the situation in the decisive moment.

Mr.Minaidis is thoroughly familiar with the details of Greece's relations with other countries. I thought about it when at the table he reminded me of the Swede, Peter Curman, the Greek-Swedish relationship in history, Sezer Duru – Greece-Turkey relationship, our German counterpart – Greece-Germany relationship and he did not miss relationship between Georgia, more precisely, Colchis and Greece. And all of his arguments were saturated with the unique and articulate evidence.

Vasos' wife Lee Minaidis, is brought up and educated in America, she is a typical American woman, thin, with athletic body and refined manners, and her face is just as beautiful. She is active in American way because she and Vasos have no children; Lee is completely involved in the public activity worldwide. Now she sits at the table and asks a rhetorical question:

- Yes, but why did not the world become crazy, when ordinary people were killed in Rwanda? Because there is no oil in Rwanda! – She answered her own question.

And Vasos smiles out of his screwed up eyes... Now I understand who he reminds me of... the Biblical King Ecclesiastes.

Letter 11

I do not know what want from this Burchuladze; he never did anything bad to me, on the contrary, when he occasionally appears on the television – bald-headed, with the outlined goatee. I think that he should have a good sense of humor. I did not read anything of him till the end, even the “Inflatable Angel”. As many times as I started it, I came upon some bad dirty words, and made sure that cursing does not suit everybody. So, I abandoned blaming myself. Shit!

Do you remember on Tbilisoba (the city holiday) on TV, we were made to drink bottoms up like the toast to siblings, the soul-kiss of the “Tbilisi Live” TV anchorwoman with some showman? Now remember: the Italian film of genius “Paradiso” and the finale – more than a hundred different kisses with different angle and passion. What an aestheticism, what a beauty, you cannot end watching, there is nothing more unexpected, and great in the film. Luckily, Georgian sex does not depend on the “Tbilisi Live” anchor or we would not escape a demographic catastrophe, we – a smaller people of Georgia!

Getting back to the subject of Burtchuladze, not that he seemed very biased, but last time, and I shall not mention his name again. The thing is that I am still on Rhodes and there is nobody to remind me of his first name, although I have on the tip of my tongue – Zura, Zaza, Zezva... But I think this man does not need a name at all, anyway he is always mentioned by his family name. Despite this nobody has never mixed him with Paata Burtchuladze (a world famous Georgian opera singer), also with Irakli Burtchuladze (Irakli is the “tough guy” of my neighborhood – very much respected in his “gang”, good professional in what he does). I know another Burtchuladze, he is an architect, also known as Burtchula, one of the most desirable eligible bachelors of all the times, and he is still a bachelor.

In short, we do not argue that Paata is a great singer, as well as that Burtchula is a social lion – at least I would not argue on this point, but what about Irakli Burtchuladze – he does not care about who argues about him, if it is not connected with the street elite. And the writer Burtchuladze, somehow he is always the subject of argument and often he has to apologize for his behavior, sayings or works. In short, it turns out that he is not responsible for his words and deeds. It turned out that he makes a cool message (he announced it himself from the big scene in Kutaisi, at the meeting of writers) and added that he is a thief, but somehow no one detains him for it... Shit!

Letter 12

Chris and I found ourselves in the office of the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court of Georgia because of the absurd situation. Absurd, since the case that got us there was needed an English-

speaking performer. Chris was my American friend, who followed my husband and me from Oxford, Mississippi and “got through” that notorious 90-ies with us.

The mediator, who led us to the Supreme Court, was my friend. He told me – we need just silence and English-speaking skills from you (I tell this story now because any time of limitation has expired, and it has nothing to do with criminal activity – I hope).

I immediately understood that I should not ask too many questions when I saw several silent men with a very serious image in the office of the Deputy Supreme Court Chairman. And what I should necessarily know (as a “language-speaker”), was the following: a teenage son of one of the influential citizens left one of the most prestigious American colleges and went to the state of Georgia to visit his Georgian friends. The college agitated and started searching, but as they were not able to find fled Tato, they contacted the parents – can you please let us know the whereabouts of your son. Now the parents agitated and started to call here and there and found their child, who was refusing to return to college, but did think about coming back to Georgia.

Parents informed the college administration – the child is alive, but he is ashamed of his behavior and is scared to go back to the college (the technique of Georgian coverage). Americans sighed in relief and politely informed the parents that the police will by all find the child and painlessly manage his extradition to the homeland. College leadership assured the parents that the extradition process would be held in accordance with all the international standards: they would take the child to the airport themselves and hand him to the reliable persons who will quietly release him home.

You probably understand that it in no way did it suit the family who have done and paid much for their star boy to study in America – in the one of the country’s most prestigious colleges. Georgian mentality started to operate immediately, the council of advisors gathered and decided to “persuade” in Georgian way the Master of American Management – the college principal. I asked Chris to help me.

- Chris, help us, you are an American and you better know how to speak with the American college principal, where she may have sensitive spots – I desperately asked Chris, because after the year and a half experience of working in the United States, more or less, I knew the American way of life.

- There is no chance that an American tells another American what you’re talking about. Forget about it, you will make even worse, it is better for you to speak, you are a Georgian, it is a different culture, it is more understandable, and who knows, maybe they even offer something acceptable for you, – no less hopelessly replied Chris, - I’ll sit here and direct you, so that you do not say too much – he promised.

So, as already mentioned, at 12 o’clock at night Chris and I, together with the supporter of the “aggrieved”, prepared ourselves for the fight for the next generation education in the Supreme Court room lit with candles (in the 90-ies recession neither the Supreme Court was supplied power).

Deputy Chairman took out of the pocket and several five lari phone receipts and called. He gave the phone to me. My hands were frozen. From there, over the ocean, a lady, the American College Principal talked with me. I explained in long that I am the aunt of their Georgian student (I guess that I still have to repent for this and other such stupid lies in my life).

- It is great to hear you, how are you? – the lady asked with the friendly and calm voice.

- Thank you, we are fine, and you?

- Perfectly

- We are still on Tato's issues, we talked to the child, and I want to speak to you about a few details.

- I am very pleased; and where is Tato?

- He is in Georgia, but we do not know the address, he is very scared. He asked me to explain to you that he regrets his behavior and asks to give him a chance to go back to school and prove that he is very committed – my ears and cheeks flushed at the same time so much, that the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court gave me a glass of water.

- Thank you, Madam, but unfortunately the policy of our county and this particular college cannot take into account Tato's request, now the main thing is that Tato appears and we will do our best to ensure that it is safe to return home – explained the Principal. I was looking into Chris's eyes, he did not move.

- Madam, the point is that Tato is afraid to return to the college, and that is why he does not tell us his whereabouts – I started to open the cards – the child is afraid to be punished by the parents. Therefore, he refuses to return home. If you do not forgive him and not give him a chance to improve, he will hide – silence from the both sides.

- Yes, but why is he scared of the parents? Why go not you explain him that you understand him, there is nothing bad that he could not put up with life and learning at our college that the parents love him and are looking forward for his coming back home?

Chris was sitting in the armchair like a stuffed dummy, and despite I stared at him, he did not make any sign, looked at me with the frozen eyes. I tried to struggle once more. To be honest, I was in excitement – now, who will say the last word, I thought.

- Quite agree with you – I started from the beginning – what you propose, is the best and the most acceptable way for the child's survival, this is not an ordinary case. Right now the child is desperate, he realizes that he made the involuntary mistake, the parents will never forgive him for it, and he does not trust us. You are his only hope now, and if you not stretch him the hand of help, he will have to undertake the entire responsibility, and this will lead to the cascade of further mistakes... (Pause)... I have a request...

- Yes, I listen to you – sounded from overseas.

- I'll try once again to talk with Tato and convince him to go back to the college. And I ask you to reconsider your decision on Tato to be expelled from the college and maybe find an alternative, more humane way to the deportation... (Pause)... this kid is still not formed, his mentality is being formed now and drastic measures may lead to unacceptable changes in his outlook. We are now able to save his soul, and do not deny it, please. I will talk to him and ask, and you, please do not take the radical measures. May be you would somehow change the decision and get Tato back to the college?

- Thank you, I promise that I'll wait for your information and make everything as it is better for the child. You ask Tato's parents to talk to their son and make him feel that they love him and are with him. Good bye, thank you very much for cooperation; I look forward to your news!

I held such an operation, called "aunt". Which aunt would have done it with the exception of for a Georgian aunt? And who would be allowed by an American college director to speak so much, other than a Georgian aunt?

We left the office of Deputy Chairman of the Court with Chris not saying a word. When we come down the supreme beautiful stairs, I heard Tato's father mumbling: "Thank you my son, I had great respect for you!"

The offended thanked us, put us into a separate car and sent us home. Chris did not speak. When we entered the dark entrance, I growled at him irritated, - "Hey, say now what do you want me to say? My husband opened the door. A candle was in the kitchen burning and we entered.

- What can I tell you?! – Finally spoke out Chris these words – you are crazy! You think, if she talked to you with patience and good will, this will help the deportation of your impudent mama's boy? His case is solved, and you fought hard and honorably lost! Are you satisfied?

Indeed, it is a different culture; that is why he said the last phrase I thought and hardly stopped myself from saying it out loudly. Chris went home in the early spring; and we – still in the dark and frozen – waited for it to get warm in Georgia.

I never was interested what came out of that case. Apparently, Tato had returned back to Georgia, because since during that time he was a very popular person in Tbilisi; moreover, very much appreciated and respected, and not in the world of "authority" – and only in Georgian but throughout the former Soviet Union and part the World for the most part.

They say, the President of Georgia still has special "feelings" towards him, because in the youth, at one of the bars the latter kicked him and then turned him out from the table. The President of course remembered Tato's old offenses and now, as soon as he gets a chance, makes Tato "sweep" the modernized Georgian prisons for all the violations no matter large or small. If the President would have not become the president, who knows maybe this "fatal" deed could be overlooked, but this is the

way how the life went on and what can be done – you have heard – the times reign! (*a Georgian saying: The times reign – not the kings*).

So now imagine, if at that time, in those notorious 90s, this teenager Tato would not run away from the American college, and behave like a “high achiever” student, could it happen that taking into consideration his potency and range of options became our President... How would go out of our business in such a case? ... Pah, pah Devil, what the hell! How could I think about it, but this damned brain does its work by itself and what is it to imagine... Oh, oh, this is an absurd theater, that is what it is!

Letter 13

I immediately took off for Gulripsh after completing my exams. My family had been there since May, and I envied them so much that I could not waste a single day before packing; however, what should I pack? – There is no need for clothes there, just something to cover strategic points. I was there in the morning on the first flight. I swam the “Lunar path” in the night, and slept a sweet, sweet sleep.

I left my bed with eyes still closed and followed the path paved with white stones through the courtyard to the beach. I heard voices in the yard - my Dad and two unknown men were talking in Russian in the verandah. They were sitting around the table, made of a huge stump of oak, on stools. I was too shy to present myself there with my unwashed face and ran directly to the beach.

I came back sober, wet and cheered up. The two men were still there, sitting with my father; they looked very cheerful. I approached and greeted them. The one who looked most like a Russian – white, tall, thick-boned, athletic and blue eyed - said, "where were you: we have been waiting for you for a month. You will spoil your eyes with so much studying; it will give you a headache." This man was Vasya (Vasili) Zhdanov, my friend Katya Simonova's husband, the son-in-law of Russian writer Konstantin Simonov. The second man looked more like one of us, very sun burnt, short, stocky, with a slightly flattened, boxer-like, rather aquiline nose and deep brown sparkling eyes. He was saying something but I didn't know what; I caught the fact that he was telling a story and saw my father almost choking with laughter. This was the grandson of Abkhazian classic Dimitry Gulia. Vasya and Dimka had made friends in Moscow, when Vasya had studied at the Military Academy and Dimka at Moscow State University. Vasya had met Katya Simonova during his visit in Gulripshi and married her the same year. Dimka had been their best man.

These two men were completely different from one other in appearance and character – their senses of humor were also totally unlike. The rough military humor of the first contrasted with the sophisticated, intelligent regionalism and good timing of the other's. Vasya endlessly repeated his Moscow and garrison stories, and knew lots of jokes, so many that I was afraid that the next day he would have none left to tell. But the next day he always started again... with new stories.

Dima imitated everybody perfectly: relatives and acquaintances, public figures and art coryphaei, drunkards and tramps. Best of all he made jokes out of Vasya and himself. None of us could survive his

parodies. Vasya paid no attention to Dima's improvisations, on the contrary, he would join in and we would all laugh hysterically. Sometimes I got a headache from too much laughter.

I had loved Dimka from the very first day. My father, who attracted young people like honey, felt very free and comfortable with them. They spoke for hours, swam together in the huge waves and drank vodka. The season had not yet begun, very few Russian tourists were there and my father spent his "precious" creative time with these two boys with the greatest of pleasure. Seeing this, my mother almost chased Vasya and Dimka away with a broom; however, this was just a joke, since she herself loved these two very much.

Dimka's humor was less understandable to me, because I was very small and still did not catch its specific Moscow "bottling", this type of Jewish-intellectual humor with a strong political flavor. Dimka put some dissident cynicism into this humor and won over the whole audience with his wit. I had been waiting for his appearance all morning, and felt my mother's exclamation; "Behold, these idlers have appeared!" was a cure for an illness.

Once, my mother went to Tbilisi for three days. Our yard was instantly filled with Gulripshi's local and visiting "tramps". Unrestrained drinking and feasting began. Three days later my mother came back to Gulripshi on the evening flight. My father, Vasya and Dimka were in our yard drinking beer and eating smoked fish. When they heard the sound of the car, Vasya flew straight to the Simonovs' place and Dimka ran to the gate, but when he realized that he could not escape he climbed the big palm tree by the gate.

Mom entered the yard, and on seeing the disorder, put her bags down on the courtyard path, took the yard broom by the palm tree, swept up the rubbish, left it by the palm tree, lit a fire, burnt it and entered the house. Who was there sitting in the palm? – Poor Dimka swallowed the smoke until Mom went in, then, when the flames reached him, jumped down straight into the fire that my mother had lit.

Vasya embellished his retelling of this as well as he could (although it needed no embellishment) and spread it all over Guripshi, then Moscow as well. In short, he did not miss an occasion to tell it. It has been amongst Gulripshi's top five for years. Somehow it eventually reached Mom's ears too, and she also laughed a lot.

Dima came to swim in front of our house, because there house was right next to Agudzera hotel complex, a typical Soviet "Dom otdikha" (rest house) with the beach, where there was no place to put a foot in the water.. He would sit on the shore for a while, as if speaking to the sea, then stand up and run into the water. I cannot tell you what style he swam in – he was like all the fish at once, or more precisely he had no style whatsoever. He would dive into waves of any size and reemerge far out, calm and rested. I could never tell whether he was swimming or living in the sea. He moved through the waves like a whale, and seeing this my heart would stop. I thought I could never get bored watching this.

Gulia's house was close to ours, just across a small stream, on the boundary between the workers canteen and Agudzera. You could see just the roof of the house and the real Abkhazian hut, the "patskha", next to it, in a yard surrounded by cypresses. The amazing smell of smoke was always coming out of the patskha. People said that Dimka's Megrelian grandmother could make delicious smoked meat and ajika... when I went shopping for the Agudzera dining house, I would peep into Dimka's enigmatic yard, hoping I could see him and go in, but nobody ever came out into the yard at those times, there was just the smoke coming out of the patskha.

Dimka himself spent hours in our yard talking to my father. Sometimes he stayed for dinner, and then my happiness was unrestrained. No one guessed my problem; everyone thought I was too small to have such a problem, including Dimka. He did not take me seriously, but I had encountered First Love and did not know what to do with this love. If you had asked me – I was in love – and always, and especially, unrequited love attracted me – left me dying and burning from afar – but now something different was affecting me: warm, hot and cold at the same time. Never before had I liked not good-looking guys, and Dimka was truly not good-looking. Then an experienced Russian woman said that he looks like Caesar, and I understood why he attracted me so much – Caesar was something strange and different.

In storms we entered the water as a group – hand in hand – to jump into the waves. That day twelve of us were in the stormy sea and we deafened the area with our screaming and shouting and expended enough adrenaline for at least three years. Dimka looked at us from the shore and did not come into the sea. At this time the drunken Irakli Dumbadze staggered out of the yard and horned in on the waves alone. Irakli was a former water polo player, and swam so well that we were not concerned about his safety. But on leaving the water several big waves caught up with him. Irakli dived into the biggest, but when he came up he was already in a deep place. Another big wave struck him from behind, he dived in and the wave took him even deeper, then a series of big waves came. Irakli was diving and swallowing water, getting tired, and we stood on the shore waiting, waiting for Irakli to get himself out, waiting... then suddenly we heard Dimka shouting from behind: "He will drown!" and we saw him jump into the water in his jeans. He came up exactly at the point where Irakli lay, unable to move his hands any more, floating on the waves. Dimka took Irakli in his arms and, I cannot tell you how, somehow dragged him out. Finally Irakli stood up and jumped over the last wave and came out with Dimka.

Irakli shook hands with Dimka, told him "You are cool", and lay down on the rocks. He was so drunk, I suppose, that he did not even understand what he had been rescued from. Dimka took off his jeans, wrung them out, put them on again and went home all wet. I looked at his back and felt how disgusted he was with this wetness. He had not wanted to go into the water but had had to, because he realized there was nobody else who could help that drunken man.

Much time has passed since then, we have endured the war with Abkhazia, and lost it, but somehow even today I still see the back of Dimka, wet to the skin, going home. This is how I remember him. I knew even then that he would never turn to me.

Then Big Love spotted me and I got married. In the year Jemo died, Vasya, Katya and their three-year-old daughter were in Gulripshi for the vacation. My Nodariko was two years old. Relations with Abkhazians were very strained, but in Gulripshi we tried not to show it, we would behave as if we did not care about the government. Dima's mother, Dimitry Gulia's daughter Tatiana Dimitrievna, was known for her radicalism, and her brother Giorgi/Zhora Gulia, for his Russophilia. Dima was a Muscovite boy and joked about all this with Muscovite cynicism. Abkhazians did not like this because he was seen as the successor of Dimitry Gulia and therefore an Abkhazian prince. Whether Dima wanted it or not he had a heavy burden of responsibility on his shoulders, and the first thing he had to do to fulfill this was marry a beautiful Abkhazian girl. After this he would give an Abkhazian son to the motherland and thus to some extent meet his commitment to the current politics. For a while the girl he married ran the house-museum of Konstantin Simonov in Gulripshi, as a friend of the family. I saw her and was glad that my Caesar had received what he really deserved in life.

Since my father could not always come to Gulripshi due to illness Dima would come up from time to time and ask me about my father. He was very worried about his health and sent his regards. I already felt how abnormally the distance between us had increased, yes, abnormally, not between two persons, but between two politics, in an artificial way. Dima ironically "joked" about our Mengrelian neighbors and common acquaintances. At that time I did not give any importance to this humor and cynicism and still laughed enthusiastically at this stuff. Then suddenly it became obvious that things were more serious now, and the point of Dima's humor and sarcasm was leaning away from the old Soviet cynicism towards something more familiar and painful.

Once we were having tea in the Simonov's courtyard. Dima was waiting for his wife. We were laughing loudly, recalling old times, a story he had related to my father. Suddenly he turned to me, and as if nothing had happened whispered: "Anyway, your father would never give you to an Abkhazian boy." He said this so quietly that the others did not hear it, and even I barely heard. At that moment I felt surprisingly warm, then hot, then cold, and pretended I was deaf and did not hear anything. He also behaved as if he had not said anything. Then he started on another subject. Vasya and Katya had got engaged, and we were laughing loudly again, not thinking about Georgian-Russian contradictions at all. Then came that beautiful woman, the wife of Dimitri Gulia, and they went together to Sokhumi.

Since then I have not seen Dima. In 1984 my father died. For a few more years I visited Gulripshi. The Simonovs would not come any more. The Gulias were not there either. Abkhazians growled at us more and more and did not speak to us in Georgian at all. In the end, we painted the gate, locked it with a padlock, blessed the house with the sign of the cross and left. Since then I have not been able to go to Gulripsh. I rarely even see it in my dreams now. Once in a thousand days I see the back of Dima, all wet, walking towards his house along the beach past the grey rocks, and know for sure that he will never turn his face to me.

Letter 14

Hamburgers

I am sure that the American cutlet with bread, of German origin, comes into the mind of everyone who hears this word, and no wonder. This happened to me when, on coming to Rhodes, Janina Orlov told me there were hamburgers in the dining room. I was surprised – what was it about me that made her think that I would be eager to fill myself with hamburgers on Rhodes – the Paradise of cookery and gourmets? Therefore, before entering my accommodation I looked into the dining room with one eye. Two men and a woman were sitting around a prettily furnished small square table. One of these men was my friend, the German writer, poet and reciter Uwe Friezel, I did not know the other man – of a very presentable appearance - or their lady colleague. She was short with black hair full figured, but seemed very exotic against the background of the two Germans. A small vase, full of wild flowers, was there in the centre of the table. Greek salad, assorted sausages and cheese were piled up on snowy white plates and each of the diners had vegetable soup in identical white bowls in front of them. A half-full bottle of red wine was standing on the corner of the table. There was no place for hamburgers on such a table, indeed.

Screaming, I pressed Uwe to my heart – I had not seen him in ten years. When we had greeted each other with hugs and kisses, Uwe introduced his two friends as Gino, another German poet and reciter, and Medina, a Bosnian poet, singer and painter. The three of them represented the Writers Association of Hamburg – accordingly, they were the Hamburgers.

It should also be noted that the Rhodes Writers and Translators International Centre, in addition to its library and small printing and publishing house, has a small, well-equipped kitchen, where the writers and translators residing there cook themselves breakfast – and, if desired, lunch and dinner as well. Medina felt at home in the kitchen. She knew by heart the location of all kinds of dishware and had filled the fridge with raw and convenience foods. From her thorough knowledge she created masterpieces of cookery and design at the Rhodes Literature Centre's kitchen and took them into the dining room on their white plates with gentle motions, while the two blissful poets waited in nirvana, still salivating. Both had checkered blue-and-white handkerchiefs on their laps. "Oh, boys, having a nice time?" I thought, sincerely regretting that I was not a man right then.

I remembered once visiting Uwe in Stockholm. At that time he had a Swedish girlfriend and was living with her. She was very hospitable. She did not begrudge us anything, and served all the drinks, and Uwe took care of the food and snacks, running between the kitchen and the sitting room, bringing this and that, proudly pointing out what an active, engaged and successful mistress he had. So it was. The woman was getting so tired that she left all the domestic affairs to Uwe. I do not remember her name, but all of us liked her very much, and most of all we enjoyed seeing their harmony, how calm and rationally they shared out the things to be done. However, this tandem did not last long, and now...

There sits Uwe, so laid back he does not lift a finger, enjoying the oriental services of the Bosnian woman, behaving as if he had never moved a glass from one place to another, while in the middle of the kitchen, on top of the taps a sign in large letters says: "Please wash your dishes!"

It is in no way linked to this, but this inscription always reminds me of the one attached to the seats of tourist buses in England: "When the floor is full of cigarettes, please use the ashtray!"

During these sessions in the dining room the more active of the "Hamburgers" were Uwe and Gino. Medina did not know English and rarely made comments in German. But one time a funny thing happened. Medina made quite a long comment on a certain issue in German and asked Uwe to translate it. Uwe listened and said "I radically disagree with this". – A Norwegian participant of this session pointed out, "You must first translate what the lady said, and then tell us what you radically do not agree with".

Gino was a man of few words, but a brilliant speaker. Mannered like Narcissus, he taught beginner poets rhetoric. He suggested one such project for next year's General Assembly.

When dinner time came we all decided to go to a nearby restaurant. The "Hamburgers" apologized – "we have to stay here, because Medina is cooking dinner for us". We were late returning from the restaurant. The sweet sounds of oriental music were coming from the yard - this was Medina, singing Uwe and Gino a Bosnian folk song while they closed their eyes, sitting deep in their armchairs, sipping red wine. A yellow candle twinkled on the table. "Well done, boys", I exclaimed in delight, but this time I meant it – "what a paradise you have created on this truly divine land?!"

In the morning Medina again fed those two doves breakfast. Then we all went to catch the bus to Monolithos – we began the ceremony of instituting the Nikos Kazdaglis prize by visiting places associated with him. The bus was just ready to leave when we realized that Gino was missing. We waited for him, but as he did not appear Medina ran back to the Centre and was also lost to us. We were late already, the organisers were getting nervous, Uwe's face had turned beetroot red and the driver was about to turn the key when we heard Medina's voice – "Wait!" She was running towards us, hand-in-hand with Gino, who could not hide his anger – "I have been waiting for this bus at the Centre, I did not know I was supposed to come here." Medina sat next to him, calmed him down and soon he was sleeping sweetly on her shoulder.

In Monolithos, at the Public Library, we read excerpts from Nikos Kazdaglis' works in English translation and then his friend, Dorotheos Sizimatos, invited us to his villa, which he and Nikos had used for fishing. It was a typical Greek house, whitewashed, with blue windows and wooden balconies. Unlike the other houses, this was at the edge of the village and in front of it there was an enormous field, from which forested slopes and the blue Aegean coast could be seen further away. Not a single building, no poles, no sign of civilization was within sight, no sounds were heard around the small white house except the gadflies' whirr, nobody was there except for us, wandering like foreign

bodies in that wide colored picture. We wandered around but seemed so tiny that we left no visible trace on the amazing excellence and balance of the environment.

The name Monolithos had been given to the village in honor of its monolithic wooded mountain. An old white church was on top of the mountain – another historical monument of Rhodes. Winding paths lead to the church, and a relatively wide serpentine road takes motorcycling tourists.

The house of Dorotheos Sizimatos is very pretty and beautiful inside. It is arched, decorated in combinations of white and blue, with white stone and dark wooden interior stairs, recesses holding Greek clay dishes and glass galleries offering the same picturesque view... The mountains of Turkey, wrapped in fog from time to time, opened their chests to us and in all their greatness looked down on the green groves of Rhodes.

Dorotheos's wife treated us to pies and Rhodian schnapps. The "Hamburgers" announced they they were to begin a performance, and please, we should all come in. This was an unplanned event, so it turned out a little complicated to get all the people into the house. Finally, we gathered and the performance started. One "Hamburger" made an improvised stage under a sitting room arch. Uwe announced: "This is Heinrich Heine's Ode to Love Gino will recite... Medina will perform the refrain..."

Gino's velvet voice and Medina's sweet nectar sounds filled the old house at once. Rhodian schnapps moved up and down heavily in our veins, and collided with Gino's lines as with waves and gushed down the convolutions of Medina's Bosnian ballads. Medina brought together all my life: my childhood, the happiness of first love, misery, the sea, and Gulripsh – which had been lost and was to be returned. In my heart I followed her song with my moan, and I sang the last line with her, choking in my throat.

The presentation ended, the audience, amazed and astonished, made no sound for a while and then burst into applause and vast, loud "bravos". Uwe declared proudly, "This Bosnian woman, with the same artistic skills, writes poems in two languages and draws." Uwe did not mention that every day she created culinary masterpieces for the German "knights" clad in bronze; no, it is not that he did not mention it, he just did not remember it, probably deeming that this was an obligatory attribute of Bosnian women!

Letter 15

"I speak in your ears!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

It all started when our project manager created the impression in me that I should be acquainted with all the famous people and officials in Georgia, either in person or from a distance. I once thought the same way, but now, I'm sorry, the public officials of my generation, except for a few, work as drivers, nightwatchmen, in the best cases – as petrol station attendants and housewives.

Olin McGill, who leads the Project for Business Climate Development and helps the Government of Georgia with this matter, urgently needed information on the newly appointed Deputy Finance Minister. He gave me his name: Kakha Baindurashvili.

He was a sprout shot in from the other side of the river of the Rose Revolution. Of course, I knew nothing about him. I started to think how I could obtain this information. The first person who came to my mind was Vaniko Baindurov, a comrade of my youth, from the Lower Vera (the very center of Tbilisi City), a friend of Zaza Daraseli, who had played football fabulously in the Kirov Park. One thought was – could this minister be Vaniko’s son? But I could not imagine Vaniko’s son would change his name, so this option was ruled out immediately. After this, I was told at the office that before being appointed this man had been assistant to Prime Minister Noghaideli. Then I knew who I should call, my son’s friend who worked there, and I did. All he could tell me was, “He is a very humble, good person and was educated in the United States. I know nothing else; he is not a friend of mine.”

I gave Olin this information and when he learnt about the American education he was very glad, saying that the guy would therefore probably have a Western mentality and cooperation with him would be easy.

Time passed, and the Ministry of Finance asked our Project for help in strengthening its public relations and cooperation with the media. In particular, it asked us to hire an expert who would create commercials with a new design and content.

The Business Climate Development project had an experienced journalist and clip maker at hand, the very expensive Frances Hardin, who had come from the US to join the Ministry of Finance. My task was to assist Frances in the office. The time and date for a meeting with the new Deputy Minister were appointed. According to the usual diplomatic protocol the Deputy Minister kept us waiting for about fifteen minutes in the waiting room, and when he appeared he looked at us with smiling grey eyes and apologized – his previous meeting had taken slightly longer than expected.

His PR manager, i.e. my putative colleague, was a girl tanned in a solarium, with black hair, long legs and filled up lips. She proudly declared, “I do not know English, but Mr. Baindurashvili does not need a translator”. I was very surprised - how can it be that in a country where knowledge of English and computers has become a must, or at least the most vital attribute, without which even an academician cannot find a job, such a person has been appointed a Ministry of Finance “PR”? My colleague whispered to me that she was in fact the sister of the Mayor’s wife, or the fiancée, I do not remember exactly.

The Deputy Minister turned out to be red-haired or fair-haired; he spoke really excellent English, and mixed in some humor now and then. In Georgian he stressed hard “L”. It appeared that some time ago his “L” had been considered too soft and he was working on this.

My son’s friend’s description was accurate. The Deputy Minister did appear to be a slightly humble, moderately free (in the American way) and friendly, smiling young man. He stated the requirements

and expectations of the Ministry and added that they would choose the journalists, advertising agencies and studios themselves, as well as the chief director and screenwriter. So why did you make us pay so much money to bring Frances here? I thought, and it seems this thought was reflected on my face, as the Deputy Minister looked at me with surprise and then a little bit sternly.

Frances listened carefully, noted everything, then asked some questions about the impartiality of television channels. When the Deputy Minister had given a comprehensive response to all her questions, he turned to me and stressed, “I say this especially in your ear”. I was astonished. I know he said this to me in Georgian to make me understand that he was shaking his finger at me and trying to make me hold my tongue. “I do not care what you say”, I informed the Deputy Minister, likewise in Georgian, with a big smile, and Kakha Baindurashvili and I thus finished our phraseological ping-pong.

The business conversation proceeded in a warm atmosphere, but matters were not concluded at all. Baindurashvili was in a hurry, and invited Frances for lunch the next day to continue the conversation. On the stairs of the Ministry of Finance the long-legged “PR” caught up with us and told my co-worker, little Nato, “You come with Frances for lunch”.

Since then the paths of the Minister and I have never crossed. Once I saw him in the lobby of a hotel in Bakuriani and we pretended not to see each other. Soon after this Kakha Baindurashvili became the Minister Finance, and he very often tells everyone on TV about the improvement of the business climate in Georgia and the country’s global achievements in this field. We have not yet spoken to each other again. He does not speak to me due to his politeness and humility and I do not speak to him due to my ambition and pride.

The result of our meeting was this: Frances prepared two commercials together with the team selected by the Ministry. A large amount of money belonging to the Business Climate Reform Project, including Frances’s royalties, was spent on these. I have not seen these (and neither have you) on any of the TV channels, maybe I have missed them, but I do not think so. However, Georgia took second place in the World Bank’s 2009 Ease of Doing Business index, so this sounds good in my ears!

Letter 16

“Durakovo 2” – a dream?

There is a museum of Literature type building in a small European city, perhaps in one of the Balkan countries, on an old square with a fountain. In the fountain two Cupids with broken wings pour water out of their mouths. A meeting with a distinguished public figure, a certain Levan/Leo Makharadze, is to be held in that Institute and I am reading, or rather, I am to read, a report. My former supervisor Olin McMaren and my son Nodar Topuridze are both there.

Probably it is the incompatibility of these two people being there which bothers me so much in my sleep that I wake up several times. As many times as I fall asleep the dream continues where it left off. I woke up the first time when I lost my report and could not find the papers. Then the devotees of some obscure religion rushed into this small European square – all middle-aged women, with yellow saffron and blue hydrangea necklaces around their necks. They were carrying a huge tray of tall tumblers full of viscous, cloud-colored liquid (looking very much like the Greek ouzo) with vapour rising from it. They walked round the square, singing, preaching and handing rose petals to passersby. They looked very much like the coordinators hired for elections by the National Movement, who run around the polling stations with the voters' lists to ensure their potential or real supporters vote.

The hall, where the career of a great philanthropist Mr. Leo Makharadze is being celebrated, looks with its presidium and rostrum like an old communist-style lecture hall, the difference being that it is dark and has broken windows, like in the 90s. Olin is aggressively trying to erase the words "Leo the Dick!" which have been written in colored chalk on the blackboard and then polished over, with a dirty rag.

Meanwhile, Leo has learned that I have lost the text of my report and helps me by giving me with his own three handwritten A4 pages outlining his achievements. I am reading through this thoroughly when I wake up again. I look at the clock. It is 7 am. I have more time till ten, and fall asleep again.

Now, equipped with the three sheets, I explain to Leo that what is said in these pages is not true. He tells me if I do not want to read it, just say so. I reply, "How could you think this, Leo," - and start to learn by heart the false numbers. Since I cannot learn them, I decide to read the report.

All this time, my human rights advocate son, Nodar Topuridze is upholding the rights of the sectaries, going around the fountain with Cupids in it on his bike. The sectaries stand at the door of the Institute in rows and preach a sermon against Leo Makharadze. I am conscientiously reading the report in the hall.

Suddenly, I find that I have lost the report papers with the ciphers in them again. They have disappeared, vanished. I start in panic to search in my handbag, then the whole Institute, and when I cannot find them anywhere, I run outside, distressed. Now this man will think I lost the papers on purpose, I mumble. Then I try to recall something from the pages and when I can recall nothing, I am scared... desperate... At this point, Nodariko goes by me several times on his bike. The sectaries are making their flock drink the viscous vaporous liquid. I am still wracking my brain trying to remember the numbers.

At this time a short scientific worker with a huge belly comes out of the Institute, I know him but for the life of me cannot remember who he is.

"Thanks to Zaur and Geno for the honor", he says ironically, to stress that these two are not attending the meeting, "of saying a word about Leo" – "Hey, it's time for your speech, come in, what you are waiting for?" he says. The Chairman of the meeting calls me to the rostrum.

Nodariko once again goes round the fountain. I breach a cordon of sectaries and deserve their scornful cries of “Traitor! Traitor!” I would rather stay with them, but still stagger into the hall, get onto the rostrum and start to read the report – in English – I do not know why.

At this moment some of the saffron and hydrangea necklaced secretaries burst in. Some sing the National Anthem; others carry round the tray and vigorously offer the audience and the viscous, whitish liquid. Olin, having unsuccessfully sought to erase “Leo the Dick” from the board, has thrown away the rag and joined the sectaries. The short, potbellied scientific worker has taken Leo from the hall and spa on the floor several times while leaving so that everyone can see this. I have escaped reading my report. I go outside; somehow they are all singing “Hari Krishna” in the hall now. I catch another sight of Nodariko, riding his bicycle, and wake up.

I look at the clock – it is 8, I can still take one more sleep before 10, but prefer to put a full stop to this Durakovo at this point. (“Durak” in Russian means stupid!)