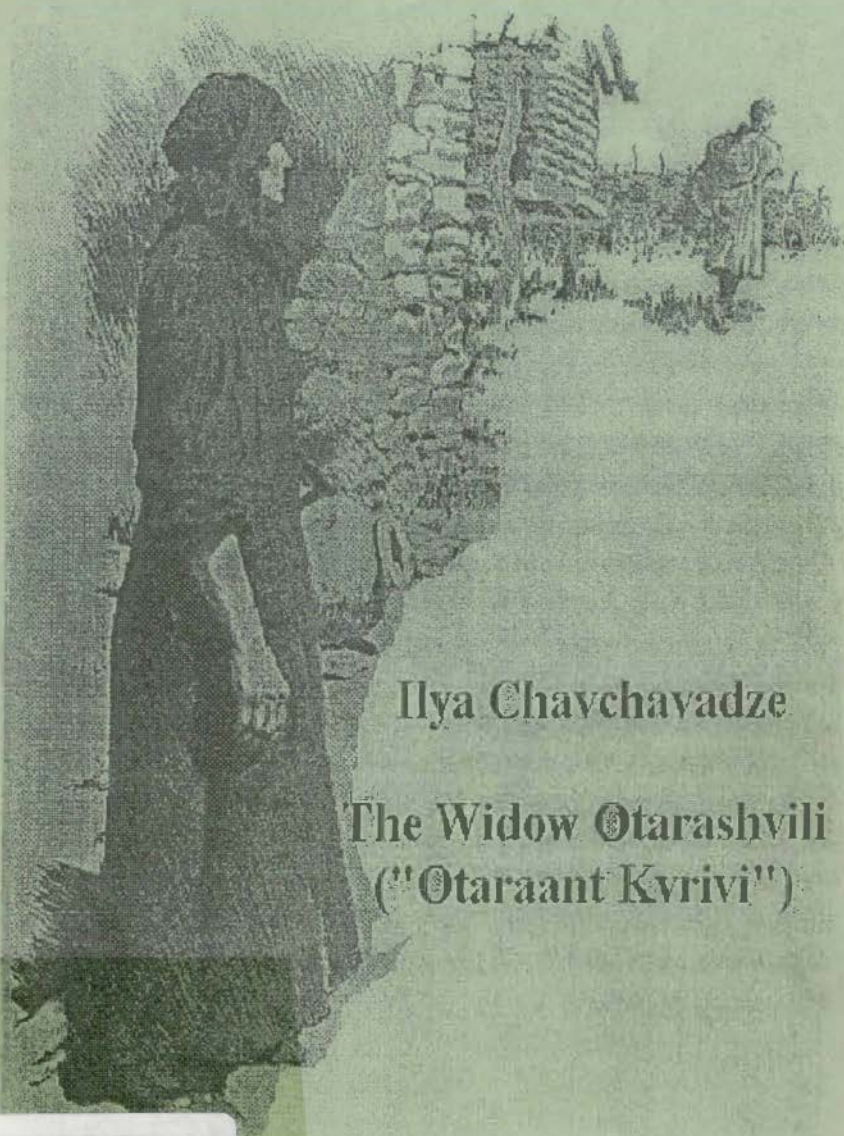




Ilya Chavchavadze

The Widow Otarashvili
("Otaraant Kvrivi")

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C 50

The joint Georgian-Australian enterprise "Quartzite" is glad to celebrate the first ton of gold produced in Georgia by issuing stories of the Georgian classic Ilia Chavchavadze "The Window Otarashvili" in the English translation. We are convinced that support to cultural initiatives is as important as filling in gold reserves of Georgia today. Sponsoring this edition, we are willing to acquaint English speaking reader with a work of gold fund of the Georgian literature.

Stephen Lay

The monument of the Georgian literature "The Window Otarashvili" has been issued in the English language first thanks to material support of the Georgian-Australian enterprise "Quartzite" and personal participation of its director, Stephen Lay. We express our gratitude to Mr. Lay and the JV "Quartzite" for their contribution in popularization of the Georgian literature among English speaking readers.

Publisher

ქართულ - ავსტრალიური ერთობლივი საწარმო „კვარციტი“, მოხარულია აღნიშნოს პირველი ტონა ქართული ოქროს წარმოება ქართული ლიტერატურის კლასიკოსის, ილია ჭავჭავაძის თხზულების „ოთარაანთ ქვრივის“, ინგლისურ ენაზე გამოცემით.

ჩვენ ღრმად გვწამს, რომ კულტურული ინიციატივების ხელშეწყობა დღევანდელი საქართველოსთვის არანაკლებ მნიშვნელოვანია მისი ოქროს ფონდის შეესებაზე. ამ გამოცემის სპონსორობით, ჩვენ გვსურს ინგლისურენოვან მკითხველს გაეცნოთ ქართული ლიტერატურის ოქროს ფონდის ეს ნიმუში.

სტივენ ლეი

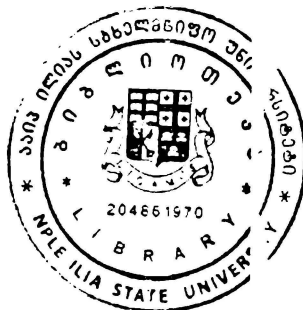
ქართული ლიტერატურის ძეგლი „ოთარაანთ ქვრივი“, პირველად გამოიცა ინგლისურ ენაზე ქართულ-ავსტრალიური საწარმო „კვარციტის“, მატერიალური დახმარებით და სტივენ ლეის, საწარმოს დირექტორის უშუალო მონაწილეობით.

ჩვენ მადლობას ვუხდით ბატონ ლეის და ერთობლივ საწარმო „კვარციტს“, მათი ღვაწლისათვის ქართული ლიტერატურის პოპულარიზაციაში ინგლისურენოვან მკითხველთა შორის.

გამომცემელი

My thanks are due to my colleagues without whom the task of translating this story by Ilya Chavchavadze, a classic of Georgian literature, could scarcely have been accomplished, I have received most valuable assistance from L.Goksadze of Tbilisi University, Ts. Topuridze and M.Kraveishvili of the Chavchavadze Institute of Foreign Languages, as well as from Mr. David Rowson, the editor.

I. Petrova



The book is published in connection with the 50th anniversary of the Institute and the 90th anniversary from the birth of I.V.Petrova

The income from the sale of the book will be used to set up a foundation at the English language study-room named after I.V.Petrova. The activities of the foundation will be targeted at publishing works of Georgian literature in the English language.

Short preface

In order to fully understand the meaning of this story that at first glance seems so naive, but is actually most complicated, in order to find a clue to this understanding, one might regard as a starting point the fact that among Ilya Chavchavadze's close associates the principal character in the story, the widow «Otarant kvrivi», was usually compared with the author; the same monolithic, inflexible nature, the same stern spirit, the same militant attitude to the world, and the same reserve in matters of the heart. Very probably, we are dealing with what specialists in art appear to have discovered of late: *la Gioconda* is thought to be a self-portrait of Leonardo da Vinci, transfigured into a woman. However, in Leonardo da Vinci's case it would have been hard to find what was the task his *Weltanschauung* had set him (if, of course, the hypothesis identifying Leonardo and *Mona Lisa* were justified), in the case of Ilya Chavchavadze, the discovery of the task he had set himself proceeding from his understanding of the world should, I hope, be attainable.

The reason for this is that Ilya Chavchavadze's quest was mainly directed towards finding out by all means whether man, in the midst of life's turmoil, could approach divine perfection. The negative aspect of this problem was discussed in «Is he a man?», a satirical story which Chavchavadze had written in his young days, in which he censured his absolutely thriftless character for disregarding God's commandment, «Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect» (Matthew, 5,48), and for leading a beast-like existence which resulted in his wallowing in malodorous mire. The image of the author is best revealed in his positive treatment of the problem, i.e., in the portrayal of the Widow and her son Giorgi.

We should not get the erroneous idea that Ilya Chavchavadze regarded himself as a personality whose perfection was almost

divine. Very probably, his personality was a mere model on the basis of which the characters he created live their own lives absolutely independently of the author, independently battling with life so as to establish ideals that are, so to say, superhuman. They, these characters, resemble the author in one thing more: to them, existence and action are identical notions (this is a theme that runs through all of Ilya Chavchavadze's principal works). Living up to these divine ideals, if they can be lived up to at all, may be achieved only in the process of constant activity. Clearly, the main difficulty is that here, under the sun, human activities constantly come up against insurmountable difficulties. This is the tragedy of existence, the unanswerable «accursed questions» (v. the last sentence of the story). The impossibility of cognizing this «question» determines not only the impossibility of overcoming egotism (cf. Ch. XI, «Two eyes») which would have meant quoting Christian ethics directly; but it means, principally that the eyesight of most people, blinded by life, is unable to apprehend and cognize the divine that is revealed in existence. From this standpoint, we regard as unwarranted the tempting inclination to somehow or other connect the personality of Giorgi with the Gospels: **Giorgi was born on Christmas Eve!** he «is crazy, or sent down to earth by God»; he takes care of Keso's garden, he's a gardener, and people failed to see, to recognize the undying essence in his image, «He was in the world ... and the world knew him not», (John, 1, 10) they only **sensed something** in him; his death on the pole of the cart suggests an association with the crucifixion ... all the above is a few pointers, in a dotted line, needed, it seems to me, to help the reader delve into the text more profoundly, to regard, with a well-wisher's attention, the classical Georgian literature which has existed for 16 centuries, and the best works of which should not appear alien to the European reader.

Revaz Tvaradze

Ilya Chavchavadze
The Widow Otarashvili
(«Otarant Kvrivi»)

I

«What do I want with sweet words?»

In the big village which I'll call, say, «Tsabliani» everyone knew Otaraant kvrivi - the widow from the house of Otar (the Otarashvili widow). If you were to ask the «gziri» (deputy headman) - no one but the sun and the rain ever trespassed on the widow's property against her will!

Neither the «natsvali» (headman), nor the Cossack captain dared to set foot in her yard, however important their business might be. If they did, - the widow would raise such an outcry and rumpus that they had nothing for it but to curse themselves and their fate. The deputy headman well remembered an occurrence that became known, subsequently, to the whole village. Once he had appropriated a chicken that belonged to her on the pretext that the police officer had arrived and the villagers were making a collection; but she made such a fuss that, as they said, she appealed directly to the governor and the incautious deputy headman had to pay seven times over for that chicken. True, the widow herself had spent no less than ten roubles on her trips to town and back. But here is what she said on this occasion:

«What's money! Dirt, nothing else! It isn't worth talking about - just one «tuman»¹. The deputy headman was punished - that's worth something, isn't it? I didn't let him impose upon me, - is that nothing? Let everyone know and remember that I'm called «Otarant kvrivi».

¹ 10-rouble coin.

Indeed, everybody kept that in mind. On catching sight of the widow, a group of peasants standing together would at once scatter like chickens at the sight of a hawk hovering above, especially if one of the administration was among them, the headman or an elder.

Nobody could have said for certain whether the widow was liked in the village or not. But as for fear - everyone stood in awe of her. Judge for yourselves: even children when they were naughty or yelling, were frightened if their angry mothers said: «Be quiet, drat you! There's Otaraant kvrivi coming!»

The widow was very well aware of all that and was untroubled by the fact that people shunned her in fear and apprehension.

- Chicken-hearted creatures, that's what they are! - she would reason.

- What's so terrible about me? Do they take me for «Baqbaq-devi»¹. The truth of the matter is that I'm just that way, I am not indifferent to evil, and I won't be put upon. If the need arises, I'll put on iron «kalamani»², I'll take an iron staff and go to see the king himself.»

It was well known in the village that the widow disliked both bragging and idle threats. She was always as good as her word.

«That's a woman, by God!» - Datia Badiashvili used to say.

- She won't take what's another's, but she'll never give up what's hers. Just look at her when she's at home. Oh, my! Bustling about from morning till night, working without a respite till dusk».

The village women stood in awe of her. The worst thing was if the widow caught one of them loitering about: she would literally flay her alive.

¹ a mythical evil being, a bugaboo.

² footwear worn by peasants in the Caucasus.

- Oh, you good-for-nothing! - she would begin. - You think it's so easy for your husband to provide for himself, and for you, lazy- bones, into the bargain? Why have you folded your arms across your breast - may they dry up! May your silly heart burst! D'you imagine it's enough for you to stir a finger, and your husband will choke with an extra mouthful, is that what you think? He'll eat his fill, will he? A plague upon you, a plague, I say! Fine creature that you are, indeed!

- She won't pass by, if something is not to her liking, she's sure to stick like a leech. She'll rarely find a kind word for anyone.

- What's the use of sweet words? - she would say. - Is there anything sweet in this bitter life, that a word should be sweet? What's the good of sweet speech? It's nothing but falsehood and fraud. Honeyed speech pleases, at the same time tickling the human heart. Tickling one's heart, nice thing they've trumped up! People scratch when they've the mange! Don't let your heart get mangy, - there'll be no need to tickle it. A word is not a horse-comb. It's like a hook, sink it in a heart and tug at it, giving the heart no peace. Or else it will grow musty like bread forgotten in a bread-bin. If a man wishes another well, he shouldn't set his heart at ease. Why tickle anyone's heart? That's what idle people do. It's noblemen who get a servant to tickle their heels so that they should go to sleep quicker; it's the same thing with the heart: comforted, it falls asleep. People can't understand that. It's enough to close one's eyes to life for a moment and it will crush you as a Lazghi from Dido crushes his felt cloak.

- It's not a heart Otaraant kvrivi has in her breast, it's a stone, - the villagers used to say.

II

Good deeds seasoned with pepper

Whether it was true or not, - you'd better ask a certain widow who lived at the other end of the village and was burdened with a lot of little children.

She was a sickly, ungainly, lazy woman. Her children, each smaller than the other, often went hungry.

Every Sunday, Otaraant kvrivi used to take her some ten «shoti»¹ and a deep bowl of wheat porridge.

- Here, gobble that up, - she would say. - Sitting there gaping, may black earth fill your mouth, you slut! All your life long you do nothing but fix your eyes on people's hands like a dog, hoping they'll throw you a well-picked bone! What did the Lord give you hands and arms for - and what arms! Not arms, but thighs! Just look at her, the glutton! Always on the look-out for something. Sleek with fat, like a young pig, wolf's bait! Not enough wits to earn her daily bread. What good will your poor children ever get from you? What will they learn by looking at you? Take pity on them, at least! It's on an ill-fated day that you were born into this world!

The woman was accustomed to such speech; nevertheless, she expressed her gratitude.

- Thanks? Put them away, tie them up in a bit of rag and mind don't lose them. Such a treasure for Otaraant kvrivi, your skimpy thanks, indeed! You do carry it too far, upon my soul! A thunderbolt upon your head! «Thanks», indeed. Good thing you got this food free! If you'd worked for it - I'd have waited for a lifetime! «Thanks!» Chuck it where you will!

Whenever a beggar knocked at her door, the widow would give alms, rebuking him in her own way.

¹ loaves of Georgian bread.

- Ah, you blockhead, a plague upon you! - she would say handing him a small coin. - You impose upon such silly women as me, trying to wheedle our last bit of bread from us. May lightning strike your scurry head. You swindler, you good-for-nothing, wandering around begging, where's your conscience? Who in this world has got more than he needs, that he should give anything to you? Can't you see, you insensible block, that all the people around strain their guts, but can hardly scrape up enough to eat their daily bread, - how are they to provide for you, too? Aren't you ashamed of the world! What's Otaraant kvrivi to you, - your own mother or father? Does she owe you anything or did she undertake to keep you? A pox on your hands, arms and legs! What's the use of them, growing on your uncouth body, if you don't know how to use them? Do the community have enough to eat that they should feed you, you great fool, you nincompoop? Faugh! Where's your conscience?

If the beggar who approached her was a miserable, sickly-looking fellow, she would say, having poured out her usual stock of curses:

- Off with you to the wine-cellar, I'll let you have some wine, - may you choke with it, and don't imagine I wish you well! Otaraant kvrivi would rather rot than give you what she needs herself. In the wine-jar there, there's some dregs left, nothing but mud to be thrown away; well, choke with that!

She would drag him there, and having given him half a litre of good wine, would send him off with her usual blessings.

Once when a beggar came to her door, she brought out for him a big loaf of bread, and as was her custom, peppered it well, abusing him roundly. As he was about to go, she noticed that he was barefoot, and his feet were all cuts and sores.

- Where are you off to, wait, may you perish!

The beggar stopped. The widow darted into the house, came out carrying six loaves and, returning to the beggar, cried:

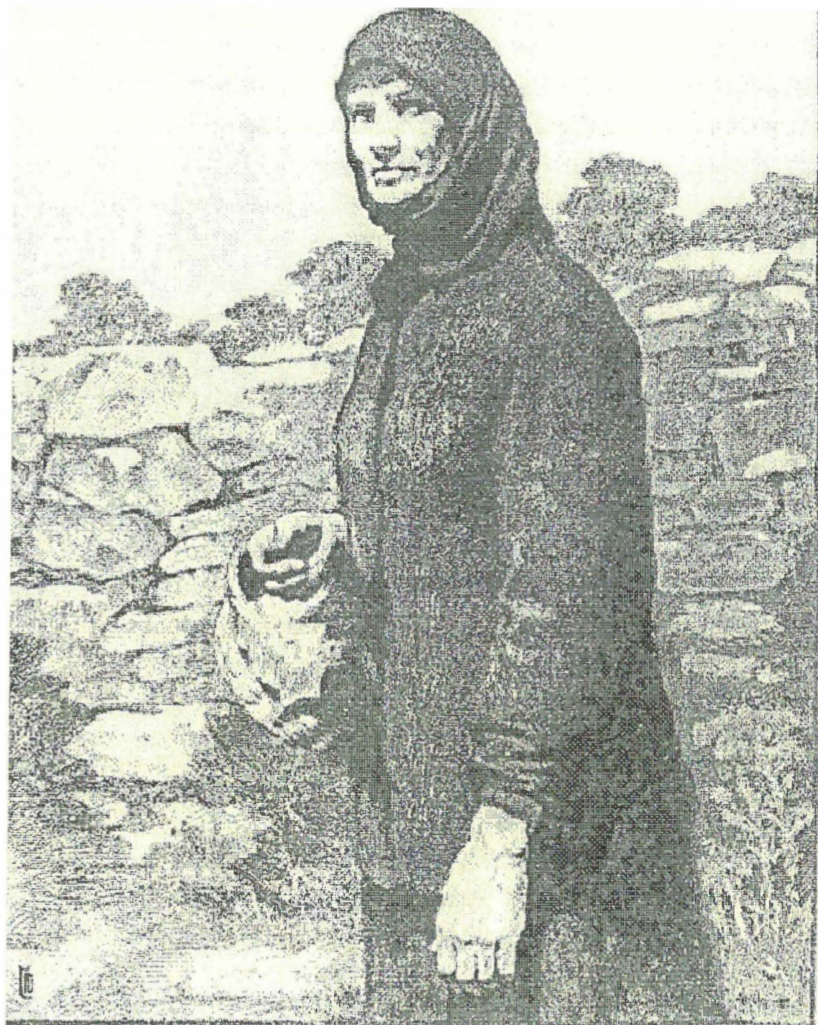
- Follow me, you miserable creature.

The beggar, dumbfounded, followed her. The widow took him to the bazaar and exchanged the bread for a piece of pig's hide to make a pair of «kalamani». Seizing the hide, she threw it at his head; the poor fellow shielded himself with his hands, so that it shouldn't come smack in his face.

- There you are, devil take you! Get shoes made and wear them! Maybe you can't do even that, you lost soul?

- Paying him back your debt, are you, Otaraant kvrivi? - asked the shopkeeper, a man as fat as a pig.

- Of course, drat him! Otherwise, should I deprive myself of bread to pay for his shoes? - lied the widow.



III

Five purses

Otaraant kvrivi's spacious wooden house stood on the outskirts of the village. The yard, large enough for a peasant homestead, was enclosed by a solid, well-plaited fence of wattle. The clean, well-kept yard was overgrown with green, rustling grass from the porch to the gate. In front of the porch, twenty paces away from it, grew an enormous walnut-tree with low-growing boughs and a round, well-trimmed top.

This yard was a feast to the eyes of a passer-by.

The house, as we have mentioned, was wooden, built of thick boards. Its north wall was blank, in the three others were doors, and everywhere in the walls there were narrow loop-holes. The house must have been built in troubled times!

To the right of the house was the «marani»¹, a thatched shed. Behind the house was the threshing-floor and a hayloft built above the cowshed. To the left of the house there was a small kitchen garden enclosed by a fence. There the widow grew all kinds of vegetables she needed for both summer and winter. She dug, hoed, sowed, and weeded her kitchen garden and gathered the vegetables all with her own hands, though the villagers kept gossiping about it:

- Whoever heard of it? That a woman should use a spade and a hoe!

But the widow didn't care a rap.

- They've never heard of it, now let them hear! - she would say on such an occasion. - Am I worse than that weakling of a Gogia? If he can manage with a spade and hoe, then has God cursed me? A man, so what? And I'm a woman! Is he any better than me? He's got legs and arms, so have I, a pair of each! If he's

¹ wine cellar.

able to use them, why shouldn't I? Am I sick with the plague, or what? Do they think me a cripple?

She enjoyed working in the kitchen-garden and wouldn't let anyone else come near it. A ditch branching off from the broad canal irrigating the village cut across the kitchen garden. Water incessantly gurgled down it. Water was plentiful in the village. The canal ran in the middle of it and there was enough water to feed three mills, if not more. But if there was a great drought the peasants sometimes stole water from each other, or even fought for it to water their kitchen gardens and especially their vineyards. However, nobody ever ventured to turn water away from the widow's property. Woe to the man who made bold to do so! The widow, with a spade on her shoulder, walked along her ditch to its very head. Catching sight of her striding along, the villagers would say:

- Here's thunder and lightning! Woe to him above whom it breaks!

The first thing that struck the eye within the house was its cleanliness and tidiness. All the north wall was lined with shelves on which earthenware vessels were arranged in order. Brightly burnished copper pots, cauldrons, a frying-pan, a dipper, a strainer twinkled merrily from above, as though boasting. - «See what a thrifty housewife we belong to!»

On both sides of the hearth there stood wooden couches covered with gaudy carpets. These were far from new, but they were obviously taken good care of and they were in good condition. The couches were of old-time workmanship, with carved heads, or «sastumali» as they are called in certain localities. In a corner stood a large wooden bread bin, also an old piece of handicraft, which was noticeable at a glance. Its front side was richly carved with ornamental designs and a complicated interwoven ancient pattern. In another corner stood a large wooden chest which had evidently once been painted blue, but the colour was now faded.

Some bedding was tidily stacked on the chest and covered from top to bottom with a big suzane¹.

If you examined the furnishing of this room attentively, the room which the widow called «darbazi»², you would say: the owner is surely well-to-do. And you would be right. Judging by village standards, many might have envied the widow Otarashvili. Her husband had left her three pairs of oxen, two buffalo cows, three milch-cows, about 5 acres of well-cared-for vineyard and about fifty acres of arable land.

The widow tended her vineyard painstakingly, she manured it well, and the vineyard yielded abundant crops of grapes. People said that even in years when crops were bad, the widow used to sell no less than one thousand quarts of wine, getting a profit of from two hundred and ten to three hundred roubles. She very often got the highest price for her wine. There was plenty left over for consumption at home. Every year she had twenty-five acres ploughed. Whether she hired someone to do the work, or the neighbour gave her a hand, or she herself followed the plough, - no matter, a plot of twenty-five acres was always ploughed and sown to grain crops.

Having sold her wine and the surplus of grain, she at once divided her money into five parts, and kept each part separately. For this she had five variegated purses, little bags made of scraps of cotton. One purse was called «crops». In it she kept the money intended to cover the expenditure for reaping the barley and wheat, for bringing the crops home and threshing. The second was called «blessed». It contained the money to be paid out for work in the vineyard. The third purse was called «the devil's due». In it she kept the money to cover «postage», i.e. the state taxes and communal dues when required by the community. In the fourth she kept the hired man's wages, and she called it «give and thou

¹ embroidered cloth.

² the hall.

shalt be given!» The fifth purse contained the money for household expenses and for charity. She had various names for this purse: sometimes it was «Parsig's caravanserai», on other occasions, she called it «Shio's marani»¹.

She was not very quick at counting her money and often used pebbles to help her, but she scarcely ever made mistakes. She put as much as was needed in the first four purses, and her calculations were almost always correct. If there was anything left over, she put the remaining money into the fifth without counting and spent it until nothing was left.

IV

The Treasure and the Testament

There was yet another treasure that her husband had left the widow, - and it was the most precious of all. She herself regarded it as the most precious; I couldn't say what others thought about it. This treasure was a few weapons. Her late husband had been a most industrious, prudent man; and besides he was a famous hunter. Take a peep into the house and you will see, to the right of the hearth, above the couch, a rather large-bore gun in its case, a sword hanging on its strap, a dagger, a pistol, a cartridge belt and a powder-horn.

Once a week the widow took the weapons down from the wall and gave them a thorough cleaning. She engaged in this task with such fervour, zeal and reverence that one might think she was performing a religious rite. Such was her attitude to these

¹ Probably an allusion to a certain merchant named Parsig who gave alms generously. «Shio's marani» refers to the custom of rich monasteries, especially the monastery of St. Shio, to open their wine cellars on church feasts. These expressions became synonyms of generosity.

weapons since her husband's death. Even if she were at death's door, she wouldn't have missed the appointed time, - she would have burnished the weapons, greased them with sheep's fat and hung them up in their places. Every time when she was cleaning the weapons, her eyes filled with tears, her heart ached and she wailed.

- Oh, poor, miserable me! - she wept, striking her breast. These weapons belonged to a fine man, and now - to a woman. He's dead, your kind master, my poor dears. Ah me, is it only you who have lost him? I have lost him too! The black earth has taken my Tevdore. My house, your mainstay has collapsed! O sword and gun, the man who was worthy of you is dead and buried. O Otaraant kvrivi, the yoke of our life is broken, your yoke-mate is dead, you are alone in the harness of life. Oh poor, forsaken me! In the month when the stags were bellowing, he used to bring me, in his cart, a buck he had killed. My heart was about to burst with joy when I heard my husband's clear, powerful voice. He always met both joy and sorrow with a song. He was a man, a real man! Blessed be his shade! Anyone who saw him at work, even when he was working alone, could think he was not toiling, but celebrating a wedding feast. He could awaken even a stone, and the stone would get down to work! Blessed be his name! Even when he was dying, his brow remained unruffled, he called me and said:

- What's the use of weeping, my wife? You won't remain in this world forever either. We all come to the same end. One born in pain had better die laughing. I've been a guest in this world, now I'm going home. Why cry?

- How am I to live without you? - I wailed.

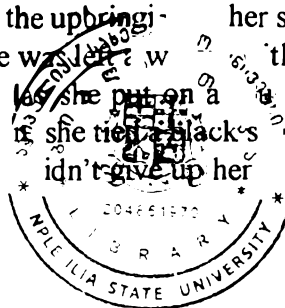
- What do you mean? Work and support yourself! Did butter and lard drip from my fingers of its own accord? I worked and ate the daily bread I had earned. The world still stands firm, no fear! Mind you stand firm too under the blows of misfortune. Don't

give way to grief. Take care of my little Giorgi, preserve our property for him, don't let anyone offend him: see that he shouldn't envy others. He'll grow up, and then - he'll be his own master. Let him live relying only on himself, let him live by the labour of his hands ... Keep his father's gun for him, it'll come in useful ... It's a smooth bore, it recoils, tell him to be careful with it. It hits the mark well when the mark is distant, let him aim a bit higher ... Ah, how sweetly the bullet buzzes when you fire! ... I wish I could hear it again! Oh, fate is hard! A longer life wasn't granted to me! ... I pity you, I pity my son still more, he's still a baby, unprotected, helpless! Oh that I could see him grown up! And then I'd be willing to die under the wheels of a cart! But what is, is. Don't let me fall into the devil's teeth, do me a service, give my dead body a decent burial.

He didn't live long after that. He had his say, turned to the wall, gave a deep sigh, moaned just once; with this moan it seemed he had given up the ghost, he said, - I'm going, - and yielded up his saintly soul to God. Ah me, I have lost you, my dear Tevdore! Recollecting all this, the widow wiped her tears with the hem of her apron, she wept and kept rubbing the weapons till they shone bright. No need to mention that nobody ever saw those tears. She concealed them even from her son.

She never violated her husband's last will. She preserved the house and all the property; if she didn't increase it, she didn't let it run to waste, she took good care of the weapons. She served her dead: every week she cooked wheat porridge in commemoration, and on every anniversary of his death she had a mass said for him.

She devoted all her youth to the upbringing of her son. She was scarcely twenty-four when she was left with a one-year-old baby on her hands. That is, she put on a dark-blue slip and a black mourning gown, she tied a black scarf over her head, - and for twenty years s



clothes for some in brighter colours. Many suitors proposed to her, desiring to enter her house, but, - God grant you a long life, she wouldn't marry again, that she wouldn't!

- And how should I look into my husband's eyes, in the next world, - she used to say. - Ah, may God's light be extinguished to Otaraant kvrivi before she allows a step-father to enter the house to my little Giorgi's sorrow! Let him have a happy childhood! That I should prove unfaithful to your father? Or should betray you? Ah, may the earth yawn open and swallow me alive! Grow up, light of my eyes, may your mother find joy in you down here, and your father - in Heaven! May all your misfortunes fall upon your mother, sonny!

And she bugged her chubby little boy tight.

V

Mother and Son

At the time when our story begins, Giorgi, Otaraant kvrivi's son, had just turned twenty-one. He was a strong, sturdy young fellow. A pitch-black moustache and beard had just sprouted on his olive-brown face with regular features, adding to his good looks. His appearance was pleasant and attractive, and would have been still more so if it were not for the stern gaze of his large eyes, reminiscent of a hawk's. This stern expression was enhanced by his eyebrows grown together in the middle. This made his face look less pleasant. A stranger would unwittingly look away from him. However, the more attentively you observed Giorgi's face and the expression of his eyes, the more you liked him. He rarely smiled, but a smile showed up his handsomeness so that it was difficult to tear one's eyes away from him. He was a tall, shapely, well-made young fellow.

He was always neatly and even smartly dressed. You should have seen his leggings adorned with bright coloured tape, patterned woollen socks and well-fitting kalamani to be convinced that our peasant footwear has a charm and beauty of its own.

When Giorgi passed through the bazaar, people would follow him with their eyes and say - He only needs to put his hand on his hip to look like a nobleman.

The gaze of many marriageable girls rested on him, many treasured his image in their hearts, and dreamed of him in secret. Much did he care!

He didn't mix with the boys of his own age, but when they got together, they always gave pre-eminence to him.

As for work, there was none to equal him in the whole village. - He swings his sickle and cuts a whole sheaf at one go! - the peasants said. With one push of the spade it seems he will cleave the earth in two! Single-handed, he can load a whole cart high, - not a simple two-wheeled affair, but a four-wheeler. If he undertakes a job, he won't give up till he's done it. He puts heart and soul into his work till he has completed it.

Many things of the sort were said in the village about Giorgi, and he became famous as a veritable toiler.

- He's a quick one, my son, - his mother used to say. All work seems light in his hands. He likes to work, but he's not openhearted and merry as his father of blessed memory was. His late father tackled any job cheerfully, and wholeheartedly, nothing could hold him back - whether it was a matter of work or a merry carouse - it was all the same. His son is just as thorough-going, industrious, capable, but he's nearly always frowning, he seldom smiles, he's always gloomy and sullen.

With all that, Giorgi obeyed his mother well nigh implicitly. He never insisted on anything against his mother's will. He was already a grown man, but he never disputed his mother's pre-eminence in the house. It is very probable that despite the fact that

his mother loved him to distraction, she would scarcely give up her position as mistress of the household. But was there any need of that? No man could have managed everything better than the widow.

Many people in the village envied the mutual love and concord in their family. The mother was proud of her son and she had no greater joy and comfort in the world than to admire him and live for him. - I am yours, I'll die for you, even if I have to stab myself with a dagger, - the mother would think to herself watching her son returning home from work.

It was like that, but she wouldn't let strangers notice that she actually doted upon her son. She concealed it even from him. One thing only - she was always very affectionate, never showed anger, never used a harsh word to him, although she often reproved him. Giorgi never argued with his mother, however sternly she might speak to him. However, it seemed he would rather die than let a bird fly over his head against his will, or let an ant crawl under his feet.

- Because she's right, - he considered, - and I'm wrong. Serves me right if she scolds me!

Giorgi could not recall a single occasion when his mother had reproved him for nothing, without a good reason. Deliberating upon her admonition, he at once found that his mother was right. He was accustomed to hear words of truth and loved truth himself. He was indignant when he had to do with disloyalty or meanness, and on such occasions he used his fists, and without stopping to think started a fight. Giorgi was still a stripling when something happened that he remembered all his life, especially as his mother approved of his behaviour, she didn't get angry or scold him as he had expected.

One day - Giorgi was ten or twelve years old - a teenage lad cheated a small boy, taking from him some metal buttons to decorate a belt. The child was crying bitterly, unwilling to part

with his buttons. Giorgi was playing nearby with some other children. Hearing the little one's desperate yells and learning what he was crying about, he was indignant. He left his game and dashed to the boy who had appropriated the buttons.

- Give them back! Why are you bullying that kid? The older boy gave him a push, sending him sprawling on the ground. Giorgi sprang to his feet and threw a stone at his offender. The stubborn lad went for Giorgi, again felled him and gave him a good drubbing. The other boys came running to help Giorgi, fell upon the offender, took away the buttons and beat him up; but Giorgi had also suffered: his bruised nose was bleeding and the collar of his red shirt was torn to shreds. His mother was alarmed when her son came home with his face smeared with blood and his shirt in tatters.

- What's the matter with you, my boy? Let me see whether you've no broken bones.

- Tedo Kuprashvili beat me up.

- What for?

- Tedo had taken Gola Manasashvili's belt buttons away from him. We decided to get them back and there was a fight. He sent me sprawling, - he's a big fellow and I'm small.

- Well, and did you get those buttons back?

- We did.

- What did you do with them?

- Gave them back to Cola.

The mother was pleased and her brow cleared.

- Never mind, you've only a small scratch on your nose. You'll grow big and you'll forget all about it, - she told her son.

- I won't forget! I'll grow big and I'll teach him how to fight! His mother gave him a hug.

- The image of his father, his father of blessed memory! - she thought happily. - My dear boy! Your mother would be happy to give her life for yours, my pride and joy! - She uttered all this in her soul, concealing her emotion from the child. She washed his

face, put his clothes in order and said,

- Now, my dear boy, everything is all right. Go and play, sonny, there's a good boy! You look even nicer, quite good-looking. And Cola cried, did he?

- Of course!

- Was he glad to get his buttons back?

- He grew quiet at once and stopped crying.

Little Giorgi sped like an arrow to join his companions and to continue their game.

His mother's gaze followed her son's rapidly receding little figure, and when he was out of sight, she said:

- My precious! Your father was a fine man, but you, his son, are no worse.

VI

Is he crazy?

Giorgi was growing, and this feature developed in him. Like his mother, if he noticed some wrong, he did not spare friend or foe. Many people disapproved of Giorgi.

- What does he want, man? Why on earth does he interfere in other people's business? - they used to repeat.

He often had to suffer because of his nature, but persisted in all the same, and his mother didn't stop him.

Quite recently - scarcely a fortnight ago - the village court of justice was about to condemn him to a term in the «gomuri»¹. He had made a fuss about an absolutely incomprehensible matter. Giorgi was in the woods cutting props for grapevines. There he came upon a farm hand of Omarashvili's.

The man had evidently been sent to the forest for firewood,

¹ a cowshed, sometimes used as a jail.

but he was lying in the shade, snoring for all he was worth. But it was not merely that: he had tied the buffaloes to the cart with pliant, short withes, and the miserable, exhausted creatures, were lying down near the wheels, drowsily chewing the cud.

On his way back from the forest, Giorgi just escaped stumbling on the sleeping man. Deciding to arouse him, he prodded him with his foot.

- Up with you, brother, let your buffaloes loose! Aren't you sorry for them?

- What the hell do you want? Stop pestering my brains.

- Who needs your stupid brains, you good-for-nothing! I tell you, aren't you sorry for your buffaloes?

- What's that to you?

- Does your master pay you for nothing? Go ahead and cheat him, but you might at least pity the poor beasts. Are you not a Christian? Aren't you sorry for the cattle? It's a sin to torture them. You've gone and tied them to the cart, so that their flanks are sunken from hunger.

- Shall I get them to sit on my head?

- Why not? They'd find something to eat on your scurvy pate! The grass is knee-deep in the wood, it costs nothing, - if you'd let them loose, they'd have grazed a bit ...

- Not much! Are my legs not my own? Why should I bother to run around looking for them afterwards?

- Oh, you shameless fellow! Nobody sees you, so you've lost your conscience and let it fall in the mud. What answer shall you make to your God? You think a buffalo is nothing but a beast, and need not be pitied? They're not yours, besides, they've been entrusted to you.

- What's that to you? I'm no servant of yours!

- I'll be damned if I allow such a man as you near me. If you were my servant, I wouldn't keep you. Up with you, I say!

Let me alone Are you tired of life? What's all this fuss? Go

your ways, if your back doesn't itch, or

- Or what? Think I'm afraid of you? Up with you, I tell you, take pity on these beasts Look out, see this stick! Giorgi kicked the man again.

The man, goaded, beside himself, leaped to his feet squaring his shoulders and stood before Giorgi, as though saying:

- Let's see who's the better man! Come on, hit me if you're not a coward, if you wear a cap¹.

Giorgi relented seeing the man's boldness, but he couldn't understand what he counted on.

- What am I to do? - Giorgi thought. - If he were a worthy man, he wouldn't neglect his work and would pity the beasts. And if he's a coward and a shirker, he wouldn't defy me so proudly and wouldn't stand up to me so confidently, like a poplar-tree.

- Just you dare to touch me with a finger! You'll see! - the man kept pressing forward.

This threat provoked Giorgi. Not giving the fellow a chance to move, Giorgi went for him and tripped him up. The man staggered, but he checked his fall, putting out his hand to support himself, and in a flash he was on his feet again and retaliated by a heavy blow to Giorgi's chest.

Giorgi involuntarily fell back.

- No, you don't. - he cried, and throwing the staff aside, he came to grips with his antagonist. Without giving him time to take breath, he threw him over his shoulder, and the man fell prone stuck to the ground like a «shoti» loaf to the wall of the oven. Giorgi forbore to strike the prostrate man. The latter was also proud-spirited. His opponent turned out to be stronger, and he took it badly. He sprang up suddenly and slapped Giorgi's cheek.

- Ah, would you?

Giorgi, outraged, felled him again and showered blows on him until the fellow cried out for mercy.

¹ In those days a man was dishonoured if he was seen bareheaded

- Get along with you, and if you start talking a lot about your self, don't you forget me! - said Giorgi. - You can't hide from God. It's a sin to torture cattle!

The offended labourer, naturally, complained to Omarashvili.

- What did he beat you up for? - Omarashvili asked.

- He said, - why have you loaded the cart like that? You care nothing for yourself, or for the beasts. And besides, he would require as much from others: and you let down other people, say, you're strong enough to do a job, why don't you pity others who can't? ... He stuck to me like a leech and hit me with his staff ... And used bad language, referring to your late parents. He pays your wages, he said, but he can't take your soul away.

- Wait a bit, man! But that cart wasn't heavily loaded at all!

- That's just it! I was surprised too, he must have fancied it, damn him. See how he has manhandled him!

Omarashvili got angry, and he was an influential man in the village. How did that milksop dare to beat up his man! Omarashvili took the man to the village court to sue Giorgi. And, it goes without saying, he gave him his full support.

- Are there any witnesses? - the fellow was asked.

- What does Giorgi Otarashvili want with witnesses? Good Lord, will he tell lies, you suppose? - someone rejoined.

- Quite right, - agreed one of the judges. - He's a straightforward man, he won't tell a lie. On a Sunday, Giorgi was summoned before the village court.

- Is it true that you gave him a beating?

- That's right.

- What for? Giorgi told the court what had taken place.

- Was that any of your business, man?

- But the world may go to the dogs through such shameless people! One man can't trust another! Such men as he spoil the reputation of honest labourers. He was fast asleep and besides had tethered the buffaloes to the cart, - they were a pitiful sight

that's what provoked me.

May your enemy find himself in the situation the judges found themselves in! They were willing to please Omarashvili, - he might dine and wine them once at least, - yet they were afraid of Otaraant kvrivi, she might go so far as to appeal to the governor! Besides, they felt sympathy for Giorgi, although, most certainly, it couldn't be denied that he had beaten the man. They found it hard to decide, what they were to rely upon: the prompting of their hearts, or fear of the widow, or the wish to please Omarashvili.

It was Omarashvili himself who got the court out of this difficult situation.

- As for me, I forgive Giorgi, - he said. - Let others decide as they think best. Good for you, boy! In faith, you're a fine fellow!

- What, he forgives him? the workman cried out in anger. Why didn't you ask me or my back? It's all sore, black and blue all over!

- What should I have asked your back, you scoundrel of a vagabond! If you ask me, you got less than you deserved! - replied Omarashvili.

- The lord is our witness, he is right, - the judges said and, acquitting Giorgi, let him go home.

When the people were leaving the court and making for home, one of the audience said, - either this man is crazy, or sent down on this earth by God. It's an unheard-of case!

- Yes, in faith, either his heart is filled with God's mercy, or there's trouble awaiting him one day, - agreed another.

- It's like the time a farm hand of Bezhanashvili's was bringing a cartload of flour to the homestead. Damn him, he had left the front of the cart without a load, the buffaloes couldn't breathe, they had the death-rattle in their throats, - the yoke was actually strangling them. Otaraant Giorgi came by, he saw what was happening, leaped into the cart, distributed the bags evenly, and the cart moved on normally. Giorgi punched the man's head

soundly and said, - That will do you good! Blast your eyes, can't you see - those buffaloes were well nigh suffocated! How will you meet your master's eyes?

- Between us, what business was it of his?

- That's just it. It's all very strange. That's why I said, - it's either that he's crazy, or there's God's mark upon him.

- His mother's just as mad, she goes too far and his late father was a restless man. God's my witness, he also used to act that way...

- It's not for nothing that people say - «Like father, like son,' or «Like mother, like son». Either they are great sinners, or they are blessed. They're marked, they're not like everybody else!

On his return home, Giorgi told mother everything. The widow was surprised:

- Just imagine, - she said, - it appears that at times those rats can give fair judgement.

VII

The Mother's Anxieties

Giorgi was now a grown man. He was already twenty-one, but the thought of marriage never entered his head. Otaraant kvrivi was worried and grieved.

- What am I to do with him? - she thought. - Marriages are made in Heaven, they say. Apparently, the Lord hasn't yet willed it! But the time is ripe: young fellows of that age already have children. Ah, if only I could dandle my grandson in my lap, and then - let them fold my arms crosswise on my breast and bury me alive.

She kept brooding over that, when another care was added to her worries. Otaraant kvrivi had noticed a change come over

her son of late. He became more gloomy than ever, unsociable and sad. True, he had never been cheerful, but now the change was striking. It seemed that something had happened to him, only he was reluctant to say anything.

He was usually late coming home at dusk.

If it was a moonlit night, - he would lie down on the grass and would lie there for hours, his arms pillowing his head, quiet and silent. Gazing intently into the sky, at the clouds, he seemed to be counting the stars or, to distract his thought away from something, to be watching the clouds sailing above. And his mother couldn't understand what had broken him and made him so melancholy.

- Come into the house, sonny, you've done enough work, don't lie on the bare ground, it's bad for you, - his mother once said to him.

- It's all right, ma! Let me lie here, my dear, just a little longer.

- It's time to have a sleep, son! Dawn is about to break.

- Ah, mother! Sometimes sleep is no rest.

- Why, son? - his mother asked and coming up to him, she said, - Giorgi, my son! won't you tell your mother what's happened to you, my boy? I'm your mother, aren't I? Something grieves you, and you conceal it from me ... Giorgi raised himself on his elbow.

- No, mother dear! It's simply that I enjoy a little lie down on a moonlit night.

- You've been doing that for two years ... Why didn't you do it before?

- Is a man always in the same mood? I used to be like that, now I'm like this. There was a time you suckled me, and now I chew the bread you've baked. So what?

- The thing is, son, that you should take a peep into my soul now and then.

- I do, mother, I look and see only myself there.
- I don't mean that . . . Take, for instance, that day .
- Which day?

When you were digging round the vines. I'd brought you something to eat. And I saw you standing among the vines leaning on your hoe, you were staring at the ground as if you were thunderstruck. What was the matter with you? I didn't ask you anything then, but since then I've kept it in my soul, right here ...

- saying this, Otaraant kvrivi laid her hand on her breast.

- Smooth out that imprint, there was nothing to worry about. What could have been the matter? I was tired, I just wanted to relax a bit, - answered her son.

- Where were your thoughts wandering? You seemed to be deaf to everything, you were somewhere far away, you didn't even notice me coming up. And it's not the only time I observed you. You work on and on, and then you stop suddenly and stand there as though turned to stone. It's not the only time I observed you at supper or at dinner: you take a mouthful, then you don't even chew it, you sit benumbed as though someone had brought you to the edge of a precipice and was about to give you a push.

- Well, it just happens!
- And nothing else?
- Maybe there's something else . . .
- Witchcraft, son, witchcraft!

This word cut Giorgi to the quick. He flushed, feeling resentful. He didn't quite understand why his mother had mentioned witchcraft. He felt a touch of suspicion, and he couldn't suppress it.

- Why did she mention witchcraft? - he thought. What if - he couldn't go on, not even in his thoughts. He had no words. It seemed he was shocked at the thought that someone had broken the lock of his heart, had opened the door and looked in ...

He shook his head sullenly, stood up and gently touching

his mother's elbow, said:

- Come along, mother, it's surely bedtime! Haven't heard you say - «It's wrong to feel downhearted, fear doesn't ward off death».

- Surely. Then listen to something more, my dear boy: «when there's no other way, even a valiant knight will withdraw», replied the mother.

- What am I to do? - replied Giorgi - Oh, why has she penetrated so deep into my soul! Does she know it, or is it just by chance? Actually, she's not far from the truth and I, in my suspicion, take something distant for something close by? Shall I avoid her? That's easier said than done!

That night the widow didn't close her eyes till dawn. Her mind was in a whirl around what had been said in the day- time like a chip of wood in a whirlpool.

- I seem to have got hold of the end of the thread, - she said to herself at last. «I think I've guessed»: the time has come, he's old enough. But why doesn't he tell me who she is?

This was the only misgiving that worried the mother, the only thing that pained her.

- He doesn't say anything because there's no need for it, she comforted herself. - When things get difficult, he'll tell me himself .

She closed her eyes, she tossed in her bed but sleep wouldn't come.

And night wouldn't wait, it hurried on.

- Did I guess aright? Am I on the right trail? - doubts assailed Giorgi's mother. - Maybe my suspicions have fooled me, deceived me? How can I tell? The human heart is an unfathomable abyss! How can I tell? Maybe I suppose one thing, but something quite different has happened? What else could it be? - she asked herself, and her heart moaned, unable to find the answer.

And the night wore on.

It was past midnight. All was still, only a mouse kept scratching in a corner behind the breadbin.

- What else could it be, what? - the mother thought, wretched with sleeplessness. - If anything could break me, it's only this constant anxiety ... He hasn't opened his heart to me. He doesn't tell me anything, my Giorgi ... If he's fallen in love, why conceal it? Why conceal it from me? And if something else has happened ... God save us even from thinking ...

Three times she crossed herself, as though to ward off the visions that arose before her.

A late moon paused on the mountain crest, about to topple over and slip down beyond it. It was there, and now it's gone. Night was coming to a close. The darkness deepened. The world was quite still, quite dumb, only the mouse was stirring near the breadbin.

- Two years ago he took his father's gun and hunting gear, - blessed be his youth, how it suited him! He went off and didn't come home for three days. And I, silly creature, didn't pay any attention to it then ... Now I am anxious, my heart aches ...»I've been out hunting,» - he said. If he was hunting, why did he return empty handed? And it was the month when the stag bellows! ... He had never before returned empty handed. He is no worse than his father, blessed be his memory! If no better, - in no way worse than his father! ... Since then he has been in low spirits. I've never forgotten how depressed he was that day. Since then something has been weighing on his heart like a stone, he can't throw off that weight. It can't have been a man that he ... O Lord that hast created Heaven, don't allow me to think that! How am I to know? There's many a misfortune in the boundless world ... God save us ... Avaunt thee, Satan!

The mother, alarmed, spat at the devil and crossed herself three times again, but her thoughts quite overcame her.

At last the dawn broke. Night knocked at the gate of day.

Since that thought had first staggered her, extenuated by lack of sleep and inner strife as she was, the widow could no longer calm her heart, she couldn't restrain it and submit it to her will.

- God save and preserve us!¹ - she prayed brokenly. One evil thought driven away, another would overwhelm her, a still more harassing one. On all sides she was assailed by painful thoughts. Meanwhile night had parted with the world. The curtain veiling the sky was half-drawn aside. Day had dawned. High aloft the sky was turning dove-coloured. Morning had opened the gate to meet the day.

Otaraant kvrivi, exhausted with her thoughts, dozed off, reality turning into a dream, and a dream appearing as reality. But echoes of her grievous thoughts followed her closely in her sleep, and she cried out several times:

- God preserve us! God preserve us!

VIII

**« . . . Breaks even Hard Stone.»
(quotation from Shota Rustaveli's poem,
«The Knight in the Panther's Skin»)¹**

However, the sun rose later than Otaraant kvrivi: the widow had already washed and dressed when it showed its head from beyond the mountain-top and surveyed the world with its one eye, ardent as gold. Its rays touched the dew that had fallen in the mountains, the dews soared as a haze, - the mountain seemed to be burning incense before that immense ball of flame.

- «What was the matter with me last night? - the widow wondered. What force had seized me? Seized me and swept me away .

¹ «An anvil of soft lead breaks even hard stone.»

«Hold on, don't yield to misfortune.» - my late husband used to say. Just try, and hold me! Misfortune lurking in the dark is a terrible thing. If it attacks you openly, face to face, - you can get the better of it. But to grapple with someone or something that you don't know! That's what I'm afraid happened to my Giorgi. Something wrapped in darkness as in a felt cloak. What's if it's love? God grant him happiness. But if it's something else?...A sin ... Blood ... Better do away with yourself, Otaraant kvrivi, let it be so! ... It will weigh on his soul like a heavy stone, and he'll never get rid of it! He won't! he won't! -

And again she returned to the thoughts that had tortured her in the night. She kept recalling those three days when her son was away, and she failed to suppress her fears.

A thought which once filled one's mind is like a mass of snow sliding down from the mountain-top, getting bigger and bigger, more and more terrible and destructive. If it is not stopped, it will develop into an avalanche sweeping away everything in its path. This is what happened to Otaraant kvrivi. All her thoughts were massed together, her love for her son pushed that mass and precipitated it from that elevated peak where only genuine mother's love dwells. What could withstand that avalanche?

Any love - a mother's or any other - is anxious and fearful: It expects misfortunes rather than joys, especially when sadness in the soul of the loved one is a perplexing, unsolved riddle.

The mother thought her son was still in bed. Softly, so as not to awaken him, she took a broom and tiptoed out to sweep the porch. But great was her amazement when she saw Giorgi in the shade under the walnut-tree. He lay still in his usual posture, on his back, his arms pillowing his head, gazing at the top of the walnut-tree, at its highest branches. Fluffy white clouds were sailing in the blue sky, they sailed softly, unhurriedly, in broken shreds, as though seeking to join their companions. The pale shimmering azure of the morning sky opened wide its depth for those lightly

floating little guests That's how a mother draws her just-awakened children close to her breast to rock them in her lap.

At other times the wrinkles on Otaraant kvrivi's forehead would have smoothed out at the sight of such a sky, such a morning. This time worries and cares distracted her.

- You're up, son? I thought you were asleep and didn't even glance at your bed so as not to wake you.

- Sleep has forsaken me, mother! I pursue it, but it escapes me. I just couldn't fall asleep. I was glad when dawn broke and went out in the yard.

His mother came up to him, sat down and passed her hand over his brow.

- Giorgi, you're still ...

- What's worrying you, mother?

- Sorrow is preying on your mind, my son, a strange sorrow, I was so anxious about it last night that I couldn't sleep either.

- True, you were talking in your sleep, - said Giorgi, trying to change the topic. - You kept saying, «God preserve us, God preserve us!»

- Did I, son?

- Yes, you did.

- I never did in my sleep.

- But you did, this time.

- I don't like idle talk, even when I'm awake.

- Is praying to God idle talk?

- Of course if it's untimely. Has God no other cares that he should think about me? His mercy be praised.

- What on earth do you mean, mother?

- I mean that God created man and commanded: - «Now go and take care of yourself. Here's life for you, live as best you can. What ever befalls you - the fault is yours, don't let the blame on me. As for me, he said, - I have washed my hands of you. When you ascend to my Heaven, that's another matter: I'll throw a bridge,



a hair's breadth bridge, over a sea of blazing pitch, and if you're pure of sin, you'll cross it. My mercy will catch you up, will support you and lead you across». As the saying goes, a bridge will not collapse under the weight of a good man.

- Righteousness is light, sin is heavy, isn't that so, mother?

Giorgi was glad to have turned his mother's thoughts to something else and tried to distract her still further away so that she shouldn't revert to the old topic. «Hope she doesn't start drawing me out again - he thought, without suspecting that his mentioning sin had shocked his mother. The widow was on her guard, the mention of sin sounded suspicious. The accustomed, nagging thought again burned her heart.

- It couldn't be otherwise, son! - she said, panting with alarm.

- Everything in this fleeting world is a battle between sin and righteousness, nothing else.

- He who shoulders a burden of sin is as heavy as lead, while he who bears righteousness within himself is light as a feather. But what has sin to do with you? - she said, eyeing him intently and thinking: «Let's see what he'll say». No criminal ever awaited the death sentence so anxiously as the mother expecting her son's answer.

- Who is without sin? But there's no mortal sin on me, by the grace of God! - replied the son.

- Why, then, are you no longer openhearted? Why do you conceal everything from me? I'm your own mother, aren't I? I'm not a stranger, am I? Anxiety has crept into my heart like a worm, and like a worm, it gnaws me and preys on me. Have mercy on me, son, don't kill me!

Giorgi sat up, as though the ground was on fire. Never had his stern mother begged for mercy. Otaraant kvrivi used to reject pity contemptuously, but this time her iron will had succumbed to emotion. There's no mightier force in this world than a mother's love.

Giorgi glanced at his mother ... Her eyes brimming with tears... Otaraant kvrivi was crying! He had never before seen her weep. Maybe he had, but couldn't recall it. Giorgi was staggered. If somebody had told him this, he wouldn't have believed it. Iron would sooner melt from the warmth of a human hand than his mother would give way to tears.

Giorgi was grieved. He wondered whether the time had come for him to speak straight out.

- Mother! - he spoke up at last. - I'll tell you, but don't get angry, I want to do something against your will. I haven't said anything yet out of respect for you, but I'd no strength to suppress my desire, although I've been baffling with myself for a long time.

- What is it, then, my son? - his mother asked, driving back her tears. It was a matter of everyday life, and Otaraant kvrivi was transformed at once; she had again become a sober-minded woman.

- I want to hire myself out as a farm hand. I can't stay at home.

- What's that you're saying? A son of your father to become a farm hand? How could you think of it? Your father will turn in his grave with shame!

- That's just what I feared, mother dear. I was afraid to grieve you. But take pity on me, I'm also human.

- But what's come over you? What's driving you? Her son hung his head and made no answer. A thought flashed like lightning through the mother's mind.

- Where do you want to go? - the mother asked again.

- To a certain house, the only place for me. Either there, or nowhere else.

- Whose house? A peasant's? A nobleman's?

- A nobleman's.

- Here, in our village?

- Yes, in our village. To work for Archil.

She was hurt and bit her tongue. Something flashed by as in

a haze as if she had guessed something. She didn't give her son a final answer. And Giorgi didn't insist.

He seemed to be engrossed in other thoughts, overwhelmed by a concealed anxiety.

IX

The strange knot

Archil had recently returned from Russia where he had been completing his education. His father and mother were dead. He had an only sister, a grown up young girl: the brother and sister lived together on the considerable estate their father had left them. The manor was in the village where Otaraant kvrivi lived.

The peasants were well disposed towards the brother and sister. When people were asked about them, they all said, as one man, that they are good people. Neither had Otaraant kvrivi seen anything but goodwill on their part, and she never forgot it. Both Archil and his sister had heard a lot about the widow, and they used to laugh heartily when told about her uncommon rations and utterances. They had a liking for her.

- She's a nice woman, that Otaraant kvrivi, she's worthy of every respect! - they used to say and, meeting the widow, they greeted her amiably and respectfully.

It's hard to say how far their politeness went to please the widow. But if anybody spoke well of them, she would invariably add:

- It's all because they're intelligent.

The brother and sister had also heard of Giorgi on many occasions. His actions, his character attracted their attention. They couldn't understand how and in what way such a nature of character could have taken shape in a peasant milieu.

- There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than

are dreamt of in your philosophy,

- Archil quoted. That's how their conversations about Giorgi usually ended.

The riddle remained unsolved.

- Giorgi asks to see you, - Archil was told one evening. Reclining on a sofa, Archil was listening to his sister who was reading something aloud to him.

-What Giorgi? - asked Archil.

- Otaraant kvrivi's son.

- Ask him to come in.

Giorgi came, cap in hand, stopped at the door and said «Good evening».

- Ah, good evening, Giorgi, my dear fellow! - Archil answered affably. - How are you? How are things with you? How's your worthy mother?

- Nothing to complain of, we're quite well, thank God ...

- Any news? What brings you here?

- Don't let my request surprise you. I'd like to work for you.

- Go on! Of course, I'm surprised! Why on earth? As what?

- It's up to you. As a farm hand, if you say so. Without any wages, if you say so, it's all the same to me.

- Come, what do you mean? - Archil said in amazement.

- You, coming from such a family, to work as a hired man? Whoever heard of such a thing? You don't realize what you are saying or do I fail to understand you?

- But I do know what I'm talking about. If only you'd do me this favour. I've had enough of remaining at home! A little more of that loneliness will be the death of me.

- What about your mother? - asked Archil's sister, glancing at him with her eyes.

- My mother ... It will grieve her, of course, madam, but she can't dissuade me.



- If that's how the matter stands, my dear Giorgi, we wouldn't like to grieve your mother. We respect and honour her greatly, - Archil objected.

- You only tell me: are you willing to take me on or not? As for my mother - that is my own look out. She won't persist. She's got nobody but me.

- Am I willing to take you on? Gladly, with both hands. Where could I find another like you? I know you. It's only your mother that worries me ...

- Thank you, good afternoon. I'll turn up in a day or two.

- What about your wages?

- It's up to you, to pay me or not. I tell you - it's all the same to me.

- No, that won't do. How much?

- As much as you like.

- That won't do. Say, how much?

- As much as I deserve.

- You leave it to my conscience?

- That's not a bad agreement.

- But what if my conscience is less than your worth?

- No matter! If you underpay me, may you profit by it. I won't take it badly. Goodbye.

Giorgi bowed and went away at once. Brother and sister exchanged looks.

- What on earth? - asked Archil.

- I can't understand it, upon my soul. It's something extraordinary, incredible!

- Maybe he's in need of money.

- But he hasn't asked for any!

- That's right! We're in luck to find such a man. But how shall we manage Otaraant kvrivi? I'm quite at a loss.

- We can't decide anything without her consent. She's a worthy woman, it's wrong to offend her.

- By your life, if she doesn't agree, I won't let Giorgi come near, although, for us, he's a priceless find.

Brother and sister thought long about it separately, but they failed to find the end of the thread tied in that strange knot.

X

Reproach or boldness?

A couple of days had scarcely passed after the events described above when Otaraant kvrivi presented herself before Archil.

- Ah, my good woman! Welcome, welcome! - Archil cried, catching sight of the widow at a distance.

Brother and sister were taking tea in the yard, under a walnut-tree.

- Good morning! - the widow greeted them, coming up. Archil stood up and offered her his chair.

- Sit down, please! Keso, give our guest a cup of tea, - he told his sister.

- Tea's not for us, drink it yourselves! I'll do without it ... How are you getting on, lassie? Keeping in good health? - said Otaraant kvrivi and sat down.

- With your prayers and bless . . .

- I don't pray for myself so as not to importune the Lord, why should I pray for you? - The widow cut her short.

- Well, well, don't spread your sails as you usually do - Keso said smiling and leaning over, she gave her a gentle slap on the knee, as though they were indeed close relatives.

The widow frowned slightly. She resented such behavior on the part of a young girl, - as though Keso was her equal.

«She's still a baby» - thought the widow. However, she

understood that intending no offense Keso merely wanted to caution her against her customary grumbling.

- What's in my heart, is on my tongue, is it not worthwhile to adorn the truth! - Otaraant kvrivi said to the girl, not without a shade of vexation.

- What has that to do with it?

- I mean your being confused by my answer, and wanting to give me a word of warning. Better follow a straight path than stray through byways.

- You're a good woman, but your speech is rough.

- Had you lived such a life as mine, if you'd been roasted in a pan as I've been, - you'd sing the same song. But is it worthwhile to speak in a different manner? It's sorrow and trouble that make people speak. If there had not been tribulation in this world, people would never have learned to speak. It would have been a needless burden. What's the good of words in times of joy? When a dog's happy, it wags its tail, - and it has said what it needed.

- Eh! You'll soon start throwing stones at each other, - Archil broke in. - Our neighbour is a businesslike woman, she can't waste time talking. Isn't that so?

- No, why? At times it's not bad to speak up.

- But you haven't come just for that, have you? You surely have some business matter to discuss.

- True, I haven't come for nothing.

- Command me, I'm at your service.

- My Giorgi wants an engagement with you as a hired man.

- We know, but we couldn't decide without you. We have the highest regard for you and we wouldn't want to displease you. We can't come to an agreement with Giorgi against your will.

- It wouldn't be against my will. My son asked me first. It hurt me, but there's no sense in trying to hold him back. It's disgraceful, he comes of good stock, he's the son of a good father.

Although it's distressing, it's too late to cry. I failed to dissuade him, but I couldn't prevent it. Let him do it, and come what may.

- If so, I'll turn down his request myself. I won't have a son disobey such a mother.

- No, no! Don't refuse him. I'm a mother, I'm the past. He's a son - he's the future. I'm going, he's coming up. He has a field to cross and I've already crossed mine. I'm at the end, he's at the beginning. I can't stand in his way.

- But what need is there for that, if it doesn't please you?

- What has need to do with it? It's his wish, maybe his destiny! He's like young wine: it's still fermenting, that's why it's frothing. When young wine is fermenting, you can't keep it covered or the vessel will burst. Let him live in his own way. I won't forbid him as he does not forbid it himself.

- Very well, I'll keep your son so that an enemy will envy him! - said Archil. - That doesn't worry me. Such a father's son can very well look after himself. It would have been better for him not to leave home. But there it is!

- But you'll be quite alone, won't you. - asked Keso.

- Why alone? Take a peep into my heart and count how many nestlings I've got there! Enough to feel joy and sorrow.

- You've just been saying, my good woman, that you don't like beating about the bush, you prefer to speak straight out, I can't get your meaning at all - said Archil glancing at his sister, as if asking her to explain.

- What didn't I say straight out? While one can still use his hands and feet he's not alone: work is the companion and friend of one who is alone. Does life give one a chance to feel lonely? Only to such as you. It's you who are lonely.

- You wanted the truth, and you've got it, - Keso said to her brother with a gentle smile,

- Our neighbour's words are so many thorns, - Archil said facetiously. A nice kind of joke that was!

Archil stood up and squared his shoulders; thrusting his hands in his pockets, he paced to and fro. Then, coming up to Keso, he stopped before her and asked in Russian;

- What do you think? Is this a deliberate reproach, or unwitting boldness?

- You're right, - his sister answered in the same language, If it's the first supposition, there's no arguing against it. If it's the second - it is rude, which is lamentable. But to my mind, it's the first,

It's hard to tell whether Archil was convinced by his sister's words. Coming up to Otaraant kvrivi, he said frankly and cheerfully:

- You're a wise woman, indeed you are!

On another occasion, the widow might have retorted sharply, as was her wont, but this time she kept her own counsel.

Later on, she found it surprising, «Why was I tongue-tied?» - she wondered,

XI

Two eyes

Hired to work for Archil, Giorgi got ready to leave home, and he looked so cheerful that day the widow said gladly, - At last that frown is smoothed out, I haven't seen him like that for such a long time!

Did she really say that so happily? Yes and no. It was a kind of «sunny-shady» gladness. It was sunny, because the widow was glad at her son's gladness: it was shady because a mother's natural sorrow was rending her heart. - «Why does it happen that he is glad to exchange me for others?»

Sun and shade, light and darkness, pain and joy interpenetrated, intertwined with each other.

The mother got together for her son a quilt, a pillow, a mattress, - the best in the house, - a change of bed-linen, a change of clothing, a Circassian coat and wide trousers of good lazghi wool, and undercoat of satinet, two pairs of bright-patterned woolen socks she had knitted herself, new leggings adorned with braid, footwear embellished in the same way, made to order in the bazaar, - such as are worn down below in the valley, She wrapped all that - first in a large embroidered cloth, then in a carpet and tied it up with rope in the manner of a large hold-all, - Mother, mother, what's that? - her son asked laughing, when he saw all those preparations, - you're not sending me off on a journey beyond nine mountains, are you? What do I want all those things for?

- No, son, I can't let you go without them. Let them know that you're not a wretched farm hand, but a man of good stock. Let them know that you're leaving your family and are not driven by homelessness.

- But they know that quite well!

- Seeing's better than hearing. Let them see with their own eyes what they know by hearsay!

- The whole village will make fun of me when they see such a load on my back!

- Mockery doesn't kill. Why mind a fool's chaffing!

- It's too much, mother, - such a lot of things! As though I were a girl about to be married off ...

- If you were a girl you wouldn't have flitted away from my hands so easily.

- A girl doesn't remain with her parents forever. A girl comes then goes away and makes her nest somewhere else.

- That's true, but before she gets married, - she is an unfeathered nestling under her mother's wing.

- Would you really have preserved me like pickles in brine?

- I don't say that. A girl awaits her destiny at home, a man seeks it abroad.

Giorgi knitted his brows, said nothing more and going into a corner began to fumble as if for something there.

Otaraant kvrivi noticed that he had deliberately broken off the conversation but gave no sign,

- He's afraid I'd guess! - the mother thought.

In a little while Giorgi again came up to her, got hold of the bundle and, bending over it, said, - Have it your own way, mother! I'll go with all these goods and chattels.

Saying that, he cheerfully swung the bundle on his shoulders and went off.

Otaraant kvrivi's gaze followed him from the porch for a long time. She gazed long until her son disappeared from sight. She seemed to be silently begging him, imploring him to turn round just once. But Giorgi never looked back. She felt a dull pain in her heart.

- He never turned round once! - moaned the mother, - He's gone, as though he wasn't bound to me by as much a single thread! He's eager to be with others, as though a rope was pulling him. Otaraant kvrivi stood rooted to the spot, her head bowed as though she'd had a stroke. All the sinews in her neck seemed to have broken, she had no force to raise her head, it hung low, her chin almost touching her breast.

- He's leaving me without a trace of bitterness or pity; something might at least have made him turn round! Has he left nothing here? He's going away from home, he's looking forward gladly into the future. Does it mean that everything he wants is there, absolutely everything? - The mother's heart was aching again.

She had said her say: then she pulled her sleeve down to reach her wrist and like that, with all her hand, wiped her eyes. She was scarcely aware of doing it. She did it unwittingly. Her hand hurried to her help before the tears should come gushing straight from her heart; it was as though she hadn't asked its

permission in time, lest it shouldn't allow her to cry.

But there were no tears in her eyes. Could any tears flow from a flame-wrapped heart?

The widow sank down on a step of the porch, her head still hanging. She propped her elbows on her knees.

Her thoughts were far away,

- Why is it that «you» and «I» exist in a mother's breast? - she asked herself, - Why has a mother's love got two eyes. Ah, that she didn't have those two eyes, like everybody else! And if that's decreed by fate, why does one eye serve her, and the other serves her son? Why does the heart look at the world with two eyes, why? Why doesn't one eye go blind while the other's looking? «Who exists for whom?» - can such a question be asked at all? Alas, it can. This seems to be the ever-lasting problem of mother-and-son.

Otaraant kvrivi's heart and mind were in a whirl for a long time. And then she seemed to have found a point of support, burst out of the whirlpool, stood up and said aloud, - No, sonny! May you be happy, may you be happy! As for me ... I'll gouge out the eye that sees only what is mine, and will live with the eye that sees you and yours ...

XII

An unexpected rap

Giorgi became a hired man. On the very first day Archil took Giorgi to the vineyard. When planting a new vineyard, Archil had planned to divide the entire plot into squares like a chessboard, and plant the vines in straight rows. He already had two rows marked out and vine cuttings planted.

Showing his new vineyard to Giorgi, he asked looking proud:

- How do you like that? From whatever point you look -

from above or from below - you see regular rows.

- It's a good idea to plant vines in rows the sun shines on them evenly, and the wind fans them evenly. Not long ago, about three or four years back, I heard that a certain nobleman in Kakheti had a vineyard planted like that. I had no peace until I went there and had a look, I liked what I saw. It's more convenient for work. It's good.

- At last I've found one man in the village who approves of what I do.

- Well, I don't like it either. Archil lost his temper.

- Why, man?

- Because it's a slope ...

- Oh, hell! Archil interrupted him. - It appears you don't understand much either. It's just the point, that slope, and it gets plenty of sunshine.

- I'm not finding fault with that. What can be better for a vineyard than sunshine!

- Then what's wrong?

- There's less humidity in our parts than in Kakheti, and the soil is dry. Whether we like it or not, we've got to irrigate the vineyards at least once a year, or else the vine won't grow. In the beginning, before the cutting takes root, it requires still more water

- What do you mean, then?

- I mean that if you plant the vines in regular rows along and across a slope, how will you bring water between them. Water won't flow upwards.

- So you would have the rows running downwards from the top and let the water flow down?

- If you do it like that, the water will certainly flow nicely but that's no good either. However you make it flow - in the ditch, or just over the surface - all the same, running down a steep slope it will erode the soil and wash the vineyard down to the very

bottom; as for the vines at the top of the slope, they'll simply be uprooted.

- Then what's to be done, in your opinion?

- Why, the way you've done it, only the rows should not be planted directly down the slope, but a bit slantwise, enough for the water to flow without washing away the soil. Look, the ditch also comes up to the new plot from one side. It should be brought here, a little slantwise, downhill. Otherwise it won't do your vineyard any good, you won't manage it that way. And as it is now, the water would have to flow upwards. How can that be? Come, look for yourself ...

Archil surveyed the whole plot attentively, walked round it, considering this and that, but he found nothing to oppose Giorgi's conclusions.

- It's quite simple, sir, - said Giorgi, noticing Archil's hesitation, - If you like, I'll open the way to the water at once, and it'll be quite clear.

- No, it's not worth-while! You're quite right, my dear Giorgi! Good thing you came in time while only two rows were planted and that's easily mended. Or else - I wouldn't wish your enemy to make such a mistake! To say nothing of the expenditure, I would have been a laughing-stock for all the peasants.

Archil returned home and told his sister all about it. She laughed a lot at the rap her brother had unexpectedly received.

- How did that happen to you? - asked Keso, laughing heartily, but she tried to soften the mockery by repeating the question in a soft, gentle sisterly tone. - How did that happen to you.?

- Well, my dear, as it always happens to self-confident ignoramuses! We read some thing out of a book and imagine that in a little while we shall master the mystery of Creation. There are many things in this world that people haven't learned from books, and they have to know all that. But we have lost the ability to

observe all that is around us. We get hold of a book - and it at once seems to us that we won't find wisdom anywhere but in books.

- Why, have you, too, come to despise books?

- I don't despise books, I despise myself. We can't do without books, but it's not good viewing everything through them. Without books, our outlook is too narrow, but with books alone it is not broad enough either. We think it below us to seek wisdom under the dirty sheepskin coat of those who have no knowledge of books. We don't acknowledge and don't believe that any sensible man is also a book. Any sensible man, even if he is unlearned, has something to teach an educated man. And it shouldn't be taken badly.

- It may result from false wisdom, - Keso put in with a smile.

- And from mistaken, ignorant self - confidence, - Archil added.

XIII

A new broom sweeps clean

Scarcely were these words out of Archil's mouth, when they heard shouts and a racket; Archil dashed out on the verandah and cried to servants who rushed out of the stable.

- What's that noise?

- I don't know! It comes from the stable! - someone answered.

- Go and find out what's the matter.

Before anyone could make a move, the stable-boy burst out of the stable. He ran, swearing and shaking his fist at somebody who was evidently following him.

- He's the scourge of God, sir, - he cried to Archil, who was standing by the balustrade. - What brought him here, that homeless

vagabond? He gave me such a beating that I'm still black and blue.

- What vagabond?
- That fellow, your new man!
- Giorgi?
- Devil take him - Giorgi, or what's - his - name? ...
- What happened, then?
- What happened? When you, sir, returned from the vineyard,

I unsaddled the horse and took it into the stall. He came soon after you, did ... He looked into the stable, picked a quarrel with me using bad language ... I did the same, he threw me to the ground and gave me such a drubbing, enough to break all my ribs.

- Call Giorgi! - Archil commanded. One of the servants ran to fetch him. Keso came out on the verandah and stood at her brother's side.

- What's the matter? - she asked.
- They had a scuffle over something.
- Who?
- Giorgi and the groom.
- What was it about?
- I don't yet know for sure. Giorgi'll be here presently, he'll

tell us.

Giorgi came. His undercoat sleeve was nearly torn off and he tried to cover up the tear carefully. Maids, young men, servants, everyone who at the moment had been doing their jobs in the house came running out into the yard.

- Did you have a quarrel?
- No, I've nothing to do with him.
- He complains that you've beaten him up.
- I did give him a beating, and I was right.
- But that's worse than a quarrel. What did you, beat him

for?

- He'd tied your horse in its stall all sweaty as it was. I

entered the stable and found him sprawling on the trestle-bed smoking his pipe.

- What a sin, - I said - the horse is running with sweat and you've put him in the stall; you should have walked him about, then doused him with water. He'll be done for, it'll harm either his back or his legs! And he, not caring a rap, draws at his pipe and retorts; «D'you know the saying, - pick a quarrel for nothing, and you'll have to pick up your bones all over the place».

- I'm not picking a quarrel, - I said, - and I'll remain whole.

- I went up to the horse intending to take him outside and rub down his sweaty back. He yelled. - Get out of here, you tramp! - and used insulting words about my mother. At that, I got angry and beat him up. I wouldn't allow even my own father to say a bad word about my mother.

- Is that how it really was? - Keso inquired, looking at Giorgi from the veranda.

- Lying is unworthy of a man ...

- It's true, it was really like that, - cried the shepherd-boy who tended the calves; he had chanced to be in the stable when the quarrel occurred, - It's quite true, I was here to witness it.

- Keso, get the ledger, see what we owe him and bring his wage. Without a question, Keso understood whom her brother meant. She returned into the house, came out again in a little while and said to her brother:

- We owe him twenty-five roubles. Here's the money.

Archil took the money, threw it to the groom and cried, Here's what we owe you, brother, and go in peace. I won't keep you any longer.

- It's me who got the beating, - and you're angry with me?

- You'll be the wiser for it: you did badly, you might at least not blame another for speaking the truth.

Archil and Keso returned into the house. The maids and men went their ways.

- That's that ... a new broom sweeps clean, - they said, chaffing the new hired man.

- When it gets old, it'll leave litter all over the place, - said others.

- Oh, no! His mother is also a character ... He's not called Otaraant kvrivi's son for nothing.

However, it was only one man who had such an opinion of Giorgi; besides, he didn't speak out, he kept his own counsel.

He was Archil's miller, an old-timer, a reserved and quiet man; that's why people used to treat him badly; no one knew where he came from, no one knew since when he had been living the life of a hermit in the mill. He had grown old at his job, he had neither a wife nor children, no kinsfolk. Nobody knew who he was, where he came from ... Somewhere, sometime his lonely star had risen, and now, lonely, sedate, calm and harmless, it was sinking to rest.

XIV

Did Giorgi know?

- How did you like this affair? - Archil asked his sister when they had returned into the house...

- He's hot-headed ... a wilful man - answered his sister, seeming to be at a loss for the right words.

- Not only that! He's got a conscience, a sensitive kind of conscience that makes him as mindful of other's interests as of his own.

- No need to exaggerate, it's all much simpler.

- Don't talk like that when you're speaking of something good there's no need to weigh it - this is more, that is less. What is good is considerable as it is. In this case you have to do with an uneducated man. It's not his mind that governs his conscience; it is nurtured by his heart alone, To my mind, this is a most important

fact, because a conscience of this sort is born of a yearning, a thirst of a man's whole being, the same as the desire to warm himself when it's cold, to find a cool spot when it's hot, to eat when he's hungry. The heart knows what to do before the mind has offered advice. This is a most important phenomenon.

- Why? He was offended by bad words about his mother, there was nothing else, was there?

- That was the end of the story. Dig deeper and find the beginning. He couldn't bear to see the groom lolling there before he'd attended to the horse. The man had neglected his duty, and Giorgi's honest heart revolted, refused to be reconciled to it. The horse was not his, was it, and the groom was not responsible to him. Between us, what did he want, why did he do what he did? To please us? If it were not for that fight, we'd never have heard of it. He took it in badly because of hostility to the groom? Did he profit by the occasion? But what could he have against a man he had set eyes on for the first time? It was neither this, nor that. He saw things done badly, he saw the man who was to do it idling, and he couldn't stand it. Whatever you may say, - that's sure proof of a man's noble nature. Yes, indeed, it's a sure sign! Now I understand the incident the miller told us about once. Do you remember, how Giorgi, returning from the field, caught Burkiashvili's buffaloes and drove them straight to Kakhuashvili saying: «They've been trampling the sprouts in your field». Although I'd heard of Giorgi's doings before, in this case I sinned before God, thinking, - «Probably Giorgi had a bone to pick with Burkiashvili». Now I'm sorry this thought came to my mind, it was an insult to a good man.

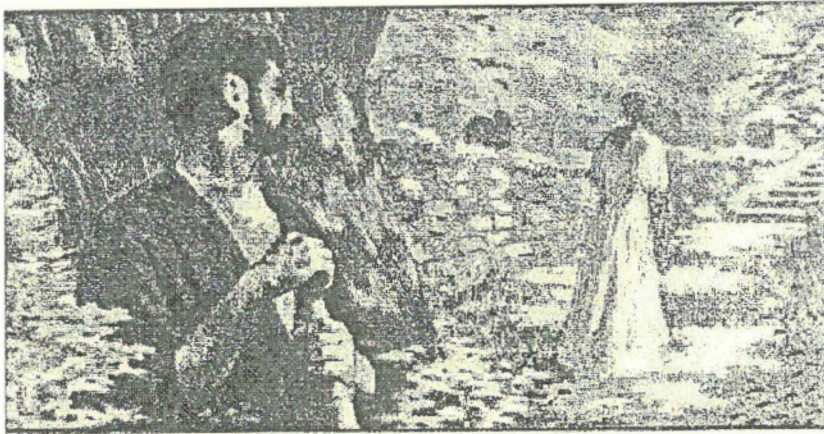
- Then you should apologize to him, - his sister advised earnestly, with all her heart, having pondered what her brother had told her.

- My repentance will be expressed by the fact that I'll learn from him. Yes, he'll be my teacher! ... What are we compared to

him? Let him teach us and edify us.

Archil paced the room pensively. Keso also became thoughtful. Giorgi was a riddle to her, as he is to me, my dear reader.

- Keso, - said Archil at last stopping before her, - D'you know what I'll tell you? You wanted to lay out a flower garden in front of the house. Let's ask Giorgi's advice. It wouldn't be bad. I suppose to dismiss that drunkard of a German and get Giorgi to do the job. He's a mindful fellow. You just show him what you want and I'm sure he'll understand at once what to do and how to do it. The day-labourers will do the rest if Giorgi supervises. It's a pity, of course, that such a fellow should spend his powers on trifles. But let it be, for a while. Afterwards we'll think of something more suitable for him ...



- Very well, - his sister approved. - But here's a difficulty: I've got nothing but a plan on paper, a drawing. I'm not sure I'll manage to explain it to him. I'd better let him have a look. We'll see if he'll make it out ...

Early next morning Archil decided to have a look at his

new vineyard. Mounting his horse, he turned it with a touch of his heel, but as he moved off, he turned to Giorgi and cried over his shoulder;

- Don't go anywhere, Keso has a bit of business with you!

- Keso?

Giorgi's heart missed a beat.

Keso was also up early, but it took her time to put things in order and dress. At last Keso called Giorgi. He was overcome with timidity when he found himself facing Keso. It was probably shyness and no wonder never in his life had he been face to face with a woman who was a stranger to him.

Keso spread on the couch the plan painted in various colours. She had found it in a book and, with her brother's assistance, had changed it according to her taste.

Giorgi stood rooted to the spot.

- Now come here, Giorgi, I want to show you this drawing

- Keso said to Giorgi who was standing at the door.

Giorgi couldn't stir a foot.

- «Curse it all, why am I weak-kneed?» - he wondered.

- Why do you stand there hesitating like a newly-married girl? Come here, I won't eat you up, don't be afraid.

Giorgi made a step forward, then another, but stopped respectfully at a distance from Keso and her plan.

- Why am I shivering like that? - he wondered.

- What's the matter with you? - Keso said with a touch of irritation. Stand here, closer to me.

- «Closer! « At times the shortest word seems long.

Giorgi didn't move, he only stretched his neck clumsily glancing sidelong at the paper.

- Can't you hear me? I can scarcely make it out standing near, you won't see anything from there, - stretching your neck like a cockerel! Come nearer!

Still Giorgi wouldn't budge.

- «Oh, how frightened I am! Is it the evil spirit holding me back, or is a sacred icon preventing me from moving forward,» - Giorgi deliberated in, bewilderment.

Keso got tired of waiting, seized him by the sleeve and drew him forward.

Giorgi staggered, as though a clap of thunder had burst over his head. Something must have tripped him up.

- What's the matter with you? - asked Keso.

- I don't know, I must have stumbled over my own foot - Giorgi explained, thinking to himself: - Has someone cut the sinews in my legs? Hell, what's happening to me?

- Here, - said Keso, showing the drawing to Giorgi when he was finally standing at her side, - you know the plot enclosed in a low fence in front of the house? Here it is. And now, my dear Giorgi, we shall make garden paths that will meet here and then run in different directions. They will be covered with beaten brick. Between the paths, flowerbeds must be made, as shown here. We'll plant various flowers on them. See the middle? From here ...

- I can't see anything, my lady. Let me go, command me to come another time, - uttered Giorgi in an imploring tone, drawing away from Keso. - Something's wrong with me, everything has gone dark before my eyes, I'm quite dazed, I can't see or hear anything. Let me go, for God's sake!

Glancing at Giorgi, Keso noticed that he was white as a ghost and was really out of sorts. She dismissed him, thinking to herself,

- What's the matter with him? Not a heart attack, by any chance?

Did Giorgi himself know what was the matter?

XV

Every man in his humour

All that happened at the beginning of March. March went by, fair April and still more lovely May had passed. June came - the month of haymaking. The garden Keso had planned blossomed out wonderfully. It was so exquisite, so lovely, brilliant with bright colours, green lawns, that one couldn't tear one's eyes from it. It seemed that mighty Nature and the active hand of man were competing; «See which of us will adorn and beautify this garden better». It seemed that Nature and the man, without sparing an effort, had spread the best gifts of their genius.

Keso was overjoyed that her old dream had so wonderfully come true. Every morning, even before the blazing sun threw its first brilliant ray from beyond the mountain and inundated the snowy peak with a golden torrent, with gold ore, Keso, throwing on her clothes, would run out into the garden and remained there almost till evening. Until twilight she never remembered it was time to go into the house. All day long she fluttered among the bright flowers and the lush green grass, enjoying the sight of every flower, delighted by every fresh shoot, by every new bud. When there was no one near by, she used to speak softly, her heart overflowing with tenderness, to an opening flower which seemed to be smiling at its own blossoming. That's how a swallow twitters to her nestlings.

But it seldom happened that she should be alone in the garden: Giorgi was invariably there. However early she may have come out, she found Giorgi there with a hoe or a spade or a pruning knife. Giorgi had laid out the flower-garden as Keso and Archil had instructed and advised him to do. He was also to tend it, I don't think he took such care of his eyes as he did of the garden. He wouldn't even leave a speck of dust on the grass or the leaves!

Archil and Keso were very well disposed towards Giorgi; many times they said he was doing the work of two, or even three men. Neither had Giorgi any occasion to complain. On the contrary, he was glad of his luck.

- What else have I to wish for? - he would ask himself when deliberating. - They keep asking me - «tell us yourself what wages you want!» - What do I want with wages? It's quite enough for me to see my sun every blessed day! «

It's hard to say what Giorgi meant by those words. But it should be mentioned that working in the garden and being in high spirits, he would croon one and the same song, - I want to live just to see you, my, sun!

It was as though nothing else in the world existed for him, as though he never dreamed or never yearned for anything else. It's not for nothing that people say, - «Every man has his humour!»

XVI

Maybe!

Days passed, the months ran their course. Bountiful autumn came. The whole village was busy washing, cleaning, scrubbing wine- jars and wine-presses. Luscious clusters of white grapes tinted with amber, or blackberry-coloured «Saperavi» grapes were gaining their owners to begin the vintage, seeming to say, - «make haste, we'll soon be over-ripe!»

The grapes were picked, pressed, the young wine had fermented.

The sonorous songs no longer rang out in the village; quite recently workmen, holding hands, had been singing them while crashing the grapes. The merry time of «Machroba», of young wine, had elapsed and fallen silent, as though extenuated and exhausted.

It was already the middle of autumn. Heavily loaded haycarts creaked between the fences in the village lanes. The villagers were in a hurry to bring the hay, winter fodder for their cattle, from the vineyards to their homesteads. They were anxious lest there should be a snowfall.

Archil sent out four carts to bring in the hay. The hay was stored right there, in the yard, not far from the cowshed, in a hayloft raised on high piles so that the cattle shouldn't reach it and scatter it.

The sun hadn't yet sunk beyond the mountains to be extinguished there; it slackened its pace on the crest and seemed to brood there: «Why am I hastening away, why am I in a hurry to part with this beautiful earth?» The calm, soft, dry, dewless, cloudless autumn evening was so lovely that it could have raised even a cripple to walk out and take a look at the world.

Archil and Keso came out of the house, went down to the hayloft and, sitting down on a great tree-stump, watched the workmen storing the hay. Archil liked to be among his workmen, to have a talk with them, sometimes exchanging jokes. He often told Keso that he was learning the language from them and sometimes common sense.

Four carts stood close to the hayloft, one at each corner. Three were empty, hay was still being banded up only from the fourth. The pole in the centre of the pile stuck out above the hay about half a metre, and the stack was rising to the roof, narrowing towards the top. Just then Giorgi came up with a hoe on his shoulder.

- Petre, hey, Petre - he called from a distance to the man who was laying the hay, - The top of the stack is slanting towards the gardens. You, re laying it unevenly, put it straight! It's not good like that!

- That's Giorgi! Where's he shouting from? - asked Archil. Giorgi was standing behind the cart and couldn't be seen, neither

could he seem Archil and Keso.

- Where are you coming from with that hoe? - asked Archil when Giorgi coming up, greeted the brother and sister.

- The water had broken through the ditch near the mill and swamped our little garden, I had to turn it away.

- What were you shouting just now?

- Nothing important. They weren't laying the top evenly, rain-water could have gathered there, the hay would rot. So I shouted to Petre to even it out.

- Let me see!

Archil stood up, Giorgi led the way round the stack to show what was wrong.

- Right you are, - said Archil, - Petre, Giorgi's talking sense, the top of the stack is crooked.

Petre got hold of the plait of withes tied to the central pole, walked around the top of the stack and surveyed its edges.

- Ah, indeed, God's wrath upon me! - cried Petre, - It's got to be evened out, - Giorgi, lend me a hand, for God's sake, climb up here, we'll put it straight, I won't manage it by myself, and I don't like putting things off till tomorrow.

- But there's no room for two up there, brother, - Giorgi cried from below, - there's no room to stand.

- Don't be lazy, in the name of God, I'll come down, and you come up. My arms are already numb. You'll do the job quickly with fresh forces. Do me a good turn, there's a good fellow!

- Do you know how to stack hay? - asked Keso who had just come up, - They say it needs skill.

- It's really nothing special, my lady, - said Giorgi with a smile, - Where was I bred?

- If so, go ahead. It's up to you. Petre, hanging on to the plait of withes tied to the central pole, slipped down, reaching with difficulty for the haycart till he felt it with his foot. Finding himself, somehow or other, on the ground, he came up to Giorgi,

slapped him on the shoulder and said gently, - It'll be on me, Giorgi, besides, I'm old enough to be your father, Eh, my son and brother, when a man has aged, he should lay down his bow.

- Why? - Giorgi asked.

- Because, my good man, an old man's eye deceives him, and his hand betrays him, - his spirit is not the same as it was in his youth. If I were your age, and such a thing had happened to me, I'd have broken my arm.

- It happens that a tottering old man is better than a clumsy young one. Don't be depressed.

- God grant you a long life, you're a good man both in word and deed.

Giorgi didn't hear the last words. He quickly leapt on the cart, pulled closer the plait with the hay-fork which was hanging down like a belt and in the twinkling of an eye was at the top of the stack; he loosened the layers of hay, threw some of it down, trod down the top, and, taking stock of the situation, - «from here it'll spread it evenly» - began to lay the hay. He had finished the job before the earth was wrapped in deep twilight.

- He's nimble as a squirrel, that son of a blessed father, said simple-hearted Petre to Archil while watching Giorgi working like one possessed ...

- He's a fine fellow, indeed, - acquiesced Archil.

- Fine, you, say? There's none to equal him in our village! Having done the job, Giorgi cried to Petre from above:

- Here, Petre! Walk around again, take a look for yourself, does it lie even? Petre walked round the stack of hay and shouted: - It's all right, quite all right! Come down, everything is as it should be.

Giorgi grasped the plait, his feet firmly planted in the hay and began to slip down. When he was at about the middle of the haystack, the plait broke suddenly ... Giorgi plunged backward, his back speared on the pole of the cart, the pole, snapping,

shattered Giorgi's spine

Archil, Keso, the peasants, all rushed up to Giorgi who lay half dead, with his face on the ground, blood spurted from the wound like a fountain

Archil went down on his knees near Giorgi and tried to bandage the wound, the others helping him. Finally, with a common effort, they succeeded in stopping the bleeding. Giorgi, more dead than alive, and Keso, who had fainted, were carried into the house.

Oh, God's curse upon my head! In what have I sinned against Thee, lord God, that you have made me answerable for this misfortune? Petre cried out, bursting into tears.

What is to be, will be, - someone tried to console him. Maybe it is his fate! Can it be your fault?

XVII

Great sorrow

Archil had Giorgi carried into his room and laid on his bed. He at once sent a man to the nearest town to fetch the doctor. Besides, he dispatched men to all the villages around to seek local bone setters, - all those who were known and who had been mentioned by members of the household.

In the village itself there was a renowned bone-setter, Opopaant Demetie. He was sent for. Half an hour hadn't passed before he arrived.

Demetie examined Giorgi. For a long time he palpated the injured man, shaking his head and finally told Archil, - No, sir! I can't undertake it. He will not last long. He is doomed.

Won't you try? Help him, for God's sake! Ask anything you want only don't let him die in my house, it's a misfortune for me! Archil begged, implored the man, he hadn't left Giorgi for a moment since the accident. He knelt at the bedside again, took

the dying man's hand in his own and chafed it, without understanding what he was doing it for.

- We'd only be torturing this unfortunate man, better let him yield up the ghost painlessly, - replied Demetre. - He'll be gone before morning, at the latest. All his entrails are crashed.

- Isn't it a pity to let such a young man die? - cried Archil panning, his head bowed with grief.

- Oh, oh, what a pity! - somebody howled of a sudden. Everyone looked round to the place whence the sobbing came, and saw Archil's miller in a dark corner. Having learned about the accident, the old man came running, slipped into the room and stood there sobbing quietly, as though afraid that someone might hear him ...

- Aren't you, sorry for me, my dear Sosia? Such a misfortune to happen in my house, - Archil complained. He saw that the miller was as distressed as he was himself. By sharing his grief with another, he tried to lighten his own.

- Indeed, sir, yes, sir! - vociferated the miller, losing his self-control ... - Woe, woe to his unfortunate mother!

Only now that the miller mentioned her did Archil remember Otaraant kvrivi. Among the general confusion nobody had thought to notify the mother about her son's accident, Otaraant kvrivi was as yet unaware of it ...

Archil was alarmed. He couldn't think how he was to announce to the mother that her son was at death's door. This thought was torturing him when Keso, recovering from her swoon, rushed into the room ... She was white as a ghost.

- What is it? How is he? - she asked hastily, dashing to Giorgi's couch.

- Couldn't be worse - her brother could hardly utter the words Keso glanced at Giorgi. He lay on his side, facing her. The young girl noticed at once that he was at the last gasp. Her face twitched painfully ... She covered her eyes with her hands and

rubbed them as hard as she could as though wishing to check the tears that were welling up.

- Keso, should we let his mother know? - asked her brother.

- What do you mean? We've killed her son and aren't we to send for her at once so that she should find him still living, that he should at least die in her arms? - Keso said sobbing.

- I'm absolutely distraught - said her brother, - I'm quite broken by this misfortune, I can neither act nor think. I'm quite at a loss.

A boy was sent for Giorgi's mother. Soon Otaraant kvrivi came.

She hurriedly entered the room where Giorgi lay, but so restrained as though she didn't attach much importance to the message she had received. Only her face, yellow as saffron, looked still more wrinkled and faded. But the boy who had gone to fetch her told the young girls and men who surrounded him that when he brought her the sad message, that big woman well-nigh fell on him.

- What makes you cry, my dear? - the mother said shortly as she passed the weeping Keso, - Has it come to shedding tears? Is it as bad as that?

Everybody was silent, paralyzed by apprehension and awe, so great was their grief ...

The widow approached her son's bedside, but she had scarcely glanced at the dying man, when she struck her head with terrible force. Her legs gave way under her, she fell to her knees.

No one uttered a word, no one stirred in the stillness of the room. Only the flame of the candle lighted at the head of the bed was flickering. Every living thing seemed to be turned to stone, as though they had become pillars of salt. Everything was still, immobile, only the mother's grief, unspoken, soundless, wordless announced her unfathomable bereavement. Only the eyes of the heart could see it. Only the heart could hear it. Physical sight and

hearing were powerless before it.

XVIII

The last confession

- Call the priest, for God's sake, call the priest! - moaned the mother in a little while, when her heart began to throb again and she had overcome the confused state of her mind. The priest was brought, Giorgi was given extreme unction. While all this was going on, the widow seemed to have pulled herself together. The first blow had felled her. Then she mastered her feelings overcame them.

Like a hero felled by a bullet, she resisted stubbornly, fighting down pain, excruciating torture.

Otaraant kvrivi went down on one knee, threw off the blanket. She half-embraced him and stroked the chest of her speechless son who lay before her, his eyes closed. The sagacious heart of the mother perceived at once, that there was no saving him, that death was wresting her son from her embrace. She didn't ask any questions, she didn't want to know anything more. Having lost all hope, she only yearned passionately that he shouldn't die without uttering a sound, without a word for her.

- Giorgi, my dear son! Look at your mother, just one look! What has happened to you? What has destroyed you, my strong brave son, that you won't open your eyes for your mother's sake?

Whether the son had felt his mother's hand on his chest, or whether it was his mother's voice that had aroused him, her wish was granted; he opened his eyes and, weak as he was, he looked round the room. Then his eyes dimmed again, he closed them, only his lips were moving.

- He wants to say something, but he can't! - his mother groaned. Two big tears came rolling from her eyes, and like drops

of molten lead, burned traces down her pale cheeks. But her face? It was not distorted with grief. With her ardency, fanatical resistance, the mother had mastered her emotions to such an extent that the excruciating pain she felt found no reflection in her face. Her burning heart melted the forcibly frozen tears, but in her face mastered by the effort of her indomitable will, not a muscle was twitching. The burning pain of hopelessness had again returned an icy calm to the woman who was worn to a shadow with grief.

- Wa ... - rasped Giorgi, but he had no strength to go on.

- Water! Water! - voices were heard. Demetre advised that wine should be given to brace him up.

- My dear, my only son, my fatherless son, say something, give me one look, just one! - the mother moaned, bringing a little cup with wine to his lips. Giorgi swallowed a few drops, which seemed to revive him a bit. He opened his eyes. His gaze wandered mildly about the room and stopped suddenly. Turning round, the mother saw the weeping Keso ...

- Mother! Do you, see that ... angel ... - Giorgi uttered with an effort, keeping his fading gaze on Keso.

- I do, my son!

- Mother! Some wine! ... His mother again gave him wine.

- It's she - my fate! ... I don't regret it, I don't! - Giorgi went on brokenly.

Archil glanced wonderingly at his sister, Keso seemed thunder struck, she grew pale, winced, she stood petrified but the mother, it seemed, was not surprised by his confession. Neither Archil, nor Keso, nor anybody else ventured to utter a word in this hour of grief. They all listened, holding their breath.

- Oh, that I could kiss the hem of your skirt at least, and then die! - moaned Giorgi, and his eyes, still on Keso's face, expressed all the depth of his despondence and yearning.

Keso, in tears, ran up to Giorgi and kissed him, on the forehead. When she raised her head, her tears flowed, unrestrained

on to the chest of the dying man. This sudden flow of tears seemed to give strength to Giorgi, a shiver ran through his body. They seemed to have sprinkled him with life-giving water, comforted and gladdened him, he revived, - one might have thought that his life on the point of leaving him, was returning. Joy, happiness coming at such a moment, - is life itself, even if a short, fleeting life ...

- See, mother? While I lived, I waited unceasingly for her smile. I'm dying, and she sheds tears over me. This joy is enough for me, I'll take it away with me! ... I've nothing to regret! I'm going, and taking away with me my joy, sprinkled with her tears. It will bloom for me there, there ... Don't grieve, mother! I've heard from you, haven't I, that one shouldn't hang on to something that can't be helped. Archil, don't be angry! Don't! Nor you! I understood, didn't I, who I am and who you are! How could I reach up to you? You are a star in the sky ... My heart could reach you, my heart, but not my hands ... I adored you as a saint ... you spread light, like the sun! You didn't even know whom you were warming, to whom you were giving joy and life! While I was living, I couldn't open my heart to you, I was held back by shame, fear ... veneration ... And now, - I'm dying, and can speak out. Can the dead be called to account? The dead are all equals ...

His head fell helplessly to one side on the pillow, a film came over his eyes again, The death-throes began. His fingers were twitching helplessly. Giorgi seemed to be seeking somebody, wishing to find ... A short while elapsed, and Giorgi was no more.

- He's gone! - the mother shrieked and fell across the dead body of her son.

She pressed her face to his chest. Not a word, not a sound! One could have thought she had died too on her son's chest.

They waited, hoping she would come to, but when they saw that Otaraant kvrivi was not moving, not weeping, they all wondered; had something happened to her as well?

Keso came up and tried to raise her. And only then Otaraant kvrivi spoke up, - My dear, let me be alone with my son. Nothing will happen to me! I was born under this star! Oh, my evil fate! Ah me, nothing will break me!

Silently Archil made a sign to the servants to leave the room. They all went.

Archil and Keso tiptoed out after them, ordering one maid-servant to remain in the adjoining room to watch over Otaraant kvrivi. Everyone left the room. And only then, feeling that she was alone, Otaraant kvrivi began to strike her head with her fists

- My Giorgi is gone! - She lamented in an undertone, - I remain here, and Giorgi's gone. You've left me, my dear son? You're dead? You're gone, gone, you'll never come back! My son, it was for you to bury me, and now I'm to bury you! It was for you to lament for me, and now I'm lamenting for you! These hands that reared you are fated to throw earth on your grave! It's not you, who will fold them over my breast, it is I, that will fold your arms crosswise with my own hands! Woe to your mother! Woe to your mother that she should have lived to see you dead!

She again let her head fall on her son's chest that was growing cold. The sound of crying was no longer heard nothing but grievous quiet sobbing.

- Oh! Oh! Oh! - the room suddenly resounded with howl-like weeping.

The widow turned round in resentful wonder. A single candle barely lighted the spacious room, one of the corners remained almost dark. Someone was crouching in that corner. As soon as she discerned the man who had remained there despite her wish, - the touching bereaved mother again became the stern Otaraan't kvrivi.

- What do you want here? - the widow cried angrily.

- I couldn't bear to see you grieving, my throat was choking

with sobs. I didn't mean to, but I burst into tears and bellowed like a cow, may I be damned!

- What keeps you here? ...

- I just can't have you here alone! I thought - it's another man's house, you might grow faint, I could at least bring you some water...

- Who are you?

- Sosia.

- What Sosia?

- If you remember me, - very well, if you don't, even then God grant you joy, if there's any joy left for you on this earth after the death of your son,

- No joy left, you think? To await death, - isn't that joy? When everybody was leaving the room the old miller had fallen back unnoticed. Bent double he crouched in an unlighted corner.

- Go away, you've nothing to do here! - said the widow, - I want to be left alone here ...

- As you will, I'll go, I'll lie down like a dog at the door! Call me, if you want anything ...

All right, leave me!

XIX

The bridge that collapsed

Archil had ceremonial obsequies held for Giorgi. He invited clergy from the whole district and the peasants from all the villages around to honour Giorgi; he spared no expenses to pay his last duty to Giorgi. Archil had him interred as though he was his close relative, a member of his family. Together with the peasants, he carried the coffin, without being relieved by another man, from the house to the church, and from there to the cemetery. Keso accompanied the deceased to the cemetery in deep mourning,

silent, her hands crossed on her breast, her head bowed with grief, as though she were the chief mourner. When the coffin was lowered into the grave, she fell on her knees, crossed herself and began to pray in silence. Then she threw a handful of earth into the grave and stood up quickly as if something had frightened her.

- Just look! She's crying - said one of the women who stood nearby, - love's no joke, - put in another, - I've heard people say they loved each other.

- She conceals her tears, poor thing, as though she were ashamed.

- What's there to be ashamed of? - the women were saying interrupting one another, - Why, wasn't he a man? The girl is pretty, the man handsome, what else does love need? Some of the peasants approved of the noble attitude of the brother and sister who were burying Giorgi with such honours, others said:

- They've done the man to death, and now they want to hoodwink the community!

They may have been right. One thing is doubtless: it's not easy to discern the truth in another's soul.

Archil could just catch what the peasants were saying; when Keso learned about it, she was indignant at that scandalmongering. Archil said - «That's nothing to wonder at. How's that? We paid him the last honours heart and soul, and they throw dirt at us! It would have been surprising if they spoke differently. And they are right, from their point of view. The bridge between us has collapsed: they remain over on the other side, and we are on this side. We are far from each other - so far that our eyes can no longer see things in the proper, actual light. Is it anything to wonder at, if at such a distance a man sees another as a log, and the face, created in God's image, is something blurred? Across that tremendous space there are many things that look black to a weak eye when they are actually white! As for us, we don't look with a naked eye, we are armed with a binocular! That binocular is science, knowledge!

They are deprived of that advantage”.

- Then, they don't perceive what is good as good, what is true as true?

- They don't recognize, -they don't believe that we think good or what we think is true. Both, if they proceed from us, seem strange to them, amazes them. «Why, what for?» they query - «For the sake of good itself? Why should he be good to me? What's he to me, what am I to him?» And in this, they are, indeed, entirely right! What are we to them, what are they to us? What are we and what are they? We belong to different worlds, I have already said that we are far from each other. Their joys and sorrows are within one fence, ours - within another. We have no chance to meet, to come in contact heart to heart. So should we wonder that they cannot understand us, neither can we understand them any longer? Tell me one thing: who holds the link between us? Only the high-flown language of a bookish man, - such people as us that I call bookish, and the avid hands of grasping men. What good could such go-betweens bring us?

- Then, the whole world has become heartless? The heart is dead, and man is left heartless?

- Yes, indeed, there's no such thing as the heart now, or, more exactly, the kindness that directs hand and heart. Or else, it still exists, but it has grown numb, smothered, it seems to be dead, - both in us and in them. Maybe it's not quite, not finally dead, but it's half-dead at the least. And, that's how we live, trying to understand each other, only with that one-eyed, half-dead half. Errors are unavoidable in this case, as it is the eye, that has gone blind, the ear that has gone deaf, that were to see another, to hear another man. What is the heart? If a man were quite alone in the world, there would have been no heart. The heart means kindness but it is possible to show kindness, only when there are two. It needs at least two for kindness to be born, because kindness is at the same time, a sacrifice on the part of one man, and willingness

to accept that sacrifice on the part of the other. If there's none to offer a sacrifice, - there's no kindness; consequently there's no heart. If there are not two, what does the heart need a go-between for; speech, sight, hearing? ... The go-between has no need of himself. He is needed only when there's someone he's to be sent to. Without another man, the heart of the only man is nothing but a bag that pumps the blood through the system, takes it and gives it back. But where's that other man? On the other bank. So far away! So why should you be surprised that we can't be seen from over there, that they don't believe us, not even our kindness... What should this belief catch hold on, what support has it? In the heart of a dead man? That's impossible!

- It's an old, old twice-changed story, dear, if he's a peasant, he's always right!

- Why do you suspect me of such foolishness, my dear? I don't eulogize the peasant childishly; he's an angel in the flesh. I'm feeling for, digging, weeping for the half I've lost, and, like a mature man, I grieve, I pine and cry for the half I've lost. He's my half, severed from me. I'm his half, severed from him. I am distressed about him, but I don't justify him. It's not only the peasant's sheepskin coat that is dirty, but also his heart, sometimes. I know that, but are we any better? Are we any purer beneath this snow-white, spotless white shirt without a speck of dust on it? I've just said I am distressed about them, that I am sorry for them, - but I also despise and hate myself. Why, living as half a man, with one half of my heart - is no life. It's death, it's rot ...

- Death is putrescence. A body in a state of decomposition exudes pus, nothing but pus. This is what you meant, isn't it?

- You've taken the words out of my mouth. Yes, pus flowing from here and from there, in two directions. One stream issues from our decaying self. Don't let it surprise you that when we, two halves, come in contact, we can't avoid being smeared with pus. If when we have done something good, we search each other's

hearts with the mortified part of our souls. That is why anyone who does good, - whoever he may be, one of us or one of them, is taken either for a fool, or a liar. One who is dead cannot understand one who is living, he cannot understand as a living man would.

- Then all is lost, if so?

- Who told you that? For such as we, it may be true, but not for them,

- I can't understand, You've said that they're as dead as we are.

- That's right, - only you've forgotten the living half still preserved in us. That's where the difference lies! We are, essentially made, while they are created. We are basted loosely together - they are beautifully stitched, - with the stitches that Nature alone uses. You know, don't you, what a great master Nature is? They are cemented with lime, while we are frail. Just listen to their singing: it's all one long-drawn-out groan, but still it's called song. Our song is not a moan, but still we can't say it's joyful. Do you remember what Paata said when he came to see us in town, through slush and sleet, only just to ask for three roubles, I said jestingly, «Say, man, how come you set out on such a journey, in such bad weather, just for the sake of three roubles?»

- Ah, sir, how should you know what kind of fruit the persimmon is, - he said rudely, without meaning to offend me, country lout that he is.

- «When I return home from here, tired, exhausted, bespattered with mud, wet to the skin with rain and snow, and wrap myself up, shivering, in my tattered old blanket, and lie down - ah, how sweetly I shall sleep! You'll never have such a sleep in all your life!» Really, for them sleep is a rest, recuperation of their forces. For us, it is a way of pampering ourselves. It makes our strength swollen and bloated as with dropsy, because wakefulness and sleep are the same to us. Their living half is active, whether

that's good or bad for them, while ours is idle. Life is activity. That's what's good about them, that's in what they excel us .

- Doesn't a wild beast prowl from morning till night in search for its prey? They are hungry, and is it wise to praise them because they work without respite in order to satisfy their hunger? There must be something human about a man. That's the most important thing, only that is worthy of praise and glory.

- What do you mean?

- I mean that, as human beings, they are worse than us. Rarely can you find such a greedy, ungrateful, perfidious and ruthless creature as a peasant; he is cruel even to a brother-peasant; finding him in misery, he's ready to strangle him, to sweep off the face of the earth. Is it worth speaking of others ...

I believe you, I've seen that sort with my own eyes, I've heard a thing or two with my own ears. But still, life is in them: the blood boils in their veins, the very pulse of life throbs in them. That which you point to is dirt, the scum of seething life. At the bottom it is pure. What, then, forges a real man, such as Giorgi was, from human material, or such a woman, as Otaraant kvrivi? Such bread can only be baked in their oven. Ours can only produce such half-baked pancakes as we are. I can't yet fully comprehend what appeared to us in the figure of Giorgi. We are unable even to see and hear, we have no power for that, while there! What creative forces are concealed there ... Giorgi...

Don't remind me. I'm so dejected when I remember him, poor man!

XX

Dawn is breaking

Archil broke off and started pacing the room.

Maybe he was sorry for Keso, or else he simply was tired and sought a respite and relief in movement ... But presently he swung round half way and said to Keso:

- No, my dear sister don't take my words badly, - what happened to Giorgi isn't something we can bypass, or wash our hands off easily. Do you, remember Grigol Orbeliani? How we were carried away by his words:

«Tell me, friends,
What is valued in a man?
Is it only high birth
That he can shine with?
Oh, no, believe me,
From age to age,
It is his bright soul
And noble mind that are honoured,
- What has that to do with it? - asked Keso.

Archil fell thoughtful. He was amazed at his sister's lack of understanding.

- Your question surprises me, Keso!
- There's nothing strange about it, - replied Keso, bending her head, as though she resented this noncommittal answer.
- Do you mean, you would have married Giorgi? - Archil asked suddenly.

Keso was offended and didn't answer at once. Archil waited anxiously. What was she about to answer - yes or no? He repeated his question.

- Would you, have married him?
- No.

- If I were you, neither would I. So, if it had not been for his birth ...

- Don't talk like that! - cried Keso angrily, her eyes flaring up.

- Don't be angry, Keso! The truth must be faced fearlessly
Human dignity demands it

- I didn't love him, - and that's all.

- Just that is our misfortune. It turns out that, to us books are one thing, and life's another. You didn't fall in love with him for the same reason why you wouldn't have married him; he was a peasant. Where are, then, the words that we were so enthusiastic about - «It is his bright soul and noble mind that are honoured?» In the book, but not in actuality, on the tongue, not in the heart. And what if we had read about Giorgi's history in a book? What fine, high-flown words we would have uttered, how we would have censured any-one who gauges a man's worth by his birth. Why speak of admiration for a «bright soul» if you simply didn't notice the man's love for you, and, as it turned out, he just worshipped you! What a high wall there is between us and them! That stone wall is built of our flesh and blood. If we are asked, we say that wall was pulled down long ago. But with what tools? Only with our tongue, whetted, like the facet of a diamond, on bookish wisdom ... We demolish it with our tongues, but our hearts cling to it, our hearts lay its foundations again and build it up high. We are half human, and, to our misfortune, our best half is severed from us.

- Archil, you're going too far.

- Keso, my dear, don't take the sharpness of blunt speech for cruelty. In our lives we don't often come across facts which teach us wisdom while they open our eyes. Indeed, we should be done away with, we have deserved it if such as we cannot endure the pain of having our eyes opened. That's our shortcoming!

- Go on, then. You cut painfully, and stitch up the wounds gently as though you were stroking them. Go on!

- You know what Giorgi was? Giorgi was a great book written on the other side of the bridge. I repeat: Giorgi was a remarkable book of life printed in characters absolutely different, absolutely unlike ours. This book was opened to us, but we couldn't read it. What a lot we read like thousands of others of our sort! Today . who isn't proud of the reputation of a well-read man, but it turns out we don't know that alphabet. Giorgi was the living image of human worth, «Immortality itself dwells in a beautiful soul». How many times have we spoken about how wonderful it sounded, how rightly said. In a book we understand it, and, of course, we blab tirelessly about it. But when life unfolded before us the living image of that soul we failed to recognize it; we failed to see what we seemed to see with our own eyes... So you wouldn't have married him? Whom? A «beautiful soul». You didn't love - whom? Him «whose bright soul and noble mind» we should have honoured? You didn't love him the beauty of whose soul «was flooded by celestial rays»?

- Love is not to be commanded.

- But does a rose bloom at the sun's command? It comes of itself, if, forgive me, it hadn't come in contact with a blind heart, sealed with nine seals of social prejudice. And what if he had been a man of your own station? Who can tell, maybe a command would have been obeyed? In any case, you would have guessed that he loved you, even if he had not been endowed with one hundredth part of the virtues Giorgi was endowed with. And in Giorgi's case, his birth prevented the door of your heart from opening. The pure ray of a beautiful soul, fruitlessly and in vain flooded a cold wall with its precious radiance. And you didn't even notice it! And he - he knew it and didn't repine. Dying, he addresses to us the meek words, - «I don't regret anything», - he left them to us as an accusation.

- Why do you debase me like that? That's enough! - said Keso, bursting into tears.

Archil, feeling sorry for his sister, came up to her and kissed her on the forehead.

- These are chaste tears, I don't want to dry them. That's how you women are better than us.

- That our tears flow like water whether we want it or not? Enough of your mockery! I'm exhausted with suffering.

- Ah, my dear! At times, tears, «like a soft rain, yield fruit». Tears aren't always water. At times, tears are a shield, and a shield raised in time is as good as a sword, as someone said.

- What's that to do with it?

- I'm glad you're crying ... I would also cry if I looked only into the past, as you do. There, in the past, it is dark ... it is night...

- And the bridge had collapsed, it is broken, - exclaimed Keso sadly.

- That's what I'd like everybody to see, I'd like everybody to know. You see now, you know.

- I know, and I'm crying.

- That's why I am glad to see your tears.

- But what's before us, Archil, what's before us? - cried out Keso, wringing her hands.

- This knowledge, though with tears burns up all the past, but our future drinks that moisture and breaks into bloom with it. When there are many tears, they'll flow together to make a river, the river will float a big raft, and then the two banks will be joined, the broken links between us will be restored. That knowledge, paid for with tears, or tears illuminated by knowledge are a ray of the future, and a ray is...

- Is the herald of dawn, isn't it, dear brother?

- Yes, it is.

Brother and sister embraced joyfully.

XXI

He's calling!

Autumn, having reached the zenith of ripeness, turned her back resolutely on summer and was about to face winter, mild, enchantingly warm and cool, dry and humid at the same time, with a deep-blue sky twinkling with myriad's of stars, autumn, that mildest, sweet autumn, the glory of our blessed land, - had imperceptibly aged and grown hoary. It was hoarfrost that showed her age.

In the early morning, the hoar-frost spread over mountain and valley, forest and field. But the midday sun had only to look at it fixedly, - and the hoar-frost vanished, and the thirsty earth imbibed all the moisture, or else it rose as mist, the sky drew that mist to itself, and it wandered over the illimitable space and unfathomable depth of the sky, floating here and there as fluffy clouds, white as flakes of cotton-wool.

Winter came, bringing snow. On Christmas Eve there was another heavy snowfall, and it spread a spotless white cloth over the country roads and lanes. The snow lay heavy on the thatched or tiled roofs of peasant homes. The grimy roofs it had put its hand to seemed to be covered with well-washed pure white mantles.

The walnut-trees in the yards, the fruit-trees in the orchards and kitchen-garden were adorned with flaky fresh-fallen snow. The bare black branches were dressed in white. The fences bordering the village lanes, wattled with vines or branches of prickly bushes, stood frozen under a dense layer of snow, as though found by a white pall.

The snow stopped falling, and soon the frost came. Everything around stood frozen, icy. But the warmth of day, lurking in the snow that had fallen earlier, still filtered through in drops,

the frost seized these drops and turned them into icicles which hung like «churchkhelas» on the branches, at the edges of fences, around the eaves and roofs.

The night wasn't dark. Now and then the moon peeped out shining from among the clouds, then was veiled again. The dark clouds and the moonlight seemed engaged in battle, now winning, now losing.

The village had long been sunk in that profound sleep which really gives complete rest, not merely relaxation. The village lay still, there was not a sound of voices or cries heard in the daytime, no rustle of human footsteps. There were no traces of footsteps on the fresh-fallen snow already hardened by the frost ... There was not a sound in the village, except from one or two places came the barking of wakeful dogs.

Everybody was asleep, except one.

There was a house in which she alone was not asleep. It was dark in that house, only one end of a great tree-stump was glowing on the hearth, - not even glowing, but, rather, smoldering morosely. When its dimly glimmering, charred surface threw out a fine tongue of flame, a small part of the room was lit up for a moment.

Near the hearth, closer to the fire, lay a dog. It had scraped together a little heap of ashes, had gathered in fore-legs and hind-legs close to its body and curled up, using its furry tail as a covering, the dog pushed its muzzle into it and fell asleep. A little farther away an old woman was fast asleep on a pallet she had spread on the floor close to the hearth. Nearby, on a couch, lay a sick woman who had long been bedridden, - emaciated, wasted, almost dying.

She was the only living being in the village that was not asleep.

- Who's calling me, who? - The sleepless sick woman kept asking herself, although not a sound, not a stir was heard. - Go away, go away! Where's my heart calling me? Where's it drawing

me? What for?

And the sufferer stirred weakly, tossed from side to side.

- Shall I be able to get there? - she asked herself. - Ah, no, I can't even move. What if I should fall on the way and die, and my body will be left there for the dogs to devour? Why are you calling me? Why?

She cried out to someone, and her cry was like a moan; she glanced sidelong at the old woman lying near the fire to see if she was awake, if she could hear.

Only the dog opened its eyes just a little, at first it emitted a low growl, seeing it was not a stranger, but its mistress, it pushed its muzzle into its tail and fell into an untroubled sleep again. The other old woman slept on as soundly as before.

- She's asleep! - the sick woman said softly. - And I'll drop off soon! The angel of death is knocking at my door, I'll go to sleep, and - thank God! - I won't wake again... I've had enough!

Saying this, she fell silent, as though her pain, relieved, had left her.

- Again! ... Again he's calling me... He was born on this day, on this very day. I'm coming, coming!

Saying this, she raised herself on the couch with an effort. Her clothes were at hand, at the head of the bed. She pulled on a pair of woollen socks, put on her warm under-coat, slipped on her dress, wrapped her head and shoulders in a warm black shawl, stood up with difficulty, pushed her feet into her slippers, but then, overcome with weakness, she found herself unable to stir a step. She staggered and again clung to the bed, afraid to fall.

She stood still for a while, her hands still clinging. Rallying a little, she reached out and got hold of a stick that was near the bed and went out noiselessly. She walked across the yard and tottered on, leaning on her stick heavily, with both hands. Emerging from the gate into the lane, seeing fresh fallen snow, as yet without a single human foot print, the sick woman said.

- No unclean, filthy human foot has yet touched and defiled this pure snow! Again! ... Coming, coming.

The watchful dog had noticed its mistress leave the house. It rose to its feet, shook off once or twice the ashes that had stuck in its coat, stretched its whole body, fore-legs first, then its hind-legs, stretched again, yawned and lazily followed its mistress. It came out on the porch, but its mistress was already out of sight. It jumped down from the step and scuttled unhurriedly along the trail.

And the ether old woman hadn't even felt that the sick woman had stolen out. She was still fast asleep.

How unlike each other these two women were, the one who slept and the one who had gone! How true the saying is, - to one - life is a mother, to another - a step-mother.

XXII

The accursed question

Christmas Day was dawning. It was still dusk when two Tushi shepherds having taken from the pen in the valley four gelded rams and five or so yearlings, were driving them to the village. «The day of joy has come, the fast is over, we may sell our sheep». There was a hard frost. The sheep shuffled along the snow-covered road swirling their fat tails. The shepherds were so cold that they folded their arms across their chests and were warming their hands in their armpits, their staves sticking out.

The road passed by the cemetery, then turned off into a lane leading to the village. Scarcely had they reached that part of the road when they heard a howl coming from the cemetery.

- What's that howling? - one of them asked.
- Well, it might be a hycna digging up somebody's grave.
- Let's frighten it away, it'll be a good deed to our account!

- said the other, drawing a pistol from under his belt, he fired.

The howling ceased for a minute, but was soon resumed again. The howls were now intermittent with whining.

- I'll go and have a look, - said one of the Tushis, making for the cemetery.

He approached the place where the sounds came from and saw a dog sitting on someone's mound. The dog sat on its haunches, its fore-legs planted on the ground, and was howling pitifully, its muzzle turned towards the village.

The shepherd was amazed. Coming closer, he stood rooted to the spot. Behind the dog, there lay the dead body of a woman. She had fallen across the grave, her legs on one side, the toes dug convulsively into the ground, her arms flung out on the other side as though she wanted to clasp in a single embrace the mound, and the stone upon it, and him who was resting under that stone.

Terror-struck, the Tushi called to his mate. But the latter gave no response. He had already turned into the lane and didn't hear the call. The Tushi made his way back, shocked by what he had seen.

- What brought her here in such a frost? What did she die of?»

- He pondered on the way. Coming up with his mate, he told him what he had seen.

- Just imagine, the dog hasn't forsaken its mistress! - cried his mate. - The blessed creature! Good dog, good dog!

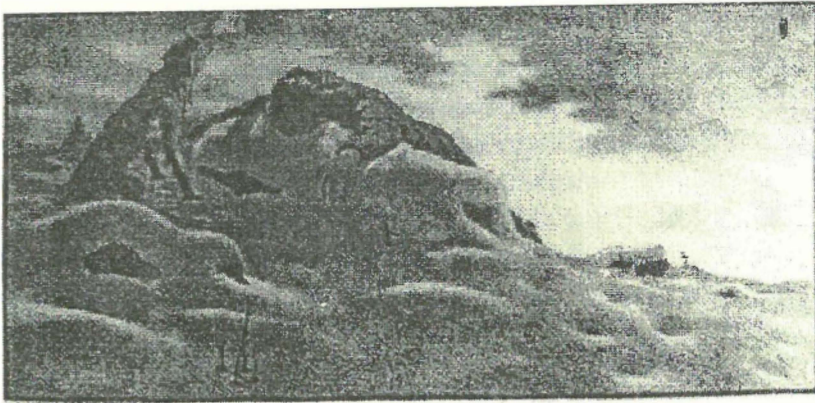
Shepherds, especially Tushi shepherds know the value of this faithful, praiseworthy four-footed animal...

They told the villagers what had occurred. Although it was a holiday, - Christmas Day, - all the people, young and old, men and women, ran to the cemetery.

The dead woman was recognized as Otaraant kvrivi. The grave needless to say was Giorgi's. And the dog? The dog was nobody's business.

A hubbub arose, shouts and cries. One would say something, another said something else. It was something to discuss! There was a lot of talk. In their palaver they quite forgot that something was to be done about the body. Everybody listened avidly to what this or that person said and, seeing a group of interlocutors or catching a bit of heated arguing, hurried to join it.

- She's finally broken, that woman of iron, - said some of them.



- This tree has fallen too, however mighty its roots were!

- It's hard lines to lose an only son! And such a son! - the women were saying. - That is what has broken and done for this indestructible woman.

Many voiced regret that Otaraant kvrivi should have come to such a sad end, but there was none to lament her. It's hard to leave this world unlamented. However, is that so important? «One who has died, has died for himself» - the peasants say. Isn't that true?

No, it is not always true! There was one man who considered that she had died not only "for herself», but for him, too. It was Sosia the miller. About thirty years ago he had come to love her when she was still a young girl, Sosia had proposed,

but he was regarded as not eligible. Since then and all his life long he had never wanted another woman, never had his heart been attracted by another. When she was widowed, the hope to marry her was once again awakened in Sosia's heart, but he said to himself, - She has Lost such a husband, I'm unworthy to hold a candle to him. No, I am not bold enough... no!

Having said that, out of respect and reverence, he never came near Otaraant kvrivi.

Now Sosia the miller had fallen on his knees before the lifeless body of the widow and grasping her cold hand, was sobbing quietly.

- Stand up, what are you howling for like a homeless dog!
- a young man cried, thinking to amuse his fellows. - What, would you also have your say?

- Don't speak like that, son, - the miller uttered between his sobs, mildly, as usual. - Does anyone know what pains another...

Sosia might have added something, but just then a makeshift stretcher was brought and when the bearers came up, one of them stumbled against the miller's foot and said disgustedly:

- Where's this fellow come from? Getting in our way, the tramp! - he said, giving the old man a hard kick - Off with you, get away from here!

The old man fell down in the snow, outraged, debased, he got to his feet painfully, and shaking the skirt of his sheepskin coat, said to the man who had kicked him:

- My fate didn't let me find joy with her when she was alive, and you won't let me weep for her now that she's dead! Mine is a bitter lot. Take pity on me! How was one not to pity him, indeed! But in this world, who does not deserve pity? That's one of those hard, accursed questions in this fleeting and chaotic world!

Dec, 6, 1887

Ilya Chavchavadze;
Well-known Georgian writer,
poet and publicist.
Biographical Data.

1837 - The well-known Georgian writer, poet and publicist Ilya Chavchavadze, son of a nobleman, was born in the village of Kvareli.

1848-1851 - Began his education in a boarding school in Tbilisi.

1852-1856 - Continued his education in a gymnasium in Tbilisi.

1857-1861 - Studied law at the St.Petersburg University.

1857 - Published his first verse in the journal «Tsiskari».

1863 - The journal «Sakartvelos moambe» founded by him published his story «The beggar's Tale». The same year saw the publication of his story «Is He a Man?».

1864-1873 Occupied various administrative posts in different parts of Georgia; e.g., was appointed governor general with his residence in Kutaisi. After the abolition of serfdom he was appointed arbitrator in eastern Georgia.

1871 - The publication of his poem «Riddles' caused a literary debate between Georgian writers, the so-called «Fathers and Sons» debate. In the same year his travelogues «Traveller's Notes» came out

1872 - His poem «The Spectre» came off the press.

1873 - In collaboration with Ivans Machabeli, Chavchavadze published a Georgian translation of Shakespeare's «King Lear».

1877 - A weekly newspaper, «Iveria» was founded by Ilya Chavchavadze who became its editor. In 1876 it became a daily.

1878 His historical poem «Dimitri the Self-

sacrificing» was published.

1879 - His story «At the Gallows» came out. the «Georgian Society for Dissemination of Knowledge» was inaugurated; I. Chavchavadze being elected President; he continued at this post till his death in 1907.

1883 - I. Chavchavadze sponsored the reopening of the Georgian theatre.

1888 - His story «Otaraant Kvrivi» came out.

1889 - Ilya Chavchavadze received Marjorie Wardrop in his Kvareli manor and assigned her in translating into English several works of Georgian literature.

1890-1891 - Were spent by him in Germany; Austria and France.

1893 - His philosophical poem «Gandegili» (the «Hermit» was translated by Merjorie Wardrop.

1905 - Ilia Chavchavadze proclaimed the demand that Georgia should regain he political autonomy.

1906-1907 - He was elected a member of the State Council in St. Petersburg, at a session of which he supported the abolition of capital punishment. On his return to Georgia, he was treacherously killed on his way to his home in Saguramo.

In 1987 - on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his birth, he was canonized by the Georgian church.



თბილისი

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