

THE SHORT STORY

The Ship in the Desert

Tedo Sharadenidze

The old woman stepped out of her run-down house on a gloomy evening. The sky was torn between two options - vesting the earth with a white shield or drenching it with drizzling drops. She liked night walks more than anything else. She cherished the existence of night and wondered why there was no space for sunbeams or blooming trees left in her heart. Maybe because there was something hidden behind the dark wall, something lurking in her soul she was afraid to reveal even to herself.

While the woman was walking down the street, she saw a black silhouette coming from the distance. She felt water touching her toes and regretted not having put on her waterproof boots. She looked at the streetlamps and caught a glimpse of snowflakes that gave away the secret of the night – it was snowing. She thought, “Maybe tomorrow I won’t be able to go out as much.”

The silhouette finally grew into a rather frightening figure. But she soon realized who it was and went up to him, asking, “Have you heard the ship roar?” The man with a bundle of hay tied to his back, probably food for the cattle, was not surprised at that question. He looked at the pine trees lining the street as if begging them to reason with this strange woman. He did not reply. He tucked his shoelaces into his thick socks and quickened his pace.

The woman comforted herself with the thought that he was simply so hungry that he could think about nothing but reaching his home and seeing a bowl of hot soup on his broken table. The one with a shabby tablecloth that is put in the corner so that it won’t fall down. During her visit a few years ago, she heard him ask his wife to change the cloth or even throw it away, but she said that

once he mended the table, she would do something about the tablecloth.

The woman heard the hay rustle, responding to the traveler’s steps. They looked exactly like ‘him’ – he who once thought that he was old enough to decide what to do and went swimming in the river without asking his mother’s permission, only to find himself dragged home by force. The old woman let a feeble smile appear on her face, but anyone looking at her would know immediately that the smile had parted ways with her a long, long time ago. The wind nipped at her face mercilessly. She thought about changing the direction of her night walk so that the wind and its tricks would not disturb her so much. But suddenly she remembered that she wanted to have a look at the deceased neighbor’s house and decided to declare war against that beastly weather. She wanted to pass by the house where the dead man was left alone in a huge cold room. The mourners were asleep. No pieces of wood on the grate – just splintered branches of the small oak tree on which the dead man was found hanging. She had already been there to pay her respects to the relatives. The old woman had helped the family put the corpse in the special box with ice. She had read a lot about body decomposition and knew what would happen and when.

“Let her pass,” the university students whispered to one another when they approached the old woman. “She’ll ask us some stupid questions about the arrival of the ship and talk our ears off.”

One of them asked, “Wait, since when do we have a port?”

“Didn’t you know that madness runs in her family?”

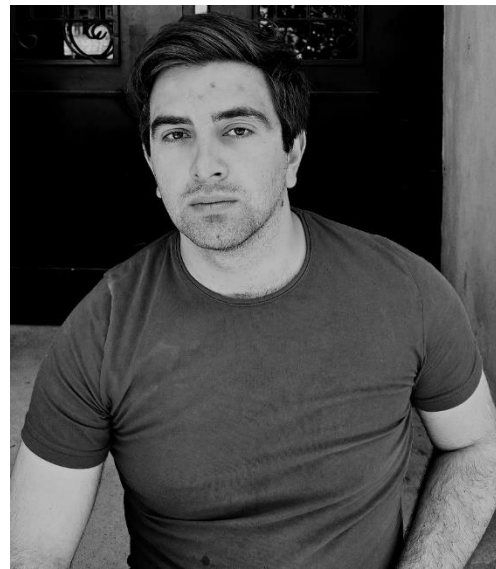
“We haven’t heard anything, madam,” they giggled, “but we will let you know if we do.” And the voices faded away. The old woman heard the noise but had no idea where it was coming from.

On her way back, she thought of her son, who was said to have died in the sea. She often envisioned him lying on the seabed, crying for help, asking his mother to perform a miracle. Suddenly, she started taking pleasure in observing the harmony between every step and breath she took. She was alive because she could feel the earth under her feet and fill her lungs with cold, fresh air. After all, perhaps he was alive too. Maybe he simply didn’t remember his mother. Possibly his lungs weren’t nested by deadly droplets of salty water. She often suffered from the creepiest question – what was he feeling when he was about to meet his destiny under the dark ocean? She was getting wet and tried to quicken her pace just like the travelers she had met before. Those travelers escaped the endless conversation and hurried home. She knew that. But why was she hurrying home? Was she running away from someone or something? Maybe she did not want to get wet.

She reached her home, pushed the door wide open, and went inside. She remembered the promise the small boy, who lived next to her cottage, had made to her. “One day I’ll be a sailor, I’ll take your message, I promise.” She had made up her mind to put an umbilical cord which she claimed to have thrown into the sea, just to throw dust in her son’s eyes, into a burnt-out bulb and hang it over the place where she would be buried one day because she was tired of being alone (according to the tradition, wherever you threw the umbilical cord of the baby, he would decide to go in that direction). Most of all, she was afraid of the dark.

She sat at the table, nibbling the crunchy crust of the bread, which, as usual, outlasted the empty bowl of soup in front of her. After that, she would creep into bed with a warm brick wrapped in a towel under her feet, listening to the silence of the night and wishing daylight would always stay in another hemisphere – the daylight that would reach the bottom of the sea, because she knew he used to be afraid of the dark as well.

Author’s Note



Tedo Sharadenidze is a 24-year-old scholar, teacher, and published author of poetry and prose from Batumi in western Georgia. He obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Humanities (English Studies) from Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University. During his undergraduate program, he studied for a year at the University of Alcalá de Henares in Madrid, Spain, in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. After finishing his BA degree, he continued at Batumi State University in the Faculty of Education and Exact Sciences completing the Teacher Certification Program. He then earned a Master’s degree in Humanities (English Linguistics) at Batumi State University. He is a Senior Teacher at School Nike in Batumi, teaching English as a Second Language. He is also the Head



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Tedo's writings mainly address the themes of alienation, indifference, eccentricity, internal conflict, childhood mirth, and the inability "*to defy what fate has thrown at you.*" He is motivated to write by the desire "*to turn simple, day-to-day occurrences into something magical...something that would inspire others to put pen to paper.*"