

The Invisible Game by Mari Bekauri

Extract

One day you'll wake up and realize that everything you thought to be true is just an illusion.

At first it will feel like you are losing your mind, and that will scare you.

Then you'll realize you are having a crisis.

Finally, you'll face reality.

However, it's a trap.

Time will pass and you'll understand that the truth you was facing was just another illusion.

Once enough time has gone by, and you've woken enough, you'll understand the illusion of reality, and the illusory cycle.

Your life will change. Now you know that everything is real, and that nothing is real. That tens, hundreds, thousands of systems rule the world in which humans play their part or refuse to do so, or act as if they're refusing. In short, they play the game but the game changes.

Those who don't realize that life is a game suffer the consequences.

Everything is cyclical. Everything that is happening, has happened, and will happen again.

1

This unusual story begins a year and a half ago.

They both came in to the publishing house within a three-day period and talked about their books. We discussed what needed to be done, defined the deadlines and made a plan. Then they both suddenly disappeared.

At the time, the world was threatened by a new virus and I didn't think much about it. The strangeness of the situation re-emerged after masked faces, quarantines and lockdowns had become the new normal.

Yet, I could never have imagined what the future would hold.

Shortly after the virus spread, we shifted to a remote working. When I went by the office to pick up my laptop and the books I was editing, the empty building made me painfully conscious of this new reality.

The unknown virus that had arrived from China had quickly spread around the world, killing thousands every day. People were not allowed to bury their family members. Hospitals were overcrowded and unable to care for their patients. Restrictions were imposed. The future looked bleak and uncertain.

No one knew or could say what was going to happen next.

Conspiracy theories became truth. The internet was flooded with speculation, false claims and much opinion. The only thing that could be predicted was economic crisis.

Before we shifted to remote working, our publisher met with us and talked about the difficulties we would face, and the possibility of downsizing. If we wanted to survive, we would have to work hard and remain patient.

- I hope you realize, she said finally, that even bread might become scarce and no one will care about books. So...we're up in the air.

Of course, we realized that was true. If the news was reporting millions of deaths, and the number of cases was increasing, we had no illusion that life would get back to normal.

The next three months were a mandatory lockdown. I spent most of my time at home. The only time I went out was to buy groceries. I was editing a book by José Luís Peixoto, and completely forgot about those two writers.

After lockdown, we were allowed back to the office. I realized people had fundamentally changed.

The first shock of the pandemic was followed by depression. Wherever you went there was a silent sense of despair. It felt like the pandemic had created a collective existential crisis.

The publishing house was still standing. Obviously, sales were down, but we turned to online stores and that saved us from bankruptcy.

The invisible outcome of the three-month lockdown took a toll on my colleagues.. We talked less and you could see the anxious lines etched on the faces behind the masks. We all posed a threat to one another. Social distance had created personal distance as well.

At the launch of José Luís Peixoto's book, which took place two months later, I noticed the first sign of a dissonance which later became madness and turned me into a character of a detective story.

The launch was scheduled for seven o'clock, but the publisher was nowhere to be found. We couldn't even get hold of her on the phone, which threw us off balance.

Fewer people attended than usual. Then the publisher didn't show up the next day either. On the third day, as we were contemplating contacting the police, she came to the office two hours late. She apologized for her absence and then locked herself in her room.

I could sense the exhaustion and stress under the mask, which made me think that something must have happened, as this was very unusual behavior for her.

The first theory was that it must have something to do with the virus.

"Maybe one of her family got it?", "Maybe she felt sick, and took a test?"

I noticed suspicion was taking over the office, so I decided to ask about it after work, as we were on good terms.

After everyone had left, I went up to the second floor and knocked on her door.

- Come in!

The voice called from inside. She let out a sigh of relief when she saw it was me. Oh, it's you!

I sat facing her and before I could say a word, she asked:

- How did it go?
- What? I was caught off guard.
- The launch?
- Oh, right. It was great!
- Attendees?
- Not many...
- Ah, she responded wearily.
- What did they say? She asked, looking at me.
- Nothing, we expected it.
- No, I mean what did they say about me?
- Oh, I shrugged. We didn't know what to think. We were confused, you know?
- Hold on, Alex. She interrupted me. Don't tell me they think it's the virus?!
- I don't know, I didn't ask. To be honest that's the first thing that popped in my head.
- Nonsense! I would have warned you. I wouldn't have kept that secret...

I nodded and went quiet. She looked away. She looked like she was thinking about something. We sat in silence for a while. I felt she was tense as if there was something bothering her, but she found it difficult to talk about it.

- Something happened, she said.
- What?
- Something...Odd. I don't know.

She looked at me and then avoided my gaze.

- Nana?!

I wanted to ask again but decided to wait.

- Let's not do it today, she said without looking at me.

I didn't question her further; I knew it was better to leave it.

- Okay, I'm off then. I looked at her while getting up.
- Yes, yes. Go! And she looked at me.

I said my goodbyes and left.

Five days later the news blew up with the madness story.

2

One of the writers that had come in five months ago and told us about his future book was 37-year-old, Nika Gasviani, going by the stage name of Meshi. I say stage name because he was making music as well as writing books.

Gasviani was very popular with young people. In my opinion, he is the most talented and authentic singer of his generation – the voice of his generation; the kind of artist who leaves a mark on history.

Meshi's lyrics were unique. He applied both literature and music to his art, giving birth to a new style and had an immense following.

Up to this point he had written two novels (both published by us) and was working on a third. When I heard that he was working on a new project I had asked the publisher to let me attend the meeting. His books were as popular as his music.

Nika Gasviani was going to write about a future world where robots create humans. A lot of interesting and unexpected stories were going to take place in the book. The plot was fascinating, and we commissioned it right away.

He told us that the first part of the novel was already written so we agreed that he would deliver the whole manuscript in eight months.

The publisher looked pleased. The moment Meshi left, she looked at me enthusiastically and said:

- It's going to be an instant hit!
- Absolutely. I nodded.

Five months later, depression had replaced collective panic. Nika Gasviani appeared on TV and made the news.

"Everything I've created so far, be it in music or literature, is illusory. It's a consequence of my drug addiction. I've been using since I was fourteen and my lyrics come from my altered consciousness. Maybe that's how I could reach the collective unconscious, and glaze over reality, but the truth is I haven't been sober for 20 years..."

He talked about it as if it were normal, as if he was discussing something quite trivial.

"I was 9 years old when I saw a neighbor's house bombed. People died in front of me, kids that I had played with. That scene...the horrors of war scenes are the part of me I'm trying to erase with drugs...I come on stage and sing. You dance and sometimes sing along, but nobody knows what's lies behind the person they see on stage telling you about ghetto life...The truth is I suffer from post-traumatic stress and for my whole life I've been trying to push those reoccurring feelings away. It's the murderer's instinct that kills you in a second...I don't know, maybe it's time that I threw off the label of war-child with PTSD and chronic anxiety. I don't regret anything. Not a moment in my life. If I had to choose, I'd

do it all over again. But at this point I think that what I experienced was an illusion and I would like to find what lies beyond it...I want to know the truth”.

The interview went viral on the internet. Everyone wanted to talk about it.

On my way to work I anticipated bedlam in the office.

I was right.

Everyone was discussing this interview. I dropped my bag on my chair and walked over to Nana's office.

- It's me. I said as I knocked politely on her door.
- Come on in, she shouted from inside.

The moment I went in, I knew what she was thinking. We've been working together for 16 years and I could read her face. She didn't look at all surprised by the news which had surprised me.

I dropped on the chair and asked anyway:

- So?

She looked at me.

- What do you want me to say?

I sensed she was hiding something, something even bigger than this.

- Nana, what's going on?
- Nothing! You saw it yourself.

She looked worried for a moment. I decided not to back down.

- You don't look surprised. Did you know?
- Me? She tried to avoid my question. It's just that there's a global pandemic; people are dying, I don't have the energy anymore; nothing surprises me.

That made me curious. I needed to know what she was hiding.

- So, are we not doing the book? I asked, just to say something.
- Yeah, well...I'm not sure...Maybe.
- Alright.

I got up but before leaving I turned to look her in the eye. She avoided my gaze and turned to her computer screen.

Everything seemed normal for a few days. While Nana was going about her business, I was naively trying to get to the bottom of things. But soon enough the second writer appeared and that really unleashed the madness of this story.

The second writer was a 30-year-old, Sofia Gilga, who'd had her short stories published in numerous literary magazines but hadn't produced a book yet.

When we'd met her five months ago, she told us that she was working on her debut novel about a missing psychiatrist. The story was full of interesting and unusual events.

Detective fiction was not a common genre in our country, so it immediately caught the eye of the publisher. And when you considered the writer's short stories, she was not half-bad as a writer.

I must admit, I was more interested in her looks and personality than her writing. She was somewhat unusual with a slender frame, masculine boxed shoulders, slightly longer limbs, and deep, colorful eyes. Sofia Gilga had an amazing energy about her. Her exotic body complemented her mysterious vibe. And I've never heard of anyone called Gilga before.

We agreed that she would finish the book in a year's time, and three months later we would publish it and put it in the bookstores.

- I don't want a launch. I've always found standing on a stage ridiculous, she told us at the end of our meeting and promised she would send over the first draft.

We have yet to receive any pages from her. After months of silence, she came to the publishing house for the second time to meet with the publisher and then vanished just like her central character.

The meeting was long; the content, secret.

After two hours, Sofia closed the publisher's door and left. Nana didn't leave her office for hours.

I remember it felt suspicious, but I didn't think to connect Sofia Gilga with Nika Gasviani. It was only later, when other things surfaced, that I noticed the coincidence...

The story takes off after Gilga's second visit to the publishing house.

Nana changed overnight. This calm, cheerful woman suddenly became slightly crazed. Her face revealed anxiety and distress.

The change affected her work badly. A woman who for twenty years had always been the one to open the office in the morning, and the last to leave at night, suddenly started to come in late until gradually she lost all interest in work and neglected her job altogether. The only thing she wanted was to be left alone.

Naturally everyone had questions but given her condition, no one dared ask.

I tried to strike up a conversation with her from time to time, but she would shut me out, making it clear she didn't want to be bothered. This change affected our friendship and nothing could bridge the gap between us. There was no way around it.

After some time, she had to transfer most of her work to us. Even though we were obviously unhappy, there was nothing to be done. The publishing house would fall if she was unable to handle the job.

One time, when I went into the kitchen, I caught a group of people having a heated discussion. They stopped the moment they saw me. I realized they were discussing Nana and because of my relationship to her felt embarrassed.

That's when I decided it was time to find out what had happened and walked straight into her office.

- Nana, we both know something is wrong. It's time to come clean. Tell me the truth, at the very least, for the sake of our sixteen-year-old friendship. I was direct even though she gave me a stern look. I wasn't going to back down.
- Everyone can feel it, everyone can see it. I don't understand... We've sacrificed so many years for... What's happened to you?!
- What are you talking about? She tried to turn it around as if nothing was wrong. I got angry.
- Are you serious?!
- Yes, I'm serious.
- You don't care about our work, if you don't care then...
- Wait, wait. She interrupted me and waved her hand dismissively, I don't have time for this nonsense.
- When will you have time, then?! I couldn't contain my anger.
- If I do, you'll be the first one to know, she said sarcastically, and turned away to her computer. But I wasn't going to give up that easily. I had had enough.

I sat in the chair and just stared at her. She wasn't expecting that... She looked confused, then her expression turned to anger.

- So, this is how it's going to be?
- Yes!

She observed me for a while, then leaned over and, with an expression I'd never seen before in the 16 years I'd known her, said:

- If you don't leave this office... I'll kick you out! – and I don't just mean out of this room!

I felt anger and the desire to test her. I thought she was trying to scare me, but her expression told me she was serious, and I couldn't afford to lose my job at this critical time.

I got up and closed the door behind me.

Who would have thought that within ten days I'd be dragged into this strange story?

On what was supposed to be a typical autumn day, with the exception of a new restriction concerning the wearing of masks in open spaces, a young man became the news, again.

Every channel covered the story of a man who had attempted suicide by overdose the night before but had been saved by a friend and survived. He had been transferred to hospital where doctors were trying to stabilize him.

The man's name was Nika Gasviani. He was famous.

Police launched an investigation and started to build their case immediately. They started questioning Gasviani's friends and family, but nobody knew anything and there was no evidence of what drove him to suicide.

The whole publishing house was obsessed by Gasviani's alias Meshi's story for a second time except the publisher. She did not leave her office for the whole day, once again revealing her indifference.

We avoided each other in the corridors, exchanging only necessary words.

That's why I was taken aback when I got the late-night call, and even more surprised when a wary voice asked me to come immediately.

- I know you're angry with me, I know. But Alex, please...I wouldn't ask to see you if I didn't feel like I'm losing my mind.
- I had been about to go to sleep when she called, but I woke myself up, and within ten minutes' was on my way to her house.

She was sitting on the couch in the living room, dressed only in her nightgown, her hands shaking. There was a bottle of brandy in front of her and an ashtray full of cigarette butts.

- I didn't know you smoked.

I said at the sight of the ashtray. But she didn't seem to hear me. She looked at me blankly and poured herself a drink.

- You want to drink? She asked pointing at the bottle
- Sure, I'll have some. I responded and sat on the low chair.
- I don't have a glass – she looked around the table – can you bring one from the kitchen?

As soon as I got up, she grabbed my hand and spoke as if she were talking to herself:

- Maybe I'm to blame?! Maybe I could have done something.
- What are you talking about, Nana? What's happened? I sat back down.

She finally noticed I was there. She looked at me for a second and then put her head down. She sat quietly. The silence continued for a while. I could feel that she was about to tell me what happened, she just needed some time to gather her strength.

- Meshi... she said, while avoiding my gaze. Do you remember when he came to talk about his new book nine months ago? He was writing a novel about robots, robots that created humans.
- Of course, I remember...And then he made some outrageous statements.
- Outrageous?! – she stared at my face – you’re wrong.

She took the brandy and gulped it down.

- Do you remember Sofia Gilga? That unusual girl?
- What does she have to do with it? I tensed.

She shook her head.

- Right. Well, she came at the same time...She was also about to write a novel.
- Yes, I remember.

That’s when it hit me. Nana’s behaviour had changed round about Sofia’s second visit.

- Did you know that Meshi sent over the first draft?

That stunned me, I looked at her shocked.

- Yeah, two days before making his “outrageous” remarks...
- Why didn’t you tell me?!

She ignored my question.

- After a few days Sofia Gilga showed up and...

She poured another glass.

- I think about it all the time...How is that even possible? How did it happen? Look!

She got up and went to the coffee table. There was a stack of paper on the table. She picked it up and came over to me.

- I must have read thousands of articles, but I still don’t understand...How is this possible
- Nana, I understand even less. What are you talking about?

She continued to ignore me. She put the papers down in front of me and sat on the couch.

- I turned him down.
- Who?
- Meshi. I refused to publish his book.
- Really?
- It was...It was absolute madness...What he wrote...Exhibitionism. Madness. Our minds will never grasp the misery that makes a young man write a novel like this.

I was not expecting to hear the words that came from her mouth. I sat motionless and listened with my eyes wide open.

- He's been through hell...What I've read is not something a normal person writes; he has gone through hellfire...Do you know what I mean?!

She stared at me and shook her head.

- It wasn't about the future of the world or robots...No, this was a different book altogether.
- What was it about?
- It was about a young woman who takes drugs in an Eastern country and falls to her death. She dies but remains alive. She faces death, which is the underworld tormenting her soul. She turns into God, into Satan, she goes mad, experiences everything, then comes back to radically change her life. This death-fall enables her to see that her whole life was just an illusion. Do you remember Meshi talking about it on that talk show? That his whole life felt like an illusion?!
- And that he wanted to face reality...Yes, I remember.
- That woman, when she comes back has to deconstruct her whole personality, piece by piece, to gradually comprehend everything.
- What does that mean?
- The systems, the mysteries of the universe, the genetic codes, the invisible patterns, the matrix, everything, my God ... the illusion of reality! Alex, do you understand what I'm talking about?!
- I'm trying.
- No, Alex, you don't understand. This book described the details. I have never read anything like it! I...I couldn't publish it....

She stopped, looking at her empty glass as if she were imagining it. Then her expression changed, and she said:

- That's not all... We both know Meshi is unique but this...

She swallowed her words and took a deep breath.

- I don't know if you remember Sofia Gilga coming to the office shortly after that interview was broadcast, do you remember?

I nodded.

- Do you know what she said? That there was no book; she was not going to write a book anymore.
- You've lost me.
- And do you know why?

She stared at me for a while not saying a word.

- Because before the pandemic, and after her first meeting with us, she travelled to India and almost overdosed on drugs. She described the feeling of falling to her death, becoming God then Satan, the madness... She travelled into her tormented soul and understood that everything in her life was an illusion.

I felt chained to the seat. I could no longer breathe.

- That girl was telling me the same exact story I had read in Meshi's transcript...The events unfolded exactly - the same facts, themes, content, understanding - everything, Alex, do you understand?! It was the same.
- But how?! – was the only thing I could ask.
- I've no idea...

She pointed at the stack of papers. I've been trying to understand it for months now, but the story gets more and more tangled.

- Now I get why you changed so much.
- Changed?! – she said sardonically. I'm surprised I didn't completely lose my mind!

We stayed quiet for a while. I was overwhelmed by the quantity and strangeness of this information. My brain was trying to take it in.

- And now... She said abruptly. This suicide attempt...I wonder if it's my fault. I could have said something...I knew what kind of hell he was going through.
- It's not your fault.

I tried to calm her, but she wouldn't let me.

- I don't need you to make me feel better...I knew it, Alex. I've read the draft, I knew!
- Where is it?
- Who?
- Not who – the draft?
- It's gone. I don't have it anymore. I deleted it so that you can't recover it...I needed to get rid of it, I was so scared!

Fear and despair alternated on Nana's face. I was dizzy. A thousand questions flew through my mind. I couldn't say a word. Then I got up and went to the kitchen to get a glass. I needed a stiff drink, maybe it would help me relax.

5

After three glasses of brandy, the fog lifted and the thoughts spiralling through my brain brought me to this question:

- Where is Sofia Gilga now?
- I don't know. I've been trying to find her for months, but it's like she's disappeared, no phone, no social media, no mail. She hasn't published anything in the magazine.
- Strange.
- Nothing is stranger than one person writing becoming another's reality!
- Yes, that is...

She didn't let me finish:

- And it happened simultaneously!

The room was silent. Nana was looking in my direction, but I don't think she saw me. She was lost in her thoughts.

- They both end on the same note – I mean the book finishes where Gilga's story ends.
- What story?
- Have you ever thought about the abyss, Alex? Not the bottom, but the actual abyss? People hit the bottom during an existential crisis, but the abyss is more of a void, where you can reach the truth. Where the truth becomes you, if you will...But most of us can't handle it so we distract ourselves with new illusions.
- Nana, you're scaring me.

I exclaimed, but she didn't hear me. She was voicing her internal questions that were not aimed at me.

- Can a person reach their truth if they don't go through purgatory?

She asked and stopped. She was staring at the bottle of brandy, her thoughts still churning. Then she looked me straight in the eye and said:

- I know one thing for sure!
- What's that?
- They have both experienced the abyss!

She went quiet again and I didn't break the silence. I sipped my brandy and tried to analyse everything I had just heard.

- This information. She started to speak again while looking at the stack of papers. It's my attempt to figure this out. I read a lot and did my research to try to get to the bottom of it...Nothing came of it.
- Why didn't you say something?
- What, Alex? She looked irritated.
- How was I supposed to tell you?! It feels like absolute madness, even now!
- Because it is madness!
- But it doesn't mean it's not happening. We just need to find the key to the truth.
- Will you help me? She looked at me. Pleading. I nodded.
- Just so you know, once you enter this confusion, you might lose your sense of reality and yourself.

She was looking at me in all seriousness.

- Where does the story end?
- Right...She leaned back on the sofa. The woman changes after she returns home. She's no longer able to continue to live her former life, so she sabotages herself. It's more like a mental self-abuse. She leaves everything behind and isolates herself like a monk. Then one day she witnesses a man

dying on the street, and while the crowd is in shock, she calmly approaches, kneels by him, puts his hands on his chest, and watches him die silently. She's the last thing he sees before he dies.

- Is it just in the book or does it happen in Gilga's life?
- It does. That's where the story ends.
- That's where we lose trace of her, and few months later Meshi tries to kill himself?

Nana nods in agreement.

- Interesting.

The room went quiet again. Nana leaned forward, poured herself another glass, and lit a cigarette.

- So, what do you think?

I automatically mirrored her and lit a cigarette myself.

- Consider me in this maze with you.

6

After my nighttime visit to Nana, my life changed. I couldn't comprehend what was happening. The story was so strange, I couldn't find any rational explanation.

I tried my best to find Sofia Gilga but to no avail. It was like she had never existed.

Instead, Meshi reappeared, eight days after his suicide attempt, and five days after his discharge from the hospital. This time he took to social media with an extensive post where he didn't mention his overdose but talked about his multiple personalities.

Singer Mesh

Writer Mesh

War-child Mesh

Drug-addict Mesh

Woman Mesh

God Mesh

As well as: Killer Mesh, who has yet to see the light.

"Maybe it's a curse put on me by my ancestors – he wrote, - the children of a cruel subculture who killed people according to their laws...I wonder how many deaths are imprinted on my bloodline?"

He wasn't completely sure.

But he knew that he had become the opposite of what his ancestors intended him to be. He started writing, he took up singing and entered the scene. He created art, and his voice became the voice of his generation...

While reading Meshi's post, a thought crossed my mind.

Given the unusual story Nana had shared with me, there was a chance that Nika Gasviani might be the only person who might know Gilga's whereabouts.

I opened the chat window and after the standard introductory text, I asked him directly:

- Where is Sofia Gilga?
- Who?

I knew it was useless, but I persisted.

- Sofia Gilga, the writer.
- I don't know anyone by that name.
- OK.

I saw the dots appear in the chat box for a few seconds and then disappear, that's where our conversation ended. Who would have thought that not long after this conversation Nika Gasviani hospitalized.

That same evening, I visited Nana after work, and we compared our notes. Nothing much. She remembered one crucial thing, that unlike Gasviani, Gilga knew Meshi.

- That's not uncommon, I said. Everyone of this generation knows Meshi.
- What do you think he would have written if I hadn't refused to publish him? She looked at me. How would the story have continued?
- Oh, Nana! It suddenly dawned on me. What if he did write it and just hasn't brought it in after you refused to publish?!
- I don't think so.
- Wait! What if he continued writing? If his writing coincides with Gilga's real life, we'll find where she disappeared!

Nana looked at me wide eyed. She was quiet. She was thinking.

- I think you should contact him and ask about the second part of the book.

Nana didn't respond.

- Nana?
- Oh my God! I can't believe this. Just stop and look at this for a second, Alex! This is madness. We're sitting here considering asking one writer to send us the second part of his book so we can find the whereabouts of another writer.
- I agree it sounds crazy, but...

She didn't let me finish:

- What have we get ourselves into, Alex? Why did I involve you in this story at all...
- Oh, come on!
- No, honestly! I beg you. Look at this situation from a different perspective. This is absurd!
- Nana. However absurd it might sound, this is the reality. There is no harm in calling Mesh.

Nana was not listening. She was lost in her thoughts.

- Maybe we should contact a medium.
- Excuse me?
- Why didn't I think of it before?

She glanced at me.

- Alex! We must find a good medium.

I laughed involuntarily.

- Why are you laughing?! I'm serious. Every great man has had a medium. They always do... Do you remember the book we published about Stalin? There was a paragraph on the relationship between Staling and Gurdjieff. It said that Gurdjieff made Stalin change his date of birth so that no one would know how to calculate his numerological figure.

She stopped when she saw my confusion.

- Haven't you heard about numerology? The science of numbers, or to be precise, the meaning behind the numbers...Everyone has a unique number you can calculate using the date of birth, and it gives specific data about your path, personality, spiritual development...It tells you who you are and who you'll become.

For a sceptic like me it was too much to handle. I couldn't believe she was seriously considering this.

- Numerology is a universal language...The world is sending us messages via numbers.
- Nana, do you really believe in this? Are you serious?
- Yes, I'm serious. She wasn't joking. Even Mesh mentioned this secret knowledge in his draft.
- I still think you can't be serious about this.
- There was a time I thought it was absurd, but if we agree Gilga and Mesh's stories are intertwined then magic numbers don't seem so far off.
- I don't know...
- Again, we must remember that Mesh himself wrote about secret knowledge. So, maybe that's where we can find the key.
- Wait, what about Gilga?
- What about her?
- Didn't she also talk about secret knowledge?
- No, Nana shook her head. Gilga only stated facts, and what those facts meant to her.
- Maybe she's in the process of understanding. Maybe that's why she disappeared...
- What do you mean?

- Maybe she has figured things out and she's trying to understand where it leads, and what it means.
- That this knowledge already exists?
- Maybe?

Nana was sunk in her thoughts.

- Just call him.
- Who? She had forgotten.
- Meshi. For the second part.
- Alright, I'll call him... But we should really consider a medium.

She took out her phone and left the room. She quickly came back and put the phone on the table and then looked at me.

- I told you he hasn't written anything else...He said he doesn't give a shit about the book. Word for word.
- Right.

Silence took over. Nana sat down on the couch in front of the table. She pulled a page from the stack of paper, looked at it for a while, then threw it down, and laid back looking at the ceiling.

- We will find out.

She said and looked at me.

- We will find the truth, won't we, Alex?

7

He looked normal with kind eyes and a thin nose. He lived in a modern house; his possessions reflected his good taste.

Contrary to my expectations, he turned out to be one of the smartest, most rational people I had ever met. There was no sign of fanaticism, on the contrary, he made a joke about people who become obsessed when they delve into the world of secret knowledge.

"It's a mind trick. You convince yourself that you've found something and start accepting the idea. You begin to justify why certain things in life didn't work out for you. It's an escape from insecurity and fear into a delusional mindset they label mystical experience."

His name was Archili, an unusually common name for a medium, one without any symbolism. There is a notion that you should invent a name to create a sense of mystery about your persona. However, in most cases it sounds weird, even immature.

I knew then that we had got lucky.

The more he talked, the more I believed the man sitting in front of us was a highly intellectual, rational human being.

He was no older than forty, which struck me as another unusual thing. How had he accumulated such exhaustive and deep knowledge at his age?

- There are different beliefs. More precisely, different belief systems. Most of them create ready-to-go scripts for people. Some systems feel so complete that you might even feel incompetent; you wonder, where's the free will? If everything is determined in your life like its tragedies, happiness, failures, and illusions, how or where does one make a choice?
- When you say systems, do you mean astrology? Numerology?

He laughed openly.

- Those are the more mainstream systems of beliefs. Psychology also offers a life script with the same success. Take Jungian archetypes, or development theory. Both talk about the script, but as we know psychology is not an exact science.

This time he laughed differently, arousing our interest.

- There are Vedas, the secret knowledge of Kahuns, the laws of karma, the laws of the universe, the system of circles, thousands of them... Depends on what your conscious eye is like.

He looked serious.

- But there are certain things that work in life despite your understanding of them. They exist beyond human comprehension, and they affect us regardless.
- Like what?
- Let's talk about it some other time.

He cut me short and stopped talking.

I looked at Nana. She said we should cut to the chase and say why we had come.

- You know, we came here to talk about some strange happenings.

I started to form a thought, but felt embarrassed, maybe because I hadn't expected him to be so rational.

- It can't be that strange... When you embrace universal knowledge, nothing seems strange anymore.

It felt as if he could sense my awkwardness and was trying to make me feel better.

- Good.

I said it more to myself than to him and began to tell the story that had completely exhausted our energy.

He listened eagerly. I was trying to read his face to spot any sense of shock or surprise but I couldn't. He listened to the strange story of the intertwined lives of the writers calmly and unemotionally.

Nana looked at me and then back at Archili to seek confirmation that all that had happened was indeed remarkable and unbelievable.

After I finished telling the story, the room fell quiet for a while. The silence was long enough for it to become uncomfortable.

Archili observed us in silence. We couldn't tell what he was thinking, or if he was thinking at all.

- It seems - he spoke, and we got tense - both writers chose the same variations out of the space of variations, but I'm curious about something else entirely...

I looked at Nana. Archili was flustered and anxious.

- I think that this woman, Gilga, touched on something big and whatever she experienced has opened the eighth circle.
- Eighth circle? – Nana beat me to it. What does it mean?

A non-local quantum circuit impressed by shock or clinical death.

Archili sat up.

- There are genetic imperatives, meaning instincts and marks – programs that the brain receives at certain points in its development. The first four circles of Wilson's cycle are ancient. Everyone possesses them, the next four circles are etched by certain actions.
- And what do they give us? I couldn't contain my question.
- A completely different level of consciousness; different perspectives, possibilities which are unfathomable to most people.
- I don't quite understand.
- Of course not. It's hard to understand. He stood and walked to a bookshelf. He took out a hardcover, black notebook and handed it to me. You should look through it and when you're done, bring it back to me.

I took it and looked over at Nana who did not seem satisfied.

- You mentioned the space of variations. I don't know what that means. You see, I don't have the necessary knowledge.
- Oh, of course not. The Space of Variations means that everything in this world is defined, absolutely everything. So, your reality depends on the selection of the variation.
- So, everyone can create the life they want?
- Exactly - Archil smiled -mostly it's done at a subconscious level. There is a huge difference between what we want and what we think we want. Especially since the whole world and its visible systems are aimed at reinforcing people's desires and goals. Most people move towards the goals imprinted on them, so they confuse that with free will. That's why people struggle and have inner conflicts. Because they know...
- Know what?
- The truth. That their life doesn't belong to them.

- So how do we figure out what we truly want, and how do we choose this variation?
- That requires the courage to face the depths of your subconscious...That's why I said this woman has touched upon something big. From what I've gathered, and what you said about her falling to her death, the hellfire...Her subconscious can't go back to what it was. It's impossible.
- That's understandable, but Gilga has vanished altogether.
- Precisely, she has faced the truth because of the imprint of the eighth circle...
- What about the second writer? Mesh?
- Look - Archili took a breath and continued – there was a variation in the Space of Variations. This woman's journey to India where she falls to her death happened as one variation. Their lifelines intersected at a point in the alternative Space of Variations bringing them together into the same world. For one, it happened in reality; for the other, through his writing. But they both connected. Do you understand?
- To be honest I don't really understand. I said, looking at Nana for reassurance, but she looked as confused as me.
- For the variation to become reality, the heart and mind have to coincide. That's why I mentioned the subconscious...People think that they want something, but that "something" is influenced by the system. In reality, they may want something else entirely. So, the heart wants one thing while the mind wants another and that creates inner conflict. The person suffers. Modern humans are more mechanical than you would imagine. As for those two, I can't answer why they chose that variation, or why they wanted it, but the fact remains that they did both truly want it.
- But Mesh's life fell apart after that. Why does a successful person choose to destroy their life and attempt suicide?
- Let me be direct...It depends on what you consider success. There is no good or bad. You don't know how it will end, you don't even know if he was as truly successful as you say, or if that made him happy.
- Maybe he wasn't trying to be happy?
- Even so, the fact remains that they both aimed to deconstruct their identities by choosing this variation.
- And?
- And they chose the path of finding their true self, which is a huge leap.