



WHO MURDERED CHAIKA?

SETTING: Old Tbilisi, central town.

THEMES: life and death; friendship; neighborhood; community.

GENRE: pseudo-detective, urban drama.

ADAPTATION: feature film.

SHORT SYNOPSIS:

Tazo is an ordinary man who with his daughter, Liziko, discovers the body of a middle-aged woman, Elizabeth. The investigation begins.

Elizabeth was a happy, single woman, with friends from many, different minority groups. She was a free spirit who enjoyed life, dancing, and traveling, and was nicknamed Chaika (a seagull). Unexpectedly, Chaika's dreams were cut short by this dreadful murder which shocks the entire community where everyone knows everything, except the detective who is investigating her death. Chaika's friends remain silent, while two of them decide to avenge Elizabeth for themselves.

MOVIE REFERENCES:

Volver (2006) a film by Pedro Almodóvar

Vertigo (1958) a film by Alfred Hitchcock



CHARACTERS:

Elizabeth M. – a free spirit nicknamed Chaika who is murdered in the beginning of the story

Tezo – a middle aged man

The Wife – Tezo's wife

Pippi – Tezo's wife's dog

Liziko – Tezo's younger daughter

Sandro – Elizabeth's friend

Toma – Elizabeth's friend

Kancha (heron) – Elizabeth's neighbor

Mama Kancha (heron) – Kancha's mother, the aunt of the neighborhood community

Vato – the investigator

Magda – Elizabeth's friend

Manana – Magda's older daughter

The Reds – Magda's children, twins

Nikoliko (Nikoloz) – Elizabeth's friend nicknamed, the queen.



BOOK SAMPLE

SUMMARY:

The story begins on a normal summer's day. A middle-aged man, Tezo, is walking his lazy dog, Pippi, together with his youngest daughter, Liziko. She is an inquisitive little girl who peers around a lot on a walk. She peeps into the window of a dilapidated house and sees a dead body. Everybody in the neighborhood knows the victim – Elizabeth, a kindergarten teacher, now lying on the ground with the murder weapon, an iron, next to her.

What begins as a classic detective story, slowly leads the reader towards a dead end. The colorful, friendly community is not interested in cooperating with the investigation. The only person invested in the process is a detective, Vato, whose attempts to dig into the story prove unsuccessful. The narrator and Elizabeth's friends seem determined to keep the community's secrets.

The novel is not limited to a single story, rather it provides a panorama of a Georgian community with tales of its past and present. At its centre, is a group of female friends: Elizabeth (Elo) – the victim, Magda and Kancha. Kancha (heron) owes her nickname to her appearance. She lost her lover to the Soviet regime which sent him to rot in a Central Asian prison, and then much later her daughter to a convent. She tried to find them both but was unsuccessful.

There are other characters: Kancha's demented mother, Magda, and her daughter, Manana, plus Elo's gay friend, Sandro, who suffers from autophobia and is afraid in elevators. He is the number one suspect because Elo seems to have left everything to him in her will.

The story is filled with flashbacks woven into the plot which unfolds over a few days in August days between the murder and the funeral. Some involve Elizabeth herself, throwing the reader back in time. Childhood and adolescent memories recall the growth of friendship and observations of the adult world and then all their upsets, sorrows and disappointments with lovers. This is a group of women who live better without men.

But these messages are inferred. At one point, Kancha, who is constantly on the edge of becoming an alcoholic, sings the Judy Garland song *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* in her deep, beautiful voice. Her friends sing along with delight and longing. The detective, Vato, is the only one who does not know the lyrics, causing his bride to be to frown.

In the course of the story, Vato often encounters those he had questioned about the murder. The author deliberately creates serendipitous connections. Vato's fiancée orders her wedding dress in Sandro's studio – the new gathering place for Elo's friends. These coincidences are unforced but serve to reveal the real central character of the novel – the city and community of Tbilisi.

The story effectively ends where it began. The last scene of the novel before recalls the first. Tezo, who has endured a series of useless interrogations, scratches his head, thinks about everything again and comes to no conclusion.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Born in 1968, Ana Kordzaia-Samadashvili is a writer and literary translator from German. She also teaches literature and creative writing at Ilia State University in Tbilisi. Anna's literary debut was in 2002 when she published a short story collection, *Berikaoba*. Later she wrote many short stories and three novels which brought her success. Her works describe the lives of the people who live alongside us in the very center of large cities but who go unnoticed or remain invisible to us. She tries to reveal the beauty, sadness and inner struggle of each and every person she or we have ever met, or will meet in future. Anna's works are translated into English, German and Swedish.