

Elene Japaridze

"Hideout"

Synopsis

The story of "Hideout" takes place in different times and spaces, and its protagonist is a young woman, Aniko, who managed to escape the Abkhazian war. The story begins in 1992, when Aniko, alongside her mother and the younger brother, escapes the wartorn city of Sukhumi with the help of a kind neighbor, Gu, who in turn is hopelessly in love with Aniko's mother. Even though Aniko survives, she witnesses horrible events along the way including the roads filled with mutilated corpses, she suffers from being looted and robbed, the image of her mother getting raped in front of her eyes. Aniko is horrified to see a dress soaked in the blood of her raped mother, the part that will forever remain ingrained in her mind.

The family survives miraculously and travels to Germany as refugees, where Aniko tries to begin her new life. Although, moving to a foreign country does not improve her situation. The war traumas haunt her mother, who wouldn't leave her bed, and the whole burden falls on Aniko's shoulders: taking care of her little brother and finding her place in a new setting is her main concern now. Most importantly, the reflection of her trauma haunts her every step of the way.

As time goes on, Aniko manages to adapt to her new environment. She has a loyal friend, Alzu, a Turkish girl who arrived in Germany through an exchange program. Then she meets Marco, a young man with whom she shares many things in common – he is from Belgrade, and his past is very similar to Aniko's path. After a few dates, they quickly find a common language and start a romantic relationship – at first everyday conversations in cafes and bars, night walks, turn into the time to move in and live together. For the first time in her life, Aniko might feel calm and protected with Marco. When thinking about an open relationship with a man, she is often reminded of her parents, a life full of conflicts, her father's yelling and abusing her mother, and how no one around would save an oppressed woman from a ruthless husband.

Aniko spends her evenings working as a sous-chef in a pizzeria, and during the day, she interns at a mental health center. At the same time, she is completing a master's degree in clinical psychology. Although she does not have high hopes for career advancement at the center, she still spares no effort and performs all her duties faithfully. She is determined to create various training and therapeutic programs for women in the future.

Over time, some problems arise in her personal life. Marco wants to get married; Aniko does not want to hear it. She avoids this awkward conversation every chance she gets.

Suddenly, a young Georgian man, Ale, appears in the center to improve his professional qualifications. The director of the center, Herr Müller, says he is a talented psychiatrist. Seeing a young, successful, charming Georgian psychiatrist shakes Aniko to the core, she wants to get to know him closely, and her desires come to fruition relatively soon. The connection is instant. They share their life stories, get closer, and soon fall in love. The relationship with Ale is all Aniko can think about, it feels as if she is happy for

the very first time and manages to erase the ghosts of her past. Aniko makes a solid decision: she will soon end her relationship with Marco and dedicate herself entirely to Ale. She does so, and despite a great deal of pain, she breaks off her relationship with Marco.

Ale agrees to include Aniko in her research. Although Herr Müller demands a strict separation of work and personal life, they keep the relationship a secret. They hardly acknowledge each other at work and are limited to only a formal smile and greeting in the corridors and the reception. They have sex whenever they have some privacy. However, not everything is as perfect as it seems at first glance. Their affair lasts for six months, and Ales' time in Germany is coming to an end, although the man is not in a hurry to talk about future plans, and as it turns out, he is not planning on returning to Georgia with Aniko. Aniko notices, Ale never mentions her to her Georgian friends or family.

One day, arriving at the center, Aniko learns that Herr Müller wants to talk to her immediately. In his office, she hears a shocking story: it turns out Ale sexually harassed women during therapeutic sessions, tried to have a relationship with almost all of them, and Herr Müller believes Aniko is one of the victims. Decisions are made, Aniko gets a unique free course to recover from her trauma, and Ale will get deported from the country.

In the final part of the novel, Alzu takes care of the lonely and unhappy Aniko. When bedridden, Aniko wakes up from her sleep; instead of her own body, she sees her mother Nina's thin and white legs. She stumbles off her bed and ultimately loses the sense of reality, starts hearing voices, and cannot distinguish who is talking to her: Alzu, Ale, Marco, or even Gu. She is on the verge of a fever dream and reality. Finally, she makes out words of a doctor, who is talking to Gu, saying Nina has an induced moment of hallucination and that is entirely normal for those who want to deny reality. Nina realizes that living through her daughter's body and the whole German odyssey was the fruit of her imagination. In reality, she was spending all this time in a psychiatric clinic, where, along with the doctors, she was taken care of by faithful Gu; and Gu is the one by her side at the moment of awakening.