

#yxdp

A Dull Life of Idle Mikheil, son of Merab Makhateli

Today's occasion

Is a celebration

Of consuming red wine.

Ergo

Makhata-sized

Mikheil Makhateli

Sits near the church

And cries:

Where can *I* find

something cheaper

old, maybe wooden,

makhati needle.

So, *I* could try

And commit to cool ART.

He walks over to the Hualing shop,

Buys a beer and drinks enthusiastically.

You can always find the money for beer

If you want it hard enough.

Story #1

Theatre and Street

Maybe one day I'll tell you the story of how walking around Lisi Lake with my friends turned into a trip to Hamburg, and how I got lost in its dark streets in just a matter of hours. But before we get to know each other better, before it reaches that point, I'll probably have driven thousands more kilometres on my scooter leased in my friends' name.

I am a professional actor but having been regulated by the economic market, I drive 100-120 kilometres a day for a living as a courier, a delivery guy. If you are considering taking a delivery job, please bear in mind that people will address you informally, and even more importantly, remember:

Tbilisi streets are odd-numbered on the right side and even-numbered on the left. The ascending order is at the starting point of the street. The trick to knowing the starting point is to turn your back to the center of the city, and the city center is, of course, the City Council.

Well, think about it: you're standing in front of city hall on Freedom Square, and you're facing Rustaveli Avenue. On the right side, you have 1,3,5, etc. On the left – 2, 4, 6, etc. The same goes for Pushkini, Leonidze, Galaktioni and Dadiani streets. Kote Abkhazi street, which we still call Leselidze, is ascending from the city council, even though the starting point for the traffic is from the bottom up. Got it, right?

You can't always spot city hall from different districts, but let's say you're in Samgori on Moskovi street – the same as the capital of Russia, you just have to do the same thing and visualize where city hall might be and turn your back on it.

However, there are some exceptions. Take the English language, for example, double O's are usually pronounced as [u]. Words like cool, snooze, Snoop Dog, and so on. But then there's Doors – the exception to the rule with no logical explanation.

The same illogical exceptions apply to "The laws of a delivery job", for instance, on Akaki Beliashvili, or Besarion Jghenti, and many other streets, housing numbers don't ascend from the center of the city, and to be honest, I have no clue as to how the houses are numbered.

At first, I thought I would title this collection something along the lines of “Stories of Unlucky Actor” instead of “A Courier’s Tales”, but that felt a little unfair to all the unlucky actors who after graduating from drama school fell straight into unemployment. Unlike them, I started working in two different theatres at the same time.

Working?!

Anyone who’s considering acting as a career doesn’t think: ‘Oh, I’ll spend every waking minute of these 4 years studying drama only to perform once in a blue moon, getting a main, secondary or small part in a god-forgotten local theatre’.

On the contrary, after doing the whole 4-year cycle and graduating, if not the next Hollywood or European film star, they think that at least they will get jobs at the Rustaveli or Marjanishvili theatres, or in the worst-case scenario, they’ll be employed at a “public theatre” (!) as a full-time actor with the minimum wage of 600 GEL to start with, while auditioning for films and TV shows in their spare time.

For a long time, I was certain that would happen to me; and that sooner or later this would be my future. That is why I was working tirelessly in two remote theatres at the same time, so one day, I could work full-time at one of them until something better came up.

We produced “The Nutcracker” in Akhmeteli theatre in two months. The other actors including me rehearsed daily without pay, but we got lucky in that the premiere fell in the month of December which predates New Year’s. It meant that we would perform three plays a day: one at 10 am, the next at 12 pm, and the last at 2 pm.

We were paid 20 GEL a play so combining three plays a day meant 60 GEL in total, but of course, you must consider the 20% income tax that the government deducts so it didn’t even amount to 60 GEL a day, but at least we didn’t starve. That is if you had the time to eat, which is no easy when one of the theatres is in the Gldani district of Tbilisi and you are late for the other theatre 40-kilometres away in a different city – Rustavi.

In Rustavi, I was performing alongside my fellow students in Levan Gotua’s “Woe of Heroes”. The director was our former Drama teacher - Giorgi Kantaria.

Working with him was a pleasure and even though we didn't expect anything, the Rustavi theatre administration were paying us 12 GEL a play.

The first time I questioned my chosen career path was when instead of three plays, I had to perform four at the Akhmeteli theatre. All four performances of "The Nutcracker" were programmed back-to-back and I had no time to eat on a supposed break. Famished and exhausted, I ran towards the Gldani-Rustavi minibus station, so I could reach "Woe of Heroes" on time, where I played The King of Kakheti, Aleksandre II's, second son Prince Davit (1569-1602).

The road from Gldani to Rustavi is long, stressful, and full of traffic, but it feels even longer and more stressful when you are just starting out as an actor trying to make it on time for your fifth performance of the day. And this one is three hours long. "Woe of Heroes" is not a children's play, but apparently, the theatre administration had sold every ticket to school students as if it were the child-friendly show "The Nutcracker" playing at the Akhmeteli theatre.

Granted they targeted senior students, but they are still at school.

I made it!

I changed!

The play begins with the war scene. I was so tired and hungry that I messed up the self-defense stunt and my stage partner managed to hit me in the head with a 1,5 kg blunt knife. They managed to stop the bleeding in the dressing room, patched up the wound and the second act started.

The words "hungry" and "tired" do little to no justice to what I was going through as I played the "terrible", "proud" prince who sacrifices his brother for the throne.

And there is my mentor, – Oman Cholokashvili, giving me poison. He says: 'if you drink this you will become sick temporarily; the royals will think you are on your deathbed; the Ottomans will not take you hostage, and your father will be forced to send your older brother to Istanbul. You will avoid capture and become heir to the throne.'

I take the potion and look at it thoughtfully.

The audience is waiting for me to drink it and betray my brother.

But I don't!

I throw it away!

At this moment, the excited youths of Rustavi burst into cheers and applaud my character's choice.

But what's really happening?

My character changes his mind, picks up the poison, and gulps it down.

Suddenly a voice comes from the audience:

Spectator #1: Fuck you, you fucking cunt!

Spectator #2: You son of a bitch!

Usher: Shhhhhhh!

From nowhere, I remember the aspirations and dreams I had as a student and start narrating my thoughts as if I was one of Dato Khorbaladze's or Michel Houellebecq's characters:

So, here *I* am on the Rustavi theatre stage. *I* barely made it out on time from Akhmeteli Theatre to be standing here with an open head wound for kids to swear at me from the audience. Well, this is my fucked-up life.

I imagine myself as the enrolling student, who is crying, and I am crying with him.

I am bawling my eyes out in the middle of the scene.

It is embarrassing, I'm crying still dressed as Prince David.

When it finally clicks, I leave the stage.

I lock myself in the dressing room.

I start to calm down!

I come into the actor's lounge!

I prepare for the next scene.

Everyone is trying to comfort me:

- "Come on man, why are you crying? They weren't swearing at you but at your character. You should be proud! That means you played your part and you're a great actor!"

I started to wail now: “Do they really think that I’m crying because of the stupid swearing?! Is that how pathetic they think I am?!” – I thought to myself, walked onto the stage, and played till the end.

I changed into my clothes and took the Tbilisi minibus home. I walked up the stairs, entered my apartment, got in bed, and continued crying and thinking.

The next day I decided to quit both theatres and make my living another way.

Oh, by the way, a few days ago I was delivering packages when I saw some graffiti sprayed in front of the theatre:” Actor for 20 GEL”. You might think I was the one behind it, but I know exactly who it was, I might even tell you one day!

Later!

#yxdp

Mikheil is whoever he is

From the mountain of Makhata

towards Avlabari

descends the Niabi street,

and the military base is near.

Next to the only blackberry bush,

Mikheil sits with a pair of binoculars

peeking at the TV Tower

and behind the TV Tower,

he's peeping at a couple on the hill,

So he takes a makhati needle in hand

and sighs out loud:

Why can't *I* have somebody too,

he rises and takes the inspired walk to Mtatsminda

He walks – doesn't know why.