

## Balla(n)d

### Excerpt

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#### Cemetery of Brothers

Deep in his heart, Levaniko knew sooner or later it was sure to happen. He still hoped maybe it wouldn't, but ever since the investigation had started a death fly had been buzzing in his ear. How many nights already had his sleep been interrupted by this fly that had climbed into his ear?

"Bzoo, Bzoo.... Are you sleeping Levan?"

"Yes, can't you see that I'm sleeping?"

"I thought perhaps your eyes were simply closed and you were thinking. If I were in your place, I sure wouldn't be able to sleep."

"Why's that?"

"Are you serious? Just think about it. Do you really have time to waste sleeping?"

"Well, what else is there to do? What can I do?"

"Do whatever you want. Do anything. Except sleep. Soon enough you'll have all the time in the world for that. But as for time to do other things... something tells me..."

"What do you want? Stop bugging me. Why are you always following me everywhere?"

"I'm not following you. It's you, taking me here and there. If it was up to me, I'd be somewhere else completely. I'd fly all over the city, and find myself some warm, new shit. I would be kicking back, doing my own thing. But truth be told, I like being here with you too. There's also the smell shit around here, and intuition suggests soon enough you will be in deep doo-doo. And then, just imagine how all the other flies will look at me with envy. Bzoo, bzoo..." the fly said with a buzzful of laughter.

"Why do you think that?"

"I mean, take a good sniff. Can you really not smell yourself? Sniff carefully. Is that how you smelled before they summoned you there?"

"Where is there?"

“You know full well where. You’re a smart boy. Don’t play a fool. Pretending is not going to help you now. You should know that once they push you in, well, no one climbs out without getting a bit dirty. That’s why you already smell of shit. It’s true. I know at first you think it’s your imagination playing tricks on you. But if you think that you are smelling someone else’s shit, someone who has already fallen in, you’d be wrong. That’s yourself you’re smelling. Sniff with that discerning brain of yours and all smells will become clear. You people can always pick out the stench of your own shit from that of others’.”

Levaniko swiped blindly at his face to shoo away the unwanted guest. Dawn had not quite arrived. He was unable to fall asleep, but if he had known where he would wake up the morning after the next, the importance of getting a good night’s sleep would have been clear.

Not only a good night’s sleep—he would have probably glued himself to the bed, for soon enough his soft pillow and wife would be replaced by a plank and by Misha, who had been caught stealing car mirrors.

Prior to sentencing, the court would convene to discuss appropriate preventative measures regarding the defendant. In effect, a determination should be made as to where the person in question was to remain while the investigation was conducted and before a judgment was passed on the charges brought before the accused. Should they remain in the custody of the state, or be granted bail or a surety and released? In normal countries, generally, when the defendant poses no threat to society, nor appears to be a flight risk, imprisonment is not deemed necessary. And if we were in a normal country, this story would end here.

Here the hearing takes place within 48 hours, and the results are already known to everyone in advance. No Bails. No sureties. Everyone goes straight to jail.

Here, precisely for the purpose of housing such defendants, there exists the infamous “Ka-Pe-Ze,” the “Kamera Predvaritselnava Zaklucheniya,” or, in the mother tongue, the pre-trial detention cell. The Kapaze is located in the Dighomi district in the Administrative Building. Since childhood, all the “Militsia-Politsia” buildings in Tbilisi had become toponyms unto themselves and coordinates in the lives of every Tbilisian: Arakishvili, Abano, Sevatsopoli, Dolidze, and the afore-mentioned Dighomi Administrative Building which stood above those of all other districts. If at the district division, you could clear things up for 200 dollars, at the Administrative Building, you’d need to ante up at least double that. For this reason, the Administrative Building had been ingrained since childhood into the minds of the people of the capital as a dangerous place.

The defendant Levan Kakabadze was moved from the police station for financial crimes to this Kapeze. At the entrance sat an old wooden table, similar to what one finds in the

teachers' boardroom at a school. The woman of about 50 who sat at the table was also characterized by the aesthetic of the teachers' boardroom and would mark in the journal all incoming prisoners. They first took Levaniko's photo, then his fingerprints, then he was taken to the pedagogical lady for questioning.

"Name and Surname?"

"Levan Kakabadze."

"Age?"

"27"

"Oh my God, my child, you poor thing. You are the same age as my son," sighed the woman. "Place of birth?"

"Tbilisi."

"Why are you here son, what is the article?" The woman asked, sighing again as she took down Levan's answers with a pen.

"Economic crime, ma'am, I don't know the exact article." Levan gave her a warm smile.

"Oh son, my son, what could you have possibly done?"

"Eli, Eli, Lama Sabaktani," said Levaniko.

"What did you say, my son?"

"Nothing ma'am, just talking to myself..." He smiled.

"Do you have family, my son?"

"Yes, a wife and two children."

"Oh no, my son, oh God, your poor mother."

"Wrap it up now Tsisana," interjected the guard on duty. "Do you have to cry over every prisoner? If he had behaved properly he'd be on the outside."

"As if you would know who behaves and who doesn't," Ms. Tsisana growled.

"Take him away to the cell man, otherwise we'll be here talking and sobbing until morning," the duty officer by the cells shouted to his colleague.

"Alright, let's go, my friend."

"Have a good day, ma'am," bid Levan.

"Farewell my child, fairwell. May God bless you. May the cross be over you. Take care of yourself." She was still blessing him as he trudged into the corridor.

"You really are pigs. You don't even let a person talk," Tsitana grumbled as she snapped shut her folder.

"What a kind lady," said Levan to the guard escorting him toward the cells.

"Yes, she is a poor woman. She lives nearby. Her son died young, and her husband left her long ago. She was raising the kid by herself, and then he was hit by a car here on the highway. She has been through a lot. She had been selling sunflower seeds, here outside in the courtyard, and we boys felt bad for her, and asked our supervisor to find her something to do around here."

"Oh, man, the poor woman. Does she talk to everyone like she talks to me?"

"Yes, everyone... What? Were you thinking you were something special?"

"No, I was just curious."

"We're here. Welcome to your first cell," smiled the policeman.

"How many more will I have?"

"Nobody knows. Probably just this one, and the second one in Gldani. And then afterward, who can tell?"

"Why Gldani? Maybe they won't keep me in custody.

"Sure, why not? Anything is possible. But chances are they'll keep you, so don't count on going anywhere. And let me give you one piece of advice. Keep this in mind. In here, it's generally better to not hope for things, otherwise you'll have a hard time. It's always better to expect the worst, and then if it doesn't happen you can be happy about it."

"Thank you very much. Just look at you guys. Turns out all of you around here are decent people. Perhaps I can stay on a bit longer." He smiled.

"No my friend," the policeman smiled back, opening the cell. "You'll be here 1 or 2 days, no more."

The cell was very small, probably around 9 square meters. Half of the space was taken up by a pallet made of wooden planks on which the prisoners slept. To be found in the cell was only Paata. The two prisoners exchanged a few words and told each other briefly the reasons that brought them there. Before long, the porthole in the cell door, which the prisoners call a karmushka, noisily slid open.

"Kakabadze. You got a package."

The package turned out to be food and magazines sent by his friends: penovani khachapuri, salami sticks, water, coca-cola, and the yellow press magazines, The Mirror and The Tbilisian.

Levaniko and Paata shared a tasty dinner and laid down on the planks to go to sleep. They slept peacefully for a while, but before long the door opened and another resident was let inside. As this new prisoner was telling his story, the door again opened and another subject entered. The door opened 6 more times, and by morning, within the space of nine square meters, 10 people had gathered in total. All of them lay on the pallet-bed, and all of them were poorly rested with frayed nerves, sleeping as they waited for an unknown future.

They slept in a tight bunch, hugging each other like the fish packed in a tin of kapchoni like the kind Levan remembered his grandfather buying in his childhood and which the Soviet population had called a cemetery of brothers.

The following morning, he was taken to the Tbilisi City Court for the first time, where just as expected, in the pre-trial detention column next to his name a new address was written: Tbilisi City, Prison Number 8.

Translated by Ryan Sherman