



BALLA(N)D

SETTING: present day; Georgian prisons in the 2010s in Tbilisi and Rustavi.

THEMES: prisoners, the penitential system, friendship, everyday life in an enclosed space, relationships between people and the system.

GENRE: drama, autobiographical novel.

ADAPTATION: feature film.

SHORT SYNOPSIS:

Balla(n)d is the odyssey of a seemingly regular guy from Tbilisi. The story opens doors to one of the most closed systems of contemporary Georgia – its prisons. Levan Kakabadze is falsely accused of a financial crime and put into an unknown and dangerous confinement. He gradually adapts to sharing a cell with 15 other prisoners and yet still finds an inner freedom; while the reader realizes that everything they know about prison life is but the tip of an iceberg compared to what actually goes on there. It's a world much more daunting than our imaginations can grasp.

MOVIE REFERENCES:

The Shawshank Redemption (1994) a film by Frank Darabont;

The French Dispatch (2021) a film by Wes Anderson.



CHARACTERS:

Levan Kakabadze – a bright young man falsely accused of financial crimes

Elene – Levan's wife

Aunt Khatuna – Levan's curious aunt

The Lawyer – Levan's lawyer

The Judge – of Levan's case

Temide – Ancient Goddess, the symbol of justice

Docent – a professor, arrested for issuing false diplomas

Gigusha – a prisoner and refugee from occupied

Abkhazia, a drug addict

Father Dositheos – an Orthodox priest

Tengo – a prisoner arrested for stealing metals from a graveyard

Aziz – a young Georgian-Azeri boy charged with murdering his brother in law

Koba – a prisoner, former physicist and drug addict



BOOK SAMPLE

SUMMARY:

Levaniko is a regular guy who had an average Tbilisi childhood, surrounded by a caring family and spending all his free time roaming the neighborhood with friends, finding ant colonies, observing life, and asking his father questions. He is his great grandfather's namesake and is doomed later in life to repeat his fate. Levan Kakabadze was one of the victims of Soviet repression back then. The young Levaniko doesn't know it yet as a child but as an adult he will face similar challenges.

As a young father and husband, Levaniko holds a top position in a construction company. One of the company's deals gets caught up in a corrupt government scheme and Levaniko becomes the scapegoat. Visited by the chief investigator, he loses his temper and says he has no interest in cooperating with a false investigation. So, his odyssey begins and Levaniko has to face years of trials, lies and injustice.

Once he knows he will be sent to prison, Levaniko starts to have recurring dreams that have a symbolic, mythological meaning, connecting his fate to that of Ulysses.

Before entering "Ka-Pe-Ze," the pre-trial detention cell, Levaniko encounters an aunt figure, Mrs. Tsisana, who follows his path to detention with her woes and concerns.

Prison turns out to be something unexpected. There is a sense of community among the inmates. They even have a welcome care-package for newcomers. The first thing people ask is your criminal classification, rather than what you did or who you were outside. Being sentenced for a financial crime marks Levaniko as a "smartie".

Before his final sentencing and moving to prison proper, Levaniko has to attend one trial after another. This becomes very frustrating for him. His family try to help out by bargaining with state officials, who agree to give Levaniko a shorter sentence if he pleads guilty. But he remains true to his principles, and never bows to the system.

A priest, who is a family friend, visits him in prison to help him steer his way through hard times. His wife leaves a post-it note in Levaniko's pocket after another meeting with the message: "I wanna live like ordinary folk", to remind him of how their relationship began. His lawyer, despite all his good intentions, can accomplish nothing.

When Levaniko is moved to prison after his final sentence, he is surprised to meet an old university friend in his cell. Prison routine includes many different activities: custom-made self-care procedures; football matches between inmates and guards; experimenting with prison food to make it more eatable. The novel's title is a wordplay between "ballad" (a hero's tale), and "baland" (the term used to connote prison food).

Levaniko leaves prison early, not thanks to justice, but rather to the priest friend of the family who had risen the clerical ranks and was able to vouch for him. Levaniko is ready to accept his luck and the blessing of release and goes back to his loved ones after experiencing his mind-altering odyssey.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Koka Kamushadze was born in Tbilisi in 1982. He graduated from the ESM (European School of Management) in Business Administration and worked in different jobs throughout his career. In recent years, he has held several positions at TBC Bank. He is also the founder of a Georgian creative agency, Playmakers. According to Koka, he has always loved writing, but assumed it wasn't to be his fate. His professional activity and life story finally brought him to literature. Koka's debut novel *Balla(n)d* was on the shortlist of the best debut novel nominees at the literary award Saba in Georgia.