

# Cupid by the Kremlin Wall

by Aka Morchiladze

excerpt

The book is based on the speech of Valerian Samkharadze dedicated to 8 March 1987 celebratory session at the Tbilisi Branch of the Soviet Institute of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

*'Do you remember Machavariani?'*<sup>1</sup> Stalin asked.

'No.'

'So, you don't, do you?'

Stalin: 'Once we stopped in a town prison. Seventy-five prisoners were put in a cell designed for twenty-five. There was no place to lie down, so we sat on the floor. I had high fever, was sweating and was drenched. But I survived. Then we continued on our way. Soon I escaped from that exile.'

From *Visiting Stalin* by Niko Berdzenishvili

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<sup>1</sup> All italicized phases are in Russian in the original. Also, the whole novel is written in the west Georgian dialect, thus 'incorrect' grammar and vocabulary in the English translation.

Of course, he knew. *Stalin knew him*. He knew, how to say, as good as, *even better than* Lado Ketskhoveri and there was no one better than Lado, till they killed the poor guy. Not only knew, Soso lived with them family, on the ground floor. Was called Koba. All boys chose short names in Kutaisi Boulevard, and Stalin was stuck with Koba. It's already the time of the First Russian Revolution and then, when all gunfire was for nothing, they hid him, so what kinda better closeness can there be?

I've heard, for example, that Soso gifted him with a Dillinger pistol to hide in his sleeve. It's a small one, called 'lady's gun' in the past, because *they were hidden in braids*. They found that pistol and they say it was a Remington.

Papala Alexandrovna took pity of the lad and baked him some khachapuri. They had a village girl as a servant, and her grandson was in the town committee, but they were never thanked. He'd eat fast and go to his ground floor room, frowning as usual. The khachapuri were very thin, nearly transparent, looking like the sun, but he wasn't used to saying thank-you, *taking things for granted*. He was hiding in their family and not only knew them, but more, *completely different relationship*. That's how it was with the old revolutionaries. I remember though I was little. Then they were executed, all of them. Stalin was known to find those *he loved from his young days* only finally.

Now if you looked at Musia when she was fifteen or sixteen, she walked around in breeches, a kinda trousers, and she was an expression of life and sort of dangerous joy, if you can imagine it. King Edward was in England at the time, a fat, famous king, son of Queen Victoria, and he invented those breeches. He just cut the legs because he said they got wet when he was hunting. Then the whole world followed him and Musia was the first suffragist and anarchist in Kutaisi with them breeches and her bicycle and she *was sticking them papers* all around the city. She cared not and it was impossible not to notice her and think about her. How can they say Stalin didn't know them? He lived in their house.

Javaira Khutulashvili used to say... Do ye know who Javaira is? Kamo's sister. Was *deputy minister of Georgian SSR*. Ye know Mother and Baby Institute, don't ya? She did it. That Khutulashvili was a good guy, her hussy. Javaira used to say: if she wasn't from Kutaisi, who'd be Kollontai in comparison. She said she was Isadora Duncan, Marie Curie and Queen of Sheba *put together*. His Kutaisi-style arrogance and wish to show more is the reason Musia didn't reach higher positions, that's her opinion. Javaira was good at seeing things.

Anyway, Simonika Eristavi, Musia's dad, was *number one* lawyer in Kutaisi. He had Niko, a son, older than Musia, nicknamed Kokosha and he was buddies with them. At the time it was cool to be buddies with them revolutionaries and have nicknames. He studied in Tartu and, in short, *stood by them revolutionaries*, himself a lawyer. Because of Kokosha, Simonika helped them for fear of his son getting really involved in their life. Oft he defended them in court, or asked others to help. I'm telling ya, it was Tsar Nicholas' time, the First Revolution is started or they are already chased or something, so they hide here and there, because gallows are already ready and Siberia looks like Yalta – so many people go there in summer and winter too.

He knew them since that time.

Then in *thirty-fifth* Stalin arrived to visit his mother. Musia was there, at the table, two or three times. Maybe she shouldn't have been, not holding any post, but he would ask about somebody and that somebody was brought. Do ya think he wouldn't ask about Musia? He used to smile through his moustache and ask if the old slut was alive. It wasn't a bad word for him. If he called a woman a whore, he was joking, meaning a beauty, someone he liked and easy to lay.

Sorry for the word, it's his.

Kokosha was long dead when he arrived to Tbilisi.

In general, Musia became a Bolshevik because of Rattinger. But maybe not. She was *rebellious*, a difficult gal for her parents, embarrassing and a sparkling star, as olden people said. She wanted to study in Paris, that

would be a perfect place for her, maybe she'd have stayed there forever. Could have married someone like Auguste Blanqui or Lafarge's son and would live in free love, leaving the Eristavi grannies in peace. She was twenty, ready to travel but she had an accident: she rode her bicycle down the stairs from Bagrati Cathedral, down that long slope, in fact insisted on it. Had the first bicycle in Kutaisi. *A protestant*. So she broke her bones and all the rest. Needed a year and ten months to get her together and then limped for three years more. Nobody seen her without stockings or on her bike since then, in her breeches. They said she had stitches and scars as if hit by a Cossack's sword. That accident was in *one thousand, nine hundred and eight*.

When she began to walk again, with crutches of course, that Rattinger arrived. That's how it was in them days: if someone did something bad over there, they ran our way and if someone had mucked up things here, they ran that way to hide. Rattinger was Kokosha's mate from Tartu, a Bolshevik with a party nickname the Swede. Actually, he was Latvian. Two meters in height without a hat, with such a big forehead that Dimitri said no myrrh would be enough – he was their servant, lived long.

Wide-shouldered, ye know, he was and it was the time of August Strindberg. Everyone was reading him, of course Musia never put the book down. She kinda saw how much he looked like Strindberg and fell madly for him. She had never seen a northern man, how would she? He dressed smartly, even washed his face differently, the servants said so too. He didn't have to shave often, but had a thick fair moustache, glowing in the sun. He was blond too and Musia went all the way with him, falling head over heels so to say. *Loved him loudly*. So loud that Simonika said either they marry or he had to leave or he promised to chain his gal. Or send her to Motsameta Monastery or to his relatives in Lechkhumi.

*Do ya get me?* No secrets in Kutaisi but she loved him so loud, at night they heard their lovemaking from the gardens. Rattinger wasn't the man to utter them sounds, so it was Musia, with a high voice anyway.

Now, they didn't want any priests or wedding or anything like that. Could burn their hair if you mentioned church to them. So they was seen as a couple, a husband and wife. Rattinger was an atheist but a Catholic too. They couldn't wed in a Georgian church anyway. Wedding and celebration was out for them and Rattingen was hiding. That's how Musia became a Bolshevik, and kinda shifted to an illegal position. Simonika sent them to Tbilisi but continued to support them.

Rattinger was the only husband, Musia didn't have another. Then he was arrested, during WWI and exiled. Musia returned to Kutaisi. Then when Nicholas was thrown and *amnesty was announced*, he rushed from Siberia directly to Petrograd to help the Bolsheviks against the new government. He got involved in that war and Musia went to see him in that bedlam.

The place was full of Georgians at the time, in all parties. Karlo Chkheidze was *the first chairman of the council of workers, soldiers and sailors*. Kaki Tsereteli too. Stalin is said to be with them and then the October Revolution happens but Georgia doesn't approve. Georgia is on its own but they still marched in three years later. We all know about the Shulaveri Revolutionary Committee, so Georgia became red. Musia went to Tbilisi and welcomed the Bolsheviks with a red flag – that was on 25 February. Then she rushed back to Kutaisi, well ahead of the retreating Provisional Government that was retreating to the sea and, they say, she had some bombs with her. By then Rattinger came together with the Bolsheviks, the 11<sup>th</sup> Army to be exact. He was in the Caucasus Bureau, so what else can you expect? For some time he was kept as a diplomat and was sent to Iran, god only knows what for, but later he was in the Transcaucasian Cheka, at various positions. Big jobs he had in Cheka, OGPU, NKVD. When they changed the ranks in 1935, he was *senior major*. That was a high rank. An NKVD captain was equal to an army colonel and *senior major* was two ranks higher, so he was kinda division commander, or a general-major, probably so. But we all know – the problem was Beria didn't like him.

When Beria was in OGPY, he called him 'a dead fish'. Rattinger was a quiet man, you'd never know what he wanted or what he thought, but had

many people killed in cold blood. All through the 1920s, and all those punitive things, he was always in them. But he was considered a Trotskyist because all Latvians were thought so.

He never showed it, never openly showed he was on this or that platform – he was a Cheka officer. But they were known to be leftists, wanted the whole country to be a camp, labour camps and world revolution. Now, they did turn Georgia into a Soviet country in 1921, but Latvia *was an independent country until the 40s and hostile* at that. Those red Latvians had their relatives in their homeland, so it was easy to find fault whenever you needed, blaming them for being bourgeoisie agents.

When purges began lots were executed, the left opposition and the right opposition, Stalin sent them all up in smoke.

Anyway, it was 1935 and Beria didn't think much before appointing that Rattinger as the deputy head of Samtrest – a Latvian in charge of the wine and brandy industry! It was a bad sign. Some were removed from politics and then arrest would soon follow. Budu Mdivani was sent to head silk production, then returned to be a deputy Sovnarkom, and then was executed.

Methinks Rattingen had seen grapes only in the market, but I also doubt he'd even been to a market, but that was his new post.

Beria was rather good at spreading gossip, so he said he was a drunkard, a lost man, drinking brandy in his office at the expense of the state. Maybe it was true – those Latvians drank till they blotted out, not otherwise. Also, he said he had a drill and couldn't be in the Cheka any longer, that a man of his position personally went to cells and drilled prisoners' ears. Basically, the talk was that Rattinger was an executioner, taking pleasure in torture and killings.

But look, *passed thirty-five, thirty-six and thirty-seven* and nobody came to get him. Sits that Rattinger in the Samtrest, sipping free brandy while everything around is in flames. Everyone is executed or arrested, *the first Moscow process, the second Moscow process*, Trotsky is already targeted. Beria has left, is moved to Moscow to the NKVD head office and

when Yezhov is arrested, he becomes a Narkom to fight Yezhov's policy. So, Beria is far away and those in Tbilisi who survived him are mighty scared. And that's when Rattinger is arrested from his Samtrest office.

That's already 1938.

All began there and then. Musia never held any serious positions, though was loud and outspoken. At the time she was a senior organizer of youth sports events at the National Education Commission, probably as an old cyclist or something like that. But she was Musia and who could resist her whatever position they had? She was an achiever because she was thought a bit mad, not because she was good at scheming and plotting. That was her nature, was born with it.

By then she must've been forty-seven or eight but still youngish, lithe and smart, still into sports. So when Rattinger didn't get home, she began looking for him. Asked high and low, quite high, as high as telephone lines allowed *to reach people in high positions, up the hierarchy.*

They couldn't find him. Or they didn't know who could know, or just couldn't say. *There was a man and then he wasn't.* Who'd be surprised in those days? But she failed to find anything, whether he was dead or alive, just that he was taken away – his office wasn't sealed, no search, no paper, no nothing.

So it continued and only on the fifth day there was talks that as a former Cheka officer, he was sent to Spain, in secret, to help his comrades in the Civil War to boost their intelligence service. The war was quite popular, even poems were written:

'Today Spain is the country  
Where revolution rages.  
They await their comrades  
While they die for our cause!'

Now, Rattinger had never worked in intelligence. Methinks his trips to and fro Iran seventeen years ago can be excluded. And why was it a secret? Four people came to his office and arrested for everyone to see. Had it been a secret mission, he'd be followed in the street, beckoned quietly and

silently. Then another information seeped saying no Andalusia, no Navarre, sorry but he was taken to the NKVD and his fingers were put in a mincing machine because he was asked to speak about his links to Latvian Fascists. That's how it goes – he had a drill but those welcomed him with a meat mincing machine. They say the drill was used too as it was conveniently left behind by the chap.

Fifteen years earlier that wouldn't happen. *It was the time when revolutionaries didn't touch their kind.* Later, who cared who was who, in fact them revolutionaries were executed mostly. Had it happened fifteen years earlier, Musia was a different hyena and pheasant. For long she thought womanhood would win and her step was wide, her voice loud. Ye might know a pheasant means beauty thanks to the elegance of its colourful neck and movement, also because it's so rare; the hyena means greed, tearing and grabbing its prey, even a carcass.

Now, ye're aware such things weren't discussed out loud for many years but perestroika helped us a bit. They say come out and speak openly but in the twenties it was very different. Then, when arrests and executions began, they blames Trotskyists and the left-wing infantile disorder of communism or whatever. Some illiterate peasants got arrested for supporting Trotsky but they had no idea who he was, couldn't tell A from B. There's a joke popular in the party: two collective farmers are talking in the pasture and one asks the other, 'Who's that Strontsky?' And *the other replies, 'Lenin!'* The third overhears and decides to educate them two: 'Ye fools! Strontsky is Lenin's wifey!'

Such people were arrested and of course said it's deviation in the party line. But not only such kind were arrested. They got the real ones too. There were real leftists. Now, clearly, Musia was leftist, was a suffragist in Kutaisi Boulevard for nothing since her early days, right? She was fighting for equality, and not to get household china for cheap, or be involved in lives of risen Bolsheviks in their privileges or get special food rations. Quite the other way round. When the Bolsheviks came to Georgia, the first ten years were really happy for Musia. Mainly because there were many freedoms in



many things, like women's issue. Not really the freedom for the kinds like Musia – educated, from a noble family and a revolutionary too, no, I mean for all walks of life. I'm saying all this as I want ya to know who Musia was and how our history forgot her.

Our students today, when you go into the class to teach them the Party History, they don't get it. They don't wish to study at all, plus think it's all lies. They only know what slogans they read in the streets: *The Party is the mind, honour and dignity of our epoch*. And all the while I want to pass on to them what I know so they know too. I didn't teach them the Party Congress reports or Brezhnev's writings. But them students of today think Party is something to mock, evil and constraining. In reality, they haven't the faintest idea what it means to be leftist or rightist. Ye tell them who was who and they look at ye as a dead fish, like Beria called Rattinger. They don't get the system of opinions – left or right. It should be essential for students. If they don't know who they are themselves, then it's not more than what I read in Zviad Gamsakhurdia's self-published article: 'they are nothing more than restaurant sluts and Komsomol Committee rodents'.

That's what I told them, you're students, it's a new time and ye must know about the modern epoch, for example what it means to be leftist or rightist, and stop staring at me with them dead fish eyes. So, one gets up and tells me that a dead fish means you're mute forever, like in the film *Godfather* when the Italian mafia murders a man and sends a fish to his family. *Do ye realize where we are?* Seen something in a video or such but don't know nothing about what leftist means.

Anyway, Musia was leftist, the kind that doesn't change. When the four Bolshevik armies came from Russia, let's admit it, they conquered and abolished the Democratic Republic of Georgia. And let's say it in French too – République démocratique de Géorgie – because French was in fashion at the time and, as ye know, the Georgian passport had one page in French, the other in Georgian.

So, when Musia took bombs to Kutaisi hoping that as the government left Tbilisi, Kutaisi could put a serious battle to the invaders, the Bolshevik

armies that were coming like the Colorado beetle invaded Georgian vineyards in Nicholas' times. She planned to throw bombs from the rear, at her homeland's army because leftists have got no idea of a homeland territory in the high understanding of the word, of course if it doesn't coincide with the leftist laws. A rightist believes that, even if there is no homeland, it's still of the Roman Empire scale, something imaginary. Right now I was talking about the Russian party difference between the left and the right wings to explain it to our students. It's a problem. A big problem.

Simply speaking, I'm talking to you and I'm saying: Musia Rattinger, Musia Eristavi, no she was more a Rattinger – nobody called her either surname – said that a woman was now free. Now, what does she mean at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or in the world – the Russian Empire holding with both hands onto the world, or Tbilisi and Kutaisi gubernias, which are outskirts of outskirts?

In a reliable group of listeners we can openly say that till 1861 there was slavery in the Russian Empire. But a Russian slave was different from an American slave of plantations because he could have a slave himself. His slave was his wife, daughter and when Russia overtook Georgia in 1801, it brought along that kinda slavery. Now, I'm not gonna say Georgia had Queen Tamar and Queen Ketevan tortured by Shah Abbas. Primarily, I don't mentioned them as women – they were the state figures of the highest position. I'll say a woman about them who was a wife.

It was before me times, but my older brothers and sisters remember that prince Chkheidze and his wife Mikeladze, also from an aristocratic family. When Chkheidze went on his business in the morning, he used to get home the same time, and his wife, Mikeladze met him at the gate, took the rein, then the man would go home while she led the horse to the stable. As ye might guess, a servant could've done that, but the man had that kinda rule, for some reason. It all happened in the part of our country so beautiful and peaceful that is fit *for the best books about the world geography*.

One day Chkheidze comes home and his wife isn't waiting for him at the gate.

He stands there, on the horse, without moving. Just like today, in those days three or four idlers would lean against fences and gates, waiting for an odd job or some kinda gift to come their way. Then the wife comes running, in her long dress, lean and frightened, opens the gate and stretches her hand to take the rein, but her hussy hits her with his whip, got that?

Hit her once, meaning how could ya keep me waiting at the gate for them bumpkins to see? She touched her aching shoulder, then took the rein and Chkheidze dismounted, looked around proudly to see if others saw what he did. The wife led the horse away, but there were them idlers and, to tell the truth, weren't surprised at all. Now, reading *The Quiet Don* and watching Russian series we're used to how they beat their women. We don't know about ourself, but Russians say '*If he beats ye up, it means he loves ye.*'

Anyways, there's this poor peasant and he calls out to Chkheidze, 'If ye don't likes her and beats her, give her to me.'

A nasty joke, specially from a peasant, but the peasant sees the Mikeladze woman's beauty and wants her, plus Russian slavery, serfdom in civilized terms, has been dropped and Chkheidze can't set his hounds on the peasant so they tear him apart, nor can he sell him to the Ottomans, nor punish his family. And that peasant knows it, like Otto von Bismarck would say, 'I'm noble with nobles and one and a half rascal with rascals'.

So, a peasant tells ye he wants yer wife, not only because she isn't well trained to take the reins on time, but more because that Chkheidze isn't good enough with his whip. That Chkheidze didn't think of nothing better than to hit the peasant with the same whip. *Terrible century, terrible hearts*, as Russia's genius Pushkin would say. The Georgians wouldn't need a poet as an illiterate peasant could come up with something super, like, 'a nobleman is bad enough, a bad one is even worse', the great Ilia said it, but still.

Why have I given such an example?

Because the Russian Empire at Nicholas II's times is a picture of failed agreements, discords and treaties. There's this Mikeladze woman

whose husband whips her for some peasants to see and he's not ashamed as a woman is just a possession for him, different from a serf by her family background. Anyways, Chkheidze as a nobleman goes to Kutaisi where there's a cinema already and Max Linder runs on the white sheet. Also, he sees Musia, Eristavi's daughter in breeches who can chase such a nobleman with a garden fork if she finds out what he's done to his wifey.

The rift is so wide nobody can bridge it, nor have a wish to fill it up. Specially that the Russian king's an idiot. The White Guard church made him a saint – his martyred death outweighed his stupidity and cold heart. They were all idiots after Catherine II, but different in their brain capacity, in philosophical restraint. Finally, it all came out and Tolstoy said: *Stupid, cruel soldier Nicholas I, weak, stupid and unkind Alexander II, awfully stupid, rude and uneducated Alexander III, and uneducated, weak and unkind Nicholas II, with his icons and relics*. Today we can say Tolstoy's opinion wasn't approved by non-revolutionaries of civil service background. The king is bad, but how come an idiot and ignorant tsar rules the country? It's like they say in Georgia that every important word contains 'mother', like motherland, mother tongue and many others. But our actions are the opposite and expressed in a folk poem which isn't folk and till very recently we couldn't say who wrote it because its author was Mikha Khelashvili who fought the Bolsheviks and was killed:

'Mother loves her children but  
Children don't remember their mum,  
That's why the Creator tortures us  
And we forever remain sinners.'

This short discussion is for Musia's sake. She became a Bolshevik thanks to her hussy. He was brainless, too tied to his stupid idea which he adored for its beauty. By then the Bolsheviks already taken over Georgia and Musia wasn't an inspired gal anymore, so couldn't join the Komsomol. We know what Komsomol is today, in 1987, but let's explain what it was in the eyes of simple, let's say unschooled people at the time when Georgia became red and the League came here.

ALKK is All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, Komsomol in Russian, which had an additional letter in Georgia: that 'a' at the end often shows familiarity or mockery, but sometimes it can be so vile that outweighs invaders' devastations. In our parts they said, 'Oh, a Komsomola!'

That 'a' meant everything bad in them days, vile things that could've happened to a young person. We still have got old songs, only bits and pieces, as the complete ones have disappeared, probably together with the short lives of them who were shot for singing them:

'I sent my son to school but  
Instead he goes to the Komsomol.'

It was impossible 'to go to the Komsomol', so they mean he went to meetings and adopted their habits which a young person would develop after joining the ranks. Those habits and features are: being suspicious, disrespectful, negligent, scheming, cruel, blindly loyal to the ideas unclear to others and a lot more similar things along the line.

'I'll kill my mum and strangle by dad  
If the Revolution orders me to.'

Yeah, there was such kinda poem.

Speaking generally, I'd have been soft in them times. Characteristic traits easily cross borders and a beauty turns into a beast and a beast tries to become a beauty. However, people mostly remember the beast because it gets softer and is sweetly tamed, but its attempt to become a beauty is nothing compared to a beauty's beastliness.

The Komsomol behaviour wasn't someone's planned cruelty. It was the result of beautifully wrapping the Revolution and believing in it as if in some divine idea. We are the Magi, St. Peter of the Revolution: 'we walk and preach and create and write epistles'. That's kinda ideas they had.

Not surprising at all as it's 1920s and they believe the Revolution will cover the whole world, from one train station to another. The world revolution. Now, don't make me cite Trotsky because we're moving, in great leaps, towards the issue of women. *The above said*, with the Georgianized

Komsomola, mainly refers to young men as, let's face it, if a woman had some kinda role in Georgia's revolutionary activities, it was quite theatrical: wears a leather hat, riding breeches and accompanies seven or eight men at some kinda ceremony or event, and only in cities. *The entourage!* But people also are familiar with a woman member of the Komsomol and it's the same as a whore. I'm quoting Stalin again, with his blessing on this celebratory day, but with an explanation.

This kinda whore was a gal who joined the Komsomol ranks, wore them revolutionary clothes that started thanks to them leather jackets found in a Petrograd warehouse. They were ordered by the Nicholas II's government for the officers fighting in the war, but the whole Central Committee walked about in them, and not only them, Cheka as well and god only knows who not. If a gal was a Komsomol member, she was a whore.

Now, the classic Georgian definition of 'a whore' by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani is: 'Whoring is divided into fornication and adultery. Fornication is done by the unmarried, who have no spouse, while adultery is when one is wed but lies with another.'

A Komsomol woman was seen as a creature without any morals so necessary for a true woman. They were neither men nor women, just some kinda creature wearing leather clothes or shown in knickers on hoarding. That's how they were seen, but it was otherwise too: some were in offices, wearing lacy collars and berets.