

Raveolution in Tbilisi

by Mikheil Tsikhelashvili

excerpt

Chapter 1

Sunday, 6 May 2018

On the Road

‘If I was meant to fly, I’d have wings,’ Khatia thinks and steps forward. She waits in a neat queue, patiently and obediently. A couple more and it will be her turn. There are so many people around that most kids wouldn’t be able to count. Leaning on a silver post separating passengers, she wonders why she had arrived there in the first place. The night before she thought so much she ended up with a bad headache, so now she isn’t going to do it again. But what is there to worry about? She had a ticket, so she took the trip. It wasn’t wasted, neither was the visa. She seemed to have succumbed to a deeply embedded evacuation plan and travelled. She failed to succeed. Now she is here, wearing a warm jacket and the others are eying her.

‘Next, please!’ the operator calls.

‘Already?’ Khatia is surprised, raising her eyebrows. It’s her turn. She steps to the booth and hands her passport to a young Latin-American girl. First the operator looks at the photo and then at the passenger with an unpronounceable name, making sure they match, and smiles. Then, out of habit if anything else, she looks through the blank pages with only one visa, squints, nods to herself as if confirming her own thoughts and asks Khatia:

‘OK. Have you already checked in?’

‘No.’

‘OK,’ she puts the information onto the database.

‘Can I have a window seat?’

‘Let me check if one is available.’

‘OK.’

‘Sorry, we don’t have any seats left in front...’

‘No problem.’

‘Well then, 25A maybe?’

‘Yeah, great.’

‘And 12A from Munich.’

‘Thanks a lot.’

‘Put your baggage here, please.’

‘I don’t have any baggage.’

The answer baffles the operator. How can someone travel such a distance without any baggage? Especially when the ticket has baggage allowance. But it’s none of her business, is it?

‘Only this,’ Khatia says and turns to show a small backpack dangling from her shoulder.

‘OK,’ the operator smiles, making a guess about wearing such a thick jacket. She has seen many like this girl.

‘Turn a little bit,’ she says without the customary *please*, and attaches a yellow band to the backpack strap. Then she puts the printed boarding pass into the passport and hands it to Khatia.

‘Enjoy your flight, miss.’

‘Thank you, bye,’ Khatia says, having stopped counting how many times she has bid goodbye that day.

She has nothing to wait for in the Chicago airport, so she follows the signs to the passport control.

She notices hundreds of people following those signs exactly as she does. From time to time they all consult the information displays to check the departure times and gates, and their flight details. Staring at the display, she thinks how small and insignificant large airports make one feel, and shamelessly at that. Thousands of passengers, not particularly different from each other, try to depart, flee or return by violating the element so alien to them. The surrounding area is so sterile, it is hard to even think. The moment you step into an airport, you are gripped by a sickening feeling of vulnerability. No one intends to hold you there, quite the other way round, they all wish to see you off as soon as possible. If by any chance you’ve got a problem and need help, your illusion that someone will come to your aid shatters in about ten minutes. What can go wrong for Khatia? She’s got everything with her – herself and a backpack.

As for a failure, well, she has already experienced defeat.

And has already admitted her defeat.

What else can you ask for?

It is her failure she constantly contemplates, which doesn’t leave room for anything else. But the more words she finds to admit it, the more questions remain, eventually convincing her that, in fact, it might have been her victory. Why

can't it be straightforward, easy to accept that every new word describing and denoting her failure might be success for Khatia? If not complete victory, can it be a hope? A new hope. Because now when she is morally broke, she can't go back – she has to move forward, take a step at a time, because a person's resources never get below the minus mark. If one falls, he can't fall below zero, can he? Khatia thinks about all this and, what the hell, she can call it her little victory. Why not? Who's there to stop her?

She isn't considered suspicious. Her belt, phone, backpack and the laptop taken out of it go through the scanner, while she walks through the detector. She gathers her stuff without a word and heads for the passport control.

A very tall man looks through her 48-page passport, surprised not to find any other stamps except the one he's interested in. There is only one visa, that of the US. He might think she was lucky to get it so easily, but it doesn't concern him because there are many others waiting behind her. He looks at the girl with a strange name, compares her face to the photo and smiles. The dates are right – she is a law-abiding person.

'The purpose of your visit, miss?'

'I visited a friend,' Khatia answers slowly.

'For four months?'

'Yes, four months.'

'Mm, well,' about to ask something else, the officer changes his mind. He doesn't feel like talking today. Besides, there are so many others waiting in the queue.

'Final destination?'

'Tbilisi, Georgia.'

The officer knows quite well where she is going, but asked anyway.

'The Republic of Georgia,' he says as if to himself, stamps her passport and opens the barrier for her with a smile. 'Enjoy your flight, miss.'

'Bye,' Khatia nods and walks through. She has an hour and a half before her flight, an hour before boarding.

Luckily, the boarding area is already designated. She heads directly towards it. She follows the signs. Just like hundreds of others.

She reaches the area in about five minutes and finds it practically empty. She takes a seat. Now is the time to take off her jacket. She does so. She's got a book in her backpack, put it there yesterday. Took it from her host's home library. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. She's heard a lot about the book from her friends, so decided to read it, just to kill time. Before she opens it, she again thinks about the reasons she resolved not to stay in the States, why not simply ignore the return ticket she had bought only to produce at the border? And why was it so cheap for this particular date? It could have been cheaper two months earlier, or a month later. Why didn't she violate the visa date? Not enough courage to break the law? She hasn't got an answer yet, but she listened to her heart and still believes her

decision was right: if she's leaving, that's how it should be. Four months are four months. She can't change anything without take the responsibility. It had to be this way. Besides, does it matter? It's four months, not four years, so is it worth worrying? Definitely not, right? Had it been years, she could say: 'Oh, sweet four years, blessed is the one who lived wisely through them.' No. No use dwelling on it. Anyone and any life can change dramatically in four minutes, let alone four months, but still, it's not worth worrying.

She opens the book and reads: 'I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up.' She forces herself to delve into the book and the first 15-20 pages prove difficult. She finds it hard to concentrate, so whenever a new passenger comes into the area, she looks up and glances around, but as far as she has decided the novel is to help her while away the time, she has to forget about other passengers.

When she hears the announcement for boarding, she stops reading. Ah, the queue is too long. She can't skip it, but it's okay, she can wait till everyone boards. Only now it dawns on her that she is really leaving. Her getting back begins right now, at this moment: everything else – leaving her temporary home, the coach ride to Chicago, the bus ride to the airport – was nothing compared to how she feels now. Neither had the passport control such an effect. The ongoing boarding marks her getting back.

She smiles and returns to the book. 'Until you learn to realize the importance of the Banana King, you will know absolutely nothing about the human-interest things of the world.' She reads but doesn't understand anything. But what's there to understand? It's a complete waste of time. She doesn't like the book. Might have found it interesting at some other time, but not now. She wonders why the book is so highly praised and gets to her feet. Keeping her finger at the page she has read, she flings her backpack onto her shoulder with her free hand and goes to join the queue. She means to go on reading during the flight – what else is there to do? But why should she read a book she doesn't like? She walks to the litter box with three sections. It is a paperback, so she easily tears the book and drops it in. For a second she is concerned because in her haste she dropped it into the Waste section, but then thinks it's okay. They'll get over it! She'll get over it, so will the cleaners. As for Kerouac, he'll surely get over it. Khatia is getting back home.

Now that she is comfortably seated in her 25A chair of an enormous Boeing, and ready for a long-distance flight, her thoughts go back to success. Consequently, about failure too. Suddenly she realizes she hasn't uttered a word for a very long time. Nearly ninety minutes. She bid goodbye to the officer, and that was the last. But is that really speaking? She must start counting from the moment she said goodbye to her host. That's seven hours ago. Or should she start from yesterday when she said *Ciao* to Giovanni? Come on, Khatia, don't cram your head with this crap. Indeed, why does it matter how long she hasn't spoken, an hour or a day?

‘Khatia,’ she whispers her name. It is more like exercising her vocal chords, checking if they are all right. Then she raises her voice a notch and repeats, ‘Khatia.’

‘Excuse me?’ the 25B passenger responds. ‘Did you ask me something?’

‘No, no,’ she replies quickly, a little confused. She smiles and turns to the window. And repeats her name again, in a whisper.

She then tears the Lufthansa plastic package and takes out a blanket. She covers herself with it, all the way from her neck down. Then, so that no one, even the passenger next to her can notice, she slips her thin hand underneath and puts it on her belly. Her hand is cold, her belly warm. She isn’t in the least bothered by the contrast. Quite the other way round, the energy her body has kept warms her hand. In about a minute she slips her hand higher, to her breast. Touches one, then the other. She squeezes her teats, caressing them. Squeezes them hard, till they ache, but she can’t even recall the last time she felt such pleasure. Now, when she feels herself, her real self, she isn’t bothered by the 25B passenger, or anyone else for that matter. She doesn’t care if those 25BCDEGHJK passengers see her. The plane is about to lift off, isn’t it?

She’s got a long flight ahead. Four hours of stopover in Munich and then to Tbilisi. And Demna is waiting for her in Tbilisi. She knows he is going to meet her on arrival. And if someone’s waiting for your arrival, you are going to survive, but Khatia doesn’t think further. She keeps caressing her breast and once again says her name, but this time in her mind, without voicing it.

Chapter 16

Saturday, 12 May 2018

The Last Rave in Tbilisi

‘Please don’t sulk. It just happened that way,’ Khatia says.

‘Oh, don’t worry, darling!’

‘I’m just... very angry! Very!’

‘I understand.’

‘Madam, shall I put that bag in the boot, or will you keep it?’ the driver of the route taxi interrupts the mother and the daughter’s conversation.

‘I’ll keep it with me. When are we leaving?’

The driver looks at his phone and says:

‘In three minutes. Or rather five.’

Khatia doesn’t say anything and turns to Lily again.

‘So, there, I’m leaving, but will be back at the end of the month,’ she says and leans to kiss her mother.

Lily kisses her. Then Khatia puts her arms round Sparrow.

‘Stay brave, my little princess!’

Sparrow licks her cheek. That’s their way of saying goodbye. Khatia is about to get into the minibus when Lily looks at the watch and decides to make use of the last minute.

‘What are you going to do today?’

‘They’re writing about a rally. I’ll be there.’

‘Be careful.’

‘Don’t worry.’

‘Will Demna be there?’

‘Sure, why not?’

‘I don’t know. Have you spoken to him?’

‘He doesn’t answer, is probably asleep,’ Khatia lies because she hasn’t phoned him today. She thinks her brother fell asleep not long before dawn, so she decided not to bother him. ‘Here I go,’ she says to her mother and gets into the minibus.

‘Call me when you get home, all right?’ Lily calls and waves goodbye.

Khatia doesn’t reply. She takes a seat and puts her backpack on her knees. Then the driver gets in and begins collecting fare.

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‘How should I know where he is? He never tells us.’

‘That’s OK, I’ll call him.’

‘Have a rest, girl. Are you hungry?’

‘No, thanks. What’s the time?’

Tsira looks at the clock on the kitchen wall:

‘Half past four.’

‘I’ve got to go.’

‘Where to? You’ve just come.’

‘There’s a rally at the Parliament.’

‘What? That one with junkies?’

‘Come on, Tsira, please don’t start.’

‘Tell me, what rally is that?’ Tsira’s voice rises. ‘You should’ve listened what things they said about that rally of yours on TV.’

‘What things?’ Khatia waves her away and heads for the door. ‘I can’t explain anything now.’

Grandma follows her but by the time she reaches the entrance door, Khatia is already half-way down the steps.

Before she dives into the underground, she calls Demna and hearing her brother is already at the rally, she has no worries anymore.

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Khatia gets out of the underground and walks towards the Parliament building. She hears music and stops in amazement. Time seems to have frozen along the pavements. She walks on, choosing the one passing the Youth Palace because it is higher so she can see better what goes on in front of the Parliament.

She is a bit cold. The weather is unusually cold for May, but she is going to be all right. Police officers with black hoods covering their heads are everywhere. Pink smoke floats in the air. Khatia looks at the sky and sees a dark cloud. Thinking it might rain later, she quickly crosses the street and joins the demonstrators. There aren't many but her intuition tells her soon there will be much more.

Surely more will come, how else can it be? Music is heard here, in front of the old Parliament building that has witnessed shooting, whizzing of bullets, public uproar, concerts of nearly-forgotten pop stars, anthems of Georgia and of friendly countries, military parades and other things. But it is the first time such music sounds here. The first time for her too, but she isn't surprised. Could the building have been waiting for this kind of music? And that dark cloud, can it be nearing to cover Rustaveli Avenue as if it was a nightclub?

Khatia walks around. The street is already blocked, which means people have arrived and more are on their way, so her intuition was right. To her right, a girl is dancing in front of the police cordon. An evil eye would say she is teasing them, but no, she is dancing as if she is absolutely alone in the middle of the street, that she has forgotten all about her fellow protesters as well as dozens of police officers she deliberately began to dance near to only about two minutes before.

Khatia approaches the dancing girl. The young people standing around are filming her on their mobiles, probably sensing that it is the kind of footage that will soon become their inspiration, the kind that can write a new page in the country's history. And all the while, the girl is dancing to herself. Suddenly Khatia recognizes her schoolmate Guriko among the police officers.

She hasn't seen him since they left school, but her natural reaction at an old friend is a smile. She waves at him, drawing surprised, even displeased glances from the fellow-protesters. Guriko doesn't pay attention but when someone waves for a long time and walks towards you, it is hard to ignore it. He looks more carefully and recognizing Khatia, he asks with a smile:

'You! What are you doing here?'

'And what are you doing over there?' Khatia asks in turn.

Momentarily, Guriko looks baffled but practically immediately says he is there to ensure safety and order, and throws a furtive glance at his mates. Khatia boldly goes over to him and kisses him on the cheek.

'Long time no see, huh?' she asks in English.

'What?'

'I said I haven't seen you for ages.'

'Yeah, true, for quite some time,' Guriko shrugs uncomfortably.

Khatia feels he finds it embarrassing in the presence of his colleagues, so she waves goodbye and walks away, as if they never met. She joins the protesters.

More young people arrive. Her phone vibrates in her pocket. She looks at the screen. Demna is calling her.

‘Hello... I’ve just come. Where are you?... I’m, you know, I’m right in the middle, on the line on the street, across from the memorial, at the cinema... Exactly! On the street, you’ll see me. A girl’s dancing here... OK, just come and find me... But wait, wait, I’ll be where the eagle or something is. Can you see it?... Right, right underneath... OK, see you in a minute.’

Demna hangs up and heads for the spot to meet his sister. The streets lights are switched on at that very moment, which seems to scare him because he freezes in his tracks. Then he walks towards the Art Museum and sees Khatia.

‘Ola!’ she also spots him, waves to him and walks towards him.

Demna hugs her without a word.

‘How are you?’ she asks.

‘How can I be?’ he points at the Parliament building.

‘I mean the overdose,’ she whispers in English.

‘Oh, nothing serious, I just overreacted.’

‘Fine. Have you been here long?’

‘Since three in the afternoon.’

‘Was anything said?’

‘What can they say? There were some speeches but you couldn’t hear anything. No equipment. They brought loudspeakers about an hour ago.’

‘Let’s get nearer, shall we?’

‘Come on, let’s dance!’ Demna takes her hand and they join the crowd.

A female singing *You’ve got it deep in your heart* sounds on a loop.

Once, twice, ten times. *You’ve got it deep in your heart*. Khatia begins to dance.

In the falling dusk, Khatia dances, wrapped in pink smoke, and feels her body getting lighter and lighter. She doesn’t stop. In a minute she might even get wings to fly, and as soon as the thought is born in her neurons, she immediately forgets everything awful that happened to her and Demna, together or in their separate lives, yesterday or years ago. As Demna watches his sister, he guesses the purpose of her dance. He dances to justify his existence, to demonstrate to the world that he is still alive and that he will keep dancing whenever he is challenged. As opposed to him, Khatia’s every move reflects a different kind of energy. He believes it is like baptism for her and how lucky she is to be baptized on the world’s biggest dance floor.

Then suddenly, when the DJ’s track is nearing the end, a wave sweeps over the dancing group, just like a deep air intake. Khatia opens her eyes, looks around and asks herself:

‘Fuck, what’s going on?’

A new track begins and Khatia continues dancing as if her thought didn't stop her even for a fraction of a second. Her body sways – she is oblivious of her surroundings. Exhausted, tired from her journey, worried about the home quarrel, she moves as if this first dance is her last.

And all the while, Demna hasn't forgotten anything and anyone. His head and arms move awkwardly threatening his sister. If he hits her accidentally, she'll be bruised. But no, the others feel his body outline, so they don't violate his dancing space. Even if they do, they will forgive his trespasses as he will forgive those who trespass against him. They are all equal here: one for all and all for one! Not a handful of adventurers, but an entity, complete and indivisible, incarnated in thousands, scattered along the street, on edgings and steps, around the fountains and the memorial..

As soon as he sees the girl dancing on the memorial, he guesses, no, he is a hundred percent certain he knows her, in fact knows her better than anyone else and that she also knows him better than the others.

He stops dancing.

It is Tinatin dancing on the memorial – ungracefully for some, unattractively for others, but she keeps dancing as if it is forbidden for her to dance but sways her body in these couple of minutes she has stolen in secret. She dances as if it is the only thing that charges all those around her, giving them the vital energy, and as if she wills all her incarnations to continue because stopping would be a crime. A hundred thoughts cross Demna's mind in those hundred seconds he watches Tinatin, and only one is ungainly: she isn't attractive at all. But because he doesn't like the idea, he concentrates on it and soon realizes that Tinatin is fighting just like him, has forgotten herself, shut herself from the outside world and is leading the DJ's army to win her own Basiani. But do we need to be beautiful in our battle, Demna? He admits it isn't so and as soon as he accepts that Tinatin is really fighting though her dance, he also concedes that she is beautiful. Who is ugly while dancing?

Demna looks away from Tinatin and now stares at the old Parliament building. Huge banners hanging between its tall eight columns remind everyone that the country is soon celebrating the 100th anniversary of independence. Demna chuckles when his gaze sweeps the space in front of the building which is full of thousands of independent dancers. Moving all the time, the pink smoke floats as if it is alive. Suddenly he realizes that from his vantage point he cannot see the monumental figure of the aluminum lady looking down from the hill. Once he knocked on her foot and heard a muffled hollow echo in return, something like a sick cough, so he was kind of sorry for her. Now the aluminum lady is wrapped in the pink smoke but her rave embodiment still looks down at the dancing protesters, welcoming everyone with a dance, whether they come with peace or for war.

Then Demna thinks it is enough of standing still and begins to dance.

But before he closes his eyes to fully commit himself to it, he sees dancing Khatia and thinks he has never seen his sister so liberated.

‘Is it victory?’ she asks herself without stopping even for a second.

‘It’s happiness,’ her thought answers.

‘How strange!’

Strange because it is the first time Khatia feels she is part of bigger energy, guessing it was what she truly needed – being a tiny nut in an enormous theatrical machinery. The senseless wanderer, she needed to come across a nomadic caravan she could follow to the end of the world.

‘Is this freedom?’ she asks herself but doesn’t get an answer.

At that moment it starts to rain. So the hovering dark cloud was there for a good reason.

No one leaves and no one resists the raindrops. They all dance as if the natural elements were ordered to produce the rain and finally there is a knock on the door – the order is delivered.

An hour passes and when Khatia looks at her phone to check the time, she is surprised because she never imagined she could dance for so long.

Tired, Demna has stopped dancing and catching her gaze, he asks:

‘What’s the time?’

‘Nearly ten,’

‘Shall we go? The set’s finishing.’

‘Shouldn’t we wait for the end?’

‘No, I never wait for the end.’

‘OK, but not home, please.’

‘Oh, no, not home!’ Demna laughs.

Time and space make a 12-hour and 180-degree turn. While Demna usually leaves clubs at ten in the morning, he is now leaving the dance floor at ten at night.

‘We’ve got things ahead!’

‘Yeah, all’s yet to come!’ Khatia echoes her brother in her thoughts and walks away from the dance floor. Now they can sit somewhere cozy and she can talk to her brother about the victory.

Synopsis

The debut novel by Mikheil Johan narrates about the bitter reality of modern Georgia, guiding readers into the epicentre of those events that are the direct results of the problems and stereotypes rampant not only in Georgian society but worldwide as well.

Khatia, the protagonist of the novel, returns to her homeland after spending some time in the US. She had left Georgia with grand plans and high hopes, but felt deeply disappointed by the lack of success, so decided to get back after four months. The seemingly simple and straightforward style of narrative often hides the author's intent behind details, which gives the novel a certain depth. The same applies to Khatia: we don't know what happened to her in the US and why she resolves to return home, but the devil in the detail prompts that her return ticket had been bought for legal reasons, while initially she had intended to stay for a much longer period.

Soon we get to know Khatia's family – quite a typical Georgian one where three generations live together, with her parents separated, and where opposing opinions lead to constant disagreements. The day before she arrives, the family faces yet another worry: her father is brought home badly beaten up. The novel ends without disclosing either the reason he was beaten or who the culprit was, but that is immaterial for the overall narrative because the immediate consequences are more important. Instead of calling the police and emergency, the family summons Khatia's brother Demna, another main character of the novel.

Demna had lived separately but due to financial problems was obliged to return to his parents' house. The family believes that he is destined to become the instrument of restoring justice by revenging the violent attacker. Niko, a fifty-year old neighbour who gets involved, firmly adheres to the principles of his generation that any conflict should be resolved in accordance with the street and community rules rather than by addressing the police. He is deeply frustrated, even irate, when instead of banging his chest in fury and vowing to find the offender, Demna very calmly dials the emergency number. It becomes obvious that though earlier the son might have been the spitting image of his father, now Demna feels and acts differently. Having discarded dated traditions and stale views, he rejects his father's and Niko's opinions, which immediately turns him into a target of their aggression. He is still quite young, inexperienced, rather withdrawn and somewhat naïve, but is guided by his own principles, so the demands of the older generation seem completely unacceptable to him.

The arrival of the emergency is followed by the police, but Demna's father, whose name isn't even mentioned in the novel, lies to them, claiming he was drunk

and tumbled down the stairs. He is rather agitated, worrying that his only son failed to do his 'manly duty', which would surely embarrass him in the eyes of the neighbourhood. The whole family, including the grandma, attempt to force Demna to change his mind. However, the young man only thinks about his sister's arrival, remaining quite indifferent to the drama unfolding at home despite the increasing intensity of the pressure he feels.

Alongside the family conflict, the rift in the society becomes evident. Infuriated by the liberal values gaining more and more support from some social groups, a number of people devise macabre plans during their clandestine meetings to fight the 'alien' influence with their own morality. It transpires that, basically, they are unsuccessful, disillusioned people of various ages, including Niko, the friend of Demna's father, and Tornike, Khatia's one-time admirer. While Niko represents the mature wing of the movement and acts as their ideological leader, Tornike is the frontrunner of the young wing, is more educated, and thus stands out. These disenchanted people form an illegal armed group that attracts more and more members. The authorities and the police ignore their existence in the same way as they believed Demna's father's lie about falling down the stairs. And all the while, the only aim of the group is to terrorize or even exterminate all those they intensely dislike, those who they believe pose a serious threat, including the Middle Eastern arrivals and LGBT community, as well as ravers – in short, anyone who doesn't share their views and principles. Having gained certain authority in the movement, Tornike enjoys his position, and even though he might not always agree with the opinions expressed, he sacrifices his own in order to keep his standing within the group and sustain the respect he gets in return.

In the meanwhile, Khatia returns in the midst of the family drama: the conflict has moved to a quieter stage. Everyone wants to know the reason she got back earlier than planned, but they also realize more questions might irritate her. On the whole, all family meals are a real ordeal for the younger members, so they try to escape the heavy atmosphere. Together with his friends, Demna works on an artistic installment and frequents night clubs, while Khatia leaves the city and moves to the countryside to live with her mother who is a teacher in a local school. She understands her daughter very well, so they talk a lot, spend evenings on a veranda and play with the dog called Sparrow after Jack Sparrow.

It becomes clear that Khatia is the only character capable of communicating with others even though she hasn't found her voice. But because she has returned to her homeland, she is ready to face the reality of a new life without undue dramatization. In fact, it is Khatia who introduces her mother into the narrative, the woman who was defeated just like her daughter. Years ago, Lily, an attractive young woman of liberal views, married her complete opposite. Ultimately, she was the victim of the mistake that many Georgian women make when they are fooled by their illusions. However, as opposed to many other young women, Lily found the courage to face the truth and admit the failure of her marriage. Despite the

widespread social pressure, Lily was able to get a divorce, something hard to even consider by many others of her generation. In the event, Demna sided with his father, which can be explained by his adolescent views, but as a result of his rejection, the mother and the son severed all contacts since the traumatic experience.

The idyllic life didn't continue for Khatia and Lily. While they spent May evenings on the terrace talking, the atmosphere in the capital worsened dramatically. The police raided Basiani, one of the most popular nightclubs, under the pretext of apprehending drug dealers. As a result, many freedom-loving young people were thrown out and some were arrested. Demna was in the club at the time and fearing imminent arrest, swallowed all MDMA he had. In an attempt to get as far away as he could, he covered quite a distance but the overdose took its effect. He phoned Khatia, who tried to calm him down and give him some practical advice. After several hours of roaming the city, Demna felt better and headed home.

At this point, a new plotline depicting the real incident joins the narrative. The scale and the nature of the event are so significant that they overshadow everything that occupied Demna and Khatia before it, eclipsing their life and previous problems. They both feel that they have become part of the reality hitherto quite unfamiliar to their city and country, so Khatia decides to get back to Tbilisi immediately.

By now, the entire media coverage is designed to demonize the young people whose pastime is visiting nightclubs. The majority believes they are drug addicts, degraded citizens, enemies of the respectable society, thus repeating the position of the authorities that still control public opinion. Demna's family is no exception, while his granny Tsira is the most active in condemning the young generation.

In the main street, right in front of the Parliament building, young people stage their protest against the nightclub raid and choose an unusual form to express their discontent: they block the street and dance. For them it is the most natural way of self-expression because they continue what the police so brutally interfered with – they just dance. The protest grows by the hour.

On arriving from the countryside, Khatia faces antagonism from her family. When learning her grandchildren are going to join the protest, the grandma throws an ugly scene, shouting they mustn't be anywhere near 'those junkies and lewd delinquents'. She blocks the doorway, trying to stop Demna and Khatia who, in their turn, try to explain that not everything the authorities say is the truth. They reason with her, stressing how the official coverage is different from the real purpose of the protest and that, even it were fair, it was high time to accept the changing social values and learn to live in harmony despite opposing viewpoints. The brother and sister manage to join the protest, which has already grown into a large-scale rally.

The authorities secretly encourage the leaders of murky groups to break up the rally. Ultimately, it means that Niko and Tornike can give vent to their aggression, so they readily head for the gathering and demand that the police allows them to disperse the hateful ravers.

Lily, Demna and Khatia's mother, unexpectedly arrives to Tbilisi because her heart prompts her to be where her children are. She spots them among the demonstrators but cannot get closer. Soon the father, supporting himself on crutches, approaches his children – the action that is equal to admitting his defeat. His decision to join them looks as a declaration of how wrong he has been all his life. On his way to the rally the father bitterly contemplates the ways leading to justice and the truth. Although he doesn't understand the young generation, and it is doubtful he will ever do, he seems to acknowledge that they might be right in their actions.

The ending of the novel presents a different reality of the historical events of May 2018: in fact, the police didn't disperse the opposing march, instead they demanded that the dancing demonstrators clear the street, finally leading them out, insulted and humiliated as they were. Mikheil Johan alters the reality by offering another version of the events, seen through his perception: the police are ordered to lift the barriers that so effectively kept the opposing sides apart. As a result, the neo-Nazi group viciously attacks the ravers and the confrontation turns nasty. However, the author gives only a few details in describing the outcome: Demna is hit in the face and falls to the ground covered in blood; meanwhile, Tornike chases someone intending to beat him up when he spots Khatia, his old love, standing among the ravers; unable to stop midway, he crashes into the young men by the side of his childhood love.