

2002

Brooklynners

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Recommended Citation

Turashvili, Dato. "Brooklynners." *The Iowa Review* 32.2 (2002): 40-46. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5508>

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DATO TURASHVILI

Brooklyners

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Erekle, a young Georgian emigrant

Irina, Erekle's sister

Guliko, their mother

Goderdzi, a distant relative of theirs

Mediko Jinjolia, a woman seeking a husband in America

New York, 1997. The scene is a present-day Georgian immigrant household in Brooklyn, with a clear view of the Manhattan skyline. The main room simultaneously fulfills the role of kitchen and bedroom. In it stands a telephone booth brought up from the street, and the bathroom is close by. The furniture may consist of whatever the producer desires, although he should keep in mind that Georgian immigrant homes are, by definition, adorned only with furniture found in the street. A table of any size and a bed are recommended. Our immigrants, Erekle and Goderdzi, are lying on a bed (found in the street, of course) as they are reminded of their homeland by a picture stuck to the wall of the bowl-cut Buba Kakabidze, a Georgian entertainer from the 60s.

Erekle's mother and sister occupy the other room and their door is visible onstage, but our spectator cannot entirely see how they live. He sees only scenes from their lives and dreams among these scenes. The border between fantasy and reality, as readers will notice, simply does not exist, but if they should conceive a desire to differentiate one from another, that is their prerogative.

Erekle comes out of the bathroom with a puzzled look on his face and turns on the light. He is holding a mostly consumed roll of toilet paper and can't take his eyes off it. He slowly approaches the center of the room as the sound of a flushed toilet is heard.

Erekle: What is this?

Goderdzi (*slightly lifting his head off the bed*): Is it morning already?

Erekle (*raising his voice, looking sternly at Goderdzi*): What is this?!

Goderdzi (*sitting up in bed, confused*): What are you talking about?

Erekle (*louder still*): What is this?

Irina (*opening the door of the adjacent room*): What's going on?

Erekle (*displays the scarce amount of toilet paper left on the roll*): Look how much toilet paper you're using... I just got this roll yesterday! This should hold us for at least a week.

Irina: Degenerate! (*Slams the door and returns to her room. Goderdzi is left alone to deal with Erekle.*)

Goderdzi: What are you looking at me for? I haven't set foot in the bathroom for two days. I don't eat: what am I gonna do in there?

Erekle: You don't work, that's why you don't eat.

Goderdzi: How am I supposed to work if I can't speak English? Yesterday, I called home, and my Dad said he was sending a piglet.

Erekle: What kind of piglet?

Goderdzi: A fried piglet. Some girl is coming from Georgia, and he said he'd send it with her. (*Takes out a scrap of paper from his pocket.*) Mediko Jinjolia.

Erekle (*has spread out the toilet paper on the floor and is allocating a certain amount for each day of the week*): What Mediko Jinjolia? Who the hell is Mediko Jinjolia?

Goderdzi: I don't know who she is, just some girl my Dad sent a piglet with. (*A knock is heard at the door. Erekle jumps up, lays the phone booth on its side and pushes it under the bed. Goderdzi removes the stick used to stop the electronic consumption meter. Aroused by the commotion, Irina pokes her head out from her room.*)

Irina: It's mom. She's been working the night shift. (*Irina's words frighten them both. Erekle approaches the door on tiptoe.*)

Erekle: Who is it?

Guliko: It's Marina, from Plekhanov Street.

Erekle: Very funny, Mom.

Guliko (*enters the room bearing a briefcase*): You bring it out in me.

Erekle pulls the phone booth out from under the bed and stands it up, while Goderdzi places the stick back in the meter.

Irina: What'd you bring us, Mom?

Guliko (*takes out various papers from the briefcase and arranges them*): Bills.

Erekle (*looks down at the papers*): They're trying to meet their budget at our expense.

Guliko (*gazing at the toilet paper spread out on the floor*): What is this?

Goderdzi: Have you found out anything about my situation, Guliko?

Guliko (*picks up the toilet paper*): What is this?

Irina: Someone among us seems to have diarrhea and is using a lot of toilet paper.

Goderdzi: Guliko, have you found out anything about my situation?

Guliko (*to Irina*): What do you expect? Everything we eat here is processed. All the food is artificial. The tomatoes taste like leather, the cucumbers taste like rubber. I miss choporti tomatoes...

Erekle and Irina name various untranslatable Georgian foods, mocking their mother's nostalgia for Georgian cuisine and her frequent complaints about American food.

Guliko: I've become the butt of your jokes, but it's my fault really. I never should have brought you kids here. What was I thinking? I could have at least looked after your father's grave over there. And besides, it never gets this hot in Tbilisi.

Erekle: Don't worry, Mom. I'll win some money, and we'll take a vacation in Florida.

Goderdzi: Guliko, have you found out anything about my situation?

Guliko (*takes a newspaper out of her briefcase and hands it to Goderdzi*): Nobody's ever won anything at that casino.

Erekle: Oh, I'll win, Mom.

Irina (*sarcastically*): Sure he'll win, he has great luck.

Guliko: Wouldn't you rather get a job? How long am I supposed to work the night shift?

Erekle: I'm not working for those people.

Guliko: Why not? Oh yeah, you're a... (*Looks over to Irina as she can't remember the word.*)

Irina: A nonconformist.

Goderdzi (*waving the newspaper in the air*): What the hell am I supposed to do with this newspaper?! (*Irina takes the newspaper from him and looks it over.*)

Guliko: I circled some want ads. (*Goes toward the window.*) I should have had a balcony built on here. (*It's common for people living in large apartment complexes in Georgia to add a balcony to the window. It's a dangerous practice, done in order to get more living space as rent is often calculated by the number of square meters in the apartment. She looks away and mumbles something to herself.*)

Goderdzi (*to Irina*): What did she say?

Irina: Hey, they're looking for someone to paint. (*Turns the page of the newspaper.*)

Goderdzi: But I can't speak the language.

Irina: Paint quietly.

Goderdzi: How?

Erekle: Have you read *Huckleberry Finn*?

Irina (*to Erekle, mockingly*): *Tom Sawyer*...

Erekle: What does it matter?

Guliko (*to Irina*): Did you see the cow? (*Pointing to the newspaper.*) Here, show your genius of a brother. (*Imitating Erekle.*) I'll start a sulguni [a unique type of Georgian cheese] business in America, if we have problems, the Americans will help us.... Doesn't this look like a sulguni cow?

Irina (*staring blankly at the cow*): Mom, how am I supposed to tell what kind of cow it is? You never took us to the country when we were little.

Guliko: It's my fault. I should have at least taught you how to milk a cow.

Erekle (*stands by Irina and stares at the cow*): It's in Pennsylvania, you want me to go to Pennsylvania for a damn cow?!

Guliko: No other kind of cow produces the right milk for sulguni. What do you want me to do about it? That cow's not gonna come here just to see you!

Erekle (*takes the newspaper from Irina and goes off by himself*): Very funny, Mom.

Goderdzi: What am I gonna do?

Erekle (*not taking his eyes off the newspaper*): How hard can it be to paint walls?!

Irina: They won't let you work on a garbage truck. Don't even dream about it.

Goderdzi: Why not? I don't need to speak English to do that.

Irina: You don't have the right blood.

Goderdzi: What do you mean, "blood"?

Erekle: Your veins must flow with Sicilian blood. It's their racket.

Irina: Didn't your dad have Sicilian blood or something?

Goderdzi (*gravely*): If my dad had any blood at all, he wouldn't send it to me. (*Imitating his father.*) Go, go, the Georgians are getting established in America. You don't want to live your whole life in this little village, do you? We have relatives there, they'll help you.... First, he said he'd send me to Tbilisi and set me up with a job at the auto inspection bureau. Then he said, "Go and work hard in America, go and study." What do I need to learn besides what I learned in the fields? Nobody can plow better than me, plus we had the very best vineyard....

The telephone rings.

Guliko (*realizing that if she doesn't answer the phone, no one will*): Oh, Khatuna, my dear (*loudly, practically shouting*), we're fine, thanks. (*To Irina, covering the receiver with her hand.*) It's Khatuna Bedeladze.... What's happening in Tbilisi? Is it hot? It's hot here, too, horribly...we're planning to yes, we're taking a vacation. We're going to...um...what's it called? (*Covering the receiver and looking at Erekle.*)

Erekle (*still reading the newspaper*): Florida.

Guliko (*proudly*): Ah, yes, Florida. We're going to Florida for a month.

Irina: No, two months.

Guliko (*into the phone*): Good, everyone's doing well. Erekle? Erekle's working on his dissertation.

Irina: For his doctorate.

Guliko: Irina? Irina's studying at the academy here, what's it called? (*Looks over at Irina and pleads for help with her eyes.*)

Erekle (*to Guliko*): The Iqalto Academy. [A school in Georgia.]

Guliko (*can't think of what to say*): Well, more importantly, what's going on over there? What? What are they constructing? Send everyone my love...do you have electricity? Send everyone my love. Hugs and kisses...no, they're not letting me work.... (*Hangs up the phone and turns angrily towards Irina.*)

Guliko: Well, what was I supposed to say? She's washing dishes in some cafe? All of Tbilisi would find out about it by the end of the day.

Irina: All of Tbilisi already knows. She was calling because someone told her about us. And besides, there's nothing wrong with my job. What are you ashamed of?

Guliko: You could have just as easily washed dishes in Tbilisi. What was stopping you?

Goderdzi: What are they building, Guliko?

Guliko: They're building an oil pipeline in Georgia. Life will be wonderful there, once they get it built.

Goderdzi: What kind of pipeline?

Irina: Petroleum.

Goderdzi: Then what?

Irina: Then all of Georgia will bask in the shade of a walnut tree.

Goderdzi: What walnut tree?

Irina: They're planting walnut trees along the pipeline. There will be oil and money. Georgians will stick their hands in the pipeline and pull out hundred dollar bills, but they'll be wet from all the oil and they'll have to hang them up on the walnut trees to dry.

Goderdzi (*interrupting*): How are they gonna get their hands in the pipeline?

Irina: They'll poke holes in it.

Erekle: Before the oil goes through it?

Goderdzi: I hope the pipeline goes through our village.

Irina: The people will have to pack up and leave.

A knock is heard at the door. Everyone jumps to their feet and prepares to hide the family's contraband, awaiting Guliko's signal. He approaches the door on tiptoe and peeks through the crack in it.