

BASA JANIASHVILI

ALIVE LIKE THE DEAD

One-Act Play

*'There are certain things which you don't believe until you see them.
And others are such that you cannot see until you believe.'*
Ilia Chavchavadze, Georgian writer, 1837-1907

Characters:

SULIKO TSABURIA	- an elderly lady
MURMAN TSABURIA	- Suliko's husband who died 15 years ago, so is 15 years younger than his widow
KETINO ASANIA	- an elderly lady, Suliko's neighbour
ZVIAD ASANIA	- Ketino's husband who died 15 years ago, so is 15 years younger than his widow
ALGIERS TSABURIA	- a middle-aged man, Ketino and Murman Tsaburia's son
GIVIKO	- a student, Algiers son, respectively Ketino and Murman Tsaburia's grandson
MICHAEL	- in charge of the Other World
CAMERAMAN	- a local TV reporter/cameraman

Other voices:

LIA	- a female TV voice
TARASH	- a male TV voice
FEMALE NEWS PRESENTER	- a voice from the car radio

THE DEATH

[THE SOUNDS OF A SUMMER EVENING: CRICKETS CHIRPING, BIRDS PERCHING ON THE TREES, SOME FLYING QUITE NEAR. MAN'S FOOTSTEPS ON THE GRASS. OLD WOODEN STEPS CREAK AS HE REACHES THE VERANDA. MUTTED PSEUDO-DRAMATIC MUSIC FROM TV. THE FOOTSTEPS STOP AS THE MAN NEARS THE DOOR. AN OLD GRANGFATHER CLOCK CHIMES SEVEN. THE DOOR OPENS WITH A CREAK. TV IS HEARD LOUDER AS NOW THE LISTENERS ARE IN THE ROOM. THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE IMITATES A TV EFFECT.]

LIA: (FRIGHTENED) Mister Tarash, please, don't...
TARASH: (LAUGHING) Lia, I want you!
LIA: I know you're not a killer, but suppose it fires accidentally.
TARAH: (CYNICALLY) Nothing accidental with me, Lia.
LIA: (PANTING) Mister Tarash, please, your mother will hear and kill me.
TARASH: Stop!
LIA: Please, don't aim the gun at me. It's not a toy!
TARASH: And I'm not playing, Lia!

[THE MUSIC BECOMES LOUDER.]

KETINO: (SIPPING HER COFFEE, PUTTING THE CUP ON THE SAUCER) Are you asleep, Suliko? (AFTER A PAUSE.) Did you see how he's aiming his gun at her? Poor girl!
LIA: (FROM TV) Mister Tarash, please... (THE SOUND OF A SLAP.)
KETINO: (LAUGHING) A hearty slap is what he deserves! Good girl! (SHE LAUGHS.)

[THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS.]

KETINO: I never liked the guy. Remember, I used to tell you it was a mistake for the poor girl to work for him? Look at that, Suliko! He deserves it! (SHE LAUGHS.) He was definitely asking for it! (SHE SIPS HER COFFEE.)

[THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS DIE.]

MURMAN: (QUIETLY) Suliko! Suliko!
SULIKO: (SLEEPILY) Mmmm... Who's there?
MURMAN: It's me, Murman, your husband.
SULIKO: (INSTANTLY WAKING UP, IN FEAR) God help me!
MURMAN: What's wrong with you? It's me – Murman.
SULIKO: Oh my God! What are you doing here?
MURMAN: Didn't you miss me?
SULIKO: Of course I did. You've been dead for 15 years.
MURMAN: Have I changed?
SULIKO: How could you? You're exactly the same as I buried you!

[THE SOUND OF ROARING LAUGHTER FROM TV.]

TARASH: (FROM TV, LAUGHING) What now? You can run but not forever! You're a maid while I'm a wealthy nobleman. And you'll be mine sooner rather than later!

[PSEUDO-TRAGIC MUSIC FROM TV.]

KETINO: Suliko, look at that! Did you see how she escaped him? Do you hear me? Are you sleeping?
MURMAN: Neither have you changed.
SULIKO: What are you up to, young man? If Ketino sees you, she'll have a heart attack.

MURMAN: She won't see me. We're dead.

SULIKO: Dead and buried. Talk about yourself. What do you want from me?
Why have you come?

MURMAN: I've come to take you with me.

SULIKO: Where to?

KETINO: Suliko, can you hear me? If you're sleepy, why don't you lie down properly? (REPROACHFULLY.) You've never done that.

MURMAN: Ketino can't see either me or you.

SULIKO: Why? Have I disappeared or what?

MURMAN: No, but she doesn't know you're dead, poor you. She thinks you're asleep.

SULIKO: Are you serious? I don't believe it. You're in my dream. That's all.

MURMAN: You can pinch yourself if you don't.

SULIKO: (AFTER A SHORT PAUSE) It hurts but doesn't wake me up.

MURMAN: Didn't I tell you?

SULIKO: (ANGRY AT HERSELF) Wake up, woman! How can you sleep, woman?

MURMAN: Told you you're dead, so what's the use of yelling now?

SULIKO: I've dreamt of you but never so clearly.

MURMAN: Michael sent me. Said your time has come.

SULIKO: Is that how it happens?

MURMAN: Yes. When I died, my dad came to take me.

SULIKO: How is he?

MURMAN: He's fine. Come on, I'll tell you all about it on the way.

SULIKO: Yes but I've got a visitor. What shall I do with Ketino?

MURMAN: We need to get going. Whatever happens from now on isn't for you to worry.

[SULIKO RISES TO HER FEET. THE CHAIR CREAKS.]

SULIKO: See, so hard to get to my feet.

MURMAN: You're getting on, my dear, aren't you?

SULIKO: Don't you like me anymore?
MURMAN: I've missed you, honey. Very much. Everyone's got their wives there. Only I was alone.
SULIKO: Yeah, but Ketino's still here, isn't she?
MURMAN: She is but...
SULIKO: And your parents are there too.
MURMAN: True, but I wanted you with me.
SULIKO: That's why you're taking me with you now.
MURMAN: You don't need to be scared. Remember, I'm here, by your side.
SULIKO: Murman, tell me the truth!
MURMAN: What is it, Suliko?
SULIKO: Am I really dead?
MURMAN: You are. Really.
SULIKO: Is this what death's like?
MURMAN: Did you think it was different?
SULIKO: I'm not sure...

[THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS AND PSEDO-DRAMATIC
MUSIC FROM TV.]

SULIKO: Ketino! Ketino! Can you hear me?
MURMAN: (AFTER A PAUSE) You can't imagine how much I missed you.
SULIKO: Fine but couldn't you have waited a bit longer? The boy would've graduated from the university. He's your grandson too, you know.
MURMAN: I'm not a killer, woman. I'm a mere guide.
SULIKO: It's all too sudden. No warning, no letter or message. Why didn't you call?
MURMAN: Call from where? The other world?

[THE DOOR OPENS WITH A CREAK.]

SULIKO: What? Is that impossible? How can I come like this? No time to pack. I could've taken my cardigan, glasses, other things I might need there.

MURMAN: You haven't changed a bit. I still love you.

SULIKO: (COQUETTISHLY, WITH A SOFT LAUGH) Stop it! No time for that!

[THE DOOR CLOSSES. FOOTSTEPS ALONG THE VERANDA, THEN ALONG THE GRASS. THE TV MUSIC DIES DOWN. A NEARBY RIVER IS HEARD ALONG WITH THE CRICKETS. A DOG BARKS IN THE DISTANCE.]

ON THE WAY TO THE VILLAGE

[THE SOUND OF AN APPROACHING CAR.
THE RADIO TRANSMITS NEWS.]

NEWS PRESENTER: The main focus of the talks between Russia and Palestine is the bilateral cooperation and seeking out the ways to resolve the Middle Eastern problems. The Speaker of the Russian Federation singled out the Gaza Sector with its aggravated situation. Quote: 'For us it is paramount that the Sextet continue their endeavors. Also, we would like to speed up the formation of an assembly where the Arab countries...'

[THE SOUND IS TURNED DOWN. ONLY THE NOISE OF THE
PASSING CARS CAN BE HEARD.]

ALGIERS: Now I'm an orphan, son.

GIVIKO: Poor Granny. I talked to her last week. She called to say how much she missed me. My Granny...

ALGIERS: And so unexpectedly... She was okay, no heart complaints or pain in the joints. (PAUSE.) Remember she didn't want to be in the city? Said she was born in the village and intended to die there.

GIVIKO: How old was Granny?

ALGIERS: 78.

GIVIKO: She called me last week...

ALGIERS: (INTERRUPTING) That's what she said. How many times I offered to move her, to take care of her, but no!

GIVIKO: She didn't need any care. She was fine.

ALGIERS: She was crazy about you. Couldn't wait till you finished your studies. Wanted you to visit her but didn't live to see you get your degree. Poor Mum!

GIVIKO: Yeah, she had this thing about my degree – as if it matters.

ALGIERS: She was proud of you. When Ketino phoned, my heart stopped. Something in her voice...

GIVIKO: (AFTER A PAUSE) What's the time?

ALGIERS: We'll be there in a sort while. You can take a nap.

GIVIKO: How can I? It's nearly dawn.

ALGIERS: We've got things to see to. Don't forget you're going to the cemetery. You need to see that dark man, the gravedigger. Wonder if he's still alive. The road is terrible though. He should start digging the grave...Poor Mum...

GIVIKO: We should get the death certificate first.

ALGIERS: Yeah, from the local authorities. But that's done pretty quickly nowadays. It's the grave that takes time.

GIVIKO: I'll see to it, don't worry.

ALGIERS: Oh, Mum!

GIVIKO: Shall I drive?

ALGIERS: No, I'm okay. We're quite near now. (SUDDENLY REMEMBERING.) The dinner! Who's going to take care of the funeral dinner? Who can I ask?

GIVIKO: Remember when Grandpa died, we gave money to the man who lives near the greenhouse and he organised everything?

ALGIERS: Dad died fifteen years ago. That man mightn't be alive.

GIVIKO: Do you mean there's no one alive in the whole village? There's bound to be someone capable of helping us, Dad.

ALGIERS: True. It's paramount we don't forget anyone. You know how important a wake is in the village and it's an embarrassment if we forget to invite someone. It's going to be the talk for the rest of their lives.

GIVIKO: We won't. We'll invite everyone.

ALGIERS: Your granny was loved in the village. They loved your grandpa too. He was a respectable man and is well remembered. Keep that in mind and follow his example. Though he died fifteen years ago, you remember him well. Everyone listened when he had anything to say. And you? You can't find a simple job!

GIVIKO: Here we go again!

ALGIERS: What? And you don't sweat over your studies either, do you? All your peers have already started working. (PAUSE.) Oh, Mum, poor Mum! (PAUSE.) When Ketino phoned I immediately knew something was wrong, but I couldn't imagine she'd go so unexpectedly. No heart complaints, no pain in her joints...

GIVIKO: (SHOUTING) Look out!

[THE SOUND OF BRAKES. A CAR PASSES CLOSE BY.]

ALGIERS: Damn it! Is he blind?

GIVIKO: It wasn't his fault. You're driving on the wrong side.

ALGIERS: Apparently they were watching a soap. Mum and Ketino were like sisters. They were born on the same day and been neighbours ever since. Had their weddings on the same day. Ketino gave birth to her son on the day I was born. And her husband died soon after Dad. And so they lived, side by side...

GIVIKO: Sounds as though we might find her dead too the way you're talking.

ALGIERS: Stop that, for God's sake!

GIVIKO: Ketino's a wonderful woman.

ALGIERS: She said they were watching a soap and she thought Mum had dozed off, but that was strange as she never did that. She'd been waiting for that episode for the whole day and Ketino found it unusual she'd nodded off. First when she called her name and got no answer, she thought she was too tired but when the soap finished and poor Mum didn't stir, she guessed things were very wrong. And phoned me... Poor Mum...

GIVIKO: I'll turn on the radio, okay?

[THE RADIO IS TURNED ON IN THE CAR.]

NEWS PRESENTER: During his visit to Britain, the Palestinian leader reiterated that time needed to solve the problems was running out...

[THE SOUND DIES DOWN AS THE CAR DRIVES AWAY.]

THE AUDIENCE

[THE HQ OF THE OTHER WORLD IS EQUIPPED WITH ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY. HUMAN VOICES MIX WITH OUT-OF-THE-WORLD SOUNDS. A KNOCK ON THE DOOR.]

MICHAEL: (FROM BEHIND THE DOOR, IRRITATED) Who's there?

[THE DOOR OPENS WITH A CREAK.]

MURMAN: It's me, Michael, Murman Tsaburia.

MICHAEL: What the hell do you want?

MURMAN: Didn't expect such words from you, sir.

MICHAEL: (BLOWING HIS NOSE) Say it and be quick.

MURMAN: I did as you ordered me to, sir.

MICHAEL: Aren't you saying what it was, you wretched?

MURMAN: Why am I wretched?

MICHAEL: (YELLING) Get it out or I'll send you to Hell!

SULIKO: (FRIGHTENED) Who's this man, Murman?

MURMAN: Hush, woman! It's Michael, in charge of the Other World.

MICHAEL: (SHOUTING) Liyba, bring me the file! The computer is stuck again.

[HE SNEEZES AND BLOWS HIS NOSE NOISILY.]

MURMAN: I've brought my wife, sir, as you ordered.

MICHAEL: Why?

MURMAN: You said her time has come, sir, and ordered to bring her.

MICHAEL: Remind me the name. (HE BLOWS HIS NOSE.)

MURMAN: Suliko Tsaburia, sir.

MICHAEL: (SHOUTING) Liyba!

SULIKO: (FRIGHTENED, WHISPERING) I don't like him, Murman.

MICHAEL: (MORE TO HIMSELF) The computer's stuck.

SULIKO: Please, take me from here.

MURMAN: Sh, woman.

MICHAEL: What can I do now? I can't access the files as since we've been using computers, I keep the stuff in there. What's the name again?

MURMAN: Suliko Tsuburia.

MICHAEL: Don't stand in the doorway. There's a draught. You can step inside.

[THE DOOR CLOSSES.]

SULIKO: Might there be a mistake? (SHE GIGGLES.)

MICHAEL: (BLOWING HIS NOSE) I've got cold. The air conditioner's fault. Blowing in my back. But what can you do? If I don't have it on, I'm going to roast in here.

MURMAN: Very true, sir.

SULIKO: Can you possibly send me back?

MICHAEL: Nothing doing. You've got to go back, lady, but only for a while. Have you explained the setup?

MURMAN: I had no time on the way here, sir.

MICHAEL: What did you do instead?

MURMAN: Haven't seen her for fifteen years, so...

MICHAEL: Why didn't you tell me? I could've speeded things a little.

SULIKO: Oh, no, sir! I wasn't in a particular hurry. I believe you're rushing even now.

MICHAEL: Everyone's scared from the beginning but then they don't want to go back. You'll feel the same. (HE SNEEZES.)

MURMAN: Bless you, sir.

MICHAEL: Do they bless the dead, you idiot?

MURMAN: Right, sir. I'll keep it in mind.

MICHAEL: Have a seat. (HE BLOWS HIS NOSE.) How can one catch a cold in this heat?

MURMAN: (SYMPATHETICALLY) Pretty bad, isn't it, sir?

SULIKO: Michael, sir, my grandson, Giviko, is graduating this year and... I don't know how to put it, but could I live till he gets his degree?

MICHAEL: If I had a working computer, I'd check, but it doesn't work. The electricity went off three times today and it's gone mad.

SULIKO: You'd check what?

MURMAN: Check when he's scheduled to...

MICHAEL: However, we can certainly speed things up.

SULIKO: (SCREAMING IN HORROR) What's that you're saying! In the name of God! Don't let me live to see that! God help my Giviko, my only grandson! God, give him health and long life and all the best to his family! My goodness, what are you saying?

MURMAN: Enough!

MICHAEL: Calm down, lady. Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen to your grandson.

SULIKO: How can I calm down?

MICHAEL: He's safe now.

SULIKO: Safe from what?

MICHAEL: He's in the car and had a narrow escape from a bad accident. Don't worry.

SULIKO: God help me!

MURMAN: Calm down, woman. It's the Other World not a market place.

SULIKO: I don't recognise you, Murman! The man's talking about your grandson!

MICHAEL: (BLOWING HIS NOSE) Please, Suliko, tell me how you died.

MURMAN: Go on, tell it.

SULIKO: I was watching a soap, not suspecting anything bad. I'm not sure you know it, but the soap is really good. Called *The Rose Petal*. There's this girl, Lia. She's a maid taking care of an old woman. She's doing her job pretty well but this son of the old lady is after poor Lia. He really stalks her because he wants...

MURMAN: (INTERRUPTING) Are you telling the whole soap opera? To Michael?

SULIKO: Oh, sorry.

MICHAEL: And?

SULIKO: And he insists she should sleep with him and she refuses and they start to fight as she's an honest girl, this Lia and...

[MICHAEL SNEEZES AND SULIKO STOPS.]

MICHAEL: Now the lady has to go back and return after her wake and the funeral. I really don't feel well at the moment.

MURMAN: As you say, sir.

MICHAEL: And don't forget to explain the rules on the way.

MURMAN: I won't, sir.

MICHAEL: When are you coming back? The day after tomorrow?

MURMAN: Oh no, that's not possible. I'd say in a week's time.

MICHAEL: These Georgians are driving me crazy! How can you keep the dead for a week?

MURMAN: That's the tradition, sir.

MICHAEL: No way!

MURMAN: As you wish, but it's hard to negotiate with the living.

MICHAEL: Five days at the most. You're dismissed.

[THERE IS ANOTHER BLACKOUT WHICH IS INDICATED
BY THE SPECIFIC BUZZ OF THE UPS.]

SULIKO: Is there a major breakdown?

MICHAEL: Who knows! It's the fourth time the electricity's switched off.

[HE SNEEZES.]

MURMAN: No blessing, sir!

THE WAKE

[MOURNFUL MUSIC CAN BE HEARD.]

KETINO: Oh, here you are... Wow is me to have seen Suliko's death!

ALGIERS: (SOBBING) Auntie Ketino, I'm an orphan now!

KETINO: My dear Algiers, if you only knew how your mum broke my heart. Let me embrace you. My condolences.

ALGIERS: Thank you, Auntie Ketino.

KETINO: You're here too, Giviko. Your granny loved you so much! Let me kiss you, my boy.

GIVIKO: Thanks, Auntie Ketino.

KETINO: She died in my hands, poor soul.

ALGIERS: She did...

KETINO: I never imagined she'd die before me. She was fine, no complaints.

ALGIERS: No complaints... (HE SOBS.) Mum, poor Mum...

KETINO: And here she is, in the coffin, beautiful and peaceful. (SHE WEEPS.)

GIVIKO: Don't cry, Auntie Ketino.

KETINO: How can I? Poor Suliko didn't live to see your graduation.

GIVIKO: I'll show her my degree when I graduate...

ALGIERS: Yes, son. Show her the paper. She'll be happy.

KETINO: Our poor Suliko is in Heaven now. The only thing that consoles me is that she's with the God and with her husband. God bless them.

ALGIERS: Mum, poor Mum...

[THERE IS A KNOCK ON THE DOOR.]

KETINO: Oh my God! We never lock doors if there's death at home. Come in!

[THE DOOR OPENS.]

CAMERAMAN: My condolences, Algiers. It's an awful tragedy. I've been crying ever since I heard the news.

ALGIERS: Thank you very much. Please, come in.

KETINO: He is from TV. He's got business to discuss with you.

ALGIERS: Beg pardon?

KETINO: From the local TV. He won't take more than two minutes of your precious time.

ALGIERS: What can I do for you?

CAMERAMAN: I deeply sympathise with your loss. I'm a reporter and cameraman for the local TV. I think you realise the pitiful condition of the free media under the current government. We work under unimaginable pressure. No commercials as everything is in the hands of the central channels... Giviko, my boy my sincere condolences to you.

GIVIKO: Thank you. Very nice of you.

CAMERAMAN: That's why I'm obliged to do two jobs. The salary is low and no one wants to film their dead for free.

ALGIERS: (IRRITATED, INTERRUPTING) Thank you.

CAMERAMAN: Dear Algiers, I'd like to make a programme about your mother.

ALGIERS: Thanks but why?

CAMERAMAN: It's true that everybody knew your mother and she was very much loved in the village, but not everyone has heard about her demise.

GIVIKO: What's it all about, Dad?

ALGIERS: A programme about Granny.

GIVIKO: Now, when she's gone?

CAMERAMAN: Don't be surprised. It's our tradition. Everyone watches the local channel in the evening. The village will get the news, the neighbouring villages too... Otherwise someone might miss it and that's rather embarrassing, don't you think so?

GIVIKO: Are we talking about a programme or an obituary?

CAMERAMAN: (INDIGNANT) Oh no! An obituary is for the papers, but we prepare programmes.

ALGIERS: Okay then.

KETINO: (GETTING MODESTLY INVOLVED) We know that you've got different rules in the city and no programmes are made about the dead, but that's our tradition.

CAMERAMAN: Everyone will get the news and come to commiserate.

ALGIERS: If that's the tradition...

CAMERAMAN: Yes, sir. Sorrow needs mourning and mourning presupposes people doesn't it?

GIVIKO: Does it?

ALGIERS: Okay, fine. Let's do it. What are the costs involved?

CAMERAMAN: (INDIGNANTLY) Don't even mention money!

ALGIERS: (TAKEN ABACK) As you wish. But you've got to come to the funeral dinner. Mind you, I won't accept a refusal.

CAMERAMAN: No talk of expenses, so don't let me hear it again. I loved your mother so much, I don't want to hear about money or I'll be offended! And I'll certainly come to the dinner.

KETINO: (WHISPERING) I'll tell you how it's done. Later.

CAMERAMAN: Let's get started. I'm going to talk to your mother to put everything in the frame, so to say. Please don't express any surprise.

ALGIERS: Are you joking?

CAMERAMAN: How can I? I'd never dream of anything like that.

KETINO: (WHISPERING) Algiers, dear, he is a rather strange man. They say he sees and talks to the dead. Apparently, he's got such a camera that shows the dead as if they are alive. (TRIUMPHANTLY.) That's absolutely true. His programmes are the talk of the whole region. Let him do his job. He knows what he's doing.

CAMERAMAN: (LOUDLY) I'd like to ask those present not to interfere. I'm starting!

[THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE IS BETWEEN THE CAMERAMAN AND THE DECEASED, SO A PIECE OF MYSTERY MUSIC SHOULD ACCOMPANY IT, CREATING AN ECHO EFFECT.]

SULIKO: What are you doing? Do you want to film me?

CAMERAMAN: Definitely, Suliko.

SULIKO: What is it you are holding?

CAMERAMAN: A video camera. I'm shooting a programme that'll be broadcast.

SULIKO: Ah, so that's how it's done!

CAMERAMAN: Indeed.

SULIKO: And that's how you filmed Liyba, right?

CAMERAMAN: Correct.

SULIKO: Is it only you who sees the dead?

CAMERAMAN: It's the camera. When I look through the lens, all dead look as if they're alive.

SULIKO: All right then. My husband's out, but he'll be back in the evening.

CAMERAMAN: I filmed him fifteen years ago. Now, when I give you a signal, it means the camera's on. Then I'll approach you and you'll rise.

SULIKO: (INTERRUPRTING) What do you mean? Get to my feet?

CAMERAMAN: No, just sit up and when I wave, you'll say the following words...

SULIKO: Without getting out of the coffin? Just sit here?

CAMERAMAN: Right. First you lie as you are, but when I wave, you sit up and say...

SULIKO: (INTERRUPTING) Isn't that rather awkward?

CAMERAMAN: Why? You're dead and it's okay if you just sit up in the coffin and say...

SULIKO: (INTERRUPTING AGAIN) But last year Liyba was on her feet!

CAMERAMAN: She couldn't sit because of her backache.

SULIKO: (THOUGHTFULLY) I thought there were no aches when one's dead.

CAMERAMAN: If that was true, Suliko, no one would want to be alive.

SULIKO: (IRRITATED) How come Liyba was standing and I should be sitting?

CAMERAMAN: That's more effective, believe me. Imagine the picture: the people are standing around, weeping, it's noisy and suddenly everything goes quiet, the camera approaches the coffin. I wave and you sit up and say right into the camera: 'I'm Suliko Tsaburia. I've lived an honest life and died as a respectable woman. My name is going to be remembered by my family and passed on to the coming generations. Long live Georgia!'

SULIKO: I expect visitors in my home so how can I be sitting?

CAMERAMAN: Please, Suliko, believe me more people will come to the wake.

SULIKO: I don't believe you.

CAMERAMAN: Did you go to Liyba's wake? Were there a lot of people?

SULIKO: No, because she wasn't a good woman.

CAMERAMAN: And do you remember how crowded Natasha Kapai's yard was?

SULIKO: (DOUBTFULLY) Just sitting up?

CAMERAMAN: Then you'll say that your wake is on the 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th and 29th, and the funeral is on the 30th of August. Say that you'll be happy to see everyone expressing their condolences and accompanying you to the cemetery.

SULIKO: That's all very well but Michael only gave me five days.

CAMERAMAN: You don't say so!

SULIKO: (WORRIED) Yes, sadly.

CAMERAMAN: Who's heard of a burial in five days?

SULIKO: That's exactly what I told him, but his computer was down and...

CAMERAMAN: Okay, then tell them to come on the 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th and that the funeral is on the 29th. Don't forget to say you'll be happy to see everyone.

SULIKO: All right. You're the boss.

CAMERAMAN: Now, lie down and relax. (THE SOUND OF THE WORKING CAMERA.) Attention! Go!

[THE MOURNFUL MUSIC IS LOUDER.]

SULIKO: (CONFUSED) I don't even know how to start. I died and here I am lying in the coffin...

RAINCOAT AND SHOES

[EVENING SOUNDS. A DOG BARKING IN THE DISTANCE.
TWO GLASSES CLICK.]

ALGIERS: Here's to Mum's memory. (HE DRINKS.)

GIVIKO: May Granny rest in peace.

ALGIERS: I guess you should've paid more attention to her. She raised you, you know.

[THEY PUT DOWN THE GLASSES.]

GIVIKO: You're right.

ALGIERS: You appreciate your parents only when they die. You'll know it when you're an orphan.

GIVIKO: Mum called from England saying she can't arrive. The fare's too expensive. She complained about the rising prices and also if she's discovered to be there illegally, she won't be allowed back. She said the family she works for is very nice, treating her well. Plans to talk to you on the Skype.

ALGIERS: Skype in this village?

GIVIKO: Said the fare was too much. And she misses us... And was sorry for Granny. You were talking to some visitors when she called.

ALGIERS: The thing is for her to be okay. We can take care of ourselves.

GIVIKO: She asked about you and if you've found a job.

ALGIERS: (INTERRUPTING, IRRITATED) Where the hell is this job? The whole country is unemployed!

GIVIKO: She just asked. She suggested phoning her cousin who might help.

ALGIERS: I won't! I've got nothing to beg of her cousin!

GIVIKO: She thought he might find you a job. Either as a driver or security guard. She's worried you've had nothing for so long. Said she's looking after an elderly woman there while I'm left to my devices.

ALGIERS: (IN FRUSTRATION) Please, stop it.

GIVIKO: Said she missed us...

ALGIERS: (IRRITATED) Should come home in that case!

GIVIKO: What are we to live on then, Dad? Who's going to pay for my studies? Or the bills?

ALGIERS: (INTERRUPING, IRRITATED) Stop it or I'll lie there by Mum. You can bury us together and then your mother will be obliged to arrive, won't she?

GIVIKO: I didn't mean to upset you.

ALGIERS: Pour some wine.

[WINE IS POURED INTO THE GLASSES.]

GIVIKO: I just passed on her words to you...

[THEY CLICK GLASSES.]

ALGIERS: To Mum's memory.

GIVIKO: Since we bought her a mobile, she used to phone every day.

ALGIERS: When I bury Mum, I'll be a real orphan. You need to take good care of me, son.

GIVIKO: Come on. Here's to you, Dad.

[SOFT KNOCKING ON THE DOOR.]

GIVIKO: Is there someone?

ALGIERS: Now, in the middle of the night?

GIVIKO: Come in, please!

[THE DOOR OPENS WITH A CREAK.]

KETINO: Where you resting, dears?

ALGIERS: Please come in, Auntie Ketino.

KETINO: I will, just for two minutes. I've brought you something to eat.

ALGIERS: Thanks but you needn't have bothered.

GIVIKO: Please have a seat, Auntie Ketino.

KETINO: How could I leave you without a meal?

ALGIERS: I was saying that now I'm an orphan. There she is, Mum, in the coffin and I lost Dad fifteen years ago. Looking at my life I realise I'm absolutely alone. (HIS VOICE QUIVERS.)

KETINO: Don't say that, Algiers! That's life. Those we love leave us, but a new generation comes instead. There was hardly a day when I didn't see Suliko. We've been together for years and now I haven't got anyone to talk to. My son's in the city. We talk once a week, not more. (TEARFULLY.) Poor Suliko...

ALGIER: I failed to take good care of Mum.

KETINO: Oh no! You were an excellent son.

ALGIERS: What kind of August Michael had in store for me?

[THE SOUND OF THUNDER.]

KETINO: See? That thunder means something.

GIVIKO: Just a coincidence.

KETINO: When there's a dead person at home, you can't say anything bad about Michael.

ALGIERS: (SOBBING) May all souls rest in peace. (HE STOPS SOBBING.) And here's to the memory of your late husband, Zviad Asania.

[THE SOUND OF GLASSES BEING CLICKED.]

KETINO: Dear Algiers, I've come to ask for a favour but please don't be surprised at its nature.

ALGIERS: I'm listening very attentively.

KETINO: You're urban people but we, who still live in the village, live like the dead. That's our past and our future too. (SHE LAUGHS AWKWARDLY.) See how Giviko's looking at me?

GIVIKO: I'm just tired, nothing else.

ALGIERS: What is it you're trying to say, Auntie Ketine?
KETINO: I'm really embarrassed but I've got to say it anyway.
ALGIERS: Then say it.
KETINO: I dreamed of my husband Zviad.
GIVIKO: Did you?
ALGIERS: Really?
KETINO: I did.
ALGIERS: And? What did he tell you?
KETINO: It's all really embarrassing.
GIVIKO: That's okay. Please tell us what it is.
KETINO: (AFTER A PAUSE) Shall I?
ALGIERS: Certainly. Pour some more, Giviko.

[WINE IS POURED INTO THE GLASSES.]

KETINO: He's asked me for something.
GIVIKO: What was it, Auntie Ketino?
KETINO: (FALTERING) I'm not sure... I don't want to be misunderstood. We the village people have got our own philosophy of life.
ALGIERS: And what does it say?
KETINO: We're all dead. Everything is decided in the Other World.
GIVIKO: That's in the Testament.
KETINO: It is but no one believes it.
ALGIERS: I do.
KETINO: If you do, here's my husband's raincoat and his shoes.
GIVIKO: Why?
KETINO: I dreamed of him. He said to send his raincoat with Suliko. The raincoat and his shoes from the wardrobe. Said his was so worn out, he felt ashamed to wear it.
GIVIKO: Right he is! How can a respectable man wear an old raincoat?
KETINO: You're like my own family, so I can tell you he said his shoes literally lost their soles.
ALGIERS: Oh my!

KETINO: Yes! (BUSINESSLIKE.) So I took down his raincoat, cleaned his shoes, polished and brought them.

GIVIKO: In that bag?

KETINO: Yes.

ALGIERS: (WORRIED) A terrible story!

KETINO: Please, Algiers, don't refuse. Don't make me the talk of the village. Didn't you know my husband? Don't you remember his good? Poor him, he can't go out because of his tatters.

ALGIERS: Oh, you don't have to apologise. Of course I'll pass the things – in person!

GIVIKO: Dad, how are you to pass the raincoat and shoes to Auntie Ketino's husband?

KETINO: He'll put them into poor Suliko's coffin.

ALGIERS: That's right.

KETINO: But you've got to put them at her feet and cover with the shroud.

ALGIERS: Of course.

KETINO: Please cover them properly. I don't want the busybodies to gossip that Suliko is taking the raincoat and shoes to Zviad. You know how malicious some people can be?

GIVIKO: What can they say?

ALGIERS: You're right. On the day of the funeral, immediately before the coffin is taken out, I'll ask everyone to leave me alone with Mum. I'll put the things at her feet and cover with the shroud. The raincoat on her left, the shoes on the right.

KETINO: (RELIEVED) I don't know how to thank you, my dear. If you help me get the stuff to my husband, I'll be grateful till the day I die.

GIVIKO: Can't we put them in now?

KETINO: That's a bad idea. Someone might notice.

ALGIERS: True. There might be unwanted questions.

KETINO: Questioning is the Devil's work as you know. Your mum and I have lived an honest life and now I'd hate to hear any gossip.

GIVIKO: (WITH SUDDEN REALISATION) Oh I see... Give me the bag, Auntie Ketino. I'll keep it in the wardrobe till the funeral.

[THEY CLICK GLASSES.]

ALGIERS: Here's to the memory of all those gone. May they rest in the Light.
Did he ask for anything else by any chance?

KETINO: Please remember, our family secret should stay with our families. Do
you agree, Giviko?

GIVIKO: Don't worry, Auntie. I'll take the secret to the grave.

[THE GLASSES ARE PUT ON THE TABLE.]

KETINO: It's getting late. I must be going. There's a lot of weeping to be done
tomorrow.

GIVIKO: Anything special happening tomorrow?

ALGIERS: The wake is advertised.

KETINO: A lot of people will turn up. Suliko was a great woman and her death
should be mourned properly so that she knows how she broke our
hearts. See you tomorrow. Sleep tight and please don't see me to the
door – that's not the custom with the dead in the house.

[THE CHAIR CREAKS, HER SLOW FOOTSTEPS SOFTLY
THUMP AS SHE GOES TO THE DOOR. THE DOOR OPENS
AND CLOSES.]

ALGIERS: Put the stuff away and remind me about them before the funeral. It'll
be embarrassing if we forget.

GIVIKO: Do you seriously believe Granny's going to deliver the raincoat and
shoes?

ALGIERS: No, but she asked us, didn't she?

GIVIKO: Neither do I.

[THE SOUND OF THUNDER. THE CROCKERY RATTLES.]

MEETING IN THE OTHER WORLD

[THE SOUND OF A GATE OPENING IN THE DISTANCE,
FOLLOWED BY FOOTSTEPS. THE DOOR OPENS.]

SULIKO: Oh, here you are, Murman!

MURMAN: Yeah, I'm a little late.

SULIKO: I'm dead beat. It's so hard to lie in the coffin for so long! Help me out, will you?

MURMAN: The papers needed sorting out. Too many dead at the moment and I had to jump the queue, which caused quite an outcry. The computer was fixed but then it caught a virus and went berserk again.

SULIKO: Which means they're not accepting me?

MURMAN: They will, but you might end up in another group, not with me.

SULIKO: What? That's gonna kill me!

[THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS. THE DOOR OPENS.]

MURMAN: You just can't imagine the chaos ruling up there. Come on, let's go now and tomorrow I'll bring you back again.

SULIKO: Is that why you killed me? To be with others? Why would you want that?

MURMAN: Please don't start. It's not me who decides who's to be where.

SULIKO: Excellent time to say it! Why didn't you tell me so when you took me?

[THE DOOR CLOSSES. THE HI-TECH NOISES.]

MURMAN: See the queue? I jumped it.

SULIKO: There wasn't one last time, was there?

MURMAN: It's because of an earthquake. Come on, I'll show you some people you know.

SULIKO: (FRIGHTENED) Oh my! Is it my parents?

MURMAN: You'll see them in forty days. The place we're in is the transit zone.

SULIKO: But I haven't got a visa!

MURMAN: (LAUGHING) A visa for the dead! Are you joking?

SULIKO: (LAUGHING TOO) That was stupid of me.

MURMAN: There are two categories here: those waiting for forty days and those waiting for a parcel. Do you recognise that man?

SULIKO: Looks familiar. (SHOUTING.) It's Ketino's husband, right? Zviad Asania.

MURMAN: That's him.

SULIKO: Zviad, hello, my dear! You look great! Death becomes you, you know?

ZVIAD: (JOYFULLY) Suliko, so good to see you! The living are deadly scared of the death and the dead are afraid of life.

[THEY KISS EACH OTHER.]

SULIKO: (WITH A LAUGH) Ketino will be over the moon when I tell her I saw you.

MURMAN: You can't tell her anything.

ZVIAD: (LAUGHING) I'll tell her everything when she dies.

SULIKO: You look amazingly young, Zviad!

MURMAN: Hey, what's wrong with you? He died fifteen years ago, six days after me.

SULIKO: Of course I remember. Your wife, Zviad, and I are getting on.

ZVIAD: Have you heard that love's not affected by age?

SULIKO: Ketino misses you very much.

ZVIAD: I know.

SULIKO: How come?

MURMAN: In order to get into the transit zone, you've got to get a special pass from Liyba, Michael's secretary.

ZVIAD: Then I can appear in her dream and talk to her.

SULIKO: So whenever I dreamt of you, I must be grateful to Liyba?

MURMAN: Please don't get jealous, Suliko.

SULIKO: I never liked her. There's always been something fishy about her.

MURMAN: Are you jealous of the dead?

SULIKO: That's what you say you are, but you both look great!

ZVIAD: (LAUGHING) She's her usual self. Remember how jealous she was of the actress when they were filming in our village?

MURMAN: Of course I do!

SULIKO: Now don't say there was nothing to be jealous of! How should I have felt when you took that lassie for horse rides?

MURMAN: Stop it, woman! Liyba's Michael's secretary. And she's dead!

SULIKO: That's exactly what you said then too. You said she was just an actress but I walked on you at the river.

ZVIAD: (LAUGHING) Let bygones be bygones, Suliko. Actually, can you do me a favour?

SULIKO: Let him answer me first.

MURMAN: What do you want, Suliko? Can you let me be? Do you need to kill me with your jealousy?

ZVIAD: When you get back...

SULIKO: (INTERRUPTING) I'm not going anywhere!

ZVIAD: When you get back, your son Algiers will put my raincoat and shoes at your feet and cover them with the shroud. Get them for me, will you?

SULIKO: Are you talking to me?

ZVIAD: Yes. I've already warned my wife.

SULIKO: How did you manage that from the transit zone?

MURMAN: Didn't I explain that one can appear in dreams and talk to the living from the zone?

SULIKO: But how am I to tell my son? They can't hear me, can they?

ZVIAD: Don't you worry. Ketino has already taken my things to Algiers.

SULIKO: And you think he won't forget about it?

ZVIAD: How can he? I can't walk around in these tatters! The soles are nearly gone too.

MURMAN: Stay here for another day and tell Ketino to remind him. I know my son all too well. He can easily forget.

ZVIAD: I've got to go today.

MURMAN: I'll ask Liyba to let you stay an extra day.

SULIKO: Why you? Can't Zviad ask her?

MURMAN: (TIMIDLY, AS IF CAUGHT OUT) He'll ask too.

ZVIAD: If I ask, she might not allow...

SULIKO: But she'll allow if you ask, right?

MURMAN: Not necessarily.

SULIKO: Didn't you say she would if you asked?

MURMAN: I just thought I'd help a friend...

SULIKO: (INTERRUPTING) And Zviad can't ask her, right?

MURMAN: He can.

ZVIAD: Let's ask together.

SULIKO: That Liyba always got on my nerves and now she's going to spoil my other life? What has she got to do with my husband?

MURMAN: Nothing. It's me who wants things from her.

SULIKO: My goodness! What's that you want?

MURMAN: Listen, didn't you dream of me twice a week for the last fifteen years? Who do you think we should be thanked for it? Who let me into the transit zone?

SULIKO: Should I be grateful to some Liyba for the fact that I dreamt of my late husband? Is that what you're saying?

MURMAN: Hush, Suliko. We might be overheard.

SULIKO: I don't care! I'm dead and they can't do anything worse to me. Show me the woman. Where's Liyba?

MURMAN: Suliko stop! Where do you think you're going?

ZVIAD: Stop Suliko. It's the transit zone, you can't...

[THEIR VOICES TRAIL OFF. THE WIND BLOWS IN THE OTHER WORLD, WHINNING AND WHIZZING.]

DUST TO DUST

[AS THE COFFIN IS LOWERED INTO THE GRAVE, IT THUMPS AGAINST THE WALLS. FOR A MORE DRAMATIC EFFECT, OCCASIONAL SOBS CAN BE ADDED. THE COFFIN HITS THE BOTTOM WITH A THUD. THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE IS ACCOMPANIED BY THE SOUND OF SOIL BEING THROWN INTO THE GRAVE.]

GIVIKO: Dad, I know it's the wrong time but...

ALGIERS: Throw a fistful of soil into the grave.

GIVIKO: Dad, I've just remembered something.

ALGIERS: Poor Mum!

GIVIKO: Dad, listen...

ALGIERS: Have we invited everyone to the dinner? It'll be very embarrassing if we forget someone. So many have turned up.

GIVIKO: I've invited everyone, as you told me.

ALGIERS: Good boy. You know how it is here... Take a fistful... They're staring at you... If you don't invite them in person, they won't come. Then they'll sulk. We are strange people. Indeed, the Georgians are strange...

GIVIKO: Dad...

ALGIERS: Instead of mourning my dear mum, I've got to think about the dinner invitations. Is the table laid? Have you checked? Is everything ok?

GIVIKO: I have, Dad.

ALGIERS: Have they added more chairs?

GIVIKO: Yes, Dad. I've asked for extra ones. No telling how many will stay.

ALGIERS: Is the wine good?

GIVIKO: You tried it yesterday and said it was fine.

ALGIERS: What about the fish?

GIVIKO: Don't worry. It's excellent.

ALGIERS: Poor Mum!

GIVIKO: Dad, I've got to tell you something.

ALGIERS: Where's Ketino?

GIVIKO: Can you listen, Dad?

ALGIERS: Everything must be perfect as fit your Granny.

GIVIKO: (LOSING PATIENCE) Dad! We've forgotten.

ALGIERS: Don't tell me it's someone we've forgotten to invite!

GIVIKO: No. It's the raincoat and shoes that Ketino brought over.

ALGIERS: Is that some kind of a joke? Now, in the middle of the funeral?

GIVIKO: No. They're still in the wardrobe where I put them. We've forgotten about them.

ALGIERS: How can you do this to me? Want me dead?

GIVIKO: I know you asked me but I forgot. It just slipped my mind with all the hustle and bustle.

ALGIERS: How could you, son?

GIVIKO: Don't worry, Dad. No one's gonna notice. We can tell Ketino we put them in.

ALGIERS: What if she finds out?

GIVIKO: How?

ALGIERS: True. But you never know with the village people...

GIVIKO: No way anyone's gonna know. We can throw the stuff on the way tomorrow, when we leave.

ALGIERS: Not good at all, son.

GIVIKO: I just forgot, Dad. Sorry.

ALGIERS: Me too.

GIVIKO: Let's pretend we put the stuff into the coffin. Ketino won't remember.

ALGIERS: And let's leave early and quietly.

KETINO: (LOUDLY INTERRUPTING THEIR MUTTED CONVERSATION) That's it. We've buried her. Difficult to lose one's mum, right, Algiers?

ALGIERS: Very. I'd have never imagined how painful it'd be, Auntie Ketino. I'm weeping like a small child.

KETINO: Your Granny loved you very much, Giviko.
GIVIKO: I loved her too.
KETINO: (WHISPERING) Last night I dreamt of my husband again. Our Suliko is already there, with her husband.
ALGIERS: Oh really?
KETINO: (TRIUMPHANTLY) They are. (WHISPERING.) He told me she's queuing for her turn. Apparently Michael's place is absolutely crowded at the moment because of an earthquake. Besides, the computer virus has added to the problems and they're stuck in the transit zone. But he said Suliko's fine so stop worrying.
GIVIKO: Haven't they got a good IT person up there?
KETINO: I don't know. He didn't say...

[THE SOUND OF MUFFLED FOOTSTEPS AS THE PROCESSION LEAVES THE CEMETERY.]

ALGIERS: Auntie Ketino, I believe we've invited everybody to the dinner. Do you think we've missed out anyone?
KETINO: Zviad was asking me if you remembered to put his things into the coffin.
ALGIERS: Giviko...
GIVIKO: Oh, we did. We put them in this morning. Didn't we, Dad?
ALGIERS: (CONFUSED) Indeed.
GIVIKO: We got the stuff from the wardrobe, took them from the plastic bag and put into the coffin. And covered with the shroud. Right, Dad?
ALGIERS: We did.
GIVIKO: I put the shoes on Granny's right and the raincoat on her left. Otherwise it would've bulged and questions would've been asked as to what it was. Right, Dad?
ALGIERS: Yes, that's right. He thought of everything.

GIVIKO: Tonight your husband will get his raincoat and shoes.
KETINO: Bless you and my poor Suliko. It's such a relief.
GIVIKO: Auntie Ketino did your husband by any chance say what kind of virus it is? Have they got an anti-virus? Do they use Macs or Windows?
KETINO: I really have no idea of these things. I had other worries.
GIVIKO: If you dream of him again, tell him about me. It's my specialization – computer networks and admin stuff.
ALGIERS: He's joking, Auntie Ketino.
KETINO: (LAUGHING) Naughty you. You're very much like your Granny, Giviko.

[THEY WALK AWAY. MUFFLED FOOTSTEPS CAN STILL BE HEARD AS THE PROCESSION WALKS AWAY FROM THE CEMETERY.]

THE POWER OF THE TURKISH COFFEE

[PAGES ARE TURNED. MICHAEL WIPES HIS NOSE.]

MICHAEL: Five days have passed you say?
MURMAN: Indeed. I've managed everything in the way you instructed.
MICHAEL: What was the rush?
MURMAN: You said five days, sir. Our tradition is seven.
MICHAEL: How was I to predict the earthquake? See how much work I'm snowed under?
SULIKO: (GRUMBLING) We were against but you...
MICHAEL: And on top of everything there's this virus. All computers are down. They won't start. God knows what information we've already lost.
MURMAN: We asked for seven days but you...
MICHAEL: Thank God Liyba's writing things by hand and keeps all papers in old-fashioned folders. Who knows which files can be retrieved...
(HE SNEEZES.) So where are you coming from? (HIS PEN CAN BE HEARD AS HE TAKES NOTES.)
SULIKO: Georgia, sir.
MICHAEL: Your name?
SULIKO: Suliko Tsaiburia.
MICHAEL: Is your husband alive?
SULIKO: I'm a widow for the last fifteen years.
MICHAEL: Your husband's name?
SULIKO: Murman Tsaiburia.
MURMAN: It's me, sir.
MICHAEL: (WIPING HIS NOSE) Oh, yes, Murman. What did bring along?
SULIKO: A pair of scissors, patent-leather shoes, a linen frock, a kerchief, knitting threads and needles, a cushion, a comb, a mirror, a pair of glasses, an apron, a purse, a handbag, a pin, a thumb, a lace nightgown, new bed sheets, a night-pot, a phone-book and a mobile phone, a brooch, a wedding ring, a string of beads and a deck of cards as I like a game of patience, and Turkish coffee with a brewing pot...

MICHAEL: Enough. (HE SNEEZES. CALLS OUT.) Liyba, a cup of coffee!

MURMAN: Michael, sir, I'd like to say...

MICHAEL: (INTERRUPTING) You're in the transit zone but you'll be transferred to your permanent residence by the end of the day.

MURMAN: Michael, sir...

MICHAEL: Your husband is going to accompany you. That's against the rules, but it's a special case, so we're prepared to make concessions. How long have you been dead, Murman?

MURMAN: Fifteen years, sir. I know all the roads like the back of my hand, but something has come up...

MICHAEL: Such as?

MURMAN: Zviad Asania had to get his raincoat and shoes...

MICHAEL: And?

MURMAN: They forgot.

MICHAEL: So what?

MURMAN: He's very annoyed.

SULIKO: His shoes are a shame, practically lost their soles.

MICHAEL: Am I supposed to dote on every single dead? When his wife dies, she can carry the stuff.

MURMAN: He's here, right behind the door. If you had a look at him, sir, you'd immediately understand he can't wait. He's really miserable in his tattered coat which is a disgrace for any dead. I don't even want to mention his shoes.

MICHAEL: When is his wife due?

SULIKO: Please, sir, don't kill my friend for a pair of shoes and a raincoat.

MURMAN: Can you leave him in the transit zone for another day? His wife will dream of him and he'll pass the message that they forgot to put his stuff in the coffin.

MICHAEL: But how can they do it now? Will they dig her out?

MURMAN: They will, sir, without anyone even noticing.

MICHAEL: You Georgians are really crazy, aren't you? Do you want me to sin for a pair of shoes and a wretched raincoat? (HE SNEEZES LOUDLY.) Liyba, can't you make me a coffee?

MURMAN: I can bring him in and you can see for yourself, sir.
(THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS, THEN THE DOOR OPENS,
LETTING IN THE DIN OF THE DISCONTENTED QUEUE.)
Come in, Zviad.

[THE SOUND OF TIMID FOOTSTEPS. THE DOOR CLOSES,
CUTTING THE DISGRUNTED DIN.]

MICHAEL: (AFTER A PAUSE, WORRIED) Oh my! What happened to you,
Zviad Asania?

ZVIAD: My fault, sir, but I've been here for fifteen years and...

MICHAEL: Your coat looks awful. Have you been in a fight?

ZVIAD: Oh no, sir, how could I?

SULIKO: It just wore out.

MICHAEL: What about your shoes? Have you been playing football?

ZVIAD: Cricket, sir.

MICHAEL: (WIPING HIS NOSE; SOLEMNLY) Too bad. (PAUSE.) How did it
happen?

ZVIAD: I'm not sure. My wife saw me three times in her dreams and assured
me she reminded them and they promised they'd remember.

MICHAEL: Does your wife know they've forgotten?

ZVIAD: No. I meant to tell her tonight.

MICHAEL: What if we take her life?

ZVIAD: So that she can bring them?

SULIKO: But have you got room for a new dead?

MURMAN: It's for one night, sir. Please.

MICHAEL: I don't really know what to do.

SULIKO: No one's gonna know, sir, neither the dead nor the living.

MICHAEL: Okay. We don't need a new dead over here. But it's for one night
only. Don't ask for more. You'll appear in her dream telling her...
(HE SNEEZES.) Why can't Liyba get my coffee?

SULIKO: Would you like a cup of real Turkish coffee? I'll make you one.

[THE SOUND OF HURRIED FOOTSTEPS.]

BACK TO THE GRAVE

[NIGHT SOUNDS: CRICKETS AND A LONELY OWL.
THE COFFIN IS OPENED.]

ALGIERS: Careful, son!

GIVIKO: I'm holding it. You can lift it.

ALGIERS: I am!

GIVIKO: Don't shout, Dad!

ALGIERS: Poor Mum!

GIVIKO: God bless us.

ALGIERS: (ANGRILY) It's all Ketino's fault. Who'd imagine I'd be digging up Mum's grave!

GIVIKO: Here, Dad, take the raincoat. (AFTER A PAUSE.) Dad!

ALGIERS: I'm not deaf, don't shout.

GIVIKO: Take the raincoat.

ALGIERS: Okay.

GIVIKO: Put it on the right.

ALGIERS: Don't tell me it matters!

GIVIKO: Then how did Ketino find out we'd forgotten?

ALGIERS: Give me the shoes.

GIVIKO: Here.

ALGIERS: On the left?

GIVIKO: Yeah.

ALGIERS: And coffee... Here I am – a fifty-year old man digging Mum's grave only because of an old woman's stupid dream. Is it normal? (IRONICALLY.) Ketino talked to her husband, oh my, who said we'd forgotten his stuff in the excitement of the last days. And he said Suliko's fine, with her husband, but he needs his stuff!

GIVIKO: He was right, wasn't he?

ALGIERS: And you believe it?

GIVIKO: How does she know we forgot?

ALGIERS: She doesn't. It's just a manic idea. And now it's coffee too.

GIVIKO: Here, take Ketino's coffee. I didn't know the dead drank it.

ALGIERS: Where do I put it?
GIVIKO: Between her feet.
ALGIERS: Okay. I've got it.
GIVIKO: We need to leave at daybreak, Dad. Otherwise we might be trapped by Ketino's dreams. Next thing can be an anti-virus for their computers.
ALGIERS: Are you joking?
GIVIKO: Didn't she say they had a virus up there? Why jump at me?
ALGIERS: Enough of this. Let's close the lid and put it back.

[THE LID IS COVERED.]

GIVIKO: Give me your hand.
ALGIERS: I'm too old for digging the grave.
GIVIKO: Here's your shovel.

[THE SOUND OF SOIL THUMPING ON THE COFFIN. THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE IS ACCOMPANIED BY IT.]

ALGIERS: Let's do it fast. We might be seen.
GIVIKO: Yeah, it's getting lighter.
ALGIERS: Still have got some time. Ketino pestered me the whole day. How she dreamt of her husband, how her miserable husband walks around in a tattered coat and how her poor husband's shoes are in a pitiful condition, how he's embarrassed to go out...

[A DOG BARKS IN THE DISTANCE.]

ALGIERS: Did you hear that?
GIVIKO: The gravedigger's dog.
ALGIERS: Come on, let's finish with this.
GIVIKO: I wonder if Ketino's gonna say anything today.
ALGIERS: Know what's driving me mad? The fact that I listened to the senile woman and dug up Mum's grave.

GIVIKO: I kind of knew we Georgians weren't really right in our heads, but I never thought it'd happen to my own dad. And all the while you're talking about joining the EU and the NATO.

ALGIERS: You're talking as if you're from Mars. You're a Georgian yourself, remember?

GIVIKO: Yeah but when you die, please don't tell me in my dream to put a satellite dish in your coffin because you want to watch football matches.

ALGIERS: And cold beer.

GIVIKO: I'm not joking.

ALGIERS: What do you want? To bury me and forget about me immediately? What about all the parental love and care you've had these years? Are you going to economise on beer and football, son?

GIVIKO: Where, in the grave?

ALGIERS: So that you have the World Cup all for yourself?

GIVIKO: I think we're done.

ALGIERS: God forgive me, please forgive me.

GIVIKO: Give me the shovel.

ALGIERS: Poor Mum!

GIVIKO: Come on, Dad. Give me the car keys.

[THE SOUND OF RUNNING FOOTSTEPS. TWO DOORS OPEN AND THEN CLOSE. THE SOUND OF IGNITION AND OF THE CAR MOVING AWAY. THE DOG IS RUNNING AFTER IT, BARKING LOUDLY.]

ALGIERS: (CATCHING HIS BREATH) Did you see it? I think we're safe now.

GIVIKO: (PANTING HEAVILY) Let's pack and sneak out as early as possible. If Ketino's husband wants croissants, I'm not gonna dig up Granny for them.

ALGIERS: God help me. I saw Dad's coffin in there. Poor Dad!

[THE CAR DRIVES AWAY. BARKING TRAILS OFF.]

WHO'S NEXT?

[THE FOLLOWING SCENE IS ACCOMPANIED BY
THE PSEUDO-DRAMATIC MUSIC OF A SOAP OPERA
FROM THE TV.]

TARASH: (YELLING THROUGHOUT) That's not my baby!
LIA: (SCARED) Mr. Tarash, why are you doing this to me?
TARASH: It's you, not me! You slept with that stable boy and now want me to believe the baby's mine? Why don't you marry him?
LIA: I've never wanted to marry you. And I've got nothing to do with the stable boy.
TARASH: I saw how he dragged you into the stable.
LIA: If you saw it, you should know I didn't stay there even a minute.
TARASH: If not then, you might've been with him some other time.
LIA: Mr. Tarash, I don't want anything from you. I just want you to know... (SHE SOBS.)
TARASH: What? You're a maid and should be in the kitchen. The baby's not mine! You can either have it or get rid of it! Suit yourself!
LIA: (IN DESPERATION) Mr. Tarash, sir... (THE SOUND OF A SLAP ON THE FACE.)

[THE FRONT DOOR OPENS WITH A CREAK. THE SOUND OF
HEAVY FOOTSTEPS WHICH SOON STOP.]

ZVIAD: (QUIETLY) Ketino...
KETINO (SLEEPILY) What's up?
ZVIAD: Don't be frightened, Ketino. It's me, Zviad, your husband.
KETINO: Oh, it's you. You scared me.
ZVIAD: I'm here and won't leave without you.
KETINO: Let me have a good look at you. Has Suliko brought your shoes? So kind of her. And the raincoat?
ZVIAD: She has but I wouldn't wear it in this heat, would I?

KETINO: That's what surprised me. I couldn't figure out why you needed it in summer. What was the rush then?

ZVIAD: How was I to know?

KETINO: I'm so relieved. You can't imagine how I pestered them for days, reminding of your shoes and raincoat. I said over and over again how much you needed them. They must've thought I was out of my mind.

ZVIAD: Yes but did you hear what I said?

KETINO: What, Zviad?

ZVIAD: I said I wasn't leaving without you.

KETINO: Do you intend to stay?

ZVIAD: No. I'm taking you with me.

KETINO: Where to? I've been dreaming of you for the last fifteen years and you've never said anything about taking me along.

ZVIAD: Because now's the time.

KETINO: Time for what?

ZVIAD: Michael has sent me.

KETINO: Anything else he wants? More coffee? If there's more, should they dig up the grave again?

ZVIAD: No, not that... It's hard to say...

KETINO: Good. You can go now and don't forget to tell Suliko how much I miss her. And tell her that poor Lia is pregnant from Tarash, but he denies the baby's his.

ZVIAD: Didn't you hear what I said, woman? You're dead and I'm here to take you to Michael.

KETINO: (LAUGHING) You don't say so! (SERIOUSLY, AFTER A PAUSE.) Oh really?

ZVIAD: You're dead. Now, we need to get going. I'll explain things on the way.

KETINO: How do you mean dead? Why do you stare like that? Have I really died?

ZVIAD: Did you think it was scarier?

KETINO: Yes... And the house... so unexpected... I'm not ready at all... Are you joking? No, you're not...

ZVIAD: Okay, let's go.

KETINO: But what about this place?

ZVIAD: That's not your worry from now on. Others will take care of everything.

KETINO: (THE CHAIR CREAKS AS SHE RISES) Why did I bother those respectable people then? If I were to die, I could've brought your stuff, no?

ZVIAD: I didn't know you'd follow Suliko so soon, did I?

KETINO: Didn't you die just like that? Right after Suliko's husband.

ZVIAD: Sometimes it's difficult to predict things.

KETINO: Did poor Suliko die like this?

ZVIAD: She did.

KETINO: And do my parents already know?

[THE SOUND OF THEIR FOOTSTEPS.]

KETINO: Can you please tell me how you thought of coffee?

ZVIAD: There's Liyba, Michael's secretary. And you know how jealous Suliko is. Anyway, it's a long story. I'll tell you on the way.

[THE DOOR OPENS.]

KETINO: I'm kind of sorry...

ZVIAD: Aren't you glad we'll be together?

KETINO: I am. Of course I am!

ZVIAD: My dear Ketino, honey...

KETINO: Zviad, am I really dead?

ZVIAD: Yes, dear, you are.

KETINO: And all the while I was afraid of death. Okay then.

[THE WOODEN DOOR CLOSES.]

AN UNEXPECTED CALL

[THE SOUND OF CARS ON THE MOTORWAY.]

GIVIKO: I'm really mad at you! How could you listen to that old woman and make me dig up your own mother?

ALGIERS: Who else could I ask for help? Should I have let your mum know over the Skype? And don't you dare tell her about it or she'll never leave England.

GIVIKO: Let alone Mum, I'm not gonna tell even myself.

ALGIERS: Have you ever heard of anything like this? One dead person taking stuff to another dead person.

GIVIKO: No.

ALGIERS: And have you ever heard of the dead drinking coffee in others' dreams?

GIVIKO: No, never.

ALGIERS: And did you know you couldn't fool the dead?

GIVIKO: Nope.

ALGIERS: Fine.

[THE RADIO IS TURNED ON IN THE CAR.]

RADIO PRESENTER: Last week was extremely rich in the developments in the Middle East. Despite all the efforts of the Arab and Western governments, Iraqi terrorists ...

[THE MOBILE PHONE RINGS.]

ALGIERS: Who can it be at this early hour?

CAMERAMAN: (HIS VOICE COMES WITH THE MOBILE PHONE EFFECT)

Hello, Algiers. It's the local TV cameraman. Can you hear me?

ALGIERS: Yes, hello. Is everything all right?

CAMERAMAN: No, not really. We've got another tragedy, Algiers. The whole village is in deep mourning.

[THE SOUND OF THE CAR BRAKING.]

ALGIERS: What happened?

GIVIKO: What's up, Dad?

CAMERAMAN: I'm trying to phone poor Ketino Asania's son, but can't get him on the mobile. Do you happen to know his home number?

ALGIERS: Why is she poor? I dug up the grave with my own hands, put her husband's stuff in Mum's coffin with my own hands – the raincoat, shoes and coffee. Don't tell me Mum hasn't delivered them!

CAMERAMAN: I'm not sure I understand you, Algiers. I know nothing about digging up the grave. What I do know is we've got to dig another, a new one. That's why I'm looking for Ketino Asania's son.

ALGIERS: (SHOUTING) I'm not going to dig up Mum for the second time and won't allow Ketino's son to go near it!

CAMERAMAN: Not for your mother, Algiers. Ketino Asania passed away this morning and I want to inform her son.

[PAUSE. ALGIERS DOESN'T REPLY. THE NOISE OF THE PASSING CARS.]

ALGIERS: Ketino died this morning.

GIVIKO: Poor Auntie...

ALGIERS: Hard to say which is easier – to be alive or dead.

GIVIKO: Probably to be alive like the dead. Turn the car, Dad. We're returning to the village.

[THE CAR DRIVES AWAY.]

THE END