

Mediator

The Rain

Air's tiny, wet droplets fall from the sky. They strike a tree, a tile, a stone, and release a point-sized fragment of pure air.

—"How are you?" — the vibration of rain creeps along the windowsill.

I don't know how I am. Who I am — that's covered by fog too. I often repeat it so I won't forget.

I am Liliana. Liliana, but they call me Leela, and it hurts me.

More precisely, it hurt me until my already diminished name turned into pronouns:

—"Does she have any food?"

—"Cover this poor thing with something, it's cold."

—"Is she asleep — does she understand our speech? Or if she's awake, does she understand?"

I wish they'd call me Leela again. I'd be happy.

Sometimes I'm embarrassed that my name is long. When mother fills in documents, before she writes "L I L I A N A" — she gets tired. Mother gets tired easily; mother is always tired.

—"It's raining — don't you see? Pull it this way, or close the window, don't get cold," mother tells father.

Sometimes I'm neither Leela nor "she" or "this poor thing." Sometimes no word is needed to hint at me, as if investing a word in me is an undue expense. Like paying money for a useless object.

—"You won't get cold," says father, and cautiously, very cautiously, wraps his arms around me from behind.

Rain comes, bringing from the sky air with tiny, wet capsules. They strike a tree, a tile, a stone, and release a point-sized fragment of pure air.

—"See how happy she is to watch the rain!"

—"Eh, how do you notice that?" — mother is tired again.

I am truly happy watching the rain, and I'm not surprised father knows it. Father and I have a secret channel: even if he just lays a finger on my shoulder, that invisible channel activates and transfers information from me to father.

Rain murmurs like mother, "Eh. Eh eh. Eh eh." — with each droplet's burst. Her heart breaks that they didn't see, didn't appreciate, didn't use her potential.

Suddenly I become weightless; I glow. When it rains outside, or the sun is out, or the wind blows, the weather begins to speak with me — this happens if father is near. As if I link weather and father together; perhaps that's why I came into being: so that father might make

friendship with the world. The whole village has hope in my father. Father revived the dead village.

The first time I understood I am a mediator was during a drought so severe that everything in the village wilted. The drought-scourged trees no longer bore fruit; people could neither eat nor sell a harvest. Our village was poor. Just like us.

Then one day a little rain fell somehow, and a few capsules of rain dropped on the parched earth belts; as they burst, the exhausted soil cried out “Auaaaa!” in pain — and I learned something new then: that sometimes when very great joy comes suddenly, it is mixed in the first moment with fear and pain.

When I thought that, father laid a hand on my head; I was sitting by the window then. The rain had warmed up, dawn came soon, and father said:

—“A water well! That’s what we need!”

That’s when I understood I am a mediator between the world and father. Rain needs me as a mediator to father. I am the one who is human and a part of nature at the same time, one who is neither entirely nature nor fully human.

Then father and the men of the village made a water well — huge, half a world’s size, as I gathered from father’s telling. They collect water there, and when the sky is dry for long periods, they use it for irrigation. The trees are happy they live and bear fruit; rain is happy that its value and use have been learned, no longer coming in vain. The village must be happy too, for it’s no longer called poor and has nothing lacking compared to other villages and people.

—“Nature is wise,” said father, “if you listen, it gives you everything for free.”

—“If it gave us everything, we’d live not in Zemo Chkhrimshi village but in Europe,” said mother.

I lost “Eh” at the start of that sentence. Father — I don’t know.

—“Do you think Europe is just geography?!”

—“Eh...” — mother shook her hand.

The Sun

The Sun enters through the window and boldly rests its long, multiple arms on my shoulders. They are so warm, almost like father. Rain always asks, “How are you?” and its vibration keeps repeating: “Calm down. May you be rejoiced! Calm down. May you be rejoiced!” I — I sort of don’t know — but I am always happy. Perhaps this light, as soon as it greets me, makes me transparent. It reaches me inside, warms me, and illuminates the darkness. It dries even the salty water that floods me inside. Calmness isn’t fearlessness for me this way, nor will it ever be.

—“They say a lot of money is allocated for people with disabilities, honey!” — the woman from the neighborhood tells mother. — “Go visit them!”
—“Eh...” — mother responds. — “When I was receiving this allowance, he didn’t let me spend it anyway.”
—“What a gloomy man you are, indeed!” — neighbor says to father.
—“How can we spend her money?!” — mother rebukes father. She is not just tired; she is angry.

I am by the window. Father comes and smooths the hair falling on my forehead. Meanwhile, he opens the window fully.

The sun enters boldly, resting its long, multiple arms on my shoulders. It is so warm, almost like father. Rain always asks, “How are you?” immediately, and its vibration keeps repeating: “Calm down. May you be rejoiced! Don’t be afraid. Calm down. May you be rejoiced! Don’t be afraid.” I — I sort of don’t know — but I am always happy. Perhaps this light, as soon as it shines on me, makes me transparent, enters me inside, warms me, and illuminates the darkness. It dries even the salty water that floods within me. Calmness and fearlessness don’t come naturally to me, nor will they ever.

—“Do you have a candle? Could I take one?” — the neighbor asks mother. — “It’s been two nights that I go to bed early because there’s no light. I couldn’t even buy candles; I forget.”
—“Yes — the wind has torn the power lines,” mother says. — “I bought several candles yesterday; I’ll give you one. Isn’t that enough, staying in darkness, when we all will go after a hundred years?”
—“See how happy she is!” — father says to mother, looking at me with a radiant face.
—“She’s not happy about that...” — says mother, sadly.
—“Eh...” — says neighbor, neither sad nor joyous, just neutral.

I am truly happy, and I’m not surprised that father knows. Father kisses my forehead, our channel activates, and I become weightless.

—“How can we stay without electricity in this century? We must find some way,” says father to himself.
—“You’re the savior of the whole village, you’re the only smart person here, but you’re not God to bring electricity. One needs money to repair the line — where to get the money?! I couldn’t even buy a candle!” — neighbor says.
—“God gave us everything; nature gave us everything. One needs to think,” says father.

I wait for one of the women to say “Eh,” but the neighbor laughs into her fist, and mother, just as she was about to utter it, restrains herself.

The Wind

The wind blows severely, to and fro. It takes away and brings everything on its will. Sometimes I think if it tried hard, maybe it would whisk me away and throw me into someone else’s body. I wonder. Wherever I would be, I would immediately shout loudly:

—“Daddy! I love you! It’s me, Liliana!”

Then I would think mother might be hurt. I’d call out:

—“Mama! It’s me, Liliana, don’t worry!”

Also, I wonder: no matter whose body it would be — wouldn’t that person pity, then, being in mine?

—“If I were Santa, I’d distribute electric cars,” — father is a bit drunk today. — “All over the village I’d put them at everyone’s doors and call: ‘Hey there! Bring your toxic smoke-emitting junk car and look what Santa brought you! Take care of the environment! Your child and grandchild must breathe that air...’”

—“Let your belly burst from all that you pour into it like in a qvevri (a clay vessel buried in the earth to keep wine)!” — mother snaps green beans at the table.

—“Shut up, girl, stop cursing, he is the only smart man we have in the village,” — neighbor says.

They both snap, sorting through the beans.

—“Smart? Haven’t you heard? He said he is Santa!”

—“Even if he were not smart, look outside — the wind has torn down the power poles and we are sitting in light. I didn’t pay for electricity, nothing. You curse him, but I thank him, and the whole village will thank him forever!”

—“Thank whom?” — father clearly enjoys it. — “Thank the solar panels!” — he answers his own question.

Wind blows, to and fro. It takes away and brings everything on its will. Sometimes I think if it willed, maybe it would whisk me away and put me into someone else’s body somewhere. Father comes, cupping my frozen hand in his.

—“Our girl is frozen,” he says.

—“Close that window, she shouldn’t get cold!” — mother yells, not asks. — “Now don’t you tell me ‘look, she’s happy in the wind’ or something like that, or else I don’t know what I’ll do to you!”

Father winks at me. We both know I’m happy. As if I become weightless, relaxed, but also — simultaneously, I can’t. Our channel evidently leans toward my mother; when father’s drunk, it doesn’t transmit the wind’s whisperings. Or perhaps it does, but father’s drunkenness cannot open doors, cannot let them inside.

I am happy that father gets some rest. Now let other men think about the village’s better life. Father put the water well for the harvest of the whole village and caused the village to prosper. Father installed solar panels and lit the dark houses. Father planted trees on the slope so tomorrow or the day after we won’t fear landslides. The air has become so clean you can’t recognize it. In short, there is work enough; today father rests. Today the gate to the channel is closed. I am in that thought and suddenly:

—“Windmill!.. That’s what the village needs!.. Free!.. From nature!.. God gives us everything!.. Don’t be afraid, Lil!”

—“Don’t be afraid, Lil! Don’t be afraid, Lil!” I hear father’s voice in the storm, and it stirs my heart. I’m weary, weightless. What is wind if not to restrain father’s drunkenness? He always takes and brings everything on his whim. If it were up to me, I’d let mother’s “eh”s pass through. I’d let the neighbor’s laughter pass through, the moment father covered his mouth with a fist. I’d let all pronouns and that “nothing” through — that I’m hinted at. I let them go, let the wind take them.

Only, I no longer want to take myself out from myself. Father holds my hand, and I know I will not find such reliable hands elsewhere. I am there the way God and the world created me. With another, perfect body, I could never participate in so vast a mystery of nature.

—“From the morning — the windmill!...” father plans.
I plan too: tomorrow, as soon as the sun rises, I will get ahead and say:

—“I have calmed down, Sun, I rejoice, I am no longer afraid!”

Author: Natia Rostiashili

Translated by Nana Namoradze