

The Sky Has No Borders



Creative writing from members of
Refugee Action Kingston

This book contains work written by members of Refugee Action Kingston during creative writing workshops in the summer of 2022.

We chatted, experimented with different styles of writing and explored different ideas and thoughts.

Most of all we created moments of happiness and well-being through playing with language and entering the world of the imagination.

The themes of peace, happiness and reconciliation all emerged in the writing that was created during our sessions. I hope you feel something of that peace and happiness as you read this book.

With very many thanks to the participants, who
contributed their writing and thoughts so
generously during our creative writing sessions.

Anton
Hamid
Natalia
Reimbay
Vitaly

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produced by Richard Neville

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Refugee Action Kingston for all their help in
making the sessions so happy and productive

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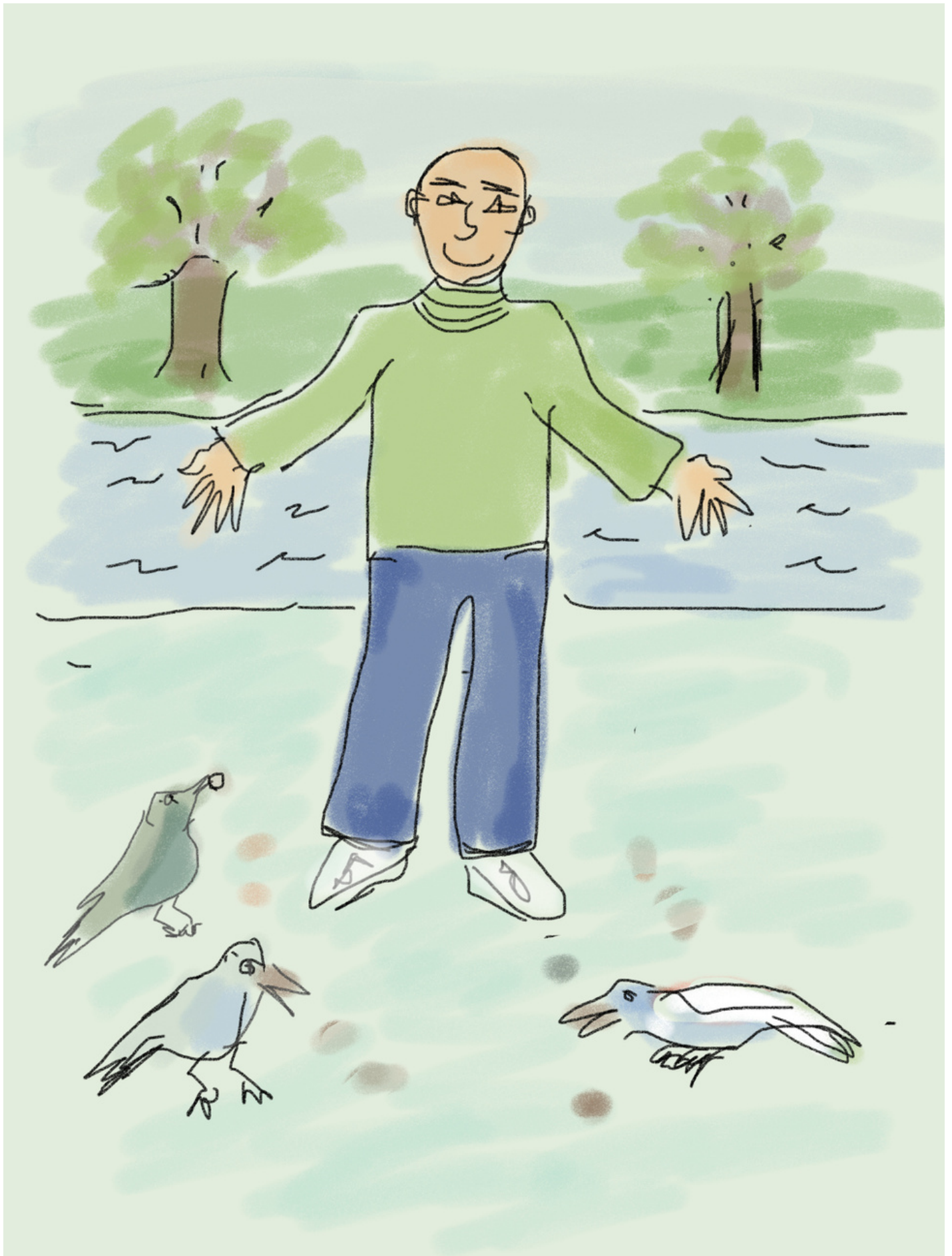


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Hi My Friend,

I'm Hamid and I'm writing about my life

I'm in the day time more than happy because:
Living in UK I have to go to school, and I have passed
Introduction 1,2,3 and now I want to go Level 1 in
Entry Level

I have two dumb-bells in my room and sometimes I
have to practice with my dumb-bells
I have learn English with laptop, phone and reading -
writing - watching - and listening to radio

I'm happy because I have plan about future
Sometimes I go to river and I feed bread to birds
because I love that
and I have happy about everything

Hi my friend - I'm Hamid And my katin
ebout my days

I talking ebout my live -

I'm in the day more than time Happy Becues -

I living in UK i have to go to school And i have 8 pasy
Prithy 1-2-3 And then i we go to level 1 in Enithy 1
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i have to Practic with my dambels - I have Learen
English with Labtob and phon And Reading -
kithing - waching - And Leasining to kadya -
im Happy Becuse i have plan ebout fiucher.
Sometimes I going in kiver times I feed bread to
berds Becues I love that And i have to Happy -
ebout every thing.

ebout

join
joined up

The Beauty of Summer

I like summer. It is beautiful time
Weather always nice and warmer. I wake up
in the morning to the chirping of birds.
Green trees outside the window and the
leaves rustle pleasantly. Flowers bloom and
nice smell. Wind blows, gently sway leaves.
Sometimes it feels like heaven on earth.

A fence may limit a piece of land but the sky
helps expand boundaries and dreams.
I love being in the garden in summer and
thinking about life.

June is beautiful
month

I like summer. It is
beautiful time. Weather
always nice and warmer.

I wake up in the morning
to the chirping of birds.

Green trees outside
the window and the
leaves rustle pleasantly.

Flowers bloom ~~and~~
and nice smell.

Wind blows gently
sway leaves.

Sometimes it feels

like Heaven on earth.
A fence may limit a
piece of land, but the
sky helps expand
~~boundaries~~^{borders} and dreams.

I love being in the
garden in summer
and thinking about
life.

24.06.2022

Vitaly

What happened to modern English poetry?

As a passionate fan of the poetic word, I have been trying to read some of the recent poems, written by contemporary poets. None of them sounds even remotely like, for example, Lewis Carroll's immortal:

*The time has come
The walrus said
To talk of many things
Of shoes and ships and sealing wax
Of cabbages and kings
And why the sea is boiling hot
And whether pigs have wings*

In contrast, in modern poetry, I can find neither rhymes, nor rhythms, nor verbal melody. It is simply prose written in rows.

Smart people tell me that modern poetry should abolish the tyranny of rhymes, and despotism of rhythm. The same people also tell me that everyone has a right to be called a poet, if one wishes to - and that it is simply a matter of Freedom.

Well, if it all boils down to Freedom, then, I guess, I can do nothing but agree with the modern interpretation of poetry, with one clause: I have the Freedom not to read it!

Hospitable Cyclops

Once I travelled in the mountains on a long road. I saw a fabulous bird in front of the stairs that led to the sky. I climbed up among the clouds for a long time. Suddenly everything changed dramatically and before me appeared the boundless sea and the boat on the shore. I decided to go for a sea rowing trip, but the boat suddenly began to sail by itself. On a sudden, a dragon appeared from under the waters and asked me in human voice what I was doing in the kingdom of the cyclops.

I said that I came in peace and love to travel to fabulous places. I would be happy to meet a cyclops.

A voice from heaven said that the cyclops is glad to welcome me to his kingdom. I immediately entered the palace and had a pleasant conversation with the cyclops for a whole week. It was an amazing welcome and an unforgettable experience.

Thoughts at the Loom

Cold and gloomy winter days. The freezing wind is howling behind the window ; the pack of hungry wolves are howling in the forest. An old woman is sitting beside her loom weaving. It is warm inside the room and safe. The cattle are fed and watered. Everything seems good but the mother's thoughts are all about her son who had sailed away last summer in search of a good fortune and memorable adventures in far far-away countries, far far-away lands.

Did he achieve his goals? Did he overcome all the harshities of the trip? Did he find his treasures: golden coins and diamonds? Did he overthrow all his worthy adversaries into the dust? Did he find the love of his life - the sunburnt young princess with tiny waist and deep dark eyes and long eyelashes?

Will we buy a big palace with many servants and amenities? Will I teach my daughter-in-law how to weave a warm coat for my grandchildren, how to cook a meat pie that will make her spouse love her even more? Will I scold the little noisy rogues for not washing their hands before sitting by the dinner table? Will I tell them the fairy tales at the fire place in the night before bedtime?

~~and do~~ The mother ~~of a~~
Long Cold winter days The Mother's Elegy.

Cold and gloomy winter days. ~~The wolf pack is~~
~~how~~ The freezing wind is howling ~~behind~~ ^{outside behind} the window; the pack of hungry wolves are howling in the forest. An old woman is sitting beside her loom weaving. ~~Her thought are~~ It is warm inside the house room ~~but~~ and safe. The cattle are fed and watered. Everything seems good but the mother's thoughts are all about her son who had sailed away ~~last~~ last summer in search of a good fortune ~~far faraway~~ and memorable for adventures in a far faraway countries, far faraway lands.

~~Is he have a set~~ Did he achieve ~~his~~ his goals?
~~What hardships did he~~ Did he ~~make~~ overcome hardships? ~~Did he throw~~
~~down worthy adversaries?~~ Did he find the love of his
~~Which a~~ Did he How did
~~Did he~~ Did he overcome all the hardships of the

My son...is he even warm now? Or maybe he is hungry?
Does he have a shelter? Or maybe he found himself in
the dust, breathless and cold....

Just come back alive!!!

trip? Did he find his treasures: golden coins
and diamonds? Did he overthrow all his
worthy adversaries into a dust? Did he find
the love of his life - the sunburnt princess
young princess with tiny waist, and ~~dark dark~~
deep dark eyes, ^{and long eyelashes.} Will I teach her we buy a
big piece of land and construct a big palace
with many servants and amenities? Will I
teach my daughter-in-law how to weave a
warm coats for my grandchildren, how
to cook a meetpie that will make her
spouse love her even more? Will I scold ~~my~~
the little noisy rogues for not washing their
hand before dinner sitting ~~behind the~~ by
the dinner table? Will I tell them the
fairy tales at the ~~for~~ fire place in the night
before bedtime?
Warm and cuddling? My son,
Is he even warm now? Or ^{maybe} he ~~is~~ hungry?
Does he have a ~~sh~~ shelter? Or maybe he ~~is~~ found
himself in a dust, ~~breathless~~ and cold? Just come back
alive ~~Just~~



If you love your enemy then you will know yourself

A dragon and a crocodile lived in the same kingdom and they were fierce enemies.


The dragon had a daughter and the crocodile had a son.

Daughter and son in love with each other, and begin to meet often, secretly.

The parents of the children found out about this and were upset, but then they saw the pure love of their children.

Children were able to change the inner world of their parents,
because the parents were able to recognise their mistakes and their attitudes towards their enemies and made them friends...

So....this story shows that...If you love you enemy then you will know yourself



If you love your enemy, (*)
then you will know yourself.

Story

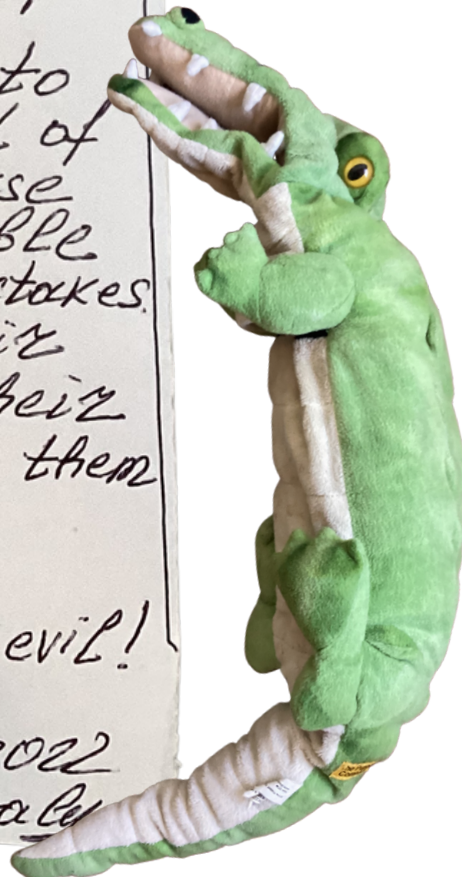
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Children were able to change the inner world of their parents, because the parents were able to recognize their mistakes and changed their attitude towards their enemies and made them friends. (*)

Love and goodness
always triumph over evil!

08.07.2022
Vitaly



Rhyming Poem

("this is the first poem I have ever written!!!")

When the flowers bloom and there is a breeze
I don't feel like my emotions freeze

Feeling blue won't give me a clue
But touching a leaf is such a relief

Climbing a tree
Makes me feel free

I don't need a fence
To know what is defence

My poem is chaotic
But believe me, it is not idiotic

Put your feet on the grass
Let's miss our bus

We live on planet earth
You should know it is time for rebirth

Don't be afraid to touch the dew
It will always feel true

- 1 (When the flowers bloom and there is a breeze
I don't feel like ^{my emotions} freeze
- 2 (Feeling blue won't give me a clue but
Touching a leaf is such a relief
- 3 (Climbing a tree makes me ~~all~~ free
- 4 (I don't need a fence
To know what is defence
My palm is chaotic
But believe me it's not idiotic
~~Step~~ Put your feet on a grass
Let's miss our bus

We live
~~We are~~ all on a planet Earth
You should know
It's ^{a good time} ~~time~~ for rebirth.
Open your eyes ~~for~~
Don't be afraid to touch dew
It will always feel true.

Happiness is a Game of Football

I played football again last Sunday. The team consisted of 10 players. My physical condition was in great shape. I was good dribbling and I hit the opponent's goal many times. I scored two goals and had a great head assist.

My goal from 10 metres with strong shot on goal turned out to be especially beautiful. Defenders and the goalkeeper did not even move. Our team won and I was happy that I helped us win!
I thank God that I can play football.



Some Text about Text

"I was always very interested in words and reading. I learned to read before I went to school. But before I could read I even loved the way the text looked. The Young Pioneers had a magazine, and I loved to look at the words laid out in columns.

I wanted to be a postman when I was a child, because I wanted to be able to hold all those texts and columns of print. I remember that I made some imitation magazines when I was very young. I could not read or write, but I scribbled on pieces of paper and made columns and blocks of text, and then I went around delivering it to people."

nb The Young Pioneers was a youth organisation in the Soviet Union similiar to the Scouts, Cubs and Guides in the UK.

Childhood

"We used to hear folk tales and fairy tales at school. We listened to them when I was in nursery school. Sometimes they were told using puppets and they were on TV as well.

When I was at summer camp one year, I was the king in a story. The story goes like this: there are seven brothers and they have a sister, and their mother dies, and then the father marries again and the step mother puts a spell on the brothers and turns them into geese. The sister has to spin a thread from a thorn bush, and then she sews shirts for her brothers. After seven years she puts the shirts on the geese and they turn back into her brothers, and the step mother...she goes away.

I remember those times and those stories. They were so happy. We played in a space surrounded by houses, where there was grass and lighting at night. We were playing all day long, playing football, until midnight sometimes, until it was dark, and no one was afraid, we were all safe."

Proverbs

If you love you enemy
Then he might become your frenemy



If you wake up early morning
Then you eat bread with honey



If you want to find a treasure
Don't waste time on leisure

If you want to achieve something
Then the whole universe will help you



If you give your love
Love will reciprocate



If you do good to people
Good often comes back to you

IF you love your
enemy

THEN he might become
your frenemy.

IF you wake up
early morning

THEN you eat a bread
with honey.

IF you want to find
a treasure

THEN don't waste your
time ~~for~~^{at} ~~in~~ leisure.

1. If you want to achieve
something,

then the whole Universe
will help you (Annamuk)

2. If you give your love,

then love will reciprocate

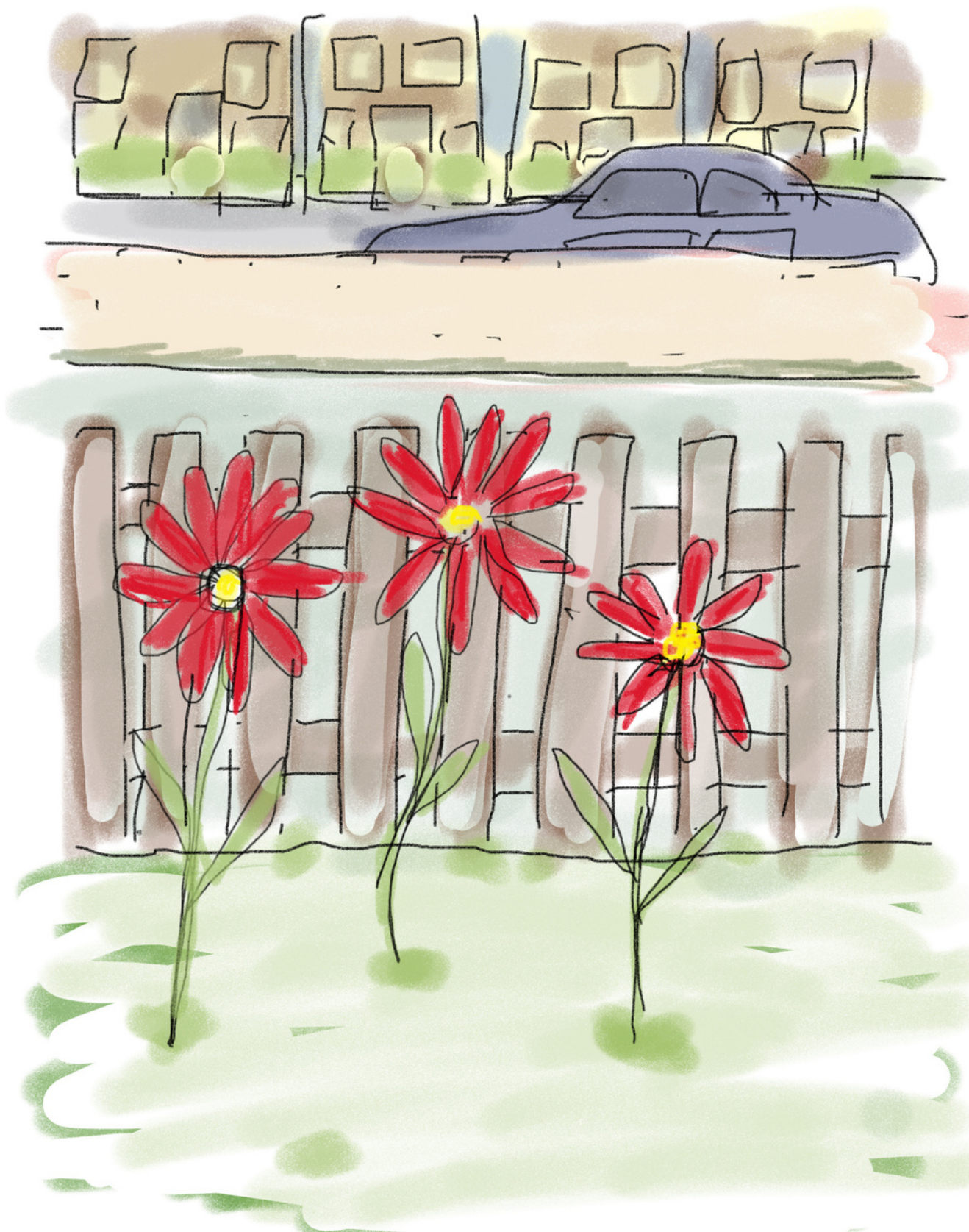
3. If you do good to people,

then good often comes back
to you.

The View Outside

Outside I am seeing beautiful red flowers, which growing close to the wooden fence. I'm feeling myself better than yesterday because it's blows breeze now. I'm so glad that there are people who can help me with my English. I really like this fresh air which is outside.





Short Story Exchange!

In the following pages, you can read an exchange of stories. Reimbay wrote a story about his experience in America and Richard re-told his story in a fictional form.

Vitali commented on both stories and suggested a new ending. And so a collective story was created!

How I became 'White'

It is said that gender is fluid but I would argue that race is no less so. Apparently it all depends... on circumstances. And this is how I realized it.

When I started my graduate studies at Georgia State University, Atlanta, I urgently needed support. I already had a master's degree and a lot of experience teaching mathematics in high school, so I was adamant about getting a teaching position in my university.

Thus one sunny day, in Atlanta that is a default mode of weather, I went to see Sandra, a department official. She gave me a bunch of forms to fill, which I did at once and brought them back to her as soon as possible.

Middle-aged with soft features, she was wearing always, along with her professional attire, a smile. Although, officially, she held a position of Office Manager in our department, there was barely anything she wasn't in charge of, from undergrad students' final grades to the proper equipment of study rooms. We had known each other for two whole semesters to the moment since as a graduate student assistant I had been meeting with her on a regular basis.

She goes through my forms and stops at one of the pages, 'You forgot to write your race here,' she points me out.

I didn't, I just hadn't been able to find the one that describes me properly. And "other" or "prefer not to answer" were not options. So, I left nothing checked.

'I don't know what to write, can I leave it blank?' I say.

'No, you cannot,' she replies, 'If you want to get the job, you have to fill it in.'

Oh no! I exclaim in my heart. Am I not getting the job because of this stupid race thing again? Being a “sneaky” Uzbek minority group back in my country, I had been denied many career opportunities, including the ability to work in my own alma mater. My heart plummets down somewhere into one of my feet.

‘I am Central Asian,’ I tell her in a small voice, ‘and it’s not there.’

‘Listen, Reimbay,’ she says calmly, seeing my disappointment, and starts explaining me that race is required due to some federal law which guarantees that minorities are properly represented in organizations.

‘We can do it right now, together,’ she says, taking a pen in her hand. ‘Just choose the one that best fits you. Or, if you are not sure, how about Mixed?’

Me? Mixed? Really? I know my ancestry quite well and I am as pure as one can get. Not like it matters. I chuck this option away, - ‘No, I am not mixed, I cannot be mixed.’

I am leaning towards her to look once more at the options and my brain starts working wildly: I am Central Asian, so in a broad sense Asian, but here in the US, Asian means Chinese, Korean etc. However Chinese are by no means a minority among graduate students in our department of Mathematics and Statistics – they are in fact a majority, comprising at least two thirds of the department’s graduate student population. If I am a minority even in my own country, I cannot be a majority here. How come? My brain is pounding. Then suddenly it clears up.

‘How about black, let’s put Black,’ I tell her.

I will never forget her reaction! She slowly looks up at me, with a mixture of amusement and anger in her face.

‘Reimbay, Black is someone like me,’ she is almost shouting, her finger pointing at her cheek. ‘Do you see my skin?’ – she is an African-American.

I am terrified, only now I realize how inappropriate it sounds. The thing is in Russia, part of which we had been until very recently, people of my race are called “chornyi”, literally meaning “black”.

I am rushing to explain that to her. Lucky for me, she is an easy going person, or should I say – tolerant. She has already come back to her senses, so to end everything quickly I add, ‘Asian, let’s just put Asian.’

‘You don’t look Asian to me,’ I hear and find Sandra squinting at me.

‘What do I look like then?’ I am starting to lose any hope of finding my race.

‘You look White,’ she declares.

‘White then, White,’ I quickly agree with her.

At this point I just want to be done with it, even if you call me Yellow-Blue or Martian.

The next semester I was already a professor, at least that’s how students started calling me. For the first time in my life! And also for the first time I became... 'white', but only in the US, and only in one of the departments of Georgia State.

Hi Richard and Reimbay,

Thanks, I liked it.

Of course, I smiled and read this good story with pleasure. Literally everything looks good enough.

However, in my opinion, this story also contains a deep meaning of racism, which has existed for a very long time in the modern world. People of other races, when they enter the society of dominant races, clearly experience complex internal feelings and oppression.

This is a serious question for inner psychological understanding.

It would be nice if at the end of the story Sandra said that:

"It doesn't matter who you are White, Black, Asian or Mixed. The main thing is that you are a person who is useful to society and brings goodness, knowledge and joy to the people around you."

Привет Ричард и Реимбай,

Спасибо, мне понравилось.

Конечно, я улыбнулся и с удовольствием прочитал этот хороший рассказ. Литературно всё выглядит достаточно хорошо.

Однако, по моему мнению, в этом рассказе заложен и глубокий смысл расизма, который существует очень давно в современном мире.

Люди других рас когда попадают в общество доминирующих рас, явно испытывают сложные внутренние чувства и угнетение.

Это серьёзный вопрос для внутреннего психологического понимания.

Хорошо бы, чтобы в конце рассказа Сандра сказала, что:

"Не важно кто ты белый, черный, азиат или метис. Главное, что ты есть человек, который, полезен для общества и несёт добро, знания и радость окружающим тебя людям".

Kind regards,

Vitaly.

White, Black, Asian, Mixed

'I'm going to tell her I'm from Turkmenistan, then she'll understand'

'Turkmenistan, where even is Turkmenistan?'

Jack was gazing at me, as though I was about to tell him I was joking all along, and I came from Miami.

'Turkmenistan is where I come from, it's near Uzbekistan'

He waved his hands in irritation

'That's Central Asia man, you come from Central Asia, if you tell Sandra anything, tell her you come from Central Asia'

'But the application form doesn't have Central Asia as an option. I think I should tell her my country instead'

'no, no, no man....'

Jack was a good friend, I was asking him for advice, but I didn't expect this. He looked at me earnestly

'Look Reimbay, you'll confuse people if you say you come from Turkmenistan, they'll think it's Turkey or somewhere, come on, you've got to wake up and start communicating'

He pointed around the cafeteria of Georgia State University, the less well-known of the two universities in this southern state of the USA. The students were milling around, dressed for the summer, which seems eternal in Georgia, and I felt absurd in my suit and tie.

'Look at these people Reimbay, look at them, what do they know of Turkmenistan? The most anyone does here is go on holiday to Albuquerque'

Jack was triumphant in his truth. The press of faces and people, the worry of completing my PhD, the noise and humidity, all these things began to oppress and trouble me. I was a stranger in a strange land.

But now Jack waved over one of our friends, Peng Li.

,

Peng man, come over here, tell me, you ever heard of Turkmenistan?’

This was becoming ridiculous. Peng, who is a citizen of China, put down his tray and smiled approvingly

‘He’s a brother, we’re all brothers’

Then he picked up his tray and went off.

I said to Jack ‘perhaps I could tell Sandra I am Asian’

This caused Jack to freeze with horror

‘Look, Reimbay, I’m warning you, if you go to see Sandra and fill out her damn form and tell her you’re Asian, she’ll think you’re fooling with her and that’s the last thing you want’

He leaned forward trying to convince me by the sheer force of his seriousness

‘if you’re Asian you look like Peng, and you don’t look like Peng, you just take a look in the mirror and you’ll see that you don’t look like him at all, not one way do you look like him, your eyes, your skin, nothing like him at all, you get me?’

He looks at me as though about to share a valuable secret for which I will thank him in later years

‘You’re white, man, you’re white, you’re white’

He points at the white plate in front of him

‘That’s your colour just like I’m black, you see’

He points at himself. Then he goes on with a passion in his voice

‘Read my lips Reimbay, you are not Asian, that’s a minority, that’s like Peng, and you don’t know what minority means, man, you’re white, you don’t know that stuff’

I feel as though I am losing the thread of myself. Who am I now? It's too hot, I can't think. I say desperately

'But Jack, in my country, I was a minority. I was an Uzbek, they persecuted me because of it, I wasn't in the majority, the Russians were the majority'

Now I play my trump card

'And you know what they called me - 'chorney' - it's the Russian word for Black. So you see, Jack, I am actually Black...'

I lean back, expecting him to understand, but he stands up quickly, gathering his tray, and clattering the cutlery nervously and impatiently.

'Reimbay, you never, ever, ever say to anyone ever that you are black'

He looks at me pityingly. We are friends. He shrugs his shoulders and says more gently

'Whatever you were over there, over here, you're white'

He walks away without looking back, putting his tray down on the pile at the door, and continuing quickly, out into the open air.

I too wanted to breathe. I was supposed to see Sandra in a few minutes for a final check of my application form. One part asked me to state my race. I had asked Jack to explain to me what that was. But I was none the wiser.

How could I be white? I had spent my whole life in Turkmenistan restricted by my status as an Uzbek minority. It was written in my passport. It was visible to everyone. It was what I was. I too knew what Jack knew, the same bitter truth. It was why we were friends.

But now he was calling me a white man.

The meeting with Sandra began to loom larger and larger. My mind seized on it, expanding its significance. If I told her I was white, I would be turning my back on my past, on the place I came from, on my entire experience of life. I would have made myself fake, hollow, false. I took a long breath, wiped my sweating face with a napkin and stood up.

I must go to see Sandra at once. I must complete the application form to become a teacher in the department. It was really not very hard. I could do it.

I made my way down the corridor that led to the administration offices. I walked past people standing around, laughing in that easy way they had. They ignored me as I passed between them excusing myself as I went. Why did I say 'excuse me' so often? I had no business in this world. I did not know what was funny or not funny. I did not know what was acceptable or not acceptable. I did not know black or white.

I knocked on Sandra's door and she opened it at once, as though she was waiting for me. This un-nerved me even more. How did she know I was coming? Perhaps the news had spread that a white man was about to declare that he was black. I felt guilty. I felt that my ancestors stood behind me in that corridor, even though nobody could see them.

Back in Turkmenistan, when we were feeling particularly rich or successful, just for one moment, we used to joke 'I feel like a white man!!!' We were speaking in Russian, using the word 'byely', which was what the majority Russians were called, it means White. In that world I was chorney and they were byely. I was black and they were white. But I could not declare that or say that or think that now.

Sandra sat down at her desk. She had the form ready, I had filled out most of it already. She pushed her hair back from her face as she studied it thoughtfully, flicking each page over. This form was the start of my new life. If my application was accepted then I would be more than a stranger in this place, I would have a paid teaching position. I would belong.

'Reimbay, you've done a great job'

'Thank you'

'Your personal statement is just perfectly personal'

She spoke in that courteous manner that I appreciate. But now she frowned, looking at the last page

'But there's one thing left, your race, you haven't filled in your race'

She looked up and her face was smiling, amused at my oversight. She pushed the paper towards me

'Just fill that in, then we're done'

I knew the moment had come. I bent over the page and looked at the options. White, Black, Asian, Mixed. How little they understood the meaning of these words to me. White was the colour of those who had driven me from my country. Black was the word with which they had denied me and restricted me. Mixed was everything I was not. I was singular, myself, from a line of ancestors who were there behind me, who urged me to go on and make my life better than theirs.

I took the pen that Sandra offered and slowly circled the word White.

She took the application back from me and nodded approvingly.

'I look forward to welcoming you as our newest faculty member'

She extended her hand, I shook it weakly, said my goodbyes and stepped into the corridor. My ancestors had fled. I bent my head. Under my breath, to nobody but myself, I uttered that phrase from another time and place, which was filled now with bitterness

'I feel like a white man'

'Hey, Reimbay, that's another thing, you mutter to yourself man, it's a bad sign'

I turned round. It was Jack. He was leaning against the wall on the other side of the corridor. Peng stood next to him. They had formed a small queue.

I tried to collect myself and asked them

'what are you guys doing here, you want to see Sandra too?'

Peng came up to me and pausing for a brief moment, eye to eye, he shook my hand. Simultaneously Jack slapped me rapidly and painfully on the back. Suddenly I understood, it was a welcoming committee.

'congratulations man'

'what, congratulations on becoming white?'

Jack smiled, slowly, and shook his head

'man, congratulations on getting the job, they're going to accept you, you've got it made'

He looked at me with his usual disapproval, turning to kindness

'you me and Peng, we're a team, we're more than a team, we're a walking dictionary, Black, White, Asian, you name it, we've got it...'

Peng was looking at me, trying to find the right words for this occasion. Finally he said

'like I say before, we're brothers, we're all brothers'

Suddenly my mood changed. My ancestors were not here to celebrate, but I was not alone. Those who wished me well were not far away, they were here in front of me. Those labels and words that seemed so important faded into nothing. Instead I saw the faces of two human beings smiling in delight, for no other reason that they wished my happiness. And in that moment I realised that I wished their happiness too.

I tried to find the right words, to put into English thoughts that were new but also familiar

'Black, White, Asian, Mixed...we're the mixture....'

I became more excited by this idea

'the mixture, the mixture, that's what we are, we are the human mixture'

The idea delighted me. The world was changing, we were thrown across it, we were mixed with everyone else, it was confusing, but it was exciting too. We were humans, it was our condition, let us celebrate it!

I laughed out loud. I seized Jack and Peng by the shoulders and shook them. I could only repeat to them

'We are the human mixture, we are the human mixture'

They joined with me in laughter, they accompanied me down the corridor, they strode with me through the cafeteria, and together we swept outside to breathe the welcoming air.

