**Samuel Menghesteab Zeughe**

**The Lonesome Soul**

I curse the day I met Zaid. I am not saying this as an excuse for hating her, or wanting to leave her. I am saying this out of distress. I can’t bear to see her go through the excruciating pain. In between the pain a smile appears, reminding me of her former beauty and making me want to cry. I know she is dying in my hands. How unbearable to witness the pain of a person you love! This must be a fate befallen only to me, I always think.

She is dying of an incurable disease. The pain this morning was the worst. She tried to bear it, looking straight in my eyes, tearing me between wanting to leave her – lest I see her go through the unbearable pain again and again, and offering myself in place of her.

She owned an incomparable beauty along with wisdom. Alas! The tumor in her breast step by step and slowly has disfigured her. She usually pleads with me tearfully to hold her hand tightly and not leave her. Looking at her, I always wonder how there is no other woman as innocent, kind and pitiable as her. I am not exaggerating, there is no other person as kind as Zaid.

When we first met, I took her as someone who was mean and self-centered. But later I realized her silence and her chat were the result of her uneasiness and worry. For anyone who saw us, sitting at a table with colorful and chipped glasses, planning our future together, we presented an image of an inseparable couple.

It feels just like yesterday, when she came crying and unburdened her heart to me. She told me to let her go. She said she had been through a lot in life, raising a child by herself and immersed in all sorts of habits – smoking and drinking, while I was a youngster whose life stretched in front of him and I was yet to start it. She pleaded that I let her go because I deserved a better person.

I told her I loved her. I told her I chose her knowing her past and present and that there was no other woman I loved as much as I loved her. I tried to explain that I understood her reasoning but I was unwilling to separate from her. She didn’t let me finish. She continued saying it was because she loved me she wanted to let me go; she didn’t want me to get hurt. She couldn’t treat me like she treated the others, her love for me couldn’t let her keep on hiding the secret anymore – the secret she kept lest the knowledge of it made me hate her, that she didn’t want to lie to me anymore. She held my hand in hers and pleaded that I don’t hate her.

I stared at her beautiful brown eyes and asked her to tell me the secret she kept from me. She eyed me and the look we exchanged stirred our emotion and we kissed passionately briefly before she breathed long and started to weep.

“My dear, please don’t cry and worry me; your cry is what is making me fall for you,” I said brushing my lips against hers.

“My dear Ben, I am scared – I don’t want you to hate me, and then lose you, nor do I want you to be with me. I am torn between two desires, I can’t control my emotions and thoughts.”

“Don’t worry my dear, I know all there is to know about you. And I am still with you. I think I know what you want to tell me. Go ahead tell me, there is nothing to fear,” when I said that, she told me what I was afraid she was going to tell me. I ascertained what I heard as a rumor. To lessen her uneasiness I laughed hard and she looked at me not knowing how to react.

“This is no news to me. People tell me all sorts of things about you. The first time I took you out, they told me you were at a hotel; other times they told me the streets you worked on, they insisted that they took me to the bar you frequented…I reasoned that you needed the money, maybe you needed it for your daughter. I never even asked you where you spent the night, yet I gave you money. Did you think I didn’t know? My little fool!?”

“It wasn’t my choice. I didn’t choose to spend nights with drunkards and strangers. I needed the money. I needed it for my daughter; my parents threw me out of the house when they knew I was pregnant; I didn’t have a choice except to roam the streets,” she said with tearful eyes.

That’s where I too met her; in the streets of cinema Dante. She was standing in the dark and I was drunk and looking for a woman. She wore a long black dress, her head covered in black scarf, expensive shoes in her feet and expensive bag in her hand. I asked her to come with me; she didn’t hesitate. We spent the night together and I started developing some feelings for her. Since that night our love developed and we vowed each other that we would not separate. We have been living together in her mice infested house since then.

Now when I think of it, I feel like my Zaid is fated to face all the trouble in the world. It all began when she mistakenly got pregnant and her family threw her out of the house. She went to live with her friend in Abashawl and that’s where she gave birth to her daughter. The women of the neighborhood accepted her as most of them were faced with similar problems and they didn’t want to see her suffer more. They looked after her until her daughter was a toddler; then they taught her how to take care of her daughter by doing the only job they knew – working in the streets. She was a good learner. She learned to appreciate both poverty and people’s love and sympathy. It was her loneliness, lack of money and the betrayal of the father who impregnated her that drove her to that kind of life. She thought she could get relief from worry and anger and therefore she began smoking and drinking. What was a temporary job began to become the only thing she could do.

Yet she took good care of herself. She never had sex without protection. She cleaned herself after every encounter, she used said, “How can a person stand in front of danger?” She thought of a solution for every fear and problem she faced. Then we met; she working to earn her bread, I looking for a temporary pleasure. She tried to flee from roaming the streets after meeting me but to no avail. And I stopped meeting with other women and remained with her; my ziadai.

We were in the middle of living our love when she got sick. The tumor that began at her nipple started to grow and the pain and sickness got worse from time to time. She was told it was cancer after she did all the necessary checkup. Then her breast was cut and the pain subsided and we continued living our love from where we interrupted it.

I must be cursed otherwise how can the only woman I fell for and wanted to be the mother of my kids get sick like that? I loved her as she was with all her weaknesses. I said I had found a woman to my liking and refused to listen to what my family had to say about my choice. “He is crazy about a prostitute,” people spread the news everywhere. I tolerated everything. I didn’t have money problem; I earned enough; I even found her a job. She didn’t fail me; she worked hard to help me. She tried hard to stop drinking and smoking. We pleaded with her mother to take her daughter and raise her so she could have a better life and after a long time she agreed. But the people didn’t stop talking about her being a prostitute.

But Zaid’s pain worsened, which became the reason for her getting fired from her job. Our love grew in our hearts. To love someone you respect and feel sorry for is both painful and beautiful. Sometimes the devil whispers in my ears and tells me, “Go live your free life, leave her,” and I spend the day without seeing her. Then I can’t bear the regret that follows! The pain it causes me! How could I abandon her? She knows how to love, too. She doesn’t get angry, she knows how to patiently help me understand her feelings. “Where have you been my love? I was worried. Come, have something to eat, but before that get cleaned,” saying that she brings warm water for my feet. And I feel pain, knowing where and why I chose to spend the day without seeing her. Then we get back to our warm love. Every time she gets better she starts smoking and drinking and then we start fighting. As time went by, her pain increased. What a life! Then she got rid of her second breast. Her tears and I were the only friends left with her.

We fought and argued about her stopping smoking; she couldn’t. As she suffers in pain, she holds my hands and screams. When it gets too difficult to see her go through the pain, I couldn’t help but wonder, “Why am I doing this? Her family had abandoned her, why am I still with her?” Then I tell myself, “Love is everything.”

I don’t know how she knows every feeling I feel. She knows when I am worried, when I am in doubt and when I am angry and when I feel regret. One morning, I woke up and left without saying bye. Then I regretted my act and went back buying fruits and vegetables for lunch. She wasn’t there. I waited for her, but she didn’t come. I had to go back to work. In the evening, I went straight home, she still wasn’t there. I don’t know where she spent the night. The next day I had to go look for her everywhere. For three days I looked for her and almost gave up on her. She then came back, her face withered and looking tired. “Where have you been?” I asked her in anger.

“I couldn’t let you go. I tried. I did. I tried to let you go. But I missed you so much, I had to come back,” she said in a tired voice.

“You want to leave me? Why? What have I done to you?”

“You didn’t do anything. It’s not you, it’s me. You deserve better.”

“Did you want me to get fired from work?” I couldn’t control my anger.

“My love, Please hold me first and then I will tell you everything. I miss you so much,” she said in tears.

I couldn’t get angry with her anymore.

“I couldn’t see you suffer because of me. I wanted to leave you and set you free but I couldn’t,” she said crying.

I felt sorry for her. Why does she have to suffer this much? I promised myself that I would never leave her again.

When she woke up yesterday, she smiled at me and eyed me with her beautiful eyes – the only part of her body that still held her former beauty in spite of her sickness. We have the habit of kissing in the morning. I must have held her tight that she startled me with a scream. I said sorry and felt her pain. When she got better she pointed at the box which was at the right corner of the bed and asked me to open it. She asked me to give her the smaller box inside. She opened the box and inside was gold jewelry and a bank note for more than 15 thousand Nkf. I was bewildered and surprised at the same time and all I could say was, “What is this?”

“This money is yours. Some of it came from before I met you, I got it selling myself and was saving it to be for my daughter; some of it I saved from my work and from what you gave me. The gold jewelry I bought from one lady for my wedding day. When he betrayed me I put it away and didn’t want to see it. Here take it.”

“But where did you get the money for the gold? Where you working then?”

“Yes, I hoped I was going to get married. But when I realized he was not to marry me, I started drinking and smoking. Before that I wasn’t smoking and drinking and was able to save money.”

I didn’t know how to react. I just listened and stared silently.

“I am dying. I know I am dying, the cancer is growing inside and I don’t have much time. I am leaving my daughter under your care, you take responsibility in helping her lead a better life than mine. My parents are mean, they may throw her out one day, please be her father and mother. Give her this when she is an adult. The gold is for her wedding day. The money could be of help to you. For my burial, at least. Thank you my love, you have been my rock,” saying that she couldn’t continue, her tears run down her cheeks and slowly and painfully held me, resting her head against my chest. Our hearts exchanged their vows not to leave and betray one another.

I pity her, the pain and suffering she has been going through makes me think of how a lonesome soul she has been. As her pain increases and our staying together is becoming numbered, I cherish the last days and wait for her death in trepidation.

*Translated from the Tigrigna by Rahel Asghedom Zere*

**Unexpectedly, Rich!**

They were laying on the *Oangerieb[[1]](#footnote-2)*, sleepily watching those passing through the adobe bricked compound. Aadadey never missed a chance to visit the *caticala[[2]](#footnote-3)* vendor. The drunks, their guts burning withcaticala, were waiting for the *kewarO[[3]](#footnote-4)* soup, neither its hair plucked nor in the pot yet. The air was filled with the smell of goats and the sheep’s hoof that was roasting over the fire. They all seemed as though they missed Aadadey.

Moraf wouldn’t put the pot on the stove until she was done cleaning, moving from hut to hut. Grach and Kuakuito*,* tired of waiting for Aadadey and his tastier food, were squabbling.

Every time Aadadey dropped by, saying his hellos and carrying his bag filled with tripe, onions, tomatoes, peppers, salt, bread and a knife, the customers of the caticala place greeted him happily. When he took out his cutlery, what he expected was obvious to the owners. They provided him with a small stove, a pot and a stand, and when he finished cooking, he drank his caticala and shared his meal with all who wanted to eat it.

Hearing Livingstone, who is never without his *abangala[[4]](#footnote-5)*, sing “Come back my love, far away you are,” saddens one’s heart. Though Yordanos, the woman from Asmara, doesn’t understand his language, she always sinks into her past, listing to his abangala until Aadadey passes around the tripe.

Today Aadadey was late. This was unusual for him, and they couldn’t guess what might be holding him up. They kept themselves busy, comparing the hair on the sheep’s hoof burning in the flames to the alcohol burning their stomachs. When Aadadey came in saying “Hello” with that bass voice of his, they greeted him warmly.

His bag seemed especially heavy. Though he usually put a stick in between its handles and carried it on his back, today he chose to fold its handles together and walk carrying the bag at his side. They were all curious to know what had happened to him when they noticed his body was covered in dirt. Yordanos was the first one to ask him.

“Why do you look like you just escaped the grave?” she asked in between bursts of laughter, feeling the caticala burning her insides.

“I visited the graveyard,” he responded shortly.

“You seriously look like you were dug out of the ground.”

“It’s nothing like that, *Asmarina*. There was a dance yesterday, and you know how we Kunama are! We hit the floor hard! The dust we stirred up made us look like the earth itself. Every time we dance and it splashes over our bodies, it feels like the earth’s way of telling us we’ll be returning to it sometime.’

Antonio, the quiet man who was raised in Sudan and who envied Aadadey looked at him closely and said, “This dirt on your body is definitely not of the dance. It’s of the grave. They probably buried you when you were drunk yesterday, thinking you were dead.”

“I just came back from visiting my uncle who died six months ago! Is that what you want me say? I already told you, leave me alone!” he said scratching his mustache. They all understood what he meant by doing that and heeded his request. They let it go and got back to their drinking and waiting.

“Should I get *dagha[[5]](#footnote-6)* or caticala?!” Moraf asked him.

“Caticala!” he answered, and without anyone noticing, he put his bag on the floor and began to open it. When he turned his eyes to all of them, he saw Yordanos and Livingstone sitting close to each other and thought to himself that they would make a very happy couple. He remembered how amazed he was by the stories she had told from her days as a student in Asmara.

"I'm from a rich family” she told him once.

“Why are you here, then?” he asked.

“I got hooked on drinking with my school friends. I had a boyfriend to fool around with, then. I got pregnant. I came here to hide from my family. My boyfriend came to take me back to Asmara after the baby was born. I refused to go. He rented a house for me here and went back. I wasn’t able to handle my addiction to smoking and drinking then, and I spent all my time in bars. When he came back to visit me, he noticed that it had become a habit of mine to neglect our baby and stay out at the bars. He went back to Asmara, this time taking our baby with him. And I started living here. Barentu and caticala absorbed me!” she told Livingstone. He felt sorry for her.

Aadadey took out a bundle of his money and started counting.

“I could invite you to share but hey, it's money. I could ask you to help me count it but you would steal from me. I’ll buy you one caticala each, though. Give it to them, Moraf!” ordered Aadadey.

Moraf promptly gave them all a three-quarters filled Coca-Cola bottle of caticala. Those drunks who only care about caticala, whether or not their stomachs were empty, were happy. And the customers who were craving Aadadey’s tripe and not the kewarO they claimed to hate began to wish that Moraf would put it in the pot already. And they were all curious to know where he had gotten the money.

The man who insisted he worked at an airport and who was always telling stories about airplanes thanked Aadadey for the caticala. Grach and Kuakuito, thistle and thorn, were jabbing at each other as always.

Aadadey, passing his fingers in between a bundle, stopped counting and said, “It’s nothing! There’s no way I wouldn’t buy you drinks when there's money to be spent. And this is just for today, I’ll go and get more when I’ve spent this!”

“From where?!” almost all of them asked at once. He didn’t answer.

Hearing him say that left them dumbstruck. They knew that amount of money couldn’t be counted in one day, let alone spent. What fascinated them the most, though, was how easily he said “I’ll go and get more.”

“Are you getting it from a money tree?” Abu-Khalil, the one who always drank in the corner, asked laughing.

Aadadey answered only “Yes,” which shocked them all. “It’s almost like that. I stripped the money from the branches.”

“Well how come you’ve never done that before?! Are you stealing it?!” asked the donkey cart driver, his hands and legs shaking from drinking too much.  
  
“I didn’t steal it! I’ve never done that in my entire life. Besides, I'm too old for that now,” he answered. “And it’s better not to steal when you’re in your fifties. I'm almost fifty-five. Leave me alone now, I never even stole when I was a young shepherd.”

“Where did you get all this money then?!” asked the cart driver.

Aadadey’s anger was growing steadily. “You don’t deserve the caticala I’m buying, when all you can think is that I stole it! Come and take this scruffy man’s caticala, Moraf. He can finish the one he bought for himself. And you go get a Coca-Cola for you and for those who are going to eat with me... How many are we?!” He counted them, “Get us fifteen plates of grilled meat. We’ve eaten only tripe and kewarO for too long. We’re not going to kill ourselves with this caticala! Here, take this money, and you’d better stop cooking that kewarO. I’ll buy it all and throw it out onto the ground. Let’s see what this cart driver eats then.

Aadadey imitated the shaking man, shouting, “*How can you eat grilled meat? KewarO tastes so much better! It’s what all those rich people eat in Saudi Arabia*! Rich! How does he think they got rich in the first place, if not by saving money on food?!”

“Don’t you dare look at me! I will make you take all the caticala and curse you to drink it and die. Relax, I’m messing with you. But you can’t stay with us today. Hmm, you thought I stole it!” The cart driver then finished his bottle of caticala and left the place shaking.

He gave Moraf almost a quarter of the bundle he was counting. “Don’t you try and steal from me! I am counting a bundle of ten thousand. What’s left of this bundle plus what I just gave you should equal ten thousand. I’ll know how much I gave you when I’m done counting. And give me the change!” He told her, and went back to counting his money. Suddenly he laughed. “Why am I counting? Look at this... all the bundles in this bag. And I’ll count all of them.”

“Why bother?”

“Because I’ve never done it before. I want to know how much I can count!”

“How high have you been able to count before?”

“Two thousand?” He looked at them questioningly, “I’m a man with a bag full of money today. I don’t care if I can’t count any higher. Even though I know this, that it won’t be possible for me, I’ll spend my life counting this money! Oh! How crazy this world can be. You will be amazed…" he paused, and then, leaving all the money where it was, he laughed and said, “I have to piss! You all keep an eye on this for me,” and he stood up and left.

They were all listening to him farting on the toilet, and they laughed when he spoke from behind the thin *tenkobet[[6]](#footnote-7)* separating them: “I’m watching you all! Yorda! You especially keep an eye on it.”

After washing his face and his legs, he came back and resumed counting. Having a sudden urge to have fun, he proposed, “I’ll ask you all a question, or no, maybe we will play “Ask and Answer Yourself!” And I’ll reward the answers I like with some of this money. This is a huge opportunity for you. You usually spend money where you drink, but today you can make money! It’s amazing. With whom should we start?”

“I’ll go first,” volunteered Kuakuito, the white-haired man who never tired of poking those around him.

“No, not him!" opposed Grach for no reason.

"What am I supposed to ask you?”  
  
“You have to ask and answer for yourself. If the question and the answer seem to fit, I’ll make you happy. Think of it like creating a job for yourself.'

“Why is God without a wife?” asked Kuakuito.

“Forget that. We don’t need a quarrel with God. Besides, how can we know of gods when we barely know of ourselves? This going to get us in trouble. Try another one?”

“If you say so! Why do we like children?”

“This is a good one. What’s your answer?”

“Because they look like a frog.”

“You have failed. A good question answered poorly. How can a child look like a frog?”

“Have you ever seen a frog?” asked Kuakuito. Aadadey laughed.

“I’m serious! They do look like frogs. When they crawl, with their hands flat on the floor, they resemble a frog that’s about to jump. They look different when they start moving, children crawl and the frog jumps. Check this out.” He sat on the floor, squatting like a frog. “See, when a human pisses outside or in Turkish toilet, he resembles a frog!”

“Alright, you’ve earned this with your portrayal." He counted and gave him 500 nakfa. Kuakuito laughed and showed Grach the money when he returned to his seat. Grach was not happy. “Anyone else? Who can ask and answer himself?” asked Aadadey.

Antonio stood up but the food was served before he could ask. They kept on drinking and chatting. Everyone who asked and answered himself received a reward from Aadadey.

“Enough with the questions; it puts one in an awkward position. I wonder why those who are willing to have interviews on TV or radio or the newspaper would want this kind of attention and willingly put themselves in a difficult situation. Yet no human can live free of questions."

Aadadey noticed three police officers passing the huts with their batons out. They reached the caticala and stood there looking at the money. “Hello officers, to what do we owe the pleasure? You heard that I have lots of money and you want to know where I got it, right? To make sure it’s not stolen, huh?” Laughing ironically, he said “I know who told you. Have a seat, take this and don’t arrest us. It’s not stolen! Relax and have a drink.” He offered to give them five hundred nakfa each from the bundle he had already begun to spend.

“We are not going to take it. It’s not ethical,” said the one who seemed to be in charge. “Thank you for understanding why we are here. We have been ordered to take you in for questioning, not to be questioned by you.”

Crossing his legs and reclining in his chair, Aadadey laughed. “I'm paying for you, no?” He looked at those who were drinking with him. “Either beg them to leave me alone or at least laugh at them, since they’re making a mistake! They think I’m bribing them. Maybe you don’t know this, but bribes aren’t offered out in the open. *Baksheesh*,[[7]](#footnote-8) sure. If I give you what I want to give you, it’s not a bribe. If you ask me for money in exchange for my freedom, then it’s a bribe.”

“Stand up and come with us! You are wanted by the law, you thief!” said the third one, trying to beat him with a stick.

“I’m not going. I am not a thief. Don’t break the law while asking me to abide by it. You must respect it first. The law isn’t a game, you can’t just insult me like this! If you think the money isn’t mine or that I don’t deserve it, take me to court. I’m not turning into a criminal now because you tried to scare me with that stick. I have a lot more money. You can take it yourselves if you want it. Don’t think I like it, I don’t even know what to do with this kind of money! Take it.” He threw the money on the floor.

“Shut up!” said the policeman, landing a warning strike on his ass.

“I will not, this is a bar.”

“Stand up and come with us, you are wanted by the law!” ordered the boss.

“Why would I let you take it?!” He picked up the money and papers which were laying on the floor and put it back in his bag. ’Yorda you hold on to the money, and put the papers somewhere safe, you will give it back to me when I need it. I will go with them and be back. They’ll say they didn’t hit me when we’re there, though. They’re amazed that I'm rich. They wouldn’t let me be rich for a minute. Do the rich always have to have fun at the big expensive hotels?! This really is amazing! They wouldn’t ask where I got it from if they saw me spending it at the big hotels. Is that drunk cart driver the one who told you?! Let’s go brothers,” he said, and led the policemen to the door.

Those who won money playing the “ask and answer yourself” game, returned the money to the police and explained that it had come from Aadadey. Kuakuito said "I told you so, I knew this money would drag the devil to us.” Aadadey stared at him for a moment, then said "I got this money by tying up the devil himself. I collected my money, and tied down that devil that you said was on the way.[[8]](#footnote-9) The police should give me a token of appreciation for my good deed. It’s alright, I’ll tell you all about it when I get back. The one who plans on hurting me today is the one who A’na won’t let eat. You know A’na right? It means god. No courageous man can terrify the Aadadey who has tied down the devil!” He continues, "Yorda, feel free to eat and drink until all the money is spent. I’ve got twice as much as what you see here!"

“Aadadey” called their boss in an authoritative voice. “*You* are taking it. You cannot leave any of it here.”

"Let me save you some trouble. You keep asking if you’re being told the truth. Let me tell you the truth now, before you go on beating me. You want to know where I got the money from? If this is about that, you should know I have even more of it.” He walked toward the station, leading the policemen, arguing with them all the way.

“We don’t care if you have more or not. You are here because you are wanted by the law. Be disciplined. You need to be quiet and wait for the officer who is questioning you today. Don’t move.”

“Move where?! Alright, I know what to say when he comes to question me. Where is he? Right now I'm so rich - who could have more money than this?! I don’t care if you take it now. I'm happy that I’ve seen it and held it in my hands.”

“Here he is. Move!” said the officer who did all the talking. He then took him to a room, with one table and two chairs.

After greeting each other and taking care of the formalities, they started to get to the point.

“Where do you get the money from?”

“It’s mine.”

“I didn’t ask if it was yours or not. My question was where did you get it from?”

“My uncle.”

“How did you get it from your uncle?”

“It was there.”

“Where do you mean?”

“At the place where he told me it would be.”

"Cut to the chase. I need details. I will ask if I need you to clear something up for me in between. How do you find this money? Where did you get it from?”

"It’s a long story! I’ll tell you if it doesn’t bore you too much. My uncle used to live around Shekat. He used to have money and secrets that he inherited from his uncle. The secret was, how to mine and where to find the most valuable and plentiful gold. He used to make his living selling gold. Because he saved almost all of his money, he told me where to find it. And here is the document that shows where it was sold.”

The interrogator was stunned and delighted when he saw the documents. “That's almost three hundred thousand! Why are you spending this money earned through hard work carelessly?!”

"Because it’s mine.”

“How is it yours?”

“I inherited it from my uncle.”

“Where is he?”

“He died."

“When?”

“Six months ago.”

“Why didn’t you get the money then?”

"He left it for me because I’m his older sister’s son.[[9]](#footnote-10) He told me “You can’t do the work we did. You’re only good at drinking. If you had money now you would spend it all on caticala - you need to learn how to work to earn it. Once you know the taste of it, you’ll know how to get it for yourself.” But I didn’t understand his instruction then.”

“How did he give it to you?"

“He put a blank white piece of paper in a plastic bag and told me not to open it in front of anyone. He said that it would blow away if I did. I was angry, not knowing what do with that blank white sheet of paper. But then, thinking the paper might hold a secret, I asked a friend of mine who is a teacher for help. The teacher opened the plastic bag, took out the paper, and sprinkled soil over it. The text was written with a wax that was made visible after brushing the soil over it, and it read, “The secret will become clear to you, at the time of dancing with the *kish -kishe.[[10]](#footnote-11)* You will find your inheritance at the *Nabula*.”

“What’s a Nabula?” asked the policeman.

“A family burial-ground. I know this because I was there when they dug it. It’s a big hole. No one goes in there except for those who provide the burial service when someone dies. I went there at night, shaking out of fear that the devil would find me. The devil did find me on the way, and I was begging him not to slap me and disfigure my face when my teacher friend came from behind and struck him with a stone. The devil collapsed. Still shaking, I walked over to see him and realized that the devil was a man I knew, Mr. Beraki. Then, we tied him up and threw him by the road.”

“You’re the one who tied up that man we found on the way to Kerkasha?”

“Yes. The teacher and I are the ones who left him.”

"Who is this teacher you keep talking about?”

“His name is Teklezgi. He works at Duta, the secondary school.”

After taking down the teacher’s full name, the policeman urged him to keep talking about the money.

“Later, when the teacher went back to his house, I entered the grave and took out the money without anyone watching. You can’t arrest the teacher though - after all, we caught the man who used to scare people by stopping them in the street and saying he was the devil! The only reason we didn’t take him directly to this police station was because we were afraid you might ask what we were doing at the graveyard in the first place.

“I'm happy that you found the devil, but we’ll discuss that later. Let’s keep talking about you.”

“No one was around. It was dark, the hyenas were howling and the donkeys were running away. Having tied him down, I was no longer afraid of the devil. What scared me was the silence of the grave. My legs were shaking, and whenever I flashed my flashlight I felt like the bones of the dead were coming back to life to take hold of me. But I found gold of inestimable value and a lot of money on top of that in the corner of the grave. I knew if someone saw me there, they would hate me for disgracing that place. But I took it because it’s money. My uncle kept it there so that I could understand how dangerous it was, to climb down into a hole to retrieve the gold. So I’m grateful for what he did, because it inspired a sense of ownership in me. And I’ll go and work at the gold mines after I’ve spent it all!”

“Your uncle was a wise man. He knew you well. Where is the rest of the money, now?”

“At my place.”

“You know Aadadey, you should put it in the bank. We can do that for you, under your name.”

“I don’t like banks.”

“You could lose it, or get killed for it when you are drunk. You need to keep it in a bank.”

“I haven’t gotten enough of it. I want to sleep with my head on it. I like counting it. The money isn’t my inheritance, though. My inheritance is the lesson I learned on how to find gold.”

“How did he leave that for you?”

“He wrote it down on a piece of paper, and a friend of his is going to explain it to me. I respected his instruction and tore up the paper. I’ll learn before I spend all the money. I’m not the poor me anymore. I’m rich. This is the letter he wrote me, and this is my inheritance.” He handed the papers over to the policeman.

After he thoroughly inspected all the documents, he laughed and said, “You can go now, Aadadey.”

“Grazie!” Aadadey thanked him and left a little money on the table.

“*Ana mieso,”* he responded, without touching the money. “God bless you. Tomorrow, you will take us to this place. We want to know how you got in, and we need to arrest that other devil that you didn’t take care of!”

“Ana mieso.”

“*Ana bubuNa kaso*” Aadadey replied. “May God bless you even more."

He then went back to the caticala place with all of his money and documents. On the way, he decided he would unite Yordanos and Livingstone in marriage.

*Translated from the Tigrigna by**Martes*

*Translation edited by Kaylee Lockett*

1. a bed made of rope and used outside, common in the lowlands of Eritrea [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. a distilled alcohol produced locally in Eritrea, usually in small batches by individuals [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. a modest soup considered to be food of the lower class in Eritrea, but valued and eaten by the wealthy in other countries [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. a stringed instrument [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. an alcoholic beverage brewed in Eritrea, Sudan, and Ethiopia [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. a mat made up of woven leaves [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. money given as a tip, gift, or bribe [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. there’s a popular local story that says that the devil is found on the way to the graveyard [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. in Kunama, inheritance is passed through the mother [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. a group of small children dancing to entertain the mourners of a dead elder [↑](#footnote-ref-11)