



TULIPS STAND FOR GOD

by

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Lale family 1925

Tulips stand for God

Chapter 1

My grandfather's name was Konstantinos.
His mother's name was Georgia.
He was born in Manisa, Asia Minor, Turkey in 1917.
His father's name was also Konstantinos.
He had five siblings, one sister and four brothers.
His father was running a tavern at the old bazaar of Manisa.
He immigrated to Greece in 1922.
He became a refugee at the age of 5.
His last name was Lale.

Their last name was Lale.
My last name is Lale.
I migrated to the New York, USA in 2014.
My father is an artist.
I have two siblings, two brothers.
My father's name is Charalampos.
I was born in Haidari, Athens, Greece in 1989.
My mother's name is Sophia.
My name is Georgia.

Our last name is Lale.

Lale it is.

Chapter 2

My grandfather died in 1998.
I was ten years old.
He was eighty-two years old.
He passed away a February night.
His wife Sofia and his son Charalampos were with him.
He was the sweetest person I've ever known.
He would sit next to me when I was doing my homework.
"I am proud when I see you studying" he would say.

He still is,
when I study,
when I make art,
when I perform.

He died in 1998.
He was exiled to Ikaria Island, during the Greek civil war, in 1946
He fought in Albania at WWII.
He immigrated from Turkey to Greece in 1922.
He was born in 1917.

Did he not know?



“FatherLand” performance at Izmir Port, Turkey, April 2018

Chapter 3

Did my grandfather know?

Did he go through his whole life keeping this secret to himself?

Did he spend a life in fear that his family secret maybe revealed?

His wife didn't know.

His son didn't know.

He had to know.

His loving body revealed his secret, a February night of 1998.

He was circumcised.

Chapter 4

His mother's name was Georgia.
She gave birth to her youngest on the Izmir port.
She was watching the Greek army ships leaving.
She was waiting for them to come back, to take them to the mother-land.
The city behind them was on fire.
She was watching.
She was waiting.
She was giving birth.
The Greek Army ships never came back.
She was still waiting,
And watching,
And giving birth.
The British Army ships picked up the refugees.
They crossed the Aegean Sea.
They arrived to the mother-land.

She was breast feeding.
With her brown eyes wildly open,
She was watching.

She had a tall, thin figure.
She was a long face girl, just like me.

Chapter 5

My grandfather's name was Konstantinos.
His father's name was also Konstantinos.
He was running a tavern at the old bazaar of Manisa.
He reunited with his family in Lagada, Thessaloniki, Greece in 1925.
He didn't say much.
He was quiet.
He had secrets.
He was a mystic.
He was an Islamic mystic.
A Dervish.
A Mevlevi.

He was trained at the Mevlevi academy of Manisa, for one thousand and one days.
He taught his family music, singing and dancing.
He taught them the worth of silent.
He taught them not to talk,
about what they saw
about what they knew
about who they were.

He stayed back in 1922.
He hoped.
He hoped that he will bring his family back to Turkey.
He was a Sufi.
He believed that one can reach God through the arts.
His Order was banned in 1925.
Their institutions were abolished.
They were prosecuted.
He escaped.

Dressed up as an old woman,
He took the train from Manisa to Izmir port.
He crossed the Aegean.
He found his wife in Northern Greece.
Waiting for him.
Waiting with her six children.
He was finally there.
He was their way back.

There was no way back.
They never saw their fatherland again.
They had no past.
They had no future.
Only present.

His name was Konstantinos.
The name he reported to the Greek authorities, was Konstantinos.
The name of his favorite son, my grandfather.
He was a man with no name.
He was a man with no land.
He was a man with no country.
His faith was forbidden.
His faith taught him the power of silence.
And he kept silent.

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“FatherLand” performance at Ephesus, Turkey, April 2018

Chapter 6

Secrets tend to leave traces.

Secrets became encrypted messages written on our skin.

My grandfather was taught to keep secrets.

He didn't tell.

Nobody knew.

His entrance to eternity broke his life long silence.

His death revealed his and his family's biggest secret.

His father.

My father's grandfather.

My great grandfather was a Mevlevi, a Sufi.

Chapter 7

April 2018

One hundred and one years after his birth.

His son, Charalampos and
His granddaughter, Georgia

Crossed the Aegean

Stepped foot on Izmir, the fatherland

They returned.

My father's desire became mine

I promised, I will take him back.

I promised, I will take them all back.

I did.

It was my duty.

My grandfather never returned.

He died away from home.

It is difficult to leave home.

You dream about it every night.

You visit every night.

You wake up in the morning.

You wake up far away.

What my grandfather was dreaming of?

What his mother was dreaming of?

What his father was dreaming of?

We all left.

We all tried to escape from something.

Some survived,

Some did not.

Some survive,

Some do not.

Some will survive,

Some will not.

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Chapter 8

I always wanted to leave.
And I did leave.
I always wanted to go forward.
But I had to go back.

I had to see it with my own eyes.
I had to feel it on my own skin.
I had to hear it with my own ears.

They fled.
We flew.
We saw the city from above,
It looked like any other city.
It didn't feel like any other city.
The Izmir port sea.
The Izmir port breeze.
The Izmir port sunset.
Similar like any other port.
Not like any other port.

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“FatherLand” performance at Izmir Port, Turkey, April 2018

Chapter 9

I took them all back.
The Izmir port breeze refreshed their faces.
They looked around,
Through my eyes,
Through my father’s eyes,
Through my art.
We were all present.

My love for them,
Their love for me,
My father’s love,
My love for my father,
Brought us here.
Waving their last photo together.

Chapter 10

They flew over Izmir.
They flew over Ephesus.
They flew over the Mount Sipylus.
They landed in Manisa.
The city where everything started.

Nothing was left behind in Manisa for us.
The old Greek houses were long turned into apartments.
Now, the old cemetery is a park.
1.000 houses survived the great Manisa fire in 1922.
11.000 houses were set on fire by the retreating Greek army.

Nothing was left behind in Manisa for us.
Only few abandoned Greek stores at the old Bazaar.
Only few people with refugee grandparents,
From Crete, from Thessaloniki, from Greece.

There was one person waiting for us.
She had been waiting since 1922.
She had been standing beneath the Mount Sipylus,
Looking over Manisa,
Waiting for us.

Chapter 11

We asked for her.
She is just a rock,
They told us.
“The Weeping Rock”
I saw a boy playing on her.
Stepping on the water that was coming from inside her.

Niobe.
You are always crying for your lost children and your burning city.
You,
The symbol of the desperate mother that cannot protect her children.
You were there,
Waiting for us.

There was no boy playing on you.
There was no water coming from you.
Eaten sunflower seeds and broken bottles were your company.

A few young women, were having tea and cookies close by.
I climbed you.
I held my grandfather’s family photo,
Up in the air.
I let them wave above their city.
Our city.

It wasn’t me that was holding the photo.
It was all the women,
Greek and Turkish.
All the women that lost their houses.
All the women that lost their children.
It was Niobe.

The young women offered us tea and cookies.
They were happy that we were back after all those years.
We hugged them like they were our lost family.
They hugged us like we were their lost family.



“FatherLand” performance at Manisa, Turkey, April 2018

Chapter 12

We walked across the hill,
Looking for the Mevlevihane.
We got lost.
The school day was over.
Kids were flooding the streets.
An old man asked a teenage girl to show us the way.
She walked us up the hill through the small village streets.
Two young boys passed by.
She turned around and looked straight into my eyes.

She wanted to share something with me.
Maybe her teenage excitement or confusion,
Maybe a secret love story, similar to mine.
Maybe she sensed my broken heart and
She wanted to comfort me.

Chapter 13

We entered the Mevlevihane.
The main room was simulating the everyday routine of the Mevlevi academy.
Human size dolls were dressed and positioned
Like the dancing Sufi.
Music instruments, traditional dresses and carpets were on display on the wall.
The shaman tambourine was among them.
Georgia, my grandfather's mother was playing this ancient instrument.

A man ran into the room.
He turned on the sound system.
Sufi music flooded the air.
I was sitting next to my father.
He started crying.
My first thought was that I did something that upset him.
I never want to make him sad.
It wasn't me.
I walked out of the building.
I gave him space.
I sat under the shade.
The same man that turned on the music asked me if you are ok.
He was checking on you.

The music, you said.
The music, reminded you of the songs that your father was singing to you.

Your father,
My grandfather.

Your grandfather,
My great grandfather.

Your grandmother,
My great grandmother.

All.

They all had been here.
At the same old building.
Learning from wise teachers.
Communicating with God through music and poetry.
Creating art.
Sending messages to the future.
Calling us to come back and find them.

History is not written in books.
History is written in our hearts.
History is written on our skin.
History is guiding us,
Through our dreams,
Through our fears,
Through our lives.

There are so many things that we will never learn.
They will be so many secrets on our way.
Secrets that we can turn into art.
Secrets that will not divide us.
Secrets that will hold us together.

Our ancestors are alive.
They live through our memories.
But, even if we forget,
The body remembers.
The body knows.
The body holds all the keys.
The body has all the answers.
The body's memories produce all the art.

Chapter 14

When I was little,
We were sleeping at the same room.
You were letting me stay up late and watch TV.
I could feel you getting sleepy,
But you weren't complaining.

I turned off the TV.
Pappou, do you want me to sing to you?
You said my voice, sounded like your mom's.
Both Georgias.
Her and I.
Your mother was putting you to sleep,
Through your granddaughter's voice.

I'm sorry Pappou,
I'm sorry that I was so little.
I'm sorry that I couldn't take you back.
But I did.
Your son and I,
Did go back.
And you did too,
Through our bodies.

Lale.
Lale means tulip in Turkish.

In the Islamic art,
Roses stand for prophets.
Tulips stand for God.

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Front page ebru painting by Georgia Lale from the series “Tulips Stand For GOD”

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