



LACK OF LIGHT

BY NINO HARATISCHWILI

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Das mangelnde Licht

Novel. German.

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**– The new novel by the internationally bestselling author –
The Eighth Life (For Brilka), over half a million copies sold so far,
‘devastatingly brilliant’, *The New York Times***

‘Here we stand, the trio that got away, that made the leap into the present; we, the survivors, who try to go on living as proxies for all those to whom this was not granted, and who will remain young for all eternity in these photographs. We want to go on concealing from the world that we are fleeing – fleeing this burden, this unjust fate – and that we sometimes wish we were the ones who had remained on the other side of these photos. And so we walk through this museum of mistakes, surrendering to the illusion that, for a few hours at least, we are bringing the dead back to life.’

Qeto Kipiani, conservator and chronicler (1973–)

‘I lived, Qeto; I stocked up on life.’

Dina Pirveli, artist (1973–2000)

As the end of the century approaches, the voices calling for separation from the once all-powerful, now tottering giant are growing ever louder. In this period of great upheaval, which culminates in chaos for the young state of Georgia, Qeto, Dina, Nene and Ira grow up alongside each other in an ‘Italian courtyard’ typical of Tbilisi’s Sololaki neighbourhood. Their lives play out between damp walls, and on enchanted wooden balconies; their families’ backgrounds and social status are as different as the four girls are from one another: Dina, hungry for freedom, fatherless, living with her unconventional mother; Ira, the clever outsider; Nene, the romantic, niece of the most powerful criminal in the city, a notorious ‘thief in law’; and the sensitive, motherless Qeto, who lives with her two cantankerous grandmothers, a father obsessed with science, and a rebellious brother.

The novel tells of a great first love that can only blossom in secret; of the violence that erupts with the country’s new-found independence; of bloody street battles and civil wars, food rationing and power cuts, the piercing cold in winter, divisions in a young democracy in turmoil capable of splitting families apart; the heroin that floods into the country, a lucrative business for some, escape to destruction for others. Despite everything, the four women’s friendship seems indestructible – until at last it is shattered by an unforgivable betrayal and another tragic death.

In 2019, they are reunited at a major retrospective of their late friend’s photographs in Brussels. These pictures recount their story, which is simultaneously the story of their country. And so, for them, it is a very intimate

retrospective that forces them to lift the veil drawn over their past. Suddenly, after all these years, a light is shone into the shadow world of their memories; something new is glimpsed, and forgiveness seems possible.

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The multiple-award-winning novelist and dramatist Nino Haratischwili is one of the most important authors of contemporary German literature. She is also an international phenomenon. Her worldwide bestseller, *The Eighth Life (for Brilka)*, was the story of a century, and her major new novel, *Lack of Light*, takes up the thread in that here, too, the author sets out to uncover a bygone era. This quest, and the desire to understand the present by way of the past, leads her back to her roots: to Georgia, and the still bleeding suture of the Soviet with the post-Soviet age. Haratischwili's literary exploration takes us not to contemporary history's highest peaks, but rather to crumbling cliff edges, along erratic, winding paths, deep into yawning chasms. Instead of cautiously feeling her way, as we are accustomed to German-language literature doing, she attacks the blind spots of the past and takes them by storm. Her novels brim with passion and unbridled emotions; they tell of great tragedies, the kind that only happen to those caught up in war. Her novels burst open like pomegranates, filled with a dramatic, luscious, crimson splendour.

Lack of Light is the story of a lost land and a lost generation; of a revolution that devours its children; of a friendship that defies death; of phantom pain, a battle with oneself and the world, a struggle with fate. It is also a homage to Georgia, the city of Tbilisi, and its people: a declaration of love across the ages.

'I left my love behind in a world that no longer exists. I left it behind in a place to which I shall never return, with people who exist now only as shadows in my head. My love is a dinosaur love, an extinct love, dirty and brutal, accustomed to circumventing prohibitions and barriers; it is a chameleon love that must lie in order to survive; yes, this is how it must be.'

Foto © Dina Oganova



Nino Haratischwili, born in Tbilisi in 1983, is a prize-winning playwright, theatre director and novelist. Her epic family saga *The Eighth Life (for Brilka)*, translated into numerous languages, is an international bestseller. She has received many prizes for her work, including the Cultural Committee of German Industry Literature Prize, the Anna Seghers Literature Prize, the Bertolt Brecht Prize and the Schiller Memorial Prize. Her last novel, *The Cat and the General*, also published by Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt, was shortlisted for the German Book Prize in 2019. Nino Haratischwili lives in Berlin.

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