

Of Cameramen and Death Squads in Tbilisi

by Alex M. Pruteanu

after four years
the little teddy bear of a man
(a hobbit i called him i think when i first met him in '06
cigarette and diet coke, permanent fixtures in his hands)
slowly opens up to me
we share somewhat the same past
he was bureau chief of ABC overseas
first stationed in Budapest after the wall was brought down
next moved around a bunch
finally landing in Tbilisi, Georgia
we juggle war room stories
and after some time he tells me
he's received electric shock therapy some years ago
for an event for which he still feels responsible
now eighteen years later and counting:
he sent out a producer and a cameraman
to cover the rebel Muslim uprising in rural Georgia
after having shot enough footage the producer took the tape to the
feeding point
when he came back the cameraman was gone
they found him six days later in an unmarked grave
strangely wearing combat fatigues
he had been tortured and shot in the neck and eyes
i say they probably dressed him like that
to claim him a spy
 like me
my friend the hobbit is now a state government functionary
a much tamer career
much quieter

much "less important"
he asks if i ever miss any of it
the madness
and i say no
i need quiet and stability in my life now
and no one shooting at me or chopping me down with a machete
he smokes and thinks and says
i must admit i sometimes wish i had a more important position
especially for someone my age
i say important positions often carry the danger of being executed
he laughs and says true
drags on his Marlboro Lights drinks his Diet Coke
and our time for lunch is up

