маяк



Katharina Koetter
Abkhazia 2022



Preface

I started this project after hearing another story about one of our neighbours. It prompted a question - What does a place consist of? The buildings, roads and paths or maybe its history, stories and people. All these little bits of gossip that wander through the neighbourhood make it feel like a living breathing being. People have lived next to each other for generations in this neighbourhood called after its lighthouse (маяк) designed by Eiffel. Their lives connected by tiny daily moments of happiness and sadness. I wanted to capture this feeling of people still living in this neighbourhood and people gone though this gossip. Let’s meet them.





Anna

Our Neighbour Anna made really good Kartu, an Armenian sweet. She died thinking her useless husband would die first so she would get the house and live out her days in peace.
On the day he brought her home my great grandmother Maria cried. Anna asked her '*Are these tears of joy*?'. Only later Maria told her what she really felt and asked '*Would you have believed me back then when I told you you were marrying a bad man*?' Anna slowly shook her head. '*No I would have thought you were a spiteful old woman incapable to love*'.





Ira

Ira already had 2 children which she left in Omsk when they were 4 years old. A boy and a girl. They stayed with their grandparents while she chased men, money and booze. Now she doesn’t know where they are nor did she ever try to get in contact with them.







Yulia

Yulia family lives on the other side of the fence. She is a smart and calm girl that always pays attention to that little rascal of her brother who throws regular tantrums. Her looks are more like her fathers - a studied ornithologist now working as a janitor at various universities. He travels lot and in each city he has his side pieces. So much so that he told Yulia's mother '*You are the mother of my children but nothing more to me*' and cut all support as soon as Yulia was of age.

Lara

Lara, Yulia's grandmother, often comes to her house and spends the summers here with her best friend. It's warm here unlike in the north where they come from and they enjoy wearing bikinis. One friend is more voluminous the other less.
Together they are a biblical plague of grasshoppers. They don't stop until they have eaten every last bite of fruit from their garden and plucked every tree or bush that bears fruit on the street: Nothing goes to waste.









The old meat factory and the bull

When walking to the beach the popular routes are either through the old shoe factory or the old meat factory. Now run down establishments, previously the sausage of Suchumi was known to be good. My mother told me this story of a very strong bull that ran himself free and onto the beach from the meat factory. They tried to capture him but he plunged himself into the water and swam to the other side of the bay. Now one would have hoped that this act of resistance gained him his freedom like an old time gladiator showing strong spirit. They caught him. In my mind I still change the ending to the story of the brave bull.









The cat moms

This year a cat came to give birth to kittens under my grandmothers staircase. She had 2 but they died shortly after. Two weeks later another cat carried 4 kittens to term and they cared for them together as mother and adoptive mother.
Feeding them, cleaning them and keeping them safe. Yet another cat came and also gave birth to 4 more kittens under the stairs. The stairs had turned into a birth clinic and the yard into a proper kindergarten. We had so many cats that it was hard not to step on one. Somehow our old little house was never poor in cats.

The lantern

There is a lantern on the crossing which is always broken. Only and only when there is an election the candidates exchange the light bulb and it burns for the duration of the election. When it inevitably breaks, it does not get replaced until the next round.



Sergei

Sergei was known to be a greedy man. When his parent died he rushed to their house in our neighbourhood. Not to care or to grief but so that his sisters wouldn’t get the house. Even when he had children he attended to his pleasures first. Sometimes watchful eyes saw him coming out of the local grocery store with some pastries rushing around the corner and eating them - fast and one by one- so he wouldn’t have to share.





The beds

Not in those sheets but definitely in those beds my relatives laid while my grandmother took care of them. Nursing staff was short on hand after the war between Georgia and Abkhazia. There is a high probability that someone died in these beds where I spend my precious summer memories.



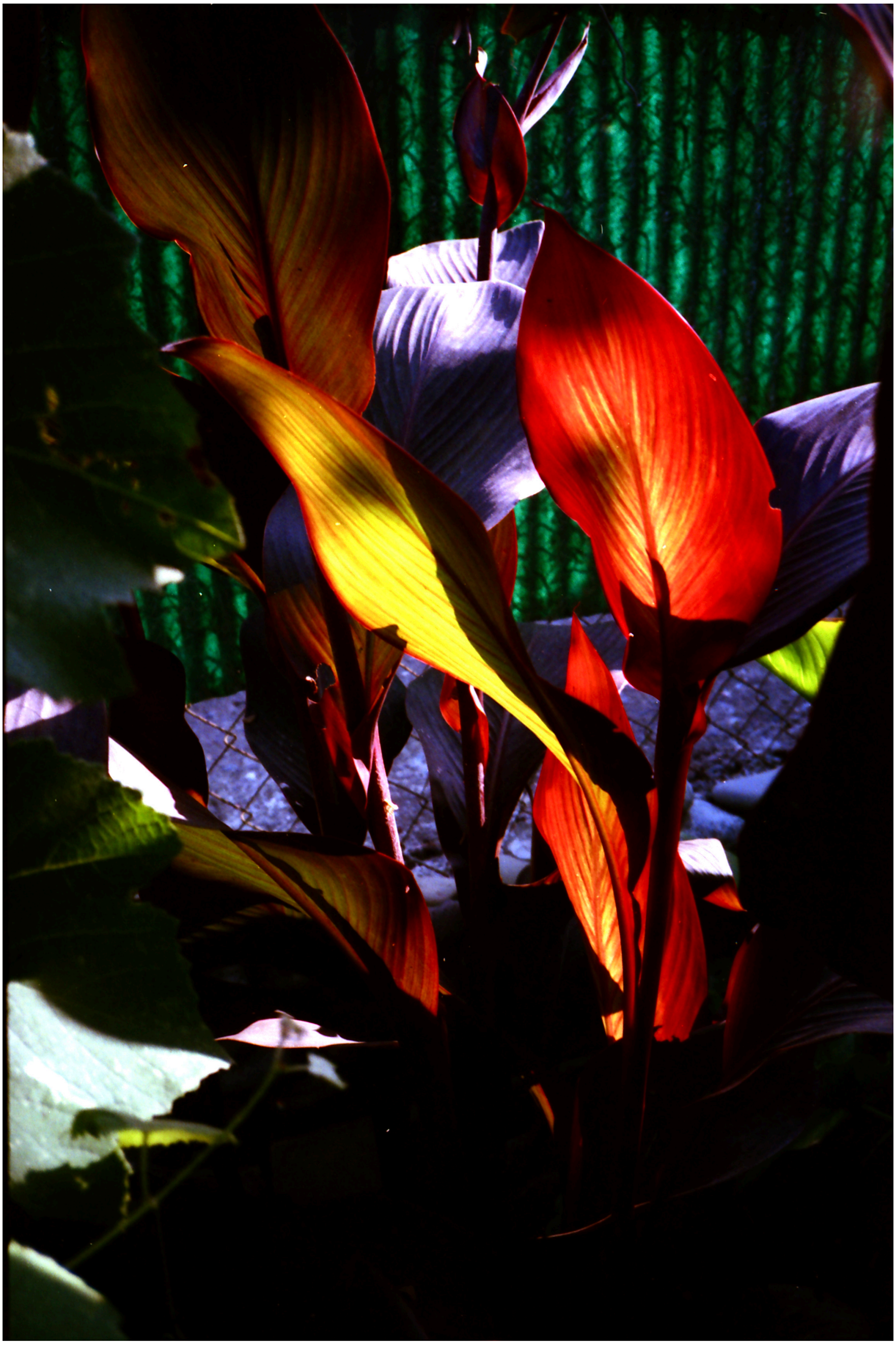




Nina

Nina is a woman who keeps herself afloat with tiny jobs. Apparently she got herself a boyfriend, who was a bit unorganised and chaotic. They fought often and loud. My mother says Nina is also neither calm nor organised. My uncle just sighs “*Oh well quite often two minuses don’t add up to a plus”*. They separated and soon she found another -who suddenly died after they were together- but left her a prayer carpet that she gifted us. Unlucky in love one might say, my mother says maybe it’s more practical like that.









The docks with the boats

Before the war and long before that great great grandmother Xenia had a house where the docks were build- directly by the beach. She was relocated when the city wanted to build the ship refinery. Back then her yard opened directly to the beach. So my grandmother and her friend would often put mattresses out on the beach to sleep under the stars in warm summer night.





Lika

Lika was fancied by a young man from the neighbourhood, however she didn’t fancy him much more than any other guy at first. What she fancied though was lace underwear. So this young man made a ploy with Lika’s friend to ‘steal her’ as it was custom in Abkhazia. Her friend was telling her after school that this lingerie place had a sale. Lika was surprised that so many people were there. Then her new husband and his friends were grabbing her and some lace underwear and they decided to marry soon after he bought her some lingerie.







Babushka

The backyard shed used to house some chicken and a very aggressive rooster. So aggressive that one could not collect the eggs. Great Grandmother Maria decided one day and said '*We should eat this rooster*'. So one night when all the hens and the rooster were sleeping my grandma snuck in- fully covered from head to toe with only her face sticking out- and grabbed that rooster by the neck and the feet. They prepared hot water to pluck him in the court yard. Just as they started some bandits and robbers were running down the street- shooting their Kalashnikovs. They ducked, took the rooster and ran to the kitchen. My grandmother later called it 'Operation Rooster'.

Information

All stories were collected in summer 2022 in Suchumi, Abkhazia. Names were changed when applicable. Photographs were collected between 2016 and 2022 by Katharina Kötter.

Correspondence: katharina.alina.koetter@gmail.com