

Clelia Ifrim

The Relatives of God



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*I wrote the novel **The Relatives of God** in Romanian, in
seven days, in 1999.
First edition in 2000, second in 2014.
It is a parable of people and world.*

The author

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- **W**hat is the City? the Teacheress asked.
- A bigger Village, the children answered.

The Teacheress smiled. Then, she looked at the little bouquet of wild violets in the inkpot of glass with silver water-marks, found by the children in a niche of the catacombs of the Old Royal Fortress from a Royal Time, from which there were vestiges of wall still.

The Teacheress looked through the window of the classroom at the City, that was seen in the distance and she dictated on.

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The City cut up in the light of the day. Or in the light of a solar dust.

The City beyond the Village from the valley and the New Village. The City beyond the Ait. The City beyond the Lake. The City, for ever, beyond.

And the Sky full of all these.

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Smell of earth and cattle, smell of water and fish, in a slow light of going on the waves, smell of beech and fir tree coming from the Joiner's near the Bridge.

The Books of the City. The Books of the Village from the valley and the New Village. The Books of the Ait. The Books of the Bridge.

And the Sky full of all these.

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The Village with its ways, gathering itself from the New Village and the Village from the valley, easily ascending to the Highroad which led on to the City, passing by the Ait, and the Bridge, and the Big Storehouses of Goods which did not take place in the City, and were built along the Highroad.

And the Sky full of these all.

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Golden light.

Towards evening, rot. Of beech and of fir.

The Disciples or Apprentices, as called them the ones from the New Village, in their blue robes with the symbol of their apprenticeship sewn on the right breast-pocket, carrying long planks of beech and fir, and one of them stopping and turning around him the light plank of fir, fir light like a night butterfly or day butterfly, turning the plank around him as a wheel,

Wheel of wheel, wheel of wheel
give my father that you will,
wheel of wheel, wheel of wheel,

and the others, the ones who did not work, old butterflies, looking at their hands smelling of a beech or fir-tree, and he, alone, turning the light plank as a wheel around him, and they, more, old butterflies with the eyes all dust, in the light morning or in the twilight of a non-working day, in the light of Saturday.

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The Joiner's. Its books on a fir-shelf by the window.

The Overseer and apprentices keeping quiet in a light of a working day, in the light of a Saturday, eating what they had brought from home.

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Home, said one of them showing the City in a great distance. Home, said another one, showing the Ait, or the New Village, or the Village from the valley, home, said another one showing the blue robes, and the apprentice who had nestled by a blue wheel, or by a bag full of sawdust, home, said another one in his dream, home, said another one looking back, home, said they all, and a thousand of voices repeated, home, like a slice of bread shared among the guests at table on a working Saturday.

A bred. A bred set apart. A bred kept for the unknown ones. For the guests or for the ones who were on the way still. It set there, on the table, set apart, for ever kept for somebody who was to come.

And the table, just a fir-plank, smelling like a bred and fir and fire, the table just a fir-plank, polished by the sun and rains, a plank set on two big stones at the end and other end, and the stones as a beginning and finishing of the bridge.

Each eating his part, in a golden silence and solar dust, in a silence flickering around them like some holes of air. Each eating his part, looking at the street which

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connected the Village with the City. Each eating his part looking at the garden at the back of Joiner's which was downing to the Ait. Some of them were newcomers, New Apprentices, and they said nothing. Other ones were older and after they had finished to eat, they said, let's go there, to take a walk.

There, showing the Bridge in the vicinity, the Lake and the Ait, and the Village, all together in a place, like an evening cloth in the light vanishing itself beyond the waters, and the last of them said, let's go there, showing the City, a bigger village, as the children and Teacheress said, showing the City in a great distance, another tissue of evening in the light lost beyond the waters.

The most of them went on the Lake bank and washed their blue robes with the symbol of their apprenticeship in the blue wave of the Lake and of the evening.

Then, they laid the robes on the earth that began to turn green, and one by one, they set in the depth of water, naked and pure, in a blue light of water and blue light of time, in a light of flowing cave.

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Unknown guests? The waited ones? The ones who are on the way still?

The asked one did not answer. And the lips repeated the question in trance: Are you an outlander in these parts?

The light of the dawn, white, milky, fat like the earth. The new heifer brought forth last night, white, milky, fat like the earth. And the milk offered to the strange one, or to unknown, or to the one from the City, or to the one who had come on that spring morning, there, in the middle of the field. And all these, on a spring morning, while he was cleaning the new heifer, from which was raising the steam, with a handful of new grass, without looking at the strange one who had come and asked him about the Joiner's, the stranger one who stood there, in the middle of the field that was of his from the beginning of the world, and he asked anew:

– Are you a newcomer in these parts?

All these in the field, under the open sky, without witnesses or wind. Only the City beyond the Lake in a light of solar golden spring dust. And they, face to face,

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the-One-with-the-cattle and the New Apprentice, asking where is the Joiner's.

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Outlander?

If he would have seen the earth on that he gone would have known that he is not a stranger.

The day light rising itself from the newly ploughed earth. A white spot. A white herd. The-One-with-the-cattle with the new brought forth heifer in his arms, putting his cheek on its neck, smelling the soft and wet skin, and then setting it on the earth and helping it to rise, softly pushing it forward, wiping its neck with a handful of grass, and telling to the unknown one, tomorrow I am going to come at the Joiner's to buy a few fir-boards to repair the cow-house.

And the unknown one, or the stranger, or the New Apprentice, or the one who had come after him, there, in the middle of the field, told him smiling, come!

At lunch they drunk milk. The-One-with-the-cattle began to come every day at the Joiner's carrying fresh milk in a bag. For the Overseer, for the Apprentices, and for the ones whom he did not know them.

On a Saturday he found nobody at the Joiner's. In the place of the windows, the blue robes with the symbols of apprenticeship fluttering in the morning wind. The-One-with-the-cattle looked at the garden at the back of the Joiner's and he went there. The Apprentices were gathered in a hollow of a tree and shivered with cold.

And some of them told, we shivered with rot, today we touch nothing, Cattler breeder, look at our hands, they are full of hollows.

And the One-with-the-cattle showed them his hands, and told, Apprentices, look at my hands, look how the milk is leaking.

Then, he set on the earth the skin bag full of milk, and took out hem, one by one, from that hollow full of green rot. One by one he took them in his arms, telling, you are more easy than my heifer, and he made the way once, twice, three times, a hundred times, telling to each,

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you are more easy than my heifer, alighting and slowly setting him on the ploughed earth where somebody had sowed a handful of grains.

The Sunlight was clear. As clear as the water.

The Apprentices began to dress and in the place of their robes set in the windows, in all the windows of the Joiner's and of the dormitories, holes of light, flickering there with them.

Some of them went to the City.

They separated on a Saturday. The dormitories got into desert and their places at the Joiner's, desert, and their places at the table, desert, and the holes of light flickering around them were turned off.

They went toward the City that was seen in the distance, a place on the floating beyond the Lake, there where they showed to the ones who asked them, where are you going?, there, showing the wave of the City, the description known from the itinerant-vendors who came to retail their goods, showing the horizon cut in a light dust and shadow, it is there, there smells like a new wall, like a foundation, there all is otherwise than here, do you not feel the smell of the City?

They kept silence looking at their robes with the symbols of their apprenticeship on the right breast-pocket and the hands full of hollows with other signs of their apprenticeships.

They separated themselves. Some remained. Some left.