

Simeon the Liftite.
Novel with Angels and Moldavians
- synopsis -

IN THIS NOVEL BRIMMING with humor and frequent references to the supernatural, the tenants of an anonymous provincial block in the town of Bacau embody one tiny part of the gigantic grotesque created by Romania's period of transition. Here we discover Mr. Elefterie, a gullible pensioner who, having lost the money he deposited in a mutual assistance fund, one night dreams the winning numbers for the so-called "6 out of 49" lottery and, of course, loses a hefty sum once more. Then we fret about the fate of Mr. Eftimie the teacher, whom a pupil falsely accuses of having seduced her - so convincingly that even the teacher himself begins to wonder whether he has done so and then forgotten about in the meantime; in the end, we discover that the schoolgirl was dreaming of winning a beauty contest in which Mr. Eftimie was to sit as a member of the jury. Then we find amusement in the pedantic style of Mr. Jon-the-stair-superintendent, a typical tenement block administrator, who communicates with the tenants by means of pasting up notices, and who has a terrible secret: he used to work for the former Securitate as an electrician. Then we have Mr. Nicostrat, a great lover of yoga and women, to whom he gives lessons on the Kama Sutra. There is a whole host of other equally strange characters, including Themistocles, a boy suspected by his teacher, with whom he is in love, of being a precocious genius.

However, the life of these typical Romanians is turned upside down one fine day. One by one, they observe that the block lift is out of order, having got stuck on the eighth floor. This would not necessarily be an insoluble problem, were it not for the fact that the lift is occupied by a self-imposed exile, their neighbour Simeon - the block's "authorised" cobbler. The latter, surprisingly, has not only chosen to spend a period isolated inside the lift, but in addition, according to legends that swiftly spread through the block, he has begun to work miracles, including the "spectacular" healing of Mr. Anghel, another neighbour, who had been suffering from a skin disease. However, it is not just the miracles, of which the neighbours have only heard rumors, but also the stories that Simeon tells from inside the lift, his prophecies and parables, which ensure him of an aura of celebrity, creating for him renown as Simeon the Liftite, after the model of St Simeon the Stylite. And in Simeon's parables, prophecies and stories, we discover piquant commentaries about the uncommon sharpness of wit displayed by Romanians, who know how to fix anything using nothing but a bit of wire; we learn about the imminent return to power of Ion Iliescu, at a time when all had written him off, and about how Jesus might descend among the Romanian people so dear to Him in order to stand, after a memorable election campaign, as president.

After almost two weeks of prophesizing and storytelling, Simeon the Liftite abandons the lift unexpectedly, leaving forever the block where he had dwelled. However, he does not depart alone, for he takes with him his disciple Themistocles, the schoolboy suspected of being a genius. And thenceforth there is room only for legend.