



European Commission

# May Day

*Young Literature from  
the Ten New Member States of  
the European Union*



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# Preface

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Dear Reader,

You hold in your hand a very special publication. This time it is not a new directive or EU policy that you will find inside. This time it is literature! It is a unique and original way to celebrate the enlargement of the European Union and the arrival of new cultures and languages in the EU institutions.

Turn a few pages and you will come across a variety of forms – short stories, excerpts from novels and poetry, a variety of themes and of languages. The authors all come from the new Member States that joined the European Union on 1 May 2004, and the anthology has been compiled by European Commission translators from those countries.

It should come as no surprise that translators choose to celebrate EU enlargement through text, not just through a toast. After all, the textual work they do is aimed squarely at furthering the integration of the new Member States and their languages. But the type of writing they have included in this book is nothing like what you will have grown accustomed to reading in the context of the enlargement. The fresh language of these literary works and the richness of the ideas in them remind us that there is more to the ten new Member States than just dry statistics, economic indicators, facts and figures. They bring with them their unique cultures, their histories and traditions, and this book is an invitation to explore them. It is also a useful and eloquent testimony to the vitality and strength that multilingualism and cultural diversity bring to the construction of our Europe and to the institutions tasked with carrying it out.

So take a comfortable seat and prepare for a journey. No matter where you start, whether on the coast of the Baltic or the Mediterranean or on the River Danube, I am sure you will find many beautiful phrases and stanzas, gripping plots, original metaphors and interesting characters on your way.

See you somewhere along the track,



**Karl-Johan Lönnroth**  
Director-General for Translation







## Editors' preface

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“... and the Elders said: that was the longest winter in Europe.” This could be the ending of a fictional story if we did not know that it was stark reality. They say all winters come to an end sooner or later. The long European winter ended on May Day 2004.

It was a winter marked by not just a chilly climate but a cold war, not just barriers but an iron curtain. As May Day 2004 brushed aside the remnants of the Iron Curtain and restored unity, spring returned to Europe. Spring brings the renewal of life, fertility and a new abundance in nature, with lush green fields and lilac blossom. May Day is the delightful festival of all this. But on May Day 2004 the dance of joy was an expression of both the new energy brought by the new member states and the celebration of the new European spring, as the lifeblood of Europe was restored to its furthest-reaching limbs.

The arrival of the European spring denotes a fresh start for the whole of Europe, as new vistas and new opportunities open up for a unified Europe. To express this dynamism and youthful spirit, we have selected the work of some of the best young writers and poets from across the new member states, innovators yet also carriers of continued traditions, in a bid to display the talent, originality, and exciting imagination of a long-hidden part of Europe.

And the languages they use as their creative carrier – well, they also vary enormously: from one of the oldest European languages (Lithuanian), to non-Indo-European languages (Estonian and Hungarian) to the unique Maltese, the only Semitic language written in the Latin alphabet. To outsiders, all of them may seem to be united by a single, striking trait: all are incredibly difficult to spell and virtually impossible to pronounce.

Thus, kind Reader, we invite you to take a deep breath and plunge into this diverse linguistic and literary experience. We hope it will allow you not only to discover fascinating and hitherto unknown treasures but also to enjoy a thoroughly delightful adventure. Why not take this slim volume as you would an apéritif – something to tempt you into further explorations. In that spirit, enjoy your May Day!

**Kovács Zsuzsanna**  
**Vera Pejovič**  
**Wanda Urbata-Greplowska**



# Olga Tokarczuk

„Dom dzienny, dom nocny“

## Amos

Krysia z Banku Spółdzielczego w Nowej Rudzie miała sen. To było wczesną wiosną sześćdziesiątego dziewiątego roku.

Śniło jej się, że słyszy głosy w swoim lewym uchu. Najpierw to był głos kobiecy, który mówił i mówił, ale Krysia nie wiedziała co. Zmartwiła się w tym śnie. „Jak będę mogła pracować, gdy wciąż ktoś mi będzie brzęczał w uchu?“ Myślała w tym śnie, że taki głos można wyłączyć, tak jak wyłącza się radio albo odkłada słuchawkę telefonu. Ale nie można było. Źródło dźwięku tkwiło głęboko w uchu, gdzieś w tych pokrętnych korytarzykach, pełnych bębenków i spiral, w labiryntach podmokłych błon, ciemnych jaskiniach wnętrza. Nie tłumilo go grzebanie palcem ani zatykanie uszu dłońmi. Krysi wydawało się, że cały świat musi słyszeć ten hałas. Może zresztą tak było - cały świat wibrował od głosu. Powtarzały się wciąż jakieś zdania, gramatycznie całkiem poprawne, pięknie brzmiące frazy, lecz nie miały sensu, udawały tylko ludzką mowę. Krysia bała się ich. A zaraz potem odezwał się w uchu Krysi inny głos, męski, przyjemny i czysty. Miło było z nim rozmawiać. „Mam na imię Amos“, powiedział. Zapytał o jej pracę, o zdrowie rodziców, ale w gruncie rzeczy - takie miała wrażenie - wcale to nie było mu potrzebne; wiedział o niej wszystko. „Gdzie ty jesteś?“, zapytała go niepewnie. „W Mariandzie“, odpowiedział, a ona wiedziała, że jest taki region w centralnej Polsce. „Dlaczego słyszę cię w moim uchu?“, chciała jeszcze wiedzieć. „Jesteś niezwykłą osobą i pokochałem cię. Kocham cię“. To samo działo się jeszcze trzy, cztery razy. Ten sam sen.

Rano piła kawę wśród bankowych papierów. Na dworze padał mokry śnieg i zaraz topniał. Wilgoć przenikała nawet do ogrzewanych biur Banku, okupowała płaszcz na wieszakach, damskie torebki ze skaju, kozaczki i interesantów. I tego niezwykłego dnia Krysia Popłoch, szefowa działu kredytów, zrozumiała, że po raz pierwszy w życiu jest totalnie, wszechmocnie i bezwarunkowo kochana. Było to odkrycie potężne jak uderzenie w twarz. Zakręciło jej się w głowie. Widok sali banku zbladł, w jej uszach na chwilę zapanowała cisza. W tej miłości, która ją nagle załapała, Krysia poczuła się jak nie używany do tej pory czajnik, który po raz pierwszy napełniono krystaliczną wodą. Opuszczona kawa stygła.

Zrobiła tak: wyszła wcześniej z pracy i znalazła się na poczcie. Wzięła książki telefoniczne dużych miast centralnej Polski: Łódź, Sieradz, Konin, Kielce, Radom, oczywiście Częstochowę, w końcu chodziło o Mariand. Otwierała pod



# Olga Tokarczuk

## Amos

Kryisia from the Cooperative Bank in Nowa Ruda had a dream. It was early in the spring of 1969.

She dreamed she heard voices in her left ear. At first it was a woman's voice that kept on talking and talking, but Kryisia couldn't work out what it was saying. She felt worried in the dream. "How am I going to work if someone keeps droning in my ear?" she said to herself. She thought she might be able to switch the voice off, just like switching off the radio or hanging up the telephone, but she couldn't do it. The source of the sound lay deep in her ear, somewhere in those small, winding corridors, those labyrinths of moist membrane, in the dark caverns inside her head. She tried sticking her fingers in her ears, she tried covering them with her hands, but she couldn't stifle it. She felt as if the whole world must be able to hear this noise. Maybe that was it – the voice was making the whole world vibrate. Some sentences kept being repeated – they were grammatically perfect and sounded fine, but they made no sense, they were just imitations of human speech. Kryisia was afraid of them. But then she started hearing a different voice in her ear, a man's voice, clear and pleasant. "My name is Amos," he said. It was nice to talk to him. He asked about her work, and about her parents' health, but in fact – or so she imagined – he didn't really need to, because he knew all about her already. "Where are you?" she asked him hesitantly. "In Mariand," he replied; she had heard of this region in central Poland. "Why can I hear you in my ear?" she asked. "You're an unusual person," said Amos, "and I've fallen in love with you. I love you." Kryisia dreamed the same dream three or four more times, always with the same ending.

In the morning she drank her coffee surrounded by piles of bank documents. Outside sleet was falling and immediately melting. The damp penetrated the bank's centrally heated offices, permeating the overcoats on their pegs, the bank clerks' imitation leather handbags, their knee boots and even the clients. But on that unusual day Kryisia Popłoch, head of the bank's credit division, realized that for the first time in her life she was wholly and unconditionally loved. This discovery was as powerful as a slap in the face. It made her head spin. Her view of the banking hall faded, and all she could hear was silence. Suddenly suffused with this love, Kryisia felt like a brand new kettle, filled for the very first time with crystal-clear water. Meanwhile, her coffee had gone cold.





A i umalowanym paznokciem wiodła po kolumnach nazwisk. Nie było Amosa czy Amoza w Łodzi, Sieradzu, Koninie i tak dalej. Nie było go pośród nielicznych abonentów na wsiach. To, co teraz czuła, najlepiej byłoby nazwać oburzeniem. Wiedziała przecież, że gdzieś tam musiał być. Siedziała przez chwilę z pustką w głowie, a potem zaczęła jeszcze raz. Wzięła też Radom, Tarnów, Lublin i Włocławek. Znalazła Lidię Amoszewicz i Amosińskich. Potem jej zdesperowana inteligencja zaczęła kombinować: Amos, Soma, Maso, Samo, Omas, aż dłonie o umalowanych paznokciach złamały ten senny szyfr - A. Mos, Sienkiewicza 54, Częstochowa.

Krysia mieszkała na wsi, z której do miasta woził ją niebieski, brudny autobus. Piął się po serpentynach i zakrętach jak przyszarzały żuk. Zimą, gdy wcześniej robi się ciemno, jego rozpalone oczy omiały kamieniste zbocza gór. Był błogosławiony. Pozwalał ludziom poznawać świat za górami. Od niego zaczynały się wszelkie podróże.

Codziennie dojeżdżała nim do pracy. Od momentu, w którym zabierał ją z przystanku aż do tego, gdy stawała przed masywnymi drzwiami Banku, mijało dwadzieścia minut. Przez tych dwadzieścia minut świat zmieniał się nie do poznania. Las stawał się domami, połoniny placami, łąki ulicami, a strumień - rzeczką, która codziennie była innego koloru, ponieważ miała nieszczęście płynąć koło hal włókienniczych Blachobytu. Krysia jeszcze w autobusie zmieniała gumowce (mówiła na nie wellingtony) i wkładała pantofle. Obcasy stukwały na szerokich poniemieckich stopniach budynku.

Była najelegantszą osobą w Banku. Modna fryzura - starannie ułożona blond trwała, odrosty ufarbowane. Jarzeniowe światło wydobywało z włosów lalkowo-brylantowe refleksy. Jej lepkie od tuszu rzęsy rzucały delikatne cienie na gładkie policzki. Perłowa szminka dyskretnie podkreślała kształt ust. Im była starsza, tym bardziej się malowała. Czasem już mówiła sobie „przestań, dość tego“, ale potem miała wrażenie, że płynące lata odbierały jej twarzy wyrazistość, zamazywały rysy. Wydawało jej się nawet, że rzędną jej brwi i blakną niebieskie tęczęwki, że linia warg robi się coraz bardziej niewyraźna, a cała twarz staje się nieokreślona, jakby chciała zaniknąć. Tego Krysia bała się najbardziej. Że zniknie, zanim się rozwinie i stanie naprawdę.

W wieku trzydziestu lat mieszkała z rodzicami na wsi pod Nową Rudą. Ich dom stał pełen nadziei przy skrzyżowaniu w serpentynie lokalnej dziurawej szosie, jakby spodziewał się, że samo to położenie przyniesie mu udział w historii, w przemarszach wojsk, w przygodach poszukiwaczy skarbów, w pościgach Straży Granicznej za przemytnikami spirytusu z Czech. Ale i szosa, i dom nie miały szczęścia. Nic się nie działo. Las położony nad domem przerzedzał się tylko, jak brwi Krysi. Jej ojciec wycinał systematycznie młode brzoźki na dyszle i drągi, świerki na bożonarodzeniowe choinki, ścieżki zamazywały się w wysokich trawach, zupełnie jak linia jej ust, blakły pomalowane na niebiesko ściany ich domu. Jak oczy Krysi.





That day she left work early and made her way to the post office. She got out the phone books for all the large cities in central Poland: Łódź, Sieradz, Konin, Kielce, Radom, and Częstochowa, home of the Black Madonna, the Virgin Mary's city. She opened each one at A and ran a painted fingernail down the columns of names. There was no Amos or Amoz in Łódź, Sieradz, Konin and so on. She couldn't find him among the small list of names from the surrounding countryside either. What she felt now would best be described as indignation. She knew he must be out there somewhere. For a while she sat still, her mind a blank, and then she began all over again, taking in Radom, Tarnów, Lublin and Włocławek as well. She found Lidia Amoszewicz and the Amosińskis. Then in desperation she began to contrive new combinations: Amos, Soma, Maso, Samo, Omas, until finally her painted fingernails broke the dream code – there he was, A. Mos, 54 Sienkiewicz Street, Częstochowa.

Kryisia lived in the countryside, and every morning a dirty blue bus took her to town, crawling up the twists and turns of the road like a dingy beetle. In winter, when darkness fell early, its blazing eyes swept over the stony mountain slopes. The bus was a blessing – it gave people the chance to know the world beyond the mountains. All manner of journeys started in it. Kryisia's journey to work took twenty minutes, from the moment the bus picked her up at the stop to the moment she stood before the massive doors of the bank. In those twenty minutes the world changed out of all recognition. The forest became houses, the mountain pastures became town squares, the meadows became streets, and the stream became a river, which was a different colour every day, because unfortunately it flowed past the Blachobył textile mill. Still on the bus, Kryisia would change her gumboots for a pair of court shoes. Her heels clicked on the broad steps of the old German building.

Kryisia was the most elegant girl at the bank. She had a fashionable hairstyle – a well-shaped blonde perm with carefully dyed roots. The fluorescent lighting brought out its highlights. Her mascara-coated lashes cast subtle shadows on her smooth cheeks. Her pearly lipstick discreetly emphasized the shape of her mouth. As she grew older, she wore more and more make-up. Nowadays she sometimes told herself “stop, that's enough”, but she worried that the passing years were blurring her features, depriving her face of definition. She thought her eyebrows were thinning, her blue irises fading, and the lines of her lips growing fainter and fainter – her whole face was becoming foggy, as if it were trying to disappear. This was Kryisia's greatest fear – that her face would disappear before it had developed and truly come into being.

At the age of thirty she still lived with her parents. Their house stood beside the winding, pot-holed local highway, looking hopeful, as if it expected this location to bring it a role in history, in the march of passing armies, in the adventures of treasure hunters, or in the border guards' pursuit of bootleggers from the Czech Republic. But neither the highway nor the house had much good fortune. Nothing ever happened, except that the forest above the house grew sparser, like Kryisia's



W swoim domu Krysia była wystarczająco ważna, zarabiała przecież pieniądze, robiła zakupy, które dźwigała w uszytych przez matkę torbach. Miała swój pokój na poddaszu, z wersalką i szafą na ubrania, ale dopiero w Banku stawiała się kimś. Tu było jej biuro, oddzielone od sali interesantów przepierzeniem ze sklejki, tak cienkiej jak tektura. Siedząc przy swoim biurku, słyszała więc bankowy gwar - skrzywienie drzwi - szuranie ciężkich chłopskich butów po drewnianej podłodze, szmer przyciszonych, wiecznie plotkujących kobiecych głosów i stukanie dwóch ostatnich liczydeł, których kierownictwo nie zdążyło jeszcze wymienić na bardziej nowoczesne terkoczące maszyny z korbką.

Około dziesiątej zaczynał się codzienny rytuał picia kawy. Brzęczały aluminiowe łyżeczki i denka szklanek uderzały delikatnie o spodki, te biurowe dzwonki. Zmielona, cenna kawa, przynoszona z domu w słoikach po dżemach, obdzielała sprawiedliwie szklanki, wrzątek tworzył na jej powierzchni gruby brunatny kożuszek, który zatrzymywał na chwilę wodospady cukru. Zapach kawy wypełniał po sufit Bank Spółdzielczy w Nowej Rudzie, a chłopci, którzy akurat teraz stawali w kolejce, pluli sobie w brody, że trafili akurat w ten kawowy święty czas.

Wtedy to Krysia przypominała sobie swój sen.

Jakie to bolesne być kochanym za nic, czyli za to, że się jest. Jaki niepokój niesie taka miłość. Jak z niedowierzania płacząc się myśli i serce puchnie od przyśpieszonych uderzeń. Jak świat odsuwa się i traci dotykalność. Krysia nagle stała się samotna.

Po Świętach Wielkanocnych przyszło do Banku zawiadomienie o kursokonferencji w Częstochowie dla pracowników Banku. Uznała to za najprawdziwszy znak i pojechała. Pakując swoje rzeczy do torby ze skajlu, pomyślała o Bogu. Że pomimo tego, co o nim mówią, on zawsze zjawia się w najważniejszym momencie.

Wiozły ją zaspane pociągi, pełne wymiętych ludzi. Nie było wolnych miejsc w przedziałach, więc stała przyklejona do brudnej szyby w korytarzu i drzemała na stojąco. Potem ktoś wysiadł w noc i wreszcie mogła usiąść. Wciśnięta między rozgrzane suchym powietrzem ciała usnęła i spała ciężko, czarno, oleisto, zupełnie bez obrazów, nawet strzępków myśli. I dopiero gdy się obudziła, zrozumiała, że wyruszyła w podróż; przedtem to było tylko przesuwanie się w przestrzeni, zwyczajna, nieuważna zmiana miejsc. Tylko sen zamyka stare i otwiera nowe, umiera jeden człowiek i budzi się drugi. Ta czarna przestrzeń bez właściwości między dniami jest prawdziwym podróżowaniem. Na szczęście wszystkie pociągi z Nowej Rudy w daleki świat kursują w nocy. Pomyślała, że po tej podróży nic już nie będzie takie samo jak przedtem.

Nad ranem znalazła się w Częstochowie. Było jeszcze za wcześnie, żeby dokądkolwiek pójść, więc w dworcowym barze zamówiła herbatę i grzała ręce, obejmując szklankę. Przy sąsiednich stolikach siedziały stare kobiety zakutane w kraciaste chusty, przepaleni tytoniem mężczyźni, sprasowani życiem mężowie i





eyebrows. Her father kept chopping down the young birch trees to make poles and rods, and every year he cut down the spruces for Christmas trees. Meanwhile the pathways in the tall grass grew blurred, just like the line of her mouth, and the sky-blue walls of their house kept fading, like Kryisia's eyes.

At home Kryisia was quite important; she earned money and did the shopping, carrying it home in bags her mother had made. She had her own room in the attic, with a sofa-bed and a wardrobe. But only at the bank did she really start to come into her own. Her office was separated from the banking hall by a plywood partition as thin as cardboard. As she sat at her desk she could hear the hubbub of the bank – doors creaking, heavy farm boots shuffling across the wooden floor, the murmur of women's voices gossiping and the rattle of the two remaining abacuses that the management hadn't yet got round to replacing with the modern machines with handles that made a whirring sound.

At about ten the daily coffee-drinking ritual began, announced by the clatter of aluminium teaspoons and the sound of glasses striking softly against saucers – the usual office chimes. The precious ground coffee brought from home in jam jars was shared equally between the glasses, and formed a thick brown skin on the surface, briefly holding up the torrents of sugar. The smell of coffee filled the bank to the ceiling, and the farmers queuing for service kicked themselves for having run into the sacred coffee hour.

After the Easter holiday the bank received information about a training course for employees to be held in Częstochowa. Kryisia saw it as an undeniable sign and decided to go. As she was packing her things into her synthetic leather bag, she thought of God, and that despite what they say about him, he always turns up at the crucial moment.

Sluggish trains full of crumpled people took her there. There were no seats free in the compartments, so she stood glued to a grubby window in the corridor and dozed standing up. Someone got out in the middle of the night, and at last she could sit down. Squashed between hot bodies in the dry air she fell into a heavy, solid sleep, without any images at all, not even the tail-ends of thoughts. Only when she awoke did she realize that she was on a journey; until then she had just been drifting about in space, casually changing location. Only sleep closes the old and opens the new – one person dies and another awakes. This black, featureless space between days is the real journey. Luckily all the trains from Nowa Ruda to the world at large run at night. It crossed her mind that after this journey nothing would ever be the same.

She found herself in Częstochowa before daybreak. It was still too early to go anywhere, so she ordered some tea at the station bar and warmed her hands on the glass. At the neighbouring tables sat old women swathed in checked shawls and men stupefied by tobacco – husbands and fathers crushed by life, with leathery faces like old wallets, and children flushed with sleep, from whose half-open mouths trickled thin streaks of dribble.



ojcowie o twarzach jak zniszczone portfele, dzieci zarumienione od snu, którym z kącików półotwartych ust sączył się cienki kłaczek śliny.

Czekanie na świt trwało dwie herbaty z cytryną i jedną kawę. Znalazła ulicę Sienkiewicza i szła nią w górę, samym środkiem, bo samochody jeszcze się nie obudziły. Patrzyła w okna i widziała gęste marszczone firanki, i fikusy przytulone do szyb. W niektórych oknach świeciło się jeszcze światło, ale było blade, nieważne. W tym świetle ludzie w pośpiechu ubierali się, jedli, kobiety dosuszały nad gazem pończochy albo pakowały kanapki do szkoły, ścielone łóżka zatrzymywały do następnej nocy ciepło ciał, śmierdziało przypalone mleko, sznurówki wracały w bezpieczne dziurki butów, radio podawało wiadomości, których nikt nie słuchał. Potem natknęła się na pierwszą kolejkę po chleb. Wszyscy w kolejce milczeli.

Sienkiewicza 54 - to była duża, szara kamienica ze sklepem rybnym na parterze i przepastnym podwórkiem. Krysia stanęła przed nią i powoli przyglądała się oknom. Mój Boże, były takie zwyczajne.

Stała tam z pół godziny, aż w końcu przestała czuć zimno. Szkolenie było nieskończenie nudne. W zeszycie, specjalnie kupionym do robienia notatek, Krystyna malowała długopisem esy-floresy. Zielone sukno prezydzialnego stołu dodawało jej jakiejś otuchy. Gładziła je odruchowo. Pracownicy banków spółdzielczych wydawali się jej podobni. Kobiety miały tlenione włosy obcięte na simonę i cyklamienowe usta. Mężczyźni - w granatowych garniturach i z teczkami ze świńskiej skóry. Jakby się umówili. Dowcipkowali w przerwach na papierosa.

Na kolację był chleb z żółtym serem i herbata w fajansowych kubkach.

A po kolacji wszyscy przenieśli się do świetlicy, na stołach pojawiła się wódka i korniszony. Ktoś wyjął ze skórzanej teczki komplet blaszanych kieliszków. Ręka mężczyzny błędziła po obciążonych nylonem kolanach kobiety.

Krysia poszła spać lekko wstawiona. Jej dwie współmieszkancki zjawiły się nad ranem i szeptem napominały się, żeby być cicho. Tak to trwało trzy dni.

Czwartego dnia stanęła przed pomalowanymi na brązowo drzwiami, na których wisiała porcelanowa tabliczka: A. Mos. Zapukała.

Otworzył jej wysoki, szczupły mężczyzna w piżamie i z papierosem w ustach. Miał ciemne, przekrwione oczy, jakby nie spał od dawna. Zamrugały, gdy zapytała:

„A. Mos?”

„Tak“, potwierdził. „A. Mos“.

Uśmiechnęła się, bo wydało jej się, że rozpoznaje głos.

„To ja jestem Krysia“.

Cofnął się zaskoczony i pozwolił jej wejść do przedpokoju. Mieszkanie było małe i ciasne. Zalewało je srebrne światło jarzeniówek, przez co wydawało się





Two lemon teas and one coffee later, dawn finally came. She found Sienkiewicz Street and walked right up the middle of it, because the cars weren't awake yet. She looked into the windows and saw thick, pleated curtains and rubber plants nestling up against the glass. In some of the houses the lights were still shining weakly. By this light people were hurriedly getting dressed and eating breakfast, women were drying out their tights over the gas or packing sandwiches for school, beds were being made, trapping the warmth of bodies until the following night, there was a smell of burned milk, shoelaces were being threaded back into their nice safe holes, and the radio was broadcasting news that no one was listening to. Then she came across the first bread queue. Everyone in the queue was silent.

Number 54 Sienkiewicz Street was a large, grey apartment block with a fishmonger's shop on the ground floor and a canyon-like courtyard. Krysia stood in front of it and slowly studied the windows. My God, they were so ordinary. She stood there for half an hour, until she stopped feeling the cold.

The training course was extremely boring. In the exercise book she had bought specially to make notes, Krysia doodled with her pen. The green cloth on the chairman's table cheered her up a bit. Absent-mindedly, she stroked it. The Cooperative Bank employees seemed all alike to her. The women had fashionably cut peroxide hair and bright pink lips. The men wore navy blue suits and had pigskin briefcases, as if by mutual agreement. They cracked jokes in the cigarette breaks.

For dinner there was bread and cheese and mugs of tea. After dinner everyone went through to the clubroom, where vodka and gherkins had appeared on the tables. Someone produced a set of tin shot glasses from his briefcase. A man's hand wandered over a woman's nylon-clad knees.

Krysia went to bed feeling rather tipsy. Her two room-mates turned up around dawn and shushed each other in a loud whisper. And so it went on for three days. On the fourth day she stood before a brown door bearing a china nameplate reading "A. Mos". She knocked.

The door was opened by a tall, thin man in pyjamas with a cigarette in his mouth. He had dark, bloodshot eyes, as if he hadn't slept for days. They blinked when she asked, "A. Mos?"

"Yes," he said. "A. Mos."

She smiled, because she thought she recognized his voice. "Well, I'm Krysia."

Surprised, he stepped aside and let her into the hall. The flat was small and cramped, flooded in fluorescent light, which made it look grubby, like a station waiting room. There were boxes of books, piles of newspapers and half-packed suitcases lying about. Steam came gushing through the open bathroom door.

"It's me," she repeated. "I've come."



niechlujne, jak dworzec. Wszędzie stały kartony z książkami, leżały sterty gazet, na wół spakowane walizki. Przez otwarte drzwi do łazienki buchała para.

„To ja“, powtórzyła. „Przyjechałam“.

Mężczyzna nagle okręcił się wokół i roześmiał.

„Ale kim pani jest? Czy ja panią znam?“ Nagle uderzył się w czoło. „Jasne, pani jest, pani jest...“, pstrykał palcami w powietrzu.

Krysia zrozumiała, że jej nie poznaje, ale nie było w tym nic dziwnego. Znał ją przecież inaczej, przez sen, od środka, nie tak normalnie, jak znają się wszyscy ludzie.

„Ja panu wszystko wytłumaczę. Mogę wejść dalej?“

Zawahał się. Popiół z papierosa upadł na podłogę i mężczyzna pokazał jej ręką pokój.

Zsunęła pantofle i weszła.

„Widzi pani, ja się pakuję“, mężczyzna tłumaczył bałagan. Wymiętą pościel z wersalki wyniósł do innego pokoju. Wrócił i usiadł naprzeciwko niej. Sprana piżama odsłoniła pasek ciała na jego piersiach; było chude i kanciaste.

„Panie A. Mos, czy czasem się panu coś śni?“, zapytała niepewnie i od razu wiedziała, że zrobiła błąd. Mężczyzna roześmiał się, uderzył otwartymi dłońmi w pasiaste uda i popatrzył na nią ironicznie, jak jej się zdawało.

„A to dopiero, przychodzi pani do nieznanego faceta i pyta pani, czy mu się coś śni. To jak sen, jak sen...“

„Ja pana znam“.

„Tak? A skąd to pani mnie zna, a ja pani nie? Ach, może się znamy z imprezy u Jasia? U Jasia Latki.“

Pokręciła przecząco głową.

„Nie? No to skąd?“

„Panie A. Mos...“

„Mam na imię Andrzej. Andrzej Mos“.

„Krystyna Popłoch“, powiedziała.

Oboje wstali, podali sobie ręce i usiedli zakłopotani.

„No więc...“, odezwał się chwili.

„Nazywam się Krystyna Popłoch...“

„To już wiem“.





The man turned round and laughed. “But who are you?” he said. “Do I know you?” He clapped his hand to his brow. “Of course, you’re... you’re...” he said, snapping his fingers in the air. Krysia realized that he didn’t recognize her, but there was nothing odd about that. After all, he knew her in a different way, through a dream, from the inside, not the way people usually know each other.

“I’ll explain everything. May I go on in?”

The man hesitated. The ash from his cigarette fell to the floor and he ushered her into the sitting room. She took off her shoes and went in.

“I’m packing, as you can see,” said the man, explaining the mess. He removed the crumpled bedclothes from the sofa-bed and took them into another room, then came back and sat down opposite her. His faded pyjamas exposed a strip of bare chest; it was thin and bony.

“Mr A. Mos, do you sometimes have dreams?” she asked hesitantly and immediately knew she had made a mistake. The man laughed, slapped his thighs and gave her a look that seemed ironic.

“Well I never – a young lady comes to see a strange man and asks if he has dreams. It’s just like a dream.”

“But I know you.”

“Do you? How come you know me, but I don’t know you? Oh, maybe we met at Jaś’s party? At Jaś Latka’s?”

She shook her head.

“No? Where was it then?”

“Mr A. Mos...”

“My name’s Andrzej. Andrzej Mos.”

“Krysia Popłoch,” she said. They both stood up, shook hands and sat down again awkwardly.

“So...” he said after a while.

“My name’s Krysia Popłoch...”

“I know that.”

“...I’m thirty years old, I work in a bank, where I’m quite senior. I live in Nowa Ruda – do you know where that is?”

“Somewhere near Katowice?”

“No, no. It’s near Wrocław.”

“Aha,” he said distractedly. “Would you like a beer?”

“No, thank you.”





„...mam trzydzieści lat, pracuję w banku i pełnię odpowiedzialną funkcję. Mieszkam w Nowej Rudzie, wie pan, gdzie to jest?”

„Gdzieś koło Katowic“.

„Wcale nie. To w województwie wrocławskim“.

„Acha“, powiedział nieuważnie. „Nie napije się pani piwa?“

„Nie, dziękuję“.

„No to ja się napiję“.

Wstał i poszedł do kuchni. Krysia zobaczyła na meblościance maszynę do pisania i wkręcony w nią papier. Nagle pomyślała, że tam jest napisane, co ma teraz zrobić, jak to powiedzieć, i nawet podniosła się, ale Andrzej Mos wrócił z butelką piwa w rękę.

„Prawdę mówiąc, myślałem, że pani jest z Częstochowy. Nawet wydawało mi się przez chwilę, że panią znam“.

„Tak?“, ucieszyła się Krysia.

„Nawet myślałem, że...“, jego oczy zablęśły. Pociągnął z butelki spory łyk.

„Że co?“

„Wie pani, jak to jest. Nie pamięta się wszystkiego. Nie zawsze. Może między nami coś było? Na imprezie u...“

„Nie“, powiedziała szybko Krysia i poczuła, że robi się czerwona. „Nigdy pana przedtem nie widziałam“.

„Jak to, mówiła pani, że mnie zna?“

„No tak, ale tylko pana głos“.

„Mój głos? Boże, co pani kombinuje? Ja chyba śnię. Przychodzi do mnie lala, twierdzi, że mnie zna, ale widzi mnie pierwszy raz w życiu. Zna tylko mój głos...“

Nagle znieruchomiał z butelką przy ustach i wpił się w Krysię wzrokiem.

„Już wiem. Pani jest z UB. Znasz mój głos, bo podsłuchujesz moje telefony, tak?“

„Nie. Pracuję w banku...“

„Dobra, dobra, ale ja już dostałem paszport i wyjeżdżam. Wyjeżdżam, rozumiesz? Do wolnego świata. Pakuję się, jak widzisz. To już koniec, nic mi nie możecie zrobić“.

„Niech pan nie...“

„Czego chcesz?“

„Pan mi się śnił. Znalazłam pana przez książkę telefoniczną.“





“Well, I’m going to have one.”

He stood up and went into the kitchen. Krysia noticed a typewriter on the desk with a piece of paper in it. Suddenly she got the idea that what she should do and say next was written on it, so she got up to take a look, but Andrzej Mos came back with a bottle of beer.

“Actually, I thought you were from Częstochowa. For a while there I even thought I knew you.”

“Really?” said Krysia, perking up.

“I even thought...” he said, his eyes shining. He took a large swig of the bottle.

“What?”

“You know how it is. You don’t remember everything. Not always. Was there something between us? At the party at...”

“No,” said Krysia quickly and felt herself go red. “I’ve never seen you before.”

“But didn’t you say you know me?”

“Yes, I do, but only your voice.”

“My voice? God, what are you on about? I must be dreaming. A girl comes round and insists she knows me, but it’s the first time she’s ever seen me in her life. She only knows my voice...”

Suddenly he froze with the bottle to his lips and his eyes bored into Krysia. “Now I know. You’re from the secret police. You know my voice because you’ve been tapping my phone, right?”

“No. I work in a bank...”

“All right, all right, but I’ve got my passport now and I’m leaving. I’m leaving, get it? For the free world. I’m packing up, as you can see. It’s all over, you people can’t do anything to me now.”

“Please don’t...”

“What do you want?”

“I dreamed about you. I found you through the phone book.”

The man lit a cigarette and stood up. He started pacing up and down the cluttered room. Krysia took her identity card out of her handbag and placed it open on the table.

“Please take a look, I’m not from the secret police.”

He leaned over the table and looked at it.

“That doesn’t prove a thing,” he said. “You don’t write in an identity card that you’re a secret policeman, do you?”





Mężczyzna zapalił papierosa i wstał. Zaczął chodzić po zagraconym pokoju od okna do drzwi. Krysia wyciągnęła z torebki dowód osobisty i położyła otwarty na stole.

„Niech pan popatrzy, nie jestem z żadnego UB“.

Nachylił się nad stołem i obejrzał dokument.

„To niczego nie wyjaśnia“, powiedział. „Przecież w dowodzie nie wpisuje się, że ubek“.

„Co mam zrobić, żeby mi pan uwierzył?“

Staął nad nią i palił papierosa.

„Wie pani co? Robi się późno. Ja zaraz mam zamiar wyjść. Jestem umówiony. Poza tym pakuję się. Muszę pozałatwiać różne ważne sprawy“.

Krysia wzięła ze stołu swój dowód i włożyła go do torebki. Gardło jej się zacisnęło boleśnie.

„To ja już pójdę“.

Nie protestował. Odprowadził ją do drzwi.

„Więc śniłem się pani?“

„Tak“, powiedziała wsuwając pantofle.

„I znalazła mnie pani przez książkę telefoniczną?“

Kiwnęła głową.

„Do widzenia. Przepraszam“, powiedziała.

„Do widzenia“.

Zbiegła po schodach i znalazła się na ulicy. Szła w dół do dworca i płakała. Tusz z rzęs rozpuszczał się i szczypał w oczy; to dlatego świat rozmazał się na świetliste, kolorowe plamy. W kasie powiedzieli jej, że ostatni pociąg do Wrocławia już odszedł. Następnym było rano, więc poszła do dworcowego baru i zamówiła herbatę. Nic nie myślała, patrzyła tylko na pływający monotonnie plasterek cytryny. Z peronów do wnętrza dworca wpływała mglista wilgotna noc. To nie dowód, żeby nie wierzyć snom, pomyślała w końcu Krysia. One zawsze mają sens, nigdy się nie mylą, to świat realny nie dorasta do porządku snu. Książki telefoniczne kłamią, pociągi obierają niewłaściwe kierunki, ulice wyglądają zbyt podobnie, mylą się litery w nazwach miast, ludzie zapominają własne imiona. Tylko sen jest prawdziwy. Wydało jej się, że znowu słyszy ten ciepły, pełen miłości głos w lewym uchu.

„Zadzwoń na informację. Ostatni pociąg do tej pani Nowej Rudy już odszedł“, powiedział Andrzej Mos i usiadł przy jej stoliku. Na mokrej ceracie narysował palcem krzyżyk. „Rozmazała się pani“.





“What can I do to convince you?”

He stood over her, smoking his cigarette.

“You know what? It’s getting late. I’m just on my way out. I have an appointment. And besides, I’m packing. I’ve got all sorts of important things to see to.”

Kryisia took her identity card from the table and put it back in her handbag. Her throat felt painfully tight.

“I’ll be off, then.”

He didn’t protest. He saw her to the door.

“So you dreamed about me?”

“Yes,” she said, slipping on her shoes.

“And you found me through the phone book?”

She nodded.

“Goodbye. I’m sorry,” she said.

“Goodbye.”

She ran down the stairs and found herself in the street. She walked down the hill towards the station, crying. Her mascara ran and stung her eyes, turning the world into a brightly coloured blur. At the ticket office she was told that the last train for Wrocław had just left. The next one was in the morning, so she went to the station bar and ordered some tea. Her mind was a blank as she sat staring at the slice of lemon floating limply in the glass. From the platforms a damp, foggy night came drifting into the station hall. This is no reason not to believe in dreams, it finally occurred to her. They always make sense, they never get it wrong – it’s the real world that doesn’t live up to their perfection. Phone books tell lies, trains go in the wrong direction, the letters in the names of cities get mixed up, and people forget their own names. Only dreams are real. She thought she could hear that warm voice full of love in her left ear again.

“I called the travel information. The last train to Nowa Ruda has already gone,” said Andrzej Mos, and sat down at her table. He drew a little cross on the wet oilcloth. “Your make-up’s run.”

She took out a handkerchief, wetted the corner with spit and wiped her eyelids.

“So you dreamed about me? It’s an incredible honour to be dreamed about by someone you don’t know, who lives at the other end of the country... So what happened in the dream?”

“Nothing. You just spoke to me.”

“What did I say?”





Wyciągnęła z torebki chusteczkę, pośliniła rożek i wytarła powieki.

„A więc śniłem się pani? To niezrozumiałe wyróżnienie tak śnić się komuś, kogo się nie zna, kto mieszka na drugim końcu kraju... No i co tam było w tym śnie?”

„Nic. Tylko pan do mnie mówił”.

„Co mówiłem?”

„Że jestem niezwykła i że mnie pan kocha”.

Pstryknął palcami i przeciągle spojrzął w sufit.

„Cóż to za dziwaczny sposób poderwania faceta. Jestem pełen uznania”.

Nie odezwała się. Małymi łyczkami sączyła herbatę. „Chciałabym być już w domu”, powiedziała po chwili.

„Chodźmy do mnie. Mam dwa pokoje”.

„Nie. Poczekam tutaj”.

„Jak pani chce”.

Poszedł do bufetu i przyniósł sobie kufel piwa.

„Myślę, że nie jest pan A. Mosem. To znaczy tym, który mi się śnił. Musiałam się gdzieś pomylić. Może to inne miasto, nie Częstochowa”.

„Może”.

„Będę musiała znowu szukać”.

Mężczyzna gwałtownie postawił kufel na stole, aż wylało się trochę piwa.

„Szkoda, że nie poznam rezultatów”.

„Ale głos ma pan podobny”.

„Chodźmy do mnie. Prześpi się pani na łóżku, a nie przy stoliku w barze”.

Widział, że się zawahała. Bez tego koszmarnego tuszu na rzęsach wyglądała młodziej. Zmęczenie rozpuściło wizerunek prowincjonalnej pańci.

„Chodźmy”, powtórzył, a ona wstała bez słowa.

Wziął jej bagaż i ruszyli z powrotem pod górę, pustą już ulicą Sienkiewicza.

„I co było jeszcze w tym śnie?”, zapytał, ścieląc jej wersalkę w dużym pokoju.

„Już mi się nie chce o tym mówić. To nieważne”.

„Napijemy się piwa? Albo wódki na dobry sen? Mogę jeszcze zapalić?”

Przytaknęła. Zniknęła w kuchni, a ona po chwili wahania podeszła do





“That I’m unusual and that you love me.”

He snapped his fingers and took a long stare at the ceiling.

“What a crazy way to pick a guy up! I take my hat off to you.”

She didn’t reply, just went on sipping her tea.

“I wish I was at home now,” she said at last.

“Let’s go to my place. I’ve got a spare bed.”

“No. I’m going to wait here.”

“As you wish.”

He went to the buffet and got himself a mug of beer.

“I don’t think you are A. Mos. I mean not the one I dreamed about. I must have gone wrong somewhere. Maybe it’s another city, not Częstochowa.”

“Maybe.”

“I’ll have to look again.”

The man plonked his mug down on the table with such force that he spilled some beer.

“Pity I won’t know the results.”

“But you do have a similar voice.”

“Let’s go to my place. You can spend the night in a bed, not at a bar table.”

He could see that she was wavering. Without the ghastly mascara she looked younger, less provincial.

“Let’s go,” he repeated, and she stood up without a word.

He took her luggage and they went back up the hill. Sienkiewicz Street was deserted now.

“And what else was in the dream?” he asked, as he made up the sofa-bed in the main room for her.

“I don’t want to talk about it any more. It doesn’t matter.”

“Shall we have a beer? Or some vodka as a nightcap? Mind if I light up?”

She agreed. He disappeared into the kitchen, and after a moment’s hesitation she went up to the typewriter. Before she had even read the title of the poem written there her heart began to beat. It said: “A Night in Mariand”. She stood over the typewriter as if rooted to the spot. Behind her, clattering about in the kitchen, was Amos from her dream, a real, live skinny man with bloodshot eyes, someone who knew everything and understood everything, who entered into





maszyny. Zanim jeszcze przeczytała tytuł jakiegoś wiersza, zaczęło jej bić serce. Tytuł brzmiał: Noc w Mariandzie. Stała nad maszyną jak sparaliżowana. Za jej plecami, w kuchni pobrzękiwał szkłem Amos z jej snu, żywy, ciepły, szczupły mężczyzna o zaczerwienionych oczach, ktoś, kto wszystko wie i wszystko rozumie, kto wchodzi w ludzkie sny, sieje tam miłość i niepokój, ktoś, kto porusza światem, jakby świat był kurtyną, którą zasłania się jakąś inną prawdę, prawdę nieuchwytną, bo nie podpartą rzeczami, zdarzeniami, niczym trwałym.

Dotknęła drżącym palcem klawisza.

„Piszę wiersze“, powiedział za jej plecami. „Wydalem nawet tomik“.

Nie mogła się odwrócić.

„No, proszę, niech pani siada. Teraz to już nie ma znaczenia. Jadę do wolnego świata. Napiszę do pani, jak mi pani da adres“.

Usłyszała jego głos tuż za sobą, po lewej stronie.

„Podoba się pani? Czyta pani poezję? To tylko szkic, jeszcze go nie skończyłem. Podoba się pani?“

Spuściła głowę. W uszach dudniła jej krew. Dotknął delikatnie jej ramienia.

„Coś się stało?“, zapytał.

Odwróciła się do niego i zobaczyła wpatrzone w siebie ciekawie oczy. Poczula jego zapach - papierosów, kurzu i papieru. Przytuliła się do tego zapachu i stali tak bez ruchu kilka minut. Jego ręce uniosły się i zawahały przez chwilę, a potem zaczęły ją gładzić po plecach.

„A jednak to ty, znalazłam cię“, powiedziała szeptem.

Dotknął palcem jej policzka i pocałował ją.

„Niech ci będzie“.

Wsunął palce w jej tlenione włosy i przyssał się do jej ust. Potem pociągnął ją na wersalkę i zaczął rozbierać. Nie podobało się jej to, było zbyt gwałtowne, nie czuła przyjemności, ale to miało być jak ofiara. Musiała na wszystko pozwolić, więc wysuwała się z garsonki i bluzki, i pasa do pończoch, i biustonosza. Jego chuda klatka piersiowa przesunęła się przed jej oczami - sucha i kanciasta jak kamień.

„No to jak mnie słyszałaś w tym śnie?“, zapytał rozdyszczonym szeptem.

„Mówiłeś mi w uchu“.

„W którym uchu?“

„W lewym“.

„Tutaj?“, zapytał i wsunął jej język do ucha.





people's dreams, sowing love and anxiety, someone who moved the world aside as if it were a curtain concealing some other, elusive truth.

Her fingers trembled as she touched the keys.

"I write poetry," he said behind her. "I've even published a small volume."

She couldn't turn round.

"Do sit down. It doesn't matter any more, because I'm off to the free world now. Give me your address and I'll write to you."

She could hear his voice just behind her, in her left ear.

"Do you like it? Do you read poetry? It's just a draft, I haven't finished it yet. Do you like it?"

She let her head drop. The blood was pounding in her ears. He gently touched her arm.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She turned round to face him and saw his eyes fixed on her curiously. She could smell his scent – of cigarettes, dust and paper. She snuggled up to that scent, and they stood there without moving for several minutes. For a while he held his hands away from her, wavering, then he began to stroke her back.

"It is you, I've found you," she whispered.

He touched her cheek and kissed her.

"If you like."

He pushed his fingers into her peroxide hair and pressed his lips to hers. Then he pulled her onto the sofa-bed and started to undress her. She didn't like this, it was too abrupt, she wasn't going to enjoy it, but it had to be done, like a sacrifice. She had to allow him anything, so she slipped out of her dress, and her blouse, her suspender belt and bra. His thin rib cage loomed before her eyes, dry and angular like a stone.

"So how did you hear me in the dream?" he asked in a breathy whisper.

"You spoke in my ear."

"Which one?"

"The left one."

"Here?" he asked and slipped his tongue into her ear.

She squeezed her eyelids shut. She could no longer break free. It was too late. He was pinning her down with the whole weight of his body, touching her, penetrating her, piercing her. But somehow she knew that this had to happen, that she had to give Amos his due first, before she'd be able to take him away with





Zacisnęła powieki. Już się nie mogła uwolnić. Było za późno. Przygniatał ją całym ciężarem ciała, dopadł ją, penetrował, przebijał. Ale skądś wiedziała, że tak właśnie musi być, że najpierw trzeba dać Amosowi to, co mu się należy, żeby potem jego samego móc zabrać ze sobą i posadzić przed domem jak roślinę, jak wielkie drzewo. Dlatego poddała się temu obcemu ciału, a nawet objęła je niezdarnie rękami i włączyła się w rytmiczny dziwaczny taniec.

„Niech cię szlag“, powiedział potem mężczyzna i zapalił papierosa.

Kryścia ubrała się i usiadła przy nim. Nalał wódki do dwóch kieliszków.

„Jak ci było?“, spojrzał na nią krótko i wypił wódkę.

„Dobrze“, odpowiedziała.

„Chodźmy spać“.

„Teraz?“

„Jutro masz pociąg.“

„Wiem“.

„Trzeba nastawić budzik“.

A. Mos powlókł się do łazienki. Kryścia siedziała bez ruchu i przyglądała się świątyni Amosa. Ściany były pomalowane na pomarańczowo, ale w zimnym świetle jarzeniówek stawały się nieprzyjemnie sine. W miejscu gdzie od ściany odstawała słomiana mata, widać było bardziej jaskrawy kolor pomarańczy. Wydało jej się, że świecił, że raził w oczy. Przy oknie wisiała okopcona papierosowym dymem firanka, a po prawej stała opustoszała meblościanka z maszyną do pisania, w której tkwiła Noc w Mariandzie.

„Dlaczego mnie pokochałeś?“, zapytała go, kiedy wrócił. „Czym się różnię od innych ludzi?“

„Ty jesteś walnięta, jak Boga kocham“.

Znowu miał na sobie tę rozłazącą się na piersiach pasiastą piżamę.

„Co to znaczy, że jestem walnięta?“

„Jesteś wariatka. Odbiło ci“.

Nalał sobie kieliszek wódki i przechylił go jednym haustem. Powiedział:

„Przyjechałeś do nieznanego faceta przez pół Polski. Opowiedziałaś mu swój sen i poszłaś z nim do łóżka. To tyle. Jesteś walnięta“.

„Dlaczego mnie zwodzisz? Dlaczego nie przyznasz się, że jesteś Amosem i wiesz o mnie wszystko“.

„Nie jestem żadnym Amosem. Nazywam się Andrzej Mos“.





her and plant him in front of her home like a huge tree. And so she surrendered to the alien body, and even embraced it awkwardly, joining in the bizarre, rhythmical dance.

“Cheers,” the man said afterwards and lit a cigarette.

Kryisia got dressed and sat down beside him. He poured vodka into two shot glasses.

“How was it for you?” he asked, briefly glancing at her and draining the vodka.

“Fine,” she replied.

“Let’s get some sleep.”

“Already?”

“You’ve got a train to catch tomorrow.”

“I know.”

“I’d better set the alarm.”

A. Mos shuffled off to the bathroom. Kryisia sat still and looked around Amos’s temple. The walls were painted orange, but the cold fluorescent light made them look a dull shade of blue. Where a patch of hessian had come away from the wall she could see a brighter orange colour. It seemed to be shining, dazzling her. A curtain yellow with cigarette smoke hung at the window, and to her right stood the abandoned desk and the typewriter with “A Night in Mariand” in it.

“Why did you fall in love with me?” she asked when he came back. “What makes me different from other people?”

“For God’s sake, you’re cracked.”

“What do you mean, I’m cracked?”

“You’re crazy. Off your rocker.”

He poured himself a shot of vodka and downed it in one.

“You came half way across Poland to see a complete stranger,” he said. “You told him your dream and you went to bed with him. That’s it. You’re cracked.”

“Why are you lying to me? Why don’t you admit you’re Amos and you know all about me?”

“I’m not Amos. My name’s Andrzej Mos.”

“What about Mariand?”

“What Mariand?”

“A Night in Mariand. What’s Mariand?”





„A Mariand?”

„Jaki Mariand?”

„Noc w Mariandzie. Co to jest Mariand?”

Roześmiał się i usiadł przy niej na krześle.

„To knajpa na Rynku. Przychodzą tam wszystkie miejscowe menele i piją wodę. Napisałem o tym wiersz. Wiem, że jest marny. Pisałem lepsze kawałki“.

Patrzyła na niego z niedowierzaniem.

Powrotna podróż była pełna trzasku zamykanych drzwi - trzaskały drzwi do nocnego pociągu, drzwi przedziałów, ubikacji dworcowych, autobusów. W końcu głucho trzasnęły drzwi wejściowe do domu. Krysia rzuciła torbę i położyła się na łóżku. Spała cały dzień. A gdy wieczorem zaniepokojona matka zawołała ją na kolację, Krysia zapomniała, że gdziekolwiek wyjeżdżała. Sen, jak gumka, wymazał całą podróż. Którejś z następnych nocy Krysia usłyszała w swoim lewym uchu znajomy głos: „To ja, Amos, gdzie byłaś?”

„Jak to, nie wiesz, gdzie mogłam być?” „Nie wiem“, odpowiedział. „Czy nie wędrujesz razem ze mną?“ Głos zamilkł, Krysi wydało się, że to milczenie było wyrazem jakiegoś zawstydzenia. „Nigdy nie odchodź tak daleko“, odezwał się w jej uchu po chwili. „Co to dla ciebie znaczy daleko?“, zapytała go ze złością. Chyba wystraszył się tego tonu, bo umilkł, a Krysia musiała się obudzić.

Po tej wyprawie do Częstochowy nic już nie było takie samo jak przedtem. Ulice w Nowej Rudzie wyschły, zalało je słońce. Dziewczyny ustawiały na biurkach bukiety z forsycji. Schodził lakier z paznokci, u nasady tlenionych włosów pojawiły się ciemne odrosty i popychały jasne końcówki ku ramionom. W południe otwierano wielkie okno w sali bankowej i płynął przez nie gwar z ulicy - głosy dzieci, smugi hałasu samochodów, nagły pośpieszny stuk damskich szpilek, trzepot skrzydeł gołębi. Wychodziło się z pracy z przyjemnością. Wąskie uliczki kusily, żeby nimi przejść, popatrzeć w twarz ludziom, zapamiętać jakiś szczególny podwórkowy pejzaż. Zapraszały kawiarnie, zadymione przestrzenie pełne ciekawych spojrzeń i leniwych rozmów. I dalej: nieśmiertelność kaw parzonych w szklankach, dzwinkowaty dźwięk aluminiowych łyżeczek.

W maju Krysia poszła do jasnovidza i zapytała go o swoją przyszłość. Jasnovidz postawił jej horoskop, a potem długo koncentrował się z zamkniętymi oczami.

„Co chcesz wiedzieć?“, zapytał ją.

„Co ze mną będzie?“, powiedziała, a on musiał widzieć pod powiekami jakieś rozległe przestrzenie, bo jego gałki oczne poruszały się w lewo i w prawo, jakby oglądały wewnętrzne krajobrazy.

Krysia zapaliła papierosa i czekała. Jasnovidz zobaczył popielate doliny, a w nich resztki miast i wiosek, obraz był nieruchomy, martwy, spopielony i z każdą





He laughed and sat on a chair beside her.

“It’s a pub in the market place. All the local boozers drink there. I wrote a poem about it. I know it’s bad. I’ve written better things.”

She stared at him incredulously.

The return journey was filled with the crash of closing doors – the door of the night train crashed shut, as did the doors of compartments, station lavatories and buses. Finally the front door of the house gave a hollow crash behind her. Krysia threw down her bag and went to bed. She slept all day, and when her anxious mother called her down to dinner in the evening, Krysia had forgotten that she had been anywhere at all. Sleep, like an eraser, had wiped out the entire journey. A few nights later Krysia heard the familiar voice in her left ear. “It’s me, Amos, where have you been?”

“How come you don’t know where I’ve been?” “I don’t,” he replied. “Don’t you travel about with me?” she asked. The voice fell silent. Krysia felt that this silence expressed some sort of embarrassment. “Never go so far away again,” he answered in her ear shortly after. “What do you mean by far away?” she asked him angrily. Maybe her tone frightened him, because he said nothing, and Krysia had to wake up.

After the trip to Częstochowa nothing was the same. The streets of Nowa Ruda dried out and were flooded with sunshine. The girls put bunches of forsythia on their desks. The varnish began to peel off Krysia’s nails, the roots of her peroxide hair grew dark and the fair ends worked their way down to her shoulders. At noon a large window in the banking hall was opened, letting the din from the street flood in – children’s voices, the noise of cars streaming by, the rapid clatter of stiletto heels, and the flutter of pigeons’ wings. It was a pleasure to leave work. The narrow streets beckoned you to enter, to look at the people’s faces and be reminded of a painting of a courtyard scene. The cafés were inviting, their smoke-filled expanses full of curious glances and idle conversation. Even better, they offered the timeless fragrance of coffee brewing in glasses and the clink of metal teaspoons.

In May Krysia went to see a clairvoyant and asked him about her future. The clairvoyant read her horoscope, then spent a long time concentrating with his eyes shut.

“What do you want to know?” he asked her.

“What’s going to happen to me?” she said, and he must have been able to see into distant space beneath his eyelids, because his eyeballs kept moving from left to right as if he were surveying inner landscapes.

Krysia lit a cigarette and waited. The clairvoyant saw ash-grey valleys, with the remains of cities and villages. The scene was dead still, and was growing dimmer from moment to moment. The sky was orange, low and thin as nylon. There was





chwilą blaknął. Niebo w nim było pomarańczowe, niskie i lekkie jak poszycie namiotu. Nic się nie poruszało, nie było żadnego wiatru, ani okruszka życia. Drzewa przypominały kamienne słupy, jakby dotknął je ten sam wzrok co żonę Lota. Wydawało mu się, że słyszy, jak delikatnie trzeszczą. Nie było tam ani Krysi, ani jego samego, ani kogokolwiek. Nie wiedział, co ma powiedzieć. Poczł tylko skurcz w brzuchu ze strachu, że będzie musiał teraz kłamać i zmyślać.

„Nigdy nie umiera się raz na zawsze. Twoja dusza będzie tu przychodzić jeszcze wiele razy, aż znajdzie to, czego szuka“, powiedział, a potem wziął głębszy oddech i dodał: „Wyjdiesz za mąż i urodzisz dziecko. Będzie chorować, a ty będziesz o nie dbać. Twój mąż będzie od ciebie starszy i uczyni cię wdową. Twoje dziecko odejdzie od ciebie, wyjedzie daleko, może za ocean. Będziesz bardzo stara, kiedy umrzesz. Umieranie sprawi ci przyjemność“.

To tyle. Krysia odeszła spokojna, bo to wszystko wiedziała. Niepotrzebnie wydała pieniądze. Mogłaby za nie kupić seledynową bluzeczkę bouclé, jakie przychodziły w paczkach z zagranicy. W nocy znowu usłyszała głos Amosa. Powiedział: „Kocham cię, jesteś niezwykłą osobą“.

W północy wydawało się jej, że rozpoznała ten głos, że ma pewność, do kogo należy, i usnęła szczęśliwa. Ale jak to bywa ze snami i półsnami, rano wszystko odpłynęło i zostało jej tylko niejasne wrażenie, że coś wie, tylko nie bardzo rozumie co. I to było wszystko.



**Olga Tokarczuk** (1962) studiowała psychologię na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim. Zadebiutowała w 1992 roku powieścią *Podróż ludzi księgi*. W 1995 roku ukazała się jej kolejna powieść E.E. a następnie *Prawiek i inne czasy* (1996), *Dom dzienny, dom nocny* (1998) i zbiór opowiadań *Gra na wielu bębenkach* (2000). Książki Tokarczuk zostały przetłumaczone m. in. na francuski, niemiecki i hiszpański. Autorka mieszka i pracuje w Sudetach.





nothing moving, not a breath of wind, not a hint of life. The trees looked like stone pillars, as if frozen by the same sight as Lot's wife. He thought he could hear them creaking gently. Kryisia wasn't in this landscape, nor was he there either, nor anyone. He didn't know what to say. He only felt a spasm of fear in his stomach at the thought that now he would have to lie and invent something.

"No one dies for ever. Your soul will come back again many times, until it finds what it's looking for," he said, then took a deep breath and added, "You'll get married and have a child. It will fall ill, and you'll look after it. Your husband will be older than you and will leave you a widow. Your child will go away from you, far away, over the ocean perhaps. You will be very old when you die. Dying will not cause you pain."

That was all. Kryisia went away calm, because she knew all that already. She had spent her money in vain. She could have bought a willow-green bouclé blouse of the sort that were arriving in bundles from abroad. In the night she heard Amos's voice again. "I love you, you're an unusual person," he said.

In her sleepy state she thought she recognized the voice, and felt sure she knew whose it was, and she fell asleep happy. But as happens with dreams and semi-dreams, in the morning it had all melted away and she was left with nothing but a vague impression of knowing something, without being quite sure what. And that was all.

*Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones*



**Olga Tokarczuk** (1962) studied psychology at Warsaw University. Her first novel, *The Journey of the People of the Book*, was published in 1992. Her further novels include *E.E.* (1995), *Time Immemorial and Other Times* (1996), *House of Day, House of Night* (1998) and *Playing Many Drums* (2000). Her books have been translated into several languages, including French, German and Spanish. She lives and works in the Sudety region of south-western Poland.

PL

en

May Day



# Mehis Heinsaar

## Liblikmees

Kui Anselm tsirkusedirektori kabinetti sisenes, vajus ta suu imestusest ammuli – talle tundus, nagu istunuks hetk aega tagasi otse tema ees asetseva laua taga kalapeaga mees. Ent arvatavasti see tõesti ainult viirastus talle nii, sest hetk hiljem kukkus teda sealtsamast laua tagant söimama täiesti normaalne – väike, paks ja kiilakas meesolevus: „Kuidas te julgete ilma koputamata minu kabinetti siseneda – milline ülbust! Ukse peal oli ju silt, et mul on praegu lõuna – tõesti, lausa ennekuulmatu ebaviisakus. Kelleks te end õige peate ja misasja te siit üldse otsite, kui küsida tohib. Või ei – parem kaduge kus see ja teine!“

Aga Anselm otsustas siiski mitte nii kergelt alla anda, sest tal oli kindel plaan saada Boruslawski maagilisse tsirkusesse tööle.

„Ma tõesti väga vabandan, härra direktor, ...kui te seda ikka olete,“ ent nähes paksuke ärrituvat nägu, veendus Anselm, et tegu on siiski Boruslawski endaga. „Khm, niisiis, härra direktor, julgen nimelt otse välja öelda, et mul on soov saada teie tsirkusesse mustkunstniku kohta.“ Seda kuuldes muutus paksuke korraka valvsaks, kiiruga libistas ta end toolilt maha ning sibas ähkides Anselmi nina alla, puurides oma kummalised pungsilmad teise omadesse: „Nii, nii – või siis sinnapoole te rihite. Kas te lugesite kuulutuse ikka hoolikalt läbi?“ „Aga selle peale ma ju tulingi,“ imestas Anselm teise umbusklikkust. „Just, just, aga siis pidite ka märkama, et meilt saab tööd vaid tõeline oma ala meister,“ ja paksukese suunurk tõmbus äkki muigvele, „on teil ehk mingi dokument ühes, mis seda tõendaks või ehk hooke pookuste nimekiri?“ Säärane surveavaldus muutis Anselmi hääle juba veidi ebakindlamaks: „Noh, mingeid pabereid mul küll ette näidata pole,“ pomises ta maha vaadates, „aga ma võin kaardimaja mõne hetkega valmis teha ja küülikuid paarikaupa torukübarast välja tirida ning publiku hulgast oma kikäpsu...“ Siinkohal katkestas Anselm oma loetelu, sest Boruslawski muigamine oli juba itsitamiseks üle läinud. „Seda ma arvasin,“ lausus ta viimaks, „kulla mees, see on ju iganenud repertuaar, te võite neil adadel olla nii tubli kui tahes, aga tänapäeval ei kõida see enam publikut. Mingid küülikud ja kaardid ja muu tilu-lilu.“

Võtame kasvõi meie eelmise mustkunstniku, Ernesto. Temaga võis juba enam-vähem rahule jääda. Ernesto ampluaa oli nimelt Pisikeste Asjade Moondamine – ja sel alal oli ta tõesti meister. Näiteks võis ta jõllitada mõne pealtvaataja tasku-uuri, kuni see kõige ehtsamaks linavästrikuks muutus, või põrnitseda kellegi pintsakunööbi vaskkrossiks – käkitegu tema käes.



# Mehis Heinsaar

## Butterfly Man

When Anselm entered the circus director's office, his jaw dropped in amazement – it seemed to him that a moment ago the man sitting at the desk there in front of him had the head of a fish. However, it must just have been a trick of the eye because, next second, a perfectly normal – small, fat, bald – man began yelling at him: “How dare you come into my office without knocking? What cheek! It says on the door that I'm having lunch, doesn't it? Who do you think you are and what do you want, may I ask? Or better not – just get the hell out of here!”

Anselm was not going to give in so easily because he was determined to get a job at the Boruslawski magic circus.

“I'm really awfully sorry, sir ... you are the director, I presume,” but on seeing the man's face cloud over, he knew it was indeed Boruslawski himself. “Er, well, Mr Boruslawski, I'll be quite frank with you – I'd like to get the conjurer's job in your circus.” On hearing this, the little man suddenly grew attentive, he quickly slipped off his chair, scurried, panting, over to Anselm and stared up into his face with his goggly eyes. “Ah, so that's what you're after. Did you read the advertisement carefully?” “I did,” said Anselm, somewhat surprised at the man's suspicious gaze. “In that case you must have noticed that only a really skilled master stands a chance here,” and suddenly the corners of the man's mouth turned up into a smile. “Perhaps you've got some document to prove your skill or a list of tricks that you can perform?” Anselm's voice took on a slightly less secure tone: “I don't think I have any papers,” he mumbled, staring at the ground, “but I can build a house of cards in a jiffy and pull pairs of rabbits out of a hat and ...” Anselm halted as Boruslawski's grin turned into a sneer. “Just as I thought,” he said, “my dear man, that's all old hat, it doesn't matter how good you are at it, rabbits, cards and all that stuff just don't grab audiences today. Let me tell you about our last conjurer Ernesto. He was quite on the ball. His forte was Transforming Small Objects – and he was a true master. For example, he could gaze at a spectator's watch until it turned into a real wagtail, or stare someone's jacket button into a copper coin – easy as pie for him! Once he even turned a lady's shoelace into a blindworm. Admittedly, the lady had a heart attack, but what a trick, eh? Ernesto's performances often dragged on until midnight, but the audiences were prepared to stick it out quite happily, because it was real art. Do you understand?” Anselm nodded in deference. “But what happened to him?” “What happened, what happened – what usually happens in these cases.





Kord suutis see mees ühe daami kingapaela koguni vaskussiks moondata, daam sai küll ataki, aga trikk missugune – eks ole!? Ernesto etteasted venisid sageli küll keskööni välja, aga samas oli publik rõõmuga valmis kannatama, sest tegemist oli tõelise kunstiga. Mõistate?“ Anselm noogutas aukartlikult pead: „Aga mis siis temaga lõpuks juhtus?“ „Mis juhtus, mis juhtus – tavaline asi säärase puhul, mida rohkem annet, seda vähem arukust. Mees püüdis ühel etendusel pingpongipallist kuldkeri välja põrnitseda – ja viimaks sai ajurabanduse. Hindas oma võimeid lihtsalt üle... Aga nüüd, andke andeks, hakkas mul veidi kiire. Ja teid enese juurde tööle võtta ei saa ma kahjuks kuidagi, sest meil käib siin haritud publik ning teiesugused vilistatakse kahjuks välja – nii et head päeva.“

„Tähendab, mind pole siin maailmas enam kellelegi vaja,“ mõtles Anselm meelemasenduses, „ja tõtt-õelda pole ma oma oskustest ju isegi mingit rõõmu veel eales tundnud, nii et Boruslawskil on täielik õigus mind välja visata.“ Norguspäi pöördus ta minekule.

Ukselinki puudutades murdis Anselmis miski ja see miski eraldus temast trobikonna liblikate kujul ning kandus mööda direktori kabinetti laiali. Anselmil hakkas nüüd korraga väga kiire – näost lubivalgeks muutudes hakkas ta kätega vehkides noid hõljujaid taga ajama, purustades seejuures mitu lillevaasi ning ühe kuldkalakestega akvaariumi. Kui ta mõne liblika kätte sai, krõmpsutas ta selle sealsamas ka kohe ära, ise poolmetsistunud pilgul direktori poole kiigates, kes omakorda tardunud poosis mustkunstnikku jälgis.

„Mul on parajasti lõunaaeg,“ püüdis Anselm end tobedalt välja vabandada, „ja ma olen oma söögiaegade suhtes väga täpne.“ Seejärel, saades aru, kui jaburas olukorras ta on, pages mustkunstnik kiiruga ruumist välja.

Trepist alla joostes tundis Anselm, et keegi on tal ähkides kannul, ning ta lisas hoogu. Ent välisukse juures sai hämmastavat kiirust üles näidanud tsirkusedirektor põgeneja siiski kätte: „Kuhu te ometi tormate, mees – see, mis te minu kabinetis äsja korraldasite, oli ju kõige ehtsam klounaad, ja pealegi need kirjud liblikad, mis teie kehast eraldusid...“

„... oh, ma palun, palun ärge norige mu ihuvea kallal,“ katkestas teda Anselm, „ma olen selle pärast niigi küllalt palju kannatanud. See on alati nii, et kui ma midagi väga sügavalt läbi elan, hakkab neid minu ihust lenduma, ning see viib mind alati endast välja. Juba koolis kiusati mind selle pärast taga ning mu lähimad sugulased ja isegi nemad nägid minus potentsiaalset värdjat, kuigi mu mõistus oli ja on igati normaalne.“

Ainult üks maniakaalne naisbioloog tundis minu fenomeni vastu loomuvastast huvi ja hakkas koguni mu armukeseks, et saaks aga põhjalikult mind uurida. Küll avastas ta minu ihuliblikais sarvknaksureid, küll mingeid ängelheina-kirivaksikuid, üle kõige aga meeldisid talle suur-kiirgliblikad, mis eraldusid minust ihulise ekstaasi ajal. Üldse aga loendas ta neid kokku üle





The more talented, the less brains. One evening he tried to stare a ping-pong ball into a golden globe and suffered a stroke. Overestimated his own powers... and now, I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me, I'm in a bit of a hurry. There's no way I can offer you a job here, our audiences are well-educated, they will boo you off. So, good day to you."

"Nobody in this world needs me anymore," thought Anselm in despair, "and to tell the truth ... Boruslawski is quite right to throw me out." Downcast, he turned to go.

As he touched the door handle, something in Anselm snapped and separated from him in the form of a swarm of butterflies, scattering in all directions around the director's office. Anselm turned deathly pale and started to flap his arms about, trying to catch the fluttering creatures. In the process he smashed a few vases and an aquarium with a few goldfish in it. The butterflies he caught he stuffed into his mouth, casting wild glances towards the director, who was standing petrified, watching the conjurer's every move.

"I usually have lunch at this time," was Anselm's stupid explanation. "And I want to keep to my meal times." Realising how feeble this sounded, the conjurer fled from the room.

As he ran downstairs, he heard someone panting behind him, and ran faster. At the front door, however, the director caught up with the fugitive. "Hey - what's the big hurry? What you just showed me, all those butterflies - that was brilliant!"

"... Oh, please, don't mock my disability," interrupted Anselm. "I've suffered enough already. It's always the same, every time I experience a strong emotion, these creatures start flying off my body. I was bullied at school for it, and my relatives, even my parents, saw me as some kind of freak although I've always been of perfectly sound mind.

Only a maniac biologist once took a perverse interest in my phenomenon; actually, she became my mistress in order to examine me more thoroughly. Among my body butterflies she found marsh carpets and bagworm moths, but she took a particular fancy to the purple emperors who emerged when I experienced physical ecstasy. She counted over five hundred species, each supposedly indicating a particular mood of mine. I finally got fed up with her nonsense and sent her packing. So now you know."

"But it's simply fantastic!" exclaimed the director, overjoyed. "Your biologist was a gem and you, my dear young friend, are a great magician. Tomorrow you will be our star attraction - if you're happy with that, of course - and your salary will be tripled. Come and meet your wonderful colleagues, who will show you your quarters." The flushed director dragged Anselm to the back rooms and pressed an unexpectedly large sum of money into his hand. "This is





viiesaja liigi, iga liik pidavat vastama erinevale meeleseisundile minus. Viimaks sai mul tema tobedast fanatismist villand ja ma ajasin ta minema, nüüd te siis teate.“

„Oo, see on lihtsalt fantastiline,“ hüüatas seepeale ülirohmsaks muutunud direktor, „see teie bioloog oli lihtsalt kullatükk ja teie, mu noor sõber, olete nüüdsest suur maag ja võlur, seda ma garanteerin teile. Juba homsest olete meie tsirkuse peaesineja – muidugi kui te ise sellega nõus olete – ja tasu saate kolmekordse. Tulge ja tutvuge nüüd aga oma suurepärase kolleegidega, kes juhatavad teile ka öömaja kätte,“ ja õhetav direktor vedas Anselmi tsirkuse tagaruumidesse ning surus talle seal pihku ootamatult suure summa raha. „See on avantsiks. Irmgiird!“ hõikas ta seejärel kuskile tahapoole: „Tule ja tutvusta meie noorele võlurile tema uut kodu.“ Seda öelnud, tegi direktor Anselmi suunas kerge kummarduse ja lahkus.

Irmgiirdiks hüütu osutus tohutuks, hiiglasvasu naisterahvaks, kelle pikkus võis ületada isegi kolme meetri piiri. Ta paksud punased juuksed olid põimitud hobusepatsi ning kui ta naeratas, paljastus naise suus rida teravaid valgeid hambaid. „Irmgiird, lõvide võitja,“ tutvustas ta end madalal ja nurruval häälel ning ulatas Anselmile kae, mis oli täis kriimustusi. „Väga tore – mina olen Anselm – keskpärane mustkunstnik ja nüüdsest võib mind vist ka liblikmeheks hüüda,“ kohmas Anselm totralt oma jalgu põrnitsedes. Irmgiird aga haaras muigvel sui tema käsivarrest ning nõnda läks see imelik paar tsirkuse tagaruumidega tutvuma.

Seal kohtas Anselm üsnagi kummalist inimgaleriid, sattudes otsekui mingisse veidrasse unenäomaailma. Ta nägi seal läbipaistva ihuga meest istumas kesk läbipaistmatu ihuga kaunitare, kes olid palgatud vist tema haaremiks, ta nägi üht vana kortsulist naist, kel kasvas otsaesel pikk valge sarv ja kelle mahe hingeõhk meenutas Anselmile mingit unustusehõlma vajunud maailma. Lae all hõljusid ringi kaks käsitiibset last ja nende lend meenutas vägagi nahkhiire oma. Veel oli seal grupp erinevaid harjutusi sooritavaid akrobaate, kelle iseärasuseks oli see, et nende nahk oli kalasoomustega kaetud. Ja kõigi nende tegelaste ümber sagis arvutu hulk teenreid, valmis täitma „artistide“ pisimaidki soove.

Anselm tundis end selle seltskonna keskel liikudes üsnagi ebakindlalt, ning järjest keerulisem oli tal aru saada sellest, kas siia on mingi hunnik vördjaid maailma erinevaist paigust kokku tassitud või on tegemist tõesti haruldaste, imeliste olenditega, kelle hulka nüüdsest temalgi on au kuuluda. Kui Irmgiird veel Anselmilt küsis, mida ta oma uuest kollektiivist ka arvab, oskas too ainult areldi õlgu kehitades vastata: „Võib-olla oleks siiski parem, kui ma keskpärase mustkunstnikuna oleksin kusagil mujal oma ametit jätkanud – siin võtab kuidagi kõhedaks.“

Säärane jutt ajas Irmgiirdi sootuks marru, ta haaras Anselmi mantlikraest kinni ja tõmbas liblikmehe nagu takukoonla oma uhkete rindade vahele. „Sa





an advance. Irmgiird!" he yelled. "Come and show our young magician his new home!" The director made a slight bow and left.

Irmgiird turned out to be a huge woman, possibly more than three metres tall. Her thick red hair was tied back in a ponytail and her smile revealed a row of sharp white teeth. "Irmgiird, lion tamer," she introduced herself in a low purring voice and held out a scratched hand. "Glad to meet you – I'm Anselm – mediocre conjurer and I suppose you could now call me butterfly man too," muttered Anselm, staring foolishly at his feet. Smiling, Irmgiird took him by the arm and the odd couple went to explore backstage.

Anselm saw a really weird selection of people there, it was rather like wandering into some kind of strange dream world. He saw a man with a transparent body surrounded by gorgeous women with non-transparent bodies, who seemed to form his harem; he saw an old wrinkled woman with a long white horn growing out of her forehead and whose sweet breath reminded Anselm of a long-forgotten world. Two children with wings for arms were floating near the ceiling and their flight resembled that of bats. There was also a troupe of acrobats practising various routines, who were distinctive in that their skin was covered in fish-scales. Countless attendants were bustling around everywhere, ready to satisfy every whim of the "artists".

Anselm felt distinctly uneasy as he moved through this company, and it grew harder for him to work out if this was just a collection of freaks from different parts of the world or if these were rare and wonderful creatures whose ranks he now had the honour of joining. When Irmgiird asked him what he thought of his new colleagues, he shrugged shyly and replied: "Maybe I would be better off as a mediocre conjurer somewhere else – it's rather intimidating here."

This comment really made Irmgiird fly off the handle; she grabbed Anselm by the collar and clasped him between her magnificent breasts. "You're just a stupid little shithead to talk like that," she rasped viciously, "do you think I'm some kind of monster too? Maybe I should be ashamed of my might and beauty, is that it?" For the duration of this tirade Anselm was forced to look into her dark green eyes and breathe in the heady smell of musk emanating from between her breasts; suddenly a huge cloud of emperor butterflies burst forth from him, a sign of supreme ecstasy.

Seeing this, Irmgiird immediately relented, squatted down in front of Anselm and spoke in a much softer tone: "Tell me, Butterfly Man, why are you ashamed of your peculiarity? Why pretend to be a stupid charlatan when clearly you are not? Your place is here with us. Out there we are all regarded as freaks and cripples, but here we are admired as demigods. Come, I'll show you your rooms." Irmgiird took hold of Anselm's hand as if he were a little child and led him to his new home. This seemed rather luxurious, he was





oled tõepoolest ainult üks väike ja rumal sitapea, kui sa sääraselt kõneled,“ kähistas naine tigidalt, „ehk pead sa ka mind üheks suureks monstrumiks, mis? Ehk peaksin ka mina oma vägevust ja ilu häbenema, ah?“ Et Anselm oli sunnitud kogu sõimuvalingu aja Irmgiirdi sügavrohelistesse silmadesse vaatama ning hullutatavat muskuselõhna sisse hingama, mis hiidnaise rindade vahelt voogas, eraldus temast korraga terve suur parv kiirgliblikaid, mis oli ülima ekstaasi tunnusmärgiks.

Sellist muutust nähes Irmgiird leebus ja kükitades Anselmi ette maha, rääkis temaga nüüd hoopis pehmemal toonil. „Ütle mulle, liblikmees, miks sa küll häbened oma erilisust? Miks tahad sa mängida mingit tobedat šarlatani, kui sa loomu poolest seda ometi pole? Just siin, meie seas on su õige koht ja sa pead selle tõsiasjaga harjuma. Seal, nende hulgas elades, suhtutaks meisse kõigisse kui monstrumeisse või invaliididesse, ent siin rambivalgel imetlevad nad meid kui pooljumalaid neile kättesaamatust maailmast, ja nii see just peabki olema. Tule, ma juhatan sulle nüüd ööbimispaiga kätte,“ ja Irmgiird võttis Anselmil otsekui väikesel lapsel, kes on pea kaotanud, käest kinni ning talutas ta oma uude elamispaika.

Juhatanud Liblikmehe tema üsnagi luksuslikku elutappa ja andnud tema käsutusse kaks kiilaspäist teenrit (kellest üks kohe Anselmi kingi ja teine tema kuube harjama asus), kummardus aga hiidnaine veel korra mehe kõrva ligi ning sosistas, et ootab teda pärast homset etendust enesele külla, mispeale Anselmist eraldusid samas neli või viis rändtähtöölasi (ehk siis *Macdunnoughia confusa*'t) – need olid juba ülisuure segaduse tunnuseks liblikmehe hinges.

Alles pärast südaööd suikus endine mustkunstnik painajalikkude ja viirastusi täis unne, oli ju tema elu saanud liigagi äkilise pöörde. Mingil ajal ilmnis Anselmile unes, et ta komberdab hiidpõrnikana tsirkuseareenile ning publikki koosneb inimsuurustest sitikaist ja saajalgseist, kes kõik kihinal-kahinal Anselmi etteastet ootavad. Seejärel hakkabki ta eneselt vastikuid musti koorikuid ära tirima, kuni seisab viimaks alasti, väriseva noorukina keset platsi. Siis sööstab aga hiidputukaist koosnev publik talle korraga kallale ja pistab ta aplalt nahka.

Kui Anselm hommikul ärkas, oli see tobe unenägu tal õnneks meelest läinud. Ometi oli tema hinges mingi lapselik hirm püsima jäänud, eelaimus, et õhtusel etendusel ei lähe see kõik nõnda lihtsalt, kui võiks arvata.

Et veidigi oma vaeseid väikseid närve rahustada, läks Anselm linna peale hulkuma, ent igal tänavanurgal, kuhu ta ka ei läinud, seisis juba suuri ja kirevaid kuulutusi, kuhu oli kirjutatud midagi taolist: „Teid kutsub maagiline tsirkus! Iga etteaste on kui maailmaime! Öhtu naelaks – LIBLIKMEES! – kohale on kutsutud ka maailmakuulus entomoloog härra Amirgaldi, tuvastamaks seniavastamata liblikaliike. Tulge ja te ei kahetsete!“





even given two bald attendants (one immediately started polishing his shoes and the other his jacket). Before leaving, the huge woman bent down and whispered in his ear that she would wait for him in her room after the next day's performance. At once, four or five dewick's plusias (*Macdunnoughia confusa*) detached themselves from Anselm – a sign of the utter confusion in the Butterfly Man's soul.

It was only after midnight that the former conjurer fell into a nightmarish and delirious sleep. His life, after all, had taken such an unexpected turn. At some point he saw himself staggering into the arena in the form of a huge beetle while the audience, consisting of man-sized bugs and centipedes, waited impatiently for his performance. Anselm started to peel off his disgusting black shell until he was standing in the middle of the arena, a shivering naked young man. Suddenly the audience rose up, stormed into the arena and devoured him greedily. Fortunately, he had forgotten the bad dream by the time he woke in the morning, but a childish fear stayed with him, a premonition that all would not be quite as simple as expected at the evening performance.

To calm his poor nerves, Anselm went for a stroll round town, but on every street corner, wherever he went, he saw huge posters announcing the circus:

“Welcome to the magic circus! Every act is a wonder of the world! The star attraction – BUTTERFLY MAN! World famous entomologist, Professor Amirgaldi, will be present to identify previously unseen species! Come and you won't regret it!”

At every poster, two or three Baltic Graylings (*Oeneis jutta*) detached themselves from Anselm, denoting average fright, and soon he was forced to return to the circus so as not to attract too much attention to himself.

As the evening progressed, Anselm's fear turned into an overwhelming apathy towards everything around him. Before the performance he chose an ordinary tailcoat, at least three sizes too big, and a totally ill-suited silly cap with a long peak. The attendants watched him anxiously, but did not dare interfere. Anselm then took up his position behind the curtain and waited for his turn, sinking slowly into ever deeper torpor.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, the circus director himself appeared, all flushed and panting and accompanied by a spindly man wearing a pince-nez, who immediately started examining Anselm with the utmost care. “May I introduce Professor Amirgaldi – hang on, what on earth are you wearing? You don't look anything like a magician, but I suppose you know what you are doing. You're on in 7 minutes.” Then he was gone, leaving the sharp-eyed professor and the completely expressionless Anselm staring at each other.



Iga uut kuulutust kohates eraldus Anselmist paar-kolm rabasilmikut (ehk *Oeneis jutta't*), mis tähendas tema puhul keskmist ehmatus, ja nii oli liblikmees peagi sunnitud tsirkusesse tagasi pöörduma, et mitte juba päeval enesele liigset tähelepanu tõmmata.

Õhtu edenedes kasvas aga hirmutunne Anselmis üle valdavaks apaatiaks kõige ümbritseva vastu. Etenduse alates valis ta enesele garderoobist suvalise fraki, vähemalt kolm numbrit talle sobivast suurema, ja mingi tobeda pika nokaga mütsi, mis tema imagoga üldse ei sobinud. Teenrid jälgisid liblikmehe tegevust üsna ärevate nägudega, ent teda keelata ei julgenud nad samuti mitte. Siis lonkis Anselm eesriide kõrvale ootama oma esinemisjärjekorda ning mida lähemale jõudis tema kord ette astuda, seda resigneerunumaks mees muutus.

Korraka ilmus teab kust välja punetav ja puhisev teatridirektor ise, käevangus keegi näpitsprillidega kuivetunud mees, kes kohe Anselmit ülisuure huviga silmitsema asus. „Saage tuttavaks,“ sõnas direktor Boruslawski, „see siin on härra professor Amirgaldi – liblikmees, muide mis pagana kupatuse sa endale selga oled ajanud, võluri moodi sa nüüd küll eriti välja ei näe – aga noh, eks sa ise tea. Peaasi, et etendus oleks ehe, teie etteaste algab seitsme minuti pärast.“ Ning juba ta oligi jälle kadunud, jättes teravilgulise professori ja sisutihja ilmega Anselmi omavahel tõtt vahtima.

Et pääseda sellest tobedast seisukorrast, lonkis liblikmees eesriide juurde ning piilus areenile, seal tegi sädelevas trikoos Irmgiird oma lõvidega viimaseid trikke – ta oleks tõesti sobinud Heraklese naiseks. Saal oli rahvast pilgeni täis, kuulutused olid oma töö teinud, ning juba kostiski käteplagin – nüüd oli tema, Anselmi, kord.

Õhetav Irmgiird, kes Liblikmehest kahe isalõviga mööda kiirustas, saatis talle õnnelikul ilmel õhusuudluse, ja kui Anselm viimaks koos professori ning teenritega areenile ilmus, kõlas tormiline aplaus. Anselmi ükskõiksust see ei häirinud, ta istus masinlikult ringi keskel asuvale toolile, heitis jala üle põlve, ning asus siis huvitult oma paremat kinga silmitsema. Saalis valitses haudvaikus.

„Tõepoolest,“ mõtles Anselm omaette muiates, „täna näevad nad maailma vaimukaimat etendust – imemees, kes tuleb ja istub lihtsalt mõnda aega toolil, jalg üle teise, ning jalutab siis jälle minema.“ Korraks tundus säärane etteaste talle eneselegi üsna huvitav.

Samal ajal sebisid teenrid juba üsna ärevalt Anselmi ümber ringi, professor Amirgaldi, käsi koos plekist ruuporiga suu juures, oli iga hetk valmis röökima liblikate ladinakeelseid nimetusi, ent liblikmees istus endiselt tühja ilmega oma toolil, vedrutades nagu mõni üleskeeratav nukk oma paremat jalga. Etteaste algusest oli möödunud tund. Saal oli ikka veel vaikne – ent kauaks?

Siis tõusis esimeses reas istuv direktor veidi ärritunult püsti ja viipas ühe teenritest enese juurde, sosistades talle midagi kõrva. Teener pöördus kiiruga





In order to get out of this embarrassing situation, the Butterfly Man sauntered over to the curtain and peeped out at the arena where Irmgiird, in a sparkling leotard, was just finishing her routine with the lions – she really would have made a perfect wife for Hercules. The circus was packed, the advertisements had worked, there was the applause already – now it was Anselm's turn.

A flushed Irmgiird rushed past the Butterfly Man with two lions, she blew him a happy kiss, and when Anselm, the professor and the attendants appeared in the arena, they were greeted with thunderous applause. This did not shake Anselm's indifference; he sat down on a chair in the middle of the ring, crossed his legs and fixed his eyes on his right shoe. You could have heard a pin drop.

"Well, well," thought Anselm, smiling to himself, "today they are going to see the wittiest performance in the world – a miracle man who just sits on a chair for a while with his legs crossed, and then walks away again." For a second, such a spectacle even seemed rather interesting.

In the meantime, the attendants were anxiously bustling around Anselm, and Professor Amirgaldi, holding a tin loudspeaker at his lips, was poised to yell out the Latin names of the butterflies, but the Butterfly Man was still sitting on his chair, his face a blank, swinging his right leg like a wound-up doll. An hour passed. The audience was still quiet – but for how long?

Suddenly the circus director, who was sitting in the front row, stood up in some agitation, and beckoning an attendant whispered something in his ear. The attendant rushed back to the others with a conspiratorial look on his face. This activity in the arena caught the attention of the audience, who began fidgeting in anticipation.

Each attendant took a small object from his pocket – a quill, half an onion, a small pair of pincers. They gathered around Anselm and tried to make him laugh or cry, anything to bring him out of this defiant mood. However, they achieved nothing more than a few silly giggles.

Some of the spectators now began to think that this was in fact a mummified Butterfly Man whom the others were trying to revive, and they applauded enthusiastically at every sound Anselm produced. The others, however, frowned at them knowingly, indicating that they had got it all wrong.

A few more hours went by without anything special happening. The audience, although well trained in waiting for a miracle to happen, was getting restless. Then came the first catcalls, some people walked out, grimaces of contempt on their faces. Most of the audience, however, which was largely made up of natural scientists of varying degrees of competence, decided to





tagasi, sosistades omakorda teistele teenritele midagi saladusliku näoga. Liikumine arenil muutus asjalikumaks ja publik hakkas mõnuga nihelema – tundus, et asi siiski edeneb.

Iga teener võttis nüüd taskust mingi väikese abiinstrumenti välja, kes hanesule, kes pooliku sibula, kes jälle väikesed näpittstangid. Siis koguneti trobikonnas Anselmi ümber ja püüti teda ajada kas nutma või naerma, igal juhul oma trotslikku meeleolu muutma. Ent peale mõne totra itsituse ei saavutanud nad liblikmehe juures midagi.

Mõnelede pealtvaatajaskonna hulgast jäi aga seepeale mulje, et tegu on hoopis mumifitseeritud liblikmehega, keda nüüd rahva silme all püütakse ellu äratada ning nad aplodeerisid tormiliselt iga Anselmi hääliitsuse peale, ent teadjamad andsid sääraسته kulmu kortsutades märku, et nad on asjast siiski valesti aru saanud.

Nõnda kulus veel paar tundi, ilma et midagi erilist oleks juhtunud. Publik, kes oli küll harjunud enamjaolt imetegusid kannatlikult ootama, hakkas siiski vähehaaval ärrituma. Kostis esimesi mõnitavaid vilesid, mõni publiku hulgast lahkus, demonstratiivne põlgusegrimass näol. Aga enamik pealtvaatajaskonnast, kelle hulgas suure osa moodustas erineva tasemega loodusteadlasi, otsustas siiski kohale jääda, et näha, millega see pentsik etteaste lõpeb. Nende seas ka õnnetu näoga Irmgiird ja vihast ning masendusest longuvajunud tsirkusedirektor.

Kesköök oli Anselm oma puust toolil vajunud sügavasse unne. Ta nägi end väikese poisina lamamas ühel kevadisel välul, käed kukla all, ning tal oli lihtne ja hea olla. See nägemus tollest õhkkergest päevast ilmus talle nii selgelt silme ette, et äkki oli liblikmehel kindel veendumus, et ei enne ega pärast seda päeva pole teda tegelikult olemas olnudki.

Sellest ideest süttinult pahvas Anselmi ihust lendu terve parv lääne-sügisöölasi, mis tähendas vaimustumist ootamatu kinnisidee üle. Professor Amirgaldi, kes oli igavusest ja väsimusest samuti juba magama jäämas, ehmatas end sääraست vaatepilti nähes tikksirgeks ning kisendas vaimustunult ruuporis: „*Agrichola macilenta!* – *Fantastico! Agrichola macilenta!*“. Rahvaski oli oma toolidelt püsti karanud ning aplodeeris tormiliselt Anselmi imeteo peale – ent see oli alles algus. Anselm, olles oma unenäo kaudu äratundmisele jõudnud, et kogu ta hilisem elu, võrreldes tolle ainsama õhkkerge päevaga, on olnud vaid mõttetu varjuteater, langes nüüd sedavõrd kaootilisse meeleollu, et kaotas korraga igasuguse kontrolli enese üle. Kogu tema tunnete nivoo paiskus sadade eri liblikaliikidena esile, nii et peagi polnud inimkeha üldse enam märgata – koerlibliklaste parved vaheldusid märslastega, põualibliklased vaheldusid sügislastega, udeselglaste parved jällegi kireslastega – ja neis tuhandeis hõljujais olid talle Anselmi tulevaste ja minevate päevade röömud, kurbused ning mõtted.





stay put, just to see how it would all end. Among them were Irmgiird, who looked most unhappy, and the circus director, who sat slumped and desolate in his seat.

By midnight, Anselm had sunk into a deep sleep. He saw himself as a small boy lying in a meadow in spring with his hands clasped behind his head. Everything was rosy. The vision of that gossamer light day appeared so clearly before his eyes that the Butterfly Man knew for certain, right there and then, that he had never actually existed before or after that day.

Inflamed by this idea, a swarm of yellow-line quakers erupted from Anselm's body, denoting raptures over an unexpected *idée fixe*. The sight startled Professor Amirgaldi, who had been falling asleep from boredom and exhaustion. He jumped up and started yelling into his loudspeaker: "*Agricola macilenta! Fantastico! Agricola macilenta!*" People in the audience were getting to their feet too and deafening applause filled the house – but that was just the beginning. The dream had made it clear to Anselm that, compared with that far-away gossamer light day, his entire subsequent life was nothing more than a meaningless shadow theatre. He slipped into such a chaotic state of mind that he lost all control of himself. The entire spectrum of his emotions burst forth in hundreds of species of butterfly so that in no time his body was not even visible any more. Brush-footed butterflies mingled with bagworm moths, yellow-white butterflies fluttered around with autumn silkworm moths, swarms of false owlet moths blended into swarms of burnet moths – and all these thousands of tiny gliding creatures expressed the joys, sorrows and thoughts of Anselm's past and future days.

At the sight of such a riot of colours, the mood of the audience became increasingly euphoric. Some tearfully hugged those standing next to them, some produced bottles of wine from their coat pockets and downed the contents in one go – everybody tried to respond to Anselm's miracle in his own way. The circus director was overjoyed and leapt from his seat and did a somersault, which was most unexpected, given his bulky frame. This dramatic outburst of joy immediately earned him a separate round of applause. Only Irmgiird stood, strangely sombre and quiet, in the midst of the jubilant crowds and watched Anselm's transformation with an anxious expression on her face.

At the same time Professor Amirgaldi was jumping up and down around the multitude of butterflies, under which a man was presumably still sitting, and shouting new Latin insect names into his loudspeaker: "*Sideridis reticulata! Hadenia confusa! Amphipoea!*" ... until his voice grew hoarse and finally broke off altogether. Several knowledgeable persons immediately emerged from the crowd (far less competent than Mr Amirgaldi, of course), rushed into the arena and started milling around in a highly agitated manner, shouting at the top of their voices. The world famous professor did not like this at all. Brandishing the loudspeaker, he attempted to herd the amateur





Kõike seda värvide pillerkaari nähes läks ka rahva meeleolu üha eufoorilisemaks. Mõni kukkus pisarsilmil enda kõrvalseisjaid kallistama, mõni võttis põuest aga veinipudeli ning kummutas selle ühe söömuga tilgatumaks – igäüks püüdis Anselmi imeteole omamoodi vastata. Ülirõõmsaks muutunud tsirkusedirektor viskas oma kohalt püsti karates koguni ühe õhusalato, mida tema rasket keret arvestades poleks osanud oodata, ning see efektne röömuavaldus sai kohe ka omaette aplausi osaliseks. Ainult Irmgiird seisis kuidagi vaikselt teiste hurraahüüdjate vahel ning vaatas tõise ja isegi äreva näoga Anselmi muundumist.

Samal ajal tantsiskles professor Amirgaldi muudkui ümber liblikakuhila, mille all kuskil ka inimene pidi olema, ning kisendas ruuporisse üha uusi ladinakeelseid putukanimesid: „*Sideridis reticulata! Hadenia confusa! Amphipoea ocula!*“ ...kuni ta hääli kähedaks muutus ja sootuks katkes. Sellepeale ilmus rahva hulgast aga kohe uusi teadjamehi (muidugi hoopis vähem kompetentseid kui härra Amirgaldi) areenile ringi sebima ning üksteisest üle karjuma, mis maailmakuulsale professorile sugugi ei meeldinud. Sedamaid asus ta isehakanud tarkpäid ruuporiga tagudes publiku kohale tagasi ajama, ent sellest tekkis ainult veelgi suurem segadus ja tülin, nii et areenil toimuvast jäi juba laadapalagani mulje.

Ühel hetkel kogu see kära ja elevus lakkas, kui märgati, et liblikaid oli tsirkusesaali ilmunud juba kummaliselt palju. Ent neid eraldus Anselmist ikka veel ja veel, kuigi terve areen oli mähkunud juba kirevasse hõljumisse, ning pealtvaatajailgi kippus hingamisruumi napiks jääma. Väljapääsu otsides tungisid liblikad rahvale suhu ja silma, ja inimeste imetlushüüded läksid nüüd üle aevastamiseks ja ärevushõikeiks. Säärane ime tundus enamiku jaoks juba liigagi pealetükkiv ja hirmutav.

Ühel hetkel koputas ka murelik Irmgiird oma suure sõrmega direktori ikka-veel-hurraatavale kiilaspeale ning avaldas ta kõrva sisse arvamust, et tema meelest pole Anselmiga asjalood päris korras. Ja kui direktor seepeale ümbritsevat kaost kaine pilguga vaagis, muutus ta heleroosa kuppel pikkamisi vähkpunaseks. „Anselm, jäta kohe järele – või ma vallandan sind paugupealt!“ – just sedasi kavatses ta karjuda –, ent juba esimese sõna järel tungis talle kümnekond ahastiib-hämarvaksikut (mis tähendasid Anselmi tundeskaalas kirglikku eneseunustust) otse hingetorru, nii et Irmgiird pidi talle tükk aega käega vastu selga taguma, et tähtis mees mitte kõhasse ei lämbuks. Seejärel tungis tsirkusedirektor läbi tiheda liblikapadriku poolkinnisilmi teed rajades areenile ning surus oma käed sinna, kus pidi olema mustkunstniku keha, ent ainus, mis ta kesk putukakuhilat tabas, oli tukslev inimsüda, ja seegi hajus aegamisi rabelevaiks liblikaiks ta pihus. Sel hetkel tabas Boruslawskit – olgu mainitud, et just direktor Boruslawski oli omal ajal üks kuulsamaid ja hinnatumaid mustkunstnikke maailmas, kelle põhinumbrer seisnes enese ürgkalaks ehk latimeeriaks moondamises, ent kes hiljem kaotas endasse usu ning asutas lohutuseks selle ainulaadse tsirkuse – tõeline hämming ja samal ajal





busybodies out of the arena and back to their seats. His efforts generated even greater confusion so that it all became increasingly like a fairground free-for-all.

At a certain point, though, all the noise and excitement subsided as people noticed that there were in fact strangely many butterflies in the circus. And yet, more and more were emerging from Anselm's body although the entire arena was already quite full of the colourful, floating creatures. There was hardly breathing space any more. Desperately seeking a way out, the butterflies squeezed into people's mouths and eyes and cries of admiration were now turning into sneezes and shrieks. This particular miracle seemed somewhat too overwhelming and frightening for most.

Irmgiird, now more worried than ever, tapped her large finger on the still jubilant director's bald skull and whispered in his ear that she thought things were not well with Anselm. The director duly looked around at the raging chaos with a more sober eye, and his pale pink pate slowly turned bright red. "Anselm – stop it immediately – do you hear – or I'll sack you!" This is what he planned to yell, but the second he opened his mouth, a dozen or so scorched wing butterflies (denoting passionate abandon on Anselm's scale of emotions) rushed into his windpipe so that Irmgiird had to give him quite a few slaps on his back to prevent the distinguished man from suffocating. Pulling himself together, Boruslawski forced his way through the dense swarms of butterflies into the arena, and stretched out his hands to where the conjurer's body was supposed to be, but the only thing he managed to get hold of was a throbbing human heart, and even that gradually turned into wildly fluttering butterflies in his hands. Precisely at that moment Boruslawski – let it be noted here that he used to be one of the most sought-after and famous conjurers in the world whose main attraction was turning himself into the primeval fish *latimeria*, but who later lost faith in himself and as a consolation set up the present unique circus – was seized by genuine bewilderment and at the same time seething envy because here was a man who had exceeded his wildest fantasies in the field of metamorphosis.

In the meantime the circus attendants had fortunately had the presence of mind to open all the doors and windows so that most of the butterflies and people had already poured out of the suffocating building and into the waking city.

Swarms of butterflies soon covered the entire sky above the city and the people coming from the circus filled the streets, causing much excitement among sleepy citizens on their way to work.

Only a few especially enthusiastic entomologists remained in the circus, among them Professor Amirgaldi, who was now running around between the rows of chairs trying to catch the rarer species of butterfly or those that were actually not even discovered yet.





ka meeletu kadetus, oli ju leidunud üks mees, kes trumpas üle tema julgemadki fantaasiad metamorfooside alal.

Vahepeal oli tsirkuseteenritel õnneks pähe tulnud avada kõik ukсед ja aknad, nii et suurem osa liblikaist ja inimestest oli juba umbsest hoonest välja pääsenud, tulvates laiali mööda ärkavat linna.

Liblikaparved katsid peagi kogu taeva linna kohal ning etendusel viibinud inimesed kõik linnatänavad, tekitades uniste tööleminejate seas omakorda suurt elevust.

Saali jäid vaid mõned üksikud fanaatikute entomoloogid, nende seas ka maailmakuulus professor Amirgaldi, kes jooksis nüüd tooliridade vahel ringi, ajades putukavõrkudega haruldasemaid või hoopis seniavastamata liblikaliike taga.

Ja toolil, kus veel tunni aja eest oli istunud mustkunstnik Anselm, lebas nüüd vaid kortsunud frakk ja nokamüts. Tooli taga seisis aga endiselt tsirkusedirektor Boruslawski, kurvad latimeeriasilmad jälgimas viimast õhkutõusvat liblikat. See oli harilik taevastiib, kes tiirles saalis veel mõnda aega niisama ringi ning peatus viimaks akna all seisva Irmgiirdi õlal. Hiidnaine vaatles ta helesiniseid veiklemaid tiibu ning jäi siis mõtlema, et ehk on just selles liblikas peidus Anselmi pärismina, see miljondikosa mustkunstnikust, kes on ometi kord vaba kogu inimkeha eksitavast tunderägastikust, ja tahab nüüd midagi ainulist talle mõista anda, mida enne ei saanud või ei osanud...

...siis aga haaras hommikune tõmbetuul liblika enesega ühes ja Irmgiird kaotas ta peagi silmist.



**Mehis Heinsaar** (sündinud 1973) on uuema eesti kirjanduse üks tõusvaid tähti. Soovinud algselt pikamaajooksjaks saada, otsustas ta peagi hoopis lühijuttude kirjutamise kasuks, mille eest on ta juba mitu mainekat preemiat pälvinud. Tema kaks novellikogumikku on „Härira Pauli kroonikad“ ja „Vanameeste näppaja“.





On the chair where the conjurer Anselm had been sitting an hour ago there now lay just a crumpled tailcoat and a peaked hat. The circus director Boruslawski was still standing behind the chair, his sad *latimeria* eyes following the flight of the last butterfly. It was an amanda's blue that circled around the circus a few times and then landed on Irmgiird's shoulder as she was standing by a window. The giant woman eyed its iridescent light blue wings and thought that maybe this was Anselm's true self, a millionth part of the conjurer, finally free of the entire disconcerting web of emotions of the human body, and maybe he now wanted to tell her something momentous, something that he could not or did not know how to say before ...

... but then the morning breeze snatched the butterfly away and Irmgiird soon lost sight of it.

*Translated by Tiina Randviir*



**Mehis Heinsaar** (1973) is one of the rising stars of new Estonian literature. Originally aspiring to become a long-distance runner, he soon moved on to writing short stories, for which he has already received several prestigious awards. He has published two collections of short stories, *Mr. Paul's Chronicles* and *Snatcher of Old Men*.



# Pauls Bankovskis

## Zeltītās klusēšanas nedēļa

### *Pirmdiena*

Pavisam parastas derības. Mēs noslēdzām tās svētdienas pievakarē — vakar vakarā. Aiz lielā, spoguļgludā kafējnīcas loga garām slidēja gājēji un braucēji. Kā zivis akvārijā. Drēbju pakaramie pie ieejas atgādināja satuntuļotus putnubiedēkļus. Jau krēsloja, un spuldzes savā spožumā uz debesīm atstāja nomācošu un grūti izdzēšamu iespaidu. — Nesaki ne „jā”, ne „nē”; ne „balts”, ne „melns”, — tu puskrēslā čukstēji. — Kurš to pirmo vārdu teiks, tas to putru apēdīs. — Runāšana sudrabs, klusēšana — zelts, — es piebalsoju. Tobrīd man neienāca pat prātā, ka runāšana sakāmvārdos, parunās un skaitāmpantiņos uzskatāma par nenovēršamas nelaimes priekšvēstnesi. Ja vien tā patiesi ir nelaime. Derībās pelnu putra netika pat pieminēta. Tas bija kaut kas nesalīdzināmi prozaiskāks — pāris pudeles pussaldā šampanieša, tāfelīte rūgtās šokolādes, turza ar pistācijām vai krējuma konfektes, kas tev tik ļoti iet pie sirds. Zaudētājs nebūs tas, kurš pirmais ierunāsies, bet gan tas, kurš pārtrauks neatbildēšanu.

Lai notiek! Viesmīlis ar mulsu smaīdu kļuva par derību liecinieku.

Pēc tam es stāvēju vilciena durvīs, un mēs pārmijām neveiklus žestus. Gluži kā dīvainie ļaudis, kas mēdz sarunāties caur aizejošu vilcienu, tramvaju vai autobusu logiem. Tu stāvēji uz stacijas perona un kopā ar gredzeniem tavos kustīgajos pirkstos zibēja spoži sārta cigaretes ogle.

Pirms mēs vēl bijām vienojušies par ķīlu un pieaicinājuši pie galdiņa viesmīli, tu teici, ka mani mīlot. Un tieši tādēļ tas būšot interesanti — pārbaudīt, uz ko mūsu mīlestība spējīga. Vai gluži otrādi — kur atrodas tās spēku izsūkuma robeža.

Tu ar slaidu žestu pamāji, un košais cigaretes gals nozuda zem vilciena. Vilciens iztrūkās un sāka slidēt uz priekšu, taču durvis palika vaļā — acimredzot tās bija sabojātas. Vējš buzināja manus matus un pa galvu maisījās savāda doma — kāpēc gan neizlēkt laukā? Neizlēkt tāpēc, ka neizlēkt. Un es pagriezios, lai ieietu vagonā, kur sēdēja pāris samiegojušies cilvēki.

Pats pirmais, ko šorīt no rīta vēlējos darīt — tev piezvanīt, tomēr tūdaļ aptvēru, ka tam nav nozīmes — tu man neatbildēsi tāpat. Un es atturējos.

Kopā ar jau no rīta iereibušiem vai pagīrainiem strādniekiem es braucu uz darbu. Līdz pat vakaram es par tevi nedomāju. Un tikai tad — apmēram



# Pauls Bankovskis

## The Week of Golden Silence

### *Monday*

It was a very common type of bet. We made it Sunday evening, yesterday. Pedestrians and cars slid by the window of the café. Like fish in an aquarium. Coats hung on the rack near the entrance like stuffed scarecrows. Darkness was descending, and the lights left an oppressive and indelible impression on the sky.

“Say neither ‘yes’ nor ‘no’ nor ‘white’ nor ‘black’ ...,” you whispered the children’s rhyme in the dusk. “The first of us to speak, will the porridge eat?”

“Silence is golden,” I chimed in. It didn’t occur to me then that nursery rhymes, teasers and proverbs are the inevitable harbingers of misfortune. If what happened really was a misfortune.

We didn’t even mention porridge made of ashes, the classic fare of nursery rhymes, as the stake in this bet. We wagered on something much more prosaic – a few bottles of *demi-sec*, a bar of bitter-sweet chocolate, a can of pistachio nuts or the cream candies that you eat with such gusto.

The loser won’t be the one who first initiates a conversation with the other, but the one who first responds. The bet is on! We invited the waiter to our table, who, with a hesitant smile, bore witness to our wager.

Afterwards, I stood at the door of the train, and we exchanged awkward gestures. Just like all the strange people who forever seem to be carrying on final discussions through the windows of departing trains, trams and buses. You were standing on the station platform, and the butt of your cigarette flashed together with the rings on your lively fingers.

Even before we had agreed about the stakes and had invited the waiter to our table, you told me that you loved me. And exactly for this reason – you thought it would be interesting to test the power of our love or to discover the extent of our endurance.

With a graceful gesture, you waved farewell and the embers of your cigarette disappeared. The train jerked forward and started to slide away. But the doors remained open. Obviously they were broken. The wind ruffled my hair and a strange thought entered my mind – why not jump out? The answer is simple. Because there is no reason to jump. And I turned around to enter a train car occupied by a few sleepy passengers.





vienpadsmitos — piezvanīju, lai pārliecinātos, ka klausulē dzirdama tava elpa. Es neko neteicu, tu man pie auss pāris reizes nepacietīgi atkārtoji:

— Hallo! Hallo!

Pirmo dienu mēs bijām izturējuši.

### *Otrdiena*

Mēs satikāmies pašā pilsētas sirdī un, protams, nepārmijām ne vārda. Es tevi panācu pie gājēju pārejas brīdī, kad dega sarkanā gaisma, un pavisam viegli piedūros tavam elkonim. Tu neatskatījies, tikai pasmaidīji. Sadevušies rokās mēs kaut kur gājām. Nevarēja saprast, kurš kuru vada — mēs bijām kā divi mēmuma pārņēmti aklie. Pirms brīža bija norimis pērķona lietuss, un miklās ielas smaržoja pēc strauji atdzisuša un savalguša piķa. Sakarsušās mašīnas kūpināja ūdens tvaikus. Pa atvērto logu mūs panāca mazohistiska mūzika. Kad klusēdami bijām nosoļojuši jau kādu stundu, nonācām uz tilta. Zem tā vidēja mazi ģimenes dārziņi, privātmājas un asfaltēts laukums ar milzu grēdās sakrātām nolietotām vieglo automašīnu riepām. Tu ar elkoņiem atbalstījies pret tilta margām un samiegtām acīm raudzījies uz priekšu — tur, kur aizvijas un izliecās dzelzceļa sliedes. Tālumā tās saplūda ar elektrības vadiem un zilganu dūmaku. Starp sliedēm mirdzēja zilas uguntiņas, ar klakšķi pārbidījās pārmijas. Es izjutu pieaugošu nemieru, lai gan tam nebija ne mazākā iemesla — mēs tur stāvējām divi vien. Garām brāzās mašīnas, zem mums aizgrabēja preču vilciens diviem vagoniem. Riepām piekrautajā laukumā kaut ko metināja. Piepeši es apjautu sava nemiera cēloni — vainīga bija šī necilā un nepazīstamā vieta. Mani tracināja un padarīja nervozu tas, ka tu te stāvi un iedziļinies šajā industriāli kretiniskajā ainavā. Jā, tu pat atļāviēs uzsmaidīt un jautri ielūkoties man acīs. Tad tu pastiepi roku un apstādināji garāmbraucošu taksometru, ko līdz pat pēdējam brīdim es tā arī nebiju pamanījis.

— Es tevi milu, — tu ātri nobēri un ielēci mašīnā. Aizcirtās durtiņas, un tu biji prom. Taksometra logā vēl pazibēja gaisa skūpstā sastinguši pirksti. Patiesībā tā bija nekrietna provokācija. Par laimi es neko nepaspēju atbildēt. Citādi būtu zaudējis derības.

### *Trešdiena*

Šodien vēlējos tevi satikt. Kad mani meklējumi pilsētā izrādījās nesekmīgi, devos uz tavu māju. Mēs dzērām augļu sulu un klausījāmies jaunu kaseti, kuru, kā es nopratu, tu vakar pēc aizbraukšanas no tilta biji iegādājusies. Izgājuši laukā, mēs iekāpām autobusā, kas saulē bija sakarsis un pieputējis kā maza siltumnīca vai ēka Saules pilsētā. Neizkāpdami braucām līdz brīdim, kad atklājās, ka esam veikuši pilnu apli. Mēs rādījām viens otram ārpusē redzamo un notiekošo un nemitīgi sasmaidījāmies. Iespējams, no malas mēs izskatījāmies pēc diviem idiotiem. Kāds netīrīgs puīselis autobusa pieturā mūs izmēdīja. Pirms šķiršanās





I wanted to call you first thing in the morning. Still, I suddenly realised the senselessness of it – you wouldn't answer me anyway. And so I refrained.

I took the morning train to work – together with labourers who were either hungover or already drunk. I didn't think about you until evening. And it was only around eleven o'clock that I called you to reassure myself that it was your breath I was hearing at the other end of the phone. I didn't say a word as you impatiently repeated "hello, hello" in my ear. We had survived the first day.

### *Tuesday*

We met in the very heart of the city without, of course, exchanging a word. I caught up with you at a crosswalk when the light was red and touched your elbow lightly. You didn't look back – you merely smiled. Hand in hand, we set off. It was impossible to understand who was leading who – we were like two dumbstruck blind people. A thunderstorm had died down a while before, and the damp streets smelled of cooled tar. Water was steaming off overheated cars and some sort of sadistic music descended upon us from an open window.

After walking for about an hour we arrived at a bridge. Beneath it were small family gardens, private homes, an asphalted area with huge piles of tyres. You leaned against the rail of the bridge and squinted at the railroad tracks winding and bending ahead. At the horizon they fused with electricity wires and a bluish haze. Small blue signal lights twinkled above the tracks, the switches clanked.

I felt a growing disquiet, which was totally unfounded. The two of us were alone. Cars dashed by and, beneath our feet, a freight train rattled towards its destination. In the area with the tyres someone was welding.

Suddenly, I realised that the source of my restlessness was this plain and unfamiliar place. I became angry and nervous because you were standing here, engrossed in this stupid, industrial landscape. Yes, you even dared to smile at me and look into my eyes.

Then you stretched out your hand and hailed a passing taxi, which I hadn't even noticed.

"I love you" – you muttered quickly and jumped into the car. The door slammed shut, and you were gone. Your fingers – frozen in the act of blowing a kiss – flashed in the window of the taxi. This was, actually, an unfair provocation. Fortunately, I didn't have the time to respond. Otherwise, I would have lost the bet.

### *Wednesday*

Today I longed to meet you. Failing in my search around the city, I went to your place. We drank fruit juice and listened to a new cassette which, I gather, you bought yesterday after leaving the bridge.



mums apbrīnojamā kārtā izdevās vienoties par rītdienas plāniem. Tas prasīja apmēram pusstundu ilgu piepūli.

Mājupejot es atkal izjutu nejēdzīgo nemieru. Tagad man šķita, ka tajā vainojama piespiedu klusēšana. Bērnībā, kad mēs smiltīs izkašātās bedrītēs noglabājām mazas puķītes, akmentiņus un varavīkšņainas trauku suķes, to visu pārsedzām ar stikliņu un rūpīgi apbērām ar zemi, šajos mākslīgajos noslēpumos obligāti ar kādu vajadzēja dalīties. Noslēpums, kuru neviens nezina jau nav nekāds noslēpums. Kādā dziesmā gan dzied, ka tieši mīlestība esot noslēpums, kuru nav kam izstāstīt. Gluži kā par mums.

### *Ceturtdiena*

Kad ierados norunātajā vietā pie Daugavgrīvas bākas, tevis tur nebija. Pret jūrā samestajiem akmeņiem un betona bluķiem šūpojās un klunkšķēja gurdieni viļņi, ostā sagrabinājās celtni un kuģi, bet uz mola, tālu jūrā notika kaut kādi remonta vai celtniecības darbi. Ik pa brīdīm turp brauca ar akmeņiem piekrautas mašīnas, pēcāk krastā atgriezās tukšas. Es nosēdēju līdz pievakarei, bet tu tā arī neatnāci. Varbūt es kaut ko biju sajaucis.

### *Piektdiena*

Atslēdzu telefonu un cauru dienu pavadīju neizgājis no istabas. Vēroju, kā aiz loga pārvietojas gaismas un pagalmā augošā koka lapotnes ēnas. Kā rīta pusē aiziet, bet pievakarē pārnāk kaimiņi. Tā bija kopš pusaudža gadiem senaizmirstā sajūta, kad vēlēšanos ir tik daudz, ka negribas pilnīgi neko. Lai to pārvarētu, iztēlojos, ka esmu slimis. Uzmeklēju termometru un patiesi — temperatūra par pāris grādiem pārsniedza normālo. Tas bija nevainojams attaisnojums dienu ilgai dikdienīgai gulšņāšanai, kuras laikā izsmēķēta paciņa cigarešu.

### *Sestdiena*

Uz norunāto vietu pie bākas tu tomēr atnāci. Un zīmēji smiltīs, ka esi te bijusi aridzan vakar. Es, protams, klusēju.

Vējš pāri pludmalei pūta smalkus smilšu graudiņus, tie lipa pie pirkstiem un pēdām. Āda no sājā jūras gaisa kļuva lipīga, bet ausīs vēl ilgi pēc tam šalca kā mazos, pie galvas pielipinātos gliemežvākos.

Vasara laikam ir pagājusi — klajās vietās pat dienas vidū kļūst vēss. Lai gan aizvējā vēl aizvien valda karstums. Atvasara. Bābu vasara. Indiāņu vasara. Katram savs.

Aizlīduši aiz milzīga sarūsējuša pludiņa, mēs pamanījamies un atļāvamies pat sauloties. Tu noģērbies pilnīgi kaila. taču man neradās ne mazākā vēlēšanās tev pieskarties. Saģērbos un devos mājup. Tu paliki turpat un neko neteici.





Setting off from the house, we stepped into a bus which was heated and dusty like a small greenhouse or some building in Sun City. We rode without speaking until we realised that we had gone full circle.

We pointed out objects and events, smiling at each other. It's quite possible that to bystanders we looked like idiots. Some unkempt boy at a bus stop clowned us. Before parting, by some divine chance, we managed to come to an agreement about the next day's plans. That required half an hour's worth of effort.

On my way home, I was overcome by the illogical restlessness once again. Now I was sure that our self-imposed silence was to blame. In childhood, we hid small flowers, pebbles and broken dishes in holes dug in the sand, covered the secrets with broken glass, and carefully evened out the ground. Even then we felt compelled to share make-believe secrets about the whereabouts of the treasures with someone. A secret unknown to anyone isn't really a secret. *Love is a secret and no one to tell* say the words of a song. It's almost as if the song is about us.

### *Thursday*

When I arrived at our arranged meeting place near the Daugavgriva lighthouse, you were not there. Tired waves clunked against the concrete blocks and rocks dumped out into the sea. Ships clanked in the port and some sort of construction work was taking place out on the breakwater. Every once in a while, trucks filled with rocks drove out to the site, only to return much later, empty. I sat there until twilight, but you never came. Maybe I had misunderstood something.

### *Friday*

I disconnected the telephone and spent the entire day in the confines of my room. I watched the passage of sunlight and the shadows of the tree grow in the yard. The feeling was one I had forgotten since my youth – so many desires culminating in indifference. In order to overcome this sensation, I acted as though I were sick. I found a thermometer and – lo and behold – my temperature really was a few degrees higher than normal. That was the perfect excuse for a day of loafing – and smoking a whole pack of cigarettes.

### *Saturday*

You actually did come to the designated meeting place near the lighthouse. And you wrote in the sand that you had also been there yesterday. Of course, I kept silent. The wind blew fine grains of sand across the beach; the sand stuck to our fingers and heels. Our skin grew sticky from the salty sea air and for a long time afterwards our ears, like small seashells pinned to our heads, roared the sound of surf.





## Svētdiena

Mūsu derības ir noslēgušās.

Atkal sēžam tajā pašā vietā, kur pirms nedēļas. Tu man kaut ko stāsti, bet es neklausos. Man laikam vajadzētu ko teikt, taču nav vēlēšanās. Mana māte mēdza sacīt, ka viens no derētājiem vienmēr esot muļķis, otrs — krāpnieks. Šoreiz laikam noticis citādi. Mēs abi esam gan uzvarētāji, gan zaudētāji. Žēl, bet es nekādi nespēju atsaukt atmiņā mūsu norunāto ķilu, kas kopīgiem spēkiem iegūta un tagad gaida izpirkšanu. Varētu tev pajautāt, taču negribas.

Tu vēro manas rokas, kas skalina glāzē peldošos ledus gabaliņus. Atceries — ar plaukstu satver glāzi aiz augšmalas tā, lai tā pilnībā būtu nosepta, un saskandina. Vecs joks. Jūras akmentiņu skaņa. Varbūt man vajadzētu kaunēties par to, ka pēc nedēļu ilgās klusēšanas vienīgais, ko spēju iedomāties, ir banālas iedzeršanu asprātības. Tavs skatiens taustās gar manu ausi, deniņiem vai deguna pamatni, lai ticami imitētu lūkošanos tieši acīs. Šo triku mācīja kādas labas uzvedības rokasgrāmatas autors. Grāmatu mēs iegādājāmies apmēram pirms gada un kopīgi vakaros lasījām.

— Nav ko teikt, — viens vai abi no mums saka, konstatē, domā. Mēs pieceļamies, lai norēķinātos un ietu. Vēl aizvien mēs neesam pārmijuši ne vārda.



**Pauls Bankovskis** (1973) Latviešu rakstnieks, studējis filozofiju, vairāku romānu un stāstu krājumu autors. Darbi tulkoti angļu, vācu, zviedru, somu valodā. Strādā par redaktoru laikrakstā „Diena”. Dzīvo Rīgā.





It must be the end of summer. It can get chilly even at noon – although it is still hot where there is no wind. Indian Summer. *Atvasara. Babje ljeto.* To each his own.

Slipping behind the rusty buoys, we allowed ourselves to go sunbathing. You took off all your clothes, but I wasn't even tempted to touch you. I dressed and headed homeward. You stayed there and didn't say a word.

### *Sunday*

Our bet has ended. We are sitting at the same place we sat exactly one week ago. You're telling me something, but I'm not listening. I probably should reply, but I have no desire to do so. My mother used to say – one betting partner is a fool, the other, a cheat. This case is a little different. Both of us are losers and both – winners. I'm embarrassed to admit it, but I simply cannot remember the stakes we played for. I should ask you, but I really don't feel like it.

You are watching my fingers as they stir the pieces of ice in my glass. Remember to hold the glass by the rim with the palm of your hand so that it completely covers the top, and make a toast. The sound is like pebbles in the sea. It's an old joke. Maybe I should be ashamed of the fact that, following a week of silence, the only thing I can think of are stupid bar jokes.

Your gaze touches me around the ear, the temples, or the base of my nose – in order to plausibly imitate a direct look into my eyes. This was a trick invented by the author of an etiquette book. We bought the book about a year ago and read it together in the evenings.

“There's nothing to say”, one or both of us admit. We get up to pay the bill and go. We still haven't exchanged a word.

*Translated by Mara Simane*



**Pauls Bankovskis** (1973) studied philosophy and has written several novels and collections of short stories. His work has been translated into English, German, Swedish and Finnish. He works as an editor for the newspaper *Diena*. He lives in Riga.

LV

en

May Day



# Jānis Šterns

## Jūra

*„Uz mana zilbalti puķotā galdauta stāv maziņš, balts spainītis ar dzeltenām puķēm. Tās ir skaistas. Tādas aug arī pie mājas. Es lēnītiņām ēdu to pašu sasodīto šokolādi un domāju par tevi. Es neprasišu, cik bieži tu domā par mani. Tas jau būtu banāli. Un tomēr...*

*Agrāk es centos saprast, kādas meitenes tev patīk, jo man arī gribējās tev patīkt. Bet viss bija velti, un tev bija un palika vientuļnieka sirds. Es domāju – man nav ko jaukties viņa dzīvē. Un tad pēkšņi tas notika: es, tāda, kā te stāvu, pēkšņi iemilējos tevī. Un tu pēkšņi biji iemilējies manī pēc tam, kad man vairs nebija cerību, ka mēs vispār varētu būt piemēroti viens otram. Bet tagad, kā es beidzot esmu sapratusi, mēs esam viens otram ļoti piemēroti. Es patiesi nevaru iedomāties, ka kāds vēl tik labi prastu mani nomierināt, mani klausīties, mani mīlēt... tā.*

*Neaizmirsti izdomāt mūsu bērniem vārdus! Neaizmirsti uzsmaidīt savam attēlam spogulī, kā smaidīji man! Man pietrūkst tavu glāstu, mīļais. Bet manas acis, lūpas un āda tavu skūpstu pieskārienus atcerēsies vienmēr. Vienmēr. (skan Ričardsa dziesma – man tā briesmīgi patīk. Tā skanēs mūsu kāzās, noteikti!!!)*

*Es negribu būt moderna, mīļais. Es gribu būt vecmodīga un mīlēt tevi visu mūžu. Kad mēs iesim pastaigāt, būdami veci, es prasišu, vai tev salst rokas. Es ielikšu savu cimdā tērpto roku tavā elkonī, un mēs būsīm visskaistākais vecais pāris.*

*Tūkstošiem dzerto un nedzerto skūpstu tev no manis. Es tevi ļoti mīlu. Vienmēr tava...”*

— Ko tu tur lasi? — aizsmakušā balsi ierējās Katija.

Jaunais cilvēks satrūcies kaut ko klusi nomurmināja un steidzīgi iegrūda tikko lasīto vēstuli atvilknē.

— Tūlīt būs pusdienas, bet tev jāatnes tomātu mērce, — Katijas balsi jautās pavēlošs tonis.

Karstais āra gaiss neļāva jaunā cilvēka domām rast sistemātisku sakārtojumu; tās skrēja cauri viņa prātam neaizķerdamās, cita pēc citas. Agrāk es mēdzu saņemt šādas vēstules. Kur tagad ir palikusi tās rakstijusi — es nezinu. Kļiedziet uz mani, skatieties pārmetoši, sitiet — un es vienalga nespēšu atbildēt. Nav sarežģītākas lietas par cilvēka prātu. Ir viegli paredzēt, kas notiks. Viss taču notiek tik vienādi, tik shematiski. Bet vēl nekad nevienam nav izdevies pateikt, atbildēt, Kāpēc tā... Kur slēpjas rīcības motivācija? Katram savs iemesls, bet Kāpēc? Kur ir cēloņi? Kas



# Jānis Šterns

## The Sea

“There is a tiny white bucket with yellow flowers on my table, with its blue and white flowered cloth. They're beautiful. They grow near the house. I'm slowly eating the same bloody chocolate and I'm thinking of you. I won't ask how often you think of me. It would be trivial. And still ...

I used to try and understand what type of girl you liked, because I wanted you to like me as well. But it was all in vain, for your heart was solitary and so remained. I thought – I shouldn't interfere with his life. And then something happened, out of the blue: I fell in love with you right on the spot. And you did the same when I had already lost hope that we could in any way be compatible with each other. But now I have finally realised that we really are meant for each other. I truly cannot imagine anybody else but you to console me so deeply, to listen to me so carefully, to love me ... so.

Don't forget to think of names for our children. Don't forget to smile at your reflection in the mirror just as you smiled at me. I miss your caresses, dear. But my eyes, lips and skin will keep the touch of your lips forever. Forever (the song by Richards is on right now – I absolutely adore it. It will definitely be played during our wedding ceremony, no doubt about it!!!)

I don't want to be modern, my beloved. I want to be old-fashioned and love you all my life. When we are old and go out for a walk, I will ask you if your hands are freezing. I will tuck my gloved hand under your elbow and we'll be the most beautiful old couple ever.

I send you thousands of the kisses consummated and unconsummated. I love you very much. Yours forever ...”

‘What are you reading there?’ Katy gave a hoarse bark.

The young man started and muttered something softly, and quickly put the letter he'd just read into a drawer.

‘Lunch is nearly ready but you haven't fetched the tomato sauce,’ Katy's voice sounded imperative.

The sweltering air outside prevented the youth from thinking coherently; his thoughts were rushing through his mind like birds, one after another. I used to receive such letters before. Where is the person who wrote them – I don't know. Yell at me, condemn me with your glances, beat me – and I wouldn't know the answer. Nothing is more complicated than a human mind. It is easy to expect what is going to happen. Everything that happens is so uniform, so predictable.





*ir tos radījies? Reizē tik vienkārši un tik sarežģīti, tik grūti saprotami. Viņa toreiz teica: „Tev tā būs labāk...” Pie velna, kā cits var zināt, kā cilvēkam būs labāk? Un gadsimtiem ilgi viena un tā pati atruna. Un tai tic, to pieņem kā aksiomu. Vēlāk.. vēlāk aizmirst, aizmirst visu.. Cik es vēl par to domāšu, ir pagājuši vairāki gadi.*

Jaunais cilvēks piespieda sevi domāt par rītdienas jubileju: viņš un Katija dzīvoja kopā jau divus gadus. Viņu attiecības nevarēja saukt par romantiskām, tās veidoja drīzāk divu cilvēku lietišķa koeksistence, un tomēr tās bija, tās vismaz pastāvēja, salīdzinot ar šī laika pasaulei raksturīgo īslaicīgumu, straujo mainību un mūžīgo mētāšanos no vienas bedres otrā. Pirmie astoņi mēneši pēc Tās Dienas bija viena liela, apziņas gadu simtus gara mētāšanās starp sāpju pilnām realitātes atskārsmēm un aizmīrēšanu, starp patiesības mirkli un kārtējo bēgšanu. Tagad bija stabilitāte. Varbūt tā nebija īsta laime, tikai izmisuma saites starp diviem prātiem, ne sirdīm. Taču bija labi, labāk nekā pirms tam. Kad nebija nekā.

Pie pusdienu galda viņš joprojām klusēja.

— Tu atkal pārlasīji vēstules? — Katijai nepalika apslēpts nekas. Pārāk labi viņa pazina sava drauga raksturu un domas. — Es saprotu, ir grūti. Taču tev ir jāpārstāj par tām domāt. Mēs abi zinām, nevar izstumt veselu dzīves periodu no apziņas tā, lai nepaliktu sekas, taču tev tomēr jādomā par to, kas tev ir un var būt, un būs, ja nekavēsies domās pie tā, kas ir aizgājis nebūtībā.

— Reizēm tā gribas piedzerties, — viņš novilka. — Kādreiz tas mēdza līdzēt.

— Tu pats tam netici.

— Neticu gan. Taču visu šo laiku es, ne reizi es neesmu pieskāries alkoholam un joprojām tik bieži atceros. Varbūt mana dvēsele vienkārši asiņo un tā vien brēc pēc narkozes, bet es stūrgalvīgi atsakos to dot?

— Ir labi tā, kā ir, un bez tā mums abiem būtu daudz, daudz grūtāk. Nebojā to, šausot sevi. Vienlīdz skaidrs ir tas, ka tu neesi vainīgs, kā tas, ka tā ir pagātne.

— Tu jau zini, ko es par to domāju. Un savas domas es nemainīšu.

— Reizēm es par to domāju... Ja man nebūtu šīs manas traumas... vai tu ar mani kādreiz gulētu?

— Lūdzu, nerunā par to... Es nezinu. Manā dzīvē nebūs vairs nevienas sievietes... Es domāju, tā, tieši kā sievietes...

— Vēl pēc desmit gadiem tam nebūs nozīmes... Un pārgulēšana nebūt nenozīmē, ka tev šī sieviete ir kā sieviete. Liela daļa cilvēku tam nepiešķir tik lielu nozīmi. Un tu taču neesi šķīsts. Tev ir bijušas sievietes.

— Tas ir savādāk. Tieši tā, kā tu to domāji – garāmejot. Nepārdomāti un nesvarīgi. Tu man pārāk daudz nozīmē, lai es tāds būtu ar tevi.

— Es zinu. Tu šodien paliksi mājās?

— Droši vien nē... Nē, man jāiet.





But there isn't a single human being who could have answered. Why is that...? Where are the underlying reasons? Everyone has a reason, but why? Where are the causes? Who made them? So simple and complicated, so difficult to grasp. She told me then: 'It'll be better for you...' How the hell can one know what is better for someone else? The same excuse handed out over and over again, century after century. And believed in, accepted as an axiom. And later... later everything's forgotten, clean forgotten. How long can I keep thinking about it, it's years since it happened. The young man forced himself to think about tomorrow's anniversary. He and Katy had now been together for two years. Their relationship could hardly be called romantic, it was rather a practical symbiosis of two people, and yet it was there, it existed at least and was more durable than this fleeting reality with its dynamic change which wavered from one extreme to the other. The first eight months after That Day were just a great flux, felt like ages, somewhere between painful exposure to reality and oblivion, between a moment of truth and another escape. Now there was stability. Maybe it wasn't real happiness, just bonds of despair forged by and between two minds, not hearts. But it was fine, much better than before. When there had been nothing.

He continued to say nothing.

'Have you been reading the letters again?' Nothing escaped Katy. She knew the nature and the thoughts of her friend all too well. 'I understand it must be hard. But you must stop thinking about them. We both know it's impossible to banish a whole period of your life from your mind without leaving a trace, but you've got to think now of what you have and what you might have, if you could just forget things past and gone.'

'I sometimes feel I'd like to get as drunk as a skunk,' he muttered. 'It used to help.'

'You don't believe that.'

'True. But I haven't touched alcohol once since then, yet these thoughts still come back so often. Perhaps it's my soul that's bleeding and begging for anaesthetics I obstinately refuse to give it?'

'We're fine just as we are and, if we didn't have this, we'd both have a much harder time. Don't spoil what you have by blaming yourself. Your innocence is clear, as clear as the fact that it is all in the past.'

'You know what I think about it. I won't change my mind.'

'Sometimes I also think about it... If this hadn't happened to me... would you sleep with me?'

'Please, stop it... I don't know. I won't have another woman in my life... That's what I meant, possessing a woman as a woman...'

'In ten years it won't make any difference anyway... Having sex with a woman doesn't necessarily mean you possess that woman as a woman. Most people don't really make a big deal of it. And you're no virgin either. You've had women.'





— Pasveicini jūru no manis. Ja vien tu spētu iedomāties, kā es reizēm gribu vienkārši pastaigāties gar jūras krastu! Ja es to varētu, tā vienkārši staigāt, droši vien tad šī vēlēšanās nebūtu tik skaudra, nebūtu tik daudz prieka.. Prieka par sajūtu, kailai pēdai pieskaroties smiltīm, pa reizei iekāpjot kādā steidzīgākā vilnītī.. Tas ir tāpat kā tev – pati vēlēšanās ir skaista, kamēr tās apmierinājums ir neiespējams... Ja to varētu sasniegt, pirmā reakcija būtu mežonīga laime, taču pēc tam sekotu frustrācija. To tu zini ne sliktāk par mani, tikai centies aizmirst.

Jaunais cilvēks stāvēja istabā pie spoguļa un aplūkoja uz kakla pulsējošās vēnas. Tajās plūda viņa dzīve ar visām tās ilgām un sāpēm, atmiņu upe. Tik viegli būtu bijis to vienā vēzienā novirzīt citā gultnē, ļaut tai izplūst no krastiem un aizskalot visu sāpīgo. Cik reižu viņš tā bija stāvējis pēdējo gadu laikā? Vairākus simtus? Tūkstoti? Visa šī brīža dzīve sastāvēja no tādiem mirkļiem. Pludmales māja bija viņa patvērumš un reizē nāves noņemne. Šeit viņš uzturējās ik reizi, kad pārņēma īstas un asas atmiņu skumjas, ko nevarēja vairs remdēt apātijā vai loģiskos spriedumos. Kā šodien. Viņš izgāja uz terases. Viņu troksnis pārmāca visas apkārtnes skaņas. *Šodien jūra mani nesagaidīs. Šis ir īpašs vakars.* Tā viņš mēdza teikt katru reizi. Kārtējā shēma, kuru neviens nebija veidojis, rakstījis. Tā nejauši notika pirmo reizi un neapzināti vienmēr atkārtojās.

Šī tomēr bija īpaša reize. Jūra trakoja, un pie tās nebija neviena paša cilvēka. Jauneklis, drēbes nenovilcis, iebrida līdz gurniem ūdenī. Viņš skatījās un skatījās tumšajās debesīs, bet jūra nestājās viņu aicināt savā klēpī. *Vēl ne, māt, vēl ne šoreiz... Es baidos. Tev es nekautrējos atzīt, ka tikai bailes liedz man tevi paklausīt. Katijai es nevaru to teikt. Viņas ticības dzīvei pamatakmens ir mana ticība, ko viņa neapzinās esam tik vāju, kāda tā reāli ir. Tu jau zini, māt, tu mani pazīsti kā neviens cits, tikai tu un vēl Mēness, mans tēvs.. Bet šodien viņa te nav, viņš ir paslēpies mākoņos, lai nebūtu mani jāsatiek.. Es viņu saprotu un atbalstu... Ko viņš varētu man pateikt tādu, kas mani apmierinātu? Virišķa cietsirdība, zobus sakoduši, mēs paejam viens otram šodien garām. Nu es iešu prom arī no tevis, māt...*

Viņš aizdedzināja sveci un nostatīja tai priekšā uz galdiņa krāsaina stikla plātnīti ar izgrieztiem ornamentiem. Caur tiem spīdošā gaisma spokaini atstarojās uz viņa kailās ādas un telpas sienas, griestiem, grīdas. Jauneklis aizdedzināja cigareti. Kad tā bija kārtīgi iedegusies, viņš ar nagiem noknieba mazu hašiša masas gabaliņu un uzlika to uz oglītes cigaretes galā. Brūnais brīnumš izdvesa biezu dūmu strūkliņu; jauneklis ātri pielika tai stikla caurulīti un iesūca to sevī. Dūmi piepildīja plaušas un tūdaļ kā karsts vilnis iesītās galvā. Pēc vēl viena dūma ēnu kontūras kļuva asākas, tās it kā materializējās un kļuva telpiskas. Katra no tām elpoja savā ritmā, un katrai bija sava sāpe, savs stāsts stāstāms, bet nakts priekšā vēl solījās būt gara. Trešā reize; vēl dažas minūtes, un tad jau bezapziņa, kam cauri strāvoja paralēlās realitātes skaidrā uztvere. Nedz laiks, nedz telpas jēdziens netraucēja ar savu klātbūtni, taču eksistences robežas nebija sagrautas. *Es pastāvu, kaut manis vairs nav. Es apzinos, kaut nespēju domāt. Acumirkliņa laime un piepildījums, un reizē nāves demonstrācijas versija. Es zinu,*





'That's a different story. That's how you meant it – superficially. Inconsiderately, casually. You mean too much to me to behave like that with you.'

'I know. Are you staying home today?'

'I suppose not... No, I've got to go.'

'My greetings to the sea. If you could only imagine how I sometimes wish I could simply go for a walk along the shore! But, at the same time, if I could walk so simply, so effortlessly, this desire wouldn't be so desperate, it wouldn't afford me so much pleasure. A tactile sort of pleasure, when your bare foot touches sand, now and then lapped by a dashing wavelet... It's the same with you – the desire itself is beautiful, as long as it remains impossible to fulfil. If you could attain this desire, the initial reaction would be unrestrained, wild happiness, but then frustration would creep in. You know all this as well as I do, but you just deliberately try and forget it.'

The young man lingered in front of a mirror and examined the throbbing veins on his neck. His whole life was running through them, with all his cravings, pains, a river of memories. Wouldn't it have been easy to make it change its course, just like that, at one stroke, remove the banks that contain it, let it run loose and wash all the pain away? How many times had he been standing like this in recent years? Hundreds? A thousand? His current life was simply a succession of moments such as these. The sea-side cottage was his refuge and, at the same time, his death camp. He came there every time when a real and penetrating sadness brought about by memories pierced him, and he felt that apathy and logical reasoning wouldn't appease it. Just like today. He went out onto the terrace. The sound of the waves suppressed all the other sounds. The sea will not welcome me today. This is a special evening. This is what he always said. Another plot written or shaped by nobody. It just so happened, by chance, the first time, and was always, unconsciously repeated.

But this time, however, was special. The sea was raging, the beach deserted. The young man, without taking off his clothes, waded into the water up to his hips. For a long time he kept contemplating the dark skies but the sea wouldn't stop and take him to its bosom. Not yet, mother, not this time... I'm scared. I'm not ashamed to tell you that only my fear keeps me from obeying you. I can't tell Katy about it. Her belief in life is based on my faith and she cannot see how tenuous this really is. You know it, mother, you know me better than anyone else, just you and the Moon, my father... He is not here today, hiding behind the clouds to avoid meeting me... I understand him, I support him... Is there anything he could tell me that would comfort me? Male cruelty, gritting our teeth, we pass each other like strangers. Now it's time to part from you too, mother...

He lit a candle that stood on a small table and placed a decorative glass plate next to it. The eerie light fell onto his naked skin, and cast flickering glints at the walls, ceiling and floor. The young man lit a cigarette. When it was glowing,





*ka elpoju, tikai tāpēc, ka dzirdu savu elpu. Tik skaļa, tik apdullinoša cauri visam šim klusumam. Vienīgā skaņa, kas notur mani pie zemes. Bet tā gribas vienkārši aizlidot... Nomirt? Nē! Bet arī nepalikt dzīvam... Jauneklis iebāza roku zem spilvena. No pēkšņā sasprindzinājuma viņa piere norasoja sviedru lāsitēm, kad pirksti pieskārs vīsam metālam. Katru reizi šī spēle, atkal stāvot pie spoguļa un lemjot pašam savu likteni. Šoreiz viss joprojām bija citādi. Vai varbūt...*

Šāviens spalgi pārcirta sapņa dūmaku. Stikls līdz ar sveci sašķīda sikās drumslās, telpa iegrima tumsā. Viss bija beidzies. *Rīt būtu bijusi jubileja. Bet es neiešu atpakaļ, es vairs nevaru.*

— Pasniedz, lūdzu, man sālstrauciņu, — palūdza Katija.



### Jānis Šterns

Dzimis 1979. gada 7. martā, studējis latviešu un klasisko filoloģiju Latvijas Universitātē, tad uzsācis sociālās psiholoģijas studijas. Interesējas par psihiatriju, bioloģiju un internetatkarības fenomenu. Strādājis dažādos darbos – bijis datorsistēmu administrators, Ārlietu ministrijas vecākais referents, pēc tam ieinteresējies par politisko jaunatnes organizāciju darbību Latvijā. Šobrīd aktīvi darbojas LSDSP un virknē NVO. Literāro darbību uzskata par vienu no saviem hobijiem. Presē un internetā publicēti apmēram 25 viņa darbi.





he nipped off a small lump of hash and put it onto its burning end. The brown marvel gave off a thick puff of smoke and the youth grabbed a small glass tube and sucked in. The smoke filled his lungs and a hot wave immediately rushed to his head. After another drag the outlines of the shadows sharpened up, they became sort of material and dimensional. They each breathed at their own rhythm, had their afflictions, their narratives, and the night awaiting him seemed long. Inhale again, a few minutes, and then unconsciousness, along with the lucid perception bestowed upon him by some immaterial, parallel reality. Neither space, nor time were weighing him down by their presence, yet the frontiers of his existence were still there, unbroken. I do exist though I'm no longer here. I'm conscious though I'm no longer able to think. A momentary flash of happiness, fulfilment, and a foretaste of death. I only know I'm breathing because I can hear my breath. So loud, so deafening, it cuts through the silence. The only sound that keeps me aground. But I so much want to fly away... To die? No! But not to stay alive either. The young man put his hand under the pillow. The sudden strain caused beads of sweat to cover his forehead, as his fingers touched the cool piece of metal. Always the same game, standing by the mirror and deciding on his own fate. But this time everything still was different. Or perhaps...

A shrill gunshot tore the veil of the dream apart. The glass and the candle were smashed into tiny pieces, and the room was suddenly plunged into darkness. It was all over now. It would have been the anniversary tomorrow. But I'm not going back, I can't do that any more.

'Could you pass me the salt, please?' Katy asked.

*Translated by Dens Dimiņš*



**Jānis Šterns** (1979) studied Latvian philology and classical studies at the University of Latvia, and later moved on to social psychology. His interests include psychiatry, biology and internet addiction. He has been employed as computer system administrator and as a senior desk officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, before taking part in political youth movements in Latvia. Currently he is an active member of the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party and various NGOs. He considers literature as a hobby. He has about 25 publications in the media and on the Internet.

LV

en

May Day



# Peter Semolič

## Večerni klepet

Včasih, ko mi je dolgčas,  
se pogovarjam z Bogom.  
Pregledujeva vzorce v linoleju,  
njihovo ritmično ponavljanje  
na kuhinjskih tleh.

Iz teh lis, rečem,  
lahko razbereš medveda,  
iz teh mačko,  
in če odmisliš klobuk  
pri tem smešnem možaku,  
dobiš levjo glavo.

Okorno ponavlja za mano:  
Medved, mačka...  
Vedno znova začuden,  
ko enak lik najde ob kredenci  
ali pod oknom.

Vidiš to črto,  
ki prepolavlja pod?  
Koliko neskladnosti vnaša v podobe.  
Tu bi lahko bil bizon,  
a se je izcimil le pohabljen  
konjski hrbet.

Bizon, konjski hrbet...  
Črkuje kot otrok ob prvem berilu,  
zgrožen nad črno razpoko,  
ki prepolavlja kuhinjska tla.

Kažem naprej, proti vratom na  
hodnik,  
kjer se pričnejo predeli pošasti,  
fantastičnih bitij brez glav,  
grozljivih spak brez teles.  
Počasi ga izrivam ven,  
ker je že pozno in bi rad spal.

A ko ponoči vstanem,  
da bi popil kozarec vode,  
še vedno stoji na pragu,  
zazrt v tenko raz,  
ki teče od zida proti oknu,  
kot nekdo,  
ki se je izgubil v tujem mestu  
in ne zna jezika,  
da bi vprašal za pot.



# Peter Semolič

## An Evening Chat

Sometimes, if I am bored,  
I talk to God. We examine  
patterns in the linoleum together,  
rhythmical repetitions  
on the kitchen floor.

In these shapes, I say,  
you can see a bear,  
and in these a kitten,  
and if you ignore the cap  
on this funny chap  
you get a lion's head.

Awkwardly he repeats after me:  
a bear, a cat ...  
And is utterly amazed whenever he  
finds  
the same shape next to the  
sideboard  
or beneath the window.

Can you see this line  
cutting the floor in half?  
What disharmony it brings into the  
images.  
This here could be a bison,  
but it turns out merely a deformed  
horse's back.

A bison, horse's back ...  
He spells like a child at his primer,  
enraged over a black crack  
that cuts the kitchen floor in half.

I point forward, towards the door  
into the hallway,  
where the monster zone begins,  
the zone of fantastical creatures  
without heads,  
horrible freaks without bodies.  
Slowly I push him out,  
after all, it is late and I would like to  
sleep.

But when I get up at night  
to have a glass of water  
he is still standing at the door,  
staring into a thin line  
that runs from the wall to the  
window  
like someone  
who is lost in a foreign city  
and does not know the language  
to ask the way.

*Translated by Ana Jelnikar*





## Oče

To noč  
sem sanjal o tebi,  
oče.

V podobi jelena  
si prišel v moje  
sanje  
in se ustopil vrh  
travnatega  
griča.

Poklical sem te  
po imenu,  
oče.  
Poklical sem te  
z besedo: oče.  
Rekel sem:

Glej,  
moji očesi sta  
dva mokra cvetova  
ob gorskem  
potoku.  
Pridi  
in tvoj topli  
jelenji jezik  
naj osuši roso,  
ki je padla  
na moje  
oči.

Ti pa si stal  
kot v nekem drugem  
svetu,  
kot v nekih drugih  
sanjah,  
vrh griča,  
poraslega s travo.

Otresel si s svojim  
mogočnim  
rogovjem  
in izginil v belem  
oblaku  
nikogaršnjih  
sanj.



## Father

Last night  
I dreamt about you,  
father.  
You came  
into my dream  
as a deer  
and stood astride  
a grassy  
mound.

I called you  
by your name,  
*father*.  
I called you  
by the word: father  
I said:

Look,  
my eyes are  
two wet flowers  
by the mountain  
stream.  
Come,  
let your warm  
deer tongue  
dry the dew  
that fell upon  
my eyes.

And you stood  
as in another  
world,  
as in another  
dream,  
on a mound,  
overgrown with grass.

You shook your  
mighty  
antlers  
and vanished in the white  
cloud  
of no one's  
dreams.

*Translated by Ana Jelnikar*



## Branje Octavia Paza

Nocoj plujem po vseh svojih rekah, nošen s tokom govornice, plujem, ko govorim, govorim, ko plujem...

... reke, lesketave kot otroški smeh, staccato brzic, hitri zdrsi prek kaskad, zanosno padanje prek slapov, delci vode in v vsakem sonce in končno pena, mehurji zraka, ki me oblivajo kot velikanski jakuzzi...

... reka, veliki rjavi bog, me nosi kot speče bruno skozi visoko poletje, brenčanje žuželk, plujem, ko govorim, govorim, ko plujem, vidim: sinje nebo, oblaki in ribe plavajo čezenj, raki se skrivajo v krošnjah dreves, v zeleni eksploziji *joie de vivre*, jata mladice prhne iz njih kot preplašene prepelice...

... vidim: pravilni Narcisov obraz, težke kvadre florentinskih zgradb, loke mostov, prek katerih tečejo verzi o minevanju (Apollinaire) in verzi pesnitve, ki jo berem...

... vidim sebe v menjavi letnih časov in svojo ljubezen, žalostno kot vrba, ki se sklanja nadme, ki sem reka, ki plujem skozi zimo, skozi mesto *de la Tour Unique du Grand Gibet et de la Roue*...

... reka sem, odsotno sprejemem nesrečnega ljubimca, vélikega pesnika in nisem žalosten, ko se obarvam s krvjo, in nisem vesel, ko se topijo ledeniki, ko se dvigam v nebo, ne prizadeneta me niti jez niti nasip...

... reka, temno božanstvo onkraj prepletajočega se barjanskega zelenja, brezčutno blatno božanstvo, moja usta te imenujejo Amazonka, ti rečejo Nil, Misisipi, moje oči postavljajo ob tebi skrivnostna mesta (Eldorado), jaz te delam za Okinavo...

... mladeniča, lepa kot Hijacint, drgetajoča v rosnem jutru, zreta vate, izgubljena v sebi, zreta vate, lepa kot Hijacint, a ti se niti ne ozreš nanju...

Nocoj plujem po vseh svojih rekah, zvezde, zvezde globoko pod mano, nocoj plujem po sebi, plujem, ko govorim, govorim, ko plujem, plujem po sebi, razmnoženem v neštete tokove, potok sem, ob katerem brusim nož, divja deklica se umije v meni po hitrem ljubljenju na produ, moja ljubezen sega vame in mi reče Kolpa in mi reče Rokava in mi reče "hladiš, odstiraš pot" in mi reče, ti si led, led, led...



## Reading Octavio Paz

Tonight I am sailing down all my rivers, borne by the stream  
of words, I sail as I speak, I speak as I sail ...

... rivers, glittering like a child's laughter, the staccato of rapids, the fast  
chutes over cascades, rapturous drops down waterfalls, beads  
of water, in each the sun, and finally the foam, bubbles of air  
engulfing me like a great Jacuzzi ...

... the river, the big brown god, carries me like a slumberous bough through  
the height of summer, the buzzing of insects, I sail as I speak,  
I speak as I sail, I can see: the blue sky, clouds and fish swimming  
across, crabs hiding in treetops, in the green explosion of  
*joie de vivre*, a flock of fry takes wing like startled quails.

... I can see: Narcissus' perfect countenance, heavy ashlar of Florentine  
masonry, arcs of bridges traversed by poetry on transience (Apollinaire)  
and by the lines of an epic, I am reading ...

... I can see myself in the turning of the seasons, and my love,  
sad as a willow, bowing over me, who am a river sailing  
through winter, through the city *de la Tour Unique du grand Gibet et  
de la Roue* ...

... I am a river, absentmindedly receiving an unhappy lover,  
a great poet, and I am not sad, when I stain myself with blood, and  
I am not happy, when ice sheets thaw away, when I soar into the sky, neither  
the dam nor the dyke can touch me ...

... the river, the dark deity from beyond the swampy  
entangled greenery, callous mired deity, my mouth  
has a name for you – the Amazon, it calls you the Nile, the Mississippi, my eyes  
erect secret places at your side (Eldorado), I  
turn you into Okinawa ...

... two youths, as beautiful as Hyacinthus, atremble in the dewy morning,  
gazing at you, lost in themselves, gazing at you, as beautiful as Hyacinthus,  
and you, you don't even spare them a glance ...

Tonight I am sailing down all my rivers, with you stars, stars  
in the depths below me, tonight I am sailing myself, replicated into  
countless currents, I am a stream, against which I sharpen a knife, a wild girl,  
hastily making love upon the gravel, cleanses herself in me, my love  
reaches into me and tells me River Kolpa and tells me River Rokava and tells me  
"you cool and unveil the path" and tells me, you are ice, ice, ice ...

... I speak and am spoken, I sail and am sailed, I am real  
and I am an illusion, I am water, flooding over me, I am a swimmer

SI

en

May Day





... govorim in govorjen sem, plujem in plut sem, resničen sem in privid sem, voda sem, ki me obliva, plavalec sem, ki ostro reže enakomerni tok, počasni hod reke proti morju, morje sem, ki je reka vseh rek, nebo sem, ki je morje morja...

Ljubljana, poletje 1998:

Na vrtu predmestne krčme berem Octavia Paza, sivi čaplji se kot dobra zmaja spreletavata v prosojnem večeru...

... enakomerni brum Ljubljanice ob zapornicah, svetlobno telo reke, veliko sonce ugaša v njej...

... poberem za otroško pest velik kamen izpod nog in ga vržem prek ograje v vodo...

... ne beri me kot zgodbo, beri me kot koncentrične kroge na vodi...



**Peter Semolič** se je rodil v Ljubljani leta 1967, študiral je splošno jezikoslovje in sociologijo kulture na Filozofski fakulteti v Ljubljani. Je avtor šestih pesniških zbirk, za svoje delo pa je prejel več nagrad, med drugim tudi Jenkovo nagrado (1997) in nagrado Prešernovega sklada (2001).





cutting sharply across the constant currents, the slow amble of the river towards  
the sea,  
I am the sea, which is the river of all rivers, I am the sky, which is the sea of all  
seas ...

Ljubljana, summer 1998:

In the garden of a suburban tavern I am reading Octavio Paz, two grey herons  
flitting to and fro like fine kites beneath a translucent evening sky ...

... the constant roaring of the Ljubljanica by the railings, the river's  
body of light, in it the big setting sun ...

... from beneath my feet I pick up a stone the size of a child's fist and fling it  
across the fence into the water ...

... don't read me like a story, read me like concentric circles  
on the water ...

*Translated by Ana Jelnikar*



**Peter Semolič** (1967) studied general linguistics and cultural studies at the University of Ljubljana. He is the author of seven books of poetry. He has received many prizes for his work, including the two most eminent awards in Slovenia, Jenko's Poetry Prize (1997) and the Prešeren Prize – the National Award for Literature and Arts (2001).



# Taja Kramberger

## Que fragilidad

Zavreči modrost  
je modrost

Zavreči pamet  
je pamet

Telebniti po tleh  
je stati pokonci

Kje si jutro?  
V luži

Kam greš tema?  
Dežujem

Kdo me vzdržuje  
nad mejo zmogljivosti?  
Diham

Kdo napenja mreže  
upora?  
Nimam

Kdo se zlomi pod  
težo vetra?  
Spim

Zdrobiti luč  
je svetloba

Zavreči zavrženo  
je vrnitev

*Post mortem* vrniti nasmeš  
življenju je čudež  
neskončno večji od kaplje rose  
veličastnejši od zrna soli  
spokojnejši od bakle v očeh

živim	zopet
ljubim	ponovno
čudim se	spet



**Taja Kramberger**, rojena 1970 v Ljubljani (Slovenija).

Doktorski študij zgodovinske antropologije. Študijske štipendije v Parizu (EHESS, CRH, MSH) in Budimpešti (Collegium Budapest - IAS). Tri knjige poezije: *Marcipan/Marzipan* (1997), *Spregovori morje/The Sea says* (1999), *Protitok/Gegenströmung* (v nemščini, 2002). Za 2004

predvidena izida četrte, v 4 jezikih (slov., it., angl. in fr.) z naslovom *Mobilizacije/Mobilizations*, in pete *Žametni indigo/Velvet indigo*. Prevaja literaturo iz italijanščine, francoščine, angleščine in španščine.



# Taja Kramberger

## Que fragilidad

To discard wisdom  
is wisdom

To discard sense  
is sense

To fall flat on your face  
is to stand upright

Where are you, morning?  
In the puddle

Where are you heading, darkness?  
I'm raining

Who keeps me above  
the limit of endurance?  
I'm breathing

Who pulls the nets  
of resistance?  
I do not have

Who breaks under  
the weight of the wind?  
I'm asleep

To crush light  
is brightness

To discard the discarded  
is a comeback

To give a smile back to life  
*post mortem* is a miracle  
infinitely larger than a bead of dew  
grander than a grain of salt  
calmer than the torch in your eyes

I live again  
I love once more  
I marvel all over

*Translated by Ana Jelnikar*



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# Immanuel Mifsud

## Rubi

1977

Rubi dejjem thares fil-vojt. Saqajha bojod karti, irraq, mimlija ponot. Xagharha isfar twil u mhabbel u mgħaqquad. Rubi tifla fqira. Ittraskurata.

- Tilgħabx magħha jew ma' huha dik.
- Għaliex ma?
- Għax hekk.
- Imma għaliex, ma?
- Għax hekk għidtlek jien!

Aħna u nisimġhu l-quddiesa noqgħod inħares lejha, lejn xagharha l-aktar, u lejn saqajha rqaq kważi jispiċċaw fix-xejn. Hi toqgħod tiekol il-helu minn taħt u tilgħab biċ-ċenteżmu li suppost titfa' fis-sassla u li dejjem, ninnota, titfgħu fil-but tal-libsa malli jasal is-sagrigan biex jiġbor.

Naraha kullimkien lil Rubi: il-knisja, il-bandli, il-ġnien t'hemm isfel, il-wied ma' huha u s-subien l-oħra, il-pjazza, għand Mary tal-merċa tixtri niskwart kunserva u niskwart ċeder ... naraha kullimkien minbarra l-iskola. Qatt ma rajtha l-iskola, la fil-bieb, la f'xi klassi, la fil-bitha.

- Int kif qatt ma tkun l-iskola?
- Rubi thares lejha biċ-ċiera.
- Int x'tindaħal x'nagħmel jien, ħaġa kerha?
- Ommok ma tgħidlek xejn?
- X'inhu affarik, kurzitàjr?
- Taf li jistgħu jiehdu 'l missierek il-ħabs jekk jaqbdok?

Rubi taqbad tidħaq u wiċċha donnu jisbieh.

- Int fejn taħseb li qiegħed missieri, l-iblah? U toqgħodx issaqsi fuq in-nies, orrajt, għax ingib lil hija għalik!

Għajnejha ċelesti.



# Immanuel Mifsud

## Ruby

1977

Ruby always stares into space. Her feet are paper-white, thin, pimply. Her long blonde hair is always a knotted mess. Ruby is a poor girl. Neglected.

- Don't play with that one, or her brother.
- Why not, ma?
- Because.
- But why not, ma?
- Because I said so!

While we are at mass I keep staring at her, at her hair mostly, and at her thin feet almost tapering into nothing. She sneaks sweets into her mouth and plays with the cent she is meant to throw into the basket and which, I notice, she always throws into the pocket of her dress as soon as the sacristan starts the collection.

I see Ruby everywhere: in church, at the swings, in the garden down there, in the valley with her brother and the other boys, the piazza, at Mary's, the grocer's, buying a bit of tomato paste and the same of cheddar..... I see her everywhere except for school. I never saw her at school, not at the door, not in any class, not in the yard.

- How come you're never at school?

Ruby looks at me crossly.

- Don't interfere, fat face!
- Doesn't your mother get angry?
- Is it your business, nosy parker? - Don't you know that they can put your dad in jail if they find out?

Ruby starts to laugh and her face seems to grow prettier.

- Where do you think my dad already is, idiot? And stop snooping around, orrite, cause I'll set my brother on you!

Her eyes are sky blue.



May Day





1981

Rubi bil-flokk aħmar bit-torċa taqbad fuq sidirha. Rubi fuq it-trakk mal-partitarji Soċjalisti, tkanta l-innijiet u thabbat idejha mal-ġenb tat-trakk. Tolqtok, tiġbidlek għajnejk mill-ewwel; xagħarha twil isfar sabiħ itir mar-riħ kiesaħ ta' tmiem Novembru. Jien bil-ġlekk u l-ingravata ta' l-uniformi ta' l-iskola, lura lejn id-dar. U f'kamarti, jien u nipprova nibda xihaga, nerga' nqatta' hin twil nara lil Rubi tghajjat ferhana għax ir-rebħa tagħhom terga' tkun.

- Ma, taf li Rubi mal-Lejber?

Ommi tibqa' taqli ċ-ċanga fit-taġen mingħajr manku.

- U int kif taf? Ma rridekx titkellem fuq il-politka, fhimt?

- Le ma tkellimtx fuq il-politka, ma. Rajtha fuq it-trakk tal-Lejber.

- Mhix biċċa taġħna fejn tmur Rubi u fejn imur kulhadd. Lesti ha tiekol.

- Allura aħna Nazzjonalisti, ma?

- Diġà għidtlek biex ma titkellimx fuq il-politka. Ejjja, fittex lesti ha tiekol.

Jien u nibla' ċ-ċanga mill-platt tal-pajreks nerga' nara lil Rubi, nara xagħarha jgħum fl-ajru u niftakar li għajnejha ċelesti. U niftakar f'sidirha qed jintefah taht it-torċa taqbad.

1982

Aħna u nisimgħu lil Bob Marley fuq radju każett imkisser, Simon jiġbor il-flus biex jithallas tal-haxixa li xtara mingħand xi hadd li jmur l-iskola miegħu. Kulhadd jitbissem b'għajnejh diġà miksura, l-aktar meta Rubi tmur f'rokna tal-garaxx u tinza' hwejjigħa flok thallas is-sehem taġħha. It-tliet subien li aħna naqsmu sehemha u ġisimha bejnietna.

Kull nhar ta' Ġimgħa ħadnieha drawwa fil-garaxx ta' missier Simon. Ġieli nkunu ħafna u flok lil Marley jkollna s-Sex Pistols jihdulna s-sentimenti ta' mohħna u jagħtuna pjaċir kbir, ma' l-amfetamini misruqa u Rubi taqbeż fin-nofs bla hwejjeġ.

Jien dejjem inħarsilha lejn xagħarha isfar, imħabbell, imqanfed, mgħaqqad; u meta mmissha dejjem nibda b'xagħarha. U meta ddu u thares lejja b'ħarsitha ċelesti, jagħtini li niġbidha għalija waħdi, neħodha 'l bogħod għalija biss u ninsew lill-bqija.

U dan l-aħħar sirt saħansitra nqum bil-lejl, b'nixfa kbira f'ħalqi u bl-istampa ta' ġisem Rubi jiżfen għalija f'kamarti, imxarrab għasra bil-qtar tax-xita. U jagħtini li nċempliha, imqar f'xi t-tlieta ta' filgħodu, biex ngħidilha toħroġ miegħi, imqar darba, is-Sibt filgħaxija.



MT

May Day





## 1981

Ruby in a red T-shirt flaunting the flaming torch on her breast. Ruby on the truck with other Socialist supporters, singing the party anthems and banging her hand against the truck's side. She stands out, you can't miss her: long beautiful blonde hair wafted by the cold wind of the end of November. I'm in my school blazer and tie, on my way home. And in my room, as I attempt to start on something, I slip into a long reverie of Ruby crying out gleefully because victory's bound to be theirs.

– Ma, did you know Ruby's with Labour? My mother goes on frying the bit of beef in the pan without a handle.

– And how do you know? I don't want you talking about politics, do you understand?

– No, I didn't talk about politics, ma. I saw her on the Labour truck.

– It's not our business where Ruby or where anybody goes. Get ready for your tea.

– Does that mean we're Nationalists, ma??

– I've already told you not to talk about politics. Go on, hurry up and get ready for your meal.

As I wolf down the beef off the pyrex plate, I see Ruby again, I see her hair waving in the air and I remember that her eyes are sky blue. And I see her breasts swelling under the flaming torch.

## 1982

While we listen to Bob Marley on a battered radio cassette, Simon collects the cash we owe him for the grass he's bought at his school. We all smile with eyes which are already glazed, especially when Ruby goes to a corner of the garage and strips instead of paying her share. The three of us boys share her portion and her body between us.

It's become a habit. Every Friday we meet in Simon's father's garage. Sometimes there are more of us and instead of Marley, it's the Sex Pistols who blow our mind and give us lots of pleasure, together with the stolen amphetamines and Ruby prancing around naked.

I always stare at her blonde hair, tousled, messy, knotted; and when I touch her, I always start with her hair. And when she turns and looks at me with her sky blue gaze, I feel tempted to make her mine alone, to take her far away with me alone where we can forget everyone else.

And lately I even wake at night, with a dry mouth and with the image of Ruby's body dancing for me in my room, soaked with rain drops. And I want to





Is-Sibt filgħaxija lil Rubi ma jaraha hadd. Għalxejn infittxuha d-disco tas-Sixth Form, għalxejn nistaqsuha fejn tmur. Nafu biss li ġieli tkun qiegħda tistenna fit-tarf tat-triq tagħhom u mbagħad tiġi Escort Mark 1 vjola bil-ħgieġ blu skur u tiġborha.

Imbagħad f'Diċembru, seħibna Simon, jispiċċa hešrem bla missier. U l-garaxx jingħalaq u ma jerga' jinfetah qatt hlief meta nxtara minn tillar minn barra r-raħal. U Simon jidhol dahla sew f'qoxortu u ahna naghmlu bħalu. Ilkoll kemm ahna

## 1985

minbarra Rubi.

Jien u sejjer għall-eżami tal-matrikola niċcassa nirrevedi n-noti f'moħħi u ninduna li ma nafx kollox. Jagħtini li mmur lura d-dar, imma min jaf xi storja naqla' d-dar. Hija l-kbir kien għamel hekk meta kellu jagħmel l-aħħar eżamijiet tal-liġi, u omni u missieri ma hafruhliu qatt. Ftīt ilu dahal f'kamarti jien u nistudja u sqarrli li lanqas hu ma hafirha lilu nnifsu. U oħti kienet tajba fl-iskola imma gġennet wara raġel sinjur u ħarbatħa. Anki lil oħti ma hafruhliha qatt, avolja omni tgħid li mn'alla hekk għax sabet raġel tal-gabra u li kieku kompliet tistudja setgħet sfrattat. U allura nirkeb il-karozza tal-linja b' qalbi diġà qiegħda ttaqtaq. Issa jekk ma ngħaddix inwahħal fihom; nara x'nivvinta u nwahħal fihom. Ngħidilhom li ma ridtx naghmel l-eżamijiet u ahjar issa milli naghmel bħal hija.

U niftakar fi shabi. Diġà bdew jahdmu. Simon diġà għandu karozza; mhix xi haġa ta' barra minn hawn imma għandu waħda u t-tfajliet aktar jingħibdu lejħ meta jċekċek iċ-ċwieviet tal-karozza. Minn fuq tal-linja nara n-nies jilagħqu x-xemx sabiħa ta' Mejju fuq il-funtana mejta tat-Tritoni u jien ninkedd aktar.

Imbagħad, kif il-karozza titħarrek ftit, fuq il-funtana, nilmaħ lil Rubi, liebsa qalziet iswed inkaxxat magħħa, flokk iswed kollu rqajja' u labar tas-sarwan u għaketta tal-ġild sewda kollħa ponot lewn il-fidda. Xagħarħa kull kulur u mgiddem. Bi flixkun imbid imwahħal ma' ħalqħa, ta' hdejħa mixħut minn tulu jmellsilħa daharħa.

Inxejrilħa, thares lejħa, tarani, tibqa' thares.

Ma tagħrafnix. Minflok, terġa' ttella' l-flixkun ma' ħalqħa u taqa' lura.

## 1991

Ferħanin se ntiru, jien u Marthese nippużaw bit-toga u l-berettin u l-lawrja f'idejħa għall-mitt ritratt hdejn il-funtana armata għall-okkażjoni. U nieħdu ritratt ma' kull professur jippoppa sidru għall-okkażjoni ukoll.





phone her, even though it is three in the morning, to ask her out, if only once, on a Saturday evening.

On a Saturday evening nobody ever sees Ruby. We look for her in vain at the Sixth Form disco. We ask her in vain where she goes. We only know that she often waits at the end of their street until a purple Escort Mark 1 with dark blue windows drives up, and she gets in.

And then in December, Simon's father suddenly dies. And the garage is closed and remains closed till it is sold to a panel beater from another town. Simon withdraws into his shell and we do so too. All of us

### 1985

except Ruby.

On my dazed way to my matriculation exam, I did a bit of mental revision and realized there were blanks in my knowledge. I felt an urge to go back home but I knew all hell would break loose. That's what my elder brother had done just before his law finals, and my parents have never forgiven him. Some time ago, he came into my room while I was studying and confessed that he hadn't even forgiven himself. And my sister was good at school, but she'd fallen for a rich man who'd disrupted her studies. They never forgave my sister either, though my mother says it's all for the best because she'd found a good man to settle down with, and if she'd gone on studying they might have broken up. And so I get on the bus with my heart already pounding. Now if I don't pass, I'll put the blame on them: I'll think of something and put the blame on them. I'll tell them I didn't want to take the exams, that it's better to give up now instead of doing what my brother did. And I think of my friends. They've all already found a job. Simon already has a car; it's nothing special but he has one, and girls are more attracted to him when he jingles the keys. From the bus I watch the people by the dead Triton fountain licking up the warm sun, and I feel even more pissed off.

Then, as the bus starts to move, there by the fountain, I see Ruby, in skin-tight black trousers, a torn black top pinned together by safety-pins, and a black leather jacket covered in silver studs. Her hair is a riot of colours and filthy. A bottle of wine is glued to her mouth and the guy lolling on the ground next to her is stroking her back.

I wave at her, she stares at me, she sees me, she keeps on staring.

She doesn't recognize me. Instead, she puts the bottle to her lips again and falls back.

### 1991

Beaming with happiness, in our togas and mortar-boards and with our degrees in our hands, Marthese and I pose next to the bedecked fountain for some





Il-profs Grima jehdilna b'idejna.

– Nawguralkom, hej, nawguralkom; anki għax smajt li dalwaqt tiehdu l-pass. Awguri!

Marthese ferhana aktar minni.

– Fadlilna sena oħra, profs.

– Eh, sena tgħaddi malajr hafna. Awguri!

Qabel nitilqu għall-festa f'Paceville, inhares lejn il-librerija u ma nafx għaliex niftakar fil-Gimghat fil-garaxx, fir-Riffis ikantaw *Dance Music For Eighties Depression*, u fl-għajnejn ċelesti ta' Rubi. Kont hsibt li nsejthom għal kollox lil shabi tat-triq. Għax issa jien ta' l-iskola, u meta jarawni (rari hafna) jitfixklu. Ġieli nieqaf inkellem lil Simon, nistaqsih kif sejjer, u jgħidli li b'zewġt itfal ikollu jagħmel hafna sahra u l-mara tiegħu x-xogħol tal-fabbrika d-dar, inkella ma jlahhqux. Insemmu lill-hbieb kollha f'litanija bħal tal-qaddisin; kollha nsemmuhom, wiehed wiehed, minbarra 'l Rubi.

## 1995

Marthese issir taf li għal din l-aħħar sena, wara x-xift ta' bil-lejl kont nibqa' sejjer għand Sandra minflok id-dar. Ratna kemm-il darba hirġin mill-isptar u darba saqet warajna.

– Ara x'se tagħmel, Joe, mil-lum 'il quddiem kellimni bl-avukat. Qatt ma mmaġinajt li se tkun daqshekk hanżir miegħi. Xi hsibtni lili; li m'għandix għajnejn f'wiċċi? U 'l dik x'rajthilha biċċa ners maħmuġa? Kif ma tisthix minnek innifsek; kellek taqa' daqshekk fil-baxx! Qabbad avukat; minix se nkelmek aktar. Imn'alla m'għandniex tfal. Imma ha ngħidlek: li kellna xorta konna nispiċċaw hekk. Ara ma tahsibx li kont se noqghod minhabba t-tfal!

Wara li niffirma d-dokumenti kollha għand l-avukat tiegħi għal separazzjoni bonarja, immur għand Sandra, ngħidilha li se nikri appartament Birzebbuġa u nistaqsiha tridx tidhol miegħi. Sandra qed taħsibha biex tazzetta ma' xihadd, tizzewweġ u tipprova tinsa l-istorja tagħna. Tgħidli dan bid-dmugħ f'għajnejha ċelesti u qabel nitlaqha tgħidli li jiddispjaċiha għal dak li għamlet. Inhares lejha u mmellsilha ftit xagħarha isfar u nitbissmilha avolja xtaqt insawwatha. Wara kollox kienet hi li għamlet l-ewwel pass dakinhar li konna f'party niċċelebraw bil-gamma-hydroxybutyrate. U issa tgħidli li jiddispjaċiha, li tixtieq tazzetta ma' xihadd tal-galbu għax żmien l-avventura spjiċċa, jew għandu jispiċċa.

Jien minix tal-galbu. Jien raġel hażin.

Iċempel it-telefon u nisma' lil Simon jistaqsi għalija. Lanqas għaraftu. Jitlobni mmur malajr għandu għax it-tifel jahraq. Jien u hiereġ mid-dar bit-taraġ ta' l-





hundred photos. And we have our photos taken together with every professor popping his chest out for the occasion. Professor Grima shakes our hands.

– Congratulations, eh, congratulations; also because I've heard that you'll soon tie the knot. Good luck!

Marthese is even happier than I.

– There's still a year to go, Profs.

– Eh, a year goes by very quickly. Good luck!

Before we leave to celebrate in Paceville, I look back at the library and, God knows why, I think of those weeks in the garage, of the Riffis singing Dance Music for Eighties Depression, and of Ruby's pale blue eyes. I thought I'd totally forgotten my street companions. Because now I'm a scholar, and when they see me (very rarely) it confuses them. Sometimes I stop to chat with Simon, I ask him how he's getting on, and he tells me that because of the two children he has to be very frugal and that his wife must take factory work home for them to cope. We mention all our friends in a litany, as with the saints; we mention them all, one by one, except for Ruby.

## 1995

Marthese finds out that throughout this last year, instead of going home after my night-shift, I have been going to Sandra's. She'd seen us leaving hospital many a time and once she followed us.

– Do what you will, Joe. From today onwards speak to me only through my lawyer. I'd never have thought you could treat me so shabbily. What did you think? That I was blind? And what do you see in a mere crappy nurse? How can you look yourself in the face after sinking so low? Find a lawyer; I won't speak to you anymore. Thank God, we have no children. But I'll tell you one thing: even if we did it would end this way. Don't for one minute think that I would have stayed on because of the children.

As soon as I sign all the papers necessary for my separation at the lawyer's, I go to Sandra's, I tell her I'm renting an apartment in Birzebuga, and ask if she wants to move in with me. Sandra is thinking of settling down with someone, getting married and trying to forget our whole affair. She tells me this with tears in her light blue eyes and before I leave she tells me she is sorry for what she has done. I look at her and stroke her blonde hair gently, and I smile at her even though I feel like hitting her. After all it was she who made the first move on the day we were partying with gamma-hydroxybutyrate. And now she tells me she's sorry, that she wants to settle down with someone decent, because her time for adventuring is over, or should be over. I am not a decent guy. I'm a bad guy.

The phone rings and I hear Simon ask for me. I hadn't recognized him. He asks me to hurry to his place because his son is burning with fever. As I leave the house





irham li bena n-Naxxar Simon ifakkarni fil-garaxx ta' missieru. Niftakar f'Rubi li l-aħħar li rajtha kienet hdejn iċ-ċentru tad-Detox jien u hiereġ mill-isptar. Joffrili grokk wiski u nġhidlu li mġhaġġel.

– Meta jkollok bżonn, Simon, tiddejjaq xejn. M'għandu xejn; daqsxejn deni. Hawn virus bħalissa jattakka t-tfal. Tinkwetax. Imma jekk ikollok bżonn tiddejjaqx iċċempel, imma ċċempilx aktar fuq dak in-numru għax se niċċaqlaq minn hemm.

Jien raġel hażin; ma nbdiltx minn dak iż-żmien tal-Ġimġhat fil-garaxx.

## 1999

Wara x-xift ta' bil-lejl niġi dritt id-dar; nixgħel l-airconditioner, ninħasel u mmur dritt fis-sodda, norqod. Il-baħar jista' ma jeżistix għalija. F'Birzebbuga żgur li le. Niddejjaq nara ċ-ċorom familji bit-tfal iwerżqu u jilagħqu l-ġelati, u niddejjaq inħares lejn id-dinożawri tal-port hieles. Malli nqum naqbad ktieb u nibda naqra. Darba fil-ġimġha tiġi seftura tnaddafli kull rokna ta' l-appartament u jien noqgħod inħares lejha minn wara l-ktieb, noqgħod nifilha t-toppu oħxon lewn id-deheb u għajnejha lewn is-sema ċar. U niehu gost naraha tiħmar u tbaxxi rasha meta taqbadni nħarsilha, l-istess kif għamlet meta qaltli li ratni fuq il-programm tat-televixin tal-Ġimġha filgħaxija meta stidnuni nitkellem fuq il-problemi tal-menopawsa u l-kriżi psikoloġika li din iġġib magħha. Ġieli noħroġ nippassiġġa jew immur sal-palestra ħa nżomm ġismi intunat. Ġieli nibqa' rieqed u tqajjimni s-seftura bit-tahbita fitta fuq il-bieb, u meta naraha thares lejja b' dik il-harsa misthija ġġeġħilni nitbissem u nkun irrid nehodha fi hđani u nġhidilha hafna affarijiet li żgur jiskomodawha.

## 1999, Diċembru

Is-siġra tal-Milied tixgħel u titfi. Fl-isfond it-tfal ikantaw dwar il-lejl ta' skiet li kellu jibdel l-istorja kollha. Fuq it-televixin dokumentarju-twissija dwar il-katastrofi possibbli minħabba l-Y2K.

Nisma' l-qanpiena u naqbad f'idi r-riċevitur ta' l-interkom.

- Dr Farrugia?
- Iva?
- Kif int, Dr Farrugia?
- Min int? Miniex nagħrfek.
- Jimporta nitilgħu nkellmuk fitit?
- Ma narax pazjenti d-dar jiddispjaċini.





with the marble staircase which he has built in Naxxar, Simon reminds me of his father's garage. I think of Ruby and that the last time I saw her on my way out of hospital was next to the Detox centre. He offers me a drink and I say I'm in a hurry.

– When you need me, Simon, don't hesitate. There's nothing wrong with him; a slight fever. There's a virus going around which children catch. Don't worry. But if you feel the need, don't worry about phoning me, but don't phone me anymore on that number because I'm moving.

I'm a bad guy; I haven't changed since that time of Fridays in the garage.

### *1999*

After the night shift I come straight home; I put on the air conditioner, wash and go straight to bed, to sleep. The sea might as well not exist for me. Definitely not in Birzebuga. I can't stand seeing those flocks of families with children screaming and licking their ice creams, I can't stand the dinosaurs in the free port. As soon as I wake I grab a book and start to read. Once a week a maid comes to clean each and every corner of the flat, and I watch her over the cover of my book. And I scrutinize her big golden bun and eyes like the clear sky. And I enjoy watching her blush and ducking her head when she catches me watching, exactly as she did when she told me she'd seen me on TV in a Friday evening programme, where I'd been invited to speak about menopause problems and the psychological crisis it brings with it. Sometimes I go out walking or I go to the gym to keep my body toned. Sometimes I go on sleeping and the maid wakes me with a persistent knock on the door, and when I see her glance at me with that shy look of hers, it makes me smile, and I want to take her in my arms and tell her lots of things which would surely embarrass her.

### *December 1999*

The Christmas tree lights flicker. In the background the children sing about the silent night which was to change the whole of history. On TV a documentary – warning about the Y2K and its threatening catastrophes.

I hear the doorbell and I answer the intercom.

– Dr. Farrugia?

– Yes?

– How are you, Dr. Farrugia? – Who is it? I haven't recognized you?

– May we come up to speak to you?

– I'm sorry. I don't see patients at home.

– No, no, it's not about sickness we wish to speak to you. Or rather it is about sickness, but about the sickness of the soul.





– Le le mhux fuq mard irridu nkellmuk. Anzi fuq mard irridu nkellmuk, imma mard tar-ruħ.

Inkemmex għajnejja.

– Mard tar-ruħ?

– Inti jimporta nitilgħu nkellmuk ffit?

Il-lehen ta' dik il-mara fuq l-interkom jinstema' persważiv biżżejjed li naqbad u niftaħ il-bieb t'isfel. Mill-bieb ta' fuq nara mara u raġel libsin il-kowt b'xi rivisti f'idejhom. Malli joqorbu nintebaħ li m'huma hadd hliel il-koppja li dan l-aħħar ġew fl-appartament tal-pjan terran, dawk li jipparkjaw il-Peogeot 306 quddiem il-bieb b'mod li xi kultant ma tkunx tista' tidhol sew u jien nitkaża kif ma jaħsbux ffit fil-proxxmu meta mal-ħġieġa ta' wara waħhlu stiker b'*Let the Light of God Guide You*.

Titkellem il-mara.

– Kif int, Dr Farrugia?

– Insomma, mhux hażin. M'għandix wisq hin però.

– M'ahnix se ndewmuk, tibzax. Nafu li f'dawn iż-żminijiet kulhadd ikollu hafna x'jaġhmel.

Ir-raġel joqgħod pass warajha u jitbissem donnu ma jafx jisserja ffit.

– Insomma, għiduli xi tridu.

– Ġejna biex inkellmuk ffit dwar il-bxara t-tajba u l-miġja ta' Kristu. Ahna ngħixu fi żminijiet diffiċli minhabba l-istorbju li hawn madwarna, speċjalment dawn iż-żminijiet u ninsew l-ispirtu, ninsew dak li huwa veru u importanti għas-saħħa spiritwali.

– Ara ha ngħidlek, sinjura, jien bniedem tad-dinja u m'għandix wisq hin għal dawn l-affarijiet. Jekk tridu tidhlu tiehdu grokk tal-festa bil-qalb kollha, imma s-suġġett ma tantx jinteressani.

– Għidtlek li rridu nkellmuk fuq il-mard tar-ruħ. M'għandek qatt tinsa li s-siegha se tasal u ma ddumx.

– Sinjura, hu paċenzja, hażbat lil ta' maġenbi, imma lili hallini ffit bi kwieti. Għidtlek, jien bniedem tad-dinja.

– Għalhekk ġejna nkellmuk, Dr Farrugia. Għax int kont bniedem tad-dinja u hekk għadek u ġejna nsalvawk.

– Int forsi ma tafx x'jiġifieri tkun bniedem tad-dinja. Intom nies tajbin, temmnu u x'naf jien. Imma mhux kulhadd bhalkom. Ma tafux xi ftsier tkun bniedem tad-dinja. U issa jekk ma jimpurtax ...



MT

May Day





I frown.

- The sickness of the soul?
- Do you mind letting us speak to you for a while?

The woman's voice over the intercom sounds persuasive enough to make me open the door downstairs. From my door I see a man and a woman, both in coats, carrying magazines. As they approach I realize that they are none other than the couple who recently came to the ground floor apartment, those who parked their Peugeot 206 so close to the door that it was difficult to get in properly, so that I was shocked that they had no consideration for their neighbour, considering the sticker stuck on the back "Let the Light of God Guide You". It is the woman who speaks.

- How are you, Dr. Farrugia?
- Not bad. However, I don't have much time.
- We won't take up much of your time, don't worry. We know that everybody is busy at this time.

The man stands a step behind her and smiles as if he is incapable of looking serious.

- Well, tell me what you want.
- We have come to speak a few words to you about the good news and the coming of Christ. We live in difficult times because of confusion all around us, especially at this time of the year and we forget the spirit, we forget that which is true and important for our spiritual health.
- Look, let me tell you, madam, I'm a man of the world and I don't have much time for these things. If you wish to have a drink because of the season, you're very welcome, but I'm not interested in what you want to talk about.
- I told you we want to speak to you about the sickness of the soul. You must never forget that your hour will come, and soon.
- Madam, be patient, knock at my neighbour's door, but leave me in peace. I've already told you I'm a man of the world.
- That is why we have come to speak to you, Dr. Farrugia. Because you were a man of the world and still are and we have come to save you.
- Perhaps you don't know what it means to be a man or woman of the world. You are good people, you have faith and so on. But not everybody is like you. You can't understand what it's like to be a man of the world. And now if you don't mind....
- Of course I know what it's like to be a woman of the world!





– Dażgur li naf x'jigifieri tkun bniedem tad-dinja.

Is-sinjura tinža' n-nuččali kbir tax-xemx li dejjem tilbes anki fi ġranet imsahhba u quddiem i jiffaċċaw żewġ għajnejn ċelesti jharsu lejja u jitbissmu.

– Rubi!

Rubi titbissem aktar, imma wiċċha jibqa' serju.

– Kif jista' jkun?!

– It-toroq tal-Mulej, Dr Farrugia, huma mohbija, imma huma hafna. Fahhar lill-Mulej, Dr Farrugia, lilna baghatna apposta għalik biex nghinuk issib it-triq mohbija li hemm lesta għalik.



**Immanuel Mifsud** twieled fit-12 ta' Settembru 1967, l-iżgħar minn familja ta' ħaddiema ta' tmint itfal u trabba' fir-Raħal il-Ġdid. Jgħallim il-Letteratura Maltija fl-Università ta' Malta. Ippubblika sitt ġabriet ta' poeżiji u novelli u waqqaf numru ta' gruppi ta' teatru ta' rikerka.





The woman removes her big sunglasses which she always wears even on cloudy days, and two light blue eyes appear looking straight at me and smiling.

– Ruby!

Ruby's smile grows wider, but her face remains serious.

– How can it be?!

– The ways of the Lord, Dr. Farrugia, are strange, but they are many. Praise the Lord, Dr. Farrugia, He has sent us purposely for us to help you find the hidden way which is ready for you.

*Translated by Maria Grech Ganado*

MT

en

May Day



**Immanuel Mifsud** (1967) teaches Maltese Literature at the University of Malta. He has published six collections of poetry and short stories, and is the founder of numerous experimental theatre groups.



# Maria Grech Ganado

## Laringa

Konna poġġejna bilqieghda  
fuq l-ghatba tal-kċina, inqaxxru l-laring.  
Bhal qisu mdendel mis-saqaf tal-bitha  
l-qamar werwirna daqs kemm kien mimli,

aħmar, sabiħ. Jiena qomt b'sabta, nidhaq  
'Ħa nduqu'. Int qbadtli idi l-leminija  
u hekk, għal għarrieda, gdimtli qamar zgħir  
hawn taht il-minkeb fejn il-gilda tibjad.

Hassejtni ninqasam felli felli.  
Felli għal meta tweggaghni,  
felli għal meta tagħdirni, għal meta  
tordnali nitlaq kollox u niġi hdejk.

U felli mimli meraq għal meta thobbni,  
tmellisli xagħri, tmellisli sidri,  
u tigdimni bil-mod hawn taht il-minkeb  
taht qamar laringa jahraq f'għajnejk.



Mwiela fl-1943, **Maria Grech Ganado** ħarġet żewġ ġabriet ta' poeżiji bil-Malti, *Iżda Mhux Biss* (1999)- li għalih ingħatat l-ewwel premju għall-poeżija mill-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ktieb, *Skond Eva* (2001), u dan l-aħħar, il-ġabra bl-Ingliż, *Ribcage* (2003). Fis-sena 2000, Maria ingħatat il-Midalja għall-Qadi tar-Repubblika bhala ġieh għall-hidma sfuqa tagħha fit-tagħlim u l-kitba.



# Maria Grech Ganado

## Orange

We were sitting together on the kitchen step  
peeling oranges, I remember. As though  
suspended from the courtyard's ceiling,  
the moon terrified us, it was so full, so rich,

so red. I started up, laughing  
"I'll taste it". You grabbed my right hand, and  
without warning, bit a small moon into the flesh  
under my elbow where the skin turns white.

I felt myself fall open into segments,  
a segment for when you hurt me, a segment  
for when you're sorry, for when you order me  
to drop everything and come to you –

and one segment gorged with juice for when you love me –  
you caress my hair, you caress my breasts  
and you bite me gently here, under the elbow,  
with a blood-orange moon ablaze in your eyes.

*Translated by Maria Grech Ganado*



**Maria Grech Ganado** (1943) has published two collections of poetry in Maltese, *Iżda Mhux Biss* (1999) – for which she received the National Book Council's 1st prize for Poetry – and *Skond Eva* (2001), and recently a collection in English, *Ribcage* (2003). In the year 2000, Maria received a prestigious national award, *Midalja għall-Qadi tar-Repubblika* (Medal for Service to the

Republic) in recognition of her teaching and writing.



# Μυρτώ Μελετίου

## Μόνη

Σε είδα πάλι  
στο μπαρ  
να τριγυρνάς σα χαμένη.  
Οι άνθρωποι μια μάζα μύγες  
γύρω σου  
να νοθεύουν το ποτό σου με την  
ανασφάλειά τους.

Σε είδα πάλι  
να κρεμιέσαι  
απ' τη θηλιά του παραλόγου  
ψάχνοντας να βρεις αυτό το κάτι  
να πιστέψεις.

Κι ενώ ήρθες εδώ μόνη,  
φεύγεις παρέα με τα δεκάδες  
βλέμματα που  
καρφώθηκαν βίαια στο κορμί σου  
ζητώντας τη λύτρωση.

Θά'σαι πάντα μόνη  
και το ξέρεις.

Αγέννητη η συμπόνια  
στα σπλάχνα  
των περαστικών που σε βλέπουν να  
πεθαίνεις από ασφυξία.

Πατί ξέχασες και πάλι  
να βάλεις τη μάσκα  
αυτή  
που φοράνε όλοι και τους κρατάει  
ζωντανούς.

Μέχρι να σκεφτούν έν' άλλο τρόπο  
να επιβιώσουν  
πίνοντας το αίμα κάποιου  
ανυποψίαστου περαστικού  
σαν και σένα.

Σε είδα.  
Γέλασες διακριτικά και μετά χάθηκες  
στη βροχή  
η αύρα σου να χαράζει τον αγέρα κι  
εσύ να προχωράς.

Ακολουθώ τ'αχνάρια που αφήνεις  
στη λάσπη  
και σε βρίσκω.

Σε αρπάζω από το χέρι.  
«Κι εγώ είμαι μόνη»,  
ψιθυρίζω.  
«Ας προχωράμε μαζί».



# Myrto Meletiou

## On Your Own

I saw you again  
 at the bar  
 moving around like an incompatible  
 figure.  
 A troop of flies, they seemed;  
 the people that rambled around you,  
 adulterating your drink with their  
 insecurity.

I saw you again  
 hanging by the loop of insanity  
 searching to find something to  
 believe in.

And even though you have come  
 here alone  
 you leave accompanied with the  
 million  
 glances that got stuck on your body  
 like leeches  
 demanding to be redeemed.

You'll always be on your own, and  
 you know that.

Consolation is yet unborn in the  
 strangers that pass you by  
 while they see you suffocating.  
 You have forgotten again to wear  
 that mask  
 which all others wear and keeps  
 them alive.

Until they think of a new way to  
 survive  
 by sucking the blood out of an  
 undefended,  
 unsuspecting creature like you.

I saw you.  
 You smiled discreetly and then  
 vanished in the rain,  
 your aura tearing the wind while  
 you walked away.

I follow the traces you leave  
 in the mud, and  
 I find you.

I grasp you by the hand.  
 "I am alone too",  
 I whisper.  
 "Let's move on together".

*Translated by Myrto Meletiou*



May Day





## Φεύγοντας

Μπορείς να φύγεις γι'αλλού, μα πάντα θα γυρνάς σ'αυτό το σκοτεινό δωμάτιο με το θαμπό φως τρέχοντας ξωπίσω από αναμνήσεις. Μπορείς να φύγεις γι'αλλού, μα δεν μπορείς να κρυφτείς από τη δηλητηριώδη οσμή που άφησαν πίσω τα καμένα σου όνειρα και τα ταριχευμένα σου ένστικτα. Το σώμα σου έχει γίνει ένα μ'αυτά τα ρούχα που φοράς χρόνια τώρα, χωρίς να νιώθεις την ανάγκη ν'αλλάξεις ή να πλυθείς. Κι ενώ κάποτε είχες το κουράγιο να στέκεσαι ακίνητος καθώς τα καυτά μου λόγια σου 'καιγαν τη σάρκα, δε νιώθεις πια την ανάγκη ν' αντιμετωπίσεις τίποτα. Τώρα ξέρω, πως, όπως η φλόγα λιώνει το κερί, έτσι κι αυτή ήταν η δική μας γνωστή και τυπική διαδικασία. Τώρα έχεις χαθεί. Κι ενώ δεν είσαι πια ορατός σε νιώθω στις άδειες σελίδες που ξετυλίγονται μπροστά μου, καθώς προσπαθώ να αιχμαλωτίσω τον πόνο μου σε λίγες λέξεις, ελπίζοντας πως θα μείνει εκεί για πάντα, παγιδευμένος και ξεχασμένος. Όσο κι αν προσπαθώ δεν μπορώ να αναστήσω όσα κάποτε μοιραστήκαμε. Το κομματιασμένο μας πάθος στοιχειώνει τους χτύπους της καρδιάς μου

σαν φάντασμα, προσπαθώντας να κλέψει το ρυθμό τους και να τον κάνει δικό του. Μπορείς να φύγεις γι'ακόμα μια φορά, μα να ξέρεις πως είδα πίσω από τη μάσκα σου. Εάν μείνεις χαμένος για πάντα να θυμάσαι πως κάποτε είχες την καρδιά μου. Μια καρδιά τόσο δυνατή που κρατούσε σφυγμό και για τους δυο μας. Τώρα αυτή η καρδιά ανήκει αλλού. Δεν μπορεί να ξεκάνει όση ζημιά της έχεις κάνει.

*Μεταφράστηκε από  
τη Μυρτώ Μελετίου*





## Running Away

*(original version)*

You can run away, but  
you'll always come back to  
that dark room with the dim light  
chasing your memories around.  
You can run away, but  
you cannot hide from the  
poisonous seethe of your  
burned dreams and  
your embalmed instincts.  
Your body has become one with  
those clothes you've worn for years  
without feeling  
the obligation to change or bathe.  
And even though you've once had the  
courage to stand still while my  
sizzling words burned your flesh,  
you no longer feel  
the need to confront anything.  
Now I know, that  
as the flame melts the candle,  
that too was a natural procedure  
for us to follow.  
You are gone now. And though  
you are no longer visible, I  
can sense you in the empty pages that  
unfold before my eyes, as I  
try to capture my pain in  
a few words, hoping that it would  
stay there for ever,  
trapped and forgotten.  
No matter how hard I try, I  
cannot revive what we once shared.  
Our scattered passion haunts my heartbeats  
like a ghost, trying to steal the rhythm and  
make it his.  
You can run away once more, though  
bear in mind that I've seen behind your mask.  
If you stay this lost for ever, know that  
once you had my heart. A heart that was  
strong enough to keep a pulse for  
both of us.

Now, this heart belongs elsewhere.  
It can't find it possible to undo  
all the damage that you've done.





## Το Τείχος

Περιπλανιέμαι για ώρες στο δρόμο  
άσκοπα.

Χρόνια που πέρασαν, ασύνδετα και  
ασυγχρόνιστα.

Σηκώνω το βάρος των χρόνων που  
κείτονται πίσω μου νεκρά, και  
κτίζω γύρω μου ένα τείχος.

«Εδώ μέσα είμαι ασφαλής», λέω.

Το μίσος μου ξέρει να κάνει πάντα το  
σωστό.

Κάποιες στιγμές κοιτάζω πέρα από  
το τείχος.

Πανέμορφη μα παράλυτη ζωή σε  
ό,τι δω.

Κορμιά που διψάνε για στοργή.  
Ψυχές παρατημένες στην άκρη του  
δρόμου.

Ματωμένα χέρια παντού, έτοιμα  
να σου ξεσκίσουν τη σάρκα και  
να σου φάν' τα σωθικά με την  
πρώτη ευκαιρία.

«Εδώ μέσα είμαι ασφαλής», λέω.

Το μίσος μου ξέρει να κάνει πάντα το  
σωστό.

Όποτε κοιτάξω πέρα από το τείχος  
φωνές ψιθυρίζουν μέσα στο κεφάλι  
μου.

Στον καθρέφτη υπάρχει πάντα  
αυτός ο άλλος που με κοιτάει  
επίμονα.

Ακούω τους κτύπους απ' το ρολόι  
που πάει ενάντια στην  
ανυπεράσπιστη ομορφιά μου, και  
νιώθω να πνίγομαι  
ώρα με την ώρα. Λεπτό με λεπτό.

«Εδώ μέσα πρέπει να είμαι  
ασφαλής», λέω.

Το μίσος μου ξέρει να κάνει πάντα το  
σωστό.

Μένω κάτω απ' το νερό,  
παγιδευμένη. Μακριά από κάθε  
ανθρώπινο ίχνος.

Τα δυο μου πόδια γίνονται τέσσερα.  
Τα τέσσερα χιλιάδες.

Δεν νιώθω. Απλά κολυμπάω.

«Θα είμαι μια χαρά», λέω.

Το μίσος μου ξέρει να κάνει τα πάντα.  
Σωστά.

*Μεταφράστηκε από  
τη Μυρτώ Μελετίου*



**Η Μυρτώ Μελετίου** γεννήθηκε το 1982 στη Λευκωσία.

Τώρα τελειώνει τις σπουδές της στο Cyprus College στον κλάδο της Ψυχολογίας, ενώ παρακολούθησε και μαθήματα Αγγλικής Λογοτεχνίας. Σκοπεύει να συνεχίσει τις σπουδές της στην Αμερική, κάνοντας μεταπτυχιακό στη Χοροθεραπεία.

Ήταν η εκδότρια του περιοδικού «Φλερ: Το Λογοτεχνικό Περιοδικό», ένα φοιτητικό περιοδικό λογοτεχνίας και τεχνών, το οποίο εκδίδετο 2 φορές το χρόνο από το Cyprus College και η βοηθός εκδότρια του «Cadences», του λογοτεχνικού περιοδικού που ήρθε και αντικατέστησε το Φλερ. Διηγήματά της και ποιήματά της δημοσιεύθηκαν στις πρώτες εκδόσεις των περιοδικών αυτών.





## The Wall

(original version)

I wander for hours in the streets aimlessly.  
Years spent, unrelated and asynchronous.  
I lift the weight of those years laid behind me, and  
build a wall around me.

'I will be safe now,' I say.  
My hate knows how to do things right.

At moments I look over the wall,  
Beautiful, still life in all I see.  
Bodies thirsty for affection,  
souls dumped by the side of the road.

Bloody hands everywhere, ready to  
tear you open and  
eat your guts at  
first chance.

'I am safe in here,' I say.  
My hate knows how to do things right.  
Whenever I look over the wall  
voices whisper in my head.  
In the mirror there's always someone else  
looking from there.

I listen to the battles of the clock  
against my defenseless beauty, and

feel like drowning  
hour by hour. Minute by minute.

'I should be safe in here,' I say.  
My hate knows how to do things right.

I remain underwater,  
trapped. No more people.  
My two legs turn four.  
My four turn millions.

I don't feel, just swim.  
'I shall be fine,' I say.  
My hate knows how to do things.  
Right.



**Myrto Meletiou** (1982) is currently in her last year at Cyprus College where she majors in psychology and minors in English literature. She further intends to obtain a Master's degree in dance therapy. She is the editor of *Flair: The Literary Magazine*, a students' journal of literature and the arts, published twice a year. Her short stories and poems are often featured in literary publications.



# Gür Genç

## Şiir değil, su

Kıbrıslı Şairlere

Aphrodit'ten beri aşk çöplüğüne döndü bu ada.  
İşgalci ırkların köklerine karışan ayaklarımız  
Kımıldadıkça kemik yığınları kıtırdıyor  
Ağrlığımız altında.

Toprak öylesine yüklendi ki ölümşirasıyla  
Tek kurtuluş

Şiir değil

Su!

Aşırı ısı nedeniyle taşlar bile eriyip  
Derelerle denize aktı  
Yaban diller erimiş bakır gibi yaktı  
Cinsel istila ile açılan ağzımızı.

Az bir ada için bu kadar şiir çok  
Artık yazmayın

Ağaç dikin

Yada su!



**Gür Genç**, 1969 yılında Baf'ta doğdu. 1992'de adadan ayrıldı. Dört yıl Türkiye'de yaşadıkdan sonra Britanya'ya yerleşti. Dansörlük, barmenlik, tercümanlık gibi çeşitli işlerde çalıştı. 2003 yılında Kıbrıs'a geri döndü. Şiir kitapları: Yarımlık, 1992 / Ye, 1994 / Yolyutma, 2000.



# Gür Genç

## Not Poetry But Water

*For Cypriot poets*

Since Aphrodite this island has turned into the rubbish dump of love.  
Our feet tangled in the roots of invaders  
Bone piles crack as we move  
under our weight.

The earth so over-saturated with death syrup  
The only escape  
is not poetry  
but water!

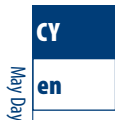
Due to excessive heat even stones have melted  
and flowed in streams into the sea  
Foreign tongues like melted copper burns  
Our mouths opened with sexual invasion.

For such a small island so much poetry  
Do not write anymore  
plant trees  
or water!

*Translated by Aydin Mehmet Ali*



**Gür Genç** (1969) was born in Pafos, then between 1992 and 1996 he lived in Turkey, before settling in Britain. Recently, however, he has returned to Cyprus. Gür Genç has held various jobs, such as dancer, barman and interpreter. He has published three books of poetry, *Divided* (1992), *Eat* (1994) and *Swallowing-the-Road* (2000).



# Νόρα Νατζαριάν

## Μετάξι

Άνοιξη. Άγγιξες τα φύλλα με το δέρμα σου  
κι ένοιωσες σιγουριά. Αυτή είναι η ζωή μου,  
σκέφτηκες, αυτό το φρέσκο φύλλο μουριάς.  
Και μάσησες σιωπηλά τις πράσινες στιγμές  
κι αναρωτήθηκες αν αυτό σήμαινε  
πως μεγάλωνες, έτσι που φούσκωνε  
και μάκραινε το κορμί σου.

Μια μέρα, άρχισες να γνέθεις  
το χρυσαφένιο κουκούλι γύρω σου.  
Φάνηκε σαν να κρυβόσουν λίγο  
το λαμπρό φως του ήλιου,  
σαν να μας αποχαιρετούσες.  
Σχεδόν σαν να πέθαινες. Μα κάναμε λάθος.  
Η μακριά εκείνη ευθεία γραμμή

ήταν η ζωή σου σε μετάξι –  
γνήσια και λευκή.



# Nora Nadjarian

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## Silk

In spring, your skin touched the leaves,  
and you felt safe. This is my life,  
you thought, a fresh mulberry leaf,  
and silently savoured the green moments  
in your mouth. Is this growing up,  
you wondered. Your body stretched and filled.

One day, you started to spin the cocoon  
of gold around you. It was a little like hiding  
from bright sunlight, like saying goodbye.  
Like dying, almost. But we were wrong.  
Because that long, continuous thread  
was your life in silk –

pure, white.

*Translated by Nora Nadjarian*



May Day





## Αηδόνι στις Πλάτρες

Σ' άκουσε ο Σεφέρης μια φορά, πριν από χρόνια.  
Η φωνή σου μέσα στον αέρα του καλοκαιριού  
αγαλλίαζε και γέμιζε ολόκληρη τη σιωπή.  
Την κάθε άδεια ρωγμή.

Κατάλαβε τότε πως όλα του τα χρόνια  
είχαν περάσει σαν τ' άσχημα τραγούδια του κόρακα  
τόσο δεμένα στο έδαφος, τόσο βραχνά,  
κράζοντας απερίσκεπτα, κρίζοντας ...

Την κατάγραψε στη μνήμη του  
αυτή τη στιγμή, σαν η μόνη της ζωής του  
όπου χίλιες κουρασμένες ώρες  
ξέχασαν το βάρος τους και πέταξαν.



Η **Νόρα Νατζαριάν** γεννήθηκε στη Λεμεσό της Κύπρου και σπούδασε στην Αγγλία. Γράφει ποίηση και διηγήματα. Εξέδωσε τις ποιητικές συλλογές *The Voice at the Top of the Stairs* (2001) και *Cleft in Twain* (2003). Τιμήθηκε με βραβεία σε παγκόσμιο διαγωνισμό ποίησης (Scottish International Open Poetry Competition) και διακρίθηκε στο διαγωνισμό του Κοινοπολιτειακού Συνδέσμου Ραδιοφωνίας «Commonwealth Short Story Competition».





## Nightingale at Platres

Seferis heard you, long ago.  
Your voice in the summer air,  
exulted, filled all silence –  
every empty crack.

He realised then, all his years  
had been ugly crow songs  
tied to the ground;  
hoarse fools, croaking.

He recorded it in memory  
as that one moment, when  
a thousand heavy hours  
forgot their weight and flew.

*Translated by Nora Nadjarian*

CY

en

May Day



**Nora Nadjarian** was born in Limassol, Cyprus, and educated in the UK. She writes both poetry and short fiction, and has published two collections of poetry: *The Voice at the Top of the Stairs* (2001) and *Cleft in Twain* (2003). She has won international awards, including prizes in the Scottish International Open Poetry Competition and the Commonwealth Short Story Competition.

# Renata Šerelytė

## Dama su karvablyniais

Žalioje prietemoje lyg prapliupusioje liūtyje juodavo niūrūs karvių siluetai. Ruggjūčio pieva, nebetekusi savo kvapnių garbanų, šalta ir drėgna, gulėjo ant žemės. Peraugusios šunramunės, susispietusios šalikelėje, linko į rudo vandens pilnas provėžas lyg į blausius veidrodžius, šiurkščiam drobiniam danguje skydo keli tamsūs dryžiai – lyg kas būtų perbraukęs neplautu teptuku.

Zita garsiai šlepsėjo šalikele, varydamasi dviratį.

Vienas dangaus pakraštys, lyg koks atsiskyrėlis, gilus ir mėlynas, su šviečiančiomis balkšvomis dėmėmis. Zita užvertė galvą ir nusišypsojo.

Atsargiai, karviamėšlis!.. Zita peršoko, bet dviračio nesusėję pakreipti, ir abu ratai pervaziavo dar nesusėjęs suragėti blyną. Zita nusikeikė.

Iš tolumoje baltuojančio miestelio į tamsias ganyklas sruvena ramybė. Kažkur girsis harmonika, tampoma neįgudusių rankų. Kai ji nutyla, pasidaro taip šmėkliškai tylu, kad neiškentęs sustūgsta šuo, žiūrėdamas į aukštus bulvienojus. Kažkas, atidarydamas langą, sušnypščia – cit, bestija!.. Apmirusiamie miežių kvadrate aidi garsus žiogų čirpimas.

Zita šlepsi purvina šalikele, įsitvėrusi dviračio vairo, ir klausosi, ką spiegia naktiniai mašalai, sukdami ratus virš galvos.

Toli, miestelio gale, įžūliai suplerpė motociklas ir nuriaumojo menkai teapšviesta gatve.

Zita stipriau suspaudė dviračio vairą ir paspartino žingsnį. Pažvelgė į savo rankas ir nelinksmi išsiviepė: smilius ir nykštys nubroz dinti, mažylis nulūžusiu nagu, delnai pajuodę.

Slystelėjo koja, ir skystas balos purvas aptaškė nutrintas kelnes.

Kieme ant suolo tupėjo katė. Atrodė, kad gintarinės jos akys iš tolo šviečia. Sutarškėjus kibiramams, nušoko nuo suolo ir neskubom atkiceno prie šulinio. Zita įpylė jai pieno.

Nuvedusi dviratį į malkinę, šiek tiek užgaišo. Žiūrėjo į skiedrų ir sausų šakelių krūvas, primenančias išmirusius skruzdėlynus. „Jie ilgiau gyvens už mane. Gulės – suzmekę, supuvę, susimaišę su žeme, virtę trūnėšiais, bet jie bus... o manęs...“

Tamsiamie prieangyje nuspyrė kaliošus. Vienas iš jų trenkėsi į duris, palikdamas purviną dėmę.



# Renata Šerelytė

## Lady with Cowshit

Cow silhouettes darkened against the green twilight as if revealed by the sudden rain. The August meadow, missing its once-fragrant curls, lay cold and wet on the ground.

Along the side of the road, overgrown clumps of dog-fennel leaned over ruts of brown water as if to dull mirrors. A few dark slashes faded into the coarse linen sky, as though someone had dragged an unwashed paintbrush across it.

Zita led her bicycle along the roadside, splashing loudly.

One corner of the sky – the separatist – shone deep and blue with white spots. Zita tilted her head back and grinned.

Careful, cow-shit!

Zita leaped over it, but had no time to avert her bicycle. One wheel followed the other through the soft lump. Zita cursed.

From the distant white village, peace flowed into the dark pastures. Somewhere a concertina creaked, yanked by amateur hands. When that sound stopped, a ghostly quiet fell, until somewhere a dog looking at tall potato plants lost patience and howled. Then someone opened a window and wheezed, “Shut up, beast!” The dying fields of barley echoed with chirping crickets.

Zita splashed along the muddy roadside, gripping the handlebars of her bicycle and listening to the screams of the night midges which spun circles overhead.

Far away, at the town line, an insolent motorcycle made a plurp-p-p and then roared onto the poorly lit road.

Zita clutched the handlebars and doubled her stride. She glanced down at her hands and grimaced: her thumb and index finger were bruised, her pinkie had a broken nail, and her palms were black.

Then, her foot slipped, and the watery mud from a puddle splattered across her faded pants.

The cat had been perched on a bench in the yard. Its amber eyes seemed lit from afar. The milk cans clattered; the cat leaped off her bench and languidly kittied-up to the well. Zita poured her some milk.

She led her bicycle to the woodshed; there, she lingered. She looked through the pile of wood-chips and dried twigs; it reminded her of an empty ant-hill.

“These will outlive me. They will lie slumped, moldering, mixing with dirt, decomposing, but they will remain... while I...”





– Vėl išmauni?... – senatviškai sugirgždėjo durys. Zita neatsakė. Dažėsi lūpas. Šiek tiek per ryškiai, negu derėtų.

– Nepareik girta, - durys cypdamos užsivėrė, ir kosulys užspringo koridoriaus tamsoje.

Pro pusiau užtrauktą užuolaidą Zita matė, kaip senelė eina kiemu, atkišusi alkūnes atgal, ir jos rankos keistai tabaluoja.

Kažkodėl pasidarė trošku, lyg kūdros dugne, po maurais. Zita piktai bloškė užuolaidą. Žalia prietema keistai nudažė kambarį, ir Zitai pasirodė, kad įėjo kažkas svetimas. Ne, jis jau seniai čia. Alsuoja nešvankiai, žiūri iš padilbų, išsidrėbęs lovoje. Zita suspaudė lūpas. Še, še!.. Turėk mano nusidėvėjusią išnarą. Mano kasdienį drabužį. Užsiklok ja lyg antklodės atvartu suskirdusias kojas. Bus šilčiau.

Senelė neša kiemu aprūkusį puodą be ąsos. Iš viralinės rūksta dūmai, ir pilkas ruožas lyg pelenai gula ant dangaus.

– Nepareik girta... – Zita užsimovė batelį ant kojos ir pastukseno į grindis. Pššš!.. – ji papūtė lūpas ir nususuko į veidrodį.

Brolis nueina kiemu ir suka į viralinę. Pro jos langus iš tamsos žėruoja žaidro žarijos. Paskui jos dingsta – langelį uždengia blyški paklodė. Matyt, prausis. Šeštadienis.

Girta, chm!.. Zita nusišypso.

Žvaigždėtą rugpjūčio naktį, po atlaidų, ją už parankių namo parvilko du vyrukai. Vienas dar visai pyplys. Šlykštų spirity gėrėm, – sumurma Zita, – šlykštų...

Ir ji nudelbia akis, bet vėl tuoj pakelia. Įžūliai pasižiūri į tamsų dangų. Akvariumas. Maurotas akvariumas.

Kažkas nudunksi kiemu, net žemė sudreba. Oho. Gal Keržikiokas. Gal jam brolio prireikė, pasitart ar šiaip dėl darbo. Bendradarbiai!.. Zita norėtų nusijuokti, bet tamsa užgniauzia jai burną. Berniokas ir trisdešimt penkerių metų papaikėlis, kuris gyvena vienas, toli nuo žmonių, miške!.. Bet jis kasdieniškai mielas, kaip malkų kūgis ar medžių guotas prie šventoriaus, nusėstas rėkiančių varnų. Arba garuojantis karvės blynas ganykloje.

Zita bereikšmiu žvilgsniu nudelbia naujus savo batelius. Kam juos apsiavė?.. Juk eit teks pagrioviu, kur pūva dumblas ir dvelkia gaižia drėgme. Tamsūs krūmai tvoskia gyvulių aitrumu.

Oi, kaip jis nemokėjo bučiuotis, – nusipurto Zita.

O kas mokėjo?.. Niekas, – vangiai prisipažįsta ji ir priglaudžia galvą prie lango stiklo. Gal neit?.. Žalia tamsa tyvuliuoja už lango lyg vanduo, ir gal jau visi prigėrė – ir senelė, ir atidunksėjęs lyg dinosauros Keržikiokas, ir tėvas, kuris





On the dark porch, Zita kicked off her galoshes. One of them slammed into the door, leaving a sloppy mark.

“Running off again?”

The door made an old-fashioned whine. Zita didn't respond. She painted her lips. Somewhat more garishly than she should.

“Don't come back drunk.”

The screeching door closed, and a cough choked out from the darkness in the corridor.

Through the partially drawn curtains, Zita watched her granny walk across the yard, elbows stuck back, hands dangling awkwardly.

She suddenly became as thirsty as the bottom of the pond under duckweed. Zita yanked the curtain closed. The green twilight had painted the room in a peculiar light, and Zita thought she felt a stranger's presence in the room. No, he had already been there for a long time: obscenely panting, gazing at her with sullen distrust while sprawled on the bed. Zita pressed her lips together. Here! Take my flayed skin. It's my everyday outfit. Go ahead, use it to wrap your chapped feet like you would the corner of a blanket. It will certainly warm them.

Granny carried an earless pot through the yard. Smoke rose from the smoke-house; the gray stripe spread across the sky like ashes.

“Don't come back drunk.”

Zita put a small shoe on her foot and stamped on the floor. Pbb-b-b! She blew noisily through her lips and turned to her mirror.

Her brother walked across the yard and turned towards the smoke-house. Cinders from the furnace sparkled through its dark windows. Then they vanished – the window was covered by a pale sheet. He was obviously going to bathe. Saturday.

That star-filled August night, after indulgences, two young guys dragged Zita home by her armpits. One was just a baby...

“Those were bad spirits we drank,” murmured Zita, “Bad...”

And she lowered her eyes, only to raise them again. Annoyed, she looked up at the dark sky. An aquarium. A Moorish aquarium.

Something had made a rumbling noise in the yard; the ground shuddered. It might be Kerzikiokas. Hopefully, he only needed to speak with her brother, to ask for advice or just to chat about work. Colleagues!

Zita wanted to laugh, but the darkness gagged her. He was just a baby with thirty-five years' experience at being an idiot who lived all alone out in the woods, far from humanity...

And he's normally rather soothing – oh sure, like a log pile covered with screaming crows beside a shrine. Or like a steaming cow-pie in a pasture.





jau kelinta diena nepareina iš miestelio, – tik brolis prausiasi viralinėje, jaukiai pleškena šiltas vanduo, nuo žaizdro žarijų dvelkia šiluma, ir jis nežino, kad lauke – žalias potvynis.

Gal neit?.. Kaip – neit?.. Ryškios Zitos lūpos nejuda, tik akys staiga prisimerkia, lyg prižertos smėlio.

Trinkteli nuspardytos durys, kažkas pliūkšteli į žalią prietemą ir nukaukši žvyruotu akvariumo dugnu. Brolis viralinėj suklūsta, nustoja turškęsis. KAS čia?.. – Jis minutėlę klausysis, paskui nusišluostys nuo nosies lašą ir pasisems iš katilo karšto vandens.

Tamsa slenka Zitai iš paskos ir striuką jos sijonėlį apdangsto juodo veliūro gabalais, kad nesimatytų plikų kojų, bet šios plačiai žirgteli į priekį, veliūras plyšta lyg voratinklis, lieka gulėti ant kelio, ir tamsa lyg vargšė senutė ima puldinėti iš vienos pusės į kitą. Jos alkūnės atsikišę, rankos keistai tabaluoja, iš pievos kyla rūkas – baltas pirties garas, ir tamsa sustingusi žiūri į jį.



**Renata Šerelytė** gimė Kupiškio rajone, Šimonių kaime. Ji studijavo lietuvių kalbą ir literatūrą Vilniaus universitete, o šiuo metu dirba redaktore. Šerelytės trumpuose prozos kūriniuose atsiskleidžia jos santykis su gimtuoju kaimu, kurį ji paliko išvykdama studijuoti į sostinę.





Zita cast an insignificant glance down onto her new shoes. Why did she put them on? They'd just end up in a ditch, where mud rots and dampness reeks. Where dark bushes stink of the bitterness of animals.

"Ugh, he did *not* know how to kiss," Zita shuddered.

But who could? No one, she sluggishly admitted and snuggled her forehead to the window glass. Maybe I shouldn't leave...

Green darkness lay outside the window like water. Maybe everyone would drown – the little old woman, the rumbling dinosaur Kerzikiokas, and her father, who hadn't been home from town for who knew how many days now – maybe her brother would survive, bathing in the cook-house, in the cosy splash of warm water, unaware of the green flood outside.

Should I stay...? How could I think that?

But maybe?

Zita's gaudy lips did not move, but her eyes closed suddenly, as if sand were thrown at them.

The marred doors clinked; something plopped into the green twilight and landed with a light tap onto the graveled bottom of the aquarium. In the smoke-house, her brother stopped to listen, stopped splashing. What – who – was that? He stopped to listen, then wiped a drip from his nose with his towel, and bailed more hot water from the cauldron.

Darkness slunk up behind Zita and covered her tiny skirt with a piece of black velour to hide her naked legs; these took wide stallion strides forward, and the velour tore like a spider-web and lay prone on the road. Darkness, like a poor old woman, began to fling herself from one side to another, her elbows sticking out behind, her hands dangling awkwardly. Fog. The darkness stiffened. With steam from the bath, the darkness watched the fog rise from the fields.

*Translated by Milda De Voe*



**Renata Šerelytė** was born in Kupiškis district, in the village of Šimoniai. She studied Lithuanian literature and linguistics at Vilnius University, and now works as an editor. Šerelytė's short prose pieces examine her own relationship to her native village, after having left the village to study in the capital.



# Eugenijus Ališanka

## iš traukinio istorijos

*josė saramago žodžiais portugalai turi naujų teritorijų  
užkariavimo patirtį*

*Ir mes būnam užkariavę pasaulį prieš atsikeldami iš lovos;  
Bet atsibundame – ir jis jau neperžvelgiamas,  
Atsikeliame – jo nebėra*

Fernando Pessoa

sveikas fernando šis rytas toks kaip visi  
po užuolaida vėjas plikos viešbučio sienos  
vamzdžiais šniokščia akveduko atneštas  
kalnų vanduo abu tylim apie tą patį  
tavo amžiaus pradžia mano pabaiga  
europos pakrašty boco do inferno kur nutrūksta  
geležinkelio linija ir eilėraščio eilutė  
nedaug ir manęs esančio čia  
kritinė turisto masė kurios užtenka  
vienam eilėraščio sproгимui  
galiu gerti žalią vyną iš bačkos *rūkyti tol  
kol leis likimas je ne suis personne*  
ir tai mane džiugina fotografuoju  
atminties negatyvuos retušuodamas miestą  
barbarų palikuonis ilgais vėjo plaikstomais  
plaukais užkariaujantis europą  
*seku akimis dūmus tarsi jie būtų mano kelio ženklai*

### *seeing is believing*

turėčiau parašyti laišką bent atvirutę iššsiųsti  
su gražiausios europos aikštės atvaizdu:  
gėlių mozaika kurią naktį trypia girtų futbolo sirgalių  
ordos ryte stiklo šukės kraujo pėdsakas  
nutrūkstantis prie dioniso mėgstamos užėigos



# Eugenijus Ališanka

## From the History of the Train

1.

*in the words of josé saramago*

*the portuguese have experience conquering new lands*

*We have conquered the world before we even get out of bed,  
but when we awake that world is unknowable.*

*We rise and it is gone.*

*Fernando Pessoa*

good morning fernando this morning seems like all the rest  
beneath billowing curtains lie naked hotel room walls  
pipes gurgle with mountain water brought  
down by aqueducts  
we are both silent about the same thing  
the beginning of our age and the end of mine  
on the edge of europe *boca do inferno* where  
the railroad line ends and the poem's line breaks  
there is not much of me here  
only the critical mass of tourist brochures  
enough to burst one poem into existence  
i can drink spring wine from a barrel *smoke as long  
as fate allows je ne suis personne*  
and that makes me glad i take photographs  
retouching the negatives of the city in my memory  
the descendant of barbarians with his long hair  
blowing in the wind is ready to conquer europe  
*i follow wafts of smoke with my eyes  
as though they marked my way*

4.

*seeing is believing*

i really should write a letter or at the very least a postcard  
with an image of one of europe's most beautiful squares:  
a horde of drunk soccer fans trample a mosaic of flowers through the night  
in the morning shards of glass and



May Day





ir aš taip norėčiau būti laužyti dievo kūną  
priimti beprotybės komunią šokti šaukti  
neišeina todėl fotografuoju  
architektūros detales vitražus kolonas  
myžantį berniuką iš bronzos tikėdamas  
kada nors pravers  
kada nors sudėliosiu europos pasjansą  
taip kad neliktų nė vienos kortos  
šiai čia tylu pats ciklono vidury  
belgai ramūs kaip belgai muziejai  
dirba iki išnaktų turėčiau užėiti  
turėčiau nupirkti ką nors lauktuvėms  
neiškentęs spjaunu sakau mesk šituos niekus  
eugenijau ir taip neturi kur dėti savo  
sapnų suvenyrų istorijų kelkis ir eik  
europos šudra iš vieno miesto į kitą  
eik ir žiūrėk kaip mirtis vis gražesniais veidais  
maitina krūtim gyvenimo džiaugsmą  
kada nors pravers



LT

May Day

### *langas į europą*

*zavra na rabotu... ech, nie perežyvaite, ješčio možno nakalbasit'sia, poveselit'sia*

iš sekmadieninės Peterburgo radijo laidos

štai ir prasideda platybės neaprėpiamos erdvės  
kur net mirtis su mirtim per kalnus nesusieina  
kaip jos sutilpo į mandelštamo rimą gal ir ne visai  
dar kyšo necenzūriniai žodžiai  
indoeuropietiškos galūnės  
melodinis kirtis už rešotų grotų  
laikas sustojo laikrodis tiksni toliau  
taisyklinga miesto geometrija  
tau svetima bičiuli sergejau  
neprigyji vienatvės kvadratuos  
ir aš vėluoju į visus įmanomus traukinius  
nerandu išėjimo iš viešbučio labirinto  
suku ir suku ratais vėl kaip vaikystėj  
skaičiuoju iki dešimties ir atsimerkiu  
ausyse švilpia vėjas nuo nevos  
tavo miestas lukštas po lukšto nuogėja  
suplyšę stogai todėl ir poezijos reikia daugiau

110





bloody traces break off by  
 dionysus's favourite pub  
 and i would like to be like that  
 break the body of christ  
 accept the communion of insanity dance and shout  
 it doesn't work therefore i photograph architectural details  
 stained-glass windows columns  
 a small bronze boy peeing thinking  
 someday this might be useful  
 someday i'll arrange europe's solitaire  
 so that not even one card will be left  
 otherwise it is quiet here in the very center of the cyclone  
 the belgians are calm as belgians  
 the museums are open until late at night i should visit one  
 i should buy a souvenir – something –  
 i can't stand it anymore i spit and i say  
 to myself forget all this nonsense  
 eugenijus as it is you have nowhere to put  
 all your histories – dreams – souvenirs get up and go  
 you european untouchable from one city to the next  
 go and see how death with an ever prettier face  
 nurses the joy of life  
 someday it might be useful

9.

*window to europe*

*zavtra na rabotu... ech, nie perezyvaete, jeshchio mozno nakalbasit'sia, poveselit'sia*  
 (Tomorrow it's back to work...well, don't worry,  
 we still have time to pig out and party)

from a Sunday Saint Petersburg radio show

and so here the wide expanses of land begin  
 even death does not meet death in the mountains  
 how did it ever all fit into mandelstam's rhymes or maybe it didn't  
 a few uncensored words peek out  
 indo-european noun-endings  
 a melodic accent behind rezoty prison camp bars  
 time stopped but the watch continues ticking  
 the precise geometry of the city  
 is foreign to you my friend sergei  
 cannot get used to the squares of loneliness  
 and i am late for every conceivable train





ir meilės net ir tos kurią matuoja valandom  
gražiausios europoje nevskio mergaitės  
dar baltosios naktys matos gerai  
smailios krūtys kupolų kryžiai ledų vežimėliai  
sekmadienio naktis sergejau dar turim laiko



May Day



**Eugenijus Ališanka** (g. 1960) – poetas, eseistas, vertėjas. Žurnalo *The Vilnius Review*, leidžiamo anglų ir rusų kalbomis, vyriausiasis redaktorius. Yra išleidęs keturias poezijos, dvi esė, tris vertimų knygas. Jo poezija versta į daugiau negu penkiolika kalbų.

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i cannot find my way out of the hotel's labyrinth  
i turn and turn in circles again like when i was a child  
i count to ten and open my eyes  
the wind from the neva whistles in my ears  
your city grows naked peel after peel  
the roofs are torn apart and that's why one needs more poetry  
and love even the kind that is measured by the hour  
by the most beautiful girls of the neva  
the white nights make vision perfect one can see  
spiky breasts the cupolas' crosses ice carts  
it's a sunday night sergei we still have time

*Translated by Laima Srugonis*



**Eugenijus Ališanka** (1960) is a poet, essayist, translator. He is the editor-in-chief of *The Vilnius Review* published in English and Russian. He has published four collections of poems, two books of essays and three books of poetry translations. His poetry has been translated into more than fifteen languages.



# Peter Šulej

## Program je program

program je program  
celý čas nám ležal rovno pred očami  
ach pokým sme neprišli na to že  
program je program

a  
zdanlivo  
nezanechal informácie o svojom vzniku  
o svojich cieľoch & opusoch  
prečo a hlavne načo taká rozmanitosť  
v každom jednom module celý vesmír  
kto ho sem vôbec nainštaloval?  
komplikovanosť kľúčkovanie v slučkách histórie?  
chce sa s nami hrať na slepú babu  
v záhradách genetických štruktúr  
úloha rýchlosti našich strojov a kryptografie  
opakujem: program je program

a pritom interpretácia sa nemusí javiť zložitejšia  
od čítania Mechúrika Koščúrika dieťaťom  
ktoré v nás stále drieme roky neprebudené  
povie len:

program je program  
zdanlivo  
nehovorí nič o svojom konci



**Peter Šulej** (1967) absolvoval štúdium na Vysokej škole technickej v Košiciach. Pracoval mediiným ako šéfredaktor časopisu o súčasnom umení VLNA a technický riaditeľ festivalu Ars Poetica. Založil vydavateľstvo Drewo a srd. Vydal päť básnických zbierok a dve zbierky poviedok.

SK

May Day



# Peter Šulej

## Program is Program

program is program  
 all the time it has been lying right before our eyes  
 oh until we figured out  
 that program is program  
 and  
 apparently  
 did not leave any info on its origin  
 on its goals & opuses  
 why and chiefly what for all this variety  
 all of the universe in every single module  
 why the hell did install it here?  
 the intricacy, zig-zaging in the loops of history?  
 it feels like playing a game of blindfolding with us  
 in the gardens of genetic structures  
 the role of speed of our machines and cryptography  
 let me repeat: program is program  
 and interpretation does not have to seem any more complex  
 due to reading Dino Barney by a child  
 that has been dormant in us for ages  
 it will just say:  
 program is program  
 apparently  
 saying nothing of its end.

*Translated by Martin Solotruk*



**Peter Šulej** (1967) studied at the Technical University in Košice. He has held several jobs, including that of editor-in-chief of the contemporary art magazine *VLNA* and technical director of Ars Poetica Festival. He founded the publishing house *Drewo a srd*. He has published five collections of poetry and two books of fiction.



# Michal Hvorecký

## Brand Party

### 23. kapitola

Nastalo polročné najhektickejšie obdobie môjho života.

Neprestajne som cestovala z miesta na miesto. Ak vám zamestnávateľ platí business class letenky, vôbec vám neprekáža, keď sa kapitál v mene preniknutia na nové trhy zrieka požiadavky demokracie, aby nestratil voľný prístup k novým obchodným partnerom.

Navyšovala som rozpočet. Presviedčala opinion lídrov. Rokovala s desiatkami potenciálnych sponzorov. Schvalovala jednotlivé zložky reklamnej kampane. Vyberala najvhodnejšie lokácie. Bookovala špičkových hudobných interpretov. Vybavovala barter s leteckými spoločnosťami kvôli prevozu hostí i účastníkov. Zabezpečovala distribúciu propagačných materiálov. Dohadovala produkčné otázky. Koordinovala plán s mestskými úradmi, políciou i armádou, presnejšie povedané – podplácala som všetkých možných byrokratov.

Možno to vyzerať hrozivo, ale ja som akurát zadávala príkazy, ktoré som dostávala zhora. Všetci pre nás pracovali svedomito, pretože sme ich nanajvýš svedomito platili. Randers si ma v novej funkcii nevedel vynachváliť.

No napriek tomu zostávali v našom pláne zádrhely, ktoré bolo treba riešiť čím skôr. Najlepšie osobne a ihneď. Neváhala som a rovno som si dohodla termíny rokovaní s najväčšími konkurentmi.

V slnkom prežiarenom Berlíne som sa na ulici Pod lipami stretla s organizátormi Love Parade.

Predtým som nevedela, že toto mesto stojí na piesku. Páčilo sa mi tam viac, než som čakala. Akurát kvôli reklamným slnečníkom som slávne lipy po celý čas takmer nevidela.

Prezliekla som sa za bohatú raverku. Natiahla som si tyrkysové tričko s bordovými flitrami a obťahnuté zvonové nohavice z hrubého lesklého latexu. Moje nové tenisky vyzerali ako bežecké tretry zo šesťdesiatych rokov minulého storočia, ale s akýmikoľvek inými by som pôsobila nedôveryhodne. Okolo krku som si dala strieborný náramok s trojcentimetrovými ostňami. Mobil som vložila do strieborného obalu, aby nepôsobil nudne. Melódiu zvonenia som si stiahla z prvého miesta aktuálneho britského rebríčka tanečných singlov. Tá hitová odrhovačka znela, akoby ju tvorca na mobile



# Michal Hvorecký

## Brand Party

### Chapter 23.

This happened to be the most hectic period of my life.

I continuously travelled from one place to the next. If your employer covers the costs of your business class tickets, you don't mind in the least that the capital renounces the need for democracy in the name of infiltration into the new markets, so that it would not lose the free access to new business partners.

I continued increasing the budget. I persuaded opinion leaders. I consulted with tens of potential sponsors. I signed and sealed individual elements of the advertising campaign. I selected the most suitable locations. I booked the top musicians and singers. I organized a barter deal with airlines for the carriage of guests and participants. I was in charge of the distribution of promotional materials. I had to sort out production matters. Put bluntly – I continually had to grease the palms of all sorts of bureaucrats.

Maybe all this sounds quite frightening, but I was just forwarding orders that I received from the top. Everyone worked for us very conscientiously since we also paid them in the most conscientious manner. Oscar Randers was very happy with me in my new position.

In spite of all this, there were still some obstacles left that had to be overcome as soon as possible. This had to be done on a personal level and at once. I didn't hesitate and immediately arranged the dates of meetings with our biggest competitors.

I met with the organizers of Love Parade in Under the Lime Trees Street in Berlin, which radiated with sunshine.

I didn't know till then that this city was built on sand. I liked it more there than I had expected. The only thing was, during the whole time I was hardly able to see any of those famous lime trees, all because of the promotional sunshades.

I disguised myself as a wealthy raver. I wore a turquoise T-shirt with purple diamantes and a pair of tight flared trousers made of thick glossy latex. My new trainers looked like a pair of running shoes from the nineteen sixties, but if I had worn anything different, I would not have looked credible. I put on a silver necklace with three-centimetre-long prickles around my neck. I placed my mobile into a silver cover so it would not appear boring. The ringing melody I copied from the current British dance chart number one. This flashy song sounded as if the



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aj produkoval. V ruke som držala čínsky vejár s bambusmi a pandou a ovievala som sa. Celé telo som mala doslova posiate špičkovými logami.

Sedela som vonku na drevenej stoličke so slamenou výplňou v kaviarni pre bohatých turistov z takzvaného ekonomického severu. Vnútri to bol starý lokál s pultom a podstavcom z lesklého mahagónu, celý obložený kachličkami z majoliky. Vo výkladných skriniach boli naukladané škatule so zákuskami a perníkové čierne berlínske medvede.

Iba po polhodinovom meškaní dorazil zlý DJ, mizerný producent a mimoriadne úspešný promotér Dr. Motte.

Zložil si slnečné okuliare so žltými sklami, aby si ma premeral. Hľadel na mňa nechápavo a pochybovačne. Váhala som, či neodhalil príčinu, ktorá sa skrýva za mojím imidžom. Ale zakrátko sa nezúčastnene usmial, takže som naňho zjavne zapôsobil dôveryhodne. Zúfalo oblečeného človeka, ako je on, iste nič nepoteší viac, ako keď uvidí jedinca s podobným vkusom.

Z jeho očí som videla iba zreničky. Podľa mierne zapálených okrajov viečok som ihneď vedela, že spáva málo a zle. Všimla som si, že ružovo presvitajúce nozdry má znútra obložené silnou vrstvou zlata, aby si ešte vôbec dokázal šnupnúť.

Prišiel spolu s dievčinou menom Uta. Označil ju za svoju asistentku, čo bol očividne len slušnejší názov pre dealerku. Obaja ma pozdravili úsečne a odmietli si so mnou podať ruky. Objednali si šampanské v lavóre ľadu, dve cappuccina a fľašu minerálky.

Povedala som si, že pôjdem priamo na vec. V coolovom oblečení som sa nechutne rýchlo potila. Rovno som Mottemu navrhla, aby tohto roku zrušil Love Parade. Požiadala som ho, aby mediálne silnou váhou svojej pochybnej osobnosti podporil Brand Party. Náhradou som mu ponúkla bližšie nešpecifikovaný astronomický balík peňazí. Schválne som bola stručná, aby som si reakciu mohla vychutnať o to dlhšie.

Vedela som, že Dr. Motte brával toľko chytrých drog, až celkom osprostel. Uta na to ani nepotrebovala party chémii. Obaja zosobňovali takzvaný progresívny životný štýl más globálnej klubovej generácie, čo je pomerne zložitá označenie pre intenzívne požívanie drog, nudu, životné sklamania a frustračné nákupy hodnotných vecí.

Najprv sa Motte nadýchol a zvrátil obočie. Tvár mal znechutenú a ľadovo stiahnutú. Potom sa už-úž chystal niečo vyhlásiť, no vzápätí zabudol čo. Odrazu povedal rázne nie, a následne sa ma opýtal, aká bola otázka.

Zopakovala som mu svoju ponuku dôraznejšie. O presnej sume som zatiaľ nehovorila. Usmievala som sa.

Dlho mlčal a fajčil. Bol meravo vysmiaty a vysmädnutý. Kto by pri takom množstve tetrahydrocannabinolu nebol? Vypil liter minerálnej vody. Počula





songwriter had produced it on a mobile as well. I fanned a bamboo fan in my hand with a panda on it. The whole of my body was literally covered in top brand logos.

I was sitting on a wooden chair with straw padding outside the café for wealthy tourists from the so-called economic north. A bad DJ, a miserable producer, and the exceptionally successful promoter Dr. Motte, arrived just half an hour late.

Dr. Motte took his yellow shade sunglasses off, so he could eye me more carefully. He was looking at me with suspicion and doubt. For a moment I wasn't sure whether he realized the reason behind my image. Soon afterwards, however, he cracked a witless smile, making it clear that he had sized me up to be a trustworthy person. Nothing makes a hopelessly dressed man, as he himself clearly was, feel happier than seeing another man with a similar flair for clothes.

I could only see the pupils of his eyes. Judging by the slightly inflamed corners of his eyelids, I immediately realized that he not only lacked sleep, but what little he got was of bad quality. I noticed that his pinkish translucent nostrils were thickly lined with gold, so that he would at least be able to have a snort.

He came with a girl called Ute. He introduced her as his personal assistant, which was obviously only a nicer name for a dealer. Both of them greeted me rather stiffly and refused my extended handshake. They ordered a bottle of champagne in an ice-bucket, two cappuccinos and one bottle of mineral water.

I decided to get straight to the point. In my cool outfit I was sweating rather profusely. Straight away I proposed to Motte to cancel the Love Parade this year. I asked him to use the heavy weight of his queer personality to influence the media, in order to give his support to the Brand Party. An astronomical undisclosed bundle was offered to him as compensation for his efforts. I talked very briefly on purpose, in order to be able to relish his reaction longer.

I knew that Dr. Motte used to take a lot of smart drugs, that it had made him stupid. Ute did not even need a party chemistry to be a perfect match for him. They both personified the so-called progressive life style of the masses of the global club generation. This is quite a complicated term to represent the constant abuse of drugs, boredom, life disillusionments and frustrating shopping sprees for valuable stuff.

At first Motte took a deep breath and frowned. His face took on a disgusted look and was ice-cold. Then he was about to say something, but in the space of a second he forgot what it was he wanted to say. Suddenly he blurted out a firm word of refusal and asked me what the question had been.

I repeated my offer in a more assertive tone. I didn't mention the exact amount yet. I was smiling.

He smoked and stayed silent for a long while. He was smiling numbly and was very thirsty. Who wouldn't be after consuming such copious amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol? He drank a litre of mineral water. I could hear only the breath from his chest, which protruded forward. Finally, he raised his head with





som iba dych z jeho predklonenej hrude. Potom konečne zdvihol čelo sperlené potom. Oči mu hlboko žiarili. Suché pery odhaľovali žlté zuby.

„Nie, to nikdy neurobím. Moja republika lásky nie je o peniazoch.“ Hovoril namáhavo ako každý, kto trápne klame. Medzi dvoma rozochvenými prstami držal cigaretu, ktorá prezrádzala jeho zmätok.

Viečka s predĺženými mihalnicami mu klesali pod vrstvou make-upu. Naniesol si na ne plátkové kozmetické striebro od Christiana Dora. V žiare slnka ma ich odlesky oslepovali. Spakruky si zotrel pot zo zvlhnutých, strapatých vlasov.

Už ma nebavilo dlhšie čakať. Na strieborný kaviarenský stól som vyložila svoj notebook. Oproti infraportu som nastavila mobil. Motte na mňa vyvaľoval od halucinácií zádumčivé oči.

Milujem elektronické bankovníctvo. Urobilo úplatkárstvo oveľa slušnejším. Autorizovanie platobného príkazu na ulici je ohromná vec. Keď v takýchto chvíľach zadávam heslo a robím pravým ukazovákom click, mám pocit, že naša spoločnosť funguje správne. Keď už dnes dokážeme vymyslieť najbezpečnejší a najdiskrétnejší spôsob prístupu k peniazom, znamená to, že sme dosiahli niečo neprekonateľné.

Aj takéto myšlienky mi vírili hlavou, pretože som sa vôbec neponáhľala. Začala som sa na Mottem dobre zabávať. Opýtala som sa ho, či vie, že o Love Parade písal Günter Grass. Myslel si, že hovorím o nejakej odrode marihuany. Bol zvedavý, či mu ju môžem zohnať. Mňa zasa zaujímalo, koľko miliónov stojí exkluzívny sponzoring jeho nekomerčnej akcie.

No Dr. Motte bol taký zhulený, že sa smial, aj keď som ho urážala. Nervóznou rukou šťuchal do vecí porozkladaných na stole. Natiahol sa po kávu. Namiesto šálky a lyžičky však mimovoľne chytil klieštiky na cukor. Malátne nimi po stole kreslil čudné kruhové znaky.

Pozornosť zbystril, až keď som mu na monitore ukázala sumu 7 000 000 mariek. Aby ho LCD lesk náhodou nepomýlil, vytlačila som mu ponuku na digitálny fotopapier. Schválne som najprv urobila multiobrazový výťah, na ktorom bolo číslo v desiatich samostatných rámečkoch. Z tej záplavy núl sa zakrútila hlava aj mne. Netrúfam si odhadnúť, aké kruhové vidiny to spôsobilo jemu. Ospravedlnila som sa a vytlačila papier vo forme nálepky.

Ale Motte by mi nerozumel, ani keby som mu záhradné číslo prilepila na čelo.

Zmýlený sa zamračil a potom odrazu blabotal o potrebe jednoty tanečnej scény i mladých ľudí na celom svete a o všeobjímajúcej láske. Vyjadril sa, že je nutné, aby sa všetci príslušníci našej generácie spojili, pretože sme jedna klubová mládež, jeden národ s jedným srdcom na jednej party a na jednej zemi.





sweat covering his forehead. His eyes glowed deeply, and yellow teeth showed through his dry lips.

“No, I would never do that. My republic of love is not about money.” He talked with difficulty, as people do who are not telling the truth. He held a cigarette between his two quivering fingers, which demonstrated his perplexity.

His eyelids with extended eyelashes were sinking under their heavy make-up layer. He applied strips of cosmetic silver from Christian Dior to them. I was being blinded by their reflection in the sunshine. With the back of his hand he wiped sweat from his wet messy hair.

I was getting bored with waiting. I put my notebook on the silver table. I set my mobile opposite the infraport. Motte rolled his eyes, pondering in hallucinations.

I just love electronic banking. It made the bribery appear much more decent. The authorization of the payment order in the street, what a marvellous concept. In such moments, when entering the password and clicking with my right index finger, I get the feeling that our society works just the way it should. If we are already able to devise the safest and the most discreet means of accessing money, it means we have attained something that cannot be outdone.

Those kinds of thoughts were also running through my head, for I was in no hurry at all. I started to enjoy myself by pulling Motte’s leg. I asked him whether he knew that Günter Grass also wrote about the Love Parade. Motte thought I was talking about a sort of marihuana. He wondered whether I could get it for him. As for me, I wanted to find out how much the exclusive sponsoring of his non-commercial enterprise cost.

But Dr. Motte was stoned out of his head, so much so that he laughed even when I offended him. He kept fiddling with things on the table with nervous hands. He reached for his coffee. Instead of his cup and teaspoon he unawares managed to pick up a pair of sugar-tongs. He was wearily drawing strange circular shapes on the table.

He sprang to attention only after I showed him the sum of 7,000,000 German Marks. I printed the offer for him on digital photopaper so the LCD reflection would not confuse him.

Puzzled, with a scowl on his face he suddenly started blabbering on about the need for unity in the dance scene and among young people throughout the world, and about all-embracing love. He expressed himself in the sense that it was necessary for all people of our generation to unite because we are one club generation, one nation with one heart, at one party and on one planet.

I seriously started considering slapping his face.

The expression on my face startled him. He pretended to be filled with immense bitterness. I am sure he still wanted to say much more. It finally dawned on me why his dance parties were being finished by hour-long speeches and why





Vážne som rozmýšľala, že mu jednu strelím.

Z výrazu mojej tváre zmeravel. Tváril sa, že ho naplnia nesmierna horkosť. Chcel toho určite povedať ešte oveľa viac. Už mi bolo jasné, prečo svoje tanečné akcie zakončuje hodinovými príhovormi a na písomné vyjadrenie svojich infantilných myšlienok potrebuje vlastnú doménu. Ale zjavne sa zlakol, že mu nezaplátim.

Dlho uprene hľadel na sedmičku a nuly. O takej sume sa mu nesnívalo ani pri najlepších tripocho pred dekádou. Samozrejme, že som vedela, koľko stojí exkluzívne sponzorstvo jeho party. Desatinu. A on, prirodzene, vedel, že to viem.

Bledá tvár, vyčerpaná a bezkrvná, mu očervenela. Modré žilky na sluchách sa zvýraznili. Okolo perí mu zlovestne potrhávalo a pošklbávalo. Vráska medzi očami sa prehĺbila. Uprene hľadel na imaginárne obrazce, ktoré jeho ruka vykresliła klieštikmi v rozsypanom cukre.

Ute medzičasom prestala účinkovať dávka. Chvilkové chtivé a blažené uspokojenie jej mysle vystriedal chvat a stres. Oči mala plné akéhosi neurčitého a podozrivého lesku. Myslel sa jej zakalila. Pod sivou a namosúrenou tvárou sa črtala vyzíabnutosť. Pod kožou na líci sa jej po celý čas chvel a mihal sval. Abstinénne príznaky zapíjala ľadovým šampanským. Zaberalo to. Ale iba na stupňovanie nervozity.

Už som toho mala akurát tak dost. Prikázala som Mottemu, aby mi ukázal údaje o bankovom spojení svojej firmy. Z počítačového kufríka som vytiahla dve kópie zmluvy o zrušení budúcoročnej Love Parade. Kontrakt mal štyridsaťpäť strán a stačilo ho podpísať na dvanástich miestach.

Do riadku s bankovým príkazom som pozorne vyfukávala číslo švajčiarskeho konta, ktoré mi spomalený Motte koktavito diktoval. Opantala som ho. Ako každý, kto v peniazoch vidí len rôzne typy práškov a tabletiék, očakával, že mu zaplatím v hotovosti. Vysmiala som ho.

Podpísal sa s pohľadným výrazom na tvári mojím korporátnym perom. Na požiadanie som mu dovolila sledovať na monitore letný okamih, keď transakcia prebehne úspešne a zaznie tiché pípnutie.

Vydýchla som si. Rokovanie pre mňa malo prichuť márnivosti a uspokojenia.

Už som si myslela, že sa budem porúčať, keď odrazu Uta vyskočila zo stoličky. Oborila sa na Motteho. Nečakane mu umelým nechtom do krvi rozrezala líce. Potupne tvrdo ho udrela do brady. Vrieskala, že je zapredanec a scéna ho vyvrhne. Búšila mu do prs päsťami. Vyhrážala sa, že zverejní, čo urobil.

Najprv mi napadlo, že to majú pripravené vopred, aby ulahodili svojmu svedomiu a aj tento týždeň do sýtosti nakfímili lačných novinárov z tinedžerského bulváru.

Práve som sa im chystala povedať, že predou mnou sa za to, že kráľovsky zarábajú na súčasnom životnom štýle mladých, vôbec nemusia hanbiť. Chcela





he needed his own domain to put down his infantile ideas. But he evidently got alarmed that I was not going to pay him.

He stared at the figure consisting of a number seven and several zeros. He could not have dreamt about this kind of money even during his greatest trips a decade ago. Of course, I knew how much the exclusive sponsoring of his party cost – one tenth of my offer. And naturally, he knew that I was aware of it.

His pale face, exhausted and bloodless, went red. Blue veins on his face turned bluer. His lips were moving ominously. The wrinkle between his eyes deepened. He gazed intently at imaginary images that he created with his hand and by a pair of sugar-tongs and scattered sugar.

In the meantime, Ute's shot wore off. The ephemeral greedy and gratifying feeling of her mind was replaced by anxiety and stress. Her eyes were full of some distant and suspicious gleam. Her mind blurred. It was possible to see the gauntness under the grey and angry face. A muscle could be seen shaking and trembling under the skin of her cheek. She was quenching the symptoms of her abstinence with ice-cold champagne. It worked. But only to intensify her nervousness.

I had had just about enough of it. I ordered Motte to show me the details of his company's bank. I pulled out two copies of the agreement on the cancellation of next year's Love Parade from my notebook case. The contract consisted of forty-five pages and it only had to be signed twelve times.

In the line for the banker's order, I carefully typed in the number of the Swiss bank account, which the slowed-down and stuttering Motte dictated. I had bewitched him. Just like everyone who can see only different sorts of powder and pills in money, he expected to be paid in cash. I sneered at him.

He signed with an expression of contempt on his face, using my corporate pen. At his request I allowed him to get a glimpse of the monitor just when the transaction was successfully going through, and we could hear the quiet beep.

I sighed. The meeting had a flavour of profusion and satisfaction for me.

I already thought I was going to say my goodbyes, when suddenly Ute was up to no good – she sprang up from her seat. She thundered at Motte. Out of the blue she cut his cheek with her artificial nail, so much so that it started to bleed. She hit his chin shamelessly hard. She yelled that he was a traitor and that the scene would reject him. She thumped her fists against his chest. She threatened him that she would make his terrible deed public.

My first impression was that they had prepared the whole act beforehand to ease their conscience, and also to feed this week's hungry journalists from the teenage tabloid press.

I was just about to tell them that there was no need at all to be ashamed in front of me for making regal megabucks on the contemporary lifestyle of young people. I wanted to explain to them that everyone who criticised them would do the same in their shoes if they only got the chance. It is common knowledge





som im vysvetliť, že každý, kto ich kritizuje, by na ich mieste robil to isté, ak by na to mal príležitosť. Je predsa všeobecne známe, že na generáciách X, Y a Net zarába ten, kto s niektorým trendom prišiel ako prvý.

Lenže situácia sa vyostрила.

Uta schmatla roh stola a prudko ním mykla smerom k Mottemu. Ten sa nezmohol na slovo. Chvíľu mu trvalo, kým v spomalenom mozgu spracoval, čo sa deje.

Celý servis sa s rachotom zosypal na dlažbu. Zarinčali črepy. Hrkotali lyžičky. Rozbíjali sa tanieriky a poháre.

Odrazu sa Dr. Motte vztýčil. Chytil si hlavu do dlaní. S neuveriteľnou nástoľčivosťou zakričal, že všetko odvoláva. Osopil sa na mňa.

Takúto nevráživosť som teda po obojstranne výhodnej transakcii neočakávala. Rozzúrila som sa. Pozornosť návštevníkov i personálu sa ihneď obrátila na nás. Dokonca k nám zamierila skupinka zvedavých holandských turistov. Vo vzduchu som si všimla krepový oranžový tulipán, ktorý ich držal pohromade. Takýto vývoj som potrebovala zo všetkého najmenej.

Bleskovo som sa postavila. Motte mi rovno do ucha vrieskal, že som zradkyňa.

Nie som stvorená pre rozčarujúce a vznetlivé úlohy. No dnes prchkosť poznačila nejednu môj čin. Švihom som chytila Mottemu aj Ute ruky. V zlomku sekundy som im dlane zovrela ako vo zveráku. Vzápätí som im skrútila prsty takou silou, až zapraskali kostičky.

Nestihli ani len zakričať, a už znova sedeli na stoličkách, každý so svojou prenikavou bolesťou. Uta omdlela, ale výraz na jej tvári sa tým veľmi nezmenil.

Zanechala som ich medzi prevráteným stolom, porozbíjanými šálkami a porozhadzovanými vecami, ktoré ležali na dlažbe v chaotickom zmätku. S pokynutím ruky a so silným úsmevom som sa rýchlo vzdialila z ulice Pod lipami i z Berlína.



**Michal Hvorecký** (1976) vydal zbierky poviedok *Silný pocit čistoty* (1998), *Lovci & zberači* (2001) a román *Posledný hit* (2003). Preklady jeho kníh vyšli v Poľsku a v Českej republike. Pravidelne píše publicistiku pre rôzne denníky a časopisy. Za svoje texty získal viacero literárnych ocenení a autorských štipendií (MuseumsQuartier vo Viedni, Literarisches Colloquium v Berlíne, Goetheho Inštitút v Mníchove. Žije v Bratislave.





though, that someone makes money on generations X, Y and Net, who comes up with a new trend first.

But the situation became a bit on edge.

Ute grabbed the edge of the table and pushed it wildly towards Motte. He was unable to open his mouth. It took a while before he could work out in his slow brain what was going on around him.

The whole table service rained down on the floor with a great noise. Glass splinters flew everywhere. Teaspoons clattered. Plates and glasses were getting smashed to pieces.

Dr. Motte rose abruptly. He put his head into his hands. He screamed with incredible persistence in his voice that he had changed his mind and wanted to call off our deal. He stormed at me.

I really didn't expect this kind of grudge after such a mutually profitable transaction. I went completely mad. At once, personnel and visitors started turning their attention to us. Even a group of curious Dutch tourists started moving towards us. In the air I noticed an orange crepe paper tulip that held them together. This kind of odd twist in the end was the last thing I needed.

In the blink of an eye I was on my feet. Motte was screaming his head off right in my ear, accusing me of betrayal.

I was not born to act in such bewildering and choleric roles. But today a fiery temper marked more than one of my actions. I grabbed Motte and Ute's hands. In a fraction of a second I gripped the palms of their hands like in a clamp. In no time I had twisted their fingers with such strength that set their broken bones crackling.

They did not even manage to scream before they found themselves seated in their chairs again, each one with a piercing pain. Ute passed out, but it didn't affect the expression on her face too much. I left them amongst the broken cups and scattered articles, which were lying all over the pavement together with the upturned table. I waved my hand and with a fake smile I briskly walked away from the street called Under the Lime Trees, away from Berlin.

*Translated by Slava Kafka*



**Michal Hvorecký** (1976) is the author of two collections of short stories, *Strong Sense of Purity* (1998) and *Hunters & Gatherers* (2001). His third book, the novel *The Final Hit* was published in May 2003. He is regularly contributing to various newspapers and magazines. His books have been translated into Polish and Czech. He has been awarded many literary prizes and scholarships (Musuems Quartier in Vienna, Austria, Literarisches Colloquium Berlin, Germany, Goethe Institut, Munich, Germany). He lives in Bratislava.



# Anna Zonová

## Poštovní schránka

Devět hodin. Pokud svítí slunce, přesouvá se právě od krajního okna pokoje k prostřednímu. Jeho paprsky prochází žaluzií a vytváří na ostění dvě svislé rovnoběžné řady zrcátek. Když přiblížíte ruce nebo tvář, máte na kůži vykresleny legrační ornamenty. Jako Aboriginálové.

Prší.

Žena několikrát protočila hliníkové listy žaluzií. Neočekávala světelnou hru, její pohled směřoval k poštovní schránce. Vylisovaná krabice s odklápěcím žlutým víkem byla uchycena na kovové trubce zapuštěné v zemi. Schránka vydržela neporušená zpravidla dva až tři týdny. Nikdy ne déle. Výlisek není drahý. V krajním případě poslouží i upravená umělohmotná láhev. Ta většinou zmizí do dvou dnů.

Žena pozvedla víko schránky a zkontrolovala polohu vodorovné přepážky. Pak ji prostředníkem mírně odklopila, asi tak o čtyřicet pět stupňů, a nahlédla dovnitř. Vracela se zpátky.

Poštačka přichází mezi desátou a jedenáctou. Jenom výjimečně se objevila dříve. Za poslední dva roky třikrát.

Žena začala pocíťovat v otevřených botách nepříjemné vlhko. Nahrbila záda a hlavu vклínila co nejvíce mezi ramena. Jako by se tím pohybem chtěla ukrýt před silicím deštěm. Mokrě, uměle vyrovnávané vlasy získaly opět původní zvlnění. Déšť jí prokreslil bradavky na hruškovitých nadrech. Ta zrychlovala svůj kmitavý pohyb zároveň s chůzí.

Doma si vysvlékla mokré triko a světle žluté plátěné kalhoty. Zadávala se na spodní kalhotky. Nad chloupky a podél žlábků hýždí zůstaly suché. Nejprve je stáhla ke kolenům, prsty nohou je shrnula ke kotníkům. Aniž by se sehnula, nadhodila si nohou kalhotky k ruce. Jejich suchou částí si utřela obličej. Pod levým okem se chvíli zastavila u tmavě modré tečky.

Když nadzvedla pravé ňadro a přejela po vlhkém záhybu, objevilo se další tetování. Malé, asi třicentimetrové srdce, strana blíže k hrudní kosti nebyla zaoblená a vytvářela trojúhelník. Kdyby nadzvedla i druhé prso, bylo by vidět jen spečenou kůži. Dříve tam byl vytečkován LUDVÍK. Jenže ona nechala ňadro bez povšimnutí. Vlhkost jí přestala vadit. Možná to bylo i tím, že na kalhotkách už nezůstalo suché místo. Na mokré kůži se spojilo několik kapek a vytvořilo tenký pramínek. Začal jí stékat k mírně vyklenutému břichu. Nevěnovala tomu pozornost.



# Anna Zonová

## The Mailbox

Nine a.m. When the sun was shining, it would move from the window on the side of the room to the one in the middle, its rays passing through the blinds to form two parallel lines of light along the wainscoting. If you put your arms or face in the way, it made funny designs on your skin. Like the ones Aborigines have.

It was raining now.

The woman twisted down the aluminum slats of the blinds. She wasn't expecting a light show today; her sights were trained on the mailbox: a sheet-metal box with a yellow, flap-open lid, perched atop a metal pipe sunk into the ground. Typically, a mailbox lasted two or three weeks at best. Sheet metal was cheap. In a pinch, a plastic bottle worked just as well, though it usually disappeared within two days.

The woman pushed open the mailbox lid. Gently, with her middle finger, she tipped it back to an angle of about 45 degrees and peered inside, then turned to head back to her building.

The mail was delivered between 10 and 11. Only three times in the past two years had it come any earlier.

The woman began to feel an unpleasant sensation of dampness in her open-toed shoes. She hunched her back and wedged her head in as far as she could between her shoulders, trying to shield herself as the rain gathered in strength. Wet, her artificially straightened hair regained its waviness. The rain traced out the nipples on her pear-shaped breasts, which quickened their bobbing motion in time with her gait.

Back in her apartment, she peeled off her wet T-shirt and yellow linen pants, and examined her panties. Above her pubic hairs and along the groove of her buttocks, they were still dry. She pulled her panties down to her knees, using her toes to roll them all the way down to her ankles. Then, without bending over, she kicked the panties up to her hand and used the dry part to wipe her face, pausing for a moment at a dark blue spot underneath her left eye.

Running a finger along its moist curve, she lifted her right breast and another tattoo appeared: a little heart, about an inch wide. The side nearest her breastbone was flat rather than rounded, giving it a triangular shape. Had she lifted her other breast, she would have seen only a patch of scorched skin where the name LUDVÍK had once been dotted on. But she left that breast alone. The dampness had ceased to bother her, and in any case there wasn't a dry spot left on her panties. A few drops of water joined on her skin, forming a slender stream that flowed down toward her slightly protruding belly. She paid no attention to it.





Stěny pokoje byly vylíčeny světle žlutou a modrou barvou. Ta byla doplněna v celé ploše o světle růžový dekor hroznů. V kuchyni se překrývaly vzory dva. Proti mušincům, jak doporučil malíř.

Posadila se před televizor. Pak si všimla ovladače pohozeného pod nízkým stolkem. Musela by udělat pět kroků, možná i sedm, a jeden ohyb. Vstala, šla nejprve ke skříni. Na vyleštěné ploše dveří pozorovala své tělo. Vypjala se a pokračovala po špičkách. Těsně u skříně udělala půlobrat a zatáhla břicho. Po třiceti odpočítaných vteřinách jej opět povolila, přesunula se ke stolkou a s dálkovým ovladačem se vrátila do křesla. Bez většího zájmu přeplnula několik televizních programů. Zastavila se u obrazu ležícího rysa. Vějířek štětinek na jeho uších ji rozesmál. Po několika chvílích opět přešla k oknu a pohlédla na schránku. Pak se vrátila ke skříni a navlékla si černé krajkové body. Jako obvykle se jí nedařilo spojit několik háčků v rozkroku. Látku proto nechala volně viset. V sukni jí nebude překážet a bez kalhotek se cítila vždycky volněji.

Z domu odcházela o půl desáté. U schránky se krátce zastavila a nahlédla do ní.

Panelové domy bez jakéhokoliv pohybu tak brzy ráno působily opuštěněji než obvykle.

U pětsettrojky se uvolnila plechová výplň okna. Plát, který se dával obvykle před kuchyňská kamna, vydával při jízdě po panelu nepřijemný skřípavý zvuk. Stejně je divné, že neskončil ve sběrně. Častěji se díry oken vyplňovaly fólií, v létě prkny.

Šla po chodníku, nebo spíš po něčem, co se tak dříve nazývalo. Vyhýbala se kalužím ve vydroleném betonu. Po několika metrech obešla napříč položený obrubník. Špičaté podpatky zůstaly uvězněny v blátě. Žena přeskočila zpět na chodník a snažila se vytáhnout lodičky z bahna. Po několika pokusech to vzdala. Otréla si ruce do zbytků trávy a pokračovala bosa.

Zhruba uprostřed sídliště, v místě jakéhosi dětského hřiště, se Kolárovi chystají na výjezd. Několik měsíců zdánlivé svobody na cestě. Dvě žluté maringotky a dětský kolotoč, to zas není tak vysoká cena. Slon, autíčko, letadlo, motorka, lokomotiva. Velbloud chyběl. V dětství se vozila jen na něm. Mívala pocit takřka absolutní jistoty, pokud měla krytá záda. Mohlo to souviset i s častou bolestí ledvin.

Její rodina skončila s kočováním podle nařízení. Kolotoč ani střelnici nikdy nevlastnili. Dřevo z obytného vozu použili při první zimě. Bylo napuštěno vyjetým olejem, hořelo dobře, ale s otevřeným ohněm před domem museli brzy přestat.

Prej divoši, pořvávali na ně sousedé. To bylo všechno, co si mezi sebou řekli. Dál se o nás nezajímali. Ani my o ně.





Her bedroom was painted bright yellow and blue, complemented throughout by a pink grape decor. The kitchen had two different patterns, overlapping. To help hide fly spots, the painter had said.

She sat down in front of the television set, then noticed the remote was under the coffee table. She would have to take five, maybe seven steps, and bend over once. She stood, heading toward the wardrobe first, observing her body in the polished surface of the doors. Then, arching her back, she rose up on tiptoe. Just before the wardrobe, she did a quick about-face and sucked in her belly. Then she counted to 30, relaxed, made her move to the coffee table, and returned to the armchair, remote control in hand. Flipping distractedly through the channels, she finally stopped at an image of a lynx. The bristly fans of his ears made her laugh. After a while, she went to the window and glanced down at the mailbox again. Then she walked back to the wardrobe and put on her black lace bodysuit. As usual, she had trouble with some of the hooks on the crotch, so she let the material flap down loose. In a skirt it wouldn't get in her way, and besides, she always felt freer without any panties on.

At half past nine, she stepped out of the building, stopping briefly at the mailbox to take a peek inside.

This early in the day, when everything was still, the prefab apartment complex seemed even more deserted than usual.

On the bus, a metal sheet replacing one of the windows had come loose, making an unpleasant creaking noise as the bus rumbled along. It was the kind of metal you usually saw on the front of a kitchen stove. Strange it hadn't ended up as scrap. Usually they filled in the windows with foil, or boards in the summertime.

She made her way down the sidewalk, or what had once been called one, steering clear of the puddles in the crumbling concrete. At one point she had to pick her way around a spot where the curb had collapsed and her pointy heels got stuck in the mud. The woman hopped back up on the sidewalk and tried to extract her shoes from the muck. After several attempts she gave up. She wiped her hands on what grass was left and continued on in her bare feet.

Gathered out in the middle of the apartment complex, on the site of a sort of playground, the Kolár family was preparing to go on a trip. A few months of illusory freedom on the road. Two yellow caravans and a kiddie carousel weren't such a high price to pay. Elephants, bumper cars, planes, motorcycles, locomotives. A camel was all that was missing. As a child, that had been the only thing the woman would ride. On the camel she'd felt almost totally safe, as long as her back was covered. Maybe because of the pain she so often felt in her kidneys.

A government decree had forced her family to put an end to their nomadic life. They had never owned a carousel or a shooting gallery. The first winter, they used the wood from their trailer. Doused in motor oil, it burned well, but they were soon forced to stop building fires in front of their home.

Savages, the neighbors had screamed at them. Those were the only words that ever passed between them. They weren't interested in knowing anything more about us. Nor were we about them.





V bytě se nikdy necítili dobře. Kliky, pro které neměli ve svém jazyce pojmenování, upadávaly při každém prudším nárazu. U osmi dětí neustále. Bylo pak jednoduché použít drát jako dřív. Pach z koupelny a záchodu znervózňoval především matku. Snažila se ucpat všechny odtokové díry, ale nepříjemný zápach jen zesílil.

„Prasata, jste opravdu prasata,“ řekla ta ženská z úřadu a zacpávala si nos ještě před bytem. Dál nešla. Ani jsme ji nezvali. My říkáme praseti *balíčo*. Ale myslím, že *balíčo* v tom nebylo to nejdůležitější.

Otáčet všemi těmi kohouty a splachovat se žena naučila až od Ludvíka a v jiném bytě. Dodnes cítí svíravý pocit kolem žaludku, když narazí na jiný typ vodovodního kohoutku nebo vypínače, který nezná a neví, jak s ním zacházet. Pousmála se nad bratrem Andrease. Ten chtěl ozářit celý pokoj žárovkami. Jednoduše patnáctkrát narušil kabel na zdi a žárovky k němu přivazoval nití. Pojistky vyletěly při prvním zářezu. Možná i proto žárovky nespustil.

Děšť opět zesílil. Nohy jí začaly promodrávat. Boty se měla pokusit přece jen vytáhnout, přemýšlela. Přiblížila se k obchodu. Trochu ji to uklidnilo. Na prochazení má být opatrná. Jak říkal doktor. Obchod se smíšeným zbožím byla jediná stará budova na sídlišti. Vypadala stejně neutěšeně jako ty ostatní. Když bylo vlhko, vystupoval na fasádě nápis *Uhrmacher*. Pak zase zmizel. Žena uvažovala, jestli se jednalo o nějakého chlapa před námi. Jméno jí připadalo cizí. Ale znělo tu něco normálně? I ona šla do *obchodos* nebo vyslovovala *obchod* s přízvukem. Směšným, jak říkali.

Možná *Uhrmacher* ani nebylo jméno.

V místech, kde se sbíhal chodník s vybagrovaným výkopem, uviděla malého, asi pětiletého Pištu. Hrál si s holubem. S tím, co z něho zbylo a pokud se to dalo označit za hru. Hadrovitý chumáč si posadil na hlavu a drobnými rukama se mu snažil roztáhnout povislá křídla.

„Leť, no tak leť,“ domlouval mu. Odhodil ho zpět do bahna.

Všiml si ženy a připojil se k ní. Mohla ho odehnat, nelíbil se jí, cítila se stísněně, když se dotkl její ruky. A navíc byl černější než většina zdejších Romů. Přesto jeho ruku stiskla a vyrazili společně. Patřil k nim a dalo se mu věřit, na rozdíl od bílých.

Ti sice prohlašovali, že jsme stejní, ale člověk věděl dobře, že tomu tak není. Místo hliněných a plechových osad *nám* postavili sídliště s opravdovými domy, a *my* jsme v nich neuměli bydlet. Zakázali *nám* kočovat a pak jsme je přestali zajímat.

Když byli kousek od obchodu, asi tak padesát metrů, děšť, zatím snesitelný, se změnil v souvislý proud vody. Zbývající část cesty utíkali.

„Budeme čistí, čistí, čistí,“ křičela žena na chlapce.





Her family had never felt at home in an apartment. The door handles, for which they had no word in their language, fell off every time someone bumped into them. Which, once they had eight children, was all the time. It was easy enough to use a wire, the way they had before. The stink from the bathroom and the toilet had gotten to Mother most. She tried to plug all the pipes, but the foul smell only got stronger.

“Pigs. You truly are pigs,” the lady from the agency had said, holding her nose even before she stepped in the door. She didn’t go any farther. We didn’t invite her to, either. We call pigs *balíčo*. But that’s not that important.

It wasn’t until their next apartment, after Ludvík came along, that the woman had learned to turn off the faucets and flush the toilet. To this day, she got a knot in her stomach whenever she encountered a new type of water faucet or an unfamiliar light switch. She had laughed at her brother Andreas when he tried to light their bedroom with lightbulbs. He made fifteen cuts in the cable running through the wall and attached the bulbs to it using thread. The first cut he made, the fuses blew.

The rain picked up again. Her feet began to turn blue. She should have made more of an effort to pull out her shoes, she thought. She was getting close to the store. That calmed her down a little. She had to be careful not to catch cold. The doctor had said so. The grocery store was the only old building in the complex. It looked just as dreary as all the rest. When it was damp out, the sign saying UHRMACHER stood out on the facade. The woman wondered whether Uhrmacher was some man who had been there before them. The name sounded foreign to her. But then again, what around here sounded normal? She referred to the shop – *obchod* in Czech – as an *obchodos*, “Gypsyfying” the word. Or else she used the Czech word but pronounced it with an accent. A ridiculous one, people said.

Maybe *Uhrmacher* wasn’t a person’s name at all.

Near the spot where the sidewalk ran off into a bulldozed ditch, she noticed Pišta, a boy of about five years old. He was playing with a pigeon. Or what was left of it, anyway, and assuming you could call what he was doing “playing.” He set the raggedy clump of feathers down on top of his head and tried with his little hands to spread its floppy wings.

“Fly. Come on, fly,” he urged it. He tossed it back in the mud.

Spotting the woman, he latched on to her. She could have shooed him away. She didn’t like his looks, and felt uneasy when he touched her hand. Besides, he was blacker than most of the local Roms. Still, she gave his hand a squeeze and together they set out. He was one of them, and could be trusted, unlike the whites.

They always said we were all the same, but they knew very well it wasn’t true. Instead of our dirt-and-sheet-metal homes, they had built apartment complexes, with real buildings, *for us*, they had said, and *we* didn’t know how to live in them. They forbade us to lead a nomadic life, at which point we ceased to interest them.

When the woman and the boy were a little way from the shop, about 50 yards or so, the rain, which up to then had been tolerable, turned into a nonstop torrent. The rest of the way they ran.

“We’re going to be clean, clean, clean!” the woman shouted to the boy.





„Já už jsem,“ zalykal se chlapec a snažil se srovnat s jejím během.

V prodejně byli jedinými zákazníky. Zvonek, který se ozval při otevření dveří, přivolal za pult Mírgovou. Přicházela ze zadní místnosti. Žena překvapením pootevřela ústa, pak se začala smát. Ne lehce, se rty přikrytými dlaní, ale celým tělem. Podřepla, napřímila se a opět podřepla. Vydávala při tom neuvěřitelně chrochtavé zvuky. Chlapec se při pohledu na ženu rozesmál. Před udivenou Mírgovou se váleli dva blázni, jak řekla.

„Krávo,“ dodala ještě. „Nepoznáš platinový blond?“ a zajela si rukou do zářivě oranžových vlasů.

Žena znovu ucítila bolest v zádech. Bála se, musí se rychle převléknout.

Pišta chtěl koláček a bílou čokoládu.

Žena potom něco řekla Mírgové.

Ta jí odpověděla.

Když se vrátila před dům, chlapce nechala v prodejně, aby se pohybovala rychleji; bolest v zádech sílila. Tlak v měchýři ji donutil zastavit. Využila toho, že se jí nepodařilo zapnout háčky body, a močila vestoje. Přitom opět nahlédla do schránky.

V pokoji se rychle svlékla z mokrého oblečení. Zabalila se do deky. Pak si uvařila čaj, hodně čaje. To pomáhá. Ale jenom někdy, pokud se zánět udrží v cestách a měchýři a nepostupuje výš. Tlak v podbříšku neustával. Žena si naplnila vanu asi tak z jedné třetiny horkou vodou a sedla si do ní. Nepříjemné pálení po chvíli zmizelo. Na polici našla ještě zbytek prášků. Pro jistotu si tři vzala. Napětí mírně povolilo. Přinutila se opět obléct a zabalila se do deky.

Probudila se, když si ve spánku posunula nízkou stoličku, kterou měla podložené nohy. Nevěděla, kolik je hodin. Déšť zkrlesoval i světlo v pokoji. Nebude víc než dvanáct, ale spíš půl dvanácté, říkala si. Sešla dolů ke schránce. Dnes byla prázdná. Někdy do ní poštačka vhodí alespoň reklamní letáčky. Na těch posledních byly počítače. A tiskárny. Žena si vše pečlivě prohlédla. Vypadalo to jak televize a na obrazovce bylo děvče v plavkách. Dvojdílných. Žena se usmála při vzpomínce na oranžovou Mírgovou. Ani po obarvení se nepodobala ženě z obrazovky. Ta byla opravdu blond. A kdo by taky fotil starou Romku. Na počítač.

Vystupovala po schodech a napadlo ji, že si tam mohla vhodit některé starší letáčky. Stejně si přesně nepamatuje, co na nich je. Šlo se jí lehčeji. Bolest v zádech takřka ustoupila. Poštu nechá na zítřek nebo na odpoledne, pokud přestane pršet. Nachlazení opravdu nechtěla riskovat. Zvláště ne nemocni.

Teprve když vyšla před dveře bytu, vzpomněla si, že nepřiklopila víko schránky. Ve spodní části krabice jsou otvory, voda by se tam neměla držet. Přesto se vrátila a dala dekl do správné polohy. Pro jistotu se ještě podívala



“I already am,” panted the boy, trying to keep up.

In the store, they were the only customers. A bell rang as they opened the door, bringing Mírgová, the saleswoman, out of the back room. The woman’s jaw dropped in surprise, then she started to laugh—not softly, covering her mouth with her hand, but with her whole body: squatting down, straightening up, and squatting back down again, all the while making these incredible snorting sounds. At the sight of this, the boy burst out laughing too.

“Silly cow,” Mírgová said. “Can’t you tell a platinum blonde when you see one?” She ran a hand through her head of bright-orange hair.

The woman felt a pain in her back again. She ought to change her clothes quickly, she thought.

Pišta asked for a pastry and a bar of white chocolate.

The woman said something to Mírgová.

Mírgová said something back.

Then the woman returned to her building, leaving the boy in the store so she could move faster; the pain in her back was getting worse. She was finally forced to stop by the pressure in her bladder. Taking advantage of the fact that she hadn’t been able to close the hooks on her bodysuit, she urinated standing up, meanwhile taking another peek into the mailbox.

Back in her room, she quickly peeled off her wet clothes and wrapped herself in a blanket. Then she made some tea, a lot. That helped. But only as long as the infection stayed down in her urinary tract and bladder, and didn’t go any higher. The pressure in her belly wasn’t letting up. The woman filled the bath about a third of the way with hot water and climbed in. After a while, the unpleasant burning sensation went away. On the shelf, she found a few pills left. Just to be safe, she took three. The tension subsided a little. She forced herself to get dressed again and wrapped herself up in the blanket.

She woke from her sleep when the stool her feet had been resting on tipped over. She wondered what time it was. The rain muted even the light indoors. It couldn’t be past 12, she thought, probably more like 11:30. She went downstairs to the mailbox. Empty. Sometimes the woman who brought the mail would toss in some flyers, if nothing else. The last few had been for computers. Computers and printers. The woman had studied them all carefully. One computer looked like a TV set, with a girl in a bathing suit on the screen. A two-piece suit. The woman smiled, remembering the orange-haired Mrs. Mírgová. Even after dying her hair, she still didn’t look like the woman on the computer screen. *She* was a *real* blonde. And besides, who’d want to take a picture of some old Romani woman? For a computer.

As the woman climbed the stairs, it occurred to her to toss some old flyers in there herself. She couldn’t remember what was on them anyway. She was walking lighter now. The pain in her back had nearly stopped. She would leave the mail for tomorrow, or afternoon, if it stopped raining. She didn’t want to risk catching cold. Especially not if it meant the hospital.





dovnitř, i když bylo jasné, že kolem domu nikdo neprošel. Pak se vracela klidnější.

Ve vedlejším bytě se ozýval hluk. Bez zaklepání vešla. Sousedé právě vstali a dohadovali se, kdo půjde nakoupit.

„Něco mám,“ řekla žena a šla pro igelitovou tašku. Vytáhla celý chleba. Na povrchu byl vlhký. Butka ho nakrájela. Chutnal nakysle. Zdálo se, že dětem to nevádí. Mohlo to být i tou marmeládou.

Žena odmítla cigaretu. Čaj si vzala. Hrnek byl ohmataný, na čaji napočítala mastná oka, asi čtyři. Nebyla příliš velká. Pocítila mírnou nevolnost, ale čaj dopila.

Neděkovala, mezi svými to nebylo nutné. Děkují si jen bílí. Něco si vykupují a předplácují. Žena nevěděla co. Prostě něco. Ani Ludvík jí to nedokázal objasnit.

Butka odešla do vedlejší místnosti. Žena si dolila ještě trochu čaje. Neměla chuť ho pít. Jenom tak vyplňovala čas, než se Butka vrátí. Slyšela její tlumený, přemlouvající hlas. „Pojď se ukázat, co by se ti smálo.“ Zároveň s Butkou se objevil Kokolili. S vyholenou hlavou. Dnes všichni blázní s vlasama, pomyslela si žena. Nesmála se. Kokolili vypadal spíše zuboženě, s holou lebkou a strništěm vousů. Měl oblečený tmavě modré tepláky. Pruhy byly jen na bocích. Do pasu byl nahý. Při vyholené hlavě mu vystupovala žebra nějak důrazněji.

„Proč?“ zeptala se žena.

„Chtěl to,“ odpověděla Butka. S tím, že byl opilý, se počítalo. Byl cítit i teď.

Kokolili si sedl k dětem a dojedl patku chleba. Žena se zakloněním trupu odtáhla. Chtěla se zeptat, jestli neměl vši a proč si hlavu neposypal DDT. Ale nezeptala se. Už se nevyrábí. Vybavila si svou kúru před lety ve škole. Preventivně i bez vši. Prášek vytvářel na černých vlasech bílé tečky. Prý hnidy, smály se jí děti.

Začala ji svědět hlava. Poškrábala se až za dveřmi. Předtím se Butky zeptala, co bude vařit. Ale nezajímalo ji to. Jíst s nimi nechtěla.

Když se vrátila domů, přešla nejprve k oknu a podívala se na schránku. Jakýsi děda v saku a dvěma řadami vojenských vyznamenání prošel kolem bloku. Před schránkou zasalutoval. Nikdo jiný tam nebyl.

Žena se uklidnila. Vytáhla z ploché krabice na kredenci několik archů papíru a usadila se k umakartovému stolu. Nohy byly z kovu, asi ze železa. Nevěděla to přesně.

Než začala psát, shrnula dopředu ubrus. Aby neprotrhávala papír. Psala tužkou. I obálky. Někdy k tomu na poště měli výhrady. Pak obtahovala adresu ještě jednou propiskou na pružince.





It wasn't until she was standing outside the door to her apartment that she realized she had forgotten to shut the mailbox. There were openings in the lower part, so the water wouldn't be trapped inside. Still, she walked downstairs and flipped the lid back into position. Just in case, she peeked inside again, even though it was obvious no one else had been by the building. Calmer again, she returned upstairs.

A noise came from the apartment next door. She walked in without knocking. The neighbors had just gotten up, and were having an argument about who would go do the shopping.

"I've got something," the woman said, and went back to her place, returning with a plastic bag. She pulled out a whole loaf of bread. The surface was damp. Butka cut it up into slices. It tasted sour. The children didn't seem to mind. Maybe because of the jam.

The woman declined a cigarette. The tea she accepted. The mug was worn from handling, and she counted four grease spots on the surface of her tea. They weren't too big. She felt a little queasy, but drank it all.

She offered no thanks; among your own, there was no need. Only white people thanked each other. They were always buying or paying for something. The woman didn't know what. Just *something*. Even Ludvík hadn't been able to explain it to her.

Butka went into the next room. The woman poured herself a little more tea. She had no desire to drink it. She was just killing time until Butka returned. From the next room she could hear Butka's muffled voice, trying to persuade someone: "Come on out and show yourself. She isn't going to laugh."

Kokolili stepped into view at the same time as Butka. His head was shaved bare. Everybody's gone nuts with their hair these days, the woman thought. She didn't laugh. Kokolili looked more forlorn than anything else, she thought, with his bare skull and his stubbly beard. He had on a dark-blue track suit. Stripes running down the sides. He was naked to the waist. With his head shaved, his ribs seemed to stick out more.

"How come?" asked the woman.

"He felt like it," Butka replied. That he had been drunk was a given. The woman could smell it on him even now.

Kokolili sat down with the children and finished off a heel of bread. The woman leaned away. She wanted to ask if he had had lice and why he hadn't used DDT. But she didn't. They didn't make that stuff anymore. She remembered her own cure, years ago, in school. Preventively. She hadn't even had lice. The powder had made white spots in her black hair. Nests, the children had laughed at her.

Her head began to itch. She didn't scratch it until she was outside the door. Before that, she asked Butka what she was going to cook. She didn't really care, though. She didn't want to eat with them.

When she got home, she went straight to the window and looked out at the mailbox. An old man in a coat with two rows of military decorations was walking around the block. As he passed the mailbox, he saluted. There was nobody else in sight.





*Drahá Šuki, pořád Tě miluji a moc o Tebe stojím. Kromě oslovení větu opsala z barevného časopisu. Koupila ho před čtrnácti dny. Ludvík jí nikdy neřikal Šuki, jenom Jolano. V tom byla potíž.*

*Matka a otec už neřvou, že spolu budem. Obarvíš se a nebudeš se stýkat s vašima. To by nesnesli. Matka nakonec říkala, že ani nejsi tak černá a moc se to nepozná. Od Anny jsem se odstěhoval, stejně byla blbá.*

Ještě napsala *Navždy Tvůj Ludvík*. Použila k tomu opět časopisu.

Do zbývajících dvou obálek zasunula několik reklamních letáčků.

Dřív odnášela dopisy na poštu každý den.

V poslední době jen nerada vstupovala do cizího území. I když pošta se jí líbila. Nová přízemní budova s velkými okny. Mohli by si pověsit ještě záclony, nebo závěsy s kanýrkama, je to veselejší. Zase by měli méně světla. Záclony by zakryly i barevné květiny na parapetech. Umělé. To se ženě líbilo. Daly se kdykoliv umýt.

Parapety jsou světle šedé. Stejně jako pulty a rámy přepážek. Zpočátku jim barevně ladily i propisovací tužky na pružinkách. Někdo je asi ukradl. Doplnili je různobarevnými reklamními kolíky. Ale i tak působí pošta pěkně. Je samozřejmě mimo sídliště, až za náměstím. U nás se s dopisy nepočítalo a sociální dávky přicházely až později.

I bílé ženy za přepážkami se jí líbily. Bílo-modře, tak byly oblečeny. Jenom tvář měly podivně našedlou. Především ty starší. Možná nebyly až tak šedé, ale chovaly se divně. S určitým výrazem shovívavého opovržení.

Žena chodívala k přepážce číslo pět. V pětce jí úřednice odpovídala na pozdrav. Úzkost ve tváři u ní bylo vidět pokaždé. Žena také pocítovala strach. Pro ten okamžik na tom byly obě stejně.

„Tři známky,“ řekla žena se zdůrazněným přízvukem. Uměla vyslovovat i zcela čistě. Nezdálo se, že by to někdy pomáhalo.

„Za kolik?“

„Nevím,“ žena rozpacitě přešlápla. Zahlédla zase tu podivnou úzkost ženy za přepážkou. To ji povzbudilo.

„Můžeš je snad zvážít, ne?“ S pobaveným napětím čekala, jak úřednice zareaguje na tykání.

Očekávala něco. Cokoliv. Upozornění, nadávku, větu.

Ta jen vzala dopisy a postupně je házela na váhu. Ženy si nevšímala.

Podél pravítka odtrhla tři osmikoronové známky a podala je ženě. Tahle se neptá, proč dopisy neodnesu osobně nebo nedám do jedné obálky. Nic jí do toho není.





The woman relaxed. She pulled a few sheets of paper from a flat box on the sideboard and settled down at the Formica table. The legs were metal, maybe iron. She didn't know for sure.

Before beginning to write, she rolled the tablecloth forward. So she wouldn't tear through the paper. She wrote in pencil. Even on envelopes. Sometimes the people at the post office complained and she had to trace over the address again with a ballpoint pen attached to the counter by a coil.

"Dear Šuki: I still love you and care for you very much." Apart from the opening, she had copied the sentence out of a glossy magazine she had bought two weeks earlier. Ludvík had never called her Šuki; only Jolana. That was the problem.

"Mother and Father have stopped screaming about us being together. You color your hair and stop talking to your family. My parents wouldn't stand for that. In the end, Mother admitted that you weren't all that black and you can't really tell. I moved out of Anna's place. Anyway, she was stupid."

At the end she wrote, "Forever yours, Ludvík." That was from the magazine, too.

The other two envelopes she stuffed with flyers.

She used to take letters to the post office every day. Lately she'd had an aversion to entering foreign territory. The post office she liked, though. A new, one-storey building with big windows. They could have put up curtains, or drapes with flounces. That would have been more cheery. On the other hand, there wouldn't have been as much light then. Not to mention that curtains would have covered up the colorful flowers on the window ledges. Artificial flowers. The woman liked that. That way you could wash them.

The window ledges were light gray. As were the counters and the frames of the service windows. Even the ballpoint pens had all been light gray to start with, until people had started to steal them and the post office had replaced them with colorful pens with ads on them. Still, it was a nice place. It was outside the complex of course, all the way on the other side of the town square. They hadn't figured on there being any mail for us, and the welfare payments hadn't started coming till later.

She even liked the white women who staffed the windows. Blue and white were the colors they wore. Only their faces were strangely gray. Especially on the older ones. Maybe they really weren't that gray, it was just the way they acted. An odd mixture of patience and disdain.

The woman usually went to window number five. The clerk there always responded to her greetings. But the woman could see the tension in her face every time. She was scared, too. For the moment, they were equals.

"Three stamps," the woman said, emphasizing her accent. She knew how to pronounce clearly. But it never seemed to help.

"What denomination?"

"I don't know," the woman said, shifting her weight nervously. Again she noticed how strangely uneasy the woman behind the window was. That encouraged her.





„Chybí vám tam směrovací číslo,“ dodala ještě. Žena je doplnila.

Domů se vracela kolem páté, asi v šestnáct padesát. Uvnula.

Probudila ji až mnohem později Butka. Přinesla jí vařené pirohy. Talíř byl čistý. Žena napichovala žlutobílé trojúhelníky na vidličku a pomalu žvýkala.

„Donesu ještě,“ řekla Butka. Žena neodpovídala. Butka zůstávala sedět. Když vešel do kuchyně i vyholený muž, žena ukryla talíř na zasunutou židli. Ústa si přikryla dlaní. Tohle Ludvík nesnášel.

„Co je na tom neslušného, před někým žvýkat?“ rozčiloval se.

Nedokázala mu odpovědět. Později se přestal ptát.

Kokolili s Butkou odešli asi ve dvanáct. Spící děti nechali u ní. Žena utřela podlahu v kuchyni a pokoji. Mokrou hadru přehodila přes žlutý kbelík. Dědala to tak vždycky. Bolest v zádech necítila. Uvnula kolem druhé. Poštačka přijde za osm až deset hodin



**Anna Zonová** (1962) vystudovala Stavební fakultu v Brně. Je kurátorkou výstav Gansovy muzejní a vlastivědné společnosti v Moravském Berouně. Příležitostně publikuje články, převážně o současném výtvarném umění, v *Literárních novinách*, *Hostu*, *Ateliéru*.





“Can’t you weigh them?” The woman waited to see how the clerk would react to such a forthright request.

She expected something. Anything. A warning, a curse, a retort. But the clerk just took the letters and tossed them, one at a time, on the scales, paying her no attention at all.

The clerk tore off three eight-crown stamps and handed them to the woman. She never asked why the woman mailed so many letters or why she didn’t at least put them all in one envelope. It was none of her business.

“You’re missing the zip code,” the clerk pointed out. The woman filled it in.

She got home at around five, maybe ten to, and fell asleep.

It was much later when Butka came in and woke her. With a batch of boiled pierogis. On a clean plate. The woman stabbed the yellowy triangles onto her fork and slowly chewed.

“I’ll go get some more,” Butka said. The woman didn’t reply. Butka remained seated. When the bald man, too, walked into the kitchen, the woman hid her plate on a chair tucked under the table. She covered her mouth with her hand. Ludvík had hated it when she did that.

“What’s so rude about chewing in front of someone?!” he had raged.

She hadn’t been able to give him an answer. Eventually he stopped asking.

Kokolili and Butka went home at around 12, leaving their sleeping children with her. The woman wiped the floor in the kitchen and bedroom, then laid the wet rag over the edge of the yellow pail. As she always did. The pain in her back was gone now. She fell asleep around two. The mail wouldn’t be coming for another eight or ten hours still.

*Translated by Alex Zucker*



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# Zilahy Péter

## Az utolsó ablakzsiráf

(részletek)

Az ablakzsiráf egy képeskönyv volt, amelyből olvasni tanultunk, amikor még nem tudtunk olvasni. Én már tudtam olvasni, mégis meg kellett tanulnom, mert akkor minnek az iskola. Az ablakzsiráf közérthető módon tárta elénk a világot ábécésorrendben. Mindennek megvolt a helye és értelme, szimbolikus és hétköznapi, megtudhattuk belőle, hogy a nap keleten kel, szívünk a baloldalon van, az októberi forradalom novemberben, és az ablakon beárad a fény – akkor is ha be van csukva. Az ablakzsiráf tele volt hétfejű sárkánnyal, tündérrel, ördöggel meg királyfival, és azt írta róluk, hogy nem léteznek. Négyféle sárkányra emlékszem, ami nem létezik, és három királyfira. Az ablakzsiráf szótagolva megtanított olvasni a sorok között. Magától értetődött, mint a tévémaci lefekvéskor, senkinek se jutott eszébe rákérdezni. Az ablakzsiráf az ablakzsiráf. Az ablakzsiráf a gyerekkorom, az öltöző, a tornaóra, az állandó növés, egy szebb kor előtti kor, a puha diktatúra, a házi feladatom, az ártatlanságom, a generációm. Az ablakzsiráf egy könyv, aminek az egyik szereplője én vagyok. Húsz év múlva megkérdezte valaki, csak akkor jöttem rá, hogy az első és az utolsó szó, az alfa és az omega, az ablak és a zsiráf. Igen. Az ablak a kezdet, az ablakon át jön a fény, a zsiráf a véges végtelen, a szürrealizmus, lángoló zsiráfok, sose halunk meg! Egy lexikon, amelyben benne van, ami kimaradt.

Szűz voltam, de nem zavart. Fogalmam sem volt róla. A világ fekete-fehér volt, a tévében lehetett nézni. Ma is előttem a holland-argentin futball döntő hosszabbítása, a Baader-Meinhof és a Szozuz-Apolló összekapcsolódása, Elvis, a király, halála (ezt nem értettem, de apám ki volt bukva), a zsanai gázkitörés, a Mount St. Helen vulkáni felhője, a magyar űrrepülés és a bűvöskocka-világbajnokság Budapesten. A sport izgalmas volt fekete-fehérben, a bokszeccsen azt kellett figyelni, kinek hány csík van a zokniján. Még az első randimon is emlékszem, hány csík volt a csaj lábán, a szeme színe már bizonytalan, most is fekete-fehérben látom. Az első csók után a szüleim vettek egy színes tévét, és kiderült, hogy a hollandok narancssárgák, az olaszok kékek, sőt vannak zöld és vörös ördögök, csak a németek maradtak fekete-fehérek, mintha büntetésben lennének, az országuk is ketté volt vágva, nem irigyeltem őket.

A híradó alatt volt a fürdetés. Anyám időnként bejött, hogy megvagyok-e még. Apám a nappaliban tévézett. Ahhoz, hogy meg tudjanak védeni a hazugságoktól, ismerniük kellett a részleteket. A fürdőszobában csak anyám



# Zilahy Péter

## The Last Window Giraffe

(*excerpts*)

The window giraffe was a picture book from which we learned to read when we didn't know how to. I could read already, but I had to learn it anyway, because that's what school's for. The window giraffe revealed the world to us in alphabetical order. Everything had its rhyme and reason, both symbolic and everyday. We learned from it that the sun rises in the east, that our hearts are on the left, that the Great October Revolution was in November, and that light comes through the window, even when it is closed. The window giraffe was full of seven-headed dragons, fairies, devils and princes, and it told us that they do not exist. I remember four kinds of dragons that do not exist, and also three princes. Syllable by syllable, the window giraffe taught us to read between the lines. It was taken as much for granted as the teddy-bear on TV before bedtime. Nobody thought of questioning it. The window giraffe was the window giraffe. The window giraffe is my childhood, the changing room, the P.E. class, and growing all the time, an age before a better age, the soft dictatorship, my homework, my innocence, my generation. The window giraffe is a book, and I am one of its characters. Twenty years later, when asked, I realized that the first and last words, the alpha and omega, are 'window' and 'giraffe' (!). Yes. The window is the beginning, light comes through the window; the giraffe is the end of endlessness, surrealism, flaming giraffes, we will live for ever! A lexicon which contains what's been left out.

I was a virgin, but it didn't bother me. I didn't have a clue. The world was black and white, you could watch it on TV. It's still in front of me: extra time in the Holland–Argentina final, the link-up of the Baader-Meinhof and the Solyut-Apollo, the death of the King (I didn't know who Elvis was, but dad was gutted), the gas explosion at Zsana, the volcanic clouds over Mount St. Helens, the Hungarian space flight, and the Rubik Cube World Championship in Budapest. Sports were exciting in black and white; during a boxing match, you had to count the number of stripes on the guys' socks. I even remember how many stripes my first date had, I'm not sure about the colour of the eyes, I see her in black and white. After the first kiss my parents bought a colour TV, and it turned out that the Dutch are orange, the Italians are blue, and there are green and red devils. Only the Germans remained black and white, as if they were being punished. Their country was split in two as well. I almost felt sorry for them.

(!) In Hungarian window is *ablak*, and giraffe is *zsráf*. Take my word for it.





sóhajtozását lehetett hallani – mekkora felfordulást csinálók a kád vízben, elárasztom a lakást. Lemerültem. A víz alatt egy hang szólt hozzám, és elmondta, mi történt aznap a világban: egy földcsuszamlás maga alá temetett százötven embert Bangladesben, forradalom tört ki valahol Nyugat-Afrikában, megnyitottak egy óvodát meg egy olimpiai úszómedencét, és 2:1-re nyert az MTK a Fradi ellen. Nem tudtam ki üzenget és miért, de nyilvánvaló volt, hogy tervei vannak velem, mert azt is megsúgta, milyen idő lesz. Másnap már több hangot különböztettem meg a kádban, ami arra utalt, hogy egy szervezettel van dolgom. A kommunikáció módja logikusnak tűnt, én nem üzenhettem nekik, mert a víz alatt nem lehet beszélni, ők pedig kizárólag a fürdetés alatt tudtak kapcsolatba lépni velem szüleim és nevelőim tudta nélkül. Nehezen fogtam fel, miért olyan fontos a szervezetnek, hogy részletes információim legyenek a legújabb lengyelországi hadgyakorlatról, vagy hogy mely dunántúli községek emelkedtek városi rangra, de tudtam, ha figyelek, jelt fognak adni. Létem mélyebb értelmet nyert a víz alatt. Amikor egy vasárnapi hajmosás közben anyám mit sem sejtve a víz alá nyomott, egy kellemes női hang a fülembé súgta, hogy elverte a termést a jégeső. Megértettem, mit várnak tőlem, és őszintén szólva nem volt ellenemre: rendetlenséget csinálni. Lefekvés után korábban is tengeralattjárókkal és vadászgépekkel viaskodtam a sötétben, előfordult, hogy padlóra kerültem, és csak rendíthetetlen kitartásomnak köszönhettem, hogy a végső győzelem az enyém lett. Attól a naptól fogva szorgos méhként szabotáltam népi demokráciánk fejlődését. Földrengések, áramkimaradások, gázrobbanások jelezték utam. A fürdőkádban szerzett információk alapján kiszűrtem a katonai objektumokat. Ha átadtak egy gyárat, vagy erőművet, én ott voltam, és tettem a dolgom. A kágéesté Kőműves Kelemenként toporgott a vasfüggöny mögött, nem sejtve, hogy a téglá házon belül van.

Nemi érésem göröngyös útját kommunista diktátorok halála övezte. Első szexuális élményem egybeesett Mao Ce Tung halálával, megharapott egy Diána nevű lány az ovisban. Tito halálakor kezdtem mutálni, Brezsnyevnél volt az első magömlésem. Három napig komolyzene ment a rádióban, egy kicsit túlzásnak tartottam, volt ahol még iskolai szünetet is elrendeltek. Aztán sokáig nem történt semmi, kísérletképpen elvittem egy lányt moziba, de túl jó volt a film, és görcs állt a kezembe. A gimnáziumban felgyorsultak az események, az első csókot az első viharos éjszakától csak néhány hónap választotta el. Andropov után Csernyenko is beadta a kulcsot. Néhány hétre rá követte őket Enver, azt nem mesélem el. Ceausescu kivégzésekor ismerkedtem meg a G-ponttal. Kim Ir Szen új szempontok szerint csoportosította ismereteim, szerencsére a bíróság ejtette a vádat. Fidel.

Gyerekkoromból az első emlék, amire emlékszem: négykézláb mászom, csendespihenő az óvodában. A lefüggönyözött teremben hold süt a fehér takarókra. Nem lehet a hold, nem voltunk este óvodában. Négykézláb mászok az ágyak alatt, attól félek, ha a többiek felébrednek én is felébredek. Egyedül





Bath time was during the news. Every now and then mother would look in to see if I was all right. Dad was watching TV in the living room. To protect me from the lies they had to know the details. I could hear mother sighing – what a shambles I'm making in the tub, I'm flooding the apartment. I dived down. Under the water I heard a voice telling me what had happened in the world that day: a landslide killed a hundred and fifty people in Bangladesh, a revolution broke out somewhere in West Africa, a new kindergarten and an Olympic pool were opened, and MTK beat Fradi 2–1. I had no idea who was sending me messages in this way, or why, but they clearly had plans for me, because they also told me what the weather was going to be like. The following day I could distinguish several voices in the tub, which pointed towards an organization. This manner of communication seemed logical. I couldn't send them messages, because you can't talk under water, and they could only get in touch with me, without my parents and teachers knowing, during bath time. I didn't understand why it was so important for the organization that I should have detailed information on the latest war games in Poland, or which Transdanubian towns were being granted city status, but I knew that if I paid attention, sooner or later I'd be given a sign. My life gained a deeper meaning under water. When one Sunday mother was washing my hair and, unsuspecting, she pushed my head into the water, a pleasant female voice whispered in my ear that the hail had ruined the crops. I knew immediately what they expected from me, and to be honest, I had no objections. To make a big mess. Even before this, after going to bed, I used to battle submarines and fighter planes in the dark. Sometimes I ended up on the floor, and it was only due to my dogged persistence that in the end the victory was mine. From that day on, I sabotaged the development of our people's democracy like a busy honey-bee. Earthquakes, power failures and gas explosions marked my way. Based on the information I received in the bathtub, I discovered the location of military objectives. When a factory or a power plant was inaugurated, I was there, doing what I had to do. COMECON was anxiously fidgeting behind the Iron Curtain, not knowing that it was me who was chopping down the bean stalk.

My bumpy road to sexual maturity was paved with the death of communist dictators. My first sexual experience coincided with the death of Mao Zedong. I was bitten by a girl called Diana in nursery school. My voice broke when Tito died, and I first came when Brezhnev went. For three days there was nothing but classical music on the radio, which I thought was overdoing it, some schools even closed. Then for a long time, nothing. As an experiment, I took a girl to the movies, but the film was too good, and I got cramps in my hand. Events accelerated in high school. It was only a couple of months between the first kiss and the first frantic fumbling. Following Andropov, Chernenko also checked out. A couple more weeks, and it was Enver's turn, but I'd rather not go into that. I first found out about the G-spot when Ceausescu was executed. Kim Il Sung cast new light on my broadening horizons, luckily, the charges were dropped. Fidel...





vagyok, egy majdnem fiktív gyerek, egyensúlyozok a nyikorgó parkettán, morzsák fúródnak a térdembe. Kicsi vagyok, nem lát senki, kúszom előre a hatalmas teremben, mintha órák óta mennék. Kerülgetem a fehér lepedők közt lecsüngő kezeket, lábakat. Döglenek az anygalkák. Bárányfelhők úsznak el szabályos rendben, pedofil mennyország, puha ujjbegyek, grübedlik, göndörödő tincsek. Na! Valaki szembejön az ágy alatt, összekoccan a fejünk, nem látom az arcát a lepedőtől. A nyakamba liheg, forró a lehelete. Jönnek az óvónők, fehér a ruhájuk, fehér zoknik és fehér papucs, lapulunk az ágy alatt, megfogja a kiskezem a kiskezével, izzad a tenyere. Jaj!

1956-ban a nándorfehérvári diadal ötszázéves évfordulóján szétlövik Budapestet. A szovjet hadsereg a 44-es hagyományokat eleveníti fel új helyszínek bevonásával. Tele a város lyukakkal, lyukak a házak falán, lyukak a házak között, az új lyukak összekeverednek a régiekkel, és állandó beszédtémává válik, hogy egy adott ház az ostromtól vagy a forradalomtól lett olyan, most 56 vagy 44, nem lehet 44-es, ez új épület, dehogyis ez bauhaus, nem látod a görbített teraszt. Aztán lehullott a hó és betemette a lyukakat, újabb hó esett, és a friss hó összekeveredett a régivel, már senki nem tudta megmondani, hogy melyik hó temette be a lyukat, és vártak az emberek az olvadásra, mert az örök hó megszállta az országot. Negyvenezer nagyobb és több millió kicsi lyuk. Budapest a lyukak városa. Ebbe a lyukas városba születtem, golyó ütötte lyukak a kórház falán, lyukas sírok a temetőben. Az orrom előtt egy kétméteres sikló kúszott báró Schwanbergi Kruchina Manó (- és neje Marianne) sírjába. A báró 56-ban halt meg, Marianne 44-ben. Osztályharc vagy részeg sírköves? Aztán eltűnt a sírkő, és egy lyuk lett a helyén. Aztán a lyuk helyén egy új sír. Nyomon követhető volt a lyukak körforgása. A nagyapám háza helyén álló lyukra épült a ház, amiben éltünk, apám a kerti bombatölcsérekben játszott gyerekkorában. A nagyobb lyukak helyére házakat építettek, a kisebbeket szeméttérakónak használták: kidobott tévék és elektroncsövek álltak halomban a kert végén, információs roncsstelep a Szabadság-hegyen. Az egyik lyukban találtunk egy szárnyas bombát, az is lyukas volt. Valaki lecsavarta a robbanófejet. Felmásztunk a falra, bedugtuk az ujjunk a lyukakba, és csukott szemmel elképzeltük a golyót. Budapest legújabb története Braille-írással. Budapest szabad szemmel nem látható, csak tapintható, csak a lyukain át látni. Olvasni a sorok között, házfalnyi hieroglifák, epikus és költői variációk, háborús graffitik, sommás erotikus üzenetek, kifordított levéltár.

Az úttörők tizenkét pontja a normatív tízparancsolattal szemben leíró szemléletet tükrözött. A beteljesült jövőt vetítette elénk. Az úttörő kész, tökéletes lény, ezt és ezt csinálja, például mindig igazat mond - a hatodik pont. Akkor már inkább az Újszövetség. Dobj vissza kenyérrel, még jó, kajával dobálni, az mindig bejön, ha az alkotó kifogy az ötletekből. Akkor jön a burleszk. De mi van, ha egy úttörő azt mondja, hogy minden úttörő hazudik? Mert tudja meg az egész világ, hogy a Sohár nem mond igazat,





This is the first thing I remember from childhood: I'm crawling on all fours, and it's rest time at nursery school. The curtains are drawn, the moon is shining on the white covers. It can't be the moon though, we were never in kindergarten at night. I'm crawling on all fours under the beds, afraid that if the others wake up, I will wake up too. I am alone, a near-fictitious child, balancing on the creaking parquet floor, bread crumbs drilling into my kneecap. I'm so small, nobody sees me. I'm worming my way along the enormous room, it's as if I'd been doing it for hours. I am winding my way between the white sheets, trying to avoid the dangling hands and feet. Dead little angels. Formations of fleecy clouds float past, a pedophile's heaven, soft fingertips, dimples, curly locks. Right! Somebody's coming under the bed, our heads bang against each other, but because of the sheet, I don't see the face. Panting against my neck, hot breath. The teachers are coming, white socks and white slippers, we crouch under the bed, a little hand takes my little hand, a sweating palm. Hoo!

In 1956, on the five-hundredth anniversary of the triumphant battle of Nándorfehérvár (?), Budapest is shot to pieces. Using new venues, the Soviet army is reviving the traditions of 1944. The city is riddled with holes, holes in house walls, holes between houses, the new holes getting mixed up with the old. Whether a house looks the way it does because of the siege or the revolution, because of 1944 or 1956, becomes a constant topic of conversation; it can't be 1944, it's a new building, no, it isn't, it's a typical Bauhaus, can't you see the curved terrace? Then the snow fell and covered up the holes, then more snow fell, and the new snow got mixed in with the old, and nobody could tell any more which snow was covering up all those holes, and people waited for the snow to melt, because the eternal snow was occupying the country. Forty thousand big, and several million smaller holes. Budapest is the city of holes. I was born in this city of holes, there were bullet holes in the hospital wall, and bullet holes in the tombstones. A six-foot grass snake slithered into the grave of Baron Manó Schwanbergi Kruchina (and his wife Marianne) before my very eyes. The baron died in 1956, his wife in 1944. Was it the class struggle, or a drunken stone-mason? Then the tomb stone disappeared, leaving a hole in its place. Then instead of the hole, a new grave. You could follow the cycle of the holes. The house in which we lived was built on top of the hole left by my grandfather's house, and as a child my father used to play in the bomb craters in the garden. The large holes were replaced by houses, the smaller ones were used to dump rubbish. Discarded TV sets and vacuum tubes stood in heaps at the back of the garden, an information rubbish dump on Liberty Hill. In one of the holes we found a winged bomb, and even that had a hole in it. Someone had screwed off the head. We climbed walls, stuck our fingers in the holes, and with eyes closed tried to imagine the bullets. The contemporary history of Budapest, written in Braille. Budapest cannot be seen with the eyes, only with the fingers. It can be

(?) Today's Belgrade, at the time (1456) a Hungarian fortress against the Turks.





pedig nyakkendője van és sípja is. Jó kis síp, a Sohár meg sem érdemli. Be kell látni, az úttörő is ember. Ez lehetne a tizenharmadik. Ez olyan nyilvánvaló, hogy nincs is szükség külön pontra. A tizenharmadik a kimondatlan pont. Mindenkinek van gyenge pontja. Én például elloptam a zoknimban a logikai játékot. Igaz, még kisdobos voltam, és a szüleim visszavitték velem, de látszott rajtuk, nagyon büszkék, mert a fiuk olthatatlan tudásszomját látták a csillogó színes karikákban és háromszögekben, a lopásról pedig nem volt semmilyen pont, az bele volt építve a rendszerbe.

A történelmi épület a Sas-hegyen, ahová iskolába jártam, apácázárda volt, mielőtt oktatási intézménnyé avanszált. A német bevonuláskor a színházteremben volt a főhadiszállás, itt tartóztatták le Budapest katonai parancsnokát. A színházteremben voltak a tornaórák, szaladgáltunk körbe-körbe a történelmi falak közt, honismeret zsugorfejállásban. A magyarok a népek országútján jöttek, mondta a harcsabajszerű, ez jól hangzott. Velőscsonttal stoppolnak a sztyeppén, amire rá van rovásírva: Magyarország, de senki sem tudja elolvasni. Bakugrás a svédsekre nyen, földre érkezéskor cigánykerék. Tanár úr szerint van egy puszta a Csendes-óceántól az Alföldig, nagyjából az Amur és a Duna között. Az egyik végén a magyarok, a másik végén a Gulag, úgyhogy viselkedjünk. Két kézzel pofozott, hogy ne vágódjunk el - ez volt az aranyközép. Inkább rúdra mászom, vagy futok két kört, azt mondta, leveszi rólam a kezét, és rám nehezedett a hangsúlyával, ő csak *becsületes magyar embert* akart faragni. Tudtam, hogy valami nem stimmel, mert ahhoz képest, hogy a nyelvünk a legnagyobb kincs, ami fennmaradt, engem arra akartak rávenni, hogy fogjam be a szám, a honismeretet egybemosták az anatómiával, a hazafiságot a nyelvtannal, a szolidaritást pedig a faragással. Szóval a magyarok ezer éve jöttek, és még ma is jönnek, ha meg nem haltak. Senki se tudja, honnan, és hová. Aki tudja, téved. Vagy nem magyar. Vagy nem becsületes. A magyar, az homályba van burkolva. Vagy odavész. Egy magyar nem feltűnő, úgy néz ki, mint bárki, bárhol könnyen asszimilálódik, kivéve Magyarországon, ott nem tud elvegyülni, megakadályozza a közös nyelv. Kicsit szerbhorvát a magyar. Kicsit hazátlan. Jön a népek országútján, hatalmas csordákat terel, és állandó harcban áll. Óriási pofonok jönnek mögötte a bukószéllal. Nincs kecmec. May Károly és a Feszty-körkép tanulmányozása közben kirajzolódó magyarságképem egyesítette a vadnyugat és a vadkelet haladó hagyományait. A magyarok úgy éltek, mint a kovbojok, és úgy harcoltak, mint az indiánok. Műkincseket gyűjtöttek, megelőzve a Nagy Földrajzi Felfedezőket. Cortez és Pizarro Lehel és Bulcsú utódai. A magyar indiánok megtámadták a középkort, féltőn, mint valami postakocsit, hujjogva körbeugrálták, és lenyilaztak mindenkit, aki kidugta a fejét. Megtámadták a vikingeket és a mórokat is, kifosztották a kolostorokat, szétrúgták Európa seggét, de erre nem illik büszkének lenni. Nem is azért mondom. Aztán megnézték az Atlanti-óceánt, és rájöttek, hogy a legelők véget érnek, nem lehet körbehujjogni a földet, ott volt keresztben a tenger. Mit volt mit tenni, felszálltak a postakocsira, a kerék fölé. A Kárpát-





seen only through its holes, read between the lines, wall-size hieroglyphs, epic and lyric variations, war-time graffiti, crude erotic messages, an archive turned inside-out.

The twelve points of the Pioneers, in contrast to the prescriptive Ten Commandments, reflect a descriptive worldview. They project a fulfilled future before our eyes. The Pioneer is a fully fledged perfect being and acts like one by, for instance, always telling the truth – point six. I'd rather have the New Testament any day. If a stone is thrown at you, throw bread in return: just great, when the Creator runs out of ideas food-fights are always an option, then it becomes burlesque. But what if a Pioneer says all Pioneers are liars? Because everyone knows Sohár tells fibs, even if he has a red tie and a whistle. It's a nice whistle but Sohár doesn't deserve it. In the end we must admit the Pioneer is only human. This could be point thirteen. Then again it's so obvious it doesn't need a separate point. The thirteenth point remains unspoken. We all have our weak points. I, for one, stole a logic game and hid it in my socks. I was only a Little Drummer at the time and my parents made me return it, but you could tell they were really proud because in those bright red circles and triangles they saw their son's unquenchable thirst for knowledge. As for stealing, there was no separate point on it: it was built into the system.

The historical building on top of Eagle Hill where I went to school was a convent before it was promoted to an institution of learning. When the Germans came, they used the auditorium as their headquarters, this is where Budapest's military commander was arrested. The auditorium later served as our gym, we ran round and round in circles within its historic walls, history class in a tucked handstand. The Magyars entered Hungary on the highway of nations, said the man with the waxed moustache, which sounded good to me. They tried to hitch a ride on the steppes using a piece of marrow-bone with "Hungary" scratched on it in runic script, but nobody could read it. A leapfrog over the vaulting horse and cartwheel on impact. According to master, there is a huge expanse of wasteland stretching from the Pacific to the Great Hungarian Plain, from the Amur to the Danube, more or less, with the Magyars at one end and the Gulag at the other, so we'd better behave. He'd slap us with both hands so we wouldn't lose our balance, his idea of the golden mean. I'd prefer to climb a pole or run two circuits. No more helping hands anymore, he said, and leaned on me with his emphasis – he just wanted to mould an *honest Magyar* out of me. Something was wrong, I could tell, because considering that our language is the greatest treasure that was left to us, they were trying to get me to hold my tongue, jumble up history with anatomy, patriotism with grammar, solidarity with mould. In short, the Magyars came a thousand years ago, and they're still coming, happily ever after. Nobody knows where they came from, or where they are headed, and he who knows is wrong. Or not really Magyar. Or not honest. The Magyar is shrouded in mystery, or perishes. The Magyar does not stand out, he looks just like anybody else, he assimilates with ease wherever he may be, except in Hungary, where he's prevented by a common tongue. A Hungarian has a little



medence is tenger volt, ha idejében érkezünk, hajós nép lettünk volna. Saját tenger, nem történelmi, nem vérrel áztatott, nem bérelt hétvégi nyaraló.

Az O betű a magyar ábécé közepén található szabályos kör, melynek minden pontja egyenlő távolságra van a középponttól. Az O betű közepe ezért a magyar nyelv középpontjának tekinthető.

Orosz tanárom szerint akkor fogom megérteni a szláv kultúrát, ha eredetiben olvasom a *Háború és békét*. Neki a transzibériai expresszen sikerült oda-vissza. Akkor már inkább a *Bűn és bűnhődés*, azzal megúsznám Moszkváig. Talán elég lenne a bűnön keresztülrágnom magam. Visszafelé jöhetnék Aeroflottal, az is milyen szép szó. Mint egy harcigézből visszaforgatott kölnivíz. A nyelv az álcázás része volt, úgy kellett csinálni, mintha tudnánk oroszul. Nű! Negyvenöt percig oroszul néztem, oroszul bólogattam, oroszul sóhajtoztam, kitettem a pad szélére a *Háború és békét*.

Eszembe se jutott, hogy a nyelvtudásnak haszna lehet. A tudás a növekedés feltétele volt, valami önmagáért való, ha nőni akartál, megcsináltad a házi feladatot. Oroszul is azért tanultunk, mert egy gyönyörű nyelv, nem mintha a magyar nem lenne mesés. Akkoriban csak az orosz tanárok beszéltek oroszul, az ötven körüli festett hajú nők. Militáns etnikai kisebbség törzsi rítusokkal. Rögeszméjük a jelentés, ez volt az életben maradás feltétele, jelenteni a létszámot minden bevetés előtt. Orosz katonát csak háborús filmekben láttam, de az is magyarul beszélő volt. Akkor láttam először igazi orosz katonát, amikor kivonultak. Véget ért a hidegháború, és véget ért a béke is, többé nem volt értelme meghalni érte, az oroszok eszmei érteken árulták a felszerelést. A haverom ejtőernyőt akart venni, én voltam a tolmács.

Párásút jeszty, kérdeztem, van-e ernyőjük, de beleröhögtem, lemaradt a ty, te jó ég, a szovjet létige összezseng az amcsi yes-szel, mégsem hiába tanultam. Egyre megy a yankee go home és a pasli damój, a megszállás egy vonal a térképen, egy ékezet, egy kötőszó.

Nem a tankok, nem a nyolcosztály, nem a Misa mackó. Egy aláírás az ellenőrzőmben. A tizedes magyarul válaszolt, két vodka lesz, mondta, és mutatta, hogy kettő, mert ketten vannak. Érdeklődött, hogy megy a sulis. Bizalmaskodásnak vettem, és konokul morogtam magam elé, hogy nű-nű, miképpen a Csendes Donban láttam. Elmondta, hogy neki is van egy fia, a Szergej, és tudja, hogy nem könnyű nekünk se, mit szólnánk egy Kalasnyikovhoz? Vagy itt ez a pisztoly! Nem vagyok édesszájú, de ilyen lehet a pufinak a cukorkaboltban. Dobtárat is adna szóróajándéknak, ígyünk a régi szép időkre. A régi szép idők, amikor még nem éltem, és apáink boldogan ölték egymást, arra igyak az ellenséges katonával, aki a nyelvemen szólít. Ege segedre, mondja az altiszt, kilóg a nazdaróvjé. Ege segedre - a nyelv zseniális! Szergejt is Szergejnek hívják, mint a fiát, nekünk Szerjözsa - kezembe nyomja az üveget, és Petőfit idéz hibátlanul. Magyarország költészet, mondja. Elmesélem, hogy egy magyar tudóscsoport azonosította Petőfi





bit of Serbo-Croat in him. A little bit without a country. He's marching down the road of nations, driving huge herds before him, and is constantly at war. From behind, the eddy-wind slaps him in the face. My image of the Magyars, which grew out of studying Karl May and the Feszty Panorama, combined the progressive traditions of the wild west and the wild east. The Magyars lived like cowboys, and fought like Indians. They collected antiquities way before the Great Discoverers. Cortez and Pizarro are the descendants of Lehel and Bulcsú. The Magyar Indians raided the Middle Ages, holding it up halfway like some stage coach, riding round and round, whooping and shooting arrows at anyone who stuck their head out. They even attacked the Vikings and the Moors, plundered the monasteries, and kicked the shit out of Europe, though that's not something to be proud of. That's not why I brought it up. Then they had a look at the Atlantic and realized that the pastures had their limit: you can't ride round and round the globe whooping it up, there is an ocean to cross. There was nothing for it but to climb up on the stage coach – over the wheels, unfortunately. The Carpathian Basin had been an ocean once. Had we arrived in time, we might have become a seafaring people, with our very own sea, not a historical one, not so soaked in blood, not a rented weekend cottage.

The letter O is a perfect circle found in the middle of the Hungarian alphabet, whose every point is equidistant from its centre. Thus, the centre of the letter O may be regarded as the centre of the Hungarian language.

My Russian teacher says I will never understand Slavic culture until I read *War and Peace* in the original. She read it while riding the Trans-Siberian express, there and back. I'd rather read *Crime and Punishment*, then I'd only have to go as far as Moscow. Perhaps it would be enough just working my way through the crime part, then on the way back I could take Aeroflot (another beautiful word, like cologne recycled from poison gas). Language was part of the pretence. We pretended we knew Russian. *Noo!* For forty-five minutes I listened in Russian, I nodded in Russian, I sighed in Russian, and even put *War and Peace* on the bench beside me.

I had no idea that knowing another language could actually be useful. Knowledge was the prerequisite for growth, it was something for its own sake. If you wanted to grow, you did your homework. Naturally, we also learned Russian because Russian is a beautiful language – not that Hungarian isn't even more ravishing, of course. Back then, only the Russian teachers could speak Russian – women with dyed hair in their early fifties, a militant ethnic minority with tribal rites and an obsession for roll calls. This was a matter of survival, taking a head count before every mission. I had never seen a Russian soldier except in war films, and even then, he was dubbed into Hungarian. The first time I saw a Russian soldier in the flesh was when they withdrew from Hungary. The Cold War had come to an end, and so too, it seemed, had peace. Since there was no longer any need to die for, the Russians were selling off their equipment for token sums. My friend wanted to buy a parachute. I was his interpreter.



Sándort egy barguzini női csontvázban. Nem lepi meg, mondja, Oroszország hatalmas. Egyáltalán nem tolakodó, inkább készséges. Nem szívesen megy haza, megszokott itt, szereti a magyarokat, különösen a nőket, rám kacsint, mint aki tudja, miről van szó. Visszakacsintok egy pavlovit, mert tudom, a nőknél kacsintani kell. Nem is zavarnánk tovább, de marasztal, továbbra is magyarul. Jobb lesz, ha vigyázok! Lehet, hogy nem beszél oroszul? Obi-ugor kettős ügynök? Integtetve hátrálunk kifelé, az ajtóban még utánunk szól, nem akarunk-e vinni néhány kézigránátot?



**Zilahy Péter** 1970-ben született Budapesten.

*Lepel alatt ugrásra kész szobor* címmel jelent meg verseskötve. Az *utolsó ablaksíráf* című képes szótárregényét 14 nyelvre fordították le. A könyvből készült CD-ROM multimédia előadása több mint 20 országban szerepelt.

Több hazai és külföldi díjat kapott, köztük az

Év Könyve díját Ukrajnában. Legújabb könyvét *Drei* címmel adták ki Németországban.





*Parashoot jesty*, do they have parachutes, but I guffawed and left off the *ty*. Good lord, the Russian “is” and the Yankee “yes” sound the same! It was worth studying after all. Yankee *go home* or *pashli damoy*, it’s all the same, the occupation just a line on the map, an accent, a conjunction. Not the tanks, not the eight grades, not Misha bear, but a signature on my report card. The corporal answered in Hungarian: two vodkas, he said, and he put up two fingers, because there were two of them. He asked how I was doing in school. I resented his familiarity and I grumbled *noo-noo*, just like I had seen in *The Silent Don*. He said he had a son, too, Sergei, and he knows it’s not easy for us either, and what would we say to a Kalashnikov? Or how about this pistol? Like letting Billy Bunter loose in a sweet shop. He’ll throw in a cartridge-drum as a gift, and let’s drink to the good old days, the good old days being when I wasn’t even alive yet and our fathers were merrily killing each other off – I should drink to that with an enemy soldier who is talking to me in my own language. *Ege segedre*, the N.C.O. said, his *nazdarovye* sticking out a mile. *Egészségedre, ege segedre: to your health, to your ass*, close enough. Sergei is also called Sergei, like his son, but we can call him Seriosha. He hands me the bottle and quotes Petőfi to perfection. Hungary is poetry, he says. I tell him that a group of Hungarian scientists identified the skeleton of Sándor Petőfi in a Barguzin grave, but it turned out to be a woman. He says he’s not surprised. Russia is a big country. But he’s not pushy, au contraire, he’s eager to please. He’d rather not go home, he says. He likes it here, he likes the Hungarians, especially the women. And he winks at me, as if I was supposed to know what he’s talking about. I give him a Pavlovian wink back, because I know that’s what you do when you talk about women. We’d rather not bother him any longer, but he begs us to stay, still speaking Hungarian, of course. I’d better tread carefully, maybe he doesn’t even speak Russian. An Obi-Ugric double agent. We back away, waving. When we reach the door, he calls after us: how about some hand grenades into the bargain?

*Translated by Judith Sonabend*



**Péter Zilahy** (1970) has published a collection of poetry, *Statue Under a White Sheet Ready to Jump*, a collection of stories *Drei* and a dictionary novel *The Last Window Giraffe* which has been translated into 14 languages. The CD-ROM based on this book has been performed in over 20 countries. He has received several

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