

The European Union Prize for Literature

Twelve winning authors

2009



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Foreword by José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

I am happy to be able to launch this new European Union Prize for Contemporary Literature during the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. Literature combines imagination, creativity and innovation in a great and accessible way. The results of investments in literature and translation can not only be found between book covers themselves, but also on screen, on disks and other electronic devices all over the globe.

The book sector in Europe generates some 40 billion euros, making it one of our largest cultural industries and it will remain a strong sector of the future. Against the backdrop of the current economic difficulties we are experiencing, this makes it fundamental that we tap its full potential so that it helps us in our objective of creating more and better growth and jobs, and developing the right skills for the labour market of tomorrow.

Europeans have a great appetite for literature, including stories written by foreign authors, provided their work is translated and made accessible. This is proven by Henning Mankell, the Ambassador of the European Union Prize for Literature, who has sold more than 30 million copies of his novels worldwide and has been translated into 41 languages. Some of his detective novels were filmed for television, for example in the United Kingdom where Kenneth Branagh starred in a detective series as Inspector Wallander.

But besides the examples of European writers whose work is being translated, filmed or recorded, and reaching large numbers of people, there are all too many examples of authors in Europe, whose work is not being translated and who are not yet managing to reach readers in other countries. The aim of this Prize is therefore to tap into this potential, to highlight this talent, to stimulate translation and to get books and stories to cross national borders.

However, as well as playing a crucial role in our economies, literature is fundamental to us as individuals, and as human beings. For whatever way the author's story is told, its aim is to draw in the reader on an individual adventure, to experience other countries, other cultures, new ideas and to stimulate and open our minds. Writers are here to entertain us, but also to challenge us. Literature is a fundamental part of our cultural identities, and we must celebrate our diversity in this respect, and protect and promote it as we are doing with this Prize which also highlights the unity which the European Union embodies in the midst of great cultural variety.

This Prize is being organised in cooperation between the Commission and the entire European book sector – the European Booksellers Federation, the European Writers' Council and the Federation of European Publishers. I am extremely pleased by the way the Consortium has fulfilled its task and very grateful to all those involved in the selection of such an impressive collection of excellent authors.

In this brochure you will find information on the Prize winners and their work and on the Ambassador of the European Union Prize for Literature, Mr. Henning Mankell, the great man and wonderful writer who I thank for the role he has taken up to promote this Prize.



Foreword by Henning Mankell, Writer and Patron of the 2009 Prize

Some years ago the great Turkish author Yasar Kemal said that '[in] the end what will save mankind is our capacity for dialogue. We are a listening and a talking species. We have what other animals do not have, this wonderful capacity of being able to talk about our fears and dreams, our wishes and hopes, and to listen to others'. And I am convinced that he is right. The dialogue, and literature is dialogue, is perhaps more important today than ever before. In a world, so fragmented, where it is so hard to know what is important and what is not.

I think we often forget something of vital importance. The fact that the translator is one of the most important persons and professionals when we come to the question of literature and intercultural dialogue in the world today. We quite easily forget that they are the ones that build the bridges. They are the ones who open up the doors between languages and cultures, and, last but not least, between people. Moreover, quite often they are not paid a huge amount of money for their important work and their craft does not get the gratitude and the respect that it deserves. I owe a lot to my translators and that is why I think this prize is very important.

Therefore, I strongly believe that art and literature must be a meeting point between cultures, where it is possible for us to learn more about others and, hence, more about ourselves.



**Winning author**

Paulus Hochgatterer

Book awarded*Die Süße des Lebens (2006)*

The Sweetness of Life

Publishing house

Deuticke Verlag

Biography

Paulus Hochgatterer, born in 1961, lives as a writer and child therapist in Vienna. He has received various literary prizes and commendations, most recently the Elias Canetti Stipend of the town of Vienna, and is the author of several novels and story collections.

Synopsis

This novel takes us through the lives of a group of damaged people living in a pleasant and seemingly tranquil Austrian village. It's a village where nothing dramatic occurs, until one Christmas...

It's the Christmas holiday, the presents have been opened, and a six-year-old girl is drinking cocoa and playing Ludo with her grandfather when the doorbell rings. Her grandfather goes to the door, talks to someone there, gets his coat, and goes out.

When her grandfather doesn't come back, the little girl puts on her new green quilted jacket with a

squirrel on it and goes out to find him. She follows some footprints and finds her grandfather's body on the ramp that leads to their barn. There is no doubt it is his body - the clothes are his - but his head has been crushed to a bloody pulp. The little girl goes home and says nothing for the next few days.

However, the body is discovered the morning after the murder, and detective superintendent Ludwig Kovacs - a middle-aged divorcé who loves gazing at the stars, has a daughter he can't communicate with and is beginning a new relationship with a local woman - has to solve this case and the spate of animal killings - chickens, ducks, hamsters and 16 hives' worth of bees - which follow.

On a basic level, this novel is about a horrific crime and the investigation which follows. But it's really about far more than this. It's about harming children through trauma, violence and cruelty, and it's about the pain that parents and elders can cause. Hochgatterer pulls back the veil of normality and reveals the part of life going on beneath the surface.

Ich esse Kartoffelpüree mit gebackenen Zwiebelringen. Lore hat es gekocht. Es schmeckt ziemlich o.k., vor allem die Ringe. Trotzdem ist sie eine Polackenhure. Ich trinke lauwarmen Pfefferminztee. Auf dem Parkplatz fährt Gerstmann mit dem Schneeflug kreuz und quer und macht die Fläche frei. Es wird morgen wieder schneien, daher ist es völlig sinnlos. Gerstmann macht sinnlose Arbeit und bekommt dafür Geld von uns. Manchmal nimmt er sich einfach ein Auto und fährt damit in der Gegend rum. Er behauptet dann, das Auto muss eingefahren werden oder so. Vater sagt, nach Reiter, dem Verkaufschef, ist Gerstmann der wichtigste Mann in der Firma. Weil er den Überblick hat.

Daniel ist wieder da. Er liegt in seinem Zimmer und schläft. Früher hat er nicht so lange geschlafen. Er sagt, er muss auftanken. Er sagt, nach vier gefickten Monaten Entbehrung muss er erst einmal so richtig auftanken.

Die Klappe des Geschirrspülers klemmt. Ich lasse den Teller neben der Spüle stehen. Lore soll ihn wegräumen. Daniel sagt, sie betet zu Hause zu einem wundertätigen Heiligenbild, danach treibt sie es mit verschiedenen Männern. So machen es alle diese Polackenhuren. Außerdem haben sie alle fürchterliche Frisuren, meistens hellblond.

Ich nehme mir ein Stück Christstollen vom Teller. Er ist aus der Konditorei und schon eine Woche alt. Mutter sagt, es ist so viel Fett drin, dass er nicht verdirbt. Er schmeckt auch so. Ein wenig vielleicht nach Vanille. Das zweite Stück schmeckt praktisch nur noch nach Fett. Es ist ein Wunder, dass ich nicht mehr aus dem Leim gehe. Das behaupten alle, die gesehen haben, wie ich essen kann. Daniel sagt, wer innerlich genügend aufgeladen ist, kann essen, was er will, ohne dick zu werden. Wobei das mit Sicherheit nicht hundertprozentig stimmt, denn unserem Vater hängt zum Beispiel der Bauch über den Gürtel, und aufgeladener als er geht gar nicht.

Die Tür zu Daniels Zimmer ist geschlossen. Ich stelle mir vor, wie er auf dem Bett liegt, auf dem Bauch, und den rechten Arm um den Kopf gekrümmt hat. Irgendwann wird er mir alles erzählen, was drinnen passiert ist, hat er gesagt. Er sagt immer 'drinnen', und er sagt, er wird es merken, wenn ich so weit bin. Er hat in den letzten viereinhalb Monaten jedenfalls trainiert. Um das zu wissen, muss man nur seine Arme anschauen. 'Du bist ja schon wieder gewachsen', hat unsere Mutter gesagt, als er nach Hause kam. Er hat gar nichts gesagt.

Auf meinem Schreibtisch liegen zwei Dinge: mein Game Boy SP und dieser Zeitungsausschnitt. Genau genommen ist es die Kopie eines Zeitungsausschnittes, die mir Daniel gestern gegeben hat. 'KURIER', Seite vier. War es wirklich ein Unfall?, total fett gedruckt, mit rotem Filzstift unterstrichen. Darunter die Geschichte eines alten Mannes, der dadurch gestorben ist, dass ihm jemand den Kopf kaputtgemacht hat. Der Kopf des Mannes war bis zur Unkenntlichkeit

entstellt', steht da. Der Mann heißt Sebastian Wilfert und er wohnt angeblich in Richtung Mühlau, oberhalb der Stadt. Neben dem Text des Zeitungsartikels ist ein Bild des Mannes abgedruckt. Man kann allerdings nicht erkennen, wie er ausgesehen hat, denn das Gesicht ist rot übermalt, in dicken Kringeln. Es könnte irgendein Gesicht gewesen sein. 'Die Macht wird Besitz ergreifen von dir', hat Daniel gesagt, als er mir den Artikel in die Hand gedrückt hat. Ich hab im ersten Moment nicht gewusst, was er damit meint. Dann hat er mir eine geknallt. Das hilft bei mir immer. Das macht die Leitungen frei.

Die Autorennbahn steht vor meinem Bett. Eine riesige Acht, vierspurig. Mein Vater hat gesagt, in meinem Alter braucht man eine Autorennbahn. Er hat auch eine gehabt. Ich schalte ein und setze den gelben Wagen mit dem blauen Doppelstreifen in die Spur. Ich nehme den Controller und fahre eine Runde, ganz langsam. Wenn ich ehrlich bin, schießt es mich ziemlich an. Eine Runde in F-Zero GX, Devil's Dungeon zum Beispiel, mit dem Blue Falcon, bringt es tausendmal mehr. Wenn ich das meinem Vater sage, sagt er nur: zwei Wochen CV, und CV heißt Computerverbot. Wenn ich ihm dann noch sage, ein Gamecube ist eine Konsole und kein Computer, bekommt er die Pupille und es gibt leichte KV. KV heißt Körperverletzung, das habe ich von Daniel und ich sage es keinem anderen.

Ich zische ab, gehe knapp vor der Kurve mit dem Tempo zurück und gebe unmittelbar am Kurvenscheitel wieder Vollgas. Wenn du nicht wirklich total behindert bist, hast du das nach ein paar Stunden im Finger.

Wie geht einem alten Mann drei Tage nach Weihnachten der Kopf kaputt? Alte Leute rutschen aus und brechen sich den Oberschenkel, o.k., und Gartenbesitzer greifen in den Häcksler, weil sich die Zweige vom Fliederstrauch verklemmt haben, und schon ist die Hand ein Matschkumpen - aber der Kopf?

So in die Kurve hineinfetzen, dass das Heck richtig wegbricht, aber der Wagen trotzdem in der Spur bleibt, das ist die Kunst. Am Anfang gibt's natürlich einen Überschlag nach dem anderen, und da stehen sie dann und sagen: In kürzester Zeit wirst du sämtliche Autos ruiniert haben! Und: Ich hätte es ja wissen müssen - warum solltest du dich plötzlich anders verhalten als sonst?! Und du merkst, wie sie dir die Sache nur deswegen nicht auf der Stelle wieder wegnehmen, weil Weihnachten ist.

Ich wette, die Leute gehen zu diesem Haus und wollen Leiche schauen. Ein jeder will diesen Kopf sehen, der keiner mehr ist, aber da ist alles abgesperrt und die Polizei lässt niemanden hin. Irgendeiner regt sich bestimmt auf und sagt einen Scheiß wie: Die Öffentlichkeit hat ein Recht auf Information!, und dabei stellt er sich dieses rote Matschding vor und wie vielleicht ein Stück

Zahnprothese herausragt.

Ich setze den blauen Wagen mit dem weißen Stern in die dritte Spur und nehme den Controller dazu in die linke Hand. Ich bin ein hoffnungsloser Rechtshänder, daher dauert es genau eine halbe Runde, bis es den Blauen raushaut. Da er mein Lieblingsauto ist, werde ich ein wenig zornig. Autos rein, Vollgas, zack! Salto mortale! Noch einmal. Und noch einmal.

Dann steht Daniel in der Tür. Er hat die Kapuze von seinem grauen Pulli in die Stirn gezogen. Das hat er sich in letzter Zeit so angewöhnt. Er geht auf mich zu und knallt mir eine. Es ist o. k.; ich hab vermutlich einen Höllenlärm gemacht. 'Hast du den Artikel gelesen?', fragt er. 'Ja', sage ich.

'Hast du dir alles eingepägt?'

'Ich denke, schon.'

Er knallt mir noch eine, eine leichte diesmal. 'Ich bin dein Imperator', sagt er, 'und du bist mein Geschöpf.'

Ich sage gar nichts. Ich atme wie Darth Vader.

* *
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Kapitel 8

Ich schlafe nur noch in meinem schwarzen Umhang. Die Maske liegt neben dem Bett auf dem Boden. Daniel hat mir die Sachen geschenkt. Er sagt, sie haben eine Menge Geld gekostet, aber er hat unerschöpfliche Reserven. Unsere Mutter meint, er klaut wahrscheinlich, aber beweisen kann sie es nicht, und unser Vater sagt, wenn er ihn dabei erwischt, hackt er ihm die Hand ab. Unser Vater ist der größte Autohändler weit und breit und verkauft Jaguars und Rolls Royce und Range Rovers, und einmal hat er bei einer Jagd einem anderen ins Bein geschossen, aber das war ein Unfall. Unlängst hat er dem jungen Stuchlik einen Dodge Viper verkauft. Dabei hat er den ärgsten Schnitt seines Lebens gemacht, obwohl er ihm zwölf Prozent nachgelassen hat. Er ist im Wohnzimmer gesessen und hat die ganze Zeit vor Lachen gebrüllt. Daniel sagt, wenn unser Vater stirbt, wird er den Laden übernehmen, aber nur ganz kurz, und dann wird er ihn verkaufen und ein Schweinegeld dafür kriegen.

Im Haus ist es total still. Das ist am Sonntagvormittag immer so. Wenn ich aus meinem Fenster schaue, sehe ich das Dach der Montagehalle, darüber diesen Hügel, der aussieht wie das spitze Ende einer Zitrone, und noch einmal darüber den Himmel.



Ich gehe in die Speisekammer und schneide mir ein Stück von dem Marmorkuchen ab, den unsere Mutter gestern aus der Konditorei gebracht hat. Sie selbst kann nicht kochen oder backen oder so. Sie sagt, ihre eigene Mutter war ein Versager und hat ihr das nie beigebracht. Eigentlich würde ich mir gerne einen Kakao machen, aber da geht dann bestimmt etwas schief und alle wachen auf, also lasse ich es bleiben.

Der Kühlschrank in der Küche brummt. Wenn niemand anderer da ist, bleibe ich einfach stehen und warte, bis er wieder aufhört. Ich schaue dabei dem roten Sekundenzeiger der Wanduhr nach. Drei Minuten und einundzwanzig Sekunden. Nicht einmal so lange wie eine kleine Schulpause. Und schon ist alles wieder optimal kalt, das Mineralwasser und die Milch und die Weihnachtswurst mit dem Tannenbäumchen oder der Glocke auf der Schnittfläche. Daniel sagt, drinnen hat es diese Wurst auch gegeben, an den allerletzten Tagen, und eigentlich findet er sie grässlich, denn in Wahrheit ist sie stinknormale minderwertige Extrawurst, nur dass die Bäumchen oder Glocken dunkler eingefärbt sind als das Drumherum. Daniel sagt, geschmacklich gibt es keinen Unterschied zwischen den hellen und den dunklen Teilen.

Meine Kleider sind vorbereitet. Die Handschuhe, das Stirnband. Auch die Stiefel im Vorzimmer. Den Umhang trage ich unter der Jacke. Ich habe einen Auftrag.

Daniel hat mir noch etwas geschenkt. Es ist schwer. Ich versuche es in den Hosenbund zu stecken, doch das geht nicht. Ich nehme daher meinen Rucksack.

Daniel hat gesagt, ich darf mir das erste Ziel aussuchen. Es ist eine Probe. Der Vater braucht auch einige Zeit, bis er dort angekommen ist, wo er hingehört. Daniel sagt, erst wenn man die Sachen tut, weiß man, dass man sie kann. Er sagt, erst wenn man etwas kann, kann man sich auch wehren, und er sagt, das ist das Einzige, das sich im Leben wirklich lohnt: sich zu wehren.

Es ist halbhell und kalt. Das Erste, was passiert, ist, dass mir die Reithbauer mit ihrem ausgefressenen Collie-Mischling über den Weg läuft. Dieses absolut angeschissene Gesicht und dann zwangsläufig die Frage: 'Na, wo gehst du denn schon hin in aller Herrgottsfrühe?' Ich lächle wie C3PO und sage: 'In die Kirche', und sie sagt: 'Stimmt, es ist Sonntag, da bist du aber früh dran', und ich sage: 'Vorher ist eine Seelenmesse', und sie fragt: 'Für wen?', und ich sage: 'Ich weiß nicht, für wen.'

Ich gehe die Ettrichgasse nach vorne bis zum Zeitungskiosk. Die dunkelgrünen Rollläden sind herabgezogen. Ich biege in die Lorenzgasse ein. Rolands Haus erkennt man ganz leicht an diesem roten Postkasten, der aussieht wie die Postkästen in amerikanischen Filmen. Roland behauptet, sein Vater ist früher einmal mit dem Motorrad durch Amerika gefahren, von daher kommt der Postkasten. Ich glaube ihm kein Wort, aber das ist jetzt egal. Roland ist eine verlogene



Drecksau, das weiß ich seit der Kino-Geschichte. Daniel sagt, wenn dich einer anlügt, dann haust du ihm entweder gleich eine in die Fresse oder du erklärst ihn innerlich für tot, das hilft auch. Momentan ist Roland mit seinen Eltern und seiner unnötigen Schwester jedenfalls im Zillertal Ski fahren und das ist genauso gut. Seine Großmutter, die auf das Haus schaut, wohnt in Mühlau, und da ich ihr Auto nirgendwo sehe, wird sie auch nicht da sein.

Über einen Fußweg, der zwischen dem zweit- und drittnächsten Haus verläuft, gelange ich auf die Rückseite der Siedlung. Ich gehe in umgekehrter Richtung den Zaun entlang und klettere bei einem alten Kirschbaum drüber. Ich habe einen Auftrag. Daniel sagt, wenn man sich nicht wehrt gegen dieses Schwulen- und Lesben- und Kanakenpack, wird man eingesackt. Er weiß das auch von drinnen, sagt er und außerdem sagt er, dass derjenige, der sich wehrt, zuallererst ein Zeichen setzen muss.

Das Biotop ist zugeschnitten, das Schilf daneben beinahe zur Gänze geknickt. An einer der Rosenkugeln fehlt ein Stück, zirka so groß wie meine Handfläche. Roland hat es mit seiner Steinschleuder herausgeschossen, aber das weiß niemand außer mir. Ein ziemlich genialer Streifschuss übrigens, jeder andere hätte die Kugel völlig zerstört.

Der Schlüssel zum Gartenschuppen liegt unter einer alten Ziegelplatte oben auf dem Holzstoß. Jeder Trottel würde ihn dort finden.

Die Kaninchen und Meerschweinchen hüpfen in ihren Käfigboxen nervös hin und her, als ich eintrete. Ich mache die Tür hinter mir zu und setze mich auf einen alten Gartenstuhl. Ich erzähle ihnen die Geschichte von Anakin Skywalker, der zu Darth Vader wird, und wie er da nach dem Kampf mit Obi-Wan auf dem Lavahang liegt und nichts mehr hat, keinen Arm und keine Beine und keinen Atem und auf und auf nur noch verbrannte Haut, und wie dann der Imperator kommt und ihm ein neues Gesicht gibt. Die Tiere beruhigen sich, während ich spreche. Alle hören mir zu.

Zwölf Kaninchen, fünf schwarz-weiß gefleckt, zwei weiß mit roten Augen, eines weiß mit blauen Augen, eines schwarz mit weißem Brustfleck, drei grau. Sieben Meerschweinchen, fünf glatt, zwei gewirbelt. Das weiße Kaninchen mit den blauen Augen heißt Kylie Minogue. Rolands Schwester hat es so getauft.

Ich öffne den Rucksack. Ich stelle das Ding, das Daniel mir geschenkt hat, mit dem Kopf nach unten auf den Boden. Es ist ein Fausthammer. Er hat einen Holzstiel mit ovalem Querschnitt.

Ich setze die Darth-Vader-Maske auf. Ich atme wie er. Danach öffne ich die Meerschweinchenbox und nehme eins der Tiere heraus. Es ist grau mit einem dunkelbraunen Hinterteil. Es quietscht nicht. Es schaut mich nicht einmal an.



I'm eating mashed potatoes with fried onion rings. Lore cooked it. It tastes alright, especially the onion rings. She's still a Polish whore all the same. I'm drinking lukewarm peppermint tea. Gerstmann is going back and forth across the car park, clearing it with the snow plough. It's pointless as it's going to snow again tomorrow. Gerstmann does pointless work and we pay him for it. Sometimes he just takes one of the cars and goes for a spin. Then he comes up with some excuse such as the car's got to have a run around. Dad says that Gerstmann is the most important man in the company after Reiter, head of sales. Because he knows everything that's going on.

Daniel's back. He's lying down in his room, asleep. He never used to sleep so much. He says he's got to catch up. He says that after four shitty months of being deprived he really needs to catch up.

The dishwasher door is jammed. I leave the plate next to the dishwasher. Lore will clear it away. Daniel says that at home she prays to a picture of a saint who worked miracles, and then she does it with various men. Just like all those Polish whores. They've all got shocking hairstyles, too, mostly platinum blonde.

I help myself to a slice of Christmas stollen from the plate. It's from the cake shop and a week old already. Mum says that there's so much fat in it that it won't go stale. It tastes like it, too. Maybe a touch of vanilla. The second slice tastes of almost nothing but fat. It's a miracle that I'm not getting porkier. That's what everyone says who's seen me eat. Daniel says that people who are highly strung can eat what they like without getting fat. But that can't be true, as our dad's tummy hangs over his belt and they don't come more highly strung than him.

The door to Daniel's room is closed. I imagine him lying there on the bed, on his stomach, his right arm wrapped around his head. He said that sometime he'd tell me what happened inside. He always says 'inside' and he says he'll know when I'm ready. Anyhow, he's been training for the last four and a half months. You only have to look at his arms to see that. 'You've grown again,' our mum said when he came home. He didn't say a word.

Two things are on my desk: my Game Boy S.P. and this newspaper cutting. In fact it's a copy of a newspaper cutting that Daniel gave me. *Kurier*, page four. 'Was It Really an Accident?' in thick black letters, underlined in red felt-tip. Under the headline, the story of an old man who died when someone crushed his head. 'The man's head was so badly mutilated as to be unrecognisable,' it says. The man's name was Sebastian Wilfert and apparently he lived above the town, towards Mühlau. There's a photo of the man next to the article, but you can't see what he looked like because red circles have been scribbled all over the face. It could have been anybody's face. 'The Force is going to take control of you,' Daniel said when he gave me the article. To begin with I



didn't understand what he meant by that. Then he whacked me. That always helps. It unblocks everything inside me.

The racetrack is beside my bed. A huge figure of eight, with four lanes. My dad said that you need a racetrack at my age. He had one, too. I switch it on and put the yellow car with the blue double stripe into the groove. I take the controller and do a lap, quite slowly. I find it pretty crap, to be honest. A lap of F-Zero G.X., Devil's Dungeon for example, in the Blue Falcon, is way more exciting. If I tell my dad that, he just says: a fortnight's C.B., C.B. meaning computer ban. If I then tell him that a Gamecube is a console not a computer, his eyes go funny and there's a little bit of B.H., B.H. meaning bodily harm. Daniel administers it to me and I don't tell anybody about it.

I zoom off, cut my speed just before the bend and then go full throttle again immediately out of it. If you're not a total spastic you can master it in a few hours.

How can an old man's head get crushed at Christmas time? O.K., old people slip and break their hips, and gardeners reach down into the shredder because a few lilac branches have got stuck, and their hands become instant sludge. But someone's *head*?

Tear into the corner so that the back swings right out but the car stays in the groove - that's the art of it. Of course, to begin with you're always coming off, and they stand there saying: you'll ruin all the cars in no time. And: I should have known it - why should you suddenly behave differently from normal? And you can see that the only reason they don't take it straight back from you is that it's Christmas.

I bet that people go to that house wanting to see the body. Each one of them wants to see the head which isn't a head any more, but everything's been sealed off and the police are not letting anybody in. Someone, no doubt, gets all excited and says some crap like, 'The public has a right to know!' while imagining this red pile of sludge with perhaps a false tooth sticking out of it.

I put the blue car with the white star in the third lane and take the controller in my left hand. I'm so hopelessly right-handed that it takes precisely half a lap before the blue car comes flying off. I'm a bit gutted because it's my favourite car. Cars on, full throttle, go! 360 degree flip! Again. And again.

Now Daniel's standing in the doorway. The hood of his grey top is pulled down over his head. He's started doing that recently. He comes over and whacks me. It's O.K.; I expect I made a heck of a racket.

'Have you read the article?' he asks.

'Yes,' I say.

'Have you memorised all of it?'



'I think so.'

He hits me again, quite gently this time. 'I am your Emperor,' he says, 'and you are my creation.'

I say nothing. I breathe like Darth Vader.

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Chapter 8

I'm sleeping just in my black cloak. The mask is on the floor next to the bed. They were presents from Daniel. He said they cost a load of money, but he has inexhaustible reserves. Our mother reckons he must be stealing, but she can't prove anything; and our father says that if he catches him nicking anything, he'll chop his hand off. Our father's the biggest car dealer in the area. He sells Jaguars, Rolls Royces and Range Rovers, and once he shot somebody in the leg while out hunting, but it was an accident. Not long ago he sold young Stuchlik a Dodge Viper. He made the worst profit of his life on this deal, although he did give him a 12 per cent discount. He sat in the sitting room and roared with laughter the whole time. Daniel says that if our father dies he's going to take over the business, but only for a short time, because then he's going to sell it for shedloads of money.

It's silent in the house. It's always like this on Sunday mornings. If I look out of my window I can see the roof of the assembly hangar, above it the hill that looks like the pointy end of a lemon, and further above that the sky.

I go into the larder and cut myself a slice of the marble cake that our mother got from the shop yesterday. She can't cook or bake herself. She says that her own mother was a failure and never taught her how to do it. I really want to make myself a hot chocolate, but something's bound to go wrong and I'd wake everybody in the house, so I leave it.

The fridge in the kitchen is buzzing. If no-one else is around I just stay there until it stops again. I watch the red second hand of the clock on the wall. Three minutes and twenty-one seconds. Not even as long as school break. And then everything is at the right temperature again: the mineral water and the milk and the Christmas salami with the mini Christmas tree or bell pattern inside. Daniel says they were fed this salami inside, on his last few days, and he thinks it's horrid because it's the same bog-standard, low-quality Extrawurst; it's just that the mini trees or



bells are darker than the bits around them. Daniel says that there's no difference in taste between the light bits and dark bits.

My clothes are ready. The gloves, the headband. And my boots in the hall, too. I'm wearing the cloak under my coat. I've got a mission.

Daniel gave me another present. It's heavy. I try to put it in my waistband, but it won't go. So I take my rucksack.

Daniel said I can choose the first target. It's a practice. Vader also needed a bit of time to get where he is. Daniel says that you don't know you can do something until you've tried. He says that it's only when you can do things that you can defend yourself, and he says that's the only important thing in life: to be able to fight.

It's not yet fully light and it's cold. The first thing that happens is that I bump into Frau Reithbauer with her really fat half-breed collie. That fuck-awful face and then the inevitable question: 'Where on earth are you going at this ungodly hour?' I smile like C-3PO and say, 'To church,' and she says, 'Well, it is Sunday, but you're rather early,' and I say, 'There's a requiem mass beforehand,' and she asks, 'For whom?' and I say, 'I don't know.'

I go along Ettrichgasse as far as the newspaper kiosk. The dark-green shutters are pulled down. I turn into Lorenzgasse. You can easily spot Roland's house by the red postbox which looks like the postboxes in American films. Roland says his dad once drove through America on a motorbike, that's where they got the postbox. I don't believe him but it doesn't matter now. Roland's a useless bastard, I've known that since the cinema story. Daniel says that when someone lies to you, you either smash his face in or you pronounce him dead in your mind - that helps too. Right now Roland is skiing in the Zillertal with his parents and his unnecessary sister, and that's just as good. His granny, who's looking after the house, lives in Mühlau and, as I can't see her car anywhere, she won't be there.

A footpath that runs between the second and third house takes me to the back of the estate. I go the other way along the fence and climb over with the help of an old cherry tree. Daniel says that if you don't fight this bunch of lesbians, gays, and wogs then you've had it. It's intuition - that's how he knows it, he says, and he also says that if you want to fight then the very first thing you've got to do is to send the right signals.

The nature reserve is covered in snow; the reeds next to it are almost all broken. One of the ornamental balls is missing a piece as big as my hand. Roland knocked it out with his catapult, but no-one else knows that except me. A pretty brilliant shot to just graze it like that, anybody else would have destroyed the ball outright.

The key to the garden shed is under an old brick slab on the woodpile. Any old idiot could find it.

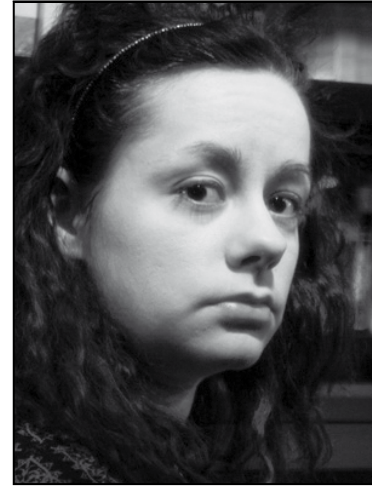
When I go in, the rabbits and guinea pigs hop around nervously in their cages. I shut the door behind me and sit on an old garden chair. I tell them the story of Anakin Skywalker who becomes Darth Vader, and how after the battle with Obi-Wan he's lying there on the lava bank, nothing left of him - no arms, no legs, no breath - just burnt skin, and how the Emperor comes and gives him a new face. The animals calm down while I'm talking. They all listen to me.

Twelve rabbits: five black and white, two white with red eyes, one white with blue eyes, one black with white on its chest, three grey. Seven guinea pigs: five with smooth coats, two curly ones. The white rabbit with the blue eyes is called Kylie Minogue. Roland's sister christened it.

I open the rucksack. I put the thing that Daniel gave me on the ground. It's a warhammer. It's got an oval wooden handle.

I put on the Darth Vader mask. I start breathing like him. Then I open the guinea pig cage and take out one of the animals. It's grey and dark-brown at the back. It doesn't squeal. It doesn't even look at me.

Published by MACLEHOSE PRESS, Quercus, London



Winning author
Mila Pavićević

Book awarded
Djevojčica od leda i druge bajke (2006)
Ice girl and other fairy tales

Publishing house
Naklada Bošković

Biography

Mila Pavićević was born in Dubrovnik on the 4 July 1988. She reads Comparative literature and Greek language and literature at the Zagreb University.

She received several literary awards for young writers in Croatia.

Synopsis

The book, entitled *Ice girl and other fairy tales* and consisting of 13 stories, is a clever combination of the miraculous and supernatural intertwined with the real. It's written in such a way that there is no obvious separation or contrast between the real and the invented, between possible and impossible.

BIJELI

Svaki put kada umre klaun, njegov crveni nos pretvori se u zvijezdu. (Sve one tvore zvijezde Velikog igrača koje se vidi samo s druge strane sjevera.) Dok mu nos svijetli u noći, besmrtni duh klauna otiđe u Zemlju Mjeseca i ondje se odmara od svojih šala...

Jednom davno, u nekoj pustinji, skitao se poprilično mlad i poprilično bezimen klaun. Nije imao kuću, čak ni onu koju bi nosio sa sobom. Sve što je imao, što mu je trebalo u pustinji, bila je svirala kojom je dozivao ptice i jedna velika košara u kojoj je čuvao svoju ne tako dobru publiku – velikog sivog mačka po imenu Auror.

Tumarao je taj bezimni klaun pustinjom iz dana u dan i tražio nekoga koga bi nasmijavao, nekoga čiji bi smijeh uistinu mogao čuti. Auror se nije znao smijati. Nije znao čak ni govoriti, a nije bio ni posve dobar prijatelj. Ptice, koje je klaun dozivao sviralom, bile su mu najbolja pustinjska publika. Činile su ga sretnim jer mu se često činilo da čuje dječji smijeh u njihovu cvrkutu.

I tako jednoga dana, dok je sjedio na svojoj omiljenoj dini i čekao da iziđe sunce, klaun je izvadio sviralu i počeo svirati svoju najljepšu melodiju u nadi da će ptice doći. Ali ptice tog dana nisu došle jer je bilo previše rano. Ptice uvijek dolaze sa suncem. Čak je i Auror još uvijek drijemao u svojoj košari. Samo se jedna šarena, ne posve zla zmija prikrala klaunu iza leđa da čuje njegovu svirku. Kada je stigao do najljepšeg dijela melodije, zmija ga je, sasvim slučajno, ugrizla i klaun je u trenu usnuo.

Ptice i dalje nisu dolazile, a Auror se nije pomaknuo iz svoje košare jer je bio odveć lijen. Zmija je otpuzala kao da se ništa nije dogodilo.

A klaun? Njegov crveni nos otišao je u zvijezde i sada tvori najsajniju u zvijezdu. Na pijesku je ostala ležati odjeća čije će boje s vremenom izbljedjeti od sunca.

U Zemlji Mjeseca od svojih šala odmara se besmrtni duh bezimenog klauna koji je tek sada... gle!... dobio ime – Bijeli.

TAMA

Jednom davno, posve davno, dok još nije postojala bitna razlika između dana i noći, u Zemlji Šapata živio je starac čije su jedino blago bile njegove tri kćeri. Bili su siromašni i živjeli su vrlo skromno u maloj kolibi na vrhu brda, daleko od prvog sela.

Bila je zima i bližio se rođendan sviju sestara. Starac nije imao novca i baš zato nije znao što bi im mogao darovati. Zaputio se u selo u nadi da će pronaći nešto što bi im mogao dati.



Putem je sreo staru vješticu i zamolio je za pomoć. Ona mu je obećala. Imala je samo dva poklona: srebrenu kutiju i zeleni prsten što ga iz stijene na vrhu brda izvadiše dva krilata orla. Oba dara vještica pokloni starcu. Jedino što je tražila zauzvrat bilo je obećanje da će ih starčeve kćeri dobro čuvati, ili će ih u protivnom stići strašna kazna. Starac obeća vješticu da će čuvati darove pa se otputi kući još tužniji jer je shvatio da svojoj najljepšoj kćeri, Tami, nema ništa pokloniti.

I tako, vraćajući se kući, zastao je kraj kamene rijeke i ondje našao malu kamenu jegulju. Budući da je jegulja izgledala jako lijepo, starac je odlučio ponijeti Tami. Došavši kući, svojoj najstarijoj kćeri pokloni srebrenu kutiju, a ona slegne ramenima. Svojoj srednjoj pokloni zeleni prsten, a ona se nevoljko zahvali. Tami pokloni kamenu jegulju, a ona se toliko razveseli da joj sestre odmah pozavidješe.

Jedne večeri dok je Tama spavala, zlobne sestre odluče ukrasti kamenu jegulju. To im je pošlo za rukom. Tada se počеше otimati oko plijena i tako im jegulja ispadne na pod i na mjestu oživi. Prestrašene sestre pobjegoše u svoje sobe, a jegulja odgmiže za njima.

Kako je prilično dugo bila okamenjena, jegulja bijaše vrlo gladna pa stade jesti sve redom. Pojede i srebrenu kutiju i zeleni prsten.

Stara vještica, koja je odmah saznala što se dogodilo, jer vještice uvijek nekako sve saznaju, bijaše zaista bijesna te odluči kazniti nemarne sestre istom onom prestrašnom kaznom koju starcu bijaše obećala.

Djevojke se pretvoriše u zrnca cementa na obali kamene rijeke. Kažu da će zauvijek tu ostati. A Tama? Ona od silne tuge za sestrama nestade, preseli se u nebo. Tako je, kažu, nastala ona svakodnevna pojava što je danas olako shvaćamo – tako je, kažu, nastala noć.

DJEVOJČICA OD LEDA

Jednom davno, posve davno, u jednom malom i sasvim nepoznatom kraljevstvu živjela je posve sama mala djevojčica od leda. Djevojčica nije imala roditelje, barem ih sama nije nikad upoznala. Nije imala ni prijatelje, bila je odviše hladna da bi se itko s njom igrao.

Živjela je na vrhu zvjezdane, snježne planine u malenoj snježnoj kućici. Svako jutro bezimena snježna djevojčica izlazila bi iz kućice i gledala sunce. Nije ga mogla previše gledati da se ne bi rastopila.

Na susjednoj planini živio je, pak, oholi kralj sa svojom obitelji: zlom kraljicom i njihovim jedinim sinom. Princ je bio mlad, pošten, lijep kao sunce. Bio je prava suprotnost svojih starih i ružnih roditelja. Jednog dana princ je pošao u šetnju i, kako to obično biva, sreo je djevojčicu.



Odmah se zaljubio: bila je tako bijela, a lijepa kao led. Iz dana u dan, kada bi sunce izlazilo, princ je dolazio gledati ledenu djevojčicu kako gleda sunce. U kraljevski se dvor vraćao neobično sretan. To je zasmatalo njegovim roditeljima pa su odlučili potražiti pomoć.

Otišli su do seoskog vrača, bezvrijednog i jadnog sluga. Vrač je bio sav siv kao miš, tanak kao prut, a zloća mu je nadirala iz krvavocrvenih očiju. Kada je vrač vidio kralja i kraljicu na svojim vratima, duboko se naklonio, onako kako to već čine sve ulizice. Ipak, to nije bio posve običan vrač. Znao je proreći istinu, i to na njemu svojstven način. Uzeo bi dvije glinene posude, jednu bi ispunio vinom, drugu mlijekom, i pretakao bi iz jedne posude u drugu dok u tekućini ne bi vidio istinu. I tako vrač uze obavljati svoju vradžbinu i proreče kralju i kraljici: 'Vaši problemi bit će riješeni. Ona koju zavolje vaš princ, prijateljica je konja.' Posve nezadovoljni odgovorom odoše kralj i kraljica natrag u dvor a da nisu shvatili ni riječi od onoga što im vrač prorekao.

Za to vrijeme bijaše pošao mladi princ svojoj ledenoj djevojčici kadli putem vidje čudnu spodobu, zakukuljenu, a sivu kao miš, s crvenim očima iz kojih je nadiralo neko svjetlo. Mladi princ bijaše premlad i neiskusna pa ne znađase prepoznati da ono svjetlo nije bilo ništa drugo nego zloća. I pristupi mladi princ toj spodobi. Ona mu se predstavi kao siromašni trgovački putnik koji prodaje čarobni napitak. Tako princ kupi napitak. (Iako nije vjerovao da je čaroban, želio je pomoći spodobi.) Čim je kupio malu tamnocrvenu bočicu, spodobu nestade. Budući da je princ bio vrlo ožednio, uzme gutljaj iz bočice i ... istog trenutka princ, lijep kao sunce, postade konj.

I tako je princ – konj lutao danima (i noćima) planinom, prestrašen i osamljen, dok jednog jutra nije vidio svoju malu ledenu djevojčicu kako gleda sunce. Prišao joj je (sada kada je bio konj, mogao joj je prići). Djevojčici se konj učinio toliko lijepim i ona pristade na igru s njime. Igrali su se čitav dan, ali eto nesreće! Kada je igra bila najljepša, okliznu se princu kopito i on na mjestu zdrobi malenu djevojčicu. Nato konj preneraženo krikne i otrči da se više nikad ne vrati.

Za njim je uskoro došla i Smrt. Bila je posve bijela, poput snijega. Kleknula je kraj razasutih krhotina ledene djevojčice, uzela ih i odnijela ih u svoj podzemni kraljevski dvor a da nitko nije znao da je djevojčica i postojala.

I tako su se ljudi, prolazeći, pitali: 'Tko živi u onoj maloj snježnoj kućici na vrhu brda?' Sve dok im se jednom nije vratila jeka: 'Nitko! Bilo je to previše davno!'

Translated from the Croatian by Nikola Đuretić

WHITE CLOWN

Every time a clown dies, his red nose turns into a star. (All of those stars make up the Great Player constellation that can be seen only from the other side of the North.) While his nose is burning bright in the night, the immortal spirit of the clown goes to the Land of the Moon, where it rests from his jokes...

Once upon a time, somewhere in a desert, a fairly young and rather unknown clown was wandering about. He had no house, not even one he could carry around with him. All he had, all he ever needed in the desert, was a flute he used to call the birds and a large basket in which he kept his not-so-good audience – one large grey tomcat named Auror.

From day to day, this nameless clown roamed the desert looking for someone whom he could make laugh, someone whose laughter he could really hear. Auror, you see, did not know how to laugh. He did not even know how to speak and, as far as friends go, he was not one of the best. So, the birds that the clown would summon with his flute were his best audience in the desert. They made him happy because he often thought he could hear children's laughter in their chirping.

And so, one morning, as he was sitting on his favourite sand dune, waiting for the sun to come up, the clown took out his flute and started to play his most beautiful melody, hoping the birds would come. But the birds did not come on that day, for it was too early. The birds always came with the sun. Even Auror was still dozing in his basket. Only one colourful and not terribly nasty snake crept up to the clown to listen to his playing. When he reached the most beautiful part of the tune, the snake accidentally bit him and the clown instantly fell asleep.

The birds were still not coming and Auror was not moving in his basket, for he was too lazy. And the snake went away as though nothing had happened.

And what happened to the clown? His red nose flew up to the stars and there it is today, the brightest star in the entire constellation. Left lying on the sand were his clothes, whose colours would fade in the sun with time.

And in the Land of the Moon, resting from his jokes, is the immortal spirit of the nameless clown who only now... what do you know!... has been given a name – White Clown.

DARKNESS

Long ago, a very long time ago, when there was still not much difference between day and night, an old man, whose three daughters were his only treasure, lived in the Land of Whispers. They were poor and lived a modest life in a cottage on top of the mountain, far away from the nearest village.

It was wintertime and the birthday of all three sisters was approaching. The old man had no money and did not know what to give them as presents. He went to the village hoping to find something for their birthday. On the way he met an old witch and asked her for help, which she promised to give him. But she had only two presents: a silver box and a green ring taken out of a rock on top of the mountain by two flying eagles. The witch gave both presents to the old man. The only thing she asked in return was that the old man promise her his daughters would cherish the presents and look after them; otherwise, they would suffer a terrible punishment. The old man promised the witch they would do so and went home even sadder, for he realised he had no present for his most beautiful daughter – Darkness.

And so, returning home, he stopped by a stony river where he found a small eel made of stone. The eel was very beautiful and the old man decided to take it home and give it to Darkness. Upon arriving home, he gave the silver box to his oldest daughter, but she just shrugged her shoulders. To his middle daughter he gave the green ring, but she thanked him grudgingly. And he gave the stony eel to Darkness, who was so happy that her sisters immediately became envious.

One evening as Darkness was having a nap, her wicked sisters decided to steal the stony eel. They succeeded in doing so. But then they started fighting over it and they dropped the eel on the floor. That very instant the eel came to life. Frightened, the two sisters ran into their rooms with the eel crawling after them.

Since the eel had been petrified for quite some time, it was very hungry, so it started eating everything in sight. It even gobbled up the silver box and the green ring.

The old witch, who had known straight away what had happened - for witches always have a way of finding out these things - was really furious, and she decided to punish the reckless sisters, just as she had warned the old man.

The girls turned into grains of cement on the banks of the stony river. People say they will stay there forever. And what about Darkness? Terribly saddened by what had happened to her sisters, she just disappeared. She went up to the heavens. And that is how something we see every day and take for granted – darkness – came about. That, they say, is how night came to be.

**ICE GIRL**

Once upon a time, a long time ago, in a small and completely unknown kingdom, a little ice girl lived all alone. The girl did not have parents, that is, she never got to know them. She did not have any friends either; she was too cold for anyone to play with her.

The girl lived on top of a starry, snowy mountain in a small house made of snow. Every morning the nameless snowy girl would come out of the house and watch the sun. She couldn't watch it too long, for she would melt.

On the neighbouring mountain lived an arrogant king with his family: an evil queen and their only son. The prince was young and honest and as beautiful as the sun. He was the total opposite of his old and ugly parents. One day the prince went for a walk and, as usually happens in life, he met the girl. He fell in love on the spot: she was very white and as beautiful as ice. For days, when the sun was rising, the prince would come to watch the girl observing the sun. He would return to the palace unusually happy. His parents didn't like that and they decided to look for help.

They visited the village sorcerer, a poor and useless servant. The sorcerer was all grey like a mouse, thin as a stick, and evil darted out from his bloodshot eyes. When the sorcerer saw the king and queen standing at his door, he made a low bow like all flatterers do. Nevertheless, he was not an ordinary sorcerer. He knew how to divine the truth and did it in his own peculiar way. He would take two clay pots, fill one with wine and the other with milk, and he would pour the liquid from one pot into the other until he could see the truth in the liquid. And so the sorcerer started performing his sorcery and said to the king and queen: 'Your problems will be solved. She who is loved by your prince is the friend of horses.' Utterly unsatisfied with his advice, the king and queen went back to their palace without understanding a word of what the sorcerer had said.

In the meantime, the young prince went to see his ice girl but met a strange creature on his way, all shrouded and grey as a mouse with red eyes that were oozing some strange light. The young prince was too young and inexperienced, unable to recognise that this strange light was nothing but wickedness. So the young prince approached this creature, who said he was a poor travelling salesman selling magic potions. And thus the young prince bought one of these potions (although he did not believe the potion was magic, he wanted to help the creature). As soon as he purchased the small dark red bottle, the creature disappeared. The prince was very thirsty, so he took a sip from the bottle and... instantly, the prince, who was as beautiful as the sun, turned into a horse.



Thus, the prince-horse wandered up and down the mountain for days (and nights), frightened and lonely, until one morning he saw his small ice girl observing the sun. He came up to her (now that he was a horse he could approach her). The girl thought the horse was very beautiful and she agreed to play with him. They played the whole day long, but then misfortune struck! When their play was at its peak, the prince's hoof slipped and he crushed the little girl. He screamed in panic and ran away, never to return.

Soon after that, Death came. She was completely white, like the snow. She knelt next to the strewn parts of the ice girl, collected them and took them to her underworld palace, with no one even knowing that the ice girl had ever existed.

And so the people who passed by would wonder: 'Who lives in that small house made of snow on top of the mountain?' Until one day, back came the echo: 'No one! It was all too long ago!'

**Winning author**

Emmanuelle Pagano

Book awarded*Les Adolescents troglodytes (2007)*

The Cave teenagers

Publishing house

Editions P.O.L

Biography

Emmanuelle Pagano was born in Aveyron in September 1969. Today she lives in Ardèche, with her three children, born in April 1991, September 1995 and May 2003. She graduated in Fine Arts, and has conducted university research in the field of aesthetics in film and multimedia.

Synopsis

Adèle, the narrator and main protagonist of *The Cave teenagers*, was born with a male body but subsequently underwent surgery to become the woman she now is. The story relates how she returns to her home region and takes a job driving the local school bus. Two lakes are mentioned in the extract. One is an artificial lake under which now lies the farm where Adèle was born and spent her childhood, with her parents and her brother Axel. The other is a natural, volcanic lake where she often goes to spend time on her own. It is beside this lake that the extract opens.

Près du lac il y a un terre-plein où je peux me garer. Au bord un pommier. Les pommes pourries au sol passent sous les roues, s'y collent écrasées et molles. Je descends, j'en ramasse deux, mûres à point. Le jour se place, on y voit à peine, c'est bientôt l'heure, mais j'ai le temps de descendre. De cet espace, mon parking, on ne voit pas l'eau, mais le lac si, on voit bien que les arbres sont en creux, sont en vide au milieu. Les matins tôt le vide est plein de brumes. C'est le trou du lac, le lac, ma pause, ma mer, mon temps.

Je fais souvent cette pause entre mes trajets, avant, après.

On n'est pas vraiment en automne comme les pommes ne le savent pas, on est juste au début de septembre, le jour est encore matinal, mais la rentrée fait tomber des feuilles, ça tout le monde peut le voir, et mes chaussures sont toutes humides d'aube sur ce parking au-dessus de la forêt qui entoure le lac.

Bientôt le jour se fera très en retard, et je ne verrai mes grands que dans leur nuit.

Je m'approche des arbres plus bas, de cette doline d'embrun ou de rien. Je prends le sentier, ce bout de ligne que j'ai tracé toute seule, à force de passer patiemment, ou sans attendre, nerveuse, l'envie d'arriver vite à travers les ramures et le poudrin. Il descend presque insensiblement, avec des griffes de branches, des froids humides, des odeurs d'eaux, et certains jours des sons lointains de castors, comme à la rivière quand j'étais tout petit. Des frottements qui s'échappent à mes pas, à ma mémoire.

Au bout de mon chemin il y a un bouleau pleureur, long, vieux, courbe, et sous lui mon abri, ovale, étroit, mais confortable. Je m'assois mais le lac, bavant froid entre ses racines, tout gris ou noir, est si bruyant malgré le calme en moi, malgré nos solitudes.

Il n'est jamais tranquille ce lac, c'est un cratère de maar sourd, aveugle aussi, un trou gris, au ressac sonore millénaire. Moins il y voit, moins on y voit, plus il fait son bordel, caverneux.

Le lac de la ferme du fond est tellement plus calme.

Au sol de mon bouleau le lac fait son bruit, permanent, un bruit qui me prend souvent bien avant d'arriver. Il me guide dans le jour encore tout maigre. Un bruit bas et plein, comme si le volcan mort ne l'était pas vraiment.

Je jouais souvent à mourir, quand j'étais petit garçon, je voulais qu'on me pleure. Je me

pleurais tout seul, souvent près d'un arbre, dessous ou dessus, comme aujourd'hui dans mon bouleau pleureur, cachée par ses branches fines.

Je mange une des pommes, assise dans mon arbre femelle, les hanches pleines d'eau. Je dis ça, mais je n'ai jamais regardé. Je n'ai jamais pris de fleur de bouleau dans mes doigts pour l'ouvrir et savoir, d'ailleurs je suis pas la seule, je me demande bien qui s'en préoccupe, du sexe des arbres. Je crois bien que le bouleau, c'est pas comme le saule, il a deux sexes, les fleurs femelles sont plus en haut, sur des rameaux élevés. Je lève les yeux, mais je ne vois rien, ce n'est ni la saison ni le moment. Je ne vois rien qu'une pluie de ramures ternes, je ne vois que du blanc presque bleu, du bleu pâle sale et plongé dans sa tourbière. Il est plus pleureur encore, plus courbe et traînant qu'un saule. J'écarte les ramilles qui m'empêchent de voir la vase à mes pieds. Un mouvement lourd nous borde, et très vite ce sont les vagues profondes. Le lac absorbe toute la lumière, ne renvoie rien, ni regard ni visage, ni jour ou nuage. Je lance mon trognon, et je ne vois pas je ne devine même pas où il retombe. Mon bouleau est bleu comme tous les arbres autour du lac. Peu d'orangé, même en automne, à cause de la présence dominante, imposante, des conifères, pas de vert non plus en été à cause de la baille grise, presque noire, du volcan plein de vide d'eau. Pas de clarté ou si peu en hiver. Ici c'est mon espace bleu sombre. Les arbres ne sont pas traversés par les saisons, à peine noués par le temps et la flotte à force de décennies. Mon bouleau comme le reste est bleu, sali d'hématomes, sans feuille il prend le marine des épiceas, sans âge il prend la forme de l'eau, des larmes, se redresse un peu, avec les feuilles glabres, douces, il se fait border de mousses outremer, mais le lac ne déborde que sur lui-même, et mon bouleau se lave au même endroit à l'eau, à l'air du lac, et moi je suis assise en dessous. À l'étroit. Ma pause.

Je m'arrête là, parce que j'ai besoin du lac et de l'ombre pour me souvenir, pleurnicher sur ma mémoire comme une vieille. La mémoire, il faut la laver et la remplir tous les jours.

Je me cachais, j'allais chercher les coins comme ça, petit garçon, pour trier mes émotions, et ma mère criait mon nom tout près sans me voir, sa voix s'épaississait avant de s'éloigner, revenir, repartir, et finir assez loin pour que je puisse me mettre enfin à penser.

Dans les bois, derrière la voix de ma mère, il y a des années, j'ai entendu une cloche tout près de ma cachette. Je me suis demandé ce qu'elle foutait là cette vache, si loin des premiers prés. J'ai cherché un peu en écartant les arbustes. Mais je cherchais trop haut. Soudain je l'ai vue, allongée, sa masse écrasante, vautreée dans les feuilles humides et fragiles, et de les voir sortir de là, de son corps énorme en tas sur la terre gonflée d'eau, ça me faisait mal. Mais c'était la vache la

plus douloureuse de nous. C'était pas une des nôtres, ni des autres, aucune de toutes les vaches que je connaissais, et j'en connaissais vraiment beaucoup, des dizaines. Elle était blanche, sale, et soufflante, pleine de crampes, bruyante. Elle a voulu se lever à cause de moi mais j'ai su la calmer en posant ma main à côté de sa douleur. Appuyer juste ce qu'il faut. Les pieds tendus du veau dépassaient, contraints. La peau de la poche déchirée pendait vide. Trop tard, alors j'ai tiré comme un sourd (sourd à la voix encore présente de ma mère), avec toute ma force de gosse de huit ou neuf ans pour l'aider à vider son veau mort. Il était énorme, comme lourd, trop gros, un veau de hanches solides, un veau de concours. Mes bras glissaient de sang et de boue, de feuilles molles mortes. Je ne suis pas arrivé à le sortir. J'ai voulu courir prévenir quelqu'un, mais non, je n'étais pas sûr d'avoir bien fait. Je n'ai prévenu personne, j'entendais à nouveau mon prénom dans la voix de ma mère et j'ai eu peur de me faire engueuler. Je suis revenu pas trop vite vers la ferme, en essayant de diluer l'émotion qui me tressait des frissons de partout. J'aurais pu chiper la vèleuse, mais je ne savais pas m'en servir et transporter ce truc immense, plus haut que moi, c'était pas possible. Je réfléchissais, je traînais.

Ma mère avait l'air ennuyée à cause des habits sales de forêt. Elle s'est agenouillée pour me dire je vais pas te gronder, j'aime bien quand tu joues dans les bois, mais fais attention s'il te plaît, je vais pas m'en sortir pour faire sécher le linge avec ce temps.

Le temps chez ma mère ça voulait dire la bruine, la brume, le temps qu'il faisait toujours là-bas mouillé, à la ferme du fond, la pluie, le brouillard ou la neige, ou même la pluie, le brouillard et la neige, mélangés par le vent, le brouillard fait de neige pure à cause de la tourmente, mais aussi tout le temps qu'il faut pour le linge, le ménage et tout ça. Elle nous répétait vous ne savez pas tout le temps que ça prend et c'est déjà l'heure de la traite, ton père a besoin d'aide à l'étable, Axel, et toi, viens m'aider avec le panier s'il te plaît.

Je prenais une poignée du panier, ma mère l'autre, et on montait au grenier.

Personne n'a jamais parlé d'une vache venue vèler, et mourir, pourrir dans les bois de vers chez nous. Je sais comment ça sent vite, les grosses bêtes mortes, mais personne n'a rien dit. Ni moi.

Je l'avais peut-être rêvé, pour m'inventer une excuse, une raison à mes salissures, à mes émotions, une raison pour moi tout seul.

Je me demande si le lac artificiel en recouvrant mon enfance, a remonté ces corps, ou ce qu'il en restait. À moi il m'en reste le souvenir de tout cet effort de sang et de boue, de feuilles mortes avec lesquelles je me suis frotté et mouché après, en pleurant.

Je pleurais beaucoup petit, souvent, et je ne savais pas pourquoi.

Je me suis mise à pleurer pareil, abondamment, après mon opération, quand le premier sentiment au réveil c'était une douleur tellement grande qu'elle débordait de mon vagin à vif et tout neuf jusqu'au ventre de ma mère. J'étais dans les vapes, sous morphine, et je retournais mes souvenirs dans tous les sens. Je portais à bout de bras le corps lourd du veau mort. Je rouvrais les yeux. Et c'était le fœtus si léger, tout étroit dans mes petites mains de petit garçon effrayé, effrayé par ce bébé minuscule, inachevé, par tout ce sang sorti, et l'écho des flaques encore à sortir, par les cris de mon père qui me disait lâche ça, en appuyant de toutes ses forces sur le bassin de ma mère pour essayer stupidement d'arrêter l'hémorragie. Elle avait déjà lâché prise, vidée. On habitait trop loin de l'hôpital, et ma mère avait dit laisse à mon frère qui voulait appeler les pompiers, je sais comment on fait, tu sais bien, c'est pas la première fois, de toute façon ça tourmente trop.

Sous morphine, et sous la douleur qu'elle calmait si mal, je voyais les deux corps, le veau large et mon petit frère, mon petit fœtus violet, nager vivants dans les eaux du lac. Le veau trop massif a coulé. Le petit bout, mon petit frère, ma petite sœur, était comme bercé de gestes sous-marins, il remontait, j'approchais une main dans mon délire, je touchais un bras porté, une jambe menue et bleue à la surface, une épaule légère et creuse comme du bois flotté.

Je n'aurai jamais d'enfant, c'était ce que répétait mon frère, si tu fais ça, tu n'auras jamais d'enfant. Je venais de faire ça, oui, et c'était tant pis, tant mieux, si je n'aurai jamais d'enfant.

Les bleus d'eaux et d'arbres, ce ne sont pas les mêmes, mais à l'ombre du lac on ne peut pas les séparer.

Close to the lake there's open ground where I can park. At the edge of it, an apple-tree. The rotten apples on the ground stick to the tyres that crush them to pulp. I get out and pick two that are perfectly ripe. The sun is rising, there is barely any light. I'll have to go soon but I have enough the time to get out. From here you can't see the water but you know the lake is there, beyond the chimera of trees. In the early morning the broad air is full of mist. This is the lake's own space, the lake that is my sea, my time.

I often stop here between runs, before or after.

Though the apples don't know it, it's not yet really autumn, it's just the beginning of September, still early morning, but going back to school makes the leaves fall, everyone can see that, and my shoes are wet with morning dew on the carpark above the forest that surrounds the lake.

Soon the days will shorten and I will only see the older children in the dark of the morning or the dark of the afternoon.

I go down, through the fine drizzle, towards the trees farther below. I could be walking out of a kind of nothingness. I follow the path that I myself opened, sometimes moving slowly along, sometimes hurrying, keen, wanting to get there fast through the boughs and misty haze. The path slopes gently, branches scratching you as you descend. There are pockets of cold wet air and the smell of water, and some days the sound of beavers in the distance, like along the river when I was small. From my footsteps, from my memory, sounds break and fade.

Where the path ends there's a weeping birch, tall, old, bowed. Underneath it, that's my shelter, an oval space, confined, snug. I sit down but the lake, oozing coldly up between the roots, all grey or black, is so loud despite my inner calm, despite the loneliness we share.

It is never quiet this crater-lake though it is deaf and blind, a grey void, breaking like an immemorial wave. The less it sees, the less visible it becomes. Its loud commotion echoes round.

The lake of the drowned farm is so much more calm.

In the ground under my birch the lake makes its sound, continuous, a sound that often grabs me even before I arrive. It guides me in the wakening day. It is a low, full sound, as if the sleeping volcano was not sleeping at all.

When I was little I often played at being dead. I wanted to be mourned. I mourned for

myself, often up a tree, or under a tree, like today in my weeping birch, hidden by its slender branches.

I eat one of the apples, sitting on my female tree, her hips full with water. I say that but I have never looked. I've never taken a birch flower in my fingers to open it and see. I can't be the only one not to do that. I wonder whose job it is to know what sex a tree is. I'm pretty sure that the birch is not like the willow, that it is bisexual, with the female flowers high up, in the higher branches. I look upwards but I see nothing. This is not the right moment or the right season. I see nothing but a rain of dull foliage, nothing but a white that is almost blue, pale dirty blue sinking into the boggy ground. This birch is even more of a weeper, more bent and drooping, than a willow. I push aside the twigs that obscure the mud at my feet. Some heavy movement stirs all around and suddenly you sense deep waves. The lake absorbs the light entirely, gives nothing back, not a look not a face, nothing of the day, nothing of the clouds. I chuck away the apple-core and do not see, cannot even guess, where it lands. My birch is blue like all the other trees around the lake. The leaves scarcely turn brown even in autumn because of the dark, brooding presence of conifers and in summer there is no green either under the grey emptiness of the dry crater. In winter there is little or no light. This is my dark, blue space. The seasons do not change these trees, time and rain barely touch them. My birch is blue like the surroundings, dirtied by bruises. Bare, she takes on the navy-blue of spruce trees. Ageless, she takes the form of water, of tears. She rights herself a little when her soft, smooth leaves unfold, veiling her in ultramarine. But the lake stays always within itself while my birch bathes in lake-water, breathes lake-air and I am sitting, confined, underneath it, in my place of respite.

I stop here because I need the lake and the shade in order to remember. To remember, and cry alone like the old. Memory – it must be tended to, renewed, every day.

I used to hide, I used to seek out corners when I was a little boy, where I could untangle my motions, and my mother, close by, called my name but didn't see me, her voice growing louder and then fading, coming back and going away again and at last far enough away for me to finally concentrate on my thoughts.

Once, years ago, in the woods I heard, behind my mother's voice, the sound of a bell right next to my hiding place. I wondered what on earth that cow was doing so far away from the pastures. I poked around for a while pushing back bushes to find her. But I was looking too high up. Then suddenly I saw her, stretched out, her crushing mass thrown down in a heap amid the wet,

fragile leaves and the calf's legs emerging. The sight of her great swollen body gave me pain.

But of the two of us it was the cow that suffered more. It wasn't one of ours, nor one of the many cows that I knew, and I knew lots of them, dozens. She was white, dirty, and gasping for breath, wracked with pain and moaning loudly. At the sight of me she tried to rise but I managed to calm her by placing my hand on her, beside where the pain was. I applied just the right pressure. The calf's stiff legs stuck out, wedged tight. The torn placenta hung open and empty. It was too late, but I pulled anyway, not heeding my mother's voice which I could still hear, I pulled with all the strength of an eight or nine-year-old to help relieve her of her dead calf. It was huge, heavy, too big, solidly built, worthy of an agricultural show. My arms glistened with blood and mud, with limp dead leaves. But it was no use. I wanted to run and tell someone, but no, I wasn't sure that I'd done the right thing. I didn't go. I heard again my mother calling my name and I was afraid that I would be in for it. I went back to the farm, taking my time, wanting to get over the emotion that made me shiver all over. I could have borrowed the calving jack without anyone knowing but I didn't know how I could carry such a huge instrument. It was bigger than myself. Impossible. I tried to think, I lingered, unable to decide what to do.

I thought my mother was angry because of my clothes being dirty from the forest, but she knelt down to tell me she wasn't going to scold me, that she liked it when I played in the woods, but would I please be careful because she would not be able to get the washing dry with the weather the way it was.

For my mother the weather meant drizzles and mists, the abiding wetness of that place, the farm on the valley floor, rain, fog, and snow recurring endlessly, sometimes all mixed together by the wind. When fog freezes in a gale it makes the purest snow. For her the weather was all about getting the washing and housework done. She told us again, you don't know how much time it takes and it's already milking time, your father needs help in the cowshed Axel, and you, come and help me with the basket.

I took one handle of the basket, my mother the other and we went up to the loft.

Nobody ever spoke about a cow that came to calve, and die, and rot in our woods. I know how quickly big beasts start to stink after they die, but nobody said anything. Neither did I.

Maybe I dreamt it to give myself an excuse, a justification for the bad things I'd done, for my emotions, a justification for myself alone.

I wonder whether the artificial lake brought the animals' bodies, or what remained of

them, to the surface when it closed over my childhood. For me, I still have the memory of all that effort of blood and mud, and of the dead leaves with which I rubbed myself down and blew my nose in, all the time in tears.

I cried a lot when I was little, often, and I did not know why.

I broke down in the same way after my operation when the first sensation I had when I woke up was a searing pain that seemed to go all the way from my completely new vagina back to my mother's womb. I was in a daze, under morphine, and I went over and over my memories from every angle. I carried at arms' length the calf's heavy, dead body. When I opened my eyes again it had become an ever-so-light foetus, all snug in the little hands of a small scared little boy, scared of this miniscule baby, not fully formed, its blood all over the place and still more of it waiting to flow, and scared by my father shouting at me to drop it while he pushed with all his strength against my mother's pelvis in a hopeless attempt to stop the bleeding.

She had already let go, given up. We lived too far from the hospital and my mother had said no when my brother wanted to call the fire-brigade. I know what I'm doing, she said, you know that, it's not my first time and anyway there's no point.

Under morphine and the pain it failed to relieve I saw the two corpses, the great calf and my little brother, my little purple foetus, both alive, swimming in the waters of the lake. Then the calf sank and the little creature, my tiny little brother, my tiny little sister, cradled by the deep moving water, rose upwards and I reached out in my delirium and touched a tiny arm, a slender leg blue with cold, a shoulder light and flimsy as a scrap of floating wood.

You will never have a child if you have that operation, was what my brother was saying over and over, you will never have a child if you do that. But that's what I'd just done and for good or ill I would never have a child.

The water and the surrounding trees are different shades of blue, and they each endure alone. But in the shadow of the lake you cannot tell them apart.



Winning author

Noémi Szécsi

Book awarded

Kommunista Monte Cristo (2006)

Communist Monte Cristo

Publishing house

Tericum

Biography

Noémi Szécsi (1976), is a writer and a translator. She graduated with a degree in Finnish and English in Budapest, and studied cultural anthropology in Helsinki. She published her first novel, *Finno-Ugrian Vampire* in 2002, which was reprinted in 2003 as a result to its success. The script based on the novel was short-listed by the workshop of the Sundance Institute. Besides being a historical novel and a saga of a family, *Communist Monte Cristo* is an artistic interpretation of the history of a communist idea in Hungary based on elaborate research.

Synopsis

'It is late July, 1919'. Sanyi, a handsome vegetarian butcher and an assistant labourer of the Communist Party, sets out for Vienna to carry out a secret mission. He has the destiny of the proletarian revolution in his hands. But the revolution soon fails and from that moment on all of his activity becomes illegal. The dramatic changes set in motion a bloody comedy complete with strange disguises and false identities.

But once a liar always a liar. Sanyi had nothing left but his syphilis after the failure of the proletarian revolution. However, he starts again, building a new life with a wife, a daughter and two sons, but keeping secret his real communist self even from his own family. Despite all the differences within this right-wing family, by 1945 Sanyi's only aim was to keep them alive.

Gingerly maneuvering through the world of politics, he survives the bloody decades of Hungarian history up until 1956. Although, after almost 40 years of devotion to the Communist cause, Sanyi starts to have his doubts and with good reason...

The novel turns the elements of the original Monte Cristo story upside down, for it is not a tale about revenge but about political stupidity.'

A dédnagyapám 1919-ben egy július végi napon indult el Bécsbe. A jobb kezében egy papírbőrönd tele diadémmal, tiarával meg bogláros kösöntyűvel, a balban sétatálcával. Szívében rettegés. Szívében szerelem. Átizzadt inge atletikus felsőtestére tapadt, de egy gombot sem gombolt volna ki, nehogy kilátsszék a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' valamelyik magasabb betűje, amit a mellkasára tetováltatott.

'Gesamtkunstwerk', csupa hosszú, nyúlánk, hajladozó betűvel. Már a tetoválómester – egy olvasottabb proletár, aki tíz évet szolgált le a Queen of Russia angol teherszállító gőzösön – is megmondta, hogy ez egy határtalan hülyeség, az összművészetnek leáldozott, Klimt is meghalt, megírta a Tolnai Világlapja. De mit lehetett tenni? A dédnagyapám valahol meglátta, és megtetszett neki. Az alkoholmérgezés azon fázisában provokatív és szofisztikált ötletnek tűnt.

Mondani sem kell, ez még a második dicsőséges március előtt történt, mielőtt beütött a szesztilalom, és egy egész politikai párt tűzte zászlajára, hogy a magyar must erjedését meg kell akadályozni. Mert a tartós józanság sokat koptatott a fényes ideán. Mindazonáltal a dédnagyapám ettől kezdve úgy járt-kelt, mintha halott szerelme nevét hordozná a bőrébe égetve.

- Inkább a homlokára kellett volna tetováltatnia – sajnálkozott sokszor az apám. – Akkor legalább lenne róla fénykép.

Sajnos sohasem látta senki a családból, mert dédnagyapám 1919 után már az úristen előtt sem mutatkozott atlétatrikó nélkül.

Azon a júliusi napon is csak igazított a nyakkendőjén – félkézzel, mert a papírbőröndöt le se merte tenni. Ő azt gondolta, úgy sejtem, azt gondolta, hogy a proletárrorradalom ügyét tartja a kezében. A proletárrorradalom elveszett ügyét, de ezt senki sem merte kimondani a Szovjetházban, amikor belemérték a húsz kiló kösöntyűt a papírbőröndbe. Kun Béla a migrénjét borogatta, Szamuely Tibor – akit dédnagyapám személyes ellenségének tekintett – ököllel ütötte az asztalt, és a vérről magyarázott. (Hogy van belőle bőven, ha sok folyik belőle, az csak megelőzi, hogy még többet kiontsanak stb. Ilyesmiket.) Csak szegény Korvin Ottó tudott nyugodt maradni.

Ottó listát írt, amelyet előtte török pasák írnokai, utána nációk és nyilasok, később pedig ávosok írtak:

- 45 aranyknak látszó gyűrű zafír-, opál-, rubinköves gyűrű (vegyesen)
- kb. 100 db antik hatású ékszerdoboz türkiz berakással
- 1 db tiara (32 db briliánsal)
- 12 db kisebb-nagyobb arany eszköz (kb. 5 kg)
- 1 db igazgyöngyfűző
- különböző ló-ékszerek (4db)



1 db. elefántcsontra készült miniatűr gr. Pálffy Geraldine gyermekkori képével

De Ottó nem gondolt sem elődeire sem utódaira. Egyszerűen csak szerette, ha stimmel a dohány. Alig pár hónapja még egy bankban dolgozott.

A dédnagyapám aláírta az elismervényt, lezárta a bőröndöt és átvette a vízumot, valamint egy köteg kisebb címletű bankjegyet az esetleges költségekre. Már is indult, hogy elérje az első induló bécsi gyorsot. Még hallotta, hogy Kun Béla sírva könyörög a telefonba oroszul, biztos Leninrel beszélt és vöröskatonákért rimázkodott. Mellette Szamuely ráncolta a szemöldökét. Ha valaki, ő biztosan tudta, hogy Lenin szívesen ad arany karórát, ad kézelőgombot vagy sarló-kalapácsos kitűzőt is, de katonát, azt nem ad. Tehát csak Ottó, szegény Korvin Ottó kívánt szerencsét.

Még miközben Ottó számolta a briliánsokat a tiarában, a dédnagyapám kiszúrta, hogy feltűnően rövid az életvonala, ezért búcsúzaskor hosszan magához vonta, és megsimogatta a púpját. Szörnyű volt elgondolni, hogy ez a rémarcú, ötletelen Ady-utánérzéseket író, gerincferdüléssel, ortodox kommunista, aki még ráadásul politikai nyomozó is, bízik benne, egy bonvivánfejű, kisportolt testű, minimális szellemi életű forradalmi segédmunkásban, akit ráadásul néhány hete ismert meg. 'Talán a kék szemem teszi' - tűnődött magában. A dédnagyapám volt a családban az utolsó kékszemű.

De nem töprengett tovább sajátos vonzerején. Inkább azon szorongott, eljut-e élve a vonatig. Ha az utcán megállítanák a vörösrők és átkutatnák a holmijait, még nyomatékos kérésére sem hoznák vissza ide a Szovjetházba, hogy igazolhassa magát, hanem lelőnék, hogy osztozkodhassanak kincsein. Az utca farkastörvényei miatt a dédnagyapám a nemzet erkölcsi süllyedését okolta, amely általában a háború és a forradalom egyenes következménye.

Beleborzongott abba, hogy az utcán felfegyverzett, bestiális, burzsujevő prolik csámborognak késő éjszakáig, és mindenkire tüzelnek, aki jól szabott zakót visel, ugyanakkor, ebből következően az is borzongatóan hatott rá, hogy nem képes magát az egységes proletariátust alkotó porszemnek hinni: homokszemnek, sőt, kavicsnak képzelte magát.

Arra gondolt a dédnagyapám, hogy vajon azért adták-e a grófi szajrét a kezébe Kunék, mert szombatkor egyikük se nyúlhat pénzhez. Pedig az a négy hónap, amelyet a mozgalomban eltöltött, meggyőzte arról, hogy egy hivatásos forradalmárnak nincs szombat, de még vasárnap se, csak az osztályharc szürke hétköznapjai. Ahogyan Kun Béla néha maga mondta: zsidó volt az apám, de én kommunista vagyok. Vagy ahogyan a dédnagyapám néha maga mondta: katolikus pap volt az apám, én viszont zabigyerék vagyok. Nem tépelődött tovább, még a kijárási tilalom előtt el akarta érní a Keleti pályaudvart. A Duna-parti Szovjetházat - ahol a népbiztosok együtt laktak, sírtak



és nevettek – maga mögött hagyva cigarettára gyújtott, és füttyörészve nekiindult. Kisért a Klotild térre, végig a Kossuth Lajos utcán, Rákóczi úton, tartva az irányt.

Dédnagyapám antiszemita volt, ez, gondolom, világos. Szébbnek, okosabbnak tartotta magát, mint izraelita ismerősei, és a feltevése kinél-kinél félig be is igazolódott, hiszen némelyiknél szebb volt, jóllehet egyiknél sem volt okosabb. Ő is enyhe fulladást érzett, ha zsidó hadimilliomosokat látott a körúton grasszálni ragyogó szépségű úrilányokból lett színésznőkkel, de ha a tükörbe nézett, a látvány annyira megnyugtatta, ellazította, hogy önfeledten tudta átadni magát a zsidó és félzsidó nők iránt érzett féktelen vonzalmának. Így állt szerinte méltó bosszút.

‘Tépd le a liliumot, amelyben forr a méz’ – morzsolgatta most magában Alice elhaló szavait, és valósággal belevörösödött az emlékképbe, hogy ő bizony letépte, és mirabile dictu: forrott benne a méz. Kifújta a cigarettafüstöt és arra gondolt, Bécsben talán nincs akkora élelmiszerhiány, mint Pesten, ahol a Gyermekbarát Egyesület egyre csak lefoglalja az összes cukrászsüteményeket, és mindenből csak az éhes kis proletárgyerekeknek juttat. A keresztényszocializmust egyre inkább az élvezetekben dúskálással társította, ki a fene gondolta volna ezt IV. Károly koronázási ünnepségén! Biztos torta is van! – csillant fel a szeme. Sacher torta! – sikította benne egy előre élvező, önfeledt hang. Aztán újra csak az jutott eszébe: ‘Tépd le, tépd le!’

De hogy jön ez ide? Semmiféle frivol gondolatnak nincs helye ott, ahol a saját, valamint egyéb nemzetek sorsa forog kockán. A hadi helyzet aggasztó, mormolta a dédnagyapám, de ezt sem a napi sajtóban olvasta, a távirászt felelte Ottónak, mikor az súgva megkérdezte tőle, miért fájdult meg Kun Béla feje.

- A hadi helyzet aggasztó – így mondta, vagy inkább suttogta a távirászt. Románok ante portas, a vöröskatonák egyre kevésbé érdeklődnek a proletariátus világfelszabadító háborúja iránt, a felmentő szovjet csapatok pedig minden valószínűség szerint sohasem érkeznek meg (helyesebben: meglehetősen késéssel, huszonöt év múlva. Rájuk most nem érdemes várni.) Lenin elvtárs már megint blöffölt!

Pedig ott, a szemben lévő hirdetőoszlopon a Szabadság győzelemre vezeti a barikádokon harcoló népet. A mutatóujjával elegánsan int: előre. Induljanak előttem, kérem. Ezenközben a bal karjában egy agyas-fejes proletárgyermeket tart, aki a kebeléből fogyaszt. A földtől már régen elrugaszkodott, bármelyik pillanatban az elkeseredetten harcoló vöröskatonák fejére nőhet. De a súlya elhanyagolható: hízottnak hízott, de mégiscsak egy nemtő.

Dédnagyapám már az Astoriánál gyalogolt. Az utcán szinte senki sem járt, legfeljebb néhány merész férfi, a nők, gyerekek, öregek, betegek otthon szürcsölték az üres pótteát, nem csaptak utcazajt. Ezért dédnagyapám már messziről meghallotta a gépkocsi hangját. Ki autózhat

ilyenkor? Senki jó ember, azt a dédnagyapám is tudta. Hátranézett. Egy terepjáró autó fékezett le mellette. Dédnagyapám egyből felmérte, hogy ez IV. Károly gépkocsija, azt valahogy mégsem remélte, hogy a trónkövetelőt őt szemelte ki egy rojalista puccsban való részvételre. De még így is nagy meglepetésre számított.

S az nem maradt el. Az autóból a nemrég még a Szovjetházban aggódó Szamuely Tibor pattant ki, és egyenest a dédnagyapám felé tartott. Mint mindig, most is military-mániájának áldozott egy szürke zsávoly egyenruhában, hátrabrillantozott fekete haján megcsillant a közvilágítás.

- Elvtársam! – kiáltott fel némi pátosszal a dédnagyapám. Tibor hangulatát szerette volna felmérni. - Én elvtársad neked nem vagyok, de szólíthatsz nyugodtan Szamuely úrnak. – Tibor nem volt jókedvében.

- Ahogy tetszel gondolni. Mit tetszel akarni tőlem, Szamuely úr? – alázatoskodott a dédnagyapám, miközben félszemmel azt figyelte, hogy lassan a Lenin-fiúk is előkaszálódtak a kocsi belsejéből. Szamuely mögé sorakoztak fel. Ő rezzenéstelen arccal elővette a hatalmas pisztolyát és kibiztosította a závarzatot. Szuggesztív tekintetét a dédnagyapámra emelte, majd az utca másik oldalán sétáló, könnyű tyúklábmintás felöltőt viselő fiatalemberre mutatott.

- Idefigyelj, Sanyi! Látod azt a burzsujt az utca túloldalán?

- Sose biztos az, hogy burzsuj.

- Mondom: látod?

- Látom.

Durr. Szamuely elvtárs célratartás nélkül, vaktában lőtt egyet, a következő pillanatban a fiatalember összerogyott, és elterült az utca kövezetén. Szamuely visszatette hatalmas fegyverét a pisztolytáskába. Igazított az övében. Felemelte jobb keze mutatóujját:

- Látod, Sanyi, így jár az, aki kárt tesz a vörös proletariátusnak.

- De nem tett kárt!

- De így jár – jegyezte meg lakonikusan Szamuely elvtárs, és ezzel újra helyet foglalt a királyi gépkocsiban. Főnökük testbeszédéből következtetve a Lenin-fiúk is tudták: megérett az idő a távozásra. Visszakaszálódtak. A hűséges sofőr gázt adott. Éles kanyart vettek és már robogtak is a Szovjetház felé.

A dédnagyapám hátán a jeges futkosott. Arra gondolt, vajon miért gyűlöli őt Tibor, akit maga is szívből utált. Megállt egy plakát előtt, és úgy tett, mintha azt vizsgálná, csak azért, nehogy ide-oda dobált végtagokkal pánikszerűen menekülni kezdjen, mint egy bokán dobott mezei nyúl. Ez a nagy vörös kéz (proletárkéz) a plakáton már amúgy is többször gondolkodóba

ejtette. Egyrészt sárga fényt bocsátott ki magából, másrészt elektrosztatikusan vonzotta magához a fém aprópénzt, a sötétzöld borítójú könyveket, valamint a sötétvörös, húsos szirmú virágokat. Ez a felirat díszítette: *Proletárkezet vagy antantkorbácsot?*

A felvetés jó. Sok ember küzd hasonló dilemmával. Lepra vagy kolera? Kötél vagy golyó? Sósav vagy marólúg? Tisza-örvény vagy Duna-sodor? Golyó vagy kötél? Ám a dédnagyapám egyelőre nem kívánt egy ilyen nagyjelentőségű döntést meghozni. Nem feltűnően gyors, de céltudatos léptekkel távolodott az incidens helyszínétől. Az a kevés járókelő, aki ilyenkor is kimerészkedett az utcára, hívta a mentőket. Jólesett látni, hogy van még jóérzés az emberekben. Ez a későbbiekben gyökeresen megváltozott. De akkoriban, ha a vörösőrök nem lőtték közelről fejbe, és nem fosztották ki, az embernek minden esélye megvolt, hogy embertársai segítőkészségének köszönhetően Prónay Pál fehérterroristáinak kezére jut, és péniszére kötözött cukorspárgán vezetik körbe a Nemzeti Lovarda udvarán.

A dédapám már a Rákóczi úton cipelte a Tanácsköztársaság ügyét. Szerfölött aggasztónak találta, hogy Tibor számára az eszme nagyobb súllyal esik latba, mint az emberélet. A burzsoáziát végleg kiirtaná, a parasztság csak annyi neki, mint az orrán zümmögő légy. Azt zümmögi: 'Földosztást, földosztást!' Tibor odakap, markába zárja, aztán összereccsenti, és ni, ott van kiontva a sárga bele. Kun Béla meg csak szabadkozna, ha kérdeznék, miért engedte, hogy Tibor likvidálja a föld népét.

- Hogy mit csinált? Ejnye, Tibor, egy percre nem nézek oda, éppen csak egy szikratávíratot küldök el Lenin elvtársnak, te meg lemészárolod a polgárságot, megtizedeled a parasztságot!

- Én ugyan nem tettem ilyet – mondaná Tibor méltatlankodva. – De szívesen kivégzem azt, aki rólam ilyet terjeszt! – Pedig a háta mögé dugott kezében ott az összecukható akasztófa! Kun elvtárs oda se tekintene, úgy veregetné Tibor vállát.

- Én megbízom benned, Tiborom. Végezd csak a munkádat. – És nem nézne oda, oda se *akarna* nézni, pedig Tibor olyan kapkodva csukta össze az akasztófát, hogy még mindig ott himbálózik rajta egy varjúszárnny-bajszos zsirosparaszt!

A dédnagyapám letörölte gyöngyöző homlokát, és megnézte zsebóráját. Még tíz perc a kijárási tilalomig. Nagyobbra mérte lépteit. Közben folyton csak figyelt meg hallgatózott, hogy jön-e megint Tibor a terepjáróval, bőrkabátos, kibiztosított fegyverű Lenin-fiúkkal az oldalán. 'És még azt is jegyezd meg, Sanyi... 'és olyat löne, hogy még a villamos kereke is leeresztene, csak úgy sikoltozna rajta a sok prolinép. De aztán hamarosan visszanyernék a lélekjelenlétüket, és spontán elénekelnék a Marseillaise-t.

A budapesti emberek egyáltalán nem büszkék, viszont rendkívül alkalmazkodóak.

Szörnyülködtek, amikor ellopták a Ferenc József-szobrot, mert maguk akartak szert tenni ilyen nagymennyiségű fémre. Viszont megkönnyebbültek, amikor kiderült, hogy elszállították Ferenc Jóskát, mert népgyilkosok szobrai nem éktelenkedhetnek az utcán. Március 21-én még kevesen tudták fejből a Marseillaise-t, de most ha csak oldalba bökkik őket, már éneklük is. Különben nincs ebéd! A dédapám személy szerint jobban kedvelte az Internacionálét, modernebb, korszerűbb hangzása és elrugaszkodottan patetikus szövegvilága miatt. Már dúdolta is: így még a gyaloglás is gyorsabban ment.

– Vajon tényleg ez a harc lesz a végső? – tűnődött dédnagyapám, és igazított a fogáson a bőrrönd fogantyúján.

My great-grandfather set off for Vienna in 1919, on a day in late July. In his right hand he held a paper suitcase full of diadems, tiaras, clover-shaped earrings; in his left, a walking-stick. In his heart, dread. In his heart, love. Damp with sweat, his shirt clung to an athletic upper body; he would not have undone a single button, lest he reveal the upper parts of the letters of the word tattooed on his chest: 'Gesamtkunstwerk'.

'Gesamtkunstwerk': all in long, slender, curving letters. Even the tattoo artist – a relatively well-read proletarian who had served for a decade on the British freight steamer *Queen of Russia* – had said that this was utter nonsense, grand art was over, even Klimt was dead, as he had read in Tolnai's World News. But what could be done? My great-grandfather had seen it somewhere and liked it. By that stage of alcohol poisoning, it had seemed a provocative and sophisticated idea.

It goes without saying that this occurred before the second glorious March, before alcohol prohibition struck, when an entire political party announced that Hungarian must fermentation was to be stopped. For sustained sobriety rather eroded the gleaming ideal. This notwithstanding, from here on my great-grandfather went around the place as if he had the name of a dead sweetheart burned into his skin.

'He should have had it tattooed on his forehead,' my father had often said with regret. 'Then at least there would be a photo of it.'

For, sadly, no one from the family ever saw the tattoo: after 1919, my great-grandfather would not show himself even before the Lord without having at least a vest on.

And on that July day he merely adjusted his tie – with one hand, as he didn't dare put the paper suitcase down. He thought, at least I think he thought, that he was holding the cause of the proletarian revolution in his hand. The lost cause of the proletarian revolution, but no one would dare say that in the Soviet House as they measured out twenty kilos of earrings into the suitcase. Béla Kun was nursing his migraine, and Tibor Szamuely – whom my great-grandfather regarded as his sworn enemy – was hitting the table with his fist, and explaining about blood. (That there is so much of it, and if a lot of it is flowing, that just prevents even more from being spilt, etc. Things like that.) Only poor Ottó Korvin was able to stay calm.

Ottó made a list of the sort once made by the scribes of Turkish pashas, then by Nazis and the Arrow Cross, and later by members of the ÁVH secret police:

- 45 gold-look rings with sapphires, opals and rubies (mixed)
- Approx. 100 antique-look jewel buttons with turquoise inserts
- 1 tiara (with 32 brilliant diamonds)

12 gold items of various sizes (approx. 5 kg)

1 string of real pearls

various horse jewels (4 items)

1 miniature from elephant bone with a childhood portrait of Countess Geraldine Pálffy

But Ottó was thinking neither of his ancestors nor his descendants. Quite simply he wanted the dosh to add up. Only a few months earlier he had still worked in a bank.

My great-grandfather signed the acknowledgement, closed the paper suitcase and took the visa, as well as a bundle of lower-denomination banknotes to cover possible expenses. He set off straight away to make it to the first express train to Vienna. He heard Béla Kun begging on the phone in Russian, tears in his eyes; he must have been speaking to Lenin and pleading for Red Army soldiers. Next to him, Szamuely frowned. He of all people knew that Lenin would happily send gold watches, cuff-links or even medals with the hammer and sickle, but that he wouldn't send any soldiers. So it was only Ottó, poor Ottó Korvin, who wished him luck.

And while Ottó was counting the brilliant diamonds in the tiara, my great-grandfather spotted that his lifeline was conspicuously short, and so he gave him a long hug goodbye, and stroked the hunch of his back. It was dreadful to think that this hideous, hunchbacked orthodox communist and writer of uninspired Endre Ady reminiscences, who was a secret service detective to boot, trusted him, a well-toned assistant labourer with a bon viveur face and minimal intellectual life – and whom he had only known a few weeks. 'Perhaps it's because of my blue eyes,' he pondered. My great-grandfather was the last person in the family to have blue eyes.

But he did not ponder his unusual power to attract for long. Rather he was worried whether he would make it to the train in one piece. Were the Red Guards to stop him on the street and search his belongings, no amount of pleading would make them drag him back to the Soviet House to prove his identity: they would shoot him on the spot so they could divide the spoils amongst themselves. My grandfather blamed the street's law of the jungle on the nation's moral decline – the usual direct consequence of war and revolution.

He shuddered to think that armed, savage, bourgeois-eating proles were roaming the streets until late at night, firing at everyone wearing a well-fitted jacket; yet at the same time he was also horrified to find that he could not imagine himself as a speck of dust making up a part of the unified proletariat; instead he imagined himself as a grain of sand, indeed a pebble.

My great-grandfather wondered whether Kun and co. might have handed him the lordly loot because none of them were allowed to come into contact with money on a Saturday. Yet the

four months he had spent in the movement convinced him that for a real revolutionary there was no Saturday, and no Sunday, either – just the grey everyday of the class struggle. As Béla Kun had himself said on occasion: my father was a Jew, but I am a Communist. Or as my great-grandfather had himself said on occasion: my father was a Catholic priest, and I'm a love-child. He didn't dither any further: he wanted to make it to the Keleti station before curfew. Leaving the Soviet House by the Danube – where the people's commissars lived, cried and laughed together – behind him, he lit a cigarette and set off on his way, whistling. He walked to Klotild Square, along Kossuth Lajos Street, and kept going down Rákóczi út.

My great-grandfather was an anti-Semite – that much, I presume, is obvious. He considered himself more attractive and smarter than his Israelite friends, an assumption which in certain cases proved half-true, for he really was more attractive than some of them, though smarter than none. He too felt a suffocating feeling if he saw Jewish arms millionaires strolling down Budapest's Great Ring with stunning high society actress girls on their arm, but if he looked in the mirror, he was so reassured and liberated by what he saw, he was able fully to surrender himself to his boundless attraction to Jewish and half-Jewish women. Thus, he thought, did he wreak adequate revenge.

'Tear down the lily in which the honey boils,' he mumbled Alice's whispered words to himself, and he went bright red with shame at this memory, that he really had torn it down, and mirabile dictu: the honey was boiling in it. He blew out the cigarette smoke and considered how in Vienna there might be less of a food shortage than in Budapest, where the Child Help Organization was slowly getting its hands on the entirety of the city's cake output and giving it solely to hungry little proletarian children. More and more, he would associate Christian Socialism with wallowing in pleasure: who would have thought this at the coronation of Charles IV? 'There must be cake!' – his eyes gleamed. 'Sacher cake!' screamed an admiring voice inside him, enjoying it pre-emptively. Then, again, all he could think of was: 'Tear it down, tear it down!'

But what has this got to do with anything? There is no place for frivolous thoughts when the fate of one's nation or other nations is at stake. The military situation is worrying, my great-grandfather mumbled. This was another thing he didn't read in the daily press, but overheard the telegraph operator telling Ottó when asked why Béla Kun's head had started to hurt.

'The military situation is worrying' – so said, or rather whispered, the telegraph operator. Romanians ante portas: the Red Army soldiers are less and less interested in the proletariat's war to free the world, while the liberating Soviet troops will most likely never arrive. (To be precise, they will arrive, rather late, twenty-five years hence. No point waiting for them now.) Comrade Lenin

has bluffed us again!

Yet just there on the advertising pillar opposite, Liberty is taking the masses fighting on the barricades to victory. With her index finger she is pointing elegantly: After you, please. Meanwhile she is breast-feeding the strong, healthy proletarian child in her left arm. She has long been up in the air, and might at any moment be head and shoulders above the valiantly fighting Red Army soldiers. But her weight is insignificant: she is overweight, no question, but still a guardian angel, after all.

My great-grandfather had already got as far as Astoria. The streets were virtually empty, except for the occasional brave man; the women, children, elderly and sick were all sipping their empty tea substitute at home, and therefore not able to fill the street with much in the way of noise. So my great-grandfather was able to hear the sound of the motor vehicle from afar. Who could be driving at such an hour? No one up to any good, he knew that. He looked back over his shoulder. The vehicle braked alongside him. My great-grandfather immediately recognised it as Charles IV's car, yet he could hardly hope for the successor to the throne to have singled him out to participate in a royalist putsch. But even so he was in for a real surprise.

The surprise was not long in coming. It was in the form of Tibor Szamuely, recently so full of worry in the Soviet House, who jumped out of the car, and headed straight for my great-grandfather. As always, he paid respect to his military obsession with a grey serge uniform; the street lighting glistened on his slicked-back black hair.

'Comrade!' exclaimed my great-grandfather, with certain pathos. He wanted to judge Tibor's state of mind.

'I'm no comrade of yours, but you are welcome to call me Mr. Szamuely.' Tibor's mood was not so good.

'As you wish. What can I do for you, Mr. Szamuely, sir?' my great-grandfather said, obsequiously, one eye on the Lenin boys climbing out of the interior of the vehicle. They lined up behind Szamuely. His expression was motionless as he took out and decocked his enormous pistol. He focused his suggestive gaze on my great-grandfather, then pointed to the young man across the street wearing a light, checked overcoat.

'Listen here, Sanyi! Can you see that bourgeois kid on the other side of the street?'

'How can you be sure he's bourgeois?'

'I asked if you could see him.'

'Yes.'

Bang. Comrade Szamuely, without taking aim, fired a shot blind. The next moment the

young man collapsed; his body sprawled all over the paving stones. Szamuely returned his huge gun to its holster, adjusted his belt, and lifted the index finger of his right hand:

‘You see, Sanyi, that’s what happens to someone who harms the red proletariat!’

‘But he didn’t harm anyone!’

‘But that’s what happens,’ noted Comrade Szamuely laconically, and with that he took his place in the royal vehicle. The Lenin boys knew from their boss’ body language that it was time to leave. They retreated. The loyal driver put his foot on the gas. They spun round a sharp bend and sped towards the Soviet House.

My great-grandfather felt ice down his spine. He was wondering why Tibor, whom he himself detested, hated him so much. He stopped in front of a billboard, and pretended to inspect it, just to stop himself fleeing in panic with his limbs flapping all over the place, like a hare flung through the air by its ankles. This giant red hand (proletarian hand) on the billboard had many times given him cause for thought. For one thing, it emitted yellow light; it also attracted to itself, in some electrostatic fashion, small coins, books with dark-green covers, and deep-red flowers with fleshy petals. It was decorated with this slogan: *The Hand of the Proletariat or the Whip of Entente?*

It was a good question. Many struggle with similar dilemmas. Leprosy or cholera? Rope or a bullet? Hydrochloric acid or caustic soda? A Tisza whirlpool or a surge of the Danube? A bullet or rope? Yet for the time being my great-grandfather did not want to take such a momentous decision. He retreated from the scene of the incident with decisive but not conspicuously speedy steps. The few pedestrians who dared be on the street at such an hour called an ambulance. It was good to see that people still had feelings. Later this was to change radically. But at that time, if the red patrolmen did not shoot you in the head at close range, and did not take everything you have, you still had every chance, thanks to the ready helpfulness of your fellows, to fall into the hands of Pál Prónay’s white terrorists and be dragged round the National Racecourse by a patisserie ribbon tied to your penis.

My great-grandfather was already carrying the Hungarian Soviet Republic’s affairs down Rákóczi Street. He found it supremely worrying that, for Tibor, ideology seemed to carry greater weight than human life. Tibor, it seemed, would be happy to exterminate the bourgeoisie for good, while the peasantry to him was no more than a fly buzzing on his nose. Buzzing, ‘Land reform, land reform!’ Tibor just grabs it, traps it in his fist, then crunches it up, and hey presto, its yellow gut is splattered all over the place. If asked why he let Tibor liquidate the people of the land, Béla Kun would just offer excuses.

‘He did what? My dear Tibor, I take my eyes off you for a single moment, just to send

a lightning telegram to Comrade Lenin, and you butcher the middle class and decimate the peasantry?’

‘I did no such thing,’ Tibor would defiantly reply. ‘But I would be happy to execute anyone who spreads such rumours about me!’ Meanwhile there in the hand stuck behind his back is the collapsible gallows! Comrade Kun would turn a blind eye even as he pats Tibor on the shoulder.

‘I trust you, Tibor. You just do your job.’ And he would not look, would not *want* to look, even though Tibor closed the gallows in such a hurry, that a greasy peasant with a rook’s wing moustache is still dangling from it!

My great-grandfather wiped his moist brow and looked at his pocket watch. Ten minutes till curfew. He quickened his steps. Meanwhile he was constantly watching, listening, whether Tibor was coming back in that car, with the Lenin boys in leather coats and with unlatched weapons at his side. ‘And let this be a lesson, Sanyi...’ and with that he would fire such a shot that even the wheel of the tram would go flat, so much would it make the proletarian masses scream. But then they would soon regain their composure and sing the Marseillaise of their own accord.

The people of Budapest are not at all proud – but they are nothing if not pragmatic. They were disgusted when Franz Joseph’s statue was stolen, because they wanted to lay their hands on such a quantity of metal themselves. But they were relieved to hear that Franz Joe had been carried away, for statues of mass murderers cannot very well remain as an eyesore on the street. On 21 March few know the Marseillaise by heart, but if they are given a nudge in the ribs, they are happy to sing it. Otherwise no lunch for them! My great-grandfather’s personal preference was for the Communist Internationale on account of its modern, contemporary sound and the quixotic pathos of its lyrics. No sooner was he humming it to himself: this made walking quicker.

‘Is this really the final struggle?’ my great-grandfather wondered, as he changed his grip on the handle of the suitcase.

**Winning author**

Karen Gillece

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Biography

Karen Gillece was born in Dublin in 1974. She studied Law at University College Dublin and worked for several years in the telecommunications industry before turning to writing full-time. She was short listed for the Hennessy New Irish Writing Award in 2001, and her short stories have been widely published in literary journals and magazines. *Longshore Drift* has been translated into German, and is published by Verlagsgruppe Random House. *Seven Nights in Zaragoza* has been translated into German and published by Verlagsgruppe Random House and Bertelsmann Books. It has also been translated into Dutch and published by de Boekerij, and is currently being translated into Danish. It is due for publication this year by Forlaget Arvids. *The Absent Wife* is currently being translated into Albanian and is due for publication in 2010 by Dudaj Publishing.

Synopsis

In the blink of an eye, in a busy Brazilian marketplace, a small boy disappears without a trace... His mother's free-living existence, travelling South America with her lover and son, comes to a sudden, brutal end. Two years later, broken from searching for her missing son, Nacio, and desolate at her lover's departure, Lara returns to her childhood home on the southwest coast of Ireland. As she struggles to come to terms with her loss, Lara once again befriends Christy, her childhood sweetheart, who finds himself increasingly drawn to her bohemian nature. But what starts as an interest in her past grows into an obsession. As Lara tries to piece her life back together, never losing hope for Nacio, Christy begins to fall apart. *Longshore Drift* is a tale of passion and betrayal, of the consequences of searching for love in all the wrong places, and of a heartbroken mother's unswerving conviction that her child will be returned to her - even when all hope seems to be gone.

The drive home was subdued. Jim slept in the the backseat and Sorcha gazed out the window at the darkness. His own head was heavy with wine, and he drove slowly, cautiously, the headlights swinging out over the narrow, twisting roads. Sorcha's hand moved and came to rest on his thigh, stroking softly. This was a signal that she would want him to make love to her when they got home. He felt a sinking feeling in his chest. His mind wandered back through a series of Friday nights, hunched up on his forearms, moving over his wife's body, his face turned sideways away from hers into the pillow, and as she held onto his shoulders, he moved into her, giving his mind over to fantasy. Lately he'd been bothered by a nagging doubt that this act was something they were both enduring rather than enjoying.

Driving past the old barracks, taking the road across the bridge and up the embankment, the word she had spoken earlier came back to him – 'broken' – and he was surprised by the sudden stab of pain it caused him. It wasn't a word he had ever imagined associating with Lara. Even that last time he saw her, when she looked at him, her eyes brimming over with pain and resentment and disbelief, there was still something so defiant about her, so wilful and strong. He felt a bristling of nerves along his neck and shoulders as he remembered that look. But perhaps that's just what he wanted to see, to lessen his own guilt.

Almost sixteen years had passed, but the details of that day were still vivid in his memory – the cloying smell of baking that clung inside the house, the heat in that room, the hiss and spit of turf in the grate, all those relatives packed into that tight space, the kisses on the cheeks, his hand gripped by many, their congratulations ringing in the hollows of his ears. He hadn't wanted ay of it – had strenuously objected to it. But at that point, he was starting to discover that what he wanted didn't count for much any more. There seemed to be a fluttering of skirts, all those women flapping around with cups of tea and plates of food, their voices shrill and high pitched, while the men sat around sullenly, eating sandwiches and drinking whiskey and passing low remarks. And Sorcha sitting in the middle of it all, face flushed with excitement, looking pleased and – did he imagine it – triumphant? His lungs had seemed to fill with heat, his collar constricting his throat, and suddenly he knew that he had to get out.

The sky was full of angry clouds that day, moving above a pewter sea, and escaping from the house, his tie and his hair were whipped back by the salty breeze. He felt confused, breathless even, his thoughts stumbling over each other. It was as if his life had changed gears all of a sudden and he wasn't prepared for it. He was only twenty-one, and yet his youth now seemed relegated to

the past, chased by his new responsibilities. This chain of events he had set in motion seemed to be taking on a life of its own, unstoppable now, and he felt baffled by it, bewildered. In the confusion of his thoughts he momentarily forgot the rocks that flanked the path on either side and he tripped and fell awkwardly, hands and knees skidding over grit, feeling the ripping of skin as tiny stones became embedded in his fleshy palms.

'Christ!' he hissed, getting to his feet quickly and glancing back at the house.

He hoped they hadn't heard him. He wasn't sure if he could bear one of them finding him like this, demanding to know what had happened. He pictured them standing there in the doorway – his in-laws – regarding him from a distance. Sorcha's father with a sullen, disapproving expression, or her mother with that pinched, anxious look, his own father's countenance heavy with sadness. But worst of all would be Sorcha, her neat face messed up by a frown, standing by silently, regarding him with those wide blue eyes. She wouldn't need to say anything. He could read everything in her face. And she would understand that all he had said to her – those few words he had uttered, his feeble attempt at enthusiasm – had been lies. He hadn't meant any of it.

He ran his hands down the front of his trouser legs, wiping the grit loose from his stinging palms, and hurried down to the grey sand, feeling it harden beneath his feet as he approached the shore. The tide was out and he found his pace quickening as he neared the water, anxious to put distance between him and the house. Reaching up to his collar, he fumbled with his tie, pulling it off over his head and stuffing it into his blazer pocket. As he came towards the end of the beach, where the rocks lay in long flat slabs of blue-grey stone, he found himself running, breath snagging in his chest, the first drops of rain dashing his cheeks. From a distance, he could see her, the wild flap of her hair in the wind and the unsteady spiral of smoke from her cigarette, as she leaned against the boulder, still wearing her navy school uniform – a protest in itself – and even though her back was turned to him, he could read everything in her posture. He knew from the defiant tilt of her head, the tension in her shoulders, the way she gripped the rock beneath her.

And as he approached, she turned to look at him and he saw tears streaking her face, chapped and ruddy from the wind. Those tears were a shock to him. He hadn't expected them.

'I'm not going, you know,' she told him in a voice stretched thin with warning. 'Don't even bother to invite me, because I won't go. I won't stand there and be a witness to that sham of a ceremony.'

'Lara,' he had said, taking a step towards her. She had looked away suddenly and tossed her unfinished cigarette into the rock pool. There was a certain ferocity in the gesture that caused him to pause. He knew he had to be careful with her.

'I didn't mean it,' he began falteringly, his voice sounding high and thin and hopelessly childish.

'You must understand that I didn't want any of it to'

'Don't,' she interrupted, shaking her head with a finality that made it clear to him that he wasn't going to be allowed to explain to her, that she didn't care to hear his words, his paltry excuse. That one word seemed to draw a line under everything there had been between them. She wasn't interested in hearing about his pain, didn't care to know about the great splintering apart of all his hopes and dreams. It wouldn't change anything now.

'And if you think I'm staying around to watch you two playing happy families, you're sorely mistaken.

'Something heavy seemed to enter his chest as she said it, a great weight bearing down on any levity remaining inside him. His entire life, all the days and months and years ahead of him, suddenly crowded out all that had gone before and all that he had hoped would come. He was struck by the calamity of his carelessness.

'I'm going without you,' she said to him wilfully, turning to look at him so that he could see the defiance in her eyes, to show that she could be strong without him. 'You may have bailed on our plans, but I can do it without you.'

'I'm sure you can,' he said, with a gentle admiration.

Something changed about her then, her defiance slipping so that he saw the hurt that was there. She couldn't hide it from him. He felt the great gaping 'why?' echoing inside her, and a little flare of anger ignited inside him. Did she not see that it was going to be worse for him? Did she not understand that she was the lucky one? That she was still free? But before he could put this to her, she pushed herself away from the rock, turning to him, and with one hand whipped the strands of hair back off her face.

'I hear you're going to Italy,' she said coolly, trying to be nonchalant, even though it was too late for that now.

'For your honeymoon.'

'Yes,' he had answered, the heaviness entering his heart.

'It won't be the same, you know.' She fixed him with her eyes, as cold and grey as the sea, and held him there for a moment.

'It won't be the same at all.'

And then she had turned away from him, and he had watched her holding herself straight and proud as she marched up the beach, her pace quickening to a run as she neared her

house, and all the while he wondered what she meant by that – the same for whom?

Did she know then how it would be? Had some shadow of intuition passed over her even then? How could it? How could she know that while he scampered around the ruins of Pompeii, Sorcha would sit politely and patiently in the shade, fanning herself with her hat, disguising her boredom, waiting for him to finish? How could Lara have foreseen that the whines of tiredness while queuing outside the Uffizi in the stifling cauldron of Florence would itch at his brain, an unfamiliar irritation? Lara couldn't know that he would have to remind himself of his new wife's condition, and that it was unfair of him to expect her to stand around in the sun. It was impossible, despite how well she knew them both, that she might have imagined how they would end up spending their honeymoon lounging under parasols by the pool of their hotel, barely speaking, while all of Italy's history and culture was locked away from him.

The fields were black, the land eerily still around him, tiredness swooping down over him as he drove, blurring his thoughts. There was a twist in the muscles of his back, angry knots working their way up and down his spine. Sorcha's hand on his thigh was still. He felt peculiar in a way he couldn't quite put his finger on. Something about the coolness of Lara's eyes on that last day came back to him, all the warmth and closeness fled from them. He tried to switch his mind off, tried to focus on the road ahead, the blaze of the headlights on the tarmac, the moonlit clouds moving over the black hump of mountains ahead. But her voice was in his head again. *It won't be the same at all.*

Lowering the window, he heard the roar of the sea.

Le trajet du retour fut maussade. Jim dormait à l'arrière et Sorcha contemplait la nuit au dehors. Lui avait la tête lourde d'avoir bu un peu trop de vin. Il conduisait lentement, avec prudence. La lumière des phares dansait sur les routes étroites et sinueuses. Sorcha tendit la main et la posa sur sa cuisse qu'elle caressa doucement. Par ce geste, elle exprimait son désir qu'il lui fasse l'amour à leur arrivée à la maison. Il sentit sa poitrine s'emplir d'angoisse. Il se remémora ces nombreux vendredis soirs où, recroquevillé sur ses avant-bras, il s'approchait du corps de sa femme, son visage sur le côté, enfoui dans l'oreiller, à l'opposé du sien. Elle s'accrochait alors à ses épaules et il la pénétrait, abandonnant son esprit au fantasme. Depuis quelque temps, il était obsédé par le doute persistant qu'en réalité, cet acte représentait pour eux deux plus une contrainte qu'une jouissance.

Alors qu'ils passaient l'ancienne caserne pour rejoindre la route qui traverse le pont en direction de la digue, le mot qu'elle avait prononcé plus tôt – cassé – résonna de nouveau en lui et il fut surpris de la douleur brute que cela lui avait immédiatement infligé. Jamais il n'aurait cru que Lara pût prononcer ce mot. Même l'ultime fois où ils s'étaient vus, à l'instant où elle le regardait, les yeux emplis de douleur, de ressentiment, et d'incrédulité, elle avait toujours gardé en elle cette attitude de défi, si volontaire, si forte. Au souvenir de ce regard, un frisson nerveux secoua son cou et ses épaules. Mais peut-être était-ce la seule chose qu'il voulait retenir pour atténuer sa propre culpabilité.

Presque seize années s'étaient écoulées depuis. Pourtant les détails de ce jour restaient vivaces dans son esprit – l'odeur douceâtre des gâteaux tout juste sortis du four qui envahissait toute la maison, la chaleur de la pièce, le crépitement de la tourbe dans l'âtre. Et la famille au complet, confinée dans cet espace étroit, les bises sur les joues, sa main qu'on agrippe sans arrêt, la litanie de leurs félicitations qui sifflait dans ses oreilles. Il n'avait rien voulu de tout ça. Il avait même protesté énergiquement. Mais à ce stade, il commençait à réaliser que, ce qu'il voulait, ne comptait plus pour grand-chose. Avec le froufrou de leurs jupes, toutes ces femmes semblaient offrir un ballet aérien ; elles papillonnaient une tasse de thé à la main et des assiettes bien garnies, se parlant à mots stridents de leurs voix aiguës. Les hommes, eux, restaient sur leurs chaises, la mine renfrognée, à manger des sandwiches et à boire du whiskey, échangeant des remarques à voix basse. Et au milieu, Sorcha, visage rayonnant d'émotion, affichait un air de satisfaction et – était-ce seulement le fruit de son imagination - de triomphe? Il eut l'impression que ses poumons s'emplissaient d'une bouffée de chaleur brûlante, son col lui serrant la gorge. Il comprit alors qu'il devait quitter cet endroit au plus vite.

Ce jour-là, le ciel était lourd de nuages menaçants qui planaient au-dessus de la mer

d'une couleur gris anthracite. Dans sa course pour fuir la maison, le souffle du vent salé rejeta en arrière sa cravate et ses cheveux. En proie à la confusion, hors d'haleine, ses pensées se télescopaient dans son esprit. C'était comme si d'un coup, sa vie avait pris une autre dimension à laquelle il n'était pas préparé. Il n'avait que vingt et un ans et pourtant sa jeunesse semblait désormais appartenir au passé, chassée par ces nouvelles responsabilités. Cette cascade d'événements qu'il avait lui-même déclenchée était en train de lui échapper, semblait impossible à arrêter. Tout cela le déconcertait et le déstabilisait. Perdu dans le chaos de ses pensées, il oublia une seconde la pierraille qui bordait le chemin, trébucha et s'affala lourdement. Pieds et mains dérapèrent sur le gravier et il ressentit la brûlure de la peau égratignée par les gravillons qui s'incrustaient dans ses larges paumes.

- Bon dieu, maugréa-t-il en se relevant, jetant en même temps un regard furtif du côté de la maison.

Il espérait que là-haut, ils n'avaient rien entendu. Il ne savait pas comment il réagirait si l'un d'eux le trouvait ainsi, le sommant d'expliquer ce qui s'était passé. Il les imaginait -ses beaux-parents- debout à la porte observant la scène de loin. Le père de Sorcha, visage fermé montrant sa réprobation ou bien sa mère, air pincé, regard inquiet, et aussi son propre père, les yeux remplis d'une profonde tristesse. Mais le pire serait Sorcha, son beau visage chiffonné, debout à côté en silence, le toisant de ses grands yeux bleus. Nul besoin de prononcer une parole. Pour lui, son visage était comme un livre. Elle comprendrait que tout ce qu'il lui avait dit, ces quelques mots chuchotés, sa velléité à feindre l'enthousiasme, tout cela n'était que mensonges. Il n'en pensait pas un mot.

Il se frotta les mains contre les jambes de son pantalon pour faire tomber les gravillons meurtrissant ses paumes, et se mit à courir sur le sable gris qui durcissait sous ses pieds à mesure qu'il approchait de la grève. La mer était à marée basse. Il accéléra son allure à l'approche de l'eau, impatient de mettre le plus de distance possible entre la maison et lui. Portant la main à son col, il desserra à la hâte sa cravate, la passa au-dessus de sa tête et la fourra dans la poche de sa veste. Il continua de courir à perdre haleine jusqu'au bout de la plage, là où les récifs forment une longue lande de roches bleu-gris, alors que les premières gouttes de pluie commençaient à lui piquer le visage.

De loin, il voyait le vent entraîner ses cheveux dans une danse farouche, et la spirale de fumée capricieuse qui montait de sa cigarette. Elle était appuyée contre un rocher, encore vêtue de l'uniforme de son école -ce qui était en soi une marque de protestation- et bien qu'elle fût de dos, il pouvait interpréter chacun de ses gestes. Il le devinait à la façon arrogante dont elle balançait la tête, à la tension qui pesait sur ses épaules, à la manière dont elle agrippait la roche sous elle.

Quand il fut près d'elle, elle se tourna vers lui, le visage sillonné de larmes et déjà gercé, rougi par le vent. A la vue de ces pleurs, il ressentit un choc violent. Il ne s'y attendait pas.

- Je n'y vais pas, tu sais, lui dit-elle d'une voix aiguë où perçait une pointe d'avertissement. Ne prends même pas la peine de m'inviter parce qu'il n'est pas question que j'y aille. Je ne vais pas rester plantée là à assister à cette parodie de cérémonie.

- Lara, avait-il répondu, en faisant un pas vers elle. Détournant subitement son regard elle avait jeté sa cigarette à moitié fumée dans l'eau entre les rochers. Son geste avait quelque chose de féroce et il préféra se retenir. Il se devait d'être prudent avec elle, il le savait.

- Ce n'est pas ce que je voulais dire, balbutia-t-il, d'un filet de voix pointue, désespérément enfantine. Comprends bien que je ne voulais pas...

- Arrête, l'interrompit-elle en secouant la tête de façon péremptoire pour bien lui faire entendre qu'elle n'accepterait aucune explication de sa part. Elle n'avait que faire de ses mots, de ses excuses pitoyables. Ce seul mot semblait marquer le point de non-retour dans tout ce qu'ils avaient vécu ensemble.

Elle ne voulait rien savoir de sa détresse et se moquait bien de tous les espoirs, de tous les rêves qu'il avait bâtis et qui volaient en éclat. Rien ne pourrait désormais changer.

- Et si tu t'imagines que je vais rester à vous regarder tous les deux jouer les familles heureuses, tu te trompes complètement.

Ces mots lui écrasèrent la poitrine comme si un poids énorme compressait chacune des parcelles d'orgueil qui restaient en lui. Sa vie entière, les jours, les mois, les années qu'il avait devant lui refoulaient brutalement son passé, ses espoirs et il prenait de plein fouet l'immensité du désastre causé par sa négligence.

- Je pars sans toi, lui dit-elle d'un air volontaire. Elle s'était tournée vers lui pour qu'il puisse bien voir l'éclair de défi dans ses yeux, pour qu'il comprenne qu'elle pouvait être forte sans lui. Tu as beau avoir ruiné nos projets, j'y arriverai sans toi.

- Je n'en doute pas, dit-il avec une douce admiration.

Quelque chose changea alors en elle. Son arrogance s'estompa pour laisser place à la peine qu'elle ne parvint pas à lui dissimuler. Il toucha du doigt le bord de l'abîme où les 'pourquoi' résonnaient dans son corps et dans son esprit comme un écho, ce qui eut pour effet d'allumer en lui une petite lueur de colère. Ne pouvait-elle pas voir que ce serait pire pour lui ? Ne comprenait-elle pas que c'est elle qui avait le plus de chance dans cette histoire. Qu'elle au moins était toujours libre. Avant qu'il n'ait pu lui faire part de ses sentiments, elle se leva du rocher sur lequel elle était appuyée, se tourna vers lui et balaya d'un revers de main les mèches de cheveux qui couvraient

son visage.

- J'ai entendu dire que tu partais en Italie, dit-elle d'un ton détaché, essayant de se donner une certaine nonchalance, bien que maintenant il fût trop tard pour cela. Pour votre lune de miel.

- Oui, fit-il, une enclume sur le cœur.

- Ça ne sera pas pareil, tu sais. Elle resta un moment à le fixer de ses yeux, froids et gris comme la mer. Ce ne sera pas du tout pareil.

Puis elle s'était éloignée. Il avait observé la façon dont elle se tenait, droite et fière alors qu'elle remontait la plage accélérant le pas à la vue de la maison. Tout le temps qu'il l'avait suivie des yeux, il n'avait cessé de se demander 'pareil pour qui?'

Avait-elle pressenti comment cela se passerait? Une intuition même infime l'avait-elle déjà à l'époque effleurée? Comment cela était-il possible ? Comment pouvait-elle savoir que, pendant qu'il flânerait entre les ruines de Pompéi, Sorcha resterait gentiment assise à l'ombre, sans fièvre, à s'éventer avec son chapeau, cachant son ennui et attendant qu'il revienne? Deviner que les soupirs de lassitude, quand ils feraient la queue devant le musée Uffizi dans la chaleur étouffante de Florence, corroderaient son cerveau d'une irritation jusque-là inconnue? Lara était incapable de savoir qu'il songerait continuellement au fragile état de sa nouvelle femme. Que c'était injuste d'attendre d'elle qu'elle tourne en rond sous le soleil. Elle avait beau bien les connaître tous les deux, c'était impossible qu'elle ait pu imaginer qu'ils passeraient leur lune de miel paressant sous les parasols au bord de la piscine de l'hôtel, se parlant à peine. Et qu'il devrait renoncer à l'histoire et la culture de l'Italie.

Les champs étaient noirs, la campagne tout autour de lui étrangement calme. Au volant, la fatigue commençait à s'emparer de lui, jetant le trouble dans ses pensées. Les muscles de son dos étaient douloureux, petits boules de colère qui montaient et descendaient le long de sa colonne vertébrale. Sur sa cuisse, la main de Sorcha ne bougeait pas. Il se sentait bizarre sans qu'il puisse dire pourquoi. Cela avait trait à la froideur des yeux de Lara lors de leur dernière rencontre. Toute chaleur, toute intimité les avaient quittés. Il tenta de penser à autre chose, essaya de se concentrer sur sa route, la lumière des phares sur le bitume, les nuages ourlés de lumière par l'éclat de la lune au-dessus de la sombre silhouette des montagnes devant lui. Pourtant sa voix résonnait encore dans sa tête. *Ce ne sera pas du tout pareil.* Il baissa la vitre pour entendre le grondement de l'océan.

**Winning author**

Daniele Del Giudice

Book awarded*Orizzonte mobile* (2009)

Movable Horizon

Publishing house

Giulio Einaudi editore

Biography

Daniele Del Giudice was born in Rome in 1949. He lives in Venice, where he teaches at the Theatre Faculty of the IUAV, the University Institute of Architecture. Daniele del Giudice's books have won the following awards: the Viareggio Prize in 1983; the 1995 Bagutta Prize; the Selezione Campiello Prize in 1995 and 1997; and the Accademia dei Lincei award for fiction in 2002. Del Giudice has also published essays on I. Svevo, T. Bernhard, R. L. Stevenson and Primo Levi.

Synopsis

As he narrates his own Antarctic expedition, Daniele Del Giudice recalls the notebooks of other courageous expeditions that are unknown to most, with shipwrecks, ships stuck for months behind ice, savage crews and sailors on the brink of desperation or annihilated by madness. These are the last true adventure writers who have created the myth and the memory of the Unknown Land, and possess an often tragic and emblematic fate as they are pushed to their limits.

Del Giudice travels to the 'deepest and furthest' parts of South Antarctica. From Santiago to Punta

Arenas in Chile, and further down, until, 'feeling embarrassed and impeccably Martian', he reaches 'another planet, a celestial body inhabited by millions of penguins'. Exploring the area, he finds stored in its ice the history of what has lived there and those who have sought to reach it.

With a work of storytelling marquetry, a patchwork of life and literature, the author reconstructs a 'hyperexpedition' that connects the explorers' past trips and retraces their paths through the world alongside those contained in literature. Playing on the diversity of these different perspectives and voices, the author presents a 'movable horizon' in space and time, but one which is stable and long-lasting in the feelings it provokes.

This is a trip beyond all sense of time, set in a hypnotising landscape, indifferent to man but with a sublime beauty: from the yellow ochre of the plains to the glaciers that drip in the water, among rocky peaks, eternal snow, precipices and a horizon of ice and light.

They are places, stories, days, years and geological eras that defy simple linear narration. It's a natural ancient landscape that stratifies everything and crystallises every memory. This book is the poem of these simultaneous worlds.

... lui incespicava sui sassi senza piú badarmi, con quell'aria affannata da 'l'm late, l'm late', finché dovette convincersi che i suoi genitori erano partiti via mare lasciandolo lí: soltanto allora si voltò verso l'acqua e pieno di sconforto e disgusto si buttò. Ormai sapevo di cosa si trattava. La scena familiare cui avevo assistito era un momento fondamentale della crescita, quando il pinguino giovane viene obbligato a procurarsi da solo in mare il krill e il plancton di cui si nutre, che fino a un certo punto gli viene fornito come poltiglia rigurgitata dal becco dei genitori. Mi accorsi che stavo antropomorfizzando i pinguini, cosa che mi ero ripromesso di non fare, e ne parlai con Jeremy, meglio attenersi alle molte spiegazioni sui comportamenti dei pinguini di diverse specie che le spedizioni dei biologi osservavano e catalogavano. Il guaio delle storie, con i pinguini, è che sono narrate da un unico punto di vista, quello umano. Alla loro fantasia e curiosità, inesauribili, sovrappriamo ciò che appartiene a noi, mutandone il senso.

Può darsi che anche i pinguini siano portati a pinguinomorfizzare gli umani, e questo certamente accadde qualche settimana dopo, quando in una traversata a piedi, mentre accompagnavo una missione internazionale di dieci biologi, incontrammo una carovana di *Imperator*, la specie piú grande. Loro, i pinguini in fila, noi, umani in fila. Due comunità egualmente in marcia, i pinguini dall'interno verso le coste per procurarsi cibo, noi dalle coste verso l'interno per raggiungere le regioni piú fredde abitate dagli *Imperator*. Loro, noi, vivevamo la stessa solitudine in un oceano di ghiacci e nevi, e le stesse preoccupazioni. Giunti a una rispettosa distanza il capo dei pinguini *Imperator*, un individuo voluminoso e importante della loro specie, allungò il collo verso di noi in un profondo inchino e con il becco contro il petto fece un lungo discorso gorgogliando. Finito il discorso, da quella posizione di riverenza fissò negli occhi Jacques, capo della missione, per vedere se aveva capito. Né Jacques, l'etologo piú esperto, né chiunque di noi poteva comprendere quel discorso. Allora il pinguino ripeté di nuovo il lungo gorgoglio con la testa china, senza spazientirsi. Chi si spazientiva erano gli altri pinguini dietro di lui, cominciavano a dubitare che il loro capo avesse combinato qualche pasticcio. Si fece avanti un altro di loro, spingendo da parte il suo predecessore. Con lo stesso inchino e lo stesso sguardo in alto tenne un nuovo discorso che sarebbe rimasto per noi altrettanto incomprensibile.

Ma la grande passione dei pinguini erano i cani. Se li scoprivano in una base antartica andavano a trovare solo loro, senza piú passare dagli uomini. Facevano molti inchini e lunghi discorsi, i cani seguivano abbaiando e schiacciandosi sulle zampe anteriori; poi qualcuno riusciva a sciogliersi dalla catena e succedeva un massacro. I pinguini guardavano i propri compagni morti con assoluto stupore, e con l'espressione da 'Non m'importa cosa sarà di me' cercavano di parlare ancora ai cani, non fosse per gli uomini che intervenivano a salvarli. Del resto questi uccelli hanno

una loro speciale idea della presenza e dell'assenza, come ebbi modo di constatare un giorno con un involontario esperimento. Mentre uno di loro tornava dall'acqua verso il suo posto nella rookery mi sono trovato sulla sua traiettoria; prima mi ha guardato stupito, poi ha cercato di attraversarmi come se non esistessi. Avanzava, urtava contro le mie gambe, faceva marcia indietro. Dopo un po' ha cominciato a colpirmi con le pinne natatorie. A me veniva da ridere, ma i colpi erano velocissimi e facevano male. Dato che non mi spostavo, ha compiuto un giro completo della rookery, e io a mia volta ho fatto un passo aspettandolo sul lato opposto. Quando è arrivato e mi ha visto ancora lí aveva un'espressione di totale incredulità. Il suo ragionamento era ineccepibile: aveva fatto un giro intero, perciò io dovevo essere sparito, non potevo esserci ancora. Un giro completo vale un cambiamento delle cose, altrimenti che si gira a fare?

A forza di osservarli mi sono convinto che il segreto dei pinguini è nel loro essere al tempo stesso impeccabili e impacciati. Questi animali dotati di grazia e autoironia, virtù che attribuiamo alle specie piú evolute, sono in realtà dei grandi incompiuti. Non ce l'hanno fatta a diventare pesci, dato che l'acqua non è il loro elemento definitivo; pur essendo uccelli non volano piú, e come bipedi sono lenti e preoccupati. Rimasero bloccati in questa ambiguità in ere antichissime e da allora non sono cambiati piú. Ma nei ghiacci, nel vento ruggente, con i pinguini si finisce per perdere la testa. Soprattutto d'inverno, nella notte perenne, notte di notte e notte di giorno, buio totale, quel buio costante che scardina la mente, distrugge il sonno, inutile guardare l'orologio, tanto è sempre l'ora dello stesso buio.

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pagine 112-113

... La prima era una spedizione 'record', Shackleton arrivò a centoventisette chilometri dal Polo Sud geografico, lí fece bene il calcolo delle riserve e poiché l'unica cosa che gli stava a cuore veramente erano i suoi uomini, ebbe il buon senso di tornare indietro. E se il cavallino manciú Chinaman non fosse sparito ingoiato da un crepaccio con i viveri che portava, e con i viveri che rappresentava da sé, dato che i cavallini venivano mangiati via via dalla spedizione, Shackleton ci sarebbe arrivato al Polo Sud, evitando cosí la corsa di Scott e Amundsen che finí in tragedia. Mawson invece raggiunse il Polo magnetico, un puro luogo scientifico, talmente scientifico che si sposta continuamente seguendo il magnetismo terrestre; quando Mawson ci pose la bandierina era sulla terra, e oggi è in mare. Negli ordini di Shackleton a Mawson, oltre alle osservazioni

magnetiche e alla raccomandazione di studiare la Dry Valley, la 'Valle Secca', c'era anche quello di prendere possesso delle terre 'quale parte dell'impero britannico'. E inoltre: 'Se troverete dei minerali di valore economico, prenderete possesso nello stesso modo della posizione in cui si trovano per mio conto, quale comandante di questa spedizione.'

Credo che non parlerò della ricerca nelle basi, della fisica delle aurore, della cosmologia, dell'indagine sugli strati limite dell'atmosfera, di come l'Antartide abbia un clima tutto speciale che determina anche quello del resto del pianeta. Quello che mi colpiva, nelle basi, erano le persone. Vivere così a sud, al Sud assoluto, segnava il carattere, e nell'eccitazione c'era qualche crinatura folle o depressiva, come mi resi conto quando fui invitato nella base sovietica Bellingshausen, intitolata a un capitano russo di origine tedesca, Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen, grande ammiratore di James Cook ed esploratore per conto di Alessandro I. Fu un invito il più possibile informale: guardavo le quaranta tonnellate di ferraglia arrugginita, vecchi anfibi e cingolati accatastati lì davanti, e dalla baracca corse fuori un ragazzo, un meteorologo che mi tirò dentro. Era molto gentile, era molto ubriaco. Passavamo in rassegna le sinossi dei dati meteorologici e le immagini di dove eravamo, riprese in tempo reale dal satellite. Fin dall'inizio mi aveva chiesto 'Sei giapponese? Sei uno zoologo?' e lì per lì avevo risposto di no a entrambe le domande, ma con l'andare del tempo e con la sua insistenza e la situazione che si faceva piuttosto dolorosa dissi di sí, ero zoologo e anche giapponese, mi sembrava giusto essere ciò che lui desiderava.

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pagine 138-139

Ogni continente ha la sua letteratura, intendo dire i capisaldi in cui vengono fissati il mito e la memoria originando il racconto, e l'Antartide non è un caso diverso dagli altri. In questo momento non penso al Gordon Pym di Poe, ricalcato sulle relazioni del capitano James Weddell, e al bellissimo seguito che ne immaginò Jules Verne nella Sfinge dei ghiacci. Mi riferisco invece ai libri di Shackleton, di Scott, di Mawson, di Bove, De Gerlache e di altri, che nacquero qui. Sono una letteratura, ma non si tratta di 'libri di viaggio'; per l'affresco storico, la forza della passione, la densità del mistero e un ethos sulla soglia dell'incognito e per gli apparati scientifici sono gli ultimi e veri grandi racconti d'avventura, il genere che Stevenson, nella sua classificazione del romanzo, definiva il più sensuale, dove gli autori furono anche personaggi e parti in commedia.

La sera, nelle baracche delle basi, mi è capitato di sentirne parlare dagli scienziati non diversamente da come alle nostre latitudini parliamo di Emma Bovary o di Charlus. Scott era

Scott, implacabile 'Royal Navy' fino alla fine, Shackleton era il più amato, aveva fallito quasi tutti gli obbiettivi, ma le sue peripezie avevano prodotto la più generosa e leggendaria esperienza antartica. E Amundsen? Rispettato, non molto di più. Fu un professionista nell'epoca di grandi amatori, venne in Antartide quando Scott aveva già iniziato la marcia verso il Polo, scelse una via migliore, arrivò primo. Piantò la sua bandiera e se ne andò. Un lavoro ben fatto, dicevano qui, ma quella spedizione fu la più povera di bagaglio scientifico e di risonanza umana.

A me tornava in mente anche Giovanni Duse, un italiano dimenticato da tutte le storie, venuto qui nel 1901 con la spedizione Nordenskjöld. Era un tenente cartografo, e infatti le uniche tracce le avevo trovate all'Istituto geografico militare di Firenze oltre che allo Scott Institute di Cambridge. Duse aveva scritto a Nordenskjöld chiedendo di partecipare e Nordenskjöld l'aveva arruolato. Arrivati qui sulla penisola antartica si erano divisi in tre gruppi, la nave era stata stritolata dai ghiacci, si erano persi, ciascuno era sopravvissuto all'inverno polare come poteva. Si ritrovarono dopo un anno sulla banchisa. Duse aveva il volto così bruciato e la barba e i capelli così aggrovigliati che Nordenskjöld non volle credere che fosse lui e lo considerò un indigeno fuegino, naufragato chissà come fino a qui.

Durante le conversazioni serali nelle baracche degli scienziati, rese un po' liquide dall'alcol, tutto questo, le storie, era intercalato da questioni sul moltiplicarsi delle basi, su quelle vere e quelle finte, distinzione possibile attraverso la qualità del lavoro scientifico, sull'inquinamento, sulle rivendicazioni territoriali, sullo sfruttamento minerario, sul Trattato Antartico che negli ultimi trent'anni aveva regolato la materia e la vita qui, giudicato da tutti i Paesi un fantastico trattato, tutti pronti però a prendere d'assalto il continente nel caso di una sua revisione. Poi di colpo ritornavano a parlare delle 'ombre di terra', quel curioso fenomeno per cui il sole, illuminando dal basso le montagne, ne proietta l'ombra sulle nubi come un cono rovesciato, e quali ragionamenti facessero gli esploratori per darne una spiegazione, e come usavano foglie di senna tra le calzature e il fondo delle scarpe per ridurre i rischi di congelamento.

... he was stumbling along over the stones without paying any further attention to me, with that breathless air of 'I'm late, I'm late', until he must have convinced himself that his parents had gone off into the sea leaving him behind: only then did he turn toward the water and, dejected and distraught, threw himself in. Now I knew what it was about. The family scene I had witnessed was a critical moment in his training, the point when a young penguin is forced to procure – all by himself, in the sea – the krill and plankton on which he feeds, which prior to a certain time is offered to him from his parents' beak as regurgitated pulp. I realized that I was anthropomorphizing the penguins, something I had promised myself not to do, and I spoke with Jeremy about it; better to stick to the numerous explanations of the behavior of penguins of different species which the biologists' expeditions observed and cataloged. The trouble with stories, when it comes to penguins, is that they are told by a sole point of view, the human one. We superimpose what has to do with us over their inexhaustible imagination and curiosity, changing its meaning.

It may be that penguins too are inclined to penguinomorphize humans, and this definitely happened a few weeks later when, during an expedition on foot, as I was accompanying an international delegation of ten biologists, we encountered a caravan of Emperors, the largest of their kind. Them, the penguins, all in a row, us, the humans, all in a row. Two colonies similarly on a trek, the penguins toward the coast in search of food, we from the coast towards the interior, to reach the coldest regions inhabited by the Emperors. They, we, were experiencing the same solitude in a sea of ice and snow, and the same concerns. When they arrived at a respectful distance, the head of the Emperor penguins, a very large, important creature of their species, stretched out his neck toward us in a deep bow and with his beak against his chest made a long, gurgling speech. When he had finished his speech, still in that deferential position, he stared up into the eyes of Jacques, the head of the delegation, to see if he had understood. Neither Jacques, the most experienced ethologist, nor anyone else could understand that discourse. So then the penguin, head bowed, repeated the lengthy gurgle once again, never losing his patience. The ones who got impatient were the other penguins behind him, who began to wonder whether their leader had somehow botched things up. Another one came forward, pushing his predecessor aside. With the same bow and the same upward gaze he launched into a new speech that for us would be equally unintelligible.

But the penguins' great passion were the dogs. If they discovered them in an Antarctic base, they went over to visit with just the dogs, not bothering to frequent the men anymore. They made countless bows and lengthy speeches, the dogs listened barking and stamping their front paws; then one would manage to get loose from his chain and a massacre ensued. The

penguins would look at their fallen comrades in absolute astonishment, and with a devil-may-care expression would continue trying to talk to the dogs, were it not for the men who interceded to save them. Moreover these birds have their own peculiar idea of presence and absence, as I was able to ascertain one day through an unwitting experiment. As one of them was returning from the water to his place in the rookery, I found myself in his path; first he looked at me in surprise, then he tried to pass through me as if I didn't exist. He moved ahead, pushed against my legs, backtracked. After a while he began striking me with his natatorial fins. I felt like laughing, but the blows were very rapid and they hurt. Since I did not move, he made a complete lap around the rookery, and I in turn took a step around and waited for him to approach from the other side. When he arrived and saw that I was still there, his expression was one of total incredulity. His reasoning was flawless: he had done an entire lap, so I had to be gone, I couldn't still be there. A complete circuit should change things, otherwise why bother to do it?

Through my observations of them, I am convinced that the penguins' secret lies in their being both flawless and awkward at the same time. These creatures endowed with grace and self-irony, virtues that we attribute to more evolved species, are in reality largely unfinished. They didn't manage to become fish, given that water is not their definitive element; though they are birds they no longer fly, and as bipeds they are slow and anxious. They remained frozen in this ambiguity in ancient eras, and since that time they have not changed. But on the ice packs, in the roaring wind, you end up losing your head with the penguins. Especially in winter, in the perpetual night, night at night and night by day, total darkness, that constant darkness that unhinges the mind, destroys sleep, useless to look at the clock, it's always the same hour of darkness.

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pages 112-113

... The first was a 'record' expedition: Shackleton got 127 kilometers from the geographic South Pole, ably calculated his reserves, and since the only thing he really cared about were his men, had the good sense to turn back. And if the Manchu pony named Chinaman had not disappeared into a crevasse along with the provisions he was carrying, and the food that he himself represented – given that the ponies were eaten by the expedition as they went along – Shackleton would have made it to the South Pole, thus precluding the race between Scott and Amundsen that ended in tragedy. Mawson on the other hand reached the magnetic Pole, a purely scientific spot, so

scientific that it continually shifts according to the Earth's magnetism; when Mawson planted his flag, it was on land, and today it's in the sea. Among Shackleton's orders to Mawson, besides that of performing magnetic observations and studying the Dry Valley, there was also the command to take possession of the lands 'as part of the British empire'. And in addition: 'If you find minerals of economic value, take possession likewise of the location where they are found on my behalf, as commander of this expedition'.

I don't think I will talk about the research at the bases, about the physics of the southern lights, the cosmology, the study of the boundary layers of the atmosphere, about how Antarctica has a very special climate which also determines that of the rest of the planet. What struck me, at the bases, were the people. Living in the south like that, in the absolute South, leaves its mark on a man's character, and there was some manic-depressive fracture in the excitation, as I realized when I was invited into the Soviet base Bellingshausen, named after a Russian captain of German origin, Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen, a great admirer of James Cook and an explorer for Czar Alexander I. It was the most informal of invitations: I was looking at the forty tons of rusted scrap iron, old amphibians and tractors stacked there in front, and a guy ran out of the shelter, a meteorologist who dragged me inside. He was very polite. He was very drunk. We examined the summaries of the meteorological data and looked at images of where we were, filmed in real time by satellite. Right away he asked me 'Are you Japanese? Are you a zoologist?' and at first I answered no to both questions. But as time passed, given his insistence and a situation that was becoming rather sad, I said yes, I was a zoologist and also Japanese. I thought it only right to be what he wanted me to be.

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pages 138-139

Every continent has its own literature, by which I mean the foundations on which the myth and recollections which give rise to its story are based, and Antarctica is no exception. At the moment I am not thinking of Poe's *Gordon Pym*, based on the reports of Captain James Weddell, or of the beautiful sequel that Jules Verne imagined in his *The Sphinx of the Ice Fields*. I am referring instead to the books by Shackleton, Scott, Mawson, Bove, De Gerlache and others, which originated here. They form a literature, though they are not 'travel books'; owing to the historical fresco they present, the intensity of their passion, the wealth of mystery and an ethos on the brink of the



unknown, and their scientific background, they are the last true great adventure stories, the kind that Stevenson, in his classification of the novel, called the most sensual, where the authors were also characters and role-players.

In the evening, in the shelters at the bases, I would hear people talk about scientists not unlike the way we in our latitudes talk about Emma Bovary or Proust's Charlus. Scott was Scott, implacable 'Royal Navy' to the end. Shackleton was the most loved, he had fallen short of almost all the objectives, but his vicissitudes had resulted in the most lavish and legendary Antarctic experience. And Amundsen? Respected, not much more. He was a professional in an era of great amateurs; he came to Antarctica when Scott had already begun his march towards the Pole, chose a better route, got there first, planted his flag and left. A job well done, they said here, but that expedition was the poorest in terms of scientific knowledge and human resonance. Giovanni Duse also came to mind, an Italian forgotten by all the histories, who arrived in 1901 with the Nordenskjöld expedition. He was a lieutenant cartographer, and indeed the only traces I found of him were at the Military Geographic Institute in Florence and the Scott Institute in Cambridge. Duse had written to Nordenskjöld asking to take part in the expedition and Nordenskjöld enlisted him. When they reached the Antarctic peninsula they divided up into three groups, the ship had been wrecked by the ice, they got lost, everyone survived the polar winter as best he could. They met up again after a year on the ice pack. Duse's face was so burned and his beard and hair so tangled that Nordenskjöld couldn't believe it was him and thought he was an indigenous Fuegian, who had somehow been shipwrecked there.

During the evening conversations in the scientists' huts, exchanges rendered a bit fluid by alcohol, all of this, these stories, was interspersed by questions about the increase in the number of bases, about which were genuine and which were sham – a distinction made possible through the quality of the scientific work – about pollution, about territorial claims, about mining exploitation, about the Antarctic Treaty that for the last thirty years had governed matters and life here, considered by all the nations to be a marvelous treaty, though all were prepared to take the continent by storm in the event of its revision. Then they would suddenly resume talking about the 'earth-shadow', that curious phenomenon by which the sun, illuminating the mountains from below, casts their shadow on the clouds like an inverted cone, and about the reasoning explorers gave to explain it, and how they put senna leaves between their socks and the bottom of their shoes to reduce the risk of frostbite.



**Winning author**

Laura Sintija Černiauskaitė

Book awarded

Kvėpavimas į marmurą (2006)

Breathing into Marble

Publishing house

Alma Littera

Biography

Prose writer, playwright. She was born in Vilnius (1976). In 1996, she enrolled in Vilnius University's Department of Extramural Studies to study Lithuanian language and literature. She worked as a freelance publicist for the magazine *Malonumas* (1998-1999); as a language editor for *Genys*, a children's magazine (2000); and as a journalist for *Tavo vaikas* (2001-2002). In 1993, she won the Republic competition of young philologists, and the next year the First Book competition granted by the Lithuanian Writers' Union. In 2001, her play *Liberate the Golden Foe* (*Išlaisvink auksinį kumeliuką*) was the winner of the competition organized by The Fairies Theatre and Vilnius University. In 2003, *Liučė Skates* (*Liučė čiuožia*) a prose and plays selection, ranks among the 12 best books of the year, and her play *Liučė Skates* is staged by the National Youth theatre. In 2004, *Liučė Skates* (*Liučė Čiuožia*) won first prize in the Berlin international play fair *Theatretrefen*.

Synopsis

Breathing into Marble is the fourth book by this young and talented writer. But it is her first novel, a well-crafted drama about painful solitude, family, and relationships between men and women. Černiauskaitė writes about yearning, about unused intimacy, about the gentleness and burdens of the heart, about life, about something from below and something from above. This is the story of a young mother named Isabelle and her young family, which adopts a six-year-old boy who is unable to put down roots in his new family and kills his ill adopted brother. It's a romantic ballad with the plot of a thriller. It's a deep psychological analysis of a mother's soul. It's a book full of so many strong emotions that it is almost possible to feel the characters breathing down your back while you read it.

Į VAIKŲ globos namų teritoriją ateidavo lapė. Ne pro spragą pinučių tvoroje, o, kaip visi, pro vartus. Tarp kamienų lyg dažuose pamirktas teptukas šmėkstelėdavo šermukšnių spalvos kailis. Iš pradžių jie bijojo, kad lapė pasiutusi, ir uždraudė vaikams prie jos artintis. Sargas paspendė spąstus. Bet lapė ėmė lankytis kasdien, spąstus apeidavo, ir netrukus paaiškėjo, kad, nepaisydami draudimų, vyresni vaikai ją prisijaukino. Šitai sužinojusi, Beatričė leido ją šerti maisto atliekomis iš virtuvės.

Bet netrukus lapė dingo. Mažiukai, kasdien po vakarienės nunešdavę jai prie tvoros lauktuves – jei būdavo palankiai nusiteikusi, lapė iškišdavo iš lazdyno pašaipų snukį ir laukdavo, kol jie pasitrauks – neapsakomai nuliūdo.

Maždaug po savaitės sargas ją rado netoli kelio. Lapės kailis nebeliepsnojo, smūksojo samanose kaip paprasta pūvančių lapų krūva. Sargas paspyrė ir atvertė ją aukštelininką – šviesus krūtinės kailis sulipęs nuo kraujo, gerklėje sustingusi juoda pjautinė žaizda. Jis paslėpė dvėseną po žabais, vakare grįžo su sodininko kastuvu ir užkasė. Vaikams buvo pasakyta, kad lapė atsivedė lapiukų, ir daugiau nebeateis. *Kas atsiveda palikuonių, turi užmiršti pramogas, ir jais rūpintis. Žvėrys dažnai tai supranta geriau už žmones*, buvo paaiškinta vaikams.

Bet Ilja jau žinojo, kad viskas, kas prasideda kaip pasaka, anksčiau ar vėliau baigiasi gyvenimu. O gyvenime niekas netrunka ilgai. Kiekviena diena ką nors iš tavęs atima, o jei gauni dovanų, tai tik tam, kad jas iš tavęs išplėštų. *Tasai*, kas šitaip žiauriai su jais žaidžia, smaginasi savo malonumui. Ilja žinojo, jautė, kad *tasai* yra. Jis pulsavo vaizduotės paribiuose. Kartais ateidavo į Iljos sapnus, bet niekada nevirsdavo vaizdu. Pasklisdavo už nugaros kaip rašalo dėmė, ir pašaipiai švokšdamas alsuodavo į sprandą – nuo jo ledinio kvapo kūnas nueidavo pagaugais.

Ilja jo nebebijojo. Tik *neketė*.

Sugrąžintas iš Puškų jis smogdavo kiekvienam, išdrįsusiam prie jo prieiti ir pažvelgti į akis. Ir niekas neturėjo teisės klausinėti.

Iš vieno berniuko mainais už kramtomą gumą jis gavo kišeninį peiliuką.

Lapė nespėjo atsivesti lapiukų.

Jis slėpė peiliuką, suvyniojęs į celofano plėvelę, parke, prie pinučių tvoros. Pats taip sugalvojo. Paslaptis reikia laikyti žemėje. Reikia jas kaupti juodai dienai. Ir laiku išsitraukti. Nežinia kada ir kam jų prireiks, bet jos būtinos.

Ir dar – paslaptys paprastai būna baisios.

Praėjus ketveriems metams, lapę visi užmiršo. Dabar į mišką už globos namų tvoros ateidavo jauna stirna. Ji buvo patikli, ir, jei neįsigeisdavai per arti prieiti, leisdavo savimi grožėtis. Jos

naivos akys ir jaukus, lyg smulkiais lapeliais nubertas kailiukas, liaunų kojų grakštumas, kuriuose lyg nekantrus gyvsidabris staiga suvirpėdavo laukinė jėga – nuo viso to Iljai užgniauždavo kvapą. Stirną suglumindavo bet koks netikėtas garsas. Kryptelėdavo grakščiu kaklu – ir jos jau nebėra, tik vos virpa užkliudytos šakos.

Ji buvo tyli ir skvarbi, ir tokia jaudinamai graži, kad Iljai sukutendavo paširdžius, ir jis nevalingai sugniauždavo kumštį, lyg laikytų jame peiliuką. Jis stovėdavo prie tvoros ir laukdavo, kol stirna išnirs tarp spindinčių liepos lapelių ir pažvelgs į jį gailiom akim. Jis žinojo jos valandas, lyg jie būtų susitarę. Bet laukdamas darydavosi silpnas, o stirnai pasirodžius taip sutraukdavo paširdžius, kad vieną sykį tai turėjo baigtis.

Jis negalėjo būti silpnas.

Vieną dieną Ilja išsikasė peiliuką ir išėjo. Grįžo tik kitą rytą. Paklaikęs ir tuščiomis rankomis, nuo kurių norėjosi nusiplauti kažką gąsdinančiai lipnaus. Upės vanduo neįstengė to nuskalauti, nors jis kruopščiai išsirakinėjo net panages.

Peiliuko Ilja daugiau nebelietė. Nei to, kuris liko upės dugne, nei jokio kito.

Kai po keleto dienų tarp liepos lapelių kyštelėjo stimos snukutis, Ilja pravirko – iš pradžių tyliai ir skaudžiai, po to – vis garsiau. Bet tik jai. Stirna nesistebėjo, užjausdama uodė orą, lyg norėtų paragauti vaiko ašarų.

Po tos nakties Ilja ėmė laukti, kol pas jį atvažiuos.

LIUDAS atvažiavo po pietų, kai mažieji būna suguldyti. Vyresni globotiniai žaisdavo judriuosius žaidimus atokiau pastatų, kad neprižadintų miegančių. Auklėtojai palikdavo juos vienus, mergaitės išsibarstydavo po parką, berniukai spardydamo kamuolį stadione.

Ilja nebuvo iš tų, kurie susideda su visais. Jis turėjo bendražygių, su jais pavykdavo nepastebėtiems išsprukti iš saugomos teritorijos į mišką, kartais net iki upės, už plento. Bet dažniausiai veikdavo vienas.

Liudas paliko automobilį miške, ir iki globos namų teritorijos atžingsniavo pėsčias. Kieme priešais administracijos pastatą šurmuliavo penkiolikos vaikų būrys, dvi pagyvenusios auklėtojos šūksniais ragino juos išsirikiuoti po du. Liudas sustojo už tvoros, iš teritorijos pusės dengiamas erškėtrožių krūmo, ir išsitraukė žiūronus.

Vaikai ruošėsi iškylai. Juos vesdavo į nesraunų užutėkį, vasarą ten ant kranto priberdavo smėlio, o citrinų geltonumo plūdurai ženklino vietą, už kurios draudžiama plaukti. Nors maudytis jau buvo per vėsu, saulėtas rugsėjo oras tiko iškylai su patiesalais, kamuoliais ir badmintonu. „Eve–li–na, kur tavo kepurė?! – šūkavo apkūni raudonplaukė auklėtoja. – Modestai! Mo–des–tai, kam pasakiau, aš daugiau nekartosiu! Ilja! Il–ja!.. Turėsime tavęs vieno laukti?“

Liudas sukluso ir tol vedžiojo žiūronais po vaikų būrį, kol objektyvas užgriebė paniurusį veidą tamsiomis migdolinėmis akimis. Ilja sukiojosi atokiau, žabeliu stumdydamas akmenukus, ir tarytum delėsė. Liudas tuojau pažino išraišką, kuri iškreipdavo Iljos veidą prieš jam ką nors iškrečiant.

Kol vaikai nepatraukė prie vartų, jis skubiai nukurnėjo mišku link automobilio.

Upe Liudas pasiekė pirmas. Automobilį paslėpė atokiau, žemais krūmokšniais apkleistame keliuke, o pats įsitaisė ant pušimis apaugusio skardžio. Iš čia paplūdimys matėsi kaip ant delno.

Iškylautojai pasirodė po gero pusvalandžio. Jų spalvotos striukės sušvytavo tarp pušų kamienų, paskui dingo ir pasirodė jau apačioje, prie vandens. Liudas pakėlė prie akių žiūronus.

Jis matė, kad Ilja kažką rezga, ir tik ieško progos pasprukti iš bendro katilo. Viename paplūdimio krašte mergaitės patiesė kelis apklotus, sukrovė krepšius su užkandžiais, sumetė striukes. Auklėtojos organizavo žaidimą su kamuoliu. Prašydama dėmesio raudonplaukė pliaukštelėjo delnais ir paragino vaikus susiburti arčiau jos.

Tada Ilja ir nėrė į švendres.

Liudas nukūrė skardžiu iš paskos, peršoko taką į paplūdimį, kuriuo ką tik nusileido vaikai. Netrukus krantą apaugę krūmokšniai baigėsi, apačioje sublyksėjo vanduo, ir nuo skardžio Liudas vėl išvydo paknopstom skuodžiantį bėglį. Ilgiau nemąstydamas jis nušliuvožė šlaitu.

Ilja iš netikėtumo stabtelėjo ir atsigrėžė.

Liudas sugriebė jį už alkūnės, surakino lyg replėmis. Ir šitai jį išdavė.

- Sveikas, Ilja, – neatgaudamas kvapo sušvokštė Liudas.

- Nu, labas...

- Kaip laikaisi?

- Gerai.

- Klausyk... mums reikia pasišnekėti.

Nieko daugiau neaiškindamas jis nusitempė vaiką pakrante, kur vėl prasidėjo brūzgnai, o vandenyje – švendrės. Jie nėrė į tankmę kaip vietos lizdai ieškantys paukščiai. Liudas nė akimirkai nepaleido Iljos. Jo veidas pakibo virš vaiko lyg orakulo rutulys – tarytum prieš kvosdamas jis jau ieškotų Iljos veide atsakymo. Šis pakėlė į Liudą akis ir klausiamai sumirksėjo – jų rainelėse blykstelėjo sidabriniai grūdėliai.

- Aš žinau, kad neseniai buvai pabėgęs. Naktį, – Liudas šneka lėtai ir aiškiai, nenuleisdamas skvarbaus žvilgsnio nuo Iljos. Bet šis nė nekrusteli. Jo akys juodos ir neįžvelgiamos, lyg neišpurenta žemė.

- Tai tiesa? – kvočia Liudas. – Nesigink, aš žinau.



- Tai kam dar klausiat? – atšauna Ilja. Šaiposi, prisidengęs išdresuoto našlaičio nuoširdumu.

Vos tvardydamasis, Liudas sugniaužia jo smailą smakrą, ir sušnypščia:

- Tik nebandyk žiūrėti savo nekaltomis akutėmis... Sakyk, kur tą naktį buvai.

- Niekur, – kuo ramiausiai atsako Ilja. – Miegojau.

Galbūt jo akių juodžemyje slypi paslaptys, turtai ar košmarai, tačiau Liudas nežino, kaip juos iškapstyti. Jis stipriau suspaudžia Iljos žandikaulį, lyg grasintų per jėgą iškratyti iš jo teisingą atsakymą.

- Meluoj, žvėriūkšti... Nieko tu nemiegojai.

- Netikit, klauskit direktorės, – atšauna Ilja.

Ir staiga Liudas viską suvokia.

Kas slypi už Iljos nugaros, kas įkvėpė jam įžūlumo.

Su juo jau pašnekėta. Pažadėta neįduoti, mainais už tylėjimą. Gal ir dar kaip nors atsilyginta.

Liudas abiem delnais suspaudžia vaiko galvą ir papurto su tokia neapykanta, lyg ketintų sutraiškyti:

- Dar sužinosiu, kad buvai dingęs – sumalsiu į miltus, supratai? Supratai..

Ir staigiai paleidžia – Ilja lošteli ir vos išsilaiko ant kojų.

- Mauk pas visus. Greitai!..

Juodžemis Iljos rainelėse net įkaista, jis kupinas tokios pat neapykantos, kokia kunkuliuoja perkreiptame Liudo veide. Kelias sekundes jiedu grumiasi akimis, lyg bandytų, kuris stipresnis. Ilja pasiduoda pirmas – o gal tik atideda kovą palankesniai momentui. Atsuka Liudui nugarą ir, susibrukęs rankas į kišenes, sparčiai nužygiuoja per aukštą žolę atgal pas vaikus.



A fox had been wandering into the grounds of the children's home. Not through a gap in the wattle fence, but through the gate like anybody else. Its fur, red like a paintbrush dipped in ashberry-colored paint, would flash between the tree trunks as it arrived. At first, because of concerns that the fox might be rabid, the children were not allowed to come near it. The guard set a trap. But the fox started visiting every day. It would walk around the trap and soon it became clear that despite the rules the older children had tamed her. With this in mind, Beatrice would let the children feed the fox leftovers from the kitchen.

But just like that, the fox disappeared. The little ones who used to leave it presents by the fence every day after supper were disconsolate (in the right mood, the fox used to poke its arrogant snout in through the fence and wait for them to move away).

About a week later, the guard found it just off the side of the road. The fox's fur was no longer blazing red: it lay in the moss like a heap of decomposing leaves. The guard gave it a kick and flipped it on its back. The light fur on its chest was matted with blood and a black knife wound on its throat had congealed. He hid the carcass under the brush and in the evening he returned to bury it with the gardener's shovel. The children were told that the fox had had kids and would no longer visit. 'When you have kids, you have to give up fun and games in order to take care of them. Animals often know this better than people,' it was explained to the children.

But Ilya already knew that all storybook beginnings end sooner or later when reality sets in. And in reality, nothing lasts for very long. Each day takes something from you, and if you're ever given anything, it's only so that someone can steal it from you later. *The evil one* who toys with you so cruelly is doing it for his own pleasure. Ilya was certain he felt it that he really exists. He flickered at the edge of Ilya's imagination. Sometimes he would enter Ilya's dreams, but never as anything concrete. His mocking presence would fill the room behind Ilya's back like spilling ink. His icy breath brought chills to Ilya's spine.

Ilya was not afraid of him. He simply *hated* him.

After they returned him from Puškai, he would smack anyone who dared to come near him or even to look into his eyes. And nobody had the right to ask any questions.

With a little boy he had traded a pack of chewing gum for a pocket knife.

The fox never had the chance to have kids.

He wrapped the knife in cellophane and hid it in the garden near the wattle fence. The idea was his own: secrets must be buried. They should be saved for a rainy day so they could be dug up at just the right moment. You never know where or when you'll need them, but you will.

And what's more, secrets are usually terrifying.

Four years later, everyone had forgotten the fox. Lately, a fawn had been coming to the woods behind the children's home. She was trusting, and if you didn't try to get too close, she would let you admire her. Her naïve eyes and velvet fur that seemed to be speckled with the tiniest leaves and the grace of her slender legs suddenly quiver when swept up by a primitive force like a boorish quicksilver would take Ilya's breath away. The fawn, startled by the slightest unexpected sound, would arch her elegant neck and then she was gone, leaving only a slight rustling of branches.

She was quiet and shrewd and so astonishingly beautiful that Ilya would get a queasy feeling in the pit of his stomach and unwittingly clench his fist as if holding a knife. He'd stand by the fence and wait for the deer to dart out from the lindens and fix her sad eyes on him. He knew her schedule as though they'd planned it. But waiting made him weak, and every time the fawn would appear, it would give him such a knot in his stomach that he knew this could not go on.

He would not be weak.

One day, Ilya dug up his knife and went out. He returned the following morning frantic and empty handed. He wanted to wash off something alarmingly sticky from his hands, but as thoroughly as he scrubbed, even under his nails, the river could not rid him of it.

Ilya would no longer touch the knife not the one left in the riverbed, nor any other one.

A few days later, when the fawn's snout peeked out through the linden leaves, Ilya burst into tears. At first his sobs were choked, painful, but they grew ever louder. He was crying for her. The deer was not surprised. She sniffed the air sympathetically trying to taste the child's tears.

From that night on, Ilya waited. He knew *he* was coming for him.

Liudas arrived after lunch when the little ones are usually put to bed for their afternoon nap. The older wards played active games farther afield from the buildings so as not to wake them. Their teachers let them go off by themselves. The girls separated into little groups throughout the grounds and the boys kicked a ball around the stadium.

Ilya had never been one to seek the company of others. He certainly had co-conspirators to sneak off with into the woods, sometimes even up to the river past the highway. But usually he acted alone.

Liudas left his car in the forest, and headed for the children's home on foot. In the yard facing the administration building, a group of fifteen children was making a commotion, and two middle-aged teachers were hollering at them, trying to get them to line them up into twos. Liudas stopped at the fence; hidden from view by a sweet briar, he took out his binoculars.

The children were getting ready for a field trip to a dam. In summer, sand would be

trucked in and lemon yellow buoys floated to mark the line beyond which it was forbidden to swim. Although it was too cold now to go in the water, the sunny September air was just right for a field trip with picnic blankets, ball games and badminton. 'E-ve-li-na, where's your hat?' shouted the overweight red-haired teacher. 'Mo-des-tas, Mo-des-tas, what did I say?' 'I am not going to say it again.' 'Ilya, Ilya, do we all have to wait for you?'

His interest piqued by the mention of Ilya, Liudas guided his binoculars through the group of children until they landed on a sulky face with dark almond-shaped eyes. Ilya was sauntering about somewhat further away; he was kicking some rocks around as if stalling. Liudas immediately recognized the look that distorted Ilya's face when he was up to mischief.

Before the kids headed out the gate, he sped off into the woods back towards his car.

Liudas reached the river first. He hid the car further away on a road overgrown with brambles and vines. He set himself up on a hill sheltered with pine trees. From here the beach was clear as day.

The field trippers appeared after a good half hour. Their brightly colored jackets flashed between the pine trunks. Then they disappeared and reappeared by the water. Liudas raised his binoculars to his eyes.

He could see that Ilya was up to something and was just waiting for the opportunity to make his getaway. At one corner of the beach, the girls had laid out blankets on which they'd piled up their jackets and picnic baskets. The teachers were organizing a ballgame. Clapping her hands for attention, the redheaded one was trying to gather the children closer to her.

That's when Ilya dove into the cat tails.

Liudas darted down the hill after him; he leapt across the path to the beach which the kids had just crossed. Soon the shrubbery along the shore gave way to the shimmering water, and from the hilltop Liudas could once again make out the fugitive in headlong flight. Without a second thought, he raced down the slope.

Ilya, surprised, stopped and stared.

Liudas grabbed him by the elbow and locked it with a vice grip. This gave him away.

'Hey, Ilya,' Liudas wheezed, out of breath.

'Well, hello...'

'What's up?'

'Not much.'

'Listen, we need to talk.'

Without further explanation, he dragged the child along the shore back into the thicket,

cat tails flanking the water. They dove into the brush like birds looking for a nesting place. Liudas did not let go of Ilya, not even for a second. His face loomed above the child's like the oracle's crystal ball, as if he were already examining Ilya's face for an answer even before asking any question. Ilya raised his eyes toward Liudas and blinked questioningly, silver grains shimmering in his irises.

'I know you ran away a few days ago at night,' Liudas speaks slowly and clearly, not taking his penetrating eyes off Ilya. But the latter doesn't even blink. His eyes are black and impenetrable like untilled soil.

'Is it true?' demands Liudas. 'Don't defend yourself. I know.'

'Then why ask?' Ilya flings back. He sneers at Liudas, his well-rehearsed orphan sincerity his cover.

Barely containing himself, Liudas grabs the boy by his angular chin and hisses:

'Don't give me that innocent look of yours. . . Tell me where you were that night.'

'Nowhere,' Ilya answers calmly, 'I was sleeping.'

Perhaps there in the blacks of his eyes lie secrets, treasures or nightmares; however, Liudas does not know how to unearth them. He tightens his grip on Ilya's face, as if he were threatening to shake the truth out of him by force.

'You're lying, you little bastard. . . No way were you sleeping.'

'If you don't believe me, ask the director,' Ilya flings back.

And all of a sudden everything becomes crystal clear for Liudas.

All that lies behind Ilya's back. All that enthralls him with impertinence.

Someone's already spoken with him. Someone's already promised not to turn him in exchange for his silence. Perhaps they're even promising a reward.

Liudas grabs the child's head with both hands and shakes it with hatred strong enough to crush it.

'If I hear about you disappearing again, I'll smash you to smithereens. Do you understand? Do you understand?'

And suddenly he lets go. Ilya jerks back, barely balancing on his two feet.

'Go back to the others. Scram!'

Ilya's black eyes smolder. His hatred is as great as that contorting Liudas's face. For a few seconds they lock eyes, as if battling to see which is the stronger. Ilya looks away first. Or maybe he's just putting off the fight for a more opportune moment. He turns his back on Liudas and with his hands shoved into his pockets, he careers through the tall grass back to the children.



Winning author
Carl Frode Tiller

Book awarded
Innsirkling (2007)
Encirclement

Publishing house
Aschehoug

Biography

Carl Frode Tiller (born January 4, 1970 in Namsos) is an author, historian and musician. His works are in Nynorsk (lit. 'New Norwegian'), one of the two official Norwegian standard languages. Tiller debuted in 2001 with the novel *Skråninga* (Downward Slope), which was recognized as the best initial work of the year with the Tarjei Vesaas' Debut Prize. Downward Slope was nominated for the Brageprisen (the Brage Prize is a juried award). In November 2007, Tiller was awarded the Brageprisen for his novel *Innsirkling* (Encirclement). In the fall of 2007, *Innsirkling* received the Norwegian Critics Prize for Literature and was nominated for the premiere Scandinavian literature prize, the Nordic Council's Literature Prize.

Synopsis

Encirclement is a novel that covers a broad and deep spectrum, both psychologically and sociologically. The novel is cleverly composed – it changes easily between different narrators and points of view, as well as using letter form, dialogue and inner monologue.

David can not remember who he is. A notice in the newspaper encourages acquaintances and friends to write him letters so he can start remembering. The letters create a network of texts where the lives of David, the writers, and others, are rewritten and reassessed.

The letters were written in 2006, but concentrate on the past. This way, false perspectives are created, whether they focus on adolescent dreams, the ambitions of artists, or people's plans for the future. It's a story about what happened to one generation of Norwegians, about gender roles and the search for popularity and identity. It's also about questions of what is a life and how is a life story created under the influence of other people's stories?

Vemundvik, 6–10. juli, 2006

Kjære David.

Eg sat på bussen på veg til hytta vår da eg las at du hadde mista hukommelsen, og da eg hadde komme meg over sjokket og begynte å tenke på korleis eg kunne hjelpe deg til å hugse, var det eit minne som dukka opp gong etter gong utan at eg heilt skjønnte kvifor, og som eg har bestemt meg for å begynne dette brevet med. Eg såg for meg oss to ute på ein av dei mange og lange gåturane våre i og rundt Namsos sentrum. Eg visste ikkje eingong at eg hadde dette minnet i meg før eg plutselig sat der i bussetet og kjente korleis det var å vere sytten år og trave gatelang, berre eg og du, side om side utan noko bestemt mål. Eg synest å hugse at vi hadde ei slags førestilling om at vi la ut på desse turane fordi vi kjeda oss og ikkje hadde noko anna å ta oss til på kveldstid, men når eg tenker tilbake på samtalen vi hadde, på kor mykje vi hadde å snakke med kvarandre om, kor oppslukte og engasjerte vi kunne bli og korleis vi pla skunde oss å ta ein annan veg når vi fekk auge på eit menneske vi elles ville ha vore nøydte til å stoppe opp og snakke med, kan eg ikkje forstå anna enn at vi måtte sjå på gåturane som meiningsfylte i seg sjølv også. Om vi ikkje tenkte på dei som meiningsfylte, så måtte vi i alle fall oppleve dei slik.

Og kanskje er det ei slik ubevisst oppleving av mening som er årsaka til at eit såpass udramatisk og kvardagsleg minne var det som dukka opp først og skein sterkast da eg såg annonsen din også. Eg veit ikkje, men svært mykje av det eg refererer til i dette brevet, for eksempel meiningar du hadde, beskrivingar av hendingar der eg ikkje var til stades eller av folk du kjente, men som eg aldri har møtt, har eg i alle fall frå desse samtalen.

Da vi gjekk på grunnskolen, visste eg ikkje stort meir om deg enn at du var stesonen til ein prest, at du spelte fotball og at du var den som kasta lengst med liten ball når det var idrettsdag på skolen.

Eg veit ikkje heilt kvifor eg beit meg merke i dei to siste tinga, kanskje fordi eg sjølv var så dårleg både i liten ball og i fotball. Eg kasta det vi kalla kjerringkast (underarmskast) når eg skulle kaste liten ball, og eg hadde rykte på meg for å vere den første og førebels siste ved Namsos Ungdomsskole som hadde lagd innkast i eit forsøk på å ta straffespark, eit rykte eg forøvrig hevda å vere stolt av da eg vart kjent med deg.

Vennskapen vår begynte da vi gjekk i førsteklassen på gymnaset. Det skulle vere ei slags markering mot narkotika inne i gymsalen, og eg hadde bestemt meg for å skulke, hugsar eg. Eg hadde lagt meg til eit slags anarkist- og frikeimage på denne tida, og eg prøvde å innbille alle, meg sjølv inkludert, at det var anarkisten sitt liberale syn på det Gateavisa hadde lært meg å kalle 'bevissthetsutvidene

midler' som gjorde at eg slengde sekken over skuldra og gjekk mot utgangen, om ikkje demonstrativt, så i alle fall med den slenrande gangen og det litt påtatt likesæle og anstrengt sløve kroppsspråket som tenåringsgutar ofte legg seg til for å skjule kor usikre dei eigentleg er. Det var det ikkje. Pappa sat inne med ein narkodom på denne tida, og det var misforstått lojalitet til han som gjorde at eg ikkje ville delta i markeringa, og da rektor plutseligropte navnet mitt og sa at eg skulle gå tilbake og sette meg igjen med ein gong, og da alle saman snudde seg og vart sittande og stire på meg, vart eg brått overmanna av alle dei kjenslene eg til da hadde greidd å halde sånn nokonlunde kontroll på, og eg brast i gråt framfor heile skolen. Dei fleste visste nok at pappa sat i fengsel og kva han hadde gjort, men der og da var det berre du som forstod samanhangen mellom dette og det fullstendig uventa samanbrotet, og etter nokre sekund med total stillheit, der lærarstaben og dei sikkert over tre hundre elevane stira forbausa på meg, hørte eg deg spørje rektor, høgt og tydeleg; 'Korleis hadde du likt å delta i ein demonstrasjon mot din eigen far?'

Seinare, etter at eg hadde forelska meg i deg, og forelskinga hadde bearbeidd hukommelsen min, såg eg deg for meg som ein slags James Dean da du sa dette. Eg syntest å hugse at du sat på ein av benkane, lett makeleg og med begge olbogane stukkne inn i ribbeveggen bak deg, og at du smilte mens du såg rett på rektor med trygge, rolege auge. No i dag har dette biletet falma, naturlegvis. Alt eg veit sikkert, er at du hadde på deg ei kvit t-skjorte og at du sa det du sa.

Til å begynne med følte eg at du hadde utlevert meg på eit vis, og eg var rasande på deg for det, men jo større avstand eg fekk til det som hadde skjedd, jo større takksemnd kjende eg, og snart var eg nesten rørt fordi du hadde forsvart meg på den måten du hadde gjort. Eg beundra deg for motet og rettferdssansen du hadde vist, og i perioden før vi vart vennar og begynte å møtes regelmessig, passa eg på å dukke tilfeldig opp på stader eg visste du var. Fekk eg høre at du skulle på ein eller annan fest, gjorde eg alt eg kunne for å få innpass på den same festen, fekk eg høre at du skulle på kino, droppa eg andre gjeremål og drog på kino, og når eg skulle på skolen eller ned til sentrum, la eg nesten alltid turen forbi huset der du og Arvid og Berit budde, slik at eg skulle få sjansen til å møte på eller berre sjå deg. At det tok nokre minutt ekstra, betydde ingenting.

Men eg freista samtidig å halde på ei slags verdigheit. Eg heldt avstand og var aldri pågåande, eg smilte og helsa kort når vi treftest, men eg torde aldri innleie ein samtale, og tatt i betraktning at du var den litt barske, stille typen som sa det som var nødvendig, men sjeldan meir, kan eg nesten ikkje forstå at vi kom i snakk med kvarandre i det heile tatt. Men det må vi altså ha gjort, for innan året var over, kunne ingen skille oss.

Eg har naturlegvis ikkje internett på hytta, så da eg skulle maile psykologen din for å få greie på korleis eg skulle gå fram for å hjelpe deg, måtte eg dra bort til ein nabo. Han sleppte meg inn og han lét meg

låne datamaskina si, men han var sur, uvennleg og tydeleg utolmodig etter å få meg ut igjen, så eg fekk dessverre ikkje tid til å spørje om alt det eg skulle ha spurt om. Men slik eg oppfatta den einaste e-posten som psykologen din rakk å sende, låg du på isolat og eg fekk derfor ikkje lov til å besøke deg, slik eg hadde mest lyst til. All kontakt måtte skje via brev. Og når eg skreiv desse breva skulle eg ikkje berre prøve å vekke minnet ditt til live igjen, forsto eg. Om ingen av brevskrivarane lykkast i å få deg til å hugse igjen, var det viktig at du visste så mykje som mogleg om kven du ein gong hadde vore, kva slags liv du hadde levd, kven du hadde omgåst, kven du var i slekt med og kor du stamma frå osv, og psykologen din oppfordra meg derfor til å ta med absolutt alt eg visste om deg, ikkje berre det vi hadde opplevd saman. Så før eg går vidare med å fortelje om oss to, skal eg forsøke å skrive ned det vesle eg veit og hugsar om bakgrunnen din og om livet du levde før vi trefte kvarandre.

I gangen heime hos dykk, hang det eit flyfoto av eit kvitt trehus som låg heilt nede i fjæresteinane ute på Otterøya. Før Berit gifta seg med Arvid og de flytta inn i huset hans i Namsos, budde du i dette huset saman med henne og morfaren din, Erik, ein mann eg kun kjenner frå eit gammalt svart-kvitt-fotografi der han er avbileta som ung, svært grovbygd vegarbeidar med bustete hår, brei, rund rygg og ein svart og fyldig mustasje som stakk som museflettar ut frå begge sidene av ansiktet.

Berit hadde fungert som husmor hos morfaren din heilt sidan mormor di døydd på begynnelsen av sekstialet ein gong. Da ho var sytten eller atten, flytta ho på hybel i Namsos og begynte på hjelpepleien på same tid som mamma, men ho vart gravid med deg etter eit knapt år, og dermed vart ho nøydd til å slutte på skolen og flytte tilbake til Otterøya igjen. Far din var det ingen som fekk vite kven var, Berit nekta av ein eller annan grunn å fortelje det, og ho heldt det skjult så lenge ho levde, også for deg.

Mor mi pla fortelje om Berit frå denne tida, og ho beskreib ei tynn og bleik ung kvinne med raudt hår, frekner og ein liten oppstoppnase. Ho fortalde om kor unnsleg og bortkommen Berit såg ut, og om kor overraska ho vart da ho viste seg å vere akkurat det motsette. Som så mange som har komme seg levande gjennom barske barne- og ungdomsår, hadde ho vorte herda, og etter kva mor mi fortalde virka ho fullstendig uredt og ikkje det spor sjenert, slik folk frå bygda gjerne var når dei kom inn til byen for å gå på skole. Ho var munnrapp og snakka både på inn- og utpust, ho tok ikkje fem øre for å seie kva ho meinte, same kven det var ho snakka med, og om nokon gjorde henne urett, kunne ho vere nådeløst frekk og nesten grenselaus når det gjaldt å såre og audmjuke den skuldige. Kroppslege skavankar, talefeil, ei belastande fortid; ho tillét seg å harselere med alt, og ho var så treffande og velformulert at tilhøyrarane ikkje kunne la vere å le, same kor mykje dei prøvde. Og om offeret svarte med same mynt og for eksempel kommenterte dei dårlege fortennene hennar, ville ho berre flire rått. Sjølvmedynk og sentimentalitet var luksus ho aldri hadde hatt råd til å unne seg, og ho lét ikkje noko gå

inn på seg. 'Ja, hadde nokon fortalt meg den gongen at ho der skulle finne seg ein prest, hadde eg døydd av latter!' pla mamma seie.

Morfaren din hadde også vanskar med å venne seg til at dottera gifta seg med ein prest. Etter kva du sa var han ateist og Moskvatru kommunist til den dagen han døydd. Han rista på hovudet og flirte av mykje av det Arvid trudde på og stod for, og han syntest aldri å gå lei av å be om å få konkrete beskrivingar av eller rasjonelle forklaringar på forskjellige mirakel og under som stod omtalt i Bibelen. 'Kan ikkje du forklare det der med jomfrufødsel sånn at ein enkel mann frå Otterøya forstår det?' kunne han seie, og om Arvid oversåg den ironiske undertonen han visste var der og svarte seriøst, sat morfaren din der og hørte på med eit lattermildt uttrykk i ansiktet, og da Arvid hadde snakka ferdig, knegga han og rista overberande på hovudet; 'Ja, det var tider!' kunne han seie. 'Slikt skjer ikkje no til dags, det er bra sikkert!'

Desse samtalan var stor underhaldning for han, sa du til meg, og det same var det å terge Berit ved å minne henne på kva slags familie og kva slags miljø ho kom frå. Når de møttest, snakka han enda litt meir saftig og grovkorna enn han gjorde til vanleg, og stadig vekk kom han liksom tilfeldig på episodar frå gamle dagar som alle hadde til felles at dei handla om ting som ikkje passa seg i det kristne miljøet Berit prøvde tilpasse seg og bli ein del av. 'Enn den nyårsaftan du drakk alle mannfolka under bordet,' kunne han seie, mens han lo høgt og godt, og når mor di ikkje gjorde det same, spelte han overraska og uforståande. 'Men hugsar du ikkje det da?' kunne han spørje, og mens han sat der og godta seg og venta på svar, var Berit kvit av raseri.

Du pla humre godt når du fortalde meg alt dette, men der og da hadde du følt deg ubekvem og usikker. Arvid igjen, prøvde å late som om han ikkje lét det gå innpå seg. Etter kva du fortalde kunne han bli både sur, oppgitt og sint, men han ville innbille deg og mor di at det var under hans verdigheit å la seg oppskake og opprøre av den slags, og derfor sat han berre der og smilte og utviste uendeleg tolmod og toleranse. Dette stemmer forresten godt med korleis eg opplevde han som person etter at vi vart kjent, og eg begynte tilbringe tid heime hos dykk. Det er mogeleg minna frå den gongen er prega av at eg på eit seinare tidspunkt fekk vite at Arvid utvikla psykiske problem etter at mor di døydd, men eg synest likevel å hugse at han forekom meg å vere av den typen som freista dekke over eit kaotisk indre med eit roleg og sindig ytre, og som utan at han veit det sjølv, overdriv og derfor ender opp med å verke skremmande. Han hadde eit smil som var så mildt og snilt at det var vanskeleg å tru på den kjærleiken det skulle utstråle, og han snakka så sakte og dempa og på ein så inderleg måte at i alle fall eg vart uroleg saman med han og ikkje roleg, slik det nok var meininga at eg skulle bli.

Mange mistolka forresten denne veremåten, og tok det som bevis på at stereotypen om den litt sjølvfornøgde og sjølvhøgtidlege presten stemte. 'Det er lett å vere mild og snill og overberande med

folk når ein er overtydd om at ein sjølv skal til himmelen og alle andre til helvete!' som mamma sa. Men det var ingen av oss som kjente Arvid som opplevde han som sjølvfornøgd og sjølvhøgtidleg. Det verka tvert imot som om han hadde eit oppriktig ønske om både å vere og å bli oppfatta som ein heilt vanleg mann som tilfeldigvis var prest, ein mann folk flest såg på som ein av sine egne. Rett nok lykkast han ikkje i dette. Når han som var så sindig elles, tok på seg det blå og kvite fotballskjerfet og stod og hoja oppe på tribunen mens Namsos spelte, var det mange som flirte og såg på han med same forakt som dei såg på politikarar som oppførte seg likeins. Dei tolka det som skodespel og forsøk på å fri til mannen i gata. I tillegg hadde Arvid, som så mange prestar, ein lei tendens til å la ein kvar samtale gli over til å handle om kristendommen etter kvart, og dette skapte ofte avstand til folk og gjorde dei utilpass. Sat vi ute på trappa dykkar ein vinterkveld og beundra stjernehimmelen for eksempel, kunne eg vere sikker på at han, liksom tilfeldig, ville begynne snakke om Betlehemsstjerna, og var det eit naturprogram på tv der ein såg kor godt ein eller annan dyreart var tilpassa omgivnadene sine, sat eg berre og venta på at han skulle uttrykke forbløffing over at det fanst folk som i ramme alvor trudde at noko så fantastisk hadde oppstått som eit slumpetreff.

Vemundvik 6th July 2006

Dear David

I sat on the bus on the way to the cottage when I read that you had lost your memory, and when I got over the shock and started to think about how I could help you to remember again, without my quite understanding why, one memory kept coming back to me, a memory I have decided to start my letter with. In my mind's eye I saw the two of us on one of our many and long walks in and around Namsos city centre. I didn't even know that I had this memory in my head before I suddenly sat there in the bus and felt how it was to be seventeen years old and roaming the streets, just you and I, side by side, wandering aimlessly. I seemed to remember we had the idea that we set out on these trips because we were bored and had nothing else to do with our evenings, but when I think back on the discussions we had, how much we had to talk to each other about, how engrossed and engaged we could become and how we used to hurry off in another direction when we saw someone we otherwise would have had to stop and talk to, I think it must be obvious that we also regarded our walks as something meaningful in themselves. If we didn't think about them as meaningful, we surely must have experienced them as such.

And perhaps it is this kind of unconscious experience of meaning which is the reason for a fairly undramatic and ordinary memory popping up first and shining the brightest when I read your advertisement. I don't know, but quite a lot of what I'm referring to in this letter, opinions you had, descriptions of events that took place without me, or of people you knew but whom I never met, I certainly learnt from these discussions of ours.

When we were in primary school, I didn't know much more about you than that you were the stepson of a pastor, that you played football and that you could throw a ball the furthest when it was sports day at school. I don't quite know why I noticed the two last things, perhaps because I myself was so bad at throwing ball and playing football. I used a girlie underarm when I was throwing ball, and I had a reputation for being the first and, for the time being, the last in Namsos Secondary School to do a throw-in when awarded a penalty kick, a reputation I otherwise claimed to be proud of when I got to know you.

Our friendship started in the first year of senior high-school. There was a kind of demonstration against drugs in the gym hall, and I had decided to wag school, I remember. I had adopted a sort of anarchic and freakish image at that time, and I tried to convince everyone, myself included, that it was

the anarchist's free-thinking views of what the leftist, anarchist magazine 'Gateavisar' had taught me to call 'consciousness-expanding tactics' that made me throw my bag over my shoulder and walk towards the exit, if not demonstratively, at least with the cruising gait and the kind of phoney indifference and artificially lethargic body language that teenage boys often adopt to hide how insecure they really are. That wasn't it. Dad was in prison with a drug conviction around that time, and it was misguided loyalty to him that made me refuse to take part in the demonstration, and when the headmaster suddenly called out my name and told me to come back at once, and sit down, and when everyone turned around and stared at me, I was suddenly overcome by all the emotions I had managed to keep more or less in check until then, and I started to cry in front of the whole school. Most of you knew that my Dad was in prison and what he had done, but at that moment you were the only one who understood the connection between this and my totally unexpected breakdown, and after a few seconds of utter silence, with the teachers and the more than three hundred students staring at me, in astonishment, I heard you ask the headmaster, loudly and clearly, 'How would you like to take part in a demonstration against your own father?'

Later, after I had fallen in love with you, and my feelings had edited my memory, I saw you in my mind's eye as a kind of James Dean when you said this. In my memory you were sprawling on one of the benches, your elbows stuck between the wall bars behind you, and you smiled as you looked straight at the headmaster with calm and confident eyes. Today this image has faded, of course. All I'm sure of is that you were wearing a white t-shirt and that you said what you said.

In the beginning I felt that you had exposed me, in a way, and I was furious with you for that, but the more distance I got to what had happened, the more grateful I was, and soon I felt almost touched because you had defended me in the way you did. I admired you for the courage and the sense of justice you had shown, and in the period before we became friends and began to see each other regularly, I made sure I turned up accidentally in places I knew you would be. If I learnt that you would be at a particular party, I did everything I could to get in to the same party, if I learnt that you were going to the movies, I dropped everything and went to the movies, and on my way to school or town, I almost always walked past the house where you and Arvid and Berit lived, just because it gave me an opportunity to meet you or at least get a glimpse of you. That it took a few minutes longer didn't matter.

But at the same time I tried to hold on to some sort of dignity. I kept my distance and was never pushy, I smiled and said hi when we met, but I never dared to start a conversation, and considering that you were the kind of tough, silent type who only said the bare essentials, and rarely anything else, I can hardly understand how we came to talk to each other at all. But we must have, because before the year

was over, we were inseparable.

Of course, I don't have internet in the cottage, so when I wanted to email your psychologist to find out how I could help you, I had to go to a neighbour. He let me in, and he let me borrow his computer, but he was grumpy, unfriendly and obviously impatient to get rid of me again, so unfortunately, I didn't have time to ask all the questions I should have asked. But I understood from the only email your psychologist was able to send me, that you were in the isolation ward and that was why I wasn't allowed to visit you, which was what I really wanted. All contact had to be in writing. And when I was writing letters to you I must not only try to bring your memory back, as I understood it. Even if none of the letter writers succeeded in making you remember again, it was important that you knew as much as possible about who you once had been, what kind of life you had lived, the friends you used to spend time with, who your relations were, and where your family was from, etc, and so your psychologist encouraged me to include absolutely everything I knew about you, not just the things you and did together. So before I continue to tell you about the two of us, I shall try to write down the little I know and remember about your background and about the life you lived before we knew each other.

In the hallway at your place hung an aerial photo of a white house nestling among the rocks on the shore of Otter Island. Before Berit got married to Arvid and they moved into his house in Namsos, you lived in this house with her and your grandfather, Erik, a man I only know from an old black and white photo which shows him as a young, sturdily built road worker with rumpled hair, broad, round shoulders and an ample black moustache that protruded like pigtails on both sides of his face.

Berit had acted as housekeeper for your grandfather since your grandmother died some time at the beginning of the sixties. When she was seventeen or eighteen, she moved into a bed-sitter in Namsos and started nursing school at the same time as my mother, but she got pregnant with you after barely a year, and so she was forced to leave school and move back to Otter Island. No one knew who your father was, for some reason, Berit refused to tell, and she kept it a secret for as long as she lived, from you as well.

My mother used to talk about Berit from this period of her life, and she described a thin and pale young woman with red hair, freckles and a small snub nose. She talked about how shy and lost she looked, and about how surprised she was when she turned out to be exactly the opposite. Like so many who have survived a tough childhood, she had been hardened, and according to my mother, she was totally unafraid and not the least bit shy, the way people from the country often were when they came to the city to get an education. She had a glib mouth and talked when she breathed in as well as out, she didn't mince her words, no matter whom she was speaking to, and if someone did her an injustice, she

could be mercilessly impudent, and she knew no bounds when it came to hurting and humiliating the guilty. Physical flaws, speech impediments, a shady past; she took the liberty to mock everything, and she was so pertinent and eloquent that the listeners couldn't help but laugh, no matter how much they tried not to. And if the victims gave as good as they got and commented on her bad teeth, for instance, she would just grin shamelessly. Self-pity and sentimentality were luxuries she could never afford, and she didn't let anything upset her. 'Yes, if someone had told me at the time that this girl would find herself a clergyman, I would've died laughing!' my mother used to say.

Your grandfather also had problems getting used to his daughter marrying a pastor. According to you, he was an atheist and a dyed-in-the-wool Moscow communist to the day he died. He used to shake his head and chortle at much of what Arvid believed in and stood for, and he never seemed to tire of asking for tangible descriptions or rational explanations of various miracles and wonders described in the Bible. 'Can you explain that thing about the virgin birth so that a simple man from Otter Island can understand it?' he could say, and if Arvid ignored the ironic undertone he knew was there and answered seriously, your grandfather sat there and listened with a smirk on his face, and when Arvid had finished talking, he sniggered and shook his head condescendingly; 'Yes, those were the days!' he would say. 'Things like that don't happen nowadays, that's for sure!'

These conversations were like party games to him, you told me, and he would tease Berit in a similar way by reminding her of what sort of family and what sort of social environment she hailed from. When they were together, his language would be even a little juicier and coarser than normal, and often he would just accidentally remember episodes from the old days that all had one thing in common - they were inappropriate in the Christian environment Berit was trying to fit into and become part of. 'What about that New Year's Eve you drank all the men under the table,' he could say, while he laughed loudly and heartily, and when your mother didn't react the same way, he played surprised and puzzled. 'But don't you remember?' he asked, and as he sat there and gloated and waited for an answer, Berit's face was white with fury.

You used to chuckle when you told me all this, but when it happened, you felt uncomfortable and uncertain. Again, Arvid tried to pretend he didn't let it upset him. According to you he could become bitter, frustrated and angry, but he wanted to make you and your mother believe that it was beneath his dignity to let himself become agitated and distressed by things like that, and so he just sat there and smiled and exercised infinite patience and tolerance. Actually, this fits my experience of him as a person after you and I became friends, and I began to spend time at your place. It is possible that the memories from that time are coloured by what I learnt later, that Arvid developed psychological problems after your mother died, but I still seem to remember that he appeared to be the type who always tries to

conceal a chaotic inner life with a calm and steady exterior, and who, without knowing it himself, is always exaggerating and so, in the end, seems frightening. He had a smile that was so mild and good-natured that it was difficult to believe in the love it was meant to radiate, and he spoke in such a slow and subdued and sincere voice that I, at least, felt nervous around him and not calm, the way I was meant to feel.

Many misinterpreted this kind of behaviour, however, and took it as proof that the stereotype of the solemn and sanctimonious pastor was right in his case. 'It's easy to be meek and good and bear over with people when you're convinced that you yourself are going to heaven and everyone else to hell!' as my mother said. But none of us who really knew Arvid thought of him as solemn or sanctimonious. On the contrary, it felt as if he had a sincere wish to be, and be perceived as, an ordinary man who happened to be a pastor, a man most people regarded as one of their own. True, he didn't succeed in this. When he, who was otherwise so calm, donned the blue and white football scarf and stood in the stands and yelled when Namsos played, he made a lot of people laugh and look at him with the same contempt they reserved for politicians who behaved in this way. They interpreted it as an act, and an effort to court the man in the street. In addition, Arvid, like so many clergymen, had a tendency to steer every conversation into a discussion about God, and this often created a distance to people and made them feel uncomfortable. If we sat outside on your steps on a winter's night and admired the starry sky, for instance, I could be sure that he would start to talk about the star of Bethlehem, as if accidentally, and if there was a nature program on television that showed how well some animal species had adjusted to their environment, I just sat and waited for him to express astonishment at the existence of people who in all seriousness believed that something as fantastic as that could be a fluke.

H. Aschehoug & Co. (W.Nygaard) AS, Oslo

**Winning author**

Jacek Dukaj

Book awarded*LÓD (2007)*

ICE

Publishing house

Wydawnictwo Literackie

**Biography**

Jacek Dukaj (born in 1974) is one of Poland's most interesting contemporary prose writers, whose books are always eagerly anticipated events. Dukaj studied philosophy at Jagiellonian University. He successfully debuted at the age of 16 with a short story *Złota Galera* (Golden Galley). He is known for the complexity of his books, and it is often said that a single short story of Dukaj contains more ideas than many other writers put into their books in their lifetime. Popular themes in his works include the technological singularity, nanotechnology and virtual reality, and because of this his books often can be classified as hard science fiction.

Synopsis

The story takes place in an alternate universe where the First World War never occurred and Poland is still under Russian rule. Following the Tunguska event, the Ice, a mysterious form of matter, has covered parts of Siberia in Russia and started expanding outwards, reaching Warsaw. The appearance of Ice results in an extreme drop in temperature, putting the whole continent under constant winter, and is

accompanied by *Lute*, angels of Frost - a peculiar form of being which appears to be a native inhabitant of Ice. Under the influence of the Ice, iron turns into *zimmazo* (cold iron), a material with extraordinary physical properties, which results in the creation of a new branch of industry, *zimmazo* mining and processing, giving birth to large fortunes and new industrial empires. Moreover, the Ice freezes History and Philosophy, preserving the old political regime, affecting human psychology and changing the laws of logic from the many-valued logic of 'Summer' to the two-valued logic of 'Winter' with no intermediate steps between True and False.

14 lipca 1924 roku, gdy przyszli po mnie czynownicy Ministerjum Zimy, wieczorem tego dnia, w wigilję syberjady, dopiero wtedy zacząłem podejrzewać, że nie istnieję.

Pod pierzyną, pod trzema kocami i starym płaszczem gabardynowym, w barchanowych kalesonach i swetrze włóczkowym, w skarpetach naciągniętych na skarpety - tylko stopy wystawały spod pierzyny i koców - po kilkunastu godzinach snu nareszcie rozmrożony, zwinięty prawie w kulę, z głową wciśniętą pod poduchę w grubej obszewce, że i dźwięki docierały już miękkie, ogrzane, oblane w wosku, jak mrówki ugrzęzłe w żywicy, tak one przedzierały się w głąb powoli i z wielkim mozołem, przez sen i przez poduszkę, milimetr za milimetrem, słowo za słowem:

- Gaspadin Wieniedikt Jerosławski.

- On.

- Spit?

- Spit, Iwan Iwanowicz.

Głos i głos, a pierwszy niski i ochryply, a drugi niski i śpiewny; zanim uniosłem koc i powiekę, już ich widziałem, jak się nade mną pochylają, ten ochryply od głowy, ten zaśpiewny od strony stóp, carscy aniołowie moi.

- Obudziliśmy panicza Wieniedikta - stwierdził Iwan, gdy podźwignąłem powiekę drugą. Skinął na Biernatową; gospodyni potulnie opuściła izbę.

Iwan przysunął sobie taburet i usiadł; kolana trzymał razem, a na kolanach czarny melonik o wąskim rondzie. Wysoki vatermörder, biały jak śnieg w południowym słońcu, raził mnie w oczy, biały vatermörder i białe biurowe mankiety, oślepiające na tle jednolitej czerni ich ubiorów. Mrugałem.

- Pozwólcie, Wieniedikt Filipowicz.

Pozwolili sobie. Drugi przysiadł w nogach łóżka, swoim ciężarem pierzynę ściągając, aż musiałem ją puścić; złapawszy z kolei za koce, uniosłem się na barłogu, i tak oto odkryłem także plecy, powietrze zimne wcisnęło się pod sweter i kalesony, zadrzałem, rozbudzony.

Narzuć mi na ramiona płaszcz, kolana podsunąłem pod brodę.

Spoglądali na mnie z rozbawieniem.

- Jak zdrowie?

Odchrząknąłem. W gardle zebrała się flegma nocna, żrący kwas na wszystkich treściach żołądka, z kiełbasy czosnkowej, korniszonów, czego tam jeszcze wczoraj zażywaliśmy, z ciepłej dereniówki i papierosów, mnóstwa papierosów. Wychyliłem się ku ścianie i charknąłem do kraszarki. Aż mnie zgięło. Zgięty, przez długą chwilę kaszlałem ciężko.

Otarłem usta rozdartym rękawem płaszcza.

- Końskie.

- A to dobrze, to dobrze, baliśmy się, że z łóżka nie wstaniecie.

Wstałem. Pugilares leżał na parapecie, wciśnięty za doniczkę z martwą pelargonią.

Wyjąłem bumagę, pod nos Iwanowi podetknąłem.

Ani spojrzął.

- Ależ gaspadin Jerosławski! Czy my stójkowi jacy jesteście! - Wyprostował się na tym taburecie jeszcze bardziej, myślałem, że to niemożliwe, ale jeszcze się wyprostował, teraz to ściany krzywymi się zdawały, szafa garbatą, futryna skoljotyczną; obrażony, unosił czynownik podbródek i pierś wypinał. - Bardzo grzecznie prosimy pana do nas na Miodową, na herbatkę i słodkości, komisarz zawsze sprowadza sobie sorbety, babeczki, rożki śmietankowe, prosto od Semadeniego, prawdziwa rozpusta podniebienia, jeśli mogę się tak wyrazić, co, Kirył?

- Możecie, Iwan Iwanowicz, jak najbardziej - zaśpiewał Kirył.

Iwan Iwanowicz miał sumiaste wąsy, wypomadowane mocno i ku górze podwinięte; Kirył natomiast cały był gładziutko wygolony. Iwan wyjął z kieszonki kamizelki cebulę na dewizce splątanej i oznajmił, że jest pięć do piątej, komisarz Preiss wielce sobie ceni punktualność, a o której wychodzi na kolację? Umówili się z generałem-majorem we Francuskim.

Kirył poczęstował Iwana tabaką, Iwan poczęstował Kiryła papirosem, przyglądali mi się, jak się ubieram. Chlusnąłem w miednicę wody lodowatej. Kafle pieca były zimne. Podkręciłem knot w lampie. Jedyne okno pokoju wychodziło na podwórko ciasne, szyby zaś tak brudem i szronem zarosły, że nawet w południe niewiele blasku słonecznego przez nie przecieka. Kiedy się goliłem - kiedy jeszcze się goliłem - musiałem byłem stawiać sobie przed lustrem lampę na pełny płomień odkręconą. Zyga rozstał się z brzytwą zaraz po przybyciu do Warszawy; wyhodował brodę godną popa. Zerknąłem na jego posłanie po drugiej stronie pieca. W poniedziałki ma wykłady, wstał pewnie o świcie. Na łóżku Zygmunta leżały czarne szuby czynowników, ich rękawice, laska i szal. Stół bowiem zastawiony był po brzegi brudnymi naczyniami, fiolkami (pustemi), książkami, czasopismami, zeszytami, Zyga suszył sobie skarpety i bieliznę, zwieszając je z krawędzi blatu, przyciśnięte atlasami anatomji i łacińskimi dykcjonarzami. A na środku stołu, na rozczytanym, zatłuszczonym *Über die Hypothesen welche der Geometrie zu Grunde liegen* Riemanna i na stercie pożółkłych 'Kuryerów Warszawskich', trzymany na podpałkę, do klajstrowania szczelin mrozem rozpartych i odwilgacania butów, a także na obwijkę butersznytów - tam wznosił się podwójny rząd świec i ogarków, ruiny stearynowego Partenonu. Pod ścianą naprzeciwko pieca piętrzyły się natomiast równe stosy woluminów w twardej obwolutie, poukładanych według formatu i grubości, i według częstości lektury. Wiszący nad nimi na okopconej ścianie ryngraf z Matką Boską

Ostrobramską - jedyna pozostałość po poprzednich lokatorach, których Biernatowa wyrzuciła na bruk z powodu 'nieprzystojnego prowadzenia' - do reszty szerniał i teraz wyglądał raczej jak element średniowiecznej zbroji dla liliputów. Iwan przypatrywał mu się długo, w natężeniu wielkim, sztywno usadzon na stołku, z lewą ręką z papirosem odsuniętą w bok pod kątem czterdziestu pięciu stopni do ciała, prawą ułożoną na udzie obok melonika, marszcząc brwi i nos, strosząc wąsa - wtedy zrozumiał, że on jest prawie ślepy, że to kancelaryjny krótkowidz, na nosie i pod oczodołami miał ślady po binoklach, bez binokli pozostało mu zdać się na Kiryła. Weszli prosto z mrozu i Iwan musiał być zdjąć okulary. Mnie samemu czasami łzawią tu oczy. Powietrze we wnętrzu kamienicy jest gęste, ciężkie, natarte wszystkimi woniami ludzkich i zwierzęcych organizmów, okien nie otwiera nikt, drzwi zaraz się zatrzaskuje i zatyka szmatami szczeliny nad progami, iżby nie uciekło ciepło z budynku - za opał trzeba przecie płacić, a kto by miał dosyć pieniędzy na węgiel, w ogóle nie gnieździłby się w takich ciemnych oficynach, gdzie powietrze jest gęste, ciężkie, oddychasz nim, jakbyś pił wodę wyplutą przez sąsiada i psa jego, każdy twój oddech milion razy wcześniej przeszedł przez gruźlicze płuca chłopów, Żydów, wozaków, rzeźników i dziwek, wykrztuszony z czarnych krtani powraca do ciebie znowu i znowu, przesączony przez ich ślinę i śluz, przepuszczony przez zagrzybione, zawzzone i zaropiałe ciała, oni wykaszleli, wysmarkali, wyrzygali go tobie prosto w usta, musisz połknąć, musisz oddychać, oddychaj!

- Prze-przepraszam.

Wychodek na końcu korytarza szczęściem nie był akurat zajęty. Wymiotowałem w dziurę, z której wionęło mi w twarz smrodem lodowatym. Spod obsranej deski wylażyły prusaki. Rozgniatałem je kciukiem, gdy podchodziły mi pod brodę.

Wyszedszy z powrotem na korytarz, zobaczyłem Kiryła stojącego w progu pokoju - miał na mnie oko, trzymał straż, czy nie ucieknę im na mróz w kalesonach i swetrze. Uśmiechnąłem się porozumiewawczo. Podał mi chusteczkę i wskazał na policzek lewy. Wytarłem. Gdy chciałem mu ją oddać, odsunął się krok. Uśmiechnąłem się po raz drugi. Mam szerokie usta, bardzo łatwo się uśmiechają.

Wdziałem jedyny mój strój wyjściowy, czyli czarny garnitur, w którym zdawałem egzaminy ostatnie; gdyby nie warstwy bielizny pod spodem, zwiślały teraz na mnie jak na szkielecie. Urzędnicy patrzyli, gdy sznurowałem buty, gdy zapinałem kamizelkę, gdy walczyłem ze sztywnym kołnierzykiem celuloidowym do ostatniej bawełnianej koszuli przypiętym. Zabrałem dokumenta i resztkę gotówki, trzy ruble i czterdzieści dwie kopiejki - łapówka z tego będzie ledwo symboliczna, ale z pustymi kieszeniami w urzędzie człowiek czuje się nagim. Na stary kozuch barani nic natomiast nie mogłem poradzić, łaty, plamy, krzywe szwy, innego nie miałem. Przyglądali się

w milczeniu, jak wciskam ramiona w niesymetryczne rękawy, lewy dłuższy. Uśmiechnąłem się przepraszająco. Kirył poślinił ołówkę i skrupulatnie zanotował coś na mankiecie.

Wyszliśmy. Biernatowa widać podglądała przez uchylone drzwi - natychmiast pojawiła się przy czynownikach, zarumieniona i roztrajkotana, by poprowadzić ich z powrotem schodami z drugiego piętra i przez oba podwórka-studnie do bramy głównej, gdzie stróż Walenty, poprawiwszy czapkę z mosiężną blaszką i schowawszy fajkę do kieszeni, zamiótł pośpiesznie śnieg z chodnika i pomógł czynownikom wsiąść do sani, ujmując panów pod łokcie, aby nie poślizgnęli się na trotuarze zalodzone, Biernatowa zaś już siedzących, gdy obwijali sobie nogi pledami, zasypała potokami skarg na lokatorów złośliwych, na bandy powiślańskich złodziei, co włamują się do domów nawet za dnia, oraz na mrozy okrutne, przez które okna zewnątrz nawilgotniałe się paczą, a rury pękają w ścianach, i żadna hydraulika ni kanalizacja nie przetrzyma długo w ziemi; na koniec zapewniła gorąco, że dawno podejrzewała mnie o rozmaite występki i bezcelestwa, i niechybnie doniosłaby stosownej władzi, gdyby nie tysiąc i jeden innych frasunków na jej głowie spiętrzonych - aż woźnica ze swego kozła za plecami Kiryła strzelił batem i konie szarpnęły sanie w lewo, zmuszając kobietę do odstąpienia, i tak ruszyliśmy w drogę do warszawskiej delegatury Ministerjum Zimy, do dawnego Pałacu Biskupów Krakowskich, Miodowa 5, róg Senatorskiej.

On the fourteenth day of July 1924, when the chinovniks from the Ministry of Winter came for me, in the evening of that day, on the eve of the Sibiriade, only then did I begin to suspect that I did not exist.

Under an eiderdown, under three blankets and an old gabardine overcoat, in fustian long johns and a worsted pullover, in socks pulled up over socks – only my feet protruded from under the eiderdown and the blankets – finally thawed out after more than a dozen hours of sleep, curled up almost into a ball, with my head squeezed under a pillow in a thick pillowslip, so that the sounds reached me already soft, warmed, immersed in wax, like ants mired in resin, pushing their way through, slowly and with great toil, through my slumber and through the pillow, millimetre by millimetre, word by word:

‘Gospodin Venedikt Yeroslavsky.’

‘Him.’

‘Asleep?’

‘Asleep, Ivan Ivanovich.’

A voice and another voice, the first deep and husky, the second deep and melodious. Even before I had lifted the blanket and a single eyelid, I could already see them as they leant over me, the husky one by my head, the melodious one by my feet, my tsarist angels.

‘We have woken Master Venedikt,’ declared Ivan once I had raised the other eyelid. He nodded at Bernatova; the landlady obediently left the chamber.

Ivan drew up a tabouret for himself and sat down; he held his knees together, and on his knees a narrow-brimmed black bowler hat. A vatermörder collar, white as snow in the noontide sun, dazzled my eyes, a white vatermörder and white office cuffs, blinding against the simple black background of their vestiture. I blinked.

‘Pray, permit us to be seated, Venedikt Filipovich.’

They permitted themselves. The second one perched on the foot of the bed, his weight pulling down on the eiderdown until I had to relinquish it; after taking hold of the blankets, I raised myself on the pallet and in doing so uncovered my back, the cold air rushed in under my pullover and long johns, I shivered, awake.

I flung an overcoat over my shoulders and pulled my knees up under my chin.

They looked down at me with amusement.

‘How’s your health?’

I cleared my throat. The night-time phlegm pooled in my gullet, a caustic acid consisting of all the contents of my stomach, from garlic sausage, gherkins, and whatever else we had ingested

the day before, from warm dogwood liqueur and cigarettes, lots of cigarettes. I leaned towards the wall and spat into the crachoir until I was bent over double. And thus bent over I coughed violently for a lengthy moment.

I wiped my mouth on the torn sleeve of my overcoat.

‘Healthy as a horse.’

‘Very good, very good. We were afraid that you wouldn’t get out of bed.’

I got up. My pocket book was lying on the window sill, squeezed behind a flower pot with a dead geranium in it. I took out my bumaga and shoved it under Ivan’s nose.

He didn’t even look at it.

‘My dear Master Yeroslavsky! Do you take us for beat constables?’ He held himself up even straighter upon the stool. I had thought it was impossible, but he held himself up even straighter, and now the walls seemed crooked, the cabinet like a hunchback, and the door frame scoliotic. Offended, the chinovnik raised his chin and puffed out his chest. ‘Sir is very kindly invited to Miodowa Street for tea and sweets. The superintendent always keeps himself supplied with sorbets, cupcakes, and cream cakes, straight from Semadeny, real debauchery for the palate, if I may say so – may I not, Kiril?’

‘Indeed you may, Ivan Ivanovich, by all means,’ sang out Kiril.

Ivan Ivanovich had bushy moustaches, heavily pomaded and curled up at the tips; Kiril, on the other hand, was ever so smoothly clean-shaven. Ivan took out a ticker on a tangled chain from the pocket of his waist-coat, announced that it was five to five, that Superintendent Preiss esteemed punctuality very highly, and asked what time he was going out for supper. They had made arrangements with the Major-General at the Hôtel Français.

Kiril offered Ivan some snuff, Ivan offered Kiril a cigarette, they both scrutinised me as I got dressed. I splashed some icy water into the basin. The stove tiles were cold. I turned up the wick in the lamp. The room’s only window opened out onto a cramped courtyard, but the panes were so thickly covered with grime and hoarfrost that even at noontide only a little sunlight seeped through them. When I was shaving – when I was still shaving – I had had to set the lamp in front of the looking glass, turned up to its full flame. Zyga had parted with his razor immediately after his arrival in Warsaw; he had cultivated a beard worthy of an Orthodox priest. I peered over at his pallet on the other side of the stove. On Mondays he had lectures, he must have risen at dawn. On Zygmunt’s bed lay the black fur-lined shubas of the chinovniks, along with their gloves, a cane, and a muffler. The table was stacked high with dirty dishes, flasks (empty), books, magazines, and copybooks; Zyga was drying out his socks and undergarments, which were hanging over the rim of the table-

top, held in place by anatomical atlases and Latin dictionaries. And in the middle of the table, on top of a well-thumbed, greasy edition of Riemann's *Über die Hypothesen welche der Geometrie zu Grunde liegen*, and on a pile of yellowed 'Warsaw Couriers' kept for kindling, for patching up cracks expanded by the frost, and for thawing out shoes, as well as for wrapping butterschnitts, a double row of candles and candle-stubs rose up like the ruins of a stearic Parthenon. By the wall opposite the stove hardbound tomes were piled up in even stacks arranged according to size and girth, and according to how frequently they were read. Hanging over them on the soot-covered wall was a gorget with Our Lady of Ostrobroma upon it – the only trace of the previous tenants, whom Bernatova had turned out onto the street for 'indecent conduct' – which was entirely blackened and now looked more like a piece of medieval armour for Lilliputians. Ivan peered at it for a long time, with great intensity, stiffly planted upon the stool, his left hand with the cigarette cocked aside at an angle of forty-five degrees to his body and his right hand placed upon his thigh beside the bowler hat, wrinkling up his nose and brow, bristling his moustaches. It was then that I realized that he was almost blind, an office myope, that he bore the marks of a pince-nez on his nose and under his eye sockets, and that without his pince-nez he was forced to rely upon Kiril. They had come straight in from the frost and Ivan must have had to remove his spectacles. I myself sometimes find my eyes watering in here. The air inside the apartment house is thick, heavy, and laden with all the odours of human and animal bodies; nobody opens the windows, the doors are opened and slammed shut forthwith and the crevices under the doorstep are stopped up with rags lest the warmth escape from the building – after all, payment must be tendered for fuel and anyone with enough money for coal would by no means coop himself up in a dark annexe like this one, where the air is thick and heavy, and you breathe it as if you were drinking water spat out by your neighbour and his dog, each breath of yours having passed a million times through the consumptive lungs of peasants, Jews, carters, butchers, and whores; coughed up from blackened larynxes it comes back to you again and again, percolated through their spittle and slime, filtered through fungus-infected, lice-ridden, and festering bodies; they have coughed it up, blown it out their noses, and spewed it out straight into your mouth, and you have to gulp it down, you have to breathe, breathe!

'Ex-Excuse me.'

Fortunately the privy at the end of the corridor was not occupied at that moment. I vomited into the hole, from which an icy stench wafted up into my face. Cockroaches skittered out from under the shit-smeared board. I squashed them with my thumb when they came up under my chin.

After coming back into the corridor I saw Kiril standing on the threshold – he was keeping an eye on me, he was on his guard, in case I might flee from them out into the frost in my long johns and pullover. I smiled knowingly. He offered me his handkerchief and pointed to my left cheek. I wiped. When I wished to return it he moved back a step. I smiled for a second time. I have a broad mouth, it smiles very easily.

I donned my only outdoor attire, the black suit in which I had taken my final exams; if it weren't for the layer of undergarments underneath it would hang off me as if from a skeleton. The functionaries watched as I laced up my shoes, as I buttoned up my waistcoat, as I struggled with the stiff celluloid collar tacked on to my last cotton shirt. I took up my documents and the rest of my ready money, three rubles and forty-two kopeks – as a bribe it would barely even be symbolic, but with empty pockets a man feels naked in an office. But there was nothing to be done about my old sheepskin – patches, stains, crooked seams – I had no other. They watched in silence as I squeezed my arms into its unsymmetrical sleeves, the left one longer than the right. I smiled apologetically. Kiril licked his pencil and meticulously noted something down on his cuff.

We went out. Bernatova must have been peeping through the half-open door – she immediately appeared alongside the chinovniks, flushed in the face and jabbering away, to escort them back down the stairs from the second floor and through both the courtyard-wells to the main entrance, where the door-keeper Walenty, after straightening his brass-badged cap and putting his pipe into his pocket, hurriedly swept the snow off the sidewalk and helped the chinovniks to get into the sleigh, gripping the two gentlemen under the elbows lest they slip on the iced-up trottoir, while Bernatova, once they were already seated and wrapping their legs in rugs, showered them with streams of complaints against malicious tenants, against bands of thieves from Powiśle who broke into homes in broad daylight, as well as against the cruel frosts, owing to which the damp windows warped from the inside, and the pipes burst in the walls, and neither plumbing nor sewerage pipes lasted long in the ground; finally, she fervently assured them that she had long suspected me of various misdemeanours and iniquities, and that she most assuredly would have informed the appropriate vlast if not for the thousand and one other cares piled up on her mind – until the sleigh-driver cracked his whip from his seat behind Kiril's back and the horses jerked the sleigh off to the left, forcing the woman to step aside, and so we set off down the road to the Warsaw department of the Ministry of Winter, to the former Palace of the Cracovian Bishops, 5 Miodowa Street, on the corner of Senatorska.



Winning author
Dulce Maria Cardoso

Book awarded
Os Meus Sentimentos (2005)
Les Anges, Violeta

Publishing house
Asa Editores

Biography

Dulce was born in Trás-os-Montes, in 1964. She regrets the lack of memories related with her journey from Vera Cruz to Angola. From her childhood she remembers the mango tree in the backyard, the sea and the involving space that shaped her soul.

She returned to Portugal in 1975. Later, she graduated from the Law Faculty of the University of Lisbon; she wrote screenplays and spent some time with uselessness. Dulce also wrote short stories. She kept on writing and enjoying uselessness. She lives in Lisbon. Her premiere novel, *Campo de Sangue*, published in 2002 and written with the support of a Fund of Literary Creation, from the Portuguese Culture Ministry, was distinguished with the Grand Prize 'Acontece de Romance'.

Synopsis

The night of the accident. There is a drop of water hanging from a piece of glass that refuses to fall. There is an instant that lasts an eternity.

Reflected in the drop, Violeta plunges into that eternity and thinks about what the last day of her life could have been like. She examines her life, and what that life consists of: the parents, the daughter, the child, the bastard. She feels the urgency of life that carries on indifferent like the road that she veered off during the accident. In her unstable position, upside down, trapped by her seat belt, it appears that everything is coming undone. Losing the obscurity that daily life presents, Violeta sinks into her past, a hallucinating spiral of transparencies and echoes.

Violeta turns a corner (or is it a page?) and the revolution of April interrupts, brandishing its anger. She opens a door (perhaps a paragraph) of an empty house and her mother calls for her when her father descends into madness out in the yard. A man chokes the desire from her body (comma, for sure) and the girl with the roller skates glides in front of the daughter who loses her life. The maid, as always, is silent.

Inesperadamente

não devia ter saído de casa, não devia ter saído de casa, não devia ter saído de casa, durante algum tempo, segundos, horas, não sou capaz de mais nada,

inesperadamente paro

a posição em que me encontro, de cabeça para baixo, suspensa pelo cinto de segurança, não me incomoda, o meu corpo, estranhamente, não me pesa, o embate deve ter sido violento, não me lembro, abri os olhos e estava assim, de cabeça para baixo, os braços a bater no tejadilho, as pernas soltas, o desacerto de um boneco de trapos, os olhos a fixarem-se, indolentes, numa gota de água parada num pedaço de vidro vertical, não consigo identificar os barulhos que ouço, recomeço, não devia ter saído de casa, não devia ter saído de casa,

são tão maçadoras as lengalengas

durante algum tempo, segundos, horas, não sou capaz de mais nada, devo ter caído muito longe da auto-estrada, a chuva estala no metal do carro, as rodas rolam em seco, gri-gri, gri-gri, grilos, não, não podem ser grilos, tic-tac, os quatro piscas, dentro da gota de água, são apenas os olhos que não se conseguem desviar, são apenas os olhos, o meu carro capotado num baldio, o meu saco de viagem preso num arbusto, as embalagens das ceras, os brindes das clientes e o caderno das contas espalhados na lama, um sapato num charco mais distante, os faróis mantêm-se acesos, a chuva, fios de pirilampos que esvoaçam até morrerem no chão, gri-gri, não podem ser grilos, em todo o lado pedacinhos de vidro que brilham muito, cristais que afugentam a noite,

não devia ter saído de casa

o líquido quente que escorre da minha boca é sangue, reconheço o sabor, a minha boca uma massa, quente, demasiado quente, enjoativa, quero mexer-me, libertar-me do cinto de segurança, as mãos não me obedecem, dois atrapalhos inábeis, as minhas pernas, duas ausências, e os olhos pousados, inertes, na gota de água cheia de luz, uma gota inundada de luz, quase a apanhar-me, a vencer-me, resisto, recomeço, não devia ter saído de casa, não devia ter saído de casa,

inesperadamente

não sinto dores, não tenho medo, os meus olhos afogados na gota de luz, os meus ouvidos um albergue de grilos,

neste momento posso já não existir aqui

este momento pode já não existir para mim rolo sobre as trevas

docemente, deslizo na auto-estrada que é sempre igual, a que fica para trás, a que se renova à minha frente, uma língua caridosa que me engole, negra, infinita, avanço, guio-me pelos reflectores que ladeiam a berma, os separadores de aço, o vento torce as árvores desfolhadas, esqueletos tristes, traços riscados a carvão contra o céu, os postes de alta tensão, espantalhos de mãos dadas numa fila para lado nenhum,

docemente

avanço no sentido único em que o infinito se cumpre, a minha cabeça num rodopio agradável, hoje à tarde vendi a casa, assinei a escritura com a caneta de prata, a minha mão não tremeu, não hesitei, se pensava que era fácil foi assustadoramente mais fácil, viajo na noite do temporal, nos últimos dias não se falou noutra coisa, o boletim meteorológico, a protecção civil, nos cafés, as minhas clientes, um assunto,

anunciaram um temporal

um tema de conversa, tanta confusão e se calhar não há nada, enganam-se a toda a hora, quem pode prever os caprichos da natureza, uma troca de palavras, no mar é que vai ser pior, a minha cabeça no rodopio que me sabe bem, estendo uma mão cega para o lado direito, procuro a minha cassete, a partir de hoje vai ser tudo diferente, repito, a partir de hoje vai ser tudo diferente, a chuva abate-se sobre o tejadilho num barulho que me devia assustar, engrossa os vidros, duplica-os, milhares de gotas esborrachadas contra os vidros, teias que o vento logo desfaz, rajadas de vento na ordem dos, desafio a noite do temporal,

rolo sobre as trevas

a minha mão cega à procura de uma voz que amanse o temporal, um raio, um resto da luz do princípio, no início apenas luz, no início apenas luz e nós já cegos para sempre,

bêtisés ma chérie, bêtisés

custa-me respirar, uma dor no peito, um assunto, bebes sempre de mais, o meu corpo pesado seguindo a mão, a dificuldade de sempre nos gestos mais simples,

mostrenga, mostrenga

outro raio, um néon bonito que divide o escuro, encontro a cassete, um trovão, o escuro que ruge, não me custa acreditar que o mar tenha tomado o lugar do céu para se despenhar sobre a terra, avanço, penso que sobre o céu, um caminho que não pára de crescer nas trevas, coloco a cassete no leitor, carrego no botão para a rebobinar, arranho o silêncio, um tema de conversa na área de serviço,

olha para aquela gorda perdida de bêbeda

uma troca de palavras, há por aí tanta desgraça, nem chega a uma conversa, vê-se cada coisa, tenho o porta-bagagens carregado de ceras, brindes, amostras, folhetos, o caderno das contas, as minhas clientes esperam-me amanhã cedinho, há anos que me esperam, não estas, não neste destino, outras, noutros destinos, um entendimento, sou uma boa vendedora, a melhor, sei de cor e salteado a composição das ceras, as temperaturas a que derretem, as peles a que se destinam, a minha vida uma luta contra milhões de pêlos, de nada me orgulho tanto, talvez da Dora, talvez, conheço os meus inimigos, conheço-lhes as manhas, não me enganam, mesmo quando se partem para crescerem mais fortes, ou se encravam, ou, cobardes, desatam a crescer debaixo da pele, escondidos, conheço os meus inimigos e não perco uma oportunidade para os desmascarar, não os deixo fingir, ganhar tempo, uma guerra sem tréguas, quando olho para as pernas de uma desconhecida sei logo a força dos meus inimigos, como são combatidos, outra profissional olha e não vê nada, eu posso aceitar apostas, sobre as armas utilizadas, cera, creme, gilete, as maquinas que fazem o barulho irritante das moscas, quando olho para as pernas de uma desconhecida

avalio de imediato a força dos meus inimigos, distingo cicatrizes, pêlos encravados, mesmo se quero pensar noutra coisa, especialmente se quero pensar noutra coisa, sou uma boa vendedora, a melhor, faço cem, duzentos quilómetros, os que forem necessários para vender as minhas ceras, não sei fazer mais nada, persigo os meus inimigos, milhões de inimigos em todo o lado, uma luta desigual, perdida, a partir de hoje vai ser tudo diferente, apesar de me sentir tão cansada, não deixo que me passe pela cabeça que, a partir de hoje, a partir de amanhã, nem uma diferença, uma única diferença, não posso aceitar um mar de dias iguais à minha frente, a minha vida a consumir-se na repetição dos dias, dos gestos, das palavras, o Ângelo

ninguém corrige o passado, ponto final

por que ouço o agoirento do Ângelo, faças o que fizeres não te livras de ti, do que foste, do que continuas a ser, faças o que fizeres, por que ouço o agoirento do Ângelo em vez das canções da minha cassete, a partir de hoje vai ser tudo diferente, vendi a casa, é verdade que ainda há pouco, na área de serviço, tornei ao mesmo, mais um homem e a mesma brincadeira, a mesma mentira, ou, para ser mais rigorosa, outra mentira, porventura mais grave, a todos os homens com quem fui e que calharam perguntar-me o nome respondi sempre com uma charadae

um nome de uma flor que também é uma cor

bêtisés ma chérie, bêtisés

nunca nenhum acertou, talvez fosse estranho, talvez tivesse achado realmente estranho se tivesse pensado nisso, não pensei, até ele todos os homens que tentaram adivinhar, responderam Rosa, a maior parte não arriscou, sorriu e pôs-se a andar, queriam lá saber o meu nome, era só uma pergunta, a mais vulgar, tinham pressa, apenas uma pergunta, a mais comum, para afastar o silêncio, o embaraço, a vergonha de terem estado dentro de uma mulher como eu, nunca conheci nada mais desapiedado do que a carne saciada, o que é certo é que até esta noite, até ele, todos os homens tinham respondido Rosa, um erro de que gostava, outro nome e não era eu que ali estava mas a tal Rosa, uma criatura que chegava a lamentar quando me dava para isso, portanto quando o homem me perguntou o nome repeti a charada certa de que não me ia dar uma resposta diferente de Rosa ou de um sorriso, estava tão convencida que me assustei quando ouvi o meu nome, tenho muito medo, quem se dedica a este tipo de caça tem sempre muito medo, qualquer presa aprende

rapidamente o medo que a pode salvar, há qualquer coisa na estrada, a chuva não me deixa ver, os limpa- pára-brisas já estão na velocidade máxima, há qualquer coisa ali à frente, travo, o carro foge-me, uma guinada, ziguezagueio, nem sequer me assusto, volto à marcha regular, franzo os olhos, é demasiado grande para ser o corpo de um cão ou de um gato, avanço com cautela, só muito perto percebo que é uma árvore tombada, os ramos aos pinotes no vento, um remoinho de folhas, rodo o volante, desvio-me da espiral de folhas que se eleva no escuro, dos ramos que esbracejam, ainda bem que esta árvore não morreu de pé, sempre me entristeceram as árvores que ficam a morrer de pé, ainda sonham com as primaveras seguintes quando lhes colam nos troncos, árvore para abate, ainda sentem o peso dos ninhos e o vento dos pardais em voo, entristecem-me as árvores mortas que esperam viajantes que lhes fogem, ninguém gosta da sombra da morte, ali ficam até que a serra eléctrica as deita por terra, o tronco em rodela de madeira, a copa um braçado de galhos que alguém há-de recolher para atear uma lareira ou para, uma folha cola- -se no pára-brisas, levo-a comigo, a partir de hoje nada vai ser diferente, não posso corrigir o que passou, não tenho mão no que aí vem, o aviso de uma saída de emergência do lado direito, a folha voa, não quis ir comigo, não me quer como companhia, estou bêbeda, uma folha não tem querer, estou bêbeda, as folhas sabem tudo sobre nós, estou bêbeda, o coração magoa- me, o meu corpo ainda mais desconhecido do que os estranhos que o tomam, apenas o reconheço na dor, a aguardente deixou-me a cabeça num rodopio que me agrada, esfrego os olhos em vão, continuo turvos, desato a chorar, a folha não me quis acompanhar, sou tão risível, sinto as mãos do homem na minha pele, afoço os pequenos sulcos que as unhas dele deixaram no meu corpo, caminhos, não sei o que fazer com o cheiro de um desconhecido entranhado na minha carne, estou assustada, e se nunca mais tiver lugar em mim, se nunca mais me pertencer, por que me deixo morrer,

por que me mata a vida

acelero em direcção ao infinito que se tornou o meu destino, um único sentido, a partir de hoje tudo vai ser diferente, a noite assusta-me, seis porções de escuro que aguardam fora dos vidros do carro, já é muito tarde, 4.37 no relógio digital do tablier, 4.32 na realidade, sempre me concedi cinco minutos de avanço, é certo que nunca me valeram de muito, nunca cheguei a horas ao futuro, ligeiros atrasos, desencontros, motivos comezinhos de que já não me recordo, avisto um carro à minha frente, é o primeiro que vejo desde que saí da área de serviço, acelero para me aproximar das duas luzinhas vermelhas que se duplicam na água da estrada, o carro segue devagar, decido

ultrapassá-lo, vou ao lado de uma desconhecida na noite do temporal, dou-lhe uma cara, redonda, exageradamente redonda, um corpo, gordo, tristemente gordo, uma profissão, vendedora, uma casa, travessa do paraíso, nº, uma filha, a Dora, entrego a desconhecida ao rasto de água que o meu carro deixa, uma serpentina que se encrespa no ar, em vez das luzinhas vermelhas duplicadas no chão duas luzes brancas no retrovisor, uma magia, se soubesse fazer magias desaparecia de mim, acelero, ganho distância das luzes brancas que ficam cada vez mais pequenas, roubo-lhes a cara, o corpo, a profissão, a família, uma bêbeda entretém-se com qualquer coisa, até com um jogo tão fraquinho como este, os faróis do carro que ultrapassei desaparecem do retrovisor, de novo apenas a noite, um aviso, um rectângulo amarelo plantado na berma, que

conduza com prudência

leio em voz alta, conduza com prudência, a voz escorrega contra os vidros, outro rectângulo, este pendurado, anuncia uma encruzilhada, quatro estradas devidamente numeradas, quatro destinos, posso finalmente mudar de rumo, inverter a marcha, desistir, é tentador pensar que posso escolher, e se a partir de hoje fosse realmente tudo diferente, a encruzilhada que conheço dos meus mapas, sempre colecionei mapas, quer dizer, coleciono mapas há muito tempo, centenas de mapas em minha casa, usados, imaculados, tanto faz, nos mapas escolho os caminhos sem medo, dou voltas e voltas aos meus mundos de papel, vou a todos os lugares, sítios a que não associo uma paisagem, uma cara, uma flor, nada, terras que só existem para cumprirem o meu desejo de partir nas tardes de muito calor, estendo os mapas no chão do meu quarto, não quero saber nada sobre o mundo, nunca quis, nas tardes de muito calor, corro os estores e o meu corpo cobre-se com fios de ovais luminosas, um amontoado de pontos de luz geometricamente dispostos, passo tardes inteiras de verão a viajar, aproximo-me da encruzilhada, dos quatro destinos numerados, a chuva cai translúcida ao pé dos candeeiros de cimento, fios de água tremeluzentes, uma chuva de pirilampos, e se mudasse o destino, e se desistisse

Translated from the Portuguese by Cécile Lombard

sans crier gare

je n'aurais pas dû partir, je n'aurais pas dû partir, je n'aurais pas dû partir, pendant quelque temps, quelques secondes, quelques heures, je ne suis capable de rien d'autre,

sans crier gare je m'arrête

la position dans laquelle je me trouve, la tête en bas, suspendue par la ceinture de sécurité, ne me dérange pas, mon corps, bizarrement, ne me pèse pas, le choc a dû être violent, je ne me souviens pas, j'ai ouvert les yeux et j'étais comme ça, la tête en bas, les bras qui cognent contre le plafond, les jambes ballantes, la gaucherie d'une poupée de chiffon, les yeux posés, indolents, sur une goutte d'eau arrêtée sur un morceau de vitre vertical, je n'arrive pas à identifier les bruits que j'entends, je recommence, je n'aurais pas dû partir, je n'aurais pas dû partir,

elles sont tellement assommantes les rengaines

pendant quelque temps, quelques secondes, quelques heures, je ne suis capable de rien d'autre, je n'ai pas dû tomber loin de l'autoroute, la pluie claque sur le métal de la voiture, les roues tournent à vide, cri-cri, cri-cri, des grillons, non, ça ne peut pas être des grillons, tic-tac, les quatre clignotants, dans la goutte d'eau, c'est seulement mes yeux qui n'arrivent pas à se détourner, c'est seulement mes yeux, ma voiture renversée dans un terrain vague, mon sac de voyage accroché dans un arbuste, les boîtes de cires, les cadeaux pour les clientes et mon cahier de comptes éparpillés dans la boue, une chaussure dans une flaque un peu plus loin, les phares sont restés allumés, la pluie, des fils de vers-luisants qui volètent jusqu'à tomber morts, cri-cri, ça ne peut pas être des grillons, partout des petits bouts de verre très brillants, des cristaux qui mettent la nuit en fuite,

je n'aurais pas dû partir

le liquide chaud qui coule de ma bouche c'est du sang, je reconnais le goût, ma bouche est une pâte, chaude, trop chaude, écœurante, je veux bouger, me délivrer de la ceinture, mes mains ne m'obéissent pas, deux poids morts encombrants, mes jambes, deux absences, et mes yeux posés, inertes, sur la goutte d'eau remplie de lumière, une goutte inondée de lumière, qui va me happer, qui m'engloutit, je résiste, je recommence, je n'aurais pas dû partir, je n'aurais pas dû partir,

sans crier gare

je n'ai pas mal, je n'ai pas peur, mes yeux noyés dans la goutte d'eau, à mes oreilles une auberge de grillons,

en ce moment je n'existe peut-être plus ici

ce moment n'existe peut-être déjà que pour moi

je roule sous les ténèbres

doucement, je glisse sur l'autoroute qui est toujours la même, celle qui reste derrière, celle qui se renouvelle devant moi, une langue charitable qui m'avale, noire, infinie, j'avance, je me guide aux réflecteurs qui longent le bas-côté, aux glissières d'acier, le vent tord les arbres sans feuilles, des squelettes tristes, des traits de charbon rayant le ciel, les poteaux haute-tension, des épouvantails qui se donnent la main pour une farandole qui ne va nulle part,

doucement

j'avance dans le sens unique vers lequel s'accomplit l'infini, dans ma tête un vertige agréable, cet après-midi j'ai vendu ma maison, j'ai signé l'acte avec un stylo d'argent, ma main n'a pas tremblé, je n'ai pas hésité, si je pensais que c'était facile c'est effarant comme ça l'a été encore plus, je voyage dans la nuit de la tempête, ces derniers jours on n'a parlé que de ça, le bulletin météorologique, la protection civile, dans les cafés, avec mes clientes, un propos,

ils ont annoncé une tempête

un sujet de conversation, ils en font tout un plat et si ça se trouve ça ne sera rien, ils se trompent tout le temps, qui peut prévoir les caprices de la nature, un échange de paroles, c'est en mer que ça va être pire, dans ma tête le vertige qui me plaît bien, je tends une main aveugle à ma droite, je cherche ma cassette, à partir d'aujourd'hui tout va être différent, je répète, à partir d'aujourd'hui tout va être différent, la pluie s'abat sur le toit avec un bruit qui devrait m'effrayer, elle épaissit les vitres, les double, des milliers de gouttes écrasées sur les vitres, des toiles d'araignée que le vent

défait aussitôt, des rafales de vent de plus de, j'affronte la nuit de la tempête,

je roule sous les ténèbres

ma main aveugle à la recherche d'une voix qui apaise la tempête, un éclair, un reste de la lumière du commencement, au commencement était la lumière, au commencement rien que la lumière et nous déjà aveugles pour toujours,

bêtises ma chérie, bêtises¹,

j'ai du mal à respirer, une douleur dans la poitrine, un sujet de conversation, tu bois toujours trop, mon corps pesant qui suit ma main, la difficulté habituelle dans les gestes les plus simples,

monstresse, monstresse

un autre éclair, un joli néon qui divise l'obscurité, je trouve la cassette, un coup de tonnerre, l'obscurité qui rugit, je n'ai aucun mal à imaginer que la mer a pris la place du ciel pour se déverser sur la terre, j'avance, sur le ciel je suppose, un chemin qui ne cesse de croître dans les ténèbres, je mets la cassette dans le lecteur, j'appuie sur le bouton pour la rembobiner, j'égratigne le silence, un sujet de conversation sur l'aire de service,

regarde cette grosse, soûle perdue

un échange de paroles, il y a tellement de malheur dans ce monde, même pas une conversation, on voit de tout, mon coffre est rempli de cires, de cadeaux, d'échantillons, de prospectus, mon cahier de comptes, mes clientes m'attendent demain matin très tôt, il y a des années qu'elles m'attendent, pas celles-ci, pas sur cette route, d'autres, dans d'autres directions, on s'entend bien, je suis une bonne vendeuse, la meilleure, je connais par cœur et sans réfléchir la composition des cires, les températures auxquelles elles fondent, les peaux auxquelles elles sont destinées, ma vie est une lutte contre des millions de poils, c'est ce dont je suis le plus fière, à part peut-être de Dora, peut-être, je connais mes ennemis, je connais leurs ruses, ils ne me trompent pas, même quand ils se cassent pour repousser plus forts, ou qu'ils poussent à l'envers, ou, les lâches, qu'ils se

¹ Les mots et expressions en italique sont en français dans le texte original

mettent à pousser sous la peau, cachés, je connais mes ennemis et je ne manque pas une occasion de les démasquer, je ne les laisse pas feindre, gagner du temps, une guerre sans trêve, quand je regarde les jambes d'une inconnue je connais tout de suite la force de mes ennemis, comment ils sont combattus, une autre professionnelle regarde et ne voit rien, je peux prendre des paris, sur les armes utilisées, cire, crème, rasoir, petites machines qui font le bruit énervant des mouches, quand je regarde les jambes d'une inconnue j'évalue immédiatement la force de mes ennemis, je distingue les cicatrices, les poils enkystés, même si je veux penser à autre chose, surtout si je veux penser à autre chose, je suis une bonne vendeuse, la meilleure, je fais cent, deux cents kilomètres, ce qu'il faut pour vendre mes cires, je ne sais rien faire d'autre, je traque mes ennemis, des millions d'ennemis partout, un combat inégal, perdu, à partir d'aujourd'hui tout va être différent, bien que je me sente tellement fatiguée, je ne me permets pas de penser que, à partir d'aujourd'hui, à partir de demain, pas une seule différence, une unique différence, je ne peux pas accepter une mer de jours égaux devant moi, ma vie qui se consume dans la répétition des jours, des gestes, des mots, Ângelo

on ne change pas le passé, point final

pourquoi est-ce que j'entends ce rabat-joie d'Ângelo, quoi que tu fasses tu ne peux pas te délivrer de toi-même, de ce que tu as été, de ce que tu es toujours, quoi que tu fasses, pourquoi est-ce que j'entends ce rabat-joie d'Ângelo au lieu des chansons de ma cassette, à partir d'aujourd'hui tout va être différent, j'ai vendu la maison, c'est vrai qu'il n'y a encore pas longtemps, sur l'aire de service, j'ai refait la même chose, un homme de plus et la même plaisanterie, le même mensonge, ou, pour être plus rigoureuse, un autre mensonge, peut-être plus grave, à tous les hommes avec qui j'ai été et qui par hasard m'ont demandé mon nom j'ai toujours répondu par une devinette et

un nom de fleur qui est aussi une couleur

bêtises ma chérie, bêtises

aucun n'est jamais tombé juste, peut-être que c'est bizarre, peut-être que j'aurais trouvé ça vraiment bizarre si j'avais pris la peine d'y penser, je n'y ai pas pensé, jusqu'à celui-là tous les hommes qui ont essayé de deviner ont répondu Rosa, la plupart d'entre eux ne s'y sont pas risqués, ils ont souri et se sont mis en route, qu'est-ce qu'ils en avaient à faire de mon nom, c'était juste une question, la plus

banale, ils étaient pressés, juste une question, la plus commune, pour éloigner le silence, la gêne, la honte d'avoir été dans une femme comme moi, je n'ai jamais rien connu de plus impitoyable que la chair rassasiée, ce qui est sûr c'est que jusqu'à cette nuit, jusqu'à lui, tous les hommes avaient répondu Rosa, une erreur qui me plaisait, un autre nom et ce n'était pas moi qui étais là mais la Rosa en question, une créature que j'en venais à plaindre quand il m'arrivait d'y penser, donc quand l'homme m'a demandé mon nom j'ai répété la devinette en étant certaine qu'il n'allait pas me répondre autre chose que Rosa ou un sourire, j'en étais tellement convaincue que j'ai eu peur quand j'ai entendu mon nom, j'ai très peur, quand on s'adonne à ce genre de chasse on a toujours très peur, toute proie apprend rapidement la peur qui peut la sauver, il y a quelque chose sur la route, je ne vois pas à cause de la pluie, les essuie-glaces sont déjà à la vitesse maximum, il y a quelque chose un peu plus loin, je freine, la voiture m'échappe, un dérapage, je zigzague, je n'ai même pas peur, je rétablis l'allure normale, je plisse les yeux, c'est trop grand pour être le corps d'un chien ou d'un chat, j'avance avec précaution, ce n'est que de très près que je comprends que c'est un arbre abattu, les branches tressautant dans le vent, un tourbillon de feuilles, je tourne le volant, j'évite la spirale de feuilles qui s'élève dans l'obscurité, des branches qui battent l'air, encore heureux que cet arbre ne soit pas mort debout, je suis toujours attristée par les arbres qui restent à mourir debout, ils rêvent encore des printemps à venir quand on leur placarde sur le tronc, arbre à abattre, ils sentent encore le poids des nids et le souffle du vol des moineaux, ils m'attristent, les arbres morts attendant les voyageurs qui les fuient, personne n'aime l'ombre de la mort, ils restent là jusqu'à ce que la scie électrique les couche par terre, le tronc en rondelles de bois, la ramure une brassée de branches que quelqu'un viendra chercher pour allumer une cheminée ou pour, une feuille se colle au pare-brise, je l'emporte avec moi, à partir d'aujourd'hui rien ne va être différent, je ne peux pas changer ce qui est passé, je ne suis pas maîtresse de ce qui vient, le panneau d'une sortie d'urgence sur la droite, la feuille s'envole, elle n'a pas voulu venir avec moi, elle ne veut pas de ma compagnie, je suis soûle, une feuille n'a pas de volonté, je suis soûle, les feuilles savent tout de nous, je suis soûle, mon cœur me fait mal, mon corps encore plus inconnu que les étrangers qui le prennent, je ne le reconnais que dans la douleur, l'eau-de-vie m'a mis dans la tête un vertige qui me plaît, je me frotte les yeux en vain, ils restent troubles, je me mets à pleurer, la feuille n'a pas voulu m'accompagner, je suis tellement ridicule, je sens les mains de l'homme sur ma peau, je caresse les petits sillons que ses ongles ont laissés sur mon corps, des chemins, je ne sais pas quoi faire de l'odeur d'un inconnu imprégnée dans ma chair, j'ai peur, et si je n'avais jamais plus de place en moi, si je ne m'appartenais plus jamais, pourquoi est-ce que je me laisse mourir,

pourquoi est-ce que la vie me tue

j'accélère en direction de l'infini qui est devenu ma destination, un sens unique, à partir d'aujourd'hui tout va être différent, la nuit me fait peur, six portions d'obscurité qui attendent de l'autre côté des vitres de la voiture, il est déjà très tard, 4h 37 à l'horloge digitale du tableau de bord, 4 h 32 en réalité, je me suis toujours concédé cinq minutes d'avance, c'est sûr que ça ne m'a jamais servi à grand chose, je ne suis jamais arrivée à l'heure au futur, de légers retards, des erreurs de trajet, des motifs tout simples dont je ne me souviens plus, j'aperçois une voiture devant moi, c'est la première que je vois depuis que je suis sortie de l'aire de service, j'accélère pour me rapprocher des deux petites lumières rouges qui se dédoublent dans l'eau sur la route, la voiture va lentement, je décide de la dépasser, je roule à côté d'une inconnue dans la nuit de la tempête, je lui donne un visage, rond, exagérément rond, un corps, gros, tristement gros, une profession, vendeuse, une maison, allé du paradis, n°, une fille, Dora, je livre l'inconnue au sillage d'eau que laisse ma voiture, un serpent qui se ride dans l'air, au lieu des petites lumières rouges dédoublées au sol deux lumières blanches dans le rétroviseur, de la magie, si je savais faire des tours de magie je disparaîtrais de moi-même, j'accélère, je gagne de la distance sur les lumières blanches qui sont de plus en plus petites, je leur vole le visage, le corps, la profession, la famille, une ivrogne s'amuse de n'importe quoi même d'un jeu aussi nul que celui-là, les phares de la voiture que j'ai doublée disparaissent dans le rétroviseur, de nouveau rien que la nuit, un panneau, un rectangle jaune planté sur le bas-côté, que

au volant soyez prudent

je lis à voix haute, au volant soyez prudent, la voix glisse contre les vitres, un autre rectangle, accroché en l'air celui-là, annonce un carrefour, quatre routes avec leurs numéros respectifs, quatre chemins, je peux enfin changer de route, inverser la marche, abandonner, c'est tentant de penser que je peux choisir, et si à partir d'aujourd'hui tout était réellement différent, le carrefour que je connais par mes cartes de géographie, j'ai toujours collectionné les cartes, c'est à dire, il y a longtemps que je collectionne les cartes, des centaines de cartes chez moi, usées, immaculées, peu importe, sur les cartes je choisis les chemins sans peur, je fais des tours et des tours de mes mondes de papier, je vais partout, à des endroits auxquels je n'associe ni un paysage, ni un visage, ni une fleur, rien, des pays qui n'existent que pour satisfaire mon désir de partir par les après-midi très chaudes, j'étales les cartes sur le sol de ma chambre, je ne veux rien savoir sur le monde, je n'ai jamais voulu savoir, les après-midi très chaudes, je ferme les volets et mon corps se couvre de fils d'ovales lumineux, un tas

de points de lumière disposés géométriquement, je passe des après-midi d'été entières à voyager, je m'approche du carrefour, des quatre chemins numérotés, la pluie tombe translucide au pied des lampadaires de ciment, des fils d'eau scintillants, une pluie de vers-luisants, et si je changeais de destination, et si j'abandonnais

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Pavol Rankov is a writer of prose fiction, essayist, journalist, information scientist and university pedagogue. After completing his secondary schooling in Bratislava he studied library science at the Philosophical Faculty of Bratislava's Comenius University (1983-1987). He worked as a methodologist in the Slovak National Library in Martin (1987-1990) and in the Slovak Pedagogic Library in Bratislava (1991-1992). Since 1993, he has worked at the Department of Library Science and Scientific Information at Comenius University in Bratislava. He participates in projects with Slovak Radio. He lives in Bratislava.

Synopsis

On September 1, 1938, at a fashionable swimming pool in Levice in the centre of Europe, three thirteen-year-old adolescents – Hungarian, Czech and Jewish – decided to compete in a swimming competition to win a claim over a Slovak blonde, Mária. The three friends' contest for love is repeated

in virtually every year of the novel's progress, but the race never ends in victory. The novel rushes its characters onward through political tribulations, but never allows them to finish the fateful race. Even though the characters' lives are filled with incredible events, they are never filled with the most sacred emotion of them all – love. Nobody wins Mária and Mária, the most innocent, loses all.

Prvého septembra bola sobota. Ján si na tento dátum preložil poslednú skúšku z letného semestra.

Vstal z lavice, v ktorej si robil prípravu, a sadol si na stoličku oproti katedre.

– Tak kolega, ukážte mi najskôr, akú otázku ste si vytiahli, – povedal bodro profesor Očovský.

Ján mu podal papierik a povedal:

– Clostridium botulinum.

– Clostridium botulinum?! – potešil sa profesor. – To je zlatý fond predmetu Bakteriológia II. Tak spustíte.

– Clostridium botulinum je baktéria rozmnožujúca sa v konzervovaných potravinách, ak boli sterilizované pri nedostatočnej teplote. Spôsobuje otravu nazývanú botulinizmus. Botulinizmus sa prejavuje bolesťami hlavy, smädom, dvojítm videním, ochrnutím dýchacích svalov, problémami pri hovorení a prehltnutí. Ale vrátim sa k samotnej baktérii.

– Nevracajte sa nikam, kolega, – usmial sa profesor Očovský. – Dajte index, zapíšem vám jednotku.

– Tak rýchlo? – prekvapil sa Ján.

Profesor rázne vpísal do Jánovho indexu známku a vrátil mu ho.

– Nech sa páči... Ale nechodte ešte preč. Musíte sa zastaviť na konci chodby v miestnosti číslo štyridsaťdeväť.

– Pravdaže, hneď tam idem, – tešil sa stále Ján. – Dovidenia. A ešte raz ďakujem.

– Neďakujte, kolega, nie je za čo, – povedal profesor, keď sa dvere za Jánom zatvorili.

Ján sa tejto skúšky, presnejšie nevyspytateľných nálad skúšajúceho profesora Očovského, obával rovnako ako všetci spolužiaci. Preto ho veľmi potešilo, ako rýchlo a ľahko sa dostal k jednotke. Bola to známka, akou sa z Bakteriológie II. mohol pochváliť málokto.

Keď Ján klopal na dvere číslo 49, ešte stále sa usmieval. A úsmev mu nezmizol z tváre, ani keď vošiel dnu a zastal oproti šedivému päťdesiatnikovi, ktorý sedel za úzkym stolom. Muž mal na sebe tmavomodrý oblek, ktorého rukávy boli odspodu tak vyšúchané, až sa leskli. Slnečné lúče prenikajúce do malej miestnosti spoza jeho chrbta sa na predlaktiach odrážali ako na hladine jazera. Na stole pred mužom bolo niekoľko papierov. Niektoré popísané strojom, iné modrým perom.

– Dobrý deň. Posiela ma súdruh profesor Očovský, – povedal veselo Ján.

– Potom musíte byť súdruh Ján Bízek, – potešil sa muž a vyskočil, aby podal Jánovi ruku. Zo stola pritom zhodil niekoľko papierov. Ján ich chcel zdvihnúť, ale chlapík sa rozkričal:

– Nie, rozhodne mi to nedvíhajte. Všetko si pozbieram sám. Vy si, súdruh Bízek, sadnite tu do kresla, nech sa páči.

Ján sa posadil a pozoroval muža, ktorý si usporadúval hárky, ktoré zdvihol zo zeme. Potom sa obrátil k Jánovi. Obaja sa usmievali a zároveň si uvedomovali, že vlastne nie je dôvod, aby sa usmievali.

– Tak ako dopadla skúška? – spýtal sa muž.

– Na jednotku, – pochválil sa Ján.

– Veď preto, – zdvihol muž veselo prst, – prihovoriť som sa za vás u súdruha Očovského.

– Prihovorili ste sa?

– Áno, sme s ním starí známi. Prízvukoval som súdruhu Očovskému, aby vás veľmi neunavil a nezdržal, – usmial sa muž a pleskol si dlaňami po stehnách, akoby tým chcel vyjadriť, ako veľmi ho teší, že sa dobrá vec podarila.

– A prečo ste sa za mňa prihovorili?

– Nechcel som, aby ste za mnou prišli v zlej nálade a unavený. Veľmi mi záležalo, aby náš rozhovor bol priateľský a príjemný. Nechcem vás oberať o čas, je predsa sobota.

Jánovi zrazu napadlo, že pred ním sedí tajný. Zaváhal, či sa má na to rovno spýtať, alebo predstierať, že zatiaľ ničomu nerozumie. Rozhodol sa pre to druhé.

– Ale ja vôbec nechápem, prečo sme sa stretli.

– Mám pre vás ponuku.

– Akú?

– V Trenčíne nedávno vznikol potravinársky výskumný ústav.

– Áno? Nepočul som o tom.

– Tak to má byť. Je to tajné vojenské pracovisko. Dobré, že ste o tom až doteraz nepočuli.

Muž vytiahol cigarety.

– Zapálite si? – spýtal sa.

– Nie, ďakujem, – Ján premochol chuť na cigaretu.

– Nie? Myslel som si, že fajčíte.

– Fajčím, ale teraz si nedám.

– Ach tak, – pokýval muž zamyslene hlavou. – Tak budem fajčiť sám.

Muž si zopárkrát potichu potiahol. Zadržoval dym v ústach a vychutnával jeho chuť. Ján ho pozoroval a čoraz viac ho mrzelo, že si nedal aj on.

– Ale k veci, – strhol sa zrazu muž. – Výskumné pracovisko v Trenčíne potrebuje šikovných ľudí. Podľa možnosti mladých. Takých, ktorí majú záujem o potravinársku chémiu a zároveň si uvedomujú, že pracujú v poprednom ústave strategického významu, kde je všetko, takpovediac, prísne tajné.

Jánovi sa ulavilo. Takže nejde o výsluch súvisiaci s nedávno ukončeným prípadom Máriinho otca,

ale o ponuku práce.

- Spýtam sa vás teda priamo: Chceli by ste pracovať v takom vedecko-výskumnom ústave?
- Áno, – odvetil Ján, – ale čaká ma ešte rok štúdia.
- Diplomovku by ste písali na tému, ktorej by ste sa venovali aj v ústave, – vysvetlil muž. – Samozrejme, museli by sme si dať pozor, aby ste v nej nevyzradili nejaké štátne tajomstvo. Ale to by nebol problém. Prečítali by sme si to a posúdili, či niečo netreba vyškrtnúť.
- Takže by som mohol nastúpiť už počas štúdia?
- Presne to vám ponúkam. Užite si ešte letné prázdniny a začnite pracovať od prvého septembra.
- To by bolo práma, – rozžiarili sa Jánovi oči.
- V poslednom ročníku už máte len zopár predmetov. Možno by sme vám vedeli vybaviť, aby ste chodili do školy len každý druhý týždeň.

Ján súhlasne pokýval hlavou.

- Mimochodom, – pokračoval nezáväzne muž, – povedali ste, že by to bolo práma. To je také české slovo – práma. Vy ste pôvodom Čech, však?
- Áno, – odvetil Ján.
- Takže Jan, a nie Ján, – usmial sa muž.
- Už dlho žijem na Slovensku, – vysvetlil Ján.
- Ale dospievanie ste cez vojnu prežili v Protektoráte, však?
- Áno, v Brne.
- Tam ste stratili rodičov, však?

Ján pokýval hlavou:

- Vidím, že o mne viete všetko. Armáda je armáda.
- To teda máte pravdu, vieme skoro všetko, – zasmial sa muž. – Len vaša sestra je pre nás veľká

záhada.

Ján mlčal.

- Čo by ste mi o nej vedeli povedať?
- Skoro nič. Zmizla počas vojny. Obávam sa, že tiež zahynula.
- Ale hovorilo sa o nej všeličo, – povedal muž a zahľadel sa na Jána.
- Naposledy som ju videl niekedy v štyridsiatom druhom alebo treťom. Nebývala s nami.
- A kde pracovala?
- Tak toto naozaj neviem, verte mi.
- Predstavte si, že vám verím. Ani nám sa o nej nepodarilo nič zistiť.

Muž znovu vytiahol balíček s cigaretami.

- Naozaj si nedáte?
- Dám.
- No vidíte, – muž sa potešil, akoby získal Jánov súhlas v nejakej mimoriadne závažnej veci. Keď Ján vydýchol prvý obláčik dymu, ticho sa spýtal:
- Vadí to?
- Čo? – spýtal sa nechápavo muž.
- No... – hľadal Ján slová, – Protektorát a tak.
- Ale kdeže, – zasmial sa muž, – skôr naopak. Pracovali ste predsa v konzervárni. To sa vám ráta ako prax.
- Ján spokojne pokýval hlavou.
- Ale je tu ešte čosi, – povedal muž, keď zatláčal ohorok do popolníka. Otvoril zásuvku a chvíľu sa v nej prehraboval.
- Aha, už to mám, – usmial sa, keď sa vystrel.
- Ján na neho nedôverčivo pozeral.
- Toto, – povedal muž a podal mu novinový výstrižok.
- Jánovi stačil jediný pohľad na fotografiu a nadpis *Krysy utekajú, no hrdinovia sa vracajú*. Bol to článok, v ktorom Peter písal o Jánovom pobyte v Izraeli.
- Takže vy ste hrdina, – povedal muž bezfarebným hlasom.
- Ja som to nepísal, – hlesol Ján.
- Aby sme si rozumeli, nič vám nevyčítam. Všetci sme očakávali, že sa Izrael stane baštou boja proti americkému a britskému imperializmu na Blízkom východe. Aj súdruh Stalin predsa podporil vznik židovského štátu. Ide o to, že je to úplne iný štát, ako sme predpokladali.
- Ja za to nemôžem, – povedal Ján a sám sa pousmial nad hlúposťou svojej odpovede.
- Máte tam asi mnoho priateľov. Čo si oni myslia o vývoji v Izraeli?
- Nemám tam žiadnych priateľov.
- To nie je možné. Za dva roky ste sa s nikým nezbližili?
- Zbližil som sa s jednou arabskou dievčinou. Keď sa rozpúťali boje, jej rodina z Izraela ušla. Nemám potuchy, čo je s ňou teraz.
- Čo si myslíte o sionizme?
- Sionizmus je sťahovanie Židov do Palestíny?
- Nie, sionizmus je židovská doktrína ovládnutia sveta, – povedal muž ostro.
- Nikdy som sa tým nezaoberal, – Ján si nervózne začal čistiť okuliare.

– A čo si myslí o sionizme váš priateľ Rosenberg?
 – Len pred pár mesiacmi ho prepustili z pľúcneho sanatória. Mal tuberkulózu. Bojoval o život. Jeho politika nezaujima, za to sa vám môžem zaručiť.

Ján si spomenul na chvíle, keď spolu s Gabrielom stáli na lodi pred britským veliteľom. Kričal vtedy, *I am not a Jew*.

– Neviem, či ste o tom informovaný, – povedal napokon Ján, – ale ja nie som Žid.

– Viem to, – pokyvoval muž pomaly hlavou, – ale neprikladám tomu veľký význam. Rovnako ako ja viete, kto sú Židia. Bankári, veľkopodnikatelia, milionári. Pre nich nie je problém kúpiť si kohokoľvek. Čecha, Slováka, Araba. Rosenbergoví jeho otec poslal drahé lieky.

– Mňa si nekúpili. Ani mi nechceli dať štipendium na štúdium.

– Tak študujete u nás. A to je dobre, aspoň môžete prispieť k budovaniu socializmu vo svojej vlasti, – povedal muž.

Ján ho nepokojne pozoroval. Čakal ďalší útok.

Muž vstal od stola a podišiel k oknu.

– Súdruh Bízek, dúfam, že vám nevadí, že vás takto, takpovediac, spovedám. Musíte nás chápať. Ponúkame vám predsa dôležitú prácu v ústave s vysokým strategickým významom. Všade okolo nás zúri studená vojna. Na Kórejskom polostrove ju dokonca imperialisti premenili na horúcu. Zomierajú tisíce nevinných ľudí. Teraz sa rozhoduje nielen o budúcnosti Kórey či Československa, ale aj o budúcnosti sveta.

Muž si sadol za stôl. Opäť prehovoril hlasom zbaveným všetkých emócií:

– Váš budúci svokor dostal len sedem rokov. Keď si predstavíme, z čoho všetkého ho obvinila obžaloba, nebolo to veľa. Aj vy ste čakali viac, však?

Jánova tvár očervenela. Napadlo mu, že by mal vyskočiť a chlapa oproti sebe udrieť. Mal by ho zabiť. Asi by sa mu to podarilo urobiť skôr, než by ten podliak stihol vytiahnuť revolver, ak vôbec nejaký má. Ján si predstavil, ako jeho ruky pomaly púšťajú mužovo hrdlo a bezvládne telo sa zosype pod stôl. Ten obraz ho upokojil, takže mohol povedať:

– Čakal som, že pána Belaja oslobodia. Nebol som síce v Leviciach cez vojnu, ale som si istý, že neurobil nikomu nič zlé. Nebol fašista.

– Na súde to tvrdil aj Rosenberg.

Ján vstal:

– Odchádzam.

– Počkajte, – rozhodil muž prekvapene ruky. – Vy ste ma nepochopili. Ja vás z ničoho neobviňujem. Nič proti vám nemáme. Ba čo viac, ponúkame vám spoluprácu. Chceme, aby ste svoje schopnosti

rozvíjali v prísne tajnom armádnom laboratóriu. A zároveň od vás očakávame aj ďalšiu spoluprácu.

– Akú? – spýtal sa Ján.

– Chceme len toľko, aby ste napísali o všetkom, čo ste z—ažili v Izraeli. Samozrejme nemusíte písať o vašej arabskej milenke, ale len o veciach súvisiacich s armádou. Mená osôb, názvy jednotiek, spôsob boja.

– Radšej nie.

– Nie? – muž sa zasmial. – Vy si asi neuvedomujete, nakoľko od nás závisí váš život. Bojovali ste v cudzej, dokonca izraelskej armáde. Váš najlepší priateľ dostáva balíky z Izraela. No ja zatiaľ netvrdím, že ste sionistický špión. Vaša sestra bola fanatická nacistka. Otec vašej frajerky je zavretý za zločiny, ktoré spáchal v uniforme šípových križov. No ja zatiaľ netvrdím, že aj vy ste zakuklený fašista. V tejto chvíli ešte veríme, že ste na našej strane, veď vám dovoľíme, aby ste naďalej študovali. Dokonca aj vašej frajerke. Mali by ste však svoj vzťah k ľudovodemokratickej vlasti a našej robotníckej triede nejako prejavíť. Možno stojíte na križovatke a ja vás nabádam, aby ste vykročili správnym smerom. Ján horúčkovo uvažoval. Podľa procesu s Máriiným otcom vedel, ako málo stačí na obvinenie z akéhokoľvek zločinu.

– Dáte mi aspoň čas na rozmyslenie? – spýtal sa Ján.

– Pravdaže, – usmial sa muž. – Stretneme sa v pondelok o jedenástej. Tu. Ale neurobte zatiaľ nijakú hlúposť. Rozhodne nehovorte nikomu o našom stretnutí. To by sa mohlo považovať za ďalší dôkaz proti vám.

Ján svoju prvú správu musel odovzdať do polovice augusta. Uviedol v nej všetko, o čo ho eštebák žiadal: mená osôb, názvy jednotiek, spôsob boja, s akým sa v izraelskej armáde stretol. Napísal dokonca ešte viac. Ak si na nejaké meno nevedel spomenúť, vymyslel si ho. Vedel, že týmto opisom nikomu neublíži. Na ľudí, ktorých v správe spomínal, nemohla mať žiaden dosah československá Štátna bezpečnosť, presnejšie jej zložka zameraná na vojenskú kontrarozvedku, kam zrejme patrili muž, ktorý Jána riadil.

Najviac však Ján písal o ceste z Izraela domov. Trikrát uviedol, že sedel v lietadle spolu s nositeľom vyznamenania Hrdina Sovietskeho zväzu Antonínom Sochorom. Tešil sa, aký zmätok v Štátnej bezpečnosti táto informácia vyvolá. Na Sochorovu hodnosť si však už presne nespomínal, a tak ho raz označil za majora, potom za kapitána a tretíkrát za dôstojníka.

Stretnutie, na ktorom Ján správu odovzdal, bolo krátke. Prešedivený muž si ju len zbežne prehládol a uškrnul sa:

– No vidíte, ani to nebolelo.

The first of September was a Saturday. Ján had postponed his last summer term exam until this date.

He got up from the desk where he had been preparing his notes and sat down on the chair in front of the examiner's table.

'Well, colleague, first show me what question you have drawn,' said Professor Očovský genially. Ján handed him the slip of paper and said, 'Clostridium botulinum.'
'Clostridium botulinum?!' the professor repeated with evident pleasure. 'That is the gold reserve of Bacteriology II. Well, let's have it.'

'Clostridium botulinum is a group of bacteria to be found in food that has been sterilized at an insufficient temperature. It causes poisoning known as botulism. The symptoms of botulism are headaches, thirst, double vision, paralysis of the respiratory muscles, difficulty in speaking and swallowing. But I'll come back to the bacteria itself.'

'Don't come back to anything, colleague,' Professor Očovský said, smiling. 'Hand me your student record book. I'll write a first in it.'

'That quick?' Ján was surprised.

The professor briskly wrote in the grade and returned the book to Ján.

'Here you are. . . But don't go away yet. You must stop by at room forty-nine at the end of the corridor.'

'Of course, I'll go there right now,' Ján said, still feeling elated. 'Goodbye. And thank you once again.'

'Don't thank me, colleague, there's nothing to thank me for,' said the professor, when the door had closed behind Ján.

Ján had been as apprehensive about this exam as all his fellow students, or to be more exact, apprehensive about the unpredictable moods of the examiner, Professor Očovský. Which is why he was very pleased to have got a first so quickly and effortlessly. It was a grade that few people could boast of having for Bacteriology II.

When Ján knocked on door number 49, he was still smiling. The smile didn't even disappear from his face when he entered and found himself standing before a grey-haired man of about fifty, who was sitting at a narrow table. The man had on a dark blue suit, the sleeves of which had been rubbed so smooth on the underside that they shone. The rays of sunshine penetrating the small room from behind his back reflected off his forearms as off the surface of a lake. On the table in front of the man lay several sheets of paper. Some typed, others covered with writing in blue pen.

'Good afternoon. Professor Očovský sent me here,' Ján announced cheerfully.

'Then you must be Comrade Ján Bízek, said the man, looking pleased, and he jumped up to offer Ján his hand. In doing so, he knocked several of the papers off the table. Ján went to pick them up, but the fellow cried out, 'No, no, don't pick them up. I'll collect them all myself. Please sit down here in this armchair, Comrade Bízek.'

Ján sat down and watched the man putting in order the sheets he had picked up from the floor. The man then turned to Ján. Both of them smiled, at the same time aware that there really was no reason to smile.

'Well, what did you get for the exam?' asked the man.

'A first,' Ján boasted.

'I should think so,' the man said, cheerfully raising a finger. 'I put in a word for you with Comrade Očovský.'

'You put in a word for me?'

'Yes. He and I are old acquaintances. I urged Comrade Očovský not to wear you out or keep you long,' the man said, smiling and slapping his hands on his thighs, as if to show how delighted he was that his plan had worked out.

'And why did you put in a word for me?'

'I didn't want you to come and see me tired and in a bad mood. I was anxious that our talk should be friendly and pleasant. I don't want to take up your time. It is Saturday after all.'

It suddenly occurred to Ján that the man sitting in front of him was a secret policeman. He wondered whether to ask him outright, or pretend for the time being that he had no idea what it was all about. He decided on the latter.

'But I don't understand why I'm here.'

'I have an offer for you.'

'What kind of offer?'

'A food research institute has recently been set up in Trenčín.'

'Really? I haven't heard about it.'

'That's how it should be. It's a secret military establishment. It's a good thing you haven't heard about it yet.'

The man pulled out a box of cigarettes.

'Will you?' he asked.

'No, thank you,' Ján suppressed his longing for a cigarette.

'No? I thought you smoked.'

'I do, but I won't have one now.'

'Ah, so that's it,' the man nodded his head pensively.

'Then I'll smoke alone.'

The man quietly drew on his cigarette a couple of times. He held the smoke in his mouth and relished its taste. Ján watched him, increasingly wishing he had lit up too.

'But to get down to business,' the man suddenly stirred himself. 'The research institute in Trenčín needs clever people. Preferably young. People interested in food chemistry, who at the same time realise they are working for a leading institute of strategic importance, where it could be said everything is strictly top secret.'

Ján felt relieved. So it wasn't an interrogation connected with the recently concluded case of Maria's father, but an offer of work.

'So I'll ask you directly. Would you like to work in such a scientific research institute?'

'Yes, I would,' Ján replied, 'but I've still got a year of studies ahead of me.'

'You'd write your degree thesis on a topic you'd be dealing with at the institute,' explained the man. 'Of course, we'd have to make sure you didn't reveal any state secrets in it. But that would be no problem. We'd read it through and judge whether anything needs to be omitted.'

'So I could start work while I'm still studying?'

'That's just what I'm offering. You could still enjoy the summer holidays and you'd begin work from the first of September.'

'That'd be marvellous. *Prima!* Ján's eyes lit up.

'You'll only have a couple of subjects in your final year. We might be able to arrange for you to attend classes just every other week.'

Ján nodded his head in agreement.

'By the way,' the man went on noncommittally, 'you said that would be '*prima!* That's a very Czech word – *prima*. You're Czech by birth, aren't you?'

'Yes,' Ján replied.

'Then you're Jan and not Ján,' the man said with a smile.

'I've been living in Slovakia for a long time,' Ján explained.

'But you grew up during the war in the Protectorate, didn't you?'

'Yes, in Brno.'

'You lost your parents there, didn't you?'

Ján nodded. 'I see you know everything about me. That's the army for you.'

'You're right there. We know almost everything,' the man laughed. 'Just your sister is a great mystery to us.'

Ján said nothing.

'What could you tell me about her?'

'Hardly anything. She disappeared during the war. I'm afraid she must have died as well.'

'But there was all kinds of talk about her,' the man said, fixing his eyes on Ján.

'The last time I saw her was in forty-two or three. She didn't live with us.'

'Where did she work?'

'That I really don't know, believe me.'

'It might surprise you, but I do believe you. We didn't manage to find out anything about her either.'

The man took out the box of cigarettes again.

'You really won't have one?'

'Yes, I will.'

'You see,' the man looked as pleased as if he had got Ján to agree to something of exceptional importance.

When Ján had breathed out the first little cloud of smoke, he asked quietly, 'Does that matter?'

'What?' the man asked, puzzled.

'Well... ' Ján was searching for words. 'The Protectorate and all that.'

'Oh, no,' the man laughed, 'rather the opposite. After all, you worked in a canning factory. That counts in your favour as experience.'

Ján nodded, satisfied.

'But there's something else,' said the man, stubbing out his cigarette in the ash tray. He opened a drawer and rummaged around in it for a while.

'Ah, here it is,' he announced, smiling as he straightened himself up.

Ján looked at him distrustfully.

'This,' said the man, handing him a newspaper cutting.

Ján only had to glance at the photo and the heading *Rats run away, but heroes come back*. It was the article Peter had written about Ján's stay in Israel.

'So you're a hero,' the man said in a colourless voice.

'I didn't write it,' murmured Ján.

'Let's get this right, I'm not reproaching you for anything. We all expected Israel to become a bastion in the struggle against American and British imperialism in the Middle East. After all, Comrade Stalin also supported the founding of a Jewish state. The thing is, it's quite a different state from what we expected.'

'I can't help that,' said Ján, himself smiling faintly at the stupidity of his answer.

'You've probably got a lot of friends there. What do they think about the developments in Israel?'

'I haven't got any friends there.'

'That can't be true. In two years you didn't make friends with anyone?'

'I made friends with an Arab girl. When the fighting broke out, her family fled from Israel. I've no idea what's happened to her now.'

'What do you think about Zionism?'

'Zionism is Jews moving into Palestine?'

'No, Zionism is the doctrine of Jewish world rule,' the man said sharply.

'I've never thought about it,' Ján uneasily began to clean his glasses.

'And what does your friend Rosenberg think about Zionism?'

'They only let him out of the lung sanatorium a couple of months ago. He had tuberculosis. He was fighting for his life. He's not interested in politics, I can assure you of that.'

Ján remembered a moment when he and Gabriel had been standing before a British commander on a ship. On that occasion he had shouted, *I am not a Jew*.

'I don't know whether anyone has informed you,' Ján said eventually, 'but I am not a Jew.'

'I know that,' the man slowly nodded his head, 'but I don't consider that to be very important. You know as well as I do who are Jews. Bankers, big businessman, millionaires. It's no problem for them to buy anyone. A Czech, a Slovak, an Arab. Rosenberg's father sent him expensive medicines.'

'They didn't buy me. They didn't even want to give me a grant to study.'

'So you're studying here. And that's a good thing. At least you can contribute to the building of socialism in your own country,' the man said.

Ján observed him anxiously. He was expecting another attack.

The man got up from the table and went over to the window.

'Comrade Bízek, I hope you don't mind me, you might say, questioning you like this. You must understand. After all, we're offering you important work in an institute of strategic importance. A cold war is raging all around us. On the Korean peninsular the imperialists have even made it a hot one. Thousands of innocent people are dying. Now it is not only the future of Korea or Czechoslovakia that is being decided, but the future of the world.'

The man sat down at the table. Once more he spoke in a voice void of all emotion: 'Your future father-in-law only got seven years. When you consider all the things he was accused of by the prosecution, it wasn't much. You yourself expected more, didn't you?'

Ján's face flushed. It occurred to him that he should jump up and hit the man facing him. He should kill him. He could probably do it before the rat could pull out his revolver; that is, if he had one. Ján imagined his hands slowly letting go of the man's throat and his lifeless body collapsing under the table. The image had a calming effect on him, so he was able to say, 'I expected Mr. Belaj to be released. I wasn't in Levice during the war, it's true, but I'm sure he didn't do anyone any harm. He wasn't a fascist.'

'That's what Rosenberg claimed in court too.'

Ján got to his feet. 'I'm going.'

'Wait a minute,' the man said, throwing up his arms in surprise. 'You misunderstood me. I'm not accusing you of anything. We've got nothing against you. What's more, we are offering you a chance to work for us. We want you to develop your talent in a top secret military laboratory. And at the same time we expect you to cooperate in another way.'

'What way?' asked Ján.

'All we want is for you to write down everything you experienced in Israel. Of course you needn't write about your Arab girlfriend, but just about things concerning the army. Names of people, units, the manner of combat.'

'I'd rather not.'

'No?' The man laughed. 'You probably don't realise to what extent your life is in our hands. You fought in a foreign army, the Israeli army even. Your best friend receives parcels from Israel. But as yet I'm not claiming you are a Zionist spy. Your sister was a fanatical Nazi. Your girlfriend's father has been jailed for crimes he committed in the uniform of the Arrow Cross Party. But I'm still not claiming you are a fascist in disguise. At present we still believe you are on our side. After all, we are allowing you to continue your studies. Even your girlfriend too. But you should show your attitude towards our people's democracy and working class in some way. Maybe you are standing at a crossroads and I'm encouraging you to go in the right direction.'

Thoughts raced through Ján's mind. He knew from the trial of Mária's father how little it took to be accused of any crime whatsoever.

'Will you at least give me time to consider?' he asked.

'Of course,' said the man with a smile. 'We'll meet on Monday at eleven. Here. But don't do anything stupid in the meantime. You should definitely not tell anyone about our meeting. That could be considered further proof against you.'

Ján had to hand in his first report by the middle of August. He included in it everything the

secret policeman had asked of him: the names of people, units, the manner of combat he had met with in the Israeli army. He wrote even more. If he couldn't remember a name, he made it up. He knew this information could do no one any harm. The people mentioned in his report were well beyond the reach of the Czechoslovak State Security, or more precisely, its branch specialising in military counter-intelligence that the man in charge of Ján clearly belonged to.

Ján wrote, however, at great length about his journey back from Israel. He mentioned three times that in the plane he had sat next to a bearer of the title Hero of the Soviet Union, Antonín Sochor. He thought gleefully of the commotion this would cause in the State Security. But he couldn't remember exactly Sochor's rank, so he once referred to him as a major, then a captain and the third time as an officer.

The meeting at which Ján handed over his report was short. The grey-haired man just glanced over it and smirked.

'You see, it didn't even hurt.'



Winning author

Helena Henschen

Book awarded

I skuggan av ett brott (2004)

The Shadow of a Crime

Publishing house

Brombergs

Biography

Helena Henschen was born in 1940 and raised in Stockholm. She has an artistic background and has worked as a graphic designer. Henschen has both written and illustrated children's books and she was one of the founders of the famous Swedish design company Mah-Jong.

Synopsis

The von Sydow murders received renewed attention in Sweden in 2004 as a result of the publication of the book *I skuggan av ett brott* by Helena Henschen, whose mother was the younger sister of Fredrik von Sydow. The book is a mixture of fact and fiction, and constitutes an attempt to understand both the taboo that arose within the family in relation to the crime, and also why Fredrik von Sydow committed the murders.

Fredrik von Sydow came from an upper-class family in Stockholm and studied Law at Uppsala University. On March 7, 1932, his father Hjalmar von Sydow - who was a conservative Member of Parliament and the managing director and

chairman of the Swedish Employers' Federation - and two maids employed in the household were found dead in the family residence in Stockholm, all bludgeoned to death with an iron bar.

Even though the police soon came to suspect the son, Fredrik, it took a few hours before they were able to locate him. Fredrik von Sydow had taken a taxi with his wife Ingun to Uppsala where they entered the restaurant of Hotel Gillet and ordered champagne, caviar and oysters. When the police eventually arrived at the restaurant, Fredrik von Sydow shot and killed his wife and himself.

Uppsala den 7 mars 1932

Jur. stud. Christian Fredrik Viktor Albert von Sydow, 23 år, född 4/6 1908, cirka 178 cm lång, smärt, avlångt något pussigt ansikte, cendré med å högra sidan benat hår, gråblå ögon, ganska stor, något inåtböjd näsa med ett snett övergående ärr, ordinär mun och dito haka samt ett mindre men djupt ärr å underkakens högra sida, iklädd troligen svart kavaj, randiga byxor, vit krage, svart slips, ljusgrå överrock och svart styv hatt.

Fru Sofie von Sydow, 23 år, född 6/3 1909, cirka 175 cm lång, smärt, askblont hår, ser mycket bra ut, iklädd mörk klänning, lång mörk kappa med persianskinn å krage och ärmar, liten svart hatt och svarta lågskor.

Begäres efterspanade och anhållna såsom misstänkta för mord.

Polismyndigheten i Stockholm

Efterlysningen nådde Uppsalapolisens klockan tio på måndagskvällen den 7 mars 1932 några timmar efter det att häradshövdingen Hjalmar von Sydow och två tjänstekvinnor hittats ihjälslagna i en våning på Norr Mälärstrand i Stockholm. Misstankarna riktades omedelbart mot sonen Fredrik von Sydow.

Fredrik och hans hustru Sofie anlände med taxi till Uppsala samma kväll klockan tjugotvå i åtta och bilen stannade utanför Stadshotellet. Chauffören frågade om han kunde få hämta dem och köra dem tillbaka, men fick till svar att de var bosatta i Uppsala. När droskägaren Erik Oskar Valdemar Nordkvist nästa dag läste om mordet i tidningen och såg ett publicerat foto på paret, var han säker på att det var Fredrik von Sydow och dennes hustru som han hade kört. Han noterade att fru von Sydow i verkligheten hade sett mycket bättre ut än vad bilden i tidningen visade.

De frågade efter ett ledigt rum på Stadshotellet men alla rum var redan bokade. Man vet att paret lämnade hotellet och ankom till restaurang Gillet vid Fyrstorg i Uppsala strax före klockan åtta. Rockvaktmästaren Ernst Gustaf Norman hade känt igen makarna von Sydow och noterat tidpunkten för deras ankomst.

De var på flykt från en död till nästa död. De ville ha en frist bara, en kort stund till att leva. Innan Gillet stängde vid midnatt skulle deras resa vara fullbordad.

Måndagen den 7 dennes klockan omkring 10.25–10.30 eftermiddagen, blev fru Sofie von Sydow

berövad livet medelst ett revolverskott, som hennes make, juris studeranden Christian Fredrik Viktor Albert von Sydow avlossat mot hennes huvud, under det makarna von Sydow uppehöll sig i vestibulen en halv trappa upp inom Hotell Uppsala Gille, här i staden, varefter mannen von Sydow omedelbart därefter och på samma plats berövade sig själv livet genom att med samma revolver skjuta ett skott mot sitt eget huvud.

Uppsala Polis
Kriminalavdelningen

Genom polisens vittnesförhör blev Sofies och Fredriks sista timmar kartlagda. Händelseförloppet upprörde, det var inte bara det faktum att Fredrik avlossade de dödande skotten invid restaurangen, utan också den provocerande rekvizitan; champagne, ostron, rosor och musikstycket som de påstods ha bett musikkapellet att spela, en sorti som på en teaterscen. Vad som var sant är oklart, händelsen omgavs av rykten och skrönor och mordet blev det stora samtalsämnet, inte bara i Uppsala utan i hela landet.

Ingen kunde förklara varför Fredrik von Sydow hade tagit livet av sin far och familjens två tjänstekvinnor. Ingen visste, och ingenstans i brottsutredningen framkommer något motiv. Vad som hände inne i Fredriks huvud och vad som utlöste ett sådant våldsamt utbrott den där måndagseftermiddagen i mars, är okänt. Sjuttio år har gått och dådet är i dag lika gåtfullt som då. I den efterlevande familjen är händelsen onämbar. Den är hemlig och förbjuden att vidröra. Händelsen finns inte och har aldrig ägt rum. Kanske är det just därför som dess existens är så påtaglig.

De var så unga, bara tjugotre år. Dagen före mordet hade de firat Sofies födelsedag tillsammans med några vänner på Skarpö i Stockholms skärgård och Sofie hade sagt att det var första gången som hon diskade en disk. Hennes händer var oförstörda som på ett barn och Fredriks haka fortfarande nästan fjunig.

I mars 1932 hade tidningarna svarta rubriker, nästan som krigsrubriker. Mordet blev förstasidesstoff i alla svenska dagstidningar under en vecka fram till den 13 mars då landet skakades av ännu en skandal, nämligen nyheten att finansmannen Ivar Kreuger hittats skjuten i Paris. De två händelserna hade inget samband med varandra utom just detta att de sammanföll i tid. De sönderbläddrade tidningsläggen är sedan länge ersatta med mikrofilm och även dessa hör till de mest tummade och repiga i Kungl. bibliotekets tidskriftsarkiv.

Mordet på Hjalmar von Sydow och de två tjänstekvinnorna, kokerskan Karolina Herou

och husan Ebba Hamn innehöll alla de ingredienser som en riktigt stor skandal ska innehålla; kända personer, ung bråd död och gastkramande detaljer. Morden fortsätter att fascinera och dyker då och då upp i tidningarna som några av de mest uppmärksammade i Sverige. Vid millennieskiftet nämndes de som en av årtusendets societetsskandaler, år 2001 togs de upp bland de illgärningar som drabbat Stockholm alltsedan 1300-talet; Kävlingemorden, Gustav III, Olof Palme ... samt de sydowska morden. Brottet blev teaterpjäs och tevefilm och fick en egen monter i polismuseet med berättelsen utlagd på internet.

Fredriks far, häradshövdingen Hjalmar von Sydow, var polischef i Stockholm vid sekelskiftet 1900, riksdagsman i första kammaren, men framför allt chef för Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen från bildandet 1907 och fram till sin död. Han var en central gestalt i svensk arbetsmarknadspolitik under 1900-talets första kvartssekel och mest känd för allmänheten blev han som den hårdföre arbetsgivargeneralen under Sveriges största arbetsmarknadskonflikt, storstrejken 1909.

De sydowska morden begicks i en familj som till synes hade allt. Man bodde i en åttarumsvåning på Norr Mälärstrand med utsikt över Riddarfjärden. Hustrun hade varit sjuklig och gått bort flera år före brottet, men en trotjänarinna skötte hushållet med hjälp av en kokerska och en husa. I familjen fanns fyra barn, först två flickor, sedan Fredrik och så sladdbarnet, en flicka. De ansågs alla ha gott läshuvud, inte minst Fredrik som tog studenten med höga betyg. Somrarna tillbringades i Velamsund med stan på lagom avstånd. Sommarbo, som huset kallades, var en av skärgårdens ståtligaste grosshandlarvillor. Trädgården var anlagd som en engelsk park med konstgjord grotta, parkbänkar, små trädgårdsskulpturer och utkikstorn med tub. Trädgårdsmästare krattade, ansade och klippte och blomsterfång bars in och ordnades i vackra vasar. I vagnslidret stod droskan och i stallbyggnaden bodde kusken beredd att hämta gäster från stan om de inte kom med ångbåt.

Här firades familjetilldragelser då släktingar och prominenta gäster bjöds ut till fest bland blomsterurnor i skuggande grönska. Det var födelsedagar, bröllop eller dopkalas; den yngsta dottern firades som om barnet inte bara var den gamle hövdingens prinsessa, utan också hela det svenska näringslivets. Häradshövdingen och hans hustru umgicks i de högsta svenska näringslivs- och politikerkretsarna.

Vid stranden en bit bort från Sydows fanns en annan villa, inte lika storslagen som Sydows, men ändå imponerande med rosafärgade grusgångar, tennisbana och ett särskilt annex för tjänststaben. Här tillbringade Sofies familj somrarna när man inte befann sig i Sandhamn vid havsbandet. Fadern och de fyra barnen kappseglade och under regattorna flyttade hela familjen dit ut. När seglingssäsongen var över återvände man till Velamsund eller till tolvrumsvåningen vid

Strandvägen i Stockholm.

Barnen i de båda familjerna lekte och umgicks. Jungfrur passade upp dem, privatchaufförer hämtade och lämnade dem och gästar riggade deras båtar. Familjerna förskansade sig bakom rikedom och det hemliga innanmätet blottades aldrig för utomstående.

Fredrik och Sofie hade alltså bott grannar och lärt känna varandra redan som unga. Deras pappor var båda framgångsrika och högt uppsatta personer, Fredriks i Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen och Sofies far som byggde upp sitt sjöförsäkringsbolag Hansa till det som senare blev Trygg-Hansa. De båda fäderna styrde sina familjer med samma maktspråk som de tillämpade i styrelserum och chefsstolar. I dåtidens patriarkala familjestruktur ansvarade mannen för alla åtaganden utanför familjen medan det ankom på kvinnan att styra över sitt revir, barnen och hemmet med tjänstefolk. Men varken Fredriks eller Sofies mödrar förmådde göra detta. Fredriks mamma tillbringade långa perioder på sjukhem och Sofies mamma lämnade hemmet när Sofie var tolv år. Papporna var sällan hemma och deras försök att fjärrstyra hem och barn var säkert dömt att misslyckas. I vilket fall kunde de inte ersätta avsaknaden av mödrar och när barnen kom i tonåren blev det allt tydligare. Fredrik och Sofie gjorde vad många andra ungdomar förmodligen skulle ha gjort om de haft möjlighet. De reste ut till de tomma villorna när sommarsäsongen var över, tullade ur spritförråden och ordnade föräldrafria fester. Vin och sprit var begärliga och svåråtkomliga varor under motbokstiden, men både Fredriks och Sofies pappor hade tilldelats extraransoner. Rykten spreds om de vilda festerna i Velamsund, men nådde säkert inte patriarkernas öron. Vem skulle ha vågat berätta någonting sådant? Knappast tjänstefolket, för det skulle bara drabba dem själva eftersom ansvaret för barnen hade anförtratts dem. Knappast grannarna som under vinterhalvåret utgjordes av bosatta fiskare och lantarbetare. För dem var livet i de stora grosshandlarvillorna lika avskilt som om det pågick på en annan planet.

Fadermord intar en särställning i litteratur och myter. Fadermord, modermord, brodermord ... det är Hamlet och Macbeth, Bröderna Karamazov och Orestes, som jagas från land till land med brinnande facklor. Det är Oidipus som sliter ut sina egna ögon när det uppenbaras att han har dödat sin far och gift sig med sin egen mor. Oidipus har brutit mot två tabun: incest och fadermord. Att han är utan skuld förringar inte gärningen, tvärtom tar den ut sin hämnd och förgör honom.

En känsla av skuld och skam. Ett gissel för den som är oskyldigt drabbad. Den skyldige kan betala sitt brott och göra sig fri, men inte den som ingen skuld har, för han har ingenting att sona.

Fredrik och Sofie efterlämnade en treårig dotter. Det lilla barnet, samt Fredriks yngre

syster som upptäckte vad som hänt i våningen på Norr Mälärstrand, fick bära på en känsla av skuld och skam genom hela livet. Vem får längta efter en sådan far, vem kan tillåtas sörja en mördare? De bemöttes som besmittade med någonting onämnt som ingen förmådde vidröra. Omvärlden vände sig bort, det fanns ingen tröst att ge och ingenting att tillägga. Mamma har farit till Paris, så man undvikande till treåringen som upphörde att tala och väntade ensam i sitt rum dit jungfrurna bar in maten. Den femtonåriga systemens upplevelser efter händelsen var likartade, kanske svårare. I ett slag hade allt utplånats som varit hennes barndom. De vuxna som stod henne nära var mördade. Hemmet upplöstes, det av pengarna som inte hade förlorats i Kreugerkraschen gick till skulder och själv kallades hon till vittnesförhör. En grannfamilj förbarmade sig över henne och hon fick bo hos dem fram till studenten.

Hjalmar von Sydow var min morfar, Fredrik min morbror och hans då femtonåriga lillasyster, min mamma. Brottet är inte längre det nervkittlande samtalsämne som det en gång var, och bland de efterlämnade släktingarna finns det bara några få som har egna minnen av vad som hände. Men hos mig har de obesvarade frågorna ständigt varit aktuella. Vad hade hänt i min mammas familj som ledde till en sådan katastrof? Under hela mitt liv har jag funderat över händelsen, periodvis vaknat av den på morgnarna eller låtit den olösta gåtan flyta in i sömnen, men det har också funnits tider då den glidit undan och förlorat i betydelse. Under min uppväxt återkom ofta samma dröm. Någon krossar en glödlampa och håller glasskärvorna i mitt öra. Som barn uppfattade jag drömmen som obegriplig trots att en enkel tolkning är uppenbar; någonting smärtsamt hade uppenbarats, något som öronen inte förmådde höra.

Brottet kom att kasta skuggor långt fram i tiden. Att tala om mordet var uteslutet och gick det inte att undvika så man Händelsen, men med så låg röst att det knappast hördes. Det var som med djävulen som kallades Den grå eller Den onde. Att ta ordet djävulen i sin mun stigmatiserade. Man riskerade att själv bli en djävul.

Om ett brott blir föremål för rättegång, gärningsmannen döms och avtjänar sitt straff, blir det kanske en renande och klagörande process där fallet sedan kan läggas åt sidan. Men så blev det inte med detta brott. Det fick aldrig något avslut och de frågor som de anhöriga bar på förblev obesvarade. Fredrik och Sofie omnämndes aldrig i familjen, än mindre ställdes frågorna. Vad fick Fredrik att göra sig skyldig till detta illdåd? Valde verkligen Sofie, en ung vacker kvinna och mamma till ett litet barn, att självmant följa honom in i döden? I verkligheten är det bara ett fåtal frågor som har ett enkelt svar. Man letar efter motiven och vill så gärna veta sanningen men den får man aldrig veta. Jag söker ändå en förklaring och reser till min mamma i Köpenhamn.

Translation from the Swedish by Carla Wiberg

Uppsala, March 7, 1932.

Law student Christian Fredrik Viktor Albert von Sydow, aged 23 years; date of birth June 4, 1908; height approximately 178 cm; slim build; face longish, somewhat bloated; hair light brown, parted on right; eyes grey-blue; nose fairly large, somewhat upturned, crossed by a slanting scar; mouth and chin ordinary; also, a small but deep scar on right-hand side of lower jaw; probably wearing a black suitcoat, striped trousers, white collar, black tie, pale grey overcoat and a tall black hat.

Wife of the above, Sofie von Sydow, aged 23 years; date of birth March 6, 1909; height approximately 175 cm; slim build; hair ash-blond; very good-looking; wearing a dark dress, long dark coat with Persian lamb on collar and sleeves, a small black hat and black boots.

Wanted on suspicion of murder.

Stockholm Police Authority

The alert reached Uppsala police at ten p.m., on Monday 7 March 1932, a few hours after district court judge Hjalmar von Sydow and two female servants had been found beaten to death in an apartment on Norr Mälärstrand road in Stockholm. Suspicion fell immediately on the judge's son, Fredrik von Sydow.

Fredrik and his wife arrived in Uppsala in a taxi-cab at twenty to eight the same evening, and the car pulled up outside Stadshotellet, the city's foremost hotel. When cab driver Erik Oskar Valdemar Nordkvist read about the murders the following day, and saw the picture published in the newspaper, he felt sure that last evening's passengers were Fredrik von Sydow and his wife. He noted that Mrs. von Sydow had looked much better in real life than in the newsprint photograph.

They asked for a room at the hotel, but there were no vacancies. What is then known is that the pair left the hotel and arrived at the Gillet restaurant ('Guild Hall') on Fyris Square in Uppsala just before eight. There cloakroom attendant Ernst Gustav Norman recognized them and took note of the hour.

They were on the run from one killing to another killing. They just wanted a respite, one more brief moment of life. Before the restaurant closed at midnight, their journey would be over.

On Monday 7 March, between 10:25 and 10:30 in the evening, Mrs. Sofie von Sydow lost her life due to a revolver shot which her husband, law student Christian Fredrik Viktor Albert von Sydow, fired at her head while the von Sydows were in the entresol lobby in the Hotell Uppsala Gille in this

city, after which Mr. von Sydow immediately afterwards, and in the same location killed himself by firing the same revolver at his head.

Uppsala Police, Crime Department

By interviewing witnesses the police charted Sofie's and Fredrik's last hours. The whole chain of events was shocking, not just because Fredrik fired the fatal shots so close to the restaurant, but also because of the outrageous props: champagne, oysters, roses, and the tune they were said to have requested from the band – making an exit as from a stage.

How much of this that was true is not known; surrounded by rumours and stories, the murders became the number one topic of conversation, not just in Uppsala but in the whole country.

No one could explain why Fredrik von Sydow had killed his father and the family's two maids. Nobody knew, and nothing in the police's investigation reveals a possible motive. What went on in Fredrik's mind, and what triggered such a burst of violence that Monday afternoon in March, is unknown. Seventy years have gone by, and the crime is as much of an enigma today as it was then. Within the family, the subject is taboo. It is a secret and must not be touched upon. And what happened never happened, and does not exist. And maybe that is why its existence is still so palpable.

They were so young, only twenty-three. The day before the murders they had celebrated Sofie's birthday with friends on Skarpö, an island in Stockholm's archipelago; and Sofie had said it was the first time ever that she washed dishes. Her hands were soft as a child's and Fredrik's chin had barely lost its peach fuzz.

In March 1932 the newspapers' headlines were black, almost as if announcing a war. That whole week the murders occupied the front pages of newspapers all across the country, until March 13th when the country was shaken by yet another scandal – the news that millionaire financier Ivar Kreuger had been found shot to death in Paris. The two events had no connection except their timing. Library copies of those newspapers were read until they fell apart, and the microfiche films that long ago replaced them are still among the most scratched and fingerprinted in the Swedish Royal Library's periodicals collection.

The murders of Hjalmar von Sydow and the two maids, cook Karolina Herou and housemaid Ebba Hamn, had all the ingredients required of a really awful scandal: famous names, young people violently dead, and chilling details. The murders keep fascinating; from time to time

they make the papers yet again. Few Swedish crimes have attracted so much attention. They were named one of the biggest scandals of the last millennium, and in 2001 were included in a list of heinous Stockholm crimes since the 1300s: the K pplinge murders in 1389, which put Stockholm in the hands of the Germans; the shooting of King Gustav III during a masked ball at the opera in 1792; the assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986 ... and the von Sydow murders. The crime was turned into a play and a TV film, got its own glass case at the Police Museum and its story published on the Internet.

Fredrik's father, district-court judge Hjalmar von Sydow, was Chief of Police in Stockholm around 1900, member of the upper house of Parliament, and above all head of the Swedish Employer's Association from its founding in 1907 until his death. He was a central figure in the politics of Swedish labour relations during the first quarter of the century, and the public came to know him as the tough head negotiator for the employers during the Great Strike of 1909.

The von Sydow murders were committed in a family which seemed to have it all. They lived in an eight-room apartment overlooking a picturesque waterway in central Stockholm. Mrs. von Sydow, had passed away several years before the crime; a faithful housekeeper ran the household with the help of a cook and a housemaid. They had four children: two girls, then Fredrik, and a much younger daughter. All were good students, especially Fredrik who graduated with strong marks. Their summers were spent at Velamsund, within easy reach of the city. Summer Nest, as their house was called, was one of the archipelago's stateliest gingerbread villas. The garden was designed like an English park complete with a grotto, benches, lawn ornaments, and a look-out tower with a telescope. Gardeners raked, trimmed, and pruned, and flowers were brought in by the armful and arranged in handsome vases. A cab waited in the carriage house and its driver above the stables, ready to pick up those city guests who didn't arrive by steamboat.

Near the water, a stone's throw from the von Sydow's, stood another gingerbread villa, not quite as grandiose but nonetheless imposing with its pink-gravel walks, tennis courts, and a separate wing for the servants. This was where Sofie's family spent their summers when they weren't on the island of Sandhamn, a sailing-race center nearer the open sea. Sofie's father and his four children were keen sailors, and the whole family migrated there for the regattas. When the sailing season was over, they returned to their twelve-room apartment on one of the most exclusive addresses in Stockholm.

The children of the two families played and spent time together. Nannies waited on them, private chauffeurs picked them up and dropped them off, and deck hands rigged their boats. Both families barricaded themselves behind their wealth, and the secrets within were never

revealed to outsiders.

Thus Fredrik and Sofie, as neighbours, had got to know each other quite young. Both fathers were successful and highly placed, Fredrik's father within the Employers' Association, and Sofie's father Alrik, within the insurance industry – his maritime insurance company Hansa would later become Trygg-Hansa, one of Sweden's largest insurers. Both of them ruled their families in the same autocratic style that they exhibited in boardrooms and director's chairs. The patriarchal structure of contemporary society put men in charge of all matters outside the home, while women were supposed to rule their own territory – children, home and servants. But neither Fredrik's nor Sofie's mother was capable of this. Fredrik's mother spent long periods in nursing homes, and Sofie's mother left the family when Sofie was twelve. The fathers themselves were seldom at home, and their attempts to run their families by remote control must have been doomed to fail. No matter what they did, they could not replace their children's missing mothers, and this became more and more apparent as the children grew into their teens.

The murder of fathers occupies a special place in literature and mythology. Patricide, matricide, fratricide ... this is the stuff of Hamlet and Macbeth, the Brothers Karamazov, and Orestes hunted from land to land with burning torches. This is Oedipus, who tears out his eyes after realizing he has murdered his father and married his mother. Oedipus broke two taboos, committing incest and patricide. That he did so unwittingly does not diminish the outrage; quite the opposite. Vengeance is exacted and destroys him.

Guilt and shame – the scourge of the inadvertent perpetrator. The consciously criminal can pay the price and move on; not so the innocent, who has nothing to atone for.

Fredrik and Sofie left a three-year-old daughter. This little girl, as well as Fredrik's younger sister—who first discovered what had happened in the apartment – were burdened feelings of guilt and shame for the rest of their lives. How could you miss such a father? How could you mourn a murderer? They were treated as though infected with some unmentionable contagion which nobody could bring themselves to come near. They would turn its back on them; there was no comfort to give and nothing to add.

Hjalmar von Sydow was my maternal grandfather, Fredrik my uncle, and his little sister, then fifteen years old, became my mother. The crime is no longer the spine-tingling topic it once was, and among the surviving relatives only a few remain who have personal memories of what happened. For me, however, the unanswered questions have always loomed large. What was it in my mother's family that paved the way for such a disaster? All my adult life the unsolved riddle has given me food for thought; sometimes waking me up in the mornings or merging with sleep at night ...

Yet at other times it has faded away, losing importance. While I grew up I had a recurring dream in which someone was crushing a light bulb and letting the broken glass fall into my ear. As a child I could never understand it, although interpretation now seems obvious: something painful had happened, something too bad for my ears.

The crime cast its shadow far into the future. Mentioning the murders was unthinkable; if it could not be avoided, it was referred to simply as What Happened, in a voice so low it almost went unheard. It was like saying the Grey One or the Bad One instead of the Devil, because uttering the word *devil* put one at risk of becoming a devil, too.

If a crime goes to trial, and the perpetrator is sentenced and takes his punishment, then perhaps he wipes the slate clean in the process, so that the matter can be laid to rest. Not so with this crime. There was never any closure, and the survivors' questions went unanswered. Fredrik and Sofie were never even mentioned in the family, much less were those questions asked. What made Fredrik commit such a heinous crime? Did Sofie, a beautiful young woman and mother of a small child, really volunteer to die with him? In real life, very few questions have simple answers. We search for motives, yearning for the truth but never finding it. Still looking for an explanation I pay a visit to my mother in Copenhagen.

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