



Tomáš Zmeškal – Czech Republic

Milostný dopis klínovým písmem
(2008)

A Love Letter in Cuneiform Script

Publishing House **Torst**

Biography

The prose writer Tomáš Zmeškal (b.1966 in Prague) studied English language and literature, and he lived and studied in London for a number of years. In the 1980s, he played for a while in the band *Psí vojáci*, led by writer and musician Filip Topol. He works as a writer, translator and a secondary-school teacher of English literature.

Although he had earlier published short stories, he came to wider attention mainly through his first novel, *Milostný dopis klínovým písmem* (*Love Letter in Cuneiform Script*, 2008), which describes the post-war world of 1950s Czechoslovakia from a postmodern, fragmented perspective. For this novel, he was shortlisted for the Magnesia Litera Prize and was awarded the Josef Škvorecký Award.

Synopsis

Tomáš Zmeškal's debut novel, *Milostný dopis klínovým písmem*, is both a history and a love story, which touches on moral issues, myths and science fiction. This family saga might also be seen as a collage or a mosaic.

The main plot is set in Czechoslovakia between the 1940s and the 1990s and its narrative concerns the tragic stories of one family. Josef meets his wife, Květa, before the Second World War at a public lecture on Hittite culture. Květa chooses Josef over their mutual friend Hynek. At the beginning of the 50s, Hynek starts work as a police investigator and, when Josef is arrested and imprisoned, Květa gives herself to Hynek in return for help and advice.

The story of Josef and Květa isn't set out in chronological order and so, in the very first chapter, we find ourselves at the end of the 60s when their daughter, Alice, is about to get married. At the end of the novel we meet Josef, his life in danger, in a West Bohemian forest during the last days of the war.

This is a work with a thoughtfully considered structure. Several chapters contain stories from other eras and other lands – these fantasies point to the finality and uniqueness of every human life.

Milostný dopis klínovým písmem

Tomáš Zmeškal

Výňatek z kapitoly 3

Alice se narodila v roce 1950, několik měsíců předtím, než otce zatkli, odsoudili a uvěznil. Nic z toho si ale Alice nepamatovala, to všechno znala jen z vyprávění a ze vzpomínek příbuzných. Matka za ním každý měsíc jezdila. Někdy jezdila Alice s ní, ale dovnitř ji stejně nepustili, a tak zůstávala u tety v sousedním městě. A pak, po deseti letech, se její otec objevil doma. Alice ho znala z vyprávění a z fotografií. Dostávala od něj dopisy, které jí zprvu četla matka, a potom, když se naučila číst, si je už četla sama. Nebyla ráda, že jim posílal dopisy, i když to matka skrývala, většinou plakala, a to Alice věděla, i když se to matka snažila nedát najevo. A pak, když minuly její desáté narozeniny, otce propustili. Těšila se, všichni se těšili a všichni byli nervózní a šťastní. Nejprve matka chodila na nějaké úřady, potom je stále častěji navštěvovali různí příbuzní a známí a s matkou pročítali spousty papírů, které pak vyplňovali a o kterých mluvili jazykem, jemuž Alice nerozuměla. A pak jí jednoho dne matka řekla, že pro ni má veliké překvapení, to překvapení bylo to, že otec měl přijet přesně za dva týdny domů, že ho propustí už po deseti letech, ne po třinácti, jak stálo v původním rozsudku, a že bude opět s nimi. Alice matce příliš nerozuměla, protože podle matky měl otec přijet, měl se vrátit, ale co se Alice pamatovala, nikdy s nimi nežil, pro ni to tedy návrat nebyl, protože ona ho nikdy neviděla odcházet. Otec se měl vrátit z vězení ve čtvrtek. Ty dva týdny nebylo s matkou k vydržení. Alice nechápala, co se to s ní děje. Byla ráda, že se jí táta vrátí, už proto, že ho měla ve

vězení a že se o tom příliš nesmělo mluvit. Alice chápala, tak to alespoň říkal strýc Antonín, že její táta je statečný člověk, který se postavil bezpráví, a proto ho uvěznili, protože tenhle ten režim, říkal dál strýc Antonín, jsou stejně všechno jenom zločinci, od kterých nikdo nemůže nic dobrého čekat. Alice příliš nerozuměla, co to ten režim vlastně je, ale myslela si, že to bude někdo asi stejně tak důležitý jako školní inspektor, kterého se bála nejenom třídní učitelka Svobodová, ale i ředitelka školy Krausová, a to už tedy bylo něco. Alice také věděla, že jsou věci, o kterých se může mluvit jen doma, a ne ve škole nebo v obchodě nebo na ulici. Těšila se, že se její tatínek vrátí domů, i když matka neustále prala, uklízela, přerovnávala věci a utírala prach. Jednou Alice zaslechla, jak se radí se strýcem Antonínem, jestli má vymalovat nebo ne. Strýc ji přesvědčil, že nemá malovat, tím, že řekl:

„Uklidni se, Květuš, přijede ti Josef a on vymaluje. Vymalujete spolu, když budeš chtít.“ Nato se její matka jako obvykle rozplakala a to, proč její matka pláče kvůli malování, Alice už opravdu pochopit nedokázala. Byt byl uklizený, okna byla umytá, květiny přesazené, dokonce i Aliciny hračky matka zkontrolovala přinejmenším čtyřikrát. Už se to s ní nedalo moc vydržet, a tak se Alice raději zdržovala u kamarádky Terezy. Tam ji matka nechávala čas od času být, protože dědeček Terezky byl také ve vězení, i když v jiném než tatínek. V obývacím pokoji u Terezy byl obrázek dědečka. Byl to veliký mohutný pán s velikým břichem, velkými kníry a pohledem, který pronikal až do morku kostí. Jednu ruku měl ve vestičce, z které visel řetízek od hodinek, a Terezčina babička o něm říkala, že to byl moc velký dobrák a že si tohle nezasloužil. To Alice Terezčině babičce nevěřila, protože se z té fotografie díval tuze přísně a nevlídně. A navíc jeho břicho bylo tak velké a vypadalo stejně přísně jako jeho kníry a jeho neúprosný pohled.

V úterý šla Tereza k Alicí domů s tím, že si odpoledne udělají domácí úkoly. Matka si posledních několik týdnů kupovala mnoho věcí, které předtím nikdy doma neměly, byly tam rtěnky, hřebeny do vlasů, přibyly pudřenky, a dokonce i několik malých lahviček parfémů. Alice s Terezou si je zkoušely. Povolení od Aliciny matky měly, i když měly zároveň také příkázáno být se vším velice opatrné, poněvadž to stálo hodně peněz. Když zazvonil zvonek, bylo jisté, že to bude sousedka paní Poláčková a že buď bude chtít půjčit mouku, vajíčka, mléko, kvasnice anebo něco jiného, nebo že bude chtít vrátit, mouku, vajíčka, mléko, kvasnice anebo něco jiného. Obě dvě dívky se na sebe podívaly, ušklíbly se a Tereza řekla:

„Poláčková?“ Alice se ušklíbla ještě jednou a řekla:

„Nemáte náhodou, miláčku, kvasnice?“ a šla otevřít. Když se podívala kukátkem ven, nikoho neviděla. To nebude Poláčková, Poláčková vždycky stála tak, aby na ni bylo vidět v kukátku, a tak se Alice otočila a šla zpátky za Terezou.

„Kdo to byl?“ zeptala se Tereza.

„Nikdo,“ odpověděla Alice, „nikdo tam není, a když tam nikdo není, tak stejně nikomu nesmíme otvírat, tak co...“ Po chvíli se znovu ozval zvonek. Teď už se obě dívky zvedly a šly se podívat ke dveřím.

„Někdo tam je,“ řekla Tereza, „podívej se.“ Alice se podívala a za dveřmi stál muž, otočený ke dveřím zády, s taškou v ruce. Dívky se na sebe znovu podívaly a Alice otevřela. Ve dveřích stál její otec. To, že to byl její otec, poznala ihned, protože jeho fotografie byly všude v jejich bytě a nejvíce jich bylo v matčině pokoji. Byl ale mnohem, mnohem hubenější než na fotografiích. Když uviděl Alici, řekl:

„Dobrý den, Alice.“ Alice stála, držela kliku dveří a řekla:

„Dobrý den, pane.“

„Já jsem tvůj tatínek, Alice,“ řekl pán.

„Já vím, pane,“ řekla Alice.

„Můžu dál?“ zeptal se otec.

„Můžete, pane tatínku,“ řekla Alice a nejistě se podívala na Terezu. Tereza stála v rohu předsíně, všechno pozorovala, ale nic neříkala. Otec vešel do předsíně a uviděl ji. Podíval se na ni a řekl:

„Ty musíš být Terezka, ne?“

„Ano, pane,“ odpověděla Terezka a po chvíli váhání se zeptala: „Vy jste Alicin tatínek?“

„Ano, jsem,“ řekl otec.

„Aha,“ řekla Terezka. Muž vešel, zavřel za sebou dveře, sehnul se a uchopil Alici do náručí, když ji zvedl, byla Alice téměř až u stropu. Alice nevěděla, co dělat, ale když ji takhle někdy chytal strýc Antonín, teta Šárka nebo strýc Bedřich, tak je vždycky uchopila kolem krku. Udělala tedy to samé. Muž se začal smát, což se Alici líbilo, ale zároveň cítila, že má od něj mokrou tvář, což se jí zase tolik nelíbilo, protože si před chvílí s Terezou zkoušely nový narůžovělý a překrásně voňavý pudr. Odtáhla se od něj a snažila se na něj nenápadně podívat, zatímco ji držel vysoko nad zemí. Po chvíli ji otec postavil na zem, vytáhl z kapsy veliký kapesník a vysmrkal se. Ten kapesník Alici zaujal, protože ani ona, ani matka takové veliké kapesníky nikdy nepoužívaly. Takové veliké kapesníky byly vyžehlené a srovnané v matčině skříni, tam, kde byly otcovy věci. Takové kapesníky se používaly jenom na rozbité koleno, na ošetření říznutí do prstu při krájení cibule nebo mrkve, do takových kapesníků se nesmrkalo. Takové kapesníky se pak daly do špinavého prádla, vyvařily se, vyžehlily a složily na sebe ve skříni v matčině pokoji. Alice se tedy otočila a odběhla do matčina pokoje, otevřela skříň a vzala ze štosu

srovnaných kapesníků dva veliké, čistě vyžehlené kapesníky vonící mýdlem a s nimi se vrátila k svému otci do předsíně a vložila mu je do ruky. Otec se na ni spěšně podíval, teď se neusmíval, ale díval se jí najednou a nečekaně přímo do očí, až v Alici hrklo a málem se jí zastavil dech, a věděla, že kdyby něco jedla, určitě by se zakuckala. Díval se na ni tak přísně, že si ani netroufala dýchat. To, že se na ni takhle dívá, usoudila později, bude muset probrat s Terezkou. Takhle se dívat, takhle divně a přísně se dívat, když nic neudělala, to se přeci nedělá. Pak muž zdvihl oči vzhůru, rozhlédl se kolem dokola po předsíni a rukou jí projel vlasy. O tom Alice věděla, že tohle dělají dospělí, když nevědí, co říct a chtějí být na děti milí. Terezka si mezitím nasadila boty, uklonila se otci, rozloučila se s Alicí a odešla domů. Cítila se přebytečná, i když přesně nevěděla proč.

Otec vešel do kuchyně, otevřel kredenc, vytáhl veliký kameninový hrnek, který stál v druhé řadě a který nikdo do té doby nepoužíval, a neomylně sáhl do poličky pro velkou plechovku, v které byla káva. On se tady vyzná, říkala si pro sebe Alice. Můj tatínek, říkala si v duchu, můj tatínek se tady vyzná, tady u mě doma, tady u mě doma v kuchyni.

Tolik se těšila, tolik se bála, tolik se na něj zlobila, a teď nevěděla, co s tím velikým vysokým mužem má vlastně dělat. Tak jen stála, koukala nahoru na něj, protože byl o mnoho větší než máma, a on koukal dolů na ni, až jí to bylo tak trochu nepříjemné, a vůbec se jí z té výšky, do které se na něj musela dívat, začala tak trochu točit hlava.

„Kde je maminka?“ zeptal se, když si udělal kávu, posadil se a díval se na svou dceru.

„Něco zařizuje,“ odpověděla Alice. „A také, také mi říkala, že přijedete až ve čtvrtek.“ Chvíli ho provázela po bytě, v kterém se za těch deset let mnoho nezměnilo. On se divil,

proč mu vyká, když si v dopisech vždycky tykali, a v duchu se podívoval nad tím, jak velkou slečnu má za dceru, i když poslední fotografie, na které ji viděl, byla stará sotva půl roku. Ona se zase v duchu podívovala, že i přes svou výšku nikam nenarazí, obratně se vyhne lampám v kuchyni i v pokoji, a že jí občas projede vlasy jeho suchá dlaň, do které se za jeho mozoly její vlasy občas zachytly. Všimla si také, že když ji hladí po ruce a po ramenou, látka její halenky se zachycuje o jeho ztvrdlou kůži, a Alice měla trochu obavu, aby ji jeho ruce nepotrhal. Jeho ruce byly tak trochu jako struhadlo a potřebovaly by určitě manikúru, nebo alespoň pořádně promazat nějakým hodně mastným krémem, takovým, který používá maminka nebo teta Šárka, to si ale netroufala říct nahlas. Každému jinému by to řekla, ale on byl tatínek, a to bylo úplně něco jiného. A pak, najednou, zničehonic, byl večer a on seděl ve tmě na zemi, tam, kde se nikdy nesedá, opřený o postel a ona mu seděla na kolenou, a to bylo příjemné, a i když se v setmělém pokoji vždy trochu bála, tak teď se tu nebála, i když se zase naopak toho vysokého hubeného muže přece jenom trochu bála, tak jí to ale také bylo příjemné. A najednou zapraskaly klíče ve dveřích a ona cítila, jak mu pod košilí a pod sakem najednou začalo tuze nahlas bouchat srdce a jak ji najednou stiskl tak, že ji to až zabořilo, jak jí svíral obě dvě zápěstí a zase se tak divně díval do dveří, které vedly do kuchyně a které byly pootevřené. A náhle vstal, a aniž cokoliv řekl, ji vzal do náruče a stále ji tiskl o něco víc, než to bylo zapotřebí, takže se Alice začala trochu škubat a připadala si jako bělička chycená v síti. A on pootevřel dveře do kuchyně a skrze druhé pootevřené dveře do předsíně bylo slyšet, jak se maminka zouvá, jak si přezouvá boty, jak si bere své domácí přezůvky a jak se ptá, kde že Alice je a jestli Terežka už odešla. A pak se otáčí a vidí je oba dva stát ve dveřích. Jeho, svého

muže, který drží svou dceru, a ještě se jednou sehne a popaměti si upraví pásek na střevících pro doma, ale už se na ty své domácí střevíce ani nepodívá a jde k nim a říká jenom: „Josefe, Josefe...“ a nedoříká větu do konce, tak jak se má a tak jak kvůli tomu vždycky sama kárá svou dceru. A přichází k nim a hladí ji po vlasech a dává svoji tvář vedle té jeho a Alice má pocit, že rozhodně za chvíli začne maminka zase brečet, což je jí nepříjemné, ale kupodivu ona nebrečí, jenom svého manžela drží za rameno a ji objímá a Alice si všímá, že srdce jejího otce, které ještě před chvílkou bilo rychle jako běžící stádo gazel, které jednou viděla v zoologické zahradě, už bilo pomalu a jakoby rozvázně, ale zase cítila, že se z maminciny ruky odvíjí malý tenký teplý pramínek, který pulsoval, který hnal její krev až do prstů, které ji svíraly a hladily, a ten pramínek se měnil a sílil a uklidňoval a bouřil. A pak ji tatínek postavil na zem, a tak nějak bylo jasné, že teď bude večere, a tak si šla sednout na svou židli a on si sedl naproti ní a maminka začala dělat pomazánku a on se na ni díval a stejně času věnoval své ženě jako své dceři a maminka jenom občas přišla a pohladila ji po vlasech a jeho taky, tak jak se to dělá jen malým dětem, ale taky ho občas – jako by nechtěla, aby to bylo vidět – bleskurychle a jakoby nenápadně pohladila po rukou, které měl položený na stole a které byly o mnoho větší než ty maminky.

A Love Letter in Cuneiform Script

Tomáš Zmeškal

Translated from the Czech by Nathan Fields – Excerpt from chapter 3

Alice was born in the year 1950, a few months before her father was arrested, convicted and imprisoned. Alice didn't remember any of it, she knew everything only from the stories and experiences of her relatives. Her mother went to see him every month. Sometimes Alice went with her, but they wouldn't let her inside anyway, and so she would stay with her aunt in a neighboring town. And then, after ten years, her father appeared at home. Alice knew him from stories and photographs. She had received letters from him, which her mother would read to her at first, and then, when she learned to read, she read them herself. She wasn't happy that he would send them letters, and although her mother hid it, she would almost always cry, and Alice knew it even though her mother tried not to show it. And then, after her tenth birthday had passed, they let her father go. She looked forward to it, everyone was looking forward to it and everyone was nervous and happy. First her mother had begun visiting some offices, then there were more and more frequent visits from relatives and acquaintances and with her mother they would read through many papers which they then filled out and about which they would speak in a language Alice didn't understand. And then her mother told her one day that she had a big surprise for her, and that the surprise was that her father should come home in exactly two weeks, that they were letting him go after ten years, not after thirteen as the original sentence had judged, and that he would be with them

again. Alice didn't understand her mother too well because, according to her, her father was supposed to return, but as far as Alice could remember, her father had never lived with them, so then it wasn't a return for her because she had never seen him depart. Her father was supposed to return from prison on Thursday. It was impossible to endure those two weeks with her mother. Alice didn't understand what was happening to her. She was glad that her father was returning to her, if only because he was in prison and she wasn't allowed to speak about it too much. Alice understood that, at least Uncle Antonin would say that, her father was a brave man who had stood up to injustice, and that's why they imprisoned him, because this regime, Uncle Antonin would go on to say, are all complete criminals anyway, from whom nobody could expect anything good. Alice didn't much understand what this regime actually was, but she thought that it was probably just as important as the school inspector, of whom not only her class teacher Mrs. Svobodova was afraid, but even School Director Krausova, and that was really something. Alice also knew that there were things about which she could speak only at home, and not at school or in the shop or on the street. She was looking forward to her dad coming back home, even though her mother was continuously washing, tidying up, rearranging things and dusting. Once Alice overheard her asking Uncle Antonin if she should paint or not. Her uncle persuaded her that she shouldn't paint by saying:

“Calm down, Kveta, Josef will come to you and he will paint. Paint together if you want.” At that her mother started crying as usual and why her mother was crying about painting, Alice now really was not able to comprehend. The flat was cleaned, the windows were washed, the plants were replanted; her mother had even inspected Alice's toys at least four times.

It was already almost unbearable with her and so Alice preferred to spend time with her friend Tereza. Her mother would let her stay over there from time to time, because Tereza's grandfather was also in prison, though a different one from her dad. In the living room at Tereza's house there was a picture of her grandfather. He was a great massive man with a large belly, a large mustache and eyes which penetrated to the marrow of the bone. He had one hand in his vest, from which a watch chain was hanging, and Tereza's grandmother would say about him that he was a very kind man and that he did not deserve this. Alice didn't believe Tereza's grandmother about this because he looked overly strict and harsh in that photograph. Even his belly was so big and looked just as strict and harsh as his mustache and relentless gaze.

On Tuesday, Tereza came over to Alice's home to do homework together in the afternoon. Her mother had already been buying many things the past few weeks which they had never had at home before; there were lipsticks, hair combs, powder boxes, and even several small bottles of perfume. Alice tried them out with Tereza. They had permission from Alice's mother, though they were also instructed to be very careful with everything because it had cost a lot of money. When the doorbell rang, it was sure to be Mrs. Polackova and that she would want to borrow either flour or eggs, milk, yeast or something else, or that she would want to return flour, eggs, milk, yeast, or something else. Both girls looked at each other grinning and Tereza said:

"Polackova?" Alice grinned again and said:

"Wouldn't you happen to have some yeast, dearie?" and went to open the door. When she looked out the peephole she didn't see anyone. So it wasn't Polackova, Polackova always stood so that she could be seen through the peephole, so Alice turned and went back to Tereza.

“Who was it?” Tereza asked.

“No one,” Alice answered, “No one’s there, and if no one’s there, we’re not allowed to open the door to anyone anyway, so...” A moment later the doorbell rang again. Now both girls stood up and went to look at the door.

“Someone’s there,” said Tereza, “look.” Alice looked and behind the door stood a man, his back turned to the door, with a bag in his hand. The girls looked at each other again and Alice opened the door. In the door stood her father. She recognized it was her father immediately because his photograph was everywhere in their flat and in her mother’s room most of all. He was, however, much, much skinnier than in the photos. When he saw Alice he said:

“Hello, Alice.” Alice stood holding the handle of the door and said:

“Hello, sir.”

“I’m your dad, Alice,” the man said.

“I know, sir,” Alice said.

“Can I come in?” her father asked.

“You can, Mr. Dad,” Alice said and looked insecurely at Tereza. Tereza stood in the corner of the entry, observing everything, but saying nothing. Her father came into the entryway and saw her. He looked at her and said:

“You must be Tereza, right?”

“Yes, sir.” Tereza answered, and after a moment’s hesitation, she whispered, “You are Alice’s dad?”

“Yes, I am,” the father said.

“Aha,” said Tereza. The man came in, closing the door behind him, straightened up, clasped Alice into a hug and lifted her up almost to the ceiling. Alice didn’t know what

to do, but when Uncle Antonin caught her like that, or Aunt Sarka or Uncle Bedrich, she always hugged them around the neck. So she did the same this time. The man started to laugh, which pleased Alice, but she also felt her face get wet from his, which didn't please her so much because she and Tereza had tried out a new pink and beautifully scented powder a moment before. She pulled away from him and tried to look at him subtly while he was holding her high above the ground. After a moment her father set her back onto the ground, pulled a large handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose. The handkerchief caught Alice's attention because neither she nor her mother ever used such a big handkerchief. There were handkerchiefs like that ironed and folded in her mother's wardrobe where her father's things were. These kinds of handkerchiefs were only used for busted knees, for treating cuts on fingers incurred while slicing onions or carrots; one didn't blow their nose into such handkerchiefs. These handkerchiefs were then put into the dirty laundry, boiled, ironed and folded up in the wardrobe in mother's room. So then Alice ran to her mother's room, opened the wardrobe and took from a stack of straightened handkerchiefs two large, freshly ironed handkerchiefs scented with soap and returned with them to her father in the entryway and put them into his hand. Her father looked at her hastily, not smiling now, and looked suddenly and unexpectedly directly into her eyes until it scared Alice and she almost stopped breathing and knew that if she were eating something that she would have certainly choked. He was looking at her so severely that she didn't dare to breathe. She would have to discuss this severe look with Tereza, she thought later. To look at her like that, so strangely and severely, when she hadn't done anything, this just wasn't done. Then the man raised his eyes, started to look

all around through the entryway and ran his hand through her hair. Alice knew about this, that adults did this when they didn't know what to say and wanted to be nice to a child. Meanwhile Tereza had put on her shoes, bowed to her father, said goodbye to Alice and went home. She felt superfluous, although didn't know exactly why.

Her father went into the kitchen, opened a cupboard, took out a large earthenware pot which stood in the second row and which no one had used until that time, and unerringly reached into the shelves for a large can in which there was coffee. He knows his way around here, Alice said to herself. My dad, she said in her mind, my dad knows his way around, in my home, in my home in the kitchen.

She was so excited, she was so afraid, she was so angry at him, and now she didn't know what she was actually supposed to do with this big tall man. So she just stood, looking up at him because he was much taller than mom, and he looked down at her, until it was a bit unpleasant for her, and just looking up to those heights she had to look to had started to make her a little dizzy.

"Where's Mom?" he asked when he had finished the coffee and sat down and looked at his daughter.

"She's taking care of something," Alice answered. "But Mom also told me that you were coming on Thursday." She led him through the flat for a bit; much hadn't changed in it in those ten years. He wondered why she was speaking formally to him, when she had always been so personal in her letters, and he reflected on what a big young woman he had for a daughter, even though the last picture he had seen her in was merely a half year old. She then wondered again on how, despite his height he didn't bump his head anywhere, he skillfully avoided the lamps in the kitchen and even in the

room, and that he sometimes ran his dry palm through her hair and how his calluses sometimes caught in it. She also noticed that when he stroked her shoulder, the material of her blouse caught on his hardened skin, and Alice was a little afraid that his hands would tear it. His hands were a bit like a grater and would certainly need a manicure or at least a good rubbing with a very greasy cream, the kind that Mom or Aunt Sarka used, but she didn't dare to say that out loud. She would say it to anyone else, but this was Dad, and that was something else completely. And then, suddenly, from out of nowhere, it was evening and he was sitting in the dark on the ground, where nobody ever sits, leaning on the bed and she was sitting on his knees, and it was pleasant, and although she was a bit afraid in the darkened room, she wasn't afraid here now, although, then again, she was a little bit afraid of this tall thin man, but this was also pleasant for her. And suddenly keys were crunching in the door and she felt his heart suddenly begin to pound extremely loud under his shirt and jacket, and how he suddenly pressed her until it hurt, how he gripped both of her wrists and then looked so strangely towards the door which led to the kitchen and which was half open. Then he stood abruptly, and without saying anything, lifted her into his arms and continued to press her a bit more than was necessary so that Alice started to squirm a little and felt like a fish caught in a net. He further opened the door to the kitchen and through the second open door into the entryway one could hear Mom taking off her shoes and slipping into her house shoes and asking where Alice was and if Tereza had already left. And then she turns around and sees both of them standing in the doorway. Him, her husband, holding his own daughter, and she bends down once again to adjust the band on her slippers from memory and not looking

at her house slippers anymore and walking towards him and saying only: “Josef, Josef...” and not completing her sentence as she should and for which she is always chastening her own daughter. And she comes to them and strokes her hair and puts her own face next to his and Alice has the feeling that her mother will definitely start crying again in a moment, which is unpleasant for her, but she surprisingly doesn’t cry but only holds her husband by the shoulder and he hugs her and Alice notices that her father’s heart, which only a moment ago had been beating as fast as a herd of running gazelles, which she had once seen at the zoo, is already beating slowly now as if deliberately, and then she felt a small thin warm trickle unfurling from her mom’s hand which was pulsing, which was pushing her blood all the way to her fingers, which were gripping her and stroking her, and that trickle changed and strengthened and calmed and stormed. And then her dad set her on the ground, and then it was somehow clear that there would be dinner now, and so she went to sit on her chair and he sat opposite her and Mom started to make spread and he watched her and devoted the same amount of time to his wife as his daughter and Mom only came occasionally and stroked her hair and his, too, as one only does to little children, and she would also sometimes – as if she didn’t want it to be seen – lightning-quick and somehow discretely stroke his hand, which was set on the table and which was much bigger than Mom’s hand.



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