

4th YEAR

# A SEA *of words*

WAYS OF PARTICIPATION: DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP

Short stories by 20 young writers

# A Sea of Words - 4<sup>th</sup> year

## Ways of Participation: Democracy and Citizenship

Short stories by 20 young writers

**IE**Med.  
European Institute of the Mediterranean



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## A Sea of Words

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## Foreword

**Andreu Bassols.** Director-General of the European Institute of the Mediterranean

### 4th Year: The Paths of Participation: Democracy and Citizenship

The EU declared 2011 as European Year of Volunteering, fostering an active citizenship, which is why the literary contest “A Sea of Words” has focused on the development of social solidarity as the consolidation of democracy, a subject that values the vision and expectations of young people, who from various scenarios show us through their writing the values and conflicts developed in contact with their societies, as well as their desires in relation to Euro-Mediterranean societies.

Barcelona is the headquarters of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). This city, which with its name and energy has symbolised Euro-Mediterranean cooperation since 1995, acquired an international organisation that made it the de facto capital of the Mediterranean. It is the recognition of a long history and continued effort since the so-called Barcelona Process began in 1995. Its Euro-Mediterranean involvement since then is unquestionable.

The UfM Secretariat has, in principle, a technical mission of preparing, monitoring and driving the projects approved by the summits or the ministerial conferences. In fact, with headquarters in a city and country that firmly believe in the Mediterranean project, with the support of all levels of government and a committed civil society, this new Union will have a broader development and much more actively invigorate the projects of Euro-Mediterranean scope. Having its headquarters in Barcelona, dialogue and cooperation will be strengthened. Barcelona’s involvement and energy will make the dream of the UfM a reality. These challenges consist of achieving peace, democratisation, social and demographic transition, employment, sustainable development or collective security.

In this context, young people play a fundamental role, as they can act as a bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean, with a clear projection towards an egalitarian future, where the cultures of the region understand and respect each other in mutual enrichment.

The youth of today, in being so plural, show some fractures and, to overcome conflicts, can only relate to each other through intercultural links. This interculturality must not only be exercised in the countries themselves and between those ambits that share linguistic closeness, but also between the youth of countries of the South and North, with the aim of facilitating understanding of diversity and fostering exchanges that allow us to get to know each other better. Young people, their dreams, realities, potential and actions, can open new paths to overcome distances and stereotypes, which are more difficult to achieve from other ambits.

Literary language allows us to confront and interlink these issues of such different natures. Moreover, the literary message makes it possible to enter the everyday, to know the particular, the individual, together with the collective and the political. The short story allows us to enter the complexity of differences without generalising them but rather by describing them. From this point of view, literary production is a fundamental means of expressing and describing

events, ideas and emotions that can be directly transmitted to and by young people from all over the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The project “A Sea of Words”, promoted jointly by the European Institute of the Mediterranean and the Anna Lindh Foundation, was developed with the aim of contributing to fostering dialogue between peoples and the exchange of knowledge and experiences between different local and international traditions.

The IEMed has always sought to be a bridge between the two shores of the Mediterranean. It has been an interesting experience. We have received 165 short stories from 32 countries and the jury has selected 20 stories, all of them of remarkable quality. Now they are available to you in this book, a virtual book that does not occupy space but that we hope will occupy a place in your thoughts and reflections on the future of generations and the generations of the future.

Given all of this and especially the great reception that the initiative has had among young people of the Euro-Mediterranean countries in this the fourth year of the contest, we are convinced that this is an experience that will continue in the coming years. The quality and enthusiasm of the contributions by the young participants allow us to be confident that this dialogue will enjoy great continuity.

## Foreword

**Andreu Claret.** Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation

### 4th Year: The Paths of Participation: Democracy and Citizenship

“A Sea of Words” has reached its fourth year, and it is probably one of the most important thanks to the fertile collaboration between the IEMed and the Anna Lindh Foundation. The subject “Democracy and Citizenship” hits at the very heart of the democratic changes affecting the Euromed region. Some youths have acted as catalysers of the uprisings and have participated in the struggle to redirect their countries to a brighter future. Others are fighting to find their way amidst the economic crisis and unemployment towards an uncertain future. In confronting the crossroads between past and future, between dreams and realities, they are confronting the challenge of transmitting their visions and ambitions for their parents’ and grandparents’ generation.

This year’s “A Sea of Words” offers an outlet for dialogue that goes beyond the conventional and explores the voice of fiction, creativity and fantasy, important mediums for dialogue. The barriers and frontiers between peoples are taken down word by word and sentence by sentence, creating spaces of participation and opportunities to share different visions.

Therefore, I greatly appreciate the IEMed’s commitment to strengthening this programme in collaboration with the Anna Lindh Foundation. “A Sea of Words” has this year received 165 stories from 32 countries and an international jury has selected 20. The ever increasing participation in the contest since its first year is the basis of its success. This shows the will of young people in the region to transmit ideas and thoughts and contribute to a vibrant literary landscape.

“A Sea of Words” is not only about filling the gap between tradition and modernity, but also between the North and South. Youths are participating in the redefinition of roles and expectations in a context of fragmentation and crisis, both in the societies where they are a driving force and great majority or in others where the participation of older people continues to increase. New scenarios for the future are present in these short stories and they draw a red line with their contributions.

It is no surprise that the revolutions that swept Arab societies were anticipated by novels, long before the political analysts and experts predicted the course of history. I was reading Aswany or Khamisi and not papers by academics of great prestige in the Arab world when I received early warnings about what would soon happen in Egypt. I am sure that by reading the stories in this fourth year of “A Sea of Words” we will have the opportunity to better understand what is happening in our societies on both shores of the Mediterranean and to anticipate some of the profound transformations taking place. These endeavours to go beyond fiction in the specific future can help us to see events from distance, curiosity and a beneficial critical spirit, listening closely to the voices of youths.

The work of the Anna Lindh Foundation focuses on both the development of social solidarity and the consolidation of democracy with the objective of creating spaces and meetings

that foster participation. How can we involve the citizens of the Euromed region so they can develop democratic rights and liberties? “A Sea of Words” prioritises this development to contribute to better understanding, respect and trust in building the future. This was the purpose of launching the contest four years ago and I am proud to see that, this year, “A Sea of Words” has come of age as an important initiative in the panoply of Euromed cultural programmes.

## Literary Language, Instrument of Dialogue 2011

With the issue *Democracy and Citizenship*, we present the best titles for the fourth year of “A Sea of Words”, the short story contest for men and women aged between 18 and 30 living in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The topic deals with social development as consolidation of democracy, which involves a broad participation of citizens in developing rights and freedom.

“A Sea of Words” has reached its fourth year in 2011 thanks to the efforts and convictions of the European Institute of the Mediterranean and the Anna Lindh Foundation and their strong belief in this programme. “A Sea of Words” represents a unique method of cooperation, known as a “network initiative”, since the selection of stories involves all the Anna Lindh Foundation national networks.

165 short stories from 32 Euro-Mediterranean countries were received in 2011. The high level of involvement is due to the fact that participants can write in any of the official languages of the Euro-Mediterranean zone.

The broad scope of the call was possible thanks to its promotion by the almost 3,000 organizations that make up the 43 national networks of the Foundation, as well as other networks in the Euro-Mediterranean area, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Non-Governmental Platform, the European Youth Forum and the Euromed Permanent University Forum. Diverse organizations linked to some of these networks also strengthened the call through their own websites, newsletters and journals.

In order to carry out the selection and translation process of the 20 winning stories, there was a pre-selection at national level conducted by the network coordinators of the Anna Lindh Foundation in each of the 32 states. Later, the organizers called an international jury comprising Elisabetta Bartuli, translator and professor at Ca’ Foscari University in Venice; Jamila Hassoune, Moroccan writer and librarian; Pere-Antoni Pons, Catalan writer; Najwa Barakat, Lebanese writer; and Alfredo Zucchi, winner of the third contest.

In the 20 selected stories different aspects and scenarios emerge within the topic of democracy and citizenship, such as social development towards solidarity and consolidation of democracy throughout voluntary actions.

The jury members gave a special mention to three of the contest winners for the high quality of their stories and the originality of the subject matter: Hanane Oulaïllah, with her piece *The Padlock*, won the first prize; Ilija Đurović, with the story *THC and LCD* won the second prize; and Gintarė Laurinavičiūtė achieved third place with *Playing Democracy or a Girl from the Republic Room*.

Through their stories, the three winners analyze the different aspects of democracy and citizenship, and they all share a glimpse of what can be found in people when they have experienced a past full of violence and domination as they try to restore their lives.

In Hanane Oulaïllah’s *The Padlock*, democracy is restored after many years of dictatorship and social disorder; the main character is led by a true sense of citizenship in overseeing the

correct procedure of the first democratic election day. Ilija Đurović's *THC and LCD* tells us how difficult it is to get rid of one's past, even when it seems so far away from us. In *Playing Democracy or a Girl from the Republic Room* by Gintarė Laurinavičiūtė we see how democracy is perceived by the mind of a little girl from Lithuania during and after the Soviet Union domination.

We would like to thank the company Mediterranean Editors & Translators (MET) for their special and voluntary participation in translating two of the 20 winning stories: *Slip Road* by Vesna Hauschild and *THC and LCD* by Ilija Đurović.

The city of Barcelona hosted the awards ceremony and began a series of events that ended in the town of Tarragona. The awards ceremony to present prizes to the 20 contest winners took place on 28th November 2011 at the Institut d'Estudis Catalans in Barcelona.

The next day, the 20 winners participated in the workshop "Literary Language, Instrument of Dialogue", during which the jury talked to the winners about the literary perspectives of the stories and their themes. In the second part of the workshop, Peter Bush, university professor and translator, explained the complexity of translation and its importance in spreading the original message.

The following day, as a shared intercultural experience, there was a trip to the town of Tarragona, including a visit to the city centre and the Roman ruins, the Archaeological Museum of Tarragona, and a lecture at the Catalan Institute of Classical Archaeology. There was also a sightseeing tour of Barcelona where the winners could enjoy Antoni Gaudí's architecture.

The European Institute of the Mediterranean and the Anna Lindh Foundation wish to thank all the people who have contributed to the success of "A Sea of Words": firstly, the 165 participants of the contest and the 43 national networks of the Anna Lindh Foundation; the members of the International Jury for their magnificent work and unfailing devotion; the Institut d'Estudis Catalans; and the Catalan Institute of Classical Archaeology of Tarragona. Special thanks to all the members of the work team of the European Institute of the Mediterranean and the Anna Lindh Foundation, especially their directors Andreu Bassols and Andreu Claret.



Group photo of the jury and the winners of the 2011 contest.

## نحو الأمل

علاء أحمد الملفوح . فلسطين

إخوته ، و في الجوار صدح صوت التلفزيون بأخبار الصباح التي يشبه كلها بعضها، كان سامي أكبر إخوته الأربعة المتمثلين في أخيه الأصغر محمود و الذي يدرس في الصف الأول الابتدائي و أخواته ميساء و غادة و ريم ، أسرع سامي يأكل بشرافة منتقلا بين البيض المسلوق والزيت و الزيتون و سلطة الفول بالليمون و الفلفل الأخضر التي تتقنها والدته ، تابعه والده بنظراته الحنونة عاقدا حاجبيه المكتنفين بالشيخوخة ، أراد أن يتكلم و لكنه امتنع حتى لا يقطع عصفوره من شحن طاقته التي استهلكها بالأمس ، أثار حفيظته صوت المذيع و هو يتحدث عن تشكيل بعض المنظمات الإنسانية و الحقوقية الأوروبية لأول سفينة تضامنية لكسر الحصار عن غزة خلال الشهر القادم ، فقال بنبرة حادة " هذا كله هراء ، العالم بأجمعه يتأمر علينا و لا يعيننا ، ماذا نستفيد من سفينة تضامنية تحمل بعض المساعدات الغذائية و الطبية ، نحن في غزة كسرب من الطيور في قفص صغير ، نحن لا ننتظر بعض فتات الطعام أو قطرات الدواء ، بل نرغب بشدة أن نرفرف خارج القفص " .

أجابه سامي بهدوء " دعني أختلف معك يا والدي العزيز، إن الشعوب الأوروبية تتعاطف مع قضيتنا قلبا و قالبا ، و تسعى جاهدة من خلال المئات من المؤسسات الحقوقية و الإنسانية و الثقافية لفضح الحصار و كسره"

نظر إليه والده بتشكك فاستطرد مكملا " من خلال مشاركاتي كمتخصص في حقوق الإنسان في العديد من اللقاءات عبر الفيديوكونفرنس و الدردشة الحية عبر الإنترنت كونت العديد من العلاقات الجيدة مع أوروبيين من أطياف و معتقدات متعددة "

أقحمت الوالدة نفسها في الحديث فقالت في بساطة " وهل تعرفت على فتيات أوربيات ؟ "

أجابها سامي مبتسما " نعم أماه، العديد من الفتيات يشاركن في هذه اللقاءات ، و بعضهن لهن دور كبير في تنظيم هذه السفينة مثل صديقتي ماريا القبرصية" ثم تابع حديثه إلى أبيه " سيكون هناك المزيد من السفن من دول أوروبية عديدة و كذلك دول عربية شقيقة ، و سوف تستمر حتى يتم كسر الحصار بحرا عن غزة "

صبت الوالدة فنجانا من الشاي و ناولته لسامي قائلة في تودد " أمنيته يا بني أن تتزوج و أرى أولادك و أحضنهم "

سامي في حنان : " كل شيء بأوانه يا أمي ، أنا الآن أفرغ نفسي للدكتوراه .. "

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سامي في حنان : " كل شيء بأوانه يا أمي ، أنا الآن أفرغ نفسي للدكتوراه .."

قاطعه والده معقبا : " و كيف ستسافر يا بني و المعابر مغلقة !! "

تنهد سامي بضيق ثم رد : "يا أبتني ، حالي هو حال العشرات من الطلاب " .. ارتشف قليلا من الشاي ثم تابع وهو يمنح نفسه قليلا من الأمل " إن شاء الله تفرج أمورنا قريبا ، و إنني بحاجة ماسة لدعائك أنت و أمي "

رفعت الأم كفيها إلى السماء بتلقائية شديدة و قالت " ربنا يسهل أمرك يا بني، و يمنحك ما تتمنى"، أتلج هذا الدعاء صدره ،كان قد أن أكمل فنجان الشاي فاستأذن والديه منصرفا ، ثم غير ملابسه و غادر المنزل ليشتري بعض الحاجيات من السوق...

مرت الأيام تباعا، و جاء اليوم المشهود ، اقترب وصول الضيف العزيز، تحفرت وسائل الإعلام منذ شقشقة العصافير ، وشارك سامي الجماهير الفلسطينية التي احتشدت بالأعلام و الرايات و الآمال .. لم يسع الجماهير بهجة أن تستقبل ضيوفها في الميناء ، فركبوا القوارب و اتجهوا إلى عرض البحر .. لاحت من بعيد ألوان الأعلام المختلفة ثم اقتربت أكثر فأكثر.. حتى اختلطت الأعلام و القلوب وسط هتافات و فرحة الجماهير.. تشكلت بعض أسراب النورس في السماء و كأنها تقدم عرضا كشفيا للزائرين.. اتجه الفوج إلى الميناء و اشتبكت الأيدي بالترحاب ، بعد أن هدأت روعة الميناء اصطحب سامي بعض المتضامنين من العاملين و المهتمين في مجاله في جولة حول القطاع و أطلعهم على حقيقة المأساة التي يعيشها الناس في ظل الحصار ، ذهلوا لما رأوه من المعاناة حتى أن أحدهم عبر قائلا : أنتم لن تدخلوا الجحيم في الآخرة ، لأنكم فيه بالفعل " ضحك سامي قائلا " أمين .. أمين " ..

شهد نجاح وصول السفينة زخما إعلاميا كثيفا خلال اليوم و الأيام التالية ، و شجع هذا الحدث فيضا من المؤسسات الدولية لتجهيز حملات مماثلة بل حتى أكبر حجما و أكثر حشدا ، و بعد أيام غادر المتضامنون غزة بنفس كيفية دخولهم بعد أن أعطوا لأهلها بصيصا من النور.

الساعة الحادية عشرة مساء .

عم السكون في الحي الذي يسكن فيه سامي ، إلا من مواء متقطع من بعض القطط المتشاكسة بين الحين و الآخر، سامي مستلقٍ على سريره يحاول جاهدا أن ينام ، لكن صراع التفكير في مستقبله عكّر عليه صفوه ، فما هي إلا أسابيع قليلة و تطير من يديه هذه المنحة التي كان ينتظرها على أحر من الجمر ، حاول أن يشغله تفكيره ببعض المواقف الظريفة فلم يستطع ، اقتنص أحد الكتب التاريخية من خزائنه .. أخذ يقرأ عن الحروب هنا و هناك ، عن المجازر و المذابح ، يحدث نفسه هل سيعيش العالم يوما في سلام دون سفك للدماء ، هل سينعم الفقراء و المضطهدون في غياهب الظلام بالعدالة و المساواة .. هل .. وهل .. رويدا ، رويدا ، أخذ يبحر في صفحات كتابه و تساؤلاته حتى غلبه النعاس ..

استيقظ على صوت هاتفه المحمول وهو يرن ، نظر إلى ساعته إنها السادسة صباحا ، تناول هاتفه من جواره ليرى أن المتصل صديقه ماريا .

سامي بعد أن تتأب : "ألو ، مرحبا ماريا !!"

ماريا بخجل : " مرحبا صديقي سامي ، عذرا للاتصال في هذا الوقت المبكر و لكن الأمر طارئ "

سامي في ترقب : "خير .. إن شاء الله خير!"

ماريا : "اطمنن .. لقد حدثتني في وقت سابق عن موضوع سفرك للدراسة و صعوبته ، لقد كنت البارحة في اجتماع مع عدد من الناشطين و المنظمين لسفن فك الحصار المزمع إرسالها خلال اليومين القادمين ، ولقد طرحت فكرة اصطحابك بالإضافة إلى عدد آخر من الطلاب في رحلة العودة و قد لاقى العرض قبولا رائعا".

سامي مبتهجا : "رائع جدا ! أشكرك جدا عزيزتي ماريا لن أنسى لك هذا الجميل"

ماريا : "لكني أريد منك أن تساعدني في اختيار حوالي عشرة طلاب ممن لديهم دراسة في أوروبا و تبلغني بأسمائهم بالبريد الإلكتروني قبل ظهر اليوم حتى نجهز ما يلزم"

سامي: "سأحاول جاهدا إن شاء الله"

ماريا: "حسنا ، حظا موفقا ، مع السلامة"

سامي: "مع السلامة"

لم يستطع سامي أن يخفي سروره ، ثم سرعان ما أجرى اتصالاته ممن يعرف من الأصدقاء و أصدقائهم و أعد قائمة بالأسماء المرشحة للسفر البحري ثم أرسلها إلى ماريا.. بعد يومين أمخرت ثلاثة سفن عباب البحر متجهة من قبرص إلى غزة ..كانت الرحلة محفوفة بالمخاطر .. كثر البحر عن أنيابه لكنها صمدت .. و في هذه الأثناء كان سامي و من معه يستعدون على أحر من الجمر ..قلوبهم تخفق بقوة كلما سمعوا خبرا حول اعتراض السفن أو مضايقتها من قبل القوات المعادية.. لكن عزيمة المتضامنين حطمت كل المصاعب..وكلما اقتربوا أكثر التهب عزمهم ..

كان الاتصال مستمرا بين سامي و ماريا للتنسيق في الرحلة .. بعد أيام قليلة رست السفن بأمان في ميناء غزة .. حظيت باستقبال أوفر من سابقتها .. وعندما حان موعد الرحيل ، احتشدت الجماهير في الميناء للوداع ، و أتت عائلات الطلاب لوداع فلذات أكبادها ..احتضن سامي والديه وإخوته بينما سقطت دموع خفية من عيون والديه ..

تعلق به أخوه محمود هاتفا " لا تنسى أن تحضر لي الدب الكبير الذي وعدتني به " ،  
 أوماً سامي برأسه إيجاباً " حاضر..من عيوني " .. قاطعهم صوت القبطان وهو يعلن  
 عن قرب الإبحار.. ركب سامي و زملائه في إحدى السفن و قد حملوا الأعلام  
 الفلسطينية و الأوروبية .. غمرتهم الفرحة و أخذوا يلوحون بأعلامهم وسط الهتافات  
 التي علت المكان ..

مرت الدقائق بسرعة و بدأت السفن بالحركة ..

ابتعدت شينا فشيئا نحو الغرب..

نحو الأمل ..

## Towards Hope

**Alaa Almalfooth. Palestine**

The wide-brimmed hat he was wearing could not stop him sweating from his forehead and cheeks, just as his sunglasses could not conceal his obvious watchful gaze. He was holding luggage laden with clothes and personal things, as his heart was loaded with endless troubles and immense pain. The long wait since the early morning made him lose all his energy, despite the fatty breakfast he had eaten, which was prepared for him by his mother while she bid him a farewell and murmured:

“Samy, this is the last breakfast for you in Gaza and, God willing, your breakfast tomorrow will be in Manchester.”

He smiled as he recalled this situation. The growing fatigue made him unashamed to sit on his suitcase, and he started to scan the large number of travellers overcrowding the departure lounge inside and outside. Everyone had been waiting their turn since the early morning. Since the closure of the crossing two years ago, it had not opened for passengers except when it rains in summer.

His mind began to wander towards the PhD scholarship which would be cancelled if he could not travel in the next two months. He had spent many nights awake studying hard to earn such an opportunity, but his future was threatened by this dreaded crossing. He wished he were a bird so that he could fly wherever he wanted. If he had been born in one of the independent countries, he would not have experienced such troubles and misery. The voice of the crossing officer interrupted his thoughts, as he declared over a loudspeaker:

“The crossing has been closed from the other side until further notice, kindly evacuate.”

The news was more painful than a dagger stabbing his chest. He walked towards the officer through the crowd of travellers, who raised their angry furious voices, and tried to question the closure. The officer interrupted, telling him that the Palestinian side is powerless.

Samy dragged his feet as depression and grief added twenty years to his twenty-five year old face. He took a bus home, leaving the crossing and abandoning his dreams. It did not take long for him to reach home; he rushed to his bed and drifted into deep sleep.

The sunrays infiltrating the window burned his face, and an intruding fly buzzed around him. He tried to continue sleeping but the heat of the sun and the buzzing fly prevented him. Moments later, he heard his mother calling:

“Samy, wake up my son. It’s breakfast time.”

He woke up lazily, washed his face and sat around the table along with his parents and siblings. The television was showing the morning news, which was the same as every day. Samy was the eldest; Mahmoud was his younger brother, who was in grade one and his sisters were Maysa, Ghada and Reem. Samy started eating greedily, moving between hard-boiled eggs, olives and the bean salad with lemon and green pepper, one of his mother’s specialities. His father watched tenderly with eyes surrounded by ageing wrinkles. His father wanted to speak, but he declined so that he would not interrupt his bird from recharging the energy that he had consumed the previous day. But his anger rose when he heard the broadcaster announcing that some humanitarian and European or-

ganizations were going to form the first ship of solidarity to break the siege in Gaza over the next month. He spoke sharply:

“This is nonsense; the whole world conspires against us and does not rescue our nation. How will we benefit from a solidarity ship carrying some medical and nutrition aid? In Gaza, we are like swarms of birds imprisoned in a small cage. We are not looking for some crumbs of food or drops of medicine, but we strongly need to destroy the cage and fly freely.”

Samy replied quietly: “Let me disagree with you my dear father; the European nations sympathize with us completely and they strive to expose and break the blockade through hundreds of humanitarian, human rights and culture organizations.” His father looked with scepticism, but Samy went on: “Through my posts as a specialist in human rights in several meetings, via video conferences and live chat on the internet, I built many relationships with Europeans of multiple spectra and beliefs.”

His mother intervened and said simply: “So did you meet any European girls?”

Samy answered with a smile: “Yes mum, many girls participate in those meetings, some of them have a significant role in organizing this ship, like my Cyprus friend, Maria.” Then he continued talking to his father: “More ships are to come from several European countries and Arab countries as well. This will continue till they break the naval blockade of Gaza.”

His mother poured a cup of tea, handed it to Samy and said sweetly: “My wish is to attend your wedding and hold your babies.”

Samy replied softly: “Everything has its suitable time, now I devote myself to my PhD.”

His father interrupted: “But how will you travel when the crossings are closed?”

Samy sighed heavily and answered: “My case is the same as dozens of students.”

He sipped some tea and went on, giving himself a little bit of hope: “God willing, all our problems will be solved soon, but I desperately need your prayers.”

His mother raised her hands spontaneously and prayed: “May God look over all your affairs and grant you what you wish.”

This simple but touching prayer made Samy shiver, he had already finished his cup of tea, so he excused himself and went to his room to change his clothes. Then he went out to buy some goods from the market.

Days passed and the arrival of the dear guest approached. The momentous day came and the media was ready. Samy participated with the Palestinians who amassed flags, banners and hopes. Out of their extreme joy and love, the masses felt that it was not enough to receive their guests at the airport, so they boarded boats and headed out to the sea. The distinctive flags waved at a distance, then it came closer and closer till the flags and hearts were mixed amid the cheers and joy of the crowd. Some of the gull flocks formed in the sky as if they were welcoming the visitors with a sky show. The delegation reached the port and hands were shaking.

When the harbour splendour calmed down, Samy accompanied some of those working and interested in his field on a tour around the sector, and briefed them on the reality of the tragedy his people were experiencing under the blockade. They were shocked when they saw the suffering of those people to the extent that one of them told Samy:

“You will never go to hell, because you are already there.”

Samy replied: “Amen... Amen.”

The successful arrival of the ship received intense media coverage during the day and the following days. This event en-

couraged a flood of international institutions to set plans for similar campaigns and even bigger ones. A few days later, the delegation departed Gaza the same way as their came, after giving its people a glimmer of light and hope for tomorrow.

It is 11 pm.

Sleep prevailed over the quarter where Samy lived; nothing could be heard except the intermittent sound of some quarrelsome cats that meowed every now and then. Samy was lying on the bed trying to sleep, but thinking about his future brought him into a bitter conflict and stole his peace. In only a few weeks he would lose the PhD scholarship, which he had been waiting for with bated breath. He tried to occupy his mind by evoking relaxing situations, but he failed, so he grabbed one of his history books out of the closet and started reading. He read about wars here and there, about massacres and pogroms, wondering if the world can one day live in peace without bloodshed, if the poor and oppressed people can enjoy life in the dark depths of justice and equality, if... if... He started to sail through the pages of his book and among his unanswered questions till he dropped off. He awoke to the sound of his ringing mobile phone, looked at his watch to find it was six in the morning, took the phone and saw that his friend Maria was the caller.

After a yawn, Samy answered: "Hello Maria."

"Hi Samy, sorry for calling so early, but it is an emergency," said Maria, timidly.

"I hope everything is fine," said Samy optimistically.

"Do not worry Samy. You told me before about the difficulty you face when you try to travel for studying. Yesterday, I was in a meeting with a number of activists and organizers for the ships that are supposed to be sent during the next two days to break the

siege. I suggested the idea of accompanying you along with a number of other students on the return journey. The idea met with total acceptance!!"

"Great, thank you dear Maria, I will never ever forget your help," said Samy cheerfully.

"Don't mention it. I need your help in choosing about ten students who have to study in Europe," said Maria.

"God willing, I will do my best," promised Samy.

"Ok, good luck, goodbye."

"Bye, Maria."

Samy could not hide his joy; he quickly called some of his friends and their friends, prepared the list of names and sent it to Maria. Two days later, three ships sailed from Cyprus to Gaza. The journey was fraught with risks, but the ships withstood the rough sea. In the meantime, Samy and his friends were getting ready and their heartbeats accelerated whenever they heard news about the interception of ships by hostile forces, but peace activists overcame all the difficulties. As they came nearer, their determination became fiercer. The connection between Samy and Maria continued to coordinate the trip.

A few days later, the ship docked safely at Gaza port. Those ships received a greater reception than their predecessors. When it was time to leave, the crowds gathered at the port to say goodbye, and the families of the students came to bid farewell to their loved ones. Samy hugged his parents and siblings and tears were falling from his parents' eyes. His brother Mahmoud hugged him and whispered:

"Do not forget to bring me the big teddy bear you promised."

Samy nodded positively and said: "I cannot forget my dear family."

The captain's voice interrupted them when he declared that it was time for the ship to sail. Samy and his companions sailed in

one of the ships waving the Palestinian and European flags and jumping for joy amid the loud cheers.

Minutes passed quickly and the ships began to sail, moving gradually towards the west. Moving towards HOPE.

## Ομάδα ελεύθερης επιλογής και συμμετοχής

Γιώργος Αμπατζίδης. Ελλάδα

«Με λένε Γιώργο. Το όνομά μου σημαίνει αυτός που εργάζεται στη Γη, ο γεωργός. Όταν ήμουν μωρό φορούσα μπλε όπως όλα τα αγόρια και έπαιζα με αυτοκινητάκια. Έβλεπα καρτούν στην τηλεόραση, φοβόμουν το σκοτάδι και έκανα προσευχή πριν κοιμηθώ. Ακόμα και αν νύσταζα πολύ, ποτέ δεν κοιμήθηκα χωρίς να έχω κάνει την προσευχή μου.

Μεγαλώνοντας πήγα σχολείο, ερωτεύτηκα συμμαθήτριάς μου, έγραψα στιχάκια και συνθήματα σε θρανία. Δοκίμασα τσιγάρο, δοκίμασα αλκοόλ, έκανα κοπάνα για καφέ τις τελευταίες ώρες. Συμμετείχα σε καβγάδες, πήρα απουσίες και πήγα στα πάρτι που οργάνωσε η τάξη μου. Ακόμα και αν δεν ήθελα να πάω γιατί δεν είχα διάθεση ή έπρεπε να πάω κάπου αλλού, δεν έχασα ούτε ένα πάρτι της τάξης μου.

Ποτέ δεν έχω κάνει κάποια γεωργική εργασία. Είμαι 26 χρονών, άνεργος. Τελείωσα το λύκειο στα 18 και μπήκα στο πανεπιστήμιο. Πήρα το πτυχίο μου και εκπλήρωσα τις στρατιωτικές μου υποχρεώσεις. Όταν απολύθηκα από το στρατό, οι γονείς μου μου πήραν δώρο ένα αυτοκίνητο ίδιας μάρκας με εκείνο του πατέρα μου. Ωραίο αυτοκίνητο και αξιόπιστο, όπως λέει. Τελευταία δεν το κυκλοφορώ πολύ γιατί συνήθως δεν έχω λεφτά για βενζίνη».

«Σε ευχαριστούμε που τα μοιράστηκες όλα αυτά μαζί μας, Γιώργο. Θα ήθελα τώρα να προσπαθήσεις να διηγηθείς ξανά όλα όσα μας είπες με διαφορετική σειρά. Ξεκίνα από εκείνο που θυμάσαι πιο έντονα, χωρίς να είναι απαραίτητα με τη σειρά που συνέβησαν».

Δίστασε για λίγο. Κοίταξε γύρω την αίθουσα και είδε πως όλοι είχαν καρφωμένα τα μάτια πάνω του. Ένοιωσε πως χρειάζεται αέρα.

«Μπορούμε να ανοίξουμε ένα παράθυρο;»

«Φυσικά, Γιώργο. Γιατί δεν το ανοίγεις εσύ;»

Προχώρησε προς το παράθυρο και το άνοιξε. Γύρισε ώστε να τον βλέπουν όλοι και ξεκίνησε: «Δεν έχασα ούτε ένα πάρτι της τάξης μου. Φοβόμουν το σκοτάδι και έκανα προσευχή πριν κοιμηθώ»

«Γιατί άνοιξες το παράθυρο, Γιώργο; Μπορεί κάποιος να κρυώνει» τον διέκοψε εκείνη.

«Μα, ρώτησα και μου είπατε να το ανοίξω...»

«Να μου μιλάς στον ενικό, σε παρακαλώ. Είσαι ο Γιώργος και είμαι η Ελένη. Εγώ απάντησα μόνο για μένα, καθώς δεν μπορώ να ξέρω πως νιώθουν όλοι όσοι είναι σε αυτή την αίθουσα. Δεν έπρεπε να ρωτήσεις και τους υπόλοιπους για να το ανοίξεις;»

«Μα, κανένας δεν διαφώνησε... Φαντάστηκα πως αν κάποιος δεν ήθελε να ανοίξω το παράθυρο, θα το έλεγε».

«Εσύ γιατί πήγαινες σε όλα τα πάρτι της τάξης σου ακόμα και αν δεν ήθελες;»

Η ερώτηση τον δυσκόλεψε. Αρχισε να χάνει τα λόγια του.

«Γιατί... γιατί πήγαν οι φίλοι μου... και γιατί...»

«Όχι!» φώναξε εκείνη τόσο δυνατά που όλοι στην αίθουσα γύρισαν να την κοιτάξουν. Ο Γιώργος σταμάτησε αμέσως να μιλάει και έκλεισε γρήγορα το παράθυρο.

«Γιατί το έκλεισες;» τον ρώτησε τότε έντονα θυμωμένα.

«Εγώ... δεν ήθελα... δεν ξέρω...» ο Γιώργος βρισκόταν ένα στάδιο πριν ξεσπάσει σε λυγμούς.

Σε μια στιγμή η έκφρασή της άλλαξε εντελώς και εμφανίστηκε για πρώτη φορά ένα χαμόγελο στο πρόσωπό της. Δειλό στην αρχή, μα γρήγορα κατέλαβε όλο το πρόσωπό της και το βλέμμα της γαλήνεψε.

«Γιώργο, κάθισε σε παρακαλώ στη θέση σου. Με συγχωρείς αν το παράκανα. Καλωσορίστε όλοι το Γιώργο στην ομάδα μας!»

«Καλώς ήρθες, Γιώργο!» με μια φωνή οι υπόλοιποι που βρίσκονταν στην αίθουσα απάντησαν στην υπόδειξή της. Σηκώθηκαν και ένας-ένας τού έσφιξαν το χέρι και τον αγκάλιασαν. Μετά από λίγο, και αφού όλοι κάθισαν ξανά στις θέσεις τους, ο Γιώργος ανασηκώθηκε στην καρέκλα του και είπε απαντώντας σε όλους συνολικά: «χαίρομαι που είμαι μαζί σας».

«Ποιος θέλει να μοιραστεί μαζί μας μια εμπειρία ελεύθερης επιλογής και συμμετοχής;»

«Μπορώ να πάρω το λόγο;» ρώτησε μια κοπέλα γύρω στα 30 με όμορφα πράσινα μάτια και αχτένιστα μαλλιά.

«Φυσικά, Μαρία. Αν συμφωνούν και οι υπόλοιποι, σε ακούμε».

Όλοι έγνεψαν καταφατικά καθώς η Μαρία διέσχισε με τα μάτια της την αίθουσα και η κοπέλα ξεκίνησε.

«Χθες το πρωί κούρεψα το γκαζόν στον κήπο μου. Τελειώνοντας σκέφτηκα πως θα ήταν καλή ιδέα να κούρευα το γκαζόν και στο μικρό πάρκο που υπάρχει στη γειτονιά μου, καθώς συνήθως αργούν πολύ να έρθουν οι υπάλληλοι του δήμου. Μέχρι το βράδυ είχα τελειώσει».

Στο πρόσωπο της Μαρίας έλαμψε ένα χαμόγελο. Όταν τελείωσε την κουβέντα της, όλοι ξέσπασαν σε χειροκροτήματα.

«Πώς ένοιωσες, Μαρία;» ρώτησε η Ελένη όταν σταμάτησαν να ακούγονται τα χειροκροτήματα.

«Ένοιωσα δυνατή. Ένοιωσα πως είχα τη δύναμη να αλλάξω κάτι που δεν μου άρεσε, να βελτιώσω τη ζωή μου και των γειτόνων μου».

«Γιώργο, τι λες;»

Η ερώτηση της Ελένης τον ξάφνιασε. Σκέφτηκε λίγο και απάντησε μετρημένα.

«Εγώ δεν θα το έκανα. Δεν είναι δική μου δουλειά. Υπάρχουν αρμόδιοι που οφείλουν να ασχοληθούν με την περιποίηση των πάρκων».

Το πρόσωπο της Μαρίας σκοτεινίασε και τα μάτια της από το πράσινο ενός νεαρού φύλλου πήραν το χρώμα του κυπαρισσιού. Οι υπόλοιποι, βλέποντας την αντίδραση της κοπέλας άρχισαν να μουρμουρίζουν, ρίχνοντας κάθε τόσο επικριτικές ματιές στο Γιώργο.

«Δεν ήθελα να πω... εννοούσα πως... δεν ήθελα...»

«Όχι, σταμάτα!» η Ελένη διέκοψε απότομα την προσπάθειά του να δικαιολογηθεί. «Έχεις μια άποψη και αυτό είναι απόλυτα σεβαστό εδώ». Τελειώνοντας την κουβέντα της είδε πως τα μουρμουρητά είχαν σταματήσει.

«Ναι... δεν είμαι σίγουρος, δεν ξέρω...» ο Γιώργος φαινόταν μπερδεμένος και καθόλου σίγουρος ούτε για αυτά που έλεγε ούτε για αυτά που σκεφτόταν.

«Απευθύνομαι σε όλους;» είπε η Ελένη με σοβαρό τόνο. «Είμαστε η ομάδα ελεύθερης επιλογής και συμμετοχής. Είστε εδώ γιατί πιστεύετε πως στη ζωή σας δεν επιλέγετε ελεύθερα και θέλετε αυτό να αλλάξει. Η ελεύθερη επιλογή όμως προϋποθέτει και το σεβασμό των επιλογών των άλλων. Πάντα φυσικά με γνώμονα την ελευθερία και την αξιοπρέπεια».

«Και η συμμετοχή;» ρώτησε ο Γιώργος.

«Κώστα, μπορείς να απαντήσεις σε αυτή την ερώτηση;»

Ο Κώστας, ένας μεσήλικας άντρας με αραιά γκριζα μαλλιά, σηκώθηκε από τη θέση του και, απευθυνόμενος στο Γιώργο, είπε: «η συμμετοχή ακολουθεί και ενισχύει την ελεύθερη επιλογή. Κάθε επιλογή προϋποθέτει δράση και αυτενέργεια. Όταν συμμετέχουμε σε μια προσπάθεια να πραγματοποιήσουμε αυτό που επιλέγουμε για μας και τους γύρω μας, νοιώθουμε ικανοί και δυνατοί».

Ο Γιώργος τον άκουσε με προσοχή. Απάντησε με ένα μισό χαμόγελο που κράτησε παράξενα ακίνητο για αρκετά δευτερόλεπτα. Τα μάτια του θόλωσαν σαν να είχε περάσει από μπροστά τους η αχλή ενός ονείρου. Όταν τελικά αποφάσισε να πει κάτι, ρώτησε: «Τι γίνεται όταν μια επιλογή είναι δύσκολη; Τι γίνεται όταν μια επιλογή απαιτεί να ρισκάρεις κάτι σημαντικό; Όπως, για παράδειγμα, την ίδια σου τη ζωή;»

Η ερώτησή του συνοδεύτηκε από μια κίνηση που θα μπορούσε να είναι ότι έβγαλε ένα χαρτομάντιλο από την τσέπη του. Αυτό που είδαν να κρατάει όμως στο χέρι του όταν το σήκωσε, ήταν ένα πιστόλι.

Για μερικά λεπτά η αίθουσα ήταν τόσο σιωπηλή που σχεδόν ακουγόταν το ανοιγοκλείσιμο των ματιών. Νόμιζες πως μετά από λίγο η σιωπή αυτή έγινε συνήθεια και κανένας δεν ήθελε να την σπάσει. Τελικά, η Ελένη ρώτησε με όσο μεγαλύτερη σταθερότητα μπορούσε να κρατήσει στη φωνή της: «Γιώργο, τι το χρειάζεσαι αυτό το όπλο;»

«Θέλω να κάνω μια υποθετική ερώτηση στην ομάδα» είπε εκείνος κρατώντας το πιστόλι με την κάνη προς τα κάτω.

«Σε ακούμε» είπε η Ελένη που ήταν η μόνη που είχε βρει τη δύναμη της φωνής της.

«Εστω πως απειλώ κάποιον από εδώ μέσα να τον σκοτώσω». Τελειώνοντας τη φράση σήκωσε το όπλο και το έστρεψε τυχαία προς την ομάδα. «Όλοι ξέρουμε πως αυτό θα ήταν λάθος. Η ερώτησή μου: πόσο εύκολο είναι κάποιος να δράσει ώστε να αποφευχθεί κάτι τέτοιο;»

Κοίταξε επίμονα έναν-έναν με το όπλο πάντα ψηλά προσπαθώντας να πάρει κάποια απάντηση. Βλέποντας πως κανένας δεν έπαιρνε το λόγο, συνέχισε: «Ας κάνω το ερώτημα πιο συγκεκριμένο. Εστω πως απειλώ να σκοτώσω τον Κώστα».

Λέγοντας αυτό, έστρεψε το πιστόλι στον Κώστα, σημαδεύοντας το στήθος του. Το πρόσωπό του Κώστα έγινε κάτασπρο κι έγειρε στη ράχη της καρέκλας. Τον έπιασε μια τρομερή ζαλάδα. Ένιωθε ότι η καρδιά του χτυπούσε τόσο δυνατά, που δεν θα άντεχε και θα σταματούσε. Ο Γιώργος, με το όπλο πάντα στραμμένο στον Κώστα, κοίταξε έναν-έναν τους άλλους οκτώ άνδρες και γυναίκες που απάρτιζαν την ομάδα ελεύθερης επιλογής και συμμετοχής. Όταν το βλέμμα του έπεφτε πάνω τους, αντιδρούσαν με διαφορετικό τρόπο ο καθένας. Κάποιοι έκρυψαν το πρόσωπό τους στα χέρια τους, κάποιοι τσίριζαν δυνατά, κάποιοι έμειναν εντελώς απαθείς σαν να μην πίστευαν αυτό που συνέβαινε. Η Μαρία είχε παραδοθεί σε ένα νευρικό γέλιο που στο τελειώμά του γινόταν λυγμός και δάκρυα.

Ο Γιώργος ξέσπασε σε δυνατά γέλια και το χρώμα των ματιών του επέστρεψε. Έτοιμος να αρπάξει τη μικρότερη ευκαιρία που θα του δινόταν για να νοιώσει καλύτερα, ο Κώστας ένοιωσε ανακουφισμένος. Η ανακούφιση μεταδόθηκε αντανακλαστικά σε όλους στην αίθουσα και φάνηκαν δειλά, επιφυλακτικά χαμόγελα σε κάποια πρόσωπα.

«Το όπλο είναι ψεύτικο. Όπως σας είπα, το ερώτημά μου ήταν υποθετικό» είπε ο Γιώργος και πάτησε τη σκανδάλη για να ακουστεί μόνο ένα αδύναμο «κλικ». «Νομίζω όμως ότι απέδειξα πως αν η δράση απαιτεί ρίσκο, τότε είναι πιο δύσκολη η επιλογή».

«Δεν είναι πάντα εύκολο να ξεπερνάμε τα ένστικτά μας» απάντησε η Ελένη. «Σε κάθε περίπτωση όμως ξέρουμε ποιο είναι το σωστό και παλεύουμε για το καλύτερο. Ο άνθρωπος

είναι κοινωνικό ον και για να λειτουργήσει σωστά η κοινωνία πρέπει όλα τα μέλη της να υποστηρίζουν τη συνοχή της μέσα από τη δράση και τη συμμετοχή τους».

«Μπορώ να πάρω το λόγο; Θέλω να μοιραστώ με την ομάδα μια εμπειρία δράσης και συμμετοχής». Ο Κώστας φαινόταν τώρα πολύ ψύχραιμος, σαν να είχε ξεχάσει ήδη πως πριν μερικά λεπτά τον απειλούσαν με ένα, όπως νόμιζε τότε, γεμάτο όπλο.

«Φυσικά, Κώστα. Αν αισθάνεσαι έτοιμος, σε ακούμε».

Σηκώθηκε από τη θέση του και πλησίασε το Γιώργο. Με μια απότομη κίνηση και πριν προλάβει εκείνος να αντιδράσει, του έδωσε ένα δυνατό χτύπημα στο πρόσωπο. Το χτύπημα τον έριξε κάτω και άρχισε τότε να τον κλωτσάει στα πλευρά και το πρόσωπο. Όλοι κοιτούσαν χωρίς να αντιδρούν τα απανωτά χτυπήματα στον, ανήμπορο να αντιδράσει, αιμόφυρτο άντρα παρά μόνο λίγο συσπώνταν τα πρόσωπά τους στα ουρλιαχτά πόνου.

Όταν ο Γιώργος δεν είχε πια ούτε τη δύναμη να φωνάζει, ο Κώστας σταμάτησε και ήρεμος επέστρεψε στη θέση του. Πριν καθίσει, το βλέμμα του διασταυρώθηκε με εκείνο της Ελένης, η οποία, σαν να έλαβε ένα μυστικό μήνυμα, σηκώθηκε και χτύπησε με δύναμη το διπλωμένο κορμί του Γιώργου.

«Σε ευχαριστούμε που μοιράστηκες την ιστορία σου μαζί μας Κώστα» είπε σκουπίζοντας μια κηλίδα αίματος που είχε βρεθεί στο παπούτσι της. «Είναι κάποιος άλλος που θέλει να μοιραστεί μια ιστορία ελεύθερης επιλογής και συμμετοχής μαζί μας;»

## A Free Choice and Participation Group

**Georgios Ampatzidis. Greece**

“My name is George. It means the earth-worker, the farmer. When I was a baby, I was dressed in blue like all the boys and played with toy car. I watched cartoons on TV, was afraid of the dark and prayed before going to sleep. Even when I was too sleepy, I never went to bed without saying my prayers.

“When I grew up I went to school, fell in love with my girl schoolmates, scratched lyrics and graffiti on the desks. I tried my first cigarette, tasted alcohol, played truant from school to go for coffee before returning home. I took part in fights, skipped school and went to parties thrown by my classmates. Even if I was in no mood for going or had to go somewhere else, I never missed a class party.

“I have never done farm work. I am 26 years old, unemployed. I finished school at the age of 18 and then entered university. I graduated and did my military service. When I demobbed, my parents bought me a car as a present, the same make as my father’s car. A nice and reliable car, as he alleges. Lately, I do not drive much, because often I cannot afford the petrol.”

“We thank you for sharing all that with us, George. Now I’d like you to attempt to tell us again all that you have already told us but in a different order. Start with what you remember more vividly without necessarily following chronological order.”

He hesitated for a moment, looked around the hall and saw that everybody was staring at him. He felt like he needed some air.

“Could we open the window?”

“Yes, of course, George. Why don’t you open it?”

He walked to the window and opened it. He turned round to us and began: “I didn’t miss my class parties. I was afraid of the dark and prayed before going to sleep.”

“Why did you open the window, George? Someone might be cold,” she interrupted him.

“But I asked and you told me to open it...”

“Please, call me Helen. You are George and I’m Helen. I only replied for myself, but I can’t know how all the people who are in this class feel. Shouldn’t you have asked the other people before opening it?”

“But nobody said not to... I thought if someone didn’t want me to open the window, he would say so.”

“And you, why did you go to your class parties even if you didn’t want to?”

He was troubled by the question. He started to waste his breath.

“Because... because my friends went... and because...”

“No!” she shouted so loudly that everybody in the class turned and looked at her. George stopped speaking at once and shut the window quickly.

“Why did you shut it?” she asked him very angrily.

“I... I didn’t want to... I don’t know...” George was about to cry.

In a moment, her facial expression changed completely and for the first time a smile appeared on her face. At first shyly, but then it seized her whole face and her expression relaxed.

“George, take your seat, please. Excuse me if I went too far. Welcome George to our group!”

“Welcome, George!” all the people in the class said, following her suggestion. They rose, shook his hand one by one and gave him a hug. Then they returned to their places and after a while George rose and said to all of them: “I’m glad to be with you.”

“Who would like to share with us a free choice and participation experience?”

“May I speak?” asked a young woman of about 30 years with pretty green eyes and dishevelled hair.

“Certainly, Maria. If the others are ok with it, we are listening to you.”

They nodded as Maria cast her eyes round the class and then started speaking.

“Yesterday morning I mowed the lawn in my garden. When I finished, I thought it would be a good idea to mow the lawn in the little park in my neighbourhood as well, because the municipal workers don’t do that often. By the evening I was done.”

Maria’s face glowed with a smile. When she finished, they all applauded her.

“How did you feel, Maria?” asked Helen, when they stopped clapping.

“I felt strong. I felt I had the power to change something I didn’t like, to improve my life and my neighbours’ life.”

“George, what do you think of this?”

Helen’s question startled him. After reflecting for a while he said in measured words.

“I wouldn’t do it. It’s not my job. There are people who have to take care of the parks.”

Maria’s face became gloomy and her light green eyes like young leaves turned into cypress green. When the others saw the girl’s reaction, they began to murmur and looked at George critically.

“I didn’t want to say... I meant that... I didn’t want to...”

“No, stop!” Helen broke in on his excuses. “You have your opinion and this is respected here.”

After these words he realized that the mumbling ended.

“Yes, I’m not sure, I don’t know.”

George seemed confused and not at all secure about what he was saying or what was on his mind.

“I’m addressing myself to all of you,” Helen said in a serious tone. “We are a free choice and participation group. You are here because you believe you don’t have a free choice in your life and you’d like to change that. But free choice also presupposes respect for the choices of others. But always based on freedom and dignity.”

“And the participation?” George asked.

“Could you reply to this question, Kostas?”

Kostas, a middle-aged man with scanty hair, rose from his seat and addressing to George said: “The participation comes after and strengthens the free choice. Each choice presupposes action and self-action. When we take part in an endeavour to achieve what we choose for us and the people around us, we feel efficient and strong.”

George listened to him carefully. He grinned in a strange way for some seconds. His eyes misted as if a dream had flashed through them. When he finally decided to talk, he asked:

“What happens when a choice is difficult? What happens when a choice requires that you should risk something important? Your life, for example?”

His question came along with a gesture like taking a handkerchief out of his pocket. But then they saw him holding a gun.

For some minutes the class was so silent that almost a blinking eye could be heard. You would say that after a while this silence became a habit and no one liked to break it. Lastly, trying to keep her voice steady, Helen asked:

“George, why do you need this gun?”

“I’d like to put a hypothetical question to the group,” he said holding the gun down.

“We are listening,” said Helen being the only one holding herself together.

“Let’s say that I threaten to kill someone among you.” As soon as he completed his sentence he levelled his gun blindly at the group. “We all know that this would be a mistake. This is my question: how easy is it for someone to act so that such a thing could be avoided?”

He stared at them one by one holding the gun and trying to get an answer. As he realized that no one wanted to speak he went on: “Let me be more specific. Let’s say that I threaten to kill Kostas.”

While he was saying that, he levelled the gun at Kostas and pointed at his chest. Kostas’s face became pale and he leaned back. He came over all dizzy. He felt his heart beating so wildly that he thought it would stop. George, pointing at Kostas with the gun, looked at the other eight men and women, one by one, who formed the free choice participation group. When he gazed at them, each one reacted in a different way. Some of them hid their face in their hands; others screamed or didn’t stir an eyelid as if they couldn’t believe what was happening right before them. Maria had gone into fits of laughter resulting in sobbing and crying.

George burst into loud laughter and his eyes found their colour again. Kostas felt relieved, ready to seize the slightest chance that would make him feel better. This relief spread in the class automatically and some people started to smile shyly and reservedly.

“The gun is a fake. As I told you, my question was hypothetical,” George said and pulled the trigger which only clicked feebly. “But I think I have proven that if the action

requires some risk, then it is more difficult to make a choice.”

“It isn’t always easy to get over our instincts” Helen retorted. “But anyway we are aware of the right and we fight for the best. Man is a social being and society works properly if its members uphold its cohesion with their action and participation.”

“May I say something? I’d like to share an action and participation experience with the group.”

Now Kostas was calm; he seemed to have already left behind the fact that some minutes before he had been threatened with a gun, supposedly loaded.

“Surely, Kostas. If you are ready, we are all ears.”

He rose from his seat and approached George. With a jerky movement and before George had time to react, Kostas punched him in the face. He knocked him down and began to kick him in the ribs and the face. The others watched without reacting to the successive blows against George, who was bleeding helplessly; only their faces winced with the yells of pain.

When George was too exhausted even to scream, Kostas returned to his place, quite composed. Before taking his seat, he met Helen’s glance, and as if she had received a secret message, she rose and hit George hard, who was lying doubled up.

“We thank you for sharing your story with us, Kostas,” Helen said while she was wiping away a blood stain from her shoe. “Is there anyone else who would like to share a free choice and participation story with us?”

## 29 Ιουνίου

**Αντωνία Ασημακοπούλου. Ελλάδα**

Στις 29 Ιουνίου το πρωί, η φίλη μου η Έμιλυ σηκώθηκε στις 7.30 το πρωί για να είναι στο κτήριο της Goldman Sacks στις 9.30. Εκεί κάνει την πρακτική της. Ο αδερφός μου τη ίδια ώρα έπαιρνε το τρένο του από το Παρίσι για να επιστρέψει στην Ολλανδία. Εκεί κάνει το μεταπτυχιακό του. Το ίδιο πρωινό στις 29 Ιουνίου ήμουν στο κέντρο της Αθήνας. Εκεί μένω-και εκείνη την ημέρα νόμιζα ότι θα πεθάνω :ή από ασφυξία, ή από χαρά.

Κάθε φορά που κάποιος μαθαίνει ότι είμαι Ελληνίδα θα μου πει πιθανότατα ότι έχει έρθει σε κάποιο από τα εκατοντάδες υπέροχα νησιά μας, έχει πει αμέτρητα ποτήρια ούζου και έχει απολαύσει έναν καλοκαιρινό έρωτα κάτω από άπειρες αχτίδες ήλιου. Έχοντας γεννηθεί πριν 22 καλοκαίρια έχω ζήσει από το σ μέχρι το α και ανάποδα τα συγκεκριμένα στερεότυπα. Μπορείς να πεις ότι έχω ζήσει ωραία πράγματα λοιπόν-και αν το πεις θα βγεις 100% αληθινός. Αυτό που θα σου πω εγώ είναι ότι στις 29 Ιουνίου άλλαξε 100% η δικιά μου αντίληψη σχετικά με την ελληνική κοινωνία.

Υποθέτω ότι ενημερώνεσαι από τα μέσα γενικά, και πιο ειδικά από το Ίντερνετ. Υποθέτω επίσης ότι ξέρεις πως από τον Μάιο έχουμε ένα είδος ιδιότυπης επανάστασης. Επανάσταση όχι γιατί κάθε απόγευμα άνθρωποι όλων των ηλικιών μαζεύονται σε πλατείες όπου συζητάνε, προτείνουν, ψηφίζουν. Ούτε επειδή υπάρχει μία πρωτοφανής μαζικότητα απέναντι στα δεινά οικονομικά μέτρα που παίρνονται ενάντια στους Έλληνες πολίτες. Πρόκειται για μία Ανθρώπινη Επανάσταση. Ένας επαναπροσδιορισμός των σχέσεων πολίτη-κοινωνία, μα κυρίως πολίτη-πολίτη. Μία σχέση που πλέον έχει βάσεις γερές, σε θεμέλια αλληλοβοήθειας, ενεργής συμμετοχής και όχι πυλώνες-τραπουλόχαρτα που ρυθμίζονται από το εκάστοτε προσωπικό όφελος.

Ο Έλληνας πολίτης που ήξερα εγώ πέθανε στις 28 Ιουνίου. Την ακριβώς επόμενη μέρα μία κοινωνική Ανάσταση έλαβε χώρα στην πιο κεντρική πλατεία της χώρας μου, στην πλατεία Συντάγματος, απέναντι ακριβώς από την ελληνική βουλή. Μεταξύ τόνων χημικών που ρίχονταν ασύστολα από τα σώματα ασφαλείας και μίας εκ των πραγμάτων προτετελεσμένης ψήφισης νέων μέτρων λιτότητας η ανάσα μου σταμάτησε τουλάχιστον δύο φορές. Προς στιγμήν νόμιζα ότι αυτό έγινε λόγω της αποπνικτικής ατμόσφαιρας εξαιτίας των δακρυγόνων. Εκ των υστέρων συνειδητοποίησα ότι έγινε για να συντονιστεί και να ενδυναμωθεί με την ανάσα των υπολοίπων διαδηλωτών στη πλατεία.

Σχεδόν όλο το φάσμα των ηλικιών, κομματικών αντιλήψεων και οικονομικών δυνατοτήτων ήταν εκεί. Εκεί που ήρωες γιατροί και νοσοκόμοι, όλοι τους εθελοντές, μετέφεραν τους εκατοντάδες τραυματίες με τους συρμούς του μετρό. Ανά 5 λεπτά, όσο και ο χρόνος αναμονής μεταξύ δύο συρμών, κόσμος πνιγμένος από χημικά και με δέρμα λευκό από το Maalox χειροκροτούσε τους ήρωες που κρατούσαν τα φορεία με τους τραυματίες του ιδιότυπου αυτού πολέμου. Φιάλες και μάσκες οξυγόνου μεταφέρονταν και αυτές μέσω του μετρό μιας και η αστυνομία εμπόδιζε την προσέλευση ασθενοφόρων. Κάθε δευτερόλεπτο αυτών των λεπτών ένα επίπεδο πιο πάνω, στις εισόδους του μετρό οι σεκιούριτι αμπαρωμένοι αναπνευστικά με μάσκες με ειδικό φίλτρο, σαν άλλοι αστικοί δύτες μας καθοδηγούσαν, μας ενθάρρυναν, μας προστά-

τευαν βάζοντας το κορμί τους κυριολεκτικά μπροστά στην αστυνομική αυθαιρεσία. Ο αριθμός των χτυπήματων που υπέστησαν δεν μπορούν να συγκριθούν με τα αιώνια ευχαριστώ που όλοι όσοι ήμασταν εκεί τους χρωστάμε. Όπως προσωπικά χρωστώ σε εκείνη τη κυρία, κοντά στα 65 η οποία βλέποντάς με να μην μπορώ να ανοίξω τα μάτια μου από το κλάμα και το τσούξιμο, έβγαλε από την τσάντα της μία ολοκάθαρη, λευκή πετσέτα και μου τα σκούπισε απαλά. Τόσο απαλά, όπως μόνο μία μητέρα ξέρει να αγαπά το παιδί της.

Λίγο αργότερα και ενώ ο φίλος μου έχει χάσει την ακοή του για λίγα λεπτά, εξαιτίας μίας κροτίδας που έσκασε πάνω του, θεωρούσα ότι τίποτα πιο σουρεαλιστικό δεν μπορεί αν συμβεί. Σε λιγότερο από 2 λεπτά λοιπόν ενώ είχα δει έναν αγαπημένο μου άνθρωπο να τρελαίνεται νιώθοντας την απώλεια μίας αίσθησής του, πανικοβλημένος και απορημένος προσπαθούσε να βρει ένα ασφαλές μέρος, βλέπω μία καλοντυμένη κυρία. Με ηλικία γύρω στα 35 και με ρούχα αξίας όσο τα χρόνια της πολλαπλασιαζόμενα επί 10, βρέθηκε ένας Θεός ξέρει πως, στο εσωτερικό του μετρό. Ταραγμένη προσπαθούσε να βρει διέξοδο. Διέξοδο διαφυγής από τα χημικά αλλά και από εκατοντάδες πρόσωπα καταβεβλημένα από τα χημικά μα συνάμα οργισμένα-δικαίως οργισμένα. Οργισμένα από την στέρηση στοιχειώδων οικονομικών άρα και κοινωνικών δικαιωμάτων, οργισμένα για μία κακή φήμη σ' ολόκληρη την ευρωπαϊκή ήπειρο, για λάθη που δεν ευθύνονται αυτοί.

Ελάχιστα μέτρα πιο πέρα, παίρνοντας μία λάνθασμένη απόφαση, πράγμα συνηθισμένο σε καταστάσεις πανικού, βρεθήκαμε στη μέση ακριβώς της πλατείας Συντάγματος. Ανάμεσα σε καλυμένους σαν αστακοί αστυνομικοί και ανθεκτικούς στα δακρυγόνα από τα χρόνια εμπειρίας αναρχικούς, στεκόμαστε εμείς χαμένοι. Τα μαντήλια και τα γυαλιά που φορούσαμε δεν είναι ικανά να μας προστατέψουν. Ο φίλος μου ο Φ. Και εγώ είμαστε στα πρόθυρα λιποθυμίας. Δεν βλέπουμε από το κλάμα και τη ταραχή, και κυριολεκτικά δεν μπορούμε να πάρουμε ανάσα. Δεν ξέρω πώς και από που, δύο ζευγάρια χέρια μας γραπώνουν, μας κρατάνε σφιχτά. Κανείς από τους δύο μας δεν έχει δύναμη να αντισταθεί, να δει που μας πάνε. Θα μπορούσαν να είναι αστυνομικοί. Δεν είναι όμως. Είναι 2 μαυροντυμένοι τύποι που μας οδηγούν ακριβώς πάνω από δύο κάδους που καίγονται. Το διοξειδίο του άνθρακα της φωτιάς ρουφάει λαίμαργα το δακρυγόνο, πρόκειται για λίγα τετραγωνικά μέτρα στα οποία υπάρχει ένα ιδίωτοπο καθεστώς αναπνευστικού ασύλου. Σιγά, σιγά αρχίζουμε να αναπνέουμε κανονικά και να ψάχνουμε για ασφαλές καταφύγιο, ξανακατεβαίνοντας στον κλειστό χώρο του μετρό.

Μέσα σ' όλα αυτά :ταραχή, κομμένες ανάσες και χέρια βοήθειας που προτάσσονται από τα πουθενά η ανθρώπινη Επανάσταση είχε περάσει σε άλλο επίπεδο. Αντικρύζουμε ένα στιγμιότυπο από αυτά που αν επρόκειτο για βίντεο, θα είχε χιλιάδες 'χτυπήματα' στο Youtube. Μισή ντουζίνα αναρχικοί, από αυτούς που μάλλον δεν γνωρίζεις προσωπικά αλλά πάντα βλέπεις στις πορείες, και σίγουρα από αυτούς που οι γονείς σου και οι δικοί μου θεωρούν υπαίτιους για τις αστικές καταστροφές, κατέβηκαν στο μετρό κρατώντας μία πιατέλα παγωτά και χιμούς. Φορώντας ακόμα τις μάσκες τους, μύρα ρούχα αν και κάποιοι από αυτούς γυμνόστηθοι από την ένταση της 'μάχης', άρχισαν να προσφέρουν σε όλους μας παγωτό φράουλα και χυμό βερύκοκο.

Ακόμα και στις πιο ζόρικες φάσεις της η ζωή μπορεί να είναι γλυκιά σαν εκείνα τα καλοκαίρια που ήσουν οχτώ χρονών και μαυρισμένος σχεδόν σαν την νύχτα, έτρωγες σοκολατένια παγωτά, με μία ανάσα. Αφού πασαλειφόσουν ολόκληρος, χαμογελούσες τόσο γλυκά που το μόνο που άξιζες ήταν ένα φιλί. Και σχεδόν πάντα αυτό έπαιρνες!

Τώρα 14 χρόνια μετά, είσαι πάλι μαύρος-γιατί πενθείς για την οικονομική, άρα και κοινωνική καταστροφή της χώρας σου, αλλά έχεις ευτυχώς ακόμα και τώρα αυτή τη γλύκα

του παγωτού γύρω από τα χείλη σου. Από κοντά και τη γλύκα του ήλιου και αυτή της ελπίδας. Μίας ελπίδας που ξεπροβάλλει μέσα από τις στάχτες ενός ταλαιπωρημένου έθνους που θα ενωθεί γραπώνοντας στις χούφτες του τις παλάμες του διπλανού, θα τις πιάσει σφιχτά και θα προχωρήσει στο μέλλον χαμογελώντας ηχηρά.

## June 29th

### Antonia Asimakopoulou. Greece

On June 29th, my friend Emily got up at 07.30 in the morning because she had to be at Goldman Sachs at 09.30. She does her practical training there. At the same time my brother took the train from Paris to go back to the Netherlands. He does his postgraduate studies there. On that same morning on June 29th, I was in downtown Athens. I live there – and on that very day I thought I would die of suffocation or joy.

When people hear that I am from Greece they are likely to tell me that they have visited one of our hundreds of magnificent islands, have drunk huge quantities of ouzo and have enjoyed a summer love under the infinite sun. As I was born 22 summers ago, I have lived through these stereotypes to a great extent. So, you could say that I have lived through nice things – and if you do, you will be 100% right. What I can say is that on June 29th my conception of Greek society changed completely.

I assume that you get your information from the mass media and especially the internet. I also assume that you are aware of the fact that since May we have been living through a peculiar revolt. It is a revolt not because each afternoon people of all ages gather in squares where they discuss, make suggestions and adopt resolutions. Nor because there is an unprecedented mass movement against the harsh economic measures taken against Greek citizens. It is about a Human Revolt. A re-determination of the citizen-society relationship and mainly of the citizen-citizen relationship. A relationship that is soundly founded on solidarity and active participation, but not on pillars of playing cards that are adjusted by personal interest.

The Greek citizen I knew died on June 28th. The very next day a Social Revolt took place in the most central square of my country, Constitution Square, in front of the Greek Parliament. Between massive amounts of tear gas fired shamelessly by police forces and a final vote for austerity measures I was short of breath at least twice. For a moment I thought it was due to the suffocating atmosphere caused by the tear gas. Then I realized that this happened so that my breath could tune into and be strengthened by the breath of the other protesters in the square.

People of almost all ages, political beliefs and all income brackets were there. There were heroic doctors and nurses, all of them volunteers, who carried hundreds of injured people inside the metro station. Every five minutes, the time lapse between trains, people suffocating from gas and pale due to Maa-lox applauded these heroes, who carried the stretchers with the injured people in this odd war. Oxygen tanks and masks were also taken by metro, because the police did not allow the ambulances to approach. Each second of these minutes, a level above, at the metro entrances, the security personnel equipped with specially filtered masks looking like urban divers guided us, encouraged us and protected us, shielding us with their bodies against police arbitrariness. The blows they suffered cannot be compared but all of us who were there are so thankful. I am personally thankful to that woman, almost 65 years old, who seeing that I could not keep my tearful and burning eyes open, took a spotlessly clean towel out of her purse and wiped them softly. So softly like a mother who loves her child.

After a while, when my friend lost his hearing for a few minutes as a firecracker went off near him, I thought that nothing more surreal could ever happen. But in two minutes, after I had seen my dear friend going mad because of hearing loss, being panicked and puzzled and trying to find a safe place, I saw a well-dressed lady. She was around 35 and her clothes were worth her age multiplied by 10. God knows how, she was inside the metro station. She was upset and was trying to find a way out. A way out of the chemicals but also of the hundreds of people who were pale and drawn from the chemicals but at the same time angry – very angry. Angry about the lack of fundamental economic and social rights, angry about the bad reputation all over Europe, angry about mistakes for which they were not responsible.

Just a few metres from there, having taken a wrong turn – usual in a panic –, we found ourselves in the centre of Constitution square. Among policemen armed to the teeth and anarchists resistant to tear gas thanks to all their years of experience, we were standing and looking abashed. The neckerchiefs and glasses that we wore could not protect us. My friend F. and I were about to faint. The tears and the agitation hindered us from seeing and we could hardly breathe. I do not know how and from where two pairs of hands grasped us and held us tight. None of us could resist, or see where they were taking us. They could be policemen. But they were not. They were two guys dressed in black who were taking us to two burning waste bins. The carbon dioxide released from the fire was

greedily sucking up the tear gas. Little by little, we began to breathe normally and were looking for a safe shelter as we made our way down to the metro station.

Through all this perturbation, breathlessness and helping hands, the human revolt had changed. We were attending a snapshot which would be downloaded massively on YouTube. Half a dozen anarchists, those you probably do not know personally but you always meet in rallies, those who your parents and your family consider responsible for the civil disasters, entered the metro station with ice-creams and juices. They still wore masks and were dressed in black, although some of them were bare-chested from the fever of the battle, and began to treat all of us to strawberry ice-cream and apricot juice.

Even during the tough moments, life can be sweet like during those summers when you were eight years old and suntanned almost like the night, and you would eat chocolate ice-cream breathlessly. After you were smeared from face to toe, you would smile so sweetly that you deserved to be kissed! And you almost always were kissed!

Now, 14 years later, you are still tanned, because you are mourning for the economic and social disaster of your country, but fortunately you still have the sweetness of the ice-cream on your lips, and the sweetness of the sun and of hope: a hope that emerges from the ashes of a worn-out nation that will be united by grasping the hands of other people, holding them tightly and moving towards the future with laughing loudly.

## Fenêtre barricadée, laisse entrer le soleil !

**Atika Belhacene.** Algérie

Avez-vous déjà en un instant tout à fait ordinaire de votre vie, senti que cette dernière venait de prendre un véritable tournant, senti en cet instant synonyme même de la banalité humaine jaillir une de ces lumières grandes à éclairer toute la sombre ambiguïté de votre vie ? Avez-vous déjà connu ce grand moment, cet éclair du temps qui a changé votre vie à tout jamais, cette minute providence après laquelle vous n'avez plus jamais été la même personne ? Wissem ne le savait pas encore mais en ce 22 décembre 2008, elle venait de connaître ce moment.

Rentrant chez elle comme à son habitude chaque vendredi après la prière collective, Wissem attendit devant la porte de sa maison... « Wissem ! Abdallah ne va pas pouvoir venir tout de suite. Il vient d'appeler Mahmoud et lui a dit que Meriem a eu un malaise et qu'il a du la conduire en urgence à l'hôpital. Il te demande de l'attendre chez nous », s'exclame de la fenêtre Wahiba, la voisine d'en face.

« D'accord, d'accord, qu'Allah vous récompense de votre amabilité », Wissem conduit le pas vers la maison de Wahiba.

« Entrez ! Entrez ma sœur ! Honte à nous ! Depuis le temps que nous sommes voisines, il a fallu qu'on attende un drame pour nous rencontrer ».

« Excusez-moi, j'espère vraiment que je ne vous dérangerai pas très longtemps ».

« Mais non, ne dites pas de sottises ! Vous êtes chez vous ma sœur, installez vous ! Je reviens tout de suite ».

Wissem se retrouve dans une pièce qui ressemble plus à une bibliothèque qu'à un salon. Les quatre murs entourant le fauteuil sur lequel elle est assise emprisonnent des milliers de livres et lui donnent le sentiment de se retrouver dans un temple du savoir.

« Petite brebis entourée de loups féroces, cela fait 10 ans et j'ai toujours le même sentiment à chaque fois que je pénètre dans cette pièce », dit Wahiba toute souriante.

Wissem : Effectivement, cette pièce est impressionnante. Vous avez là des trésors inestimables. Je vous jalouerais presque ».

Wahiba : La plus grande partie appartenait à mon père. Il était cheikh d'une zawiya et professeur d'école. Sidi Mansour, vous connaissez ?

Wissem : Non désolée, je suis sœur musulmane, je ne crois pas à l'islam marabout.

Wahiba : Non, mon père était soufiste pas marabout.

Wissem : Désolée mais je n'y crois pas non plus.

Wahiba : Mais non, ne soyez pas désolée... L'autre partie, je l'ai achetée avec mon mari au fur et à mesure et sont tous en rapport avec nos domaines de travail.

Wissem : Bien ! Très bien ! Et qu'exercez vous ?

Wahiba : Moi je suis professeur au département de psychologie et mon mari est avocat... Excusez ma curiosité et vous, êtes vous lettrée ? Wissem, gênée, baisse la tête. Ah, ou avais je

la tête ! Je n'ai plus de manières moi ! J'espère que votre parente ira mieux, que Dieu soit avec elle et ses proches ! Continue Wahiba.

Wissem (secouée) : Ma parente !? Mais de qui parlez-vous ?

Wahiba (choquée) : Mais Meriem, voyons !

Wissem (avec totale froideur) : Non ce n'est pas ma parente, c'est la deuxième femme de mon mari ! Vos gâteaux sont excellents, vous l'ai-je dis ?

Wahiba (perdant ses mots) : Merci, merci ! Attendez, on sonne à la porte, c'est peut-être votre époux ! Je vais voir.

Wissem : Non celui là c'est Nacer, le petit dernier de Fatma qui habite la maisonnette bleue au bout de la ruelle. Il frappe et s'enfuit.

Wahiba : Et vous savez ça rien qu'en entendant la sonnette ?

Wissem : Cela fait huit années que la seule sonnette que j'entends est celle de mon époux alors entendre de temps à autre une autre que la sienne est un événement mémorable dans ma vie. À vrai dire, chaque jour en milieu d'après midi comme maintenant, je m'assieds devant ma porte et attend impatiemment cette sonnette qui m'annonce que quelqu'un de l'autre côté de l'humanité se souvient de moi. C'est mon petit bonheur quotidien ! Quant à mon mari, le connaissant chez sa deuxième épouse, il m'a sûrement oubliée !

Wahiba n'arrive plus à cacher la confusion qui la pénètre, elle met sa main sur celle de Wissem, « je suis navrée » dit t-elle. Wissem retire sa main doucement et esquisse un sourire timide : « Mais non, ne le soyez pas ! Chacun son destin et tel est le mien ».

Wahiba : N'avez-vous pas de famille, d'amis ?

Wissem : Non.

Un silence glacial prend part de la pièce à la réponse de Wissem. Wahiba ne sait plus si le froid lui sort des os ou s'il vient de l'extérieur, elle sent ces gouttelettes brûlantes coulant le long de son épine dorsale mais n'arrive plus à en définir l'origine. Elle a le sentiment que chaque cellule de son corps est entrain de pleurer. Des milliers de questions se dressent broussailleuses dans sa tête, elle en a plein la bouche.

Wahiba : Regardez, celui là c'est *L'halètement de l'halètement* d'Ibn Rochd en réponse à *L'halètement des philosophes* de l'imam El Ghazali, excellent ouvrage et inépuisable source de savoir... Enchaîne t'elle debout devant une étagère... et celui là c'est *Chambre à soi* de Virginia Woolf, toute femme n'importe où dans le monde devrait le lire...

Wissem : Le voilà mon mari qui arrive. Je reconnais le bruit de sa voiture. Se relève t'elle en arrangeant son niqab. Je vous remercie infiniment ! Que dieu bénisse ton foyer.

Wahiba : Il n'y a vraiment pas de quoi, je n'ai fait que mon devoir de voisine. Soyez la bienvenue quand vous voulez. Elle l'a raccompagne jusqu'à la porte, Wissem rejoint Abdallah.

Wissem (haussant le ton) : Je t'ai dit des milliers de fois qu'il était plus que nécessaire que j'aie une clef moi aussi. Cela fait huit ans, ce n'est pas trop tôt pour me faire confiance !

Abdallah ralentit le pas et la fixe du regard : Ferme-là ! J'espère pour toi que tu n'as rien dit, et puis comment faire confiance à une pute qui a trahi son Dieu !

Vingt ans de carrière comme psychologue, ça ne trompe pas. Wahiba sut dès ce 22 décembre que dans la maison a deux mètres de la sienne vivait une femme violentée, l'archétype même de la femme maltraitée : cloîtrée chez elle, isolée de tout contact avec l'extérieur, insultée, humiliée

et contrainte à la soumission mais elle était encore loin de mesurer l'ampleur de cette violence. Son mari le lui déconseilla fermement à maintes reprises mais Wahiba s'était décidée à aider Wissem, le « ce sont leurs affaires, nous n'avons pas nous en mêler » ne trouvât point de dessein à son oreille et les mises en gardes de Mahmoud la laissèrent de marbre. Les cris, les insultes, les hurlements et les éclats de verre au milieu de la nuit, elle en savait désormais l'origine. « Je refuse de l'enfoncer encore plus par mon silence. Nous serons la main invisible d'un meurtre en nous taisant encore plus ! », c'est ce qu'elle dit à Mahmoud des lors et c'est ce qu'elle dit à la police quand le lendemain elle se rendit au poste, dénonçant son voisin pour mauvais traitement à l'égard de son épouse. Quelle fut grande sa déception quand les policiers lui firent explicitement comprendre qu'elle était entrain de détruire un foyer et qu'ils n'interviendraient pas avant qu'il y'ait véritable agression et dénonciation de la part de l'épouse elle-même.

Allongée sur son lit dans sa chambre sans télé, sans radio et sans berceau, Wissem sursaute surprise par une sonnette à la porte. C'est Wahiba lui ramenant des gâteaux.

« Comment vais-je lui expliquer que je ne peux pas lui ouvrir la porte, que je n'ai pas les clefs de mon propre chez moi ?... Elle saura tout et Abdallah me le fera payer... Je vais me taire et faire comme si je n'étais pas là... Mais non, ce n'est pas faisable, cette femme m'a accueillie chez elle et a montré tant d'amabilité... mais il n'en saura rien ! Je ne vais pas lui dire... mais Dieu maudit la femme désobéissante... » les idées se bousculent dans la tête de Wissem, elle est proie de confusion.

Wahiba : Ouvrez Wissem ! Je suis devant la fenêtre et je sais que vous êtes là... j'ai vu combien ils vous avaient plu la dernière fois et j'ai voulu vous en ramener un peu ». Wissem jette un coup d'œil timide de la fenêtre : je suis navrée, excusez-moi... je suis vraiment désolée, je ne peux pas vous accueillir chez moi...

Wahiba : Ce n'est pas de votre faute, je sais. Vous n'avez pas les clefs... la boîte est petite, elle passera par les barreaux... tenez !

Wissem : « Vous ne devriez pas autant vous gêner ! Merci beaucoup... Attendez ! Moi aussi j'ai quelques choses pour vous. Tenez ! Je ne crois pas que c'est de votre goût mais ça pourrait enrichir votre bibliothèque... ».

Wahiba (très émue) : « *Waiting for Godot* ! Wissem ! Je suis... je suis... vous me... ».

Wissem : Surprenez ! Oui je sais, je sais ! Que fait un livre pareil chez une femme comme moi ! Je ne vous ai pas répondu l'autre fois mais j'ai un Master en critique théâtrale et ce n'est pas de la comédie que je vous fais là.

Wahiba riante s'en va : J'espère de tout mon cœur avoir un deuxième acte du coté fenêtre de votre maison. Jusqu'ici n'attendez pas Godot ! Il n'est pas venu et il ne viendra jamais. Si vous voulez, on pourrait aller le chercher ensemble.

Depuis ce jour, les deux femmes se donnèrent rendez-vous devant la fenêtre toujours aussi barricadée. Durant deux ans, Wahiba attendit le départ d'Abdallah pour aller rejoindre son amie et la fournir en livres, en documents et en médicaments. Un peu plus tard, elle lui offrit un téléphone mobile « au cas où » et lui fit découvrir les joies du Net. Les nuits où Abdallah dormait chez sa seconde épouse, le ciel pouvait entendre les rires de Wissem traverser les barreaux, les déchirer et rejoindre les étoiles arrachant à chaque nuage une place auprès de la lune. Durant deux ans, Wahiba fut à tour de rôle l'intraveineuse d'une agonisante, le poumon d'une essoufflée et

l'œil vaillant d'une contrainte à l'aveuglement. Wissem revivait grâce à elle, à travers elle et en elle mais les nuits où Abdallah dormait à la maison, le ciel et Wahiba larmoyaient toujours autant en écoutant ses vociférations d'écorchée. Les cieux se rassuraient de temps en temps en entendant retentir les sirènes de la police mais leur cœur se crispait d'avantage en les entendant repartir aussitôt laissant derrière eux un Abdallah encore plus violent et une Wissem encore plus meurtrie. Wahiba avait beau tout faire, Wissem n'arrivait pas à dépasser sa frayeur et dénoncer Abdallah. « Je n'ai que lui », s'excusait-elle chaque fois à Wahiba.

Au quartier, la rumeur circulait ; Wahiba endoctrinerait Wissem et la pousserait à divorcer. À la mosquée, les femmes l'isolèrent et à leurs fêtes, elles ne l'invitèrent plus. Abdallah finit par apprendre cette nouvelle liaison « dangereuse » et ne tarda pas à la détruire. Wissem perdit même le droit d'aller à la mosquée et les livres dissimulés sous ses piles de vêtements ne lui furent plus d'aucun réconfort. Le souvenir de Wahiba au chevet de sa fenêtre lui semble si lointain, perdre cette relation du dernier espoir signifiait la perte du dernier fil qui l'alimentait de vie. En ses draps blancs si souvent rougis de sang, elle ne vit plus que son futur linceul. Le tombeau, elle l'avait dans le cœur et le cimetière, elle y habitait depuis plus de huit ans.

« C'est une belle journée ! Je vais me coucher, une si belle journée... » « Ferme-la salope ! Tu m'agasses », crie Abdallah en pénétrant la chambre de Wissem qui chante à voix haute. Rouge à lèvres rouge, vernis à ongles noir, cheveux relâchés et très bien coiffés, mini robe en satin rouge, Abdallah n'en revenait pas de voir Wissem.

Abdallah : Tu as moins l'air d'une chienne comme ça !

Wissem : Je sais ! Je suis magnifique, belle, sublime ! DIVINE ! Elle se dirige hautainement vers la porte de sortie.

Abdallah : Qu'est ce que tu fais ?

Wissem : Je vais fêter mon anniversaire avec mon amie Wahiba.

Abdallah : Elle perd les pédales la femme ! Elle perd les pédales, ton anniversaire est en août et nous sommes le 22 décembre. Il rit aux éclats, Wissem prend la clef de la maison et se dirige sérieusement vers la porte.

Wissem : « Bye, je ne rentre pas ce soir », elle continue à ouvrir les serrures.

Abdallah hausse le ton : « Assez durer ! Referme cette porte tout de suite et enlève ce déguisement ». Wissem complètement indifférente ouvre le Gros Cadenas. Furieux, Abdallah la tire des cheveux et la jette sur le sol. Elle se relève et court s'enfermer dans sa chambre et commence à crier de toutes ses forces, elle vocifère à s'époumoner...

« Ouvrez la porte monsieur ! Ouvrez, c'est la police ». Abdallah ouvre la porte tout souriant.

« Bonsoir monsieur, pourrait-on voir votre femme ? ».

Abdallah : « Bien sûr monsieur... Wissem ! Wissem ! Viens, on demande à te voir ». Wissem dans son élégante toilette sort et avance vers les policiers. « Couvre-toi femme ! » lui indique furieusement Abdallah mais elle continue d'avancer faisant mine de ne pas l'entendre.

« Bonsoir madame, êtes-vous bien madame Lakhal Wissem ? ».

Wissem : « Oui tout à fait messieurs ! ».

« Voilà, nous venons d'entendre deux témoins nous indiquant que vous seriez victime de violence conjugale. Pourriez-vous nous le confirmer ? ».

Abdallah sourit à Wissem et aux policiers, « tout à fait messieurs, je suis victime de violence conjugale et je désire porter plainte pour coups et blessures entraînant la mort, agression

sexuelle, emprisonnement, vol, et tout un tas d'autres choses », dit enfin Wissem devant le regard perdu d'Abdallah.

« D'accord madame, nous aurions besoin de votre déposition ».

« Huit ans à raconter, ça va être long ! Mais d'abord allons à la maison en face, je m'y sentirai beaucoup mieux pour vous narrer mon histoire ». Devant la porte, Wissem trouve Wahiba et Mahmoud en train de l'attendre.

« Les salops ! Je croyais que tu étais mon frère ! Ah la putain, tu vas me le payer, tu vas le payer très cher », crie Abdallah embarqué dans la voiture de police.

« Je fus une putain ! Femme de joie, point en l'air et culotte baissée ou alors sans culotte. Fille d'une analphabète dont je maudissais la soumission à mon père. Je fuis mon Douar natal pour poursuivre mes études à 18 ans, effaçant derrière moi et en moi toute dévotion à une vie conjuguee au masculin. Je refusai très jeune la fatalité de vie de la femme algérienne, fille de, sœur de, épouse de et qui finit mère de. Je ne fus faite pour aucun moule sinon celui de la liberté et de l'insoumission. La bonne réputation et l'obturation du vagin, je n'en avais que foutre. Le théâtre, de festival en festival et de scène en scène, capitaine de mon âme et maître unique de mon destin, tel fut mon rêve. Ainsi je décidai mon destin.

La vie animée d'une mangeuse d'hommes. L'absolution de la Vodka et la vulgarité du Pastis, les nuits d'éternité et l'ivresse vaginale, je connus tous les plaisirs et goûtai à tous les paradis et un jour je connus Abdallah, beau et vertueux taxiste, barbu en Kamis qui me conduisit chaque nuit à mon lieu de soirée. Les nuits passèrent et la voix de l'imam récitant le Coran dans la voiture résonnait de plus en plus dans mon cœur, plus encore que la voix du chanteur de soirée. Abdallah me passait de plus en plus d'ouvrages sur la religion et m'en parla de plus en plus : le jour du jugement dernier, la torture de la tombe... J'arrêtai d'abord la boisson puis resserrai les jambes, peu de temps après j'arrêtai les soirées mais rien ne me satisfaisait. Je devins paralysée par la peur de Dieu, je me voila et m'éloigna de plus en plus de la scène. Je ne m'en doutais pas mais je sombrais doucement mais sûrement dans le fanatisme et l'intégrisme religieux. Je me dégoûtais, quoique je fisse je me trouvai toujours sale et répugnante. Toutes les caresses passées sur mon corps me semblaient repasser à l'infini comme des lames meurtrières me rappelant à tout moment les flammes de l'enfer. Abdallah me parla du repentir, de la miséricorde de Dieu, de la deuxième chance. Contrairement à tous les hommes qui me présentèrent partout à tous leurs amis mais jamais à leurs mères, Abdallah me demanda en mariage. J'appris à l'aimer en aimant Dieu, contre l'amour éphémère de la chaire, il m'offrit un amour platonique, timide et tolérant. Je l'épousai en 2000. Je mis le djilbab et arrêtai définitivement le théâtre « mixte ».

Sans télé, sans radio, sans téléphone, Abdallah me dépourvut de tout ce qui me mettait en face de la tentation. Il prit les clefs de la maison le temps de me connaître, de m'appriivoiser et de me faire confiance. Ceci ne me dérangerait nullement au départ, je fus trop occupée à adorer Dieu mais avec le temps je commençai à me lasser, la sortie seule le vendredi pour la prière ne me suffit plus. J'avais coupé tout lien avec mes amies « trop libres » et « trop nues ». Un peu plus tard, Abdallah me contraignit à couper les liens avec mes parents jugés par sa communauté de frères comme étant mécréants pour leur pratique d'un islam marabout. Je pris des lors conscience de l'amertume de ma réalité, je fus piégée mais il était trop tard. Je croyais me soumettre à Dieu

mais en réalité, je me soumettais encore une fois à un homme et cette fois si ce fut pire, je me suis réduite à l'esclavage au nom de la religion.

Les coups ? Je ne saurai vous dire précisément comment ça a commencé, je crois que personne ne saurait dire précisément comment commence ce genre de choses. Ça commence en élevant le ton, ça vire très vite aux insultes, ça se développe en menaces et très vite, on à l'œil bleu. Je fus fouettée quand j'ai voulu reprendre mes études et mutilée pour avoir salué dans la rue une ex-amie non voilée. Il prit tous mes papiers d'études, ma carte d'identité, mon passeport. Il saisit mes bijoux, prit ma vie. Je fus enceinte de six mois quand il m'annonça son deuxième mariage après uniquement deux ans de mariage, mon refus me valut d'être battue pour injure à l'égard du Coran, jusqu'à l'hémorragie qui me fit perdre mon enfant. Blessée dans ma fierté je refusai qu'il me touche après mais il me forçait, je pleurai, je criai mais rien n'arrachait cette bête féroce à mon corps. Je fus emprisonnée chez moi et à maintes reprises violée par mon propre mari. Pourquoi ne l'ai-je pas tout simplement quitté ? Cela vous semblera ridicule mais j'avais peur de lui et peur de ce que je deviendrai sans lui. Je n'avais rien, ni maison, ni enfant, ni travail. Je n'avais que lui, du moins jusqu'au jour où je connus Wahiba.

Wahiba me fit prendre conscience que ce n'était pas à l'islam que je m'étais convertie mais à la doctrine religieuse extrémiste d'Abdallah et de ses semblables, utilisant la manipulation des versets et prônant leur interprétation dans un sens unique. Sens arrangé de façon à soumettre la femme et à la réduire à l'esclavage au nom d'Allah. Je commençai à me regarder différemment, comme un être humain entier, digne et en droit à l'égalité et la justice au même titre que tout autre être humain sans distinction aucune de race, de nationalité ou de genre. Nous naissons tous égaux et dignes, je l'avais compris et des lors plus rien ne pouvait plus me freiner ou me faire peur. Par le billet de Wahiba, je rentrai en contact avec une association d'aide aux victimes de violences de genre qui m'éduqua en droit et psychologiquement. J'eus plusieurs correspondances avec des femmes ayant ou vivant la même chose que moi. L'Association me trouva une place dans un refuge pour femmes battues le temps de finir les dernières formalités de mon nouveau travail.

Dans l'amphithéâtre, s'élèvent les applaudissements. Les gens se mettent debout, les plus émotifs se débattent avec leurs mouchoirs.

« Asseyez-vous svp, asseyez-vous », dit la conférencière, « je n'ai pas encore fini... Pour vous, ce n'est peut-être qu'une nouvelle touchante et émouvante mais, il est impératif de regarder les choses avec plus de maturité... Ce que j'essaie de vous expliquer c'est qu'il ne suffit pas d'applaudir, il faut agir. Vous connaissez une femme violentée ? Agissez, alertez ses proches, informez la police, parlez-lui et ne vous découragez jamais car il lui faudra toujours dix fois plus de courage que vous. Ne perdez jamais la foi car elle la perd à chaque seconde. La mobilisation de la masse est plus qu'urgente, des milliers de femmes partout dans le monde subissent quotidiennement la violence, mobilisez vous ! Engagez vous dans des associations ou créez votre propre association ! Croyez-moi, il n'y en aura jamais assez. Camarades militants et militantes, soyons citoyens ! Votre combat vous semblera toujours une petite goutte insignifiante dans l'océan mais n'oubliez jamais que ce n'est que de gouttes qu'est fait l'océan. Sans Wahiba, je ne serai jamais là, j'aurai encore la tête dans l'eau et mes draps auraient certainement rencontré leur tragique destin de linceuls. Il est question de dignité humaine alors contre une tragique chute du rideau, privilégions toujours une entrée glorieuse sur scène ! »

## Barricaded Window, Let the Sun In!

**Atika Belhacene.** Algeria

Have you ever felt, in a completely ordinary moment, that your life had just undergone a real shift? And in that moment, which embodies human banality, did one of those lights illuminate all the dark ambiguity of your existence? Have you ever experienced that great moment, that flash of time which has changed your life forever, that minute of providence after which you have never been the same person? Wissem didn't know it yet but on that 22nd December 2008, she had just experienced that moment.

After returning as on every Friday from group prayer, Wissem is waiting in front of her front door when Wahiba, the neighbour across the street, cries out from the window:

“Wissem! Abdallah can't come right now. He's just called Mahmoud and told him that Meriem is sick and that he's taken her urgently to the hospital. He wants you to wait for him at our house.”

“Ok, ok, may Allah bless you for your kindness.”

Wissem walks over to Wahiba's house.

“Come in! Come in, my sister! Shame on us! We've been neighbours for so long yet it takes such a misfortune for us to meet.”

“I do hope I won't disturb you for too long.”

“Of course you won't, don't worry! You're at home, my sister, make yourself comfortable! I'll be back in a moment.”

Wissem finds herself in a room that looks more like a library than a sitting room. The four walls around the sofa house thousands of books and give her the feeling of being in a temple of wisdom.

“A small ewe surrounded by wolves. It's been ten years and I always have the

same feeling every time I go into this room,” says Wahiba smiling.

Wissem: “Indeed, this room is impressive. You have priceless treasures here. I envy you.”

Wahiba: “Most of them belonged to my father. He was the Sheik of a Zawiya and a school teacher. Sidi Mansour, you know?”

Wissem: “I'm so sorry, I'm a Muslim sister, I don't believe in Marabout Islam.”

Wahiba: “No, my father was Sufi not Marabout.”

Wissem: “I'm sorry... but I don't believe in it either.”

Wahiba: “Don't be sorry. I gradually acquired the other books with my husband and they are all related to our fields of work.”

Wissem: “Good! Very good! And what do you do?”

Wahiba: “I lecture at the Department of Psychology and my husband is a lawyer... Excuse my curiosity, but are you well-read?”

Wissem, troubled, looks down.

Wahiba: “Ah, but what am I doing? Where are my manners? I hope that your relative gets better, God be with her and her loved ones!” continues Wahiba.

Wissem (shaken): “My relative!? But who are you talking about?”

Wahiba (shocked): “Meriem, of course!”

Wissem (coldly): “No, she is not my relative; she's my husband's second wife! Your cakes are delicious, did I tell you?”

Wahiba (confused): “Thank you, thank you! Wait a moment, someone is ringing the bell. Maybe it's your husband! I'll check.”

Wissem: “No, it's Nacer, the youngest son of Fatma who lives in the small blue

house at the end of the alley. He always knocks and runs away.”

Wahiba: “And you know just by hearing the bell?”

Wissem: “For eight years the only bell I’ve heard is my husband’s, so to hear another from time to time is a memorable event in my life. To tell the truth, every day in the middle of the afternoon like now I sit in front of my door and impatiently wait for the bell announcing that someone from the other side of humanity remembers me. It’s my little daily pleasure! As for my husband, and knowing that he is with his second wife, he must have forgotten me!”

Wahiba cannot conceal the confusion haunting her. She puts her hand on Wissem’s and says:

“I’m sorry.”

Wissem gently removes her hand and smiles timidly:

“Don’t be! Everyone has their fate and this is mine.”

Wahiba: “You don’t have any relatives, friends?”

Wissem: “No.”

An icy silence takes hold of the room with Wissem’s answer. Wahiba no longer knows if the coldness comes from her bones or from outside. She feels those small burning drops of sweat slipping down her back but she doesn’t know why. She has the feeling that each cell of her body is crying. Thousands of complex questions come to her mind.

Wahiba: “Look, that one is the *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* by Ibn Rochd as a response to *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* by Imam Al-Ghazali, an excellent work and an inexhaustible source of knowledge...” she tells her, standing in front of a shelf... “And that one is *A Room of One’s Own* by Virginia Woolf; every woman in the world should read it...”

Wissem: “That’s my husband coming. I recognise the noise of his car.” She stands up arranging her niqab. “Thank you very much! God bless your home.”

Wahiba: “You’re welcome. I’ve only done my duty as a neighbour. Come whenever you want.”

She accompanies her to the door. Wissem meets Abdallah.

Wissem (speaking more loudly): “I’ve told you thousands of times that I really need a key too. It’s been eight years; it’s time to trust me!”

Abdallah slows down and stares at her: “Shut up! I hope you haven’t said anything. How can anyone trust a whore who has betrayed her god?”

Twenty years working as a psychologist makes you see things clearly. Wahiba knew from that 22nd December that a battered woman lived in the house two metres from hers, the archetype of the abused woman: a prisoner in her home, isolated from the outside, insulted, humiliated and bound to submission but still far from realising the scope of this violence. Her husband warned her on many occasions but Wahiba was determined to help Wissem. People who said “it’s their business, we mustn’t get involved” did not convince her and Mahmoud’s warnings left her indifferent. She now knew the origin of the shouts, the insults, the yells and the crashes of glass in the middle of the night.

“I refuse to repress even more with my silence. We will be the invisible hand of a murder if we say nothing!” This is what she told Mahmoud then and what she told the officers the day she went to the police station. The police officers made her understand that she was destroying a home and that they would not intervene until there was a real aggression reported by the wife herself.

Lying on the bed of her room without a television, without a radio and without a cradle, Wissem jumps up surprised when the bell rings. It is Wahiba bringing her some cakes.

“How will I explain to her that I can’t open the door, that I don’t have the keys of my own house? She will know about everything and Abdallah will make me pay. I won’t say anything and just pretend not to be here... But no, it’s not feasible, this woman welcomed me into her home and was so kind to me and needn’t know about it! I won’t tell her... But God curses the disobedient woman...” The ideas shake in Wissem’s mind, she is confused.

Wahiba: “Open the door, Wissem! I’m outside the window and I know you’re in... I saw how much you liked the cakes last time and I decided to bring you some more.”

Wissem timidly looks out of the window:

“I’m sorry... I’m really sorry. I can’t let you in...”

Wahiba: “It’s not your fault, I know. You don’t have the keys... The box is small and will fit through the bars... Take it!”

Wissem: “You shouldn’t have bothered! Thank you very much... Wait!! I also have something for you. Take it! I don’t know if it’s your taste but this could enrich your library.”...

Wahiba (deeply moved): “*Waiting for Godot!* Wissem! I am... I am... you...”

Wissem: “I’ve surprised you! Yes I know, I know! What is such a book doing at the house of a woman like me! I didn’t tell you last time but I have a master in theatre criticism and I’m not joking.”

Wahiba leaves smiling:

“I hope with all my heart to have a second act at your house. Until then, don’t wait for *Godot!* He hasn’t come and will never come. If you want, we could go and look for him together.”

From that day, the two women met in front of the always barricaded window. For two years,

Wahiba waited for Abdallah’s departure to go and see her friend and provide her with books, documents and medicines. Sometime later, she offered her a mobile phone, “just in case”, and helped her discover the joys of the internet.

The nights when Abdallah slept at his second wife’s house, the sky could hear the laughter of Wissem going through the bars, breaking them up and reaching the stars, taking from each cloud a place close to the moon.

For two years, Wahiba played the part of an intravenous drip attached to a dying woman, the watching eye of a person bound to blindness. Wissem revived thanks to her, through her and in her. However, the nights when Abdallah slept at the house, the sky and Wahiba always wept at the sound of his shouts. The sky calmed from time to time when hearing the police alarms but its heart tensed more upon listening to them leaving so soon, leaving behind an even more violent Abdallah and an even more bruised Wissem. No matter how hard Wahiba tried, Wissem did not manage to overcome her fear and report Abdallah.

“He is all I have,” she apologised to Wahiba every time.

In the neighbourhood, the rumour circulated: Wahiba would indoctrinate Wissem and push her to divorce. In the mosque, the women isolated her and didn’t invite her to their parties anymore. Abdallah finally discovered this new “dangerous” liaison and did not delay in destroying it. Wissem even lost the right to go to the mosque and the books concealed under her piles of clothes did not give her any comfort. The memory of Wahiba at her window seemed to her so distant... Losing the final hope in this relationship meant losing the last thread that fed her with life. On her white sheets so often tainted with blood, she only saw her future shroud. She carried the

grave in her heart and she had been living in a cemetery for more than eight years.

“It’s a nice day! I’m going to bed, such a nice day.”

“Shut up, bitch! You’re getting on my nerves,” shouts Abdallah going into Wissem’s bedroom, who is singing loudly. Red lipstick, black nail varnish, untied and very well combed hair, short red satin dress. Abdallah cannot believe what he was seeing.

Abdallah: “You look less like a bitch like this!”

Wissem: “I know! I’m great, beautiful, sublime! DIVINE!” She goes haughtily towards the front door.

Abdallah: “What are you doing?”

Wissem: “I’m going to celebrate my anniversary with my friend Wahiba.”

Abdallah: “You’re crazy! You don’t know what you’re saying, your anniversary is in August and today it’s 22nd December.”

He starts laughing. Wissem takes the key of the house and moves towards the door with determination.

Wissem: “Bye, I won’t be back tonight,” she continues unlocking the door.

Abdallah raises his voice:

“That’s enough! Close the door immediately and take off that costume.”

Wissem, completely indifferent, opens the big padlock. Abdallah, furious, drags her by her hair and pulls her onto the floor. She gets up and runs to lock herself in her room and starts crying with all her strength. She shouts until she loses her voice...

“Open the door, sir! It’s the police!”

Abdallah opens the door, smiling.

“Good evening, sir. Could we see your wife?”

Abdallah: “Of course, sir... Wissem! Wissem! Come down, someone wants to see you.”

Wissem, wearing her elegant dress, goes down and moves towards the police officers.

“Cover yourself, woman!” Abdallah furiously orders her but she continues moving on as if she has not understood him.

“Good evening, madam. Are you Mrs Lakhal Wissem?”

Wissem: “Yes, it’s me, sirs!”

“We’ve just talked to two people who told us that you are a victim of domestic violence. Could you confirm that?”

Abdallah smiles at Wissem and the police officers:

“That’s right, sirs, I’m a victim of domestic violence and I’d like to press charges for physical abuse, sexual assault, imprisonment, theft and many other things,” Wissem finally says, faced with Abdallah’s bewildered expression.

“Alright, madam, we need your statement.”

“Eight years will take a long time to explain! But first we’ll go to the house opposite, I’ll feel much better there telling you my story.”

In front of the door, Wissem meets Wahiba and Mahmoud waiting for her.

“Bastards. I thought you were my brothers. You, bitch! You’ll pay dearly for this,” Abdallah shouts from the police car.

“I was a whore! A loose woman, scantily dressed. The daughter of an illiterate woman whose submission to my father I cursed. I escaped my native village to continue my studies at the age of 18, leaving behind me and in me all devotion to married life with a man. From a very young age, I refused the fate of the Algerian woman, the daughter of, the sister of, the wife of and ending as the mother of. I was only made for freedom and rebelliousness. I didn’t give a damn about my reputation. Theatre, from festival to festival and from stage to stage, the captain of my soul and only master of my destiny, that was my dream. So I decided my destiny.

“The busy life of a man eater. The absolute of vodka and the vulgarity of alcohol, the nights of eternity and vaginal drunkenness. I experienced all pleasures and tried all paradises and one day I met Abdallah, a handsome virtuous taxi driver, a bearded man in kamis who every evening drove to my place of work. The nights went by and the voice of the Imam reciting the Koran in the car increasingly resounded in my heart, even more than the voice of the night singer. Abdallah gave me more and more books about religion and spoke to me about it more and more: the day of the Last Judgement, the torture of the tomb... I first gave up drinking and then closed my legs. Soon after, I stopped going out in the evenings but nothing satisfied me. I became paralysed by the fear of God; I put on a veil and increasingly distanced myself from the stage. I didn't hesitate but I smoothly slipped into fanaticism and religious fundamentalism. I hated myself, and no matter what I did I always felt dirty and disgusting. All the caresses upon my body seemed to endlessly return like murdering deadly blades that always reminded me of the flames of hell. Abdallah told me of repentance, the mercy of God, the second chance. In contrast to all men who everywhere introduced me to their friends but never to their mothers, Abdallah asked me for my hand in marriage. I learnt to love him by loving God; against the ephemeral love of flesh, he offered me a platonic, timid and tolerant love. I married him in 2000. I put on the jilbab and I definitively gave up the world of performance.

“Without TV, without radio, without telephone, Abdallah deprived me of everything that put temptation before me. He took the keys of the house from me, tamed me and made me trust him. This did not disturb me at all in the beginning: I was too busy to adore God but with time I began to get tired. Friday evening prayer was not enough. I had cut all links with my friends, who were “too free” and “too na-

ked”. A little later, Abdallah obliged me to cut the links with my parents who his brotherhood community considered infidels because they practised Marabout Islam. I then became aware of the bitterness of my reality, I was trapped but it was too late. I thought had I submitted myself to God but, in fact, I had submitted myself again to a man and this time it was worse: I was reduced to slavery in the name of religion.

“The abuse? I can't tell you exactly how it began. I don't think anyone could exactly say how these kinds of things begin. It starts with shouting, it quickly turns to insult, it grows into threats and, very soon, you have a bruised eye. I was whipped when I wanted to resume my studies and mutilated for having greeted an old friend of mine in the street who was not veiled. He took all my study records, my identity card and my passport. He took my jewels, he took my life. I was six months pregnant when he announced his second marriage to me after only two years of our marriage. My rejection meant being beaten for insulting the Koran, until the haemorrhage resulted in a miscarriage. My pride wounded, I refused to be touched by him later but he forced me. I cried, I screamed, but nothing could shake off that savage beast from my body. I was imprisoned at home and raped many times by my own husband. Why didn't I just leave him? You may find it ridiculous but I was afraid of him and frightened of what I would become without him. I had nothing, no home, no child, no job. I had only him, at least until the day I met Wahiba.

“Wahiba made me aware that it was not to Islam that I had converted but to the extremist religious doctrine of Abdallah and his fellow men, who manipulated the verses and interpreted their meaning in their own way. A meaning to subjugate the woman and reduce her to slavery in the name of Allah. I began to look at myself differently, as a complete human being, dignified and deserving

of the same equality and justice as any other human being without any distinction of race, nationality or gender. We are all born equal and dignified, I had understood, and from then nothing else could stop me or frighten me. Following Wahiba's advice, I joined an association providing assistance to victims of domestic violence which trained me in law and psychologically. I began corresponding with women who had experienced or were experiencing the same as me. The association found me a place in a refuge for battered women when making the final arranging for my new job."

The auditorium filled with applause. People stood up, and some were moved to tears.

"Sit down, sit down, please," said the lecturer, "I have not finished yet... For you it is a moving story but it is essential to look at things with more maturity... What I am try-

ing to tell you needs more than applause, we must act. Do you know a battered woman? If so, act, warn those around her, inform the police, talk to them and never get discouraged because they will need more courage than you. Never lose faith because she loses it at every moment. A mass mobilisation is more than urgent. Thousands of women throughout the world suffer violence every day. Stand up! Join an association or found your own! Believe me, there will never be enough. Militant comrades, be citizens! Your struggle will always seem to you a small insignificant drop in the ocean but never forget that the ocean is only made up of drops. Without Wahiba, I wouldn't be here, I would still have my head in the water and my sheets would have found their tragic destiny as shrouds. It is a matter of human dignity. So, against a tragic curtain fall, we must always favour a glorious entrance onto the stage."

## Traffic Light

**Ayah Bseisy, Palestine**

As the green traffic light was on, he was already standing on the pavement, so no car would honk at him. He placed the tissue box, the medals, and some small car accessories down on the pavement... He rubbed his hands really hard, it was freezing. He took a look at his hands, wondering how he had forgotten his gloves... usually his sister reminded him to take them with him.

It is strange how much his life has changed ever since his sister got divorced. He remembers till this day when she was married, and how happy his mother was about her only daughter's marriage, and he still remembers how his mum was crying the day after she left the house...

He was only 21 years old and it's been 11 years since he had decided to leave school in order to work in Jerusalem. He was tempted by the fact that he'd be paid 5,000 NIS per month...

"If I end up a doctor I won't get this amount of money!!" ... These were the words that convinced his mother, and she did her work to convince his father...

"But he should continue his education!!" his father argued.

"Come on, he's not good studying, he's 21 and he's still in the first year of university. His cousin is one year older than him and graduated last month, and he's planning to go to work in Jerusalem as well... So why on earth would you want him to study?"

The mother was looking at the gestures of her husband, it was clear that he needed more persuading. "Wives know best!!" her mother always told her.

"He'll probably spend more years studying, wasting our time. Just let him go and work and he'll help you with the household expenses. It's time for you to rest and leave work!!" she continued, and she succeeded!!!

He still remembers his mum telling him the exact words of the conversation, bragging about how she could convince his father, how delighted he was to leave school and start to work...

The traffic light changed to red. Quickly, he grabbed the car's accessories with both hands and did the usual, moving from one car to another and saying the prices in a very low voice, which could hardly be heard. The two minutes of red light were over so he went back to the pavement, and tried to remember the chain of thoughts that had led him to remember a conversation between him and his mum that took place years ago.

Holding the accessories in his hands, he didn't want to put them down, he didn't want to waste the few seconds of picking them up from the ground, but his hands started turning blue from the cold wind that was slapping them...

"Hope it won't rain," he thought to himself. "Can't risk being sick from working in the rain or not working!!"

His thoughts went back to the day he returned to the house from work in Jerusalem, and seeing his sister sitting with his mother. She wasn't laughing or smiling as she used to do... That was when she found out that her husband couldn't have children. Of course, his mother told him that. Because his sister tried to fake a smile as he asked her what was wrong...

And then he remembered the day he entered the house and found his sister sitting with his mother, her eyes red, but this time his mum didn't tell him what was wrong... His sister collapsed crying and told him that her husband was beating her...

He still remembers this day, 8 years later, when he started shouting at his mother and sister about why they hadn't told them, and promised his sister that he would kill her husband...

And when he sat with his dad later, after he calmed down, they discussed how they could solve this problem, and his dad suggested asking his brother-in-law for a divorce quietly and calmly, but the brother wanted to kill him and started swearing and screaming.

"You're not doing anything!!" the mother said, entering the room. "And stop shouting, we don't want to wake your sister. She'll go back to her husband, put up with him; it's just a phase that will pass!!"

The woman had spoken and the father and brother considered her plan, but were not sure about it. The brother wanted so hard to just go and hit his brother-in-law, but he couldn't.

Only one year after that he still remembers how he got a call from his sister in the middle of his working day. She was crying so hard... he started to ask: "Did he do it again?"

"No!!!" was her answer. "Our mother just passed away this morning."

Even though he remembers his sister's reply, he doesn't remember how he hung up the phone, went to his employer, asked him for permission to leave, and then arrived home. Everything was vague for him...

Months after his mum died, he started missing her, no one to cook for him, no one to wash his clothes, and no one to take care of his sick old father. His sister came as often as she could, but it was never like his mother.

"She should've found you a wife," his sister told him once. "You didn't have to be stubborn and refuse to marry our cousin as our mother suggested," she continued, "guess she always thought of you as her little child and gave you everything you needed."

"She's jealous," he thought to himself. It's just a sister-brother thing that has been going on ever since they were kids, anything they want to argue about, they just say that they were not the favourite child, and then the jealousy issue pops into their heads.

Why didn't he get married? He was in his early 20s and most of his friends were married: "I just love being single!! I suppose after my mum's death we'll see how lovely it is to be single!!"

Red light!!! He woke up from his deep thoughts and ran toward the stopping cars, for 1 minute and 30 seconds had already passed. He was moving between the cars, not much hope of selling anything in the next 30 seconds. He started to move towards the pavement, when a window opened and a boy hardly 20 years old called for him:

"How much is the tissue... doesn't matter, give me one."

"Only 5 NIS," he replied wondering how on earth a boy could have money to own such a car!!! The cars from behind started to honk, he looked up and the light was green, so the boy told him to meet him on the side across the street. So the car parked and he ran after it between the other cars. He didn't even look to check the cars, he just wanted the 1 NIS profit coming from this small transaction... "I should try to sell him more things, damn it. I left the flags on the street... I'll try to sell him the key holder!!"

He went to the car and gave the boy the tissue, and the boy gave him the money. He wanted to offer the rest of his products but the look on the boy's face, and the way he completed the

deal, made him feel so little and insignificant... So he gave him the change and walked back to his corner, trying to sink into his thoughts!!! Insignificant, that was the feeling. "He didn't even look at my face!!! Was I nothing??"

He couldn't remember how long he'd felt this way. It only started when he decided to work at the traffic lights selling gum and newspapers... at that time he started to fade away and become invisible.

He wanted to remember the last time he felt like a full human being, when he was not fading or invisible, when he was a reliable man... It only took him couple of seconds...

He remembered one day when he came back from work, entered the house, smelled food being cooked, closed his eyes and inhaled really deeply... "Mmm... molokheyeh, my favorite, must be my sister cooking for us." There was a big smile on his face as he went into the kitchen, but it soon changed to a frown. His sister was crying while cooking. She looked so surprised that she started to wipe her tears with her apron, as she was faking a smile, saying:

"Oh, dear brother, you're back so soon, you must be hungry."

"Why are you crying??" he interrupted her.

"Look, I made you molokheye, I know you love it," she said as if he hadn't asked her anything.

"Did he do it again? Did he hit you?" he asked.

Suddenly, her cheerful face changed back to a sad face. Her broken spirit was obvious, and she burst into tears, nodding her head in agreement.

He didn't curse, he didn't get mad. He just wrapped his arms around her offering his shoulder to cry on, and she did. She cried like never before, no more hiding tears from him, just crying, and each tear and each voice she made told him how awful and unbearable it was for her.

He grabbed her arms gently, pushed her far away from him to see her face full of tears, looking into her eyes he said:

"You don't have to go back to him, this is your house and it has always been like that. If he doesn't respect you, you don't need him... Do you hear me? You don't need him," and he took the apron and wiped her tears and held her again.

He still remembers his father's reaction to the fact that he wanted to get his sister a divorce. He expected shouting and screaming to try to convince him, but on the contrary he agreed. He said that he felt the unhappiness of his child, but didn't want to interfere unless she wanted him to.

So his father made some calls inviting the elders of the family for a cup of coffee and mentioning a problem, but not saying what it was.

His memories were interrupted by a man calling for a tissue box. He didn't notice the red light, so he jumped from his place and ran quickly to the car driver who called, not noticing the medals and other things that were sitting in his lap. Everything fell down on the ground, but he jumped over them and went to the driver to sell him the tissue box. The driver gave him 20 NIS and as he put out his hand to take the change, the driver said: "You can keep the change."

He smiled, took out the change and said it's not fair, and gave the driver the change and thanked him. The driver smiled and said: "Have a nice day brother."

What a change from someone who didn't even look into his face and treated him as an inferior, to someone who was nice and treated him as an equal, and above all he called him brother!!

The light wasn't green yet, but he had to go back where he had left his things scattered all over the ground and started picking them up. He started picking up the mess as once he had

picked up the pieces of his sister's shattered life. He remembered how he was frustrated by the reaction of the family elders as they suggested his sister should go back to her husband, saying that Al Qur'an says that she must endure it...

He still remembers how he started screaming that God never said that humans must be treated with violence and that he would ask for a divorce whether they went with him and his father or not... One of the old men asked him to calm down or else he would destroy his sister's life.

"I'll destroy her life??? I'm saving it. I'm not waiting for her to come back to us in a coffin!! We came to you because we respect you enough to go with us to their house to end everything smoothly and peacefully, but if you don't want to do that, if you don't value my sister's life or her pride, I guess I'll just act on my own and deal with things on my own."

How could he say such things? What would everyone say in the village? All the men stood up at the same time as if they had been practising for a long time, and the elder one said:

"Then go. You're on your own with this madness," and with that they all left the house.

He turned his face to his father expecting him to be mad, but he was wearing a smile instead.

"You're a man now, and tomorrow we'll go and finish the whole thing."

Everything was done easily, they didn't expect that. He planned to get married to another girl, hoping to have children, but of course that didn't happen and now 10 years later it still hadn't happened.

"God punished him," his sister used to say!!

Red light, then green light, then red, moving around the stopped cars and sometimes selling and sometimes not... It went on till the daylight started to fade. It was already cloudy, and it looked as if the day got shorter than usual. As he looked up at the sky, he felt some drops of rain falling on his face. He decided to call it off for the day and go home and he gathered all the medals and the rest of the accessories. He walked 15 minutes to reach the only public transportation leading to his village, and got onto the old bus, waited another hour until the bus was full of people. He took the money from his pocket and started calculating the how much he had made that day. It was such a bad day; he hadn't even earned his bus fare. He remembered when once he earned lots of money from selling flags, because it was the time when the great poet died, and everyone was putting flags on their cars and holding them. He remembers how delighted he was, not that the poet was dead, but because on that day he made lots of money and that he didn't have to walk for 15 minutes but took the taxi. He didn't have to wait for hours for the bus to fill, but took the taxi which usually costs double. So the bus moved at last and, during the 30 minutes on the way back home, he tried to remember the name of the great poet, but couldn't. He felt guilty for they always said he was the best national poet, wrote poems for the country, the cause and the people and, above all, him being dead created the best working day ever. Oh how guilty he felt at this idea... He tried to remember his name, but nothing... so he decided to wait until he got home and ask his sister.

Once he got home he smelled the food; his sister had heated leftovers from the day before. He took off his shoes by the door, went in and sat on the mattress, waiting for the food. As his sister was putting the food on the plate with only one spoon, he asked if she was going to eat, or his father, but she mentioned that they had eaten earlier, so he silently ate his food. He was really tired.

“It must be the cold, that’s why I’m peculiarly tired,” he thought to himself.

As his sister was bringing the tea to him, he asked:

“What’s the name of the poet who died last year??”

“Why do you want to know??” she replied.

“Well, it just came up and it’s on my mind and I can’t remember his name.”

“I can’t remember either,” she said walking toward the kitchen to wash the dishes.

He poured the tea in the small cup and started sipping it with the fresh sage. He drowned his thoughts trying to remember the name of the poet... It popped into his mind and he started smiling at how silly he was not remembering such a common name. His sister came in and noticed the big smile on his face.

“Why would you want to remember his name? It’s not like he remembers your name,” she said.

“Maybe not, but if he had met me I think he would’ve written a poem about me,” he replied.

“You’re being absurd now. Why do you think your life is interesting enough to be written in a poem?” she asked.

“Well, it’s just a story of another man living in a village selling things to cars at traffic lights, acting invisibly... but someone will see me and won’t think I’m invisible.”

He took the last sip of his tea, placed his head on the pillow and imagined many scenarios of how he’ll meet someone who’ll see him, remember him, smile at him... and maybe, just maybe, they will write about him.

## THC i LCD

### Ilija Đurović. Crna Gora

U Amsterdamu, na sreću, mogu da hodam ulicom sa pet grama marihuane u džepu. Do sad nisam provjerio da li pravilo o pet grama znači da u drugom džepu mogu da imam još toliko. I tako sa svakim sljedećim džepom na mojim pantalonama sa pet džepova. Po pet grama u pet džepova znači 25 grama trave u pantalonama. Ne računam dva džepa na košulji, naravno.

Rado bih razgovarao sa policijom kad bi me zaustavili. Spreman sam da se držim svoje ideje od 5 grama po džepu. Uz dosta engleskog i malo lošeg holandskog dosađivaću im dok ne odu. „Ike, Ike, dont spik holand, dont spik holand. Poket gras fajv dont spik andrstend.“ I sve tako dok se ne uhvate za kapu i nastave dalje. Niko nije raspoložen da maltretira azilanta. I dalje se osjećam kao politički iako me u džepu prijatno žulja njihov pasoš. Državljanin sam ali se ipak osjećam gadno. Kao višak. Ili otpad. Otpadak, tačnije.

Što god da se desi danas je moj dan i niko ne želi da me uznemirava. Znaju ko sam i odakle sam i svi su čuli da je danas uhapšen onaj kojeg su svi tražili. Najtraženiji. Iza rešetaka je. Naručio je jagode i čeka. Izgleda loše. Sa kapom koja je nekoliko brojeva veća kao i koža koja mu se nekako topi sa lica. U kofi šopu je televizor bio uključen, za one koji vole da prate radnju kad se urade, a svi kanali su se razbudili kad je stigla vijest. Monstrum je uhapšen. Kasapin iza rešetka. Duhovi konačno mirni. I tako dalje u istom dosadnom tonu.

Sjedim i čekam da se kroz pomjerenu svijest probije holandski spiker. Konobar se okreće prema meni. On me zna. Od početka sjedim u istoj stolici i upoznali smo se. Prije četiri godine mi je prišao i rekao da mnogo pušim. Rekao sam mu da tako lakše patim za zemljom. Nije mu bila jasna emigrantska patetika. Kad sam izgovorio ime prostora koji sam napustio mislio je da govorim o Africi, „ili tako nešto“, rekao je. Onda sam pomislio da to i zvuči nekako afrički. Black Mountain. Crna Gora. Montenegro. Afrika, brate, nema što.

Nastavio sam da dolazim u isti kofi šop i da pušim mnogo a konobar je svaki moj sljedeći upad ukrašavao imenima gradova zemlje za koju je shvatio da nije afrička. Balkans, I found it, its on Balkans, ponavljao je. A ja sam rekao Western Balkans, my friend, thats the worst one, i smijali smo se, lijepo smo se smijali.

Od tada smo neka vrsta prijatelja. Ne pričamo mnogo ali se razumijemo. On me pogleda, ja mu namignem, on donese koka kolu ja smotam, ništa više od toga. Kad sam dobio pasoš rekao mi je: „Ista govna, eto što smo sad“. Moj holandski je bio sve bolji, pogotovo kad se naduвам, a on je tvrdio da govorim bolje od lokalaca. Dopadao mu se moj akcenat, a ja sam ponekad mogao i da se šalim na tuđem jeziku, što je, smatrao sam, znak da nisam toliko loš.

Dobar si ti tip, Montenegro, govorio mi je kad popuši sa mnom. Inače ne pušim, Montenegro, ali ti si dobar tip i nije mi loše kad mi praviš društvo. Sjeban si ti, Montenegro, a meni ne smetaju sjebani tipovi.

Tako je govorio konobar, sve dok mu nisam donio Džeja. Svježe iz metroa preko ruke drugova po nostalgiji, kroz prazni kofi šop pustio sam glas, nedjelja i svi su tu, a kofi šop prazan. Montenegro, pa ti si luđi nego što sam mislio, a muzika ti nije afrička ni za kurac. Tako je rekao.

On me prvi pogledao kad su svi cnoovi bbcevi i abcevi ovoga svijeta javili da je „mastermind of the biggest war crime after second world war arrested“. Montenegrino, pa ovo je onaj vaš.

Nije naš, rekao sam, previše umoran za objašnjavanje. Ali kao da jeste, blizu smo, skoro komšije, dopunio sam.

Nekoliko naduvanih Holandana okrenulo se prema meni, nisam znao što da uradim pa sam visoko podigao džoint i rekao: „Jebi ga, ne služe alkohol, inače bih vas častio, takav je red“. Vjerovatno su mislili da sam lud, mada ne mnogo ljudi od njih, pa su samo vratili izbuljene poglede na ekran.

Svi su gledali generala kako dijeli čokoladu i mazi djecu. Misle da je to užasno. Da od toga ne može gore. A može. Ne znaju koliko može.

Iznenada zainteresovani naduvani umovi nisu skidali pogled sa ekrana. „Mastermind of the biggest“ ih očigledno zanima. Pojedini odmahuju glavom, a moj konobar me povremeno gleda i slegne ramenima.

Njihova pažnje me udaljila i gurnula u novi džoint i teške misli. Nije mi jasno kakve veze srebro ima sa imenom sela. Tu teško da ima srebra. Tu se i dalje izvlače samo kosti. Kao da se razmnožavaju ispod natopljene zemlje. Tako sam mislio dok su vrijedni novinari tražili prve žrtve. Majke stradalih su zadovoljne *ali ništa ne može da izbriše bol*. Ne postoji hapšenje koje uklanja takve podočnjake. Oči se iz mračnih duplji teško vraćaju na svjetlost. Ironija jutarnjeg sunca ne ulazi u takva udubljenja. Summertime, and the livin' is easy. A one bi voljele da ga vide na giljotini. Traže od suda da im ga preda, na pravdu boga kažu i gledaju prema nebu. Daleko su, mislim, a „mastermind“ će uskoro da leti za Hag, one ostaju, on stiže, a ja sam blizu, Amsterdam-Hag vozom, mala stvar, a usput bih mogao da potražim Džonija, da pitam za Ljuba i ostale „tamo kod nas“. One bi se rado mijenjale sa mnom, odavde bi lakše otišle na protest koji ne bi promijenio stvar. Ja više nikome ne mogu da pomognem a mastermind će svoje da dobije samo da prvo dobije jagode. One su dobre za krvnu sliku, kažu.

I tako će da prođu dani, mislim. Baj baj lijepa prijedpodneva i poslijepodneva, uz pristojnu gramažu trave i diskaveri čenel u kofi šopu na lcdu. A tako sam volio pjesmu kitova kad se naduвам i smjestim u svoj ćošak. Svi smo voljeli pjesmu kitova, osjećao sam to. Zidovi kofi šopa su posrtali pod dubokom plavom koju je prskao lcd, a gusti dim je stvarao efekat talasa, mogao si da gledaš i da razdvojiš velike od malih, talas za surfere, talas za dobru zajebanciju uz obalu, talas koji bi ozbiljno zaljuljao barku, i sve to vidiš a samo sjediš u svom ćošku. Katodna cijev je ni za šta, pomislio sam toliko puta.

A sad nas čekaju dani sa „mastemindom“. Izručice ga ili neće. Protesti, slavlje, ja tebi mater ne nego ja tebi. I sve to bez cilja jer mastermind je mastermind i sigurno putuje za Den Hag, to je jedino jasno, ako već nije tamo, jer dani brzo prolaze kad duvaš i slušaš kitove.

Nekoliko dana i gotovo. Ševeningen bluz i kofi šop. On u sudnici, mastermind sa kapom i jagode su odradile svoje, nije više onako blijed i koža mu djeluje nekako svježije. Opet liči na onog starog. Čiko sa čokoladom. Kamera snima ložu i hvata majke, ipak su došle, nisu žalile pare, odriješile su kesu sjele na avion i eto ih. Viču. Neke plaču a jedna ga samo gleda. Kamerman i ja i svi ostali jasno vidimo da ga ona samo gleda. Ne plače niti viče ali ga prati. Takav pogled ne može da se ne osjeti. I on ga osjeća. Znao bih to i da nisam naduvan. Osjetio je taj pogled od kojeg ne može da se pobjegne i pogledao je prema njoj. Prema loži i prema majkama. A ona, ona koja ga samo gleda i ne plače niti psuje, sad je iskolačila oči i viče, glasno da je svi čuju,

„gdje je moj sin?“, „gdje je moj sin!“, viče i kofi šop ćuti, a ona nastavlja i kamerman je snima. Mastermind mirno sjedi. On zna i mi znamo da je staklo neprobojno za metak i zvuk, možda joj čita sa usana, možda ne, ali se ipak osmjehuje. Ponovo liči na onog starog of chocolate, osmjehuje se i gleda prema loži iz koje se ne čuje pitanje, kratko gleda i spušta pogled prema sudiji. To je on. Sad sam siguran da jeste i više niko me ne gleda iako je on „onaj moj“. Konobar je u toku i ne propušta prenose suđenja. Izlazim na ulicu i više me nije briga. Amsterdam je veliki, počinju vreline a ja nisam više azilant, imam pasoš i sad je „onaj moj“ ustvari „onaj njihov“ a moji su samo džepovi i svaki je težak ravno pet grama. I vjerujem da mi je lakše. Bolje je što sam pobjegao prije nego što je mastermind postao mastermind i prije nego što se moja zemlja odvojila. I ništa me ne zanima jer više nisam Montenegrino nego Holandez sa 35 grama trave i sopstvenim viđenjem zakona. Želim da vjerujem da me ne zanima, ali od „onih mojih“ se teško bježi. Zanima me. To znam iako lebdim i ne želim da znam. Dotičem me. Ipak, Montenegrino, ne bježi se tako lako.

## THC and LCD<sup>1</sup>

**Ilija Đurović. Montenegro**

Luckily in Amsterdam I can walk the streets with five grams of marijuana in my pocket. I haven't checked yet whether the five-gram rule means that I can have the same amount in the other one. And so on with every other pocket in my five-pocket trousers. Five grams times five pockets means twenty-five grams of weed in my trousers. That's not counting my two shirt pockets, of course.

I'd be happy to talk to the police if they stopped me. I'm prepared to stick with the theory of five grams per pocket. With a bit of English and some bad Dutch, I'll bore them until they leave. "Ik, ik, dont spik holand, dont spik holand. Poket gras fayf dont spik andrstend." Until they touch their caps and keep on walking. No one wants to harass an asylum seeker. I still feel like one, even though their passport is pleasantly rubbing against me in my pocket. I'm a national, but I still feel disgusting. Surplus. Waste. One for the reject bin, to be exact.

Whatever happens, today's my day and no one wants to bother me. They know who I am and where I come from and they've all heard that the one everybody's been looking for was arrested today. The most wanted one. He's behind bars. He's asked for strawberries and now he's waiting. He doesn't look so good. His cap is several sizes too big and his skin seems like it is somehow melting off his face. The coffee shop TV's, on for those who like to see the action while they're high, and all the channels come alive when the news

breaks. The monster arrested. The butcher behind bars. Spirits finally at peace. And so on and on. Same old story.

I'm sitting, waiting for the Dutch news-reader to break through my displaced consciousness. The waiter turns to me. He knows me. I've been sitting in the same spot from day one so he knows me. Four years ago he came up and said I smoked a lot. I told him it makes it easier to suffer for my country. The emigrant pathos was lost on him. When I named the place I'd left, he said he thought I was talking about Africa "or somewhere like that." Then I figured it does sound African in a way. Black Mountain. Crna Gora. Montenegro. Africa, bro, can't deny it.

I kept coming to the same coffee shop and kept smoking a lot, and the waiter greeted each of my entrances with names of towns from the countries he realized weren't African. "Balkans, I found it, it's the Balkans," he repeated. I said, "Western Balkans, my friend, that's the worst one," and we had a good laugh.

Since then we've sort of been friends. We don't say much, but we understand each other. He looks at me, I nod at him, he brings me a Coca Cola, I roll up, that's pretty much it. When I got my passport, he said, "Same shit, that's what we are now." My Dutch was improving, it was particularly good when I was stoned, and he claimed I spoke better than the locals. He liked my accent and I was able to joke around in this new, foreign language, which I took as a sign that my Dutch wasn't all that bad.

"You're a good guy, Montenegrino," he said when he smoked with me. "By the way,

1. This edited version of the original translation was created by Stuart Dyke, Mary Fons i Fleming, Paula James, Mary Ellen Kerans, Aisha Prigann and Irwin Temkin between March and September of 2012.

Montenegrino, I don't smoke, but you're a good guy and hanging out with you is alright. You're fucked up, Montenegrino, and I get on with fucked up characters."

That's how the waiter talked until I introduced him to Dzej. In the empty coffee shop, fresh from the subway and the world of homesick compatriots, I started singing: "*Nedelja i svi su tu...*" The coffee shop being empty. "Montenegrino, you're crazier than I thought, and that music isn't fucking African at all," he said.

He's the first to look over at me when all the BBCs, CNNs and ABCs of the world report that "the mastermind of the biggest war crime since the Second World War" has been arrested.

"Montenegrino, this is one of yours."

"He's not ours," I say, too tired to explain, "But it's almost as if he is. We're close, almost neighbours," I add.

Several stoned Dutchmen turn towards me. I don't know what to do so I raise my joint high and say, "Fuck it, they don't serve alcohol or I'd buy you all a drink, as is the custom." They probably think I'm crazy, but not much crazier than them, so they just turn their lost gazes back to the screen.

They all watch the general giving chocolate and hugs to the children. They think it's terrible. That it can't get any worse. But it can. They have no idea how much worse it can get.

Suddenly interested, stoned heads can't take their eyes off the screen. They're obviously interested in the "mastermind of the biggest." Some of them shake their heads and my waiter occasionally glances over at me and shrugs.

Their attention alienates me and drives me to dark thoughts and another joint. I can't wrap my head around silver having anything to do with the name of that village. There's hardly any silver there. The only thing being dug up is bones. As if they're multiplying un-

der the damp ground. That's what I thought when the diligent journalists were searching for the first victims. The mothers of the dead are pleased but nothing can erase their pain. No arrest can remove the dark circles under their eyes. They're so deep set now they can hardly turn to the light. The irony of the morning sun doesn't penetrate such darkness. Summertime, and the livin' is easy. But they'd love to see him hang. They want the court to hand him over to them, have him answer to God's justice, that's what they're saying as they look to the sky. I'm thinking they're far away, and the "mastermind" will soon be flying to The Hague, they'll still be there and he'll be here. I'm not far, it's easy to get from Amsterdam to The Hague by train. I could look up Johnnie on the way, ask about Ljubo and the others who are "ours." The mothers would gladly switch places with me, it'd be easier for them to go to the protests from here, but it wouldn't change anything. I can't help anyone anymore, but Mastermind will get what he deserves after he gets his strawberries. Strawberries are good for your blood, they say.

This is how the days will go by, I expect. So long to beautiful coffee shop mornings and afternoons with a decent supply of weed and Discovery Channel on the LCD. Stoned and sitting in my corner, how I loved the song of those huge whales. We all did, I could feel it. The LCD splashed deep blue on the coffee shop walls and they tumbled under waves of thick smoke. You could tell large waves from small ones, surfers' waves from waves for messing about on the beach, waves that would seriously shake the boat, you could see all of that just sitting in your corner. The cathode-ray tube is useless, or so I've often thought.

And more days with Mastermind lie ahead of us. He'll be extradited. Or not. Protests, celebrations, fuck your mother, no I fuck your mother. And all pointless because

Mastermind is always the mastermind and nothing will keep them from taking him to The Hague, that's the only thing that's clear. If he's not already there of course, the days fly when you're stoned and listening to whales.

Couple of days and it's done. Scheveningen blues and the coffee shop. Mastermind's in the courtroom with his cap on. The strawberries did their bit, he's no longer as pale as he was. Skin seems fresher. He's himself again. The old man with the chocolate. The TV cameras are filming the gallery and show the mothers. They came anyway, never mind the money. They reached into their pockets, got on the plane and there they are. Yelling. Some cry and one just looks at him. The camera crew and I and everyone else can see that she's the only one looking at him. She's not crying or yelling. She simply fixes her eyes on him. A gaze like that, you can't help feeling it. And he does feel it, too. I'd know that even if I wasn't stoned. He feels that gaze, the kind you can't escape from, and looks in her direction. Towards the gallery and the mothers. The woman who's simply looking at him, who isn't crying or cursing, starts to yell loudly so everyone can hear. Her eyes widen and she yells, "Where's my son?" The coffee

shop remains silent, but she keeps at it and the cameras stay with her. Mastermind sits calmly. He knows and we know that the glass is bulletproof and soundproof. Maybe he's reading her lips, maybe not, but he's still smiling. He looks like his old self again, the man with the chocolates. He smiles and looks at the gallery, the question silenced by the glass, and glances down at the judge. It's him. I'm sure of that now. No one's looking at me even though he's "one of mine." The waiter follows the news and never misses the trial. I go outside and I don't care anymore. Amsterdam's big, it's getting hot, and I'm no longer an asylum seeker. I have a passport and he's not one of mine. He's one of theirs. Only the pockets are mine, each one weighing five grams. I believe my life's easier. It's better that I left before the mastermind became Mastermind and my country separated. I don't care about anything anymore because I'm no longer Montenegrino, but a Dutchman with thirty-five grams of weed and my own vision of the law. I want to believe that I don't care, but it's hard to escape these people who are my people. I do care. I know it, even though I'm floating and don't want to know. It gets to me. You can't escape that easily, Montenegrino.

## אחרי אל-פאוור

### פנינה גפן. ישראל

את ג'מילה לא פגשתי כבר שנתיים.

שנתיים שאני מדמינת את העיניים הירוקות שלה, את המטפחת המתהדקת תחת סנטרה, את שמלת הבורדו הארוכה שלה. אני זוכרת טבעת כסופה מנוקדת אבנים קטנות על אצבע דקה וארוכה.

ייתכן ועד היום היא הולכת בצידי הדרכים; עם תיק עור שחור התלוי על אמצע כתפה, ועם רגליה הנושאות אותה שני קילומטרים כל יום, עד לבית הספר בו היא מלמדת.

באותו יום שחתם את חודש אפריל יצאתי לכיוון ירושלים.

הרכב דהר במורד הכביש, ממושעם ללחיצותי על דוושת הגז. כל סיבוב בכביש חד היה מעלה בדמיוני, כל פעם מחדש, את הרגע בו צלף רעול פנים מגיח מאחורי סלע, מכונן אלי רובה ומרסס אותי ללא רחמים.

הרכב מתהפך, וסביבו ניתזים אלפי רסיסים של זכוכית, חלקם נוצצים בשמש וחלקם מגואלים בדם,

ואני לכודה בין תחתית הרכב ההפוכה כלפי מעלה, לבין האספלט הרוחח, וסביבי טבע שומם וקליעים פזורים למרגלות עץ אורן זקן.

אחרי קטע כביש צר וארוך, מתרחבים הדרכים והנוף נפתח, ומתוך פיתולי הדרך מבליחה אל פאוור ואיתה שמים ואור, ופזות כרובית ומלפפון; טרקטורים ישנים נעים באיטיות על אדמה לחה, זוג נערים יושבים כפופי גו על עגלה רתומה לחמור, ולצד בור מים קטן בצד הדרך יושבים חבורת פלאחים קשישים, כשברכיהם צמודים לחזם.

ציפורים צייצו אז בחדוה, השמש היתה גדולה והאוויר נקי.

ואני סגורה במכונית, איני יכולה להושיט יד אל פיסת הדרך הזו, ונפשי מייחלת לברוח מבעד לחלון ולשבת בצל בקתת הפח העלובה. אני לוכדת במבטי אשה עבת בשר, בידיה סלים ומתוכם מפציע בליט

ירוץ ורך של עלים, טיפות מים מנצנצות מן הסבך הטרי, ובאותו רגע אני מוכנה להחליף אותה בהליכתה הכבדה, רק לצאת כבר מהרכב, לצאת. לנשום את הלחלוחיות שבאוויר, לשטוף פנים עם מים מן הבור, להסתכל מקרוב על חיבורה של הכרובית לאדמה.

אל פאוור נעלמת מאחורי הגב שלי והדרכים מתרוקנות מבתים. רביעיית ילדים עם ילקוטים משוכים כלפי מטה מסובבים את ראשם לאחור ומלווים אותי במבטם עד לאחר העיקול הבא.

לפני אל הג'רה הבחנתי בדמות אשה רוכנת בשולי הכביש, תנועותיה תזזיתיות וכל כולה אומר בהלה. ניירות לבנים התעופפו סביבה ברוח; חלקם היו תלויים על השיחים, חלקם פזורים על הכביש, וחלקם קמוטים בערמה קטנה תחת אבן.

מרחוק סימנה לי לעצור בתנועות ניפנוף נרגשות והצביעה על הכביש. לפתתי את ההגה ובחנתי בחשש את השבילים בצידי הדרך. הנה הצלף יצא עוד רגע מאחורי השיחים ואני שלי אגמור כאן

בין אל פאוור לאל הג'רה. קול קטן מבפנים צייץ לי להאט, והאטתי. האשה שבה להתכופף והמשיכה לאסוף את ניירותיה במרץ.

וידאתי בעוד כמה מבטים מהירים שהאשה לבדה. המשכתי להאט עד שהרכב נעצר. היא נעמדה מולי עם ערמת דפים בין ידיה לחזה שלה, ומבעד לשימשה ראיתי פנים יפות, סומק ורוד ומטפחת הדוקה סביב. העפתי מבט במראה האחורית. אין איש מלבדה.

העברתי להילוך ניוטרל ויצאתי מהרכב. היא אימצה אל ליבה את הדפים הקמוטים והתבוננה בי בחשש. עמדתי מולה ושתקתי. סביבנו היו פזורים עוד ניירות, על חלקם סימון שחרחר של גלגלי רכב. משהו במבט הקפוא שלה ריכך אותי.

"אני יכולה לעזור לך..". פלטתי לבסוף והצבעתי על ניירות שניתלו על שיח קוצים. היא התכופפה אל הדפים שלה, ממשיכה להביט בי, שותקת.

"את מדברת עברית?", "שאלתי אחרי דקה של שקט, "את מבינה מה שאני אומרת?"

היא הניחה כמות נוספת של דפים תחת האבן והצביעה צפונה, "אנא למדרסה" אמרה בערבית.

נטלתי לידי כמה דפים פזורים, עליהם כתב יד צפוף בערבית. מסרתי לידיה את הדפים האחרונים שהיו פזורים על הכביש והיא החזירה לי הינהון בראשה.

סובארו סטיישן לבנה עצרה לידינו בחריקה, ומתוך החלון הציץ ראשו של תושב היישוב שלי.

"מה את עושה פה?" הוא צעק אלי, "הכל בסדר?"

"הכל בסדר, אין שום בעיה", מיהרתי לומר וניערתי את האבק על חולצתי.

"את בטוחה?" הוא שאל ונתן מבט חשדני באשה שלצידו. "כן, כן, זה בסדר", אמרתי קצת יותר בתקיפות. "תזיהרי", הוא הפטיר ונסע לו, מסתכל עלינו דרך המראה הקדמית שלו.

"שוקראן.. שוקראן", מילמלה האשה וחייכה חיוך נבוך. הסתכלתי עליה. אשה יפה, תיק עור, נעלי עקב, וערמת דפים מלוכלכת תחת בית שחיה.

"את.. את הולכת ברגל עכשיו?" שאלתי והדגמתי עם אצבעותי תנועות הליכה. הרגשתי פתאום שזאת שאלה טפשית.

"את רוצה טרמפ?" שאלתי בהבזק של רגע, והצבעתי על המכונית שלי ועליה לסירוגין, מפנה את סנטרי צפונה. פניה של האשה אורו והיא הינהנה.

בנסיעה ראיתי איך היא מעבירה את ידיה שוב ושוב על הניירות כדי ליישרם וחשתי חמלה.

"את מורה? יו אר א טי צ'ר? יו אר אין א מדרסה?"

"אין'וה, מדרסה..". השיבה לי האשה בהנהון נמרץ. היא הצביעה על ניירותיה ופתחה בשטף מילים נרגש, תוך שהיא מצביעה על עצמה ועל הניירות לסירוגין.

לא הבנתי מילה, רק הנהנתי והסבתי אליה את מבטי מידי כמה רגעים.

"הון", הצביעה לעבר שביל שהוביל אל מבנה מרוחק. "שוקראן..", הינהנה מולי שוב ושוב כשעצרתי את הרכב לצד הכביש. היא יצאה מהרכב ושתי ילדות שצעדו בסמוך אלינו ניתלו עליה בשמחה ובחנו אותי בעניין. הן היו לבושות בחולצת פסים ירוקה.

"אנא ג'מילה", קראה אלי מבעד לחלון הפתוח. "ג'מילה ניזאר."

נופפתי לה לשלום.

זה היה יום יפה. שמש גדולה ורוח קלה, כזו שהיתה מפזרת את שיערה של ג'מילה אם לא היתה מכסה אותו. הפלגתי לדרכי, ובליבי התרגשות וכעס. שמחה ועצבנות.

בערב צלצל הטלפון. על הקו היה דודי, הרבש"צ של היישוב.

"תגידי", הוא שאל, "זה נכון שלקחת איתך אשה מוסלמית ברכב היום?"

"אהההה...כן", השבתי באריכות, חשה לפתע שנתפסתי על עברה.

"את נורמאלית", הוא שאל בנימת תוכחה, "את יודעת איזה התרעות יש עכשיו על האיזור שלנו, מה נפל עלייך? את לא יודעת שלא מכניסים לאוטו שום ערבי?"

מראה פניה של ג'מילה והניירות הפזורים עלו מולי באחת.

"תבין דודי", עניתי בקול חלש "לא ממש הצעתי לה טרמפ, רק ראיתי הרבה ניירות מפוזרים על הכביש, לא יודעת למה עצרתי, פשוט..."

"זה ממש לא משנה מה היה שם", הוא אמר בקול חמור, "אסור לעצור לאף אחד על הכביש, מבינה?"

"מבינה", לחשתי וניתקתי.

בלילה שכבתי על המיטה ובהיתי בתיקרה. חשבתי על ג'מילה ניזאר.

איפה היא גרה? מה היא מלמדת? התהפכתי שוב ושוב ולא הצלחתי להירדם. לא הצלחתי להגדיר לעצמי מה אני מרגישה. תחושה מוזרה ומעיקה עטפה אותי.

כשלבסוף נרדמתי, חלמתי שאני עומדת על כרובית ענקית, ידי פרושות לצדדים בניסיון לשמור על שיווי משקל. לרגלי הכרובית התרוצצו ילדים קטנטנים שניסו לטפס עליה ללא הצלחה.

חלקם טיפסו על סולם רעוע שהתפרק לפתע, חלקם קפצו ונופפו בידיהם, ואני רק המשכתי לעמוד על הכרובית, ידי פרושות בביטחון, והכרובית נעה באיטיות מצד לצד, ימין ושמאל.

החלום התעמעם לעת בוקר. דבר אחד אני זוכרת בבהירות עד היום:

זאת היתה הכרובית הלבנה ביותר שראיתי מעודי.

## After el-Fawar

**Pnina Geffen.** Israel

I haven't seen Jamilla for two years.

Two years in which I've been imagining her green eyes, the scarf wrapped tightly under her chin, her long maroon dress. I remember a silver ring dotted with tiny stones on her long, narrow finger. She may still be walking along the side of the road, a black purse slung from the middle of her shoulder, her legs carrying her two kilometres each day to the school where she teaches.

On that last day of April I set out for Jerusalem. The car roared down the road, obeying my pressure on the gas pedal. Every sharp turn of the road made me imagine anew the moment in which a masked sniper would appear behind a rock, aim his rifle at me, and, without mercy, spray me with bullets.

The car turns over, spewing thousands of glass splinters, some of them glinting in the sunlight and some of them drenched in blood, and I'm trapped between the bottom of the overturned car and the scorching asphalt, and around me are barren nature and spent bullets scattered at the foot of an old pine tree.

After a long narrow stretch, the roads get wider and the vista expands, and el-Fawar emerges out of the twists of the road, and with it the sky and light, and fields of cauliflower and cucumbers; old tractors moving slowly on damp earth, a pair of boys sitting hunched over on a cart yoked to a donkey, and a group of farmers sitting near a small water cistern, their knees drawn close to their chests. Birds sang joyously then, the sun was large, and the air was clean.

And I am locked in the car, unable to reach out to this stretch of the road, and my

soul desires to escape through the window and sit in the shade of the rickety tin shack. My gaze falls on a heavy woman, her hands filled with baskets from which a soft jumble of green leaves protrudes, drops of water glistening on the fresh bunch, and at that very moment I would exchange places with her, with her heavy gait, just to get out of the car, to get out. To breathe the moisture in the air, to rinse my face with water from the cistern, to look closely at the cauliflower's connection to the earth.

El-Fawar disappears behind my back and the roads empty of houses. A quartet of children with schoolbags pulled way down their backs turn their heads back and follow me with their gaze until the next curve.

Before el-Hajara I noticed a woman bent over the shoulder of the road, her motions frantic and everything about her expressing panic. White papers blew about her in the wind; some of them hung on the bushes, some were strewn on the road, and some were crumpled in a little pile under a rock.

From a distance she motioned to me to stop, using agitated waving motions, and pointed at the road. I gripped the steering wheel and anxiously studied the paths on the side of the road. Here the sniper would come out in a moment from behind the bushes and I would end my life here between el-Fawar and el-Hajara. A small voice inside me piped up to tell me to slow down, and I slowed down. The woman bent down again and continued energetically picking up the papers.

With another few glances I made sure that the woman was alone. I kept slowing down until the car stopped. She stood op-

posite me with a pile of pages between her hands and her chest, and through the windshield I saw a pretty face with pink rouge and a scarf tied tightly around it. I gave a quick look in the rear-view mirror. There was no one besides her.

I shifted to neutral and got out of the car. She pressed the crumpled papers to her chest and looked at me fearfully. I stood opposite her and was silent. Around us more papers were scattered, on some of them the black marks of car tyres. Something in her frozen gaze touched me.

“Can I help you...,” I blurted out in the end in Hebrew and pointed at the papers that hung on a thorny bush. She continued looking at me, silently.

“Do you speak Hebrew?” I asked after a minute of silence. “Do you understand what I’m saying?”

She put another bunch of papers under the rock and pointed northward.

“I’m going to the school,” she said in Arabic.

I picked up some of the scattered papers, covered in dense Arabic handwriting. I handed her the last of the papers that had been strewn on the road and she gave me a nod in return.

A white Subaru station wagon screeched to a halt near us, and a resident of my community stuck his head out the window.

“What are you doing here?” he yelled at me. “Is everything alright?”

“Everything’s alright, there’s no problem,” I answered hurriedly and brushed the dust off my blouse.

“Are you sure?” he asked, looking suspiciously at the woman next to me.

“Yes, yes, it’s okay,” I said a little more assertively.

“Be careful,” he said in parting and drove off, looking at us in his front rear-view mirror.

“Thank you, thank you,” the woman murmured in Arabic and gave me an embarrassed smile. I looked at her. A pretty woman, a leather purse, high heels, and a pile of dirty papers under her arm.

“Are you... are you walking now?” I asked, and I mimed the movement with my fingers. Suddenly I felt that it was a stupid question.

“Do you want a ride?” I asked in a moment’s flash of inspiration, and I pointed to my car and at her in alternation. The woman’s face lit up and she nodded.

As I drove I saw how she kept moving her hands over the papers to straighten them, and I felt compassion for her.

“Are you a teacher?” I asked in Hebrew.

Then, mixing English and Arabic, I asked, “You are a teacher? You are in a madrasseh?”

“Yes, a school...” the woman replied in Arabic with an energetic nod. She pointed at the papers and poured out a flood of excited words, pointing first at herself and then at the papers and back at herself.

I didn’t understand a word. I only nodded and looked at her every few moments.

“Here,” she said in Arabic, pointing at a path that led to a distant building.

“Thank you...” she said and nodded toward me again and again when I stopped the car at the side of the road. She got out of the car and two girls who were walking nearby hung on her joyfully and looked at me with interest. They were wearing green-striped blouses.

“I’m Jamilla,” she called to me through the open window. “Jamilla Nizar.”

I waved goodbye to her.

That was a beautiful day. A large sun and a light breeze, the kind that would have spread Jamilla’s hair if she hadn’t covered it. I sailed on my way, and my heartfelt excitement and anger. Joy and nervousness.

In the evening the phone rang. It was Dudi, the security officer of the community.

“Tell me, is it true that you took a Muslim woman in your car today?” he asked.

“Uh ... yes,” I answered slowly, suddenly feeling I had been caught breaking the law.

“Are you out of your mind?” he asked in a scolding tone. “Do you know what kind of alerts there are in our area? What’s wrong with you? Don’t you know that you don’t let any Arab into your car?”

Suddenly, Jamilla’s face and the scattered papers appeared before me.

“Listen, Dudi,” I answered in a weak voice, “I didn’t actually offer her a ride, I just saw a lot of papers scattered on the road, I don’t know why I stopped, I just...”

“It really doesn’t matter what happened there,” he said in a stern voice. “It is forbidden to stop for anyone on the road. You understand?”

“I understand,” I whispered and hung up.

That night I lay on my bed and stared at the ceiling. I thought about Jamilla Nizar. Where does she live? What does she teach? I tossed and turned and couldn’t fall asleep. I couldn’t define what I was feeling. A strange and oppressive feeling enveloped me.

When I finally fell asleep, I dreamed that I was standing on a giant cauliflower, my hands spread out to the sides in an attempt to keep my balance. At the bottom of the cauliflower little children ran around trying to climb it, unsuccessfully. Some of them climbed up a rickety ladder that suddenly fell apart, some jumped and waved their hands, and I just kept standing on the cauliflower, my hands spread confidently, and the cauliflower moved slowly from side to side, right and left.

Toward morning, the dream lost its clarity. But one thing I remember clearly to this day: it was the whitest cauliflower I had ever seen.

## Letters for a Peaceful Revolution

**Lyuba Guerassimova.** Bulgaria

Dear Future,

Despair is palpable in the air. We live in the midst of heroism by day and sleep in the midst of death by night, longing for sleep to mean more than closed eyes and nightmares. Today's killings were on a scale that defied our imagination. It was the largest grave we dug. In this revolution, it does not matter what standing you had previously, how much you earned, or what life you would go back to in case you survived. We are all equal before death. The tacit acknowledgement that we were all in the same boat, with equal chances of staying alive, has brought us into one family. We are all brothers. Earlier today I saw our leader mourn one of us as if he had lost a son. He meticulously cleaned his face and combed his hair. As he was doing this, I felt a tear run down my cheek as the long-suppressed sorrow rose and left my spirit unguarded. I miss all my dead friends. I miss all my relatives who ran away. Will I survive long enough to ever see them again? From up here I can see another body, but I cannot distinguish what he is wearing in this silent darkness, whether he is a brother or a devil. All I know is that he is some poor mother's son. The blood surrounding him forms an uncanny puddle which reflects the moon.

It was 20th July, the day of prophet Iliya, who rides the heavens in his chariot and has charge of storms and thunder. The thunder that day came only from gunpowder. The headquarters of the revolutionary committee for the Ilinden Uprising had reached us with the fateful call:

"Brothers, finally the much-anticipated day to get back at our enslaver has come. The blood of our brothers, innocently perished at the hands of Turkish tyranny, is crying out for retaliation. The trampled honour of our mothers and sisters needs to be recovered. Enough with so much pain, enough with so much disgrace! Death is a thousand times better than brutish life. The designated day in which the people throughout Macedonia and Adrianople ought to come out overtly with weapon in hand against the enemy is the 20th July, 1903. Follow, brothers, your leaders and gather under the banner of freedom. Persist, brothers, in the struggle! Salvation lies only in perseverance and long-standing struggle. May God bless our righteous deed and the day of the uprising. Down with Turkey! Down with the tyrants! Death to the enemy! Long live the people, long live freedom!"

The air of excitement had trapped our souls into a perpetual ecstatic hope which led us to sincerely believe in the success of the uprising. Yet somewhere deep in the memory of our hearts lay the painful truth that our lives would be a price to pay for a cause. When we were coming out of the forests and into the battle, we were fighting to survive; we were fighting for each other. We were not thinking of the cause. Yet we knew. We knew that if we die, we die for the freedom of our families, of all Bulgarians in Macedonia, from Bitolja through Ohrid. I sometimes wonder: Are we going to be remembered, just as we learn of our khans and kings, who fought to unite and bring glory to Bulgarians everywhere? Will there be a monument for us?

There are twenty of them for every single one of us, and we are outnumbered as well as outgunned. Our houses were set alight and are now providing us with the smouldering light to

cook the last provisions we are left with. I heard that my cousin's family left with the whole neighbouring village for the eastern lands that were freed from the Ottomans. The Bulgarian government is providing help for all of us who are seeking refuge in the freed lands, yet they have still not waged war on the Ottomans. Some say they have forgotten about us. Some say the Great Powers are not allowing this. I sincerely hope they have not forgotten about our struggle. As we are lying here in the woods, we cannot help but have little sympathy for the cowards who ran away. Why did they choose not to take up arms? Even with no ammunition left, I will not flee. I will die here, on my land.

Last week I met a newspaper correspondent who said he is from England, yet I could not understand anything else he said. Will Europe really hear our cries for help? Will our spilled blood matter for them? Can these writers truthfully portray the desperate stench that sticks in my nostrils? I know where my anger comes from: from years of witnessing unfairness and oppression, lack of rights and freedoms. The last devil I saw spread out on the ground, I started kicking. But you cannot kill an enemy twice. What damned fools we are – all human and still can do no better than killing each other.

The Past,  
An Unknown Rebel

\* \* \*

Dear Past,

Every time I pass by the eternal flame of the Monument to the Unknown Warrior, I think of you. I think of your pain, blood, and thirst for justice. Every year grateful Bulgarians gather to commemorate the Ilinden–Preobrazhenie Uprising and all its fallen heroes, just as we lay wreaths of fresh flowers for our brightest leaders throughout history, for our distinguished rulers, and for the ones who perished in their struggle for a cause. 1903 was not the end of battles. Numerous wars were fought on the Balkans and across the whole world, with amounts of weapons you could never have imagined, with flying machines that can easily destroy huge buildings, with bombs that can erase whole cities in a matter of seconds, with chemicals that can damage the lives of generations. People struggle against their enemy in tens of countries. In the aftermath of your struggle, 30,000 refugees fled to the freed lands in the east, thousands died, and even more houses were burned. The self-sacrifice of the ones who gave up their lives for Bulgarian freedom is firmly anchored in our common memory, and your uprising is still seen as a powerful impetus for the national ideal of liberation and unification of all Bulgarians.

Remember the English reporter you met? There were many more like him, and their words of your uprising captured attention of diplomats across Europe, who pushed for more reforms, yet the push was too gentle. I am now happy to tell you that there is now a principle of self-determination for nations everywhere, which is gaining more and more importance, and it has slowly brought freedom to the lands you were fighting for. Yet I am also sad to tell you that liberty did not come with unity. Thracian and Macedonian Bulgarians were readily accepted as refugees, but their lands were split further and further. Just like you, I ask, why did the great powers not support them further? Why did my country's neighbours declare that if the government fought

for you and your brothers, they would be on Turkey's side and declare war on the young Bulgarian state? Do you remember the story of our greatest hero of the struggle for freedom was captured by the enemy? Because of a traitor whose veins carried the "brotherly" Bulgarian blood. It hurts my soul to tell you that disunity still prevails in our world. Freedom has not yet erased it.

Yet I admire mankind. In war and bloodshed, some people still believe in nonviolent peace. During your uprising, a republic was proclaimed in a southern town, Krushevo, and even though it lasted for only ten days before it was crushed, four ethnicities were communicating peacefully, and even the ordinary Turkish families were not harmed in any way. Now, in a very similar way, there is overwhelming peace in the area. We are not at war with our neighbours, and we are even cooperating. Could you have ever imagined that the mayor of the city of Istanbul would fund the restoration of a Bulgarian Orthodox church? Could you ever imagine that mosques and churches would successfully coexist across the country? It is a beautiful thing to imagine, and even more beautiful to witness.

I believe in the power of nonviolence, and yet I dearly respect your struggle. I exist because of you. I am in the here and now because both of those who fought and those who sought refuge in the liberated lands. Some of your friends died as Bulgarians, and some of your family fled. Your cousin married a beautiful girl and gave birth to an angelic child. The child grew up happy and independent, raised three sons with his charming wife, and was an integral part of the political life of the country. I am his granddaughter.

I live in a democratic republic which provides basic rights and freedoms to all its peoples – at least on paper. We are part of a union of European states and hopeful that this will make our lives better. Yet we still do not strive to reconcile with our neighbours. We do not strive to enter into a Balkan union. The language that was long ago created to unite us now divides us. The religion that is supposed to make us better human beings has left us mistrustful and in disbelief. The political discourse makes us hate each other, and it has taken me many years to open up my heart and mind in order to expel these destructive feelings. I believe in peace, yet peace can only come through a revolution in our ways of thinking and acting. It is admirable to imagine you waiting for the enemy in the woods, with a loaded gun and hopeful eyes and, despite my staunch support for nonviolence, I would probably have stood up for the cause together with you. Because there is an uncanny beauty in revolutions. Would I take up arms for the sake of peace? I don't know. All I know is that revolution is beautiful. Death is not. Is it?

The Present,  
Your Child

\* \* \*

Dear Present,

It would take you more time to travel to Sarajevo than to reach the westernmost parts of Austria, and I understand why this frustrates you. The destruction of the Berlin Wall stood for something much larger, namely the demise of the transnational communist comradeship and friendship. The drive towards democracy has left many wondering who they are, who is to blame for the disparity between rich and poor, and why they now constantly see crime and

suffering. On the Balkans, many wars were fought which could have been avoided. The suffering and death that they created will need decades to be softened in the memory of the peoples. Comradery has been replaced by the “us versus them” paradigm and by a discourse of who has the greenest grass.

You rightfully wonder why we are not united, why the Great Powers have not supported people’s right to self-determination, why some have been desperate enough to take up arms, and why we are sometimes filled with so much antagonism. The peace you describe is not honest peace when it does not come from the inside, from personal peace. The lack of outright gun-loaded violence does not promise perpetual peace when unspoken diplomatic anger towards the Other accumulates. Conflict in this part of the world is often attributed to ancient hatred, yet it is in fact not much different from conflict elsewhere. The source of it all is the greed for power, fear of the Other, hatred, and overzealous ambition. These self-serving destructive emotions are often coupled with religion, language, or ethnicity in order to give them more legitimacy in their violent quest, yet you should not fall victim to this misconception. Even in secular societies, religions have had an immense influence on our morals and ethics, and all major religions tell us that there is something wrong with us if we have no compassion towards each other. And language exists to enable us to do this, not to divide us. Ethnicity exists to enable us to see the humanity in each other.

Compassion does not mean feeling sorry for each other; it means treating others as you wish to be treated yourself. There can be no social justice without compassion, and the greed for each other’s riches that is so often expressed in the political abuse of religion and nationality can only be erased by compromise. It should not be about having more power, but about mutual respect and openness. Our identity need not clash with how others feel, and your Bulgarian identity can indeed be reconciled with your friend’s Macedonian identity, if we are open to it. Creating peace requires us to get naked before each other. Not literally, of course.

Yesterday I was observing a few children play with a basketball. I asked one of them where he came from. The child merely looked with surprised and said, “why, don’t you want to play with us?” Then he explained: “I am Bulgarian, so you can never know if I say ‘yes’ if I nod my head, he is Macedonian, so he can invite you to his house at the beautiful lake Ohrid, she is Greek, so she can show you how to write your name with funny letters, and he is Turkish, so after the game he will prepare for us some black tea with baklava!” I smiled and remembered all those who have died in order to create an environment for all of this to happen. In the end, compromise has slowly crept in, and agreeing to disagree, forgiving but not forgetting, people have moved forward for the sake of both their own selves and future and past generations. We still believe that war movies present the most beautiful romances, and we sometimes find death beautiful. Yet we have opened up enough to look for beauty in living life. Is it possible that, while we remain sensitive to our conflicts, social solidarity and compassion overcome our differences and create an environment where we find happiness not in what we own but in what friendships we create? It is. I am a witness.

In loving memory,  
The Future

## שקרים לבנים

### איילת גונדר גושן. ישראל

חודשיים לפני הבחירות האיש מהקיוסק קרא לאברם אדיטו ושאל אם הוא רוצה עבודה. אברם אדיטו לא מיד ניגש אליו, כי בפעם הקודמת שהאיש מהקיוסק קרא לו הוא תפס אותו בצוואר ואמר לו שאם עוד פעם אחת הוא מוכר פה את המציתים המחורבנים שלו הוא בועט אותו בחזרה לאתיופיה. אבל הפעם האיש מהקיוסק בכלל לא כעס. הוא חייך לאברם אדיטו ושאל בן כמה אתה, וכשאברם אדיטו ענה חמש עשרה הוא חייך עוד יותר ואמר שאם ככה זה אפילו חוקי. זה לא היה לגמרי נכון, כי אברם אדיטו עוד לא היה לגמרי בן חמש עשרה, אבל מדונה אמרה לו שהוא חייב ללמוד לשקר קצת, לפחות שקרים לבנים, וזה נראה לו כמו שקר לבן.

אחרי שהאיש מהקיוסק שמע שאברם אדיטו בן חמש עשרה, ושהוא רוצה עבודה, הוא לקח אותו אליו למחסן של הקיוסק. בין מגדלים של וופלות וסיגריות שכבו הפוסטרים של המועמד. אתה יודע מי זה, שאל האיש מהקיוסק. אברם אדיטו חשב על מדונה והתכוון להגיד שהוא יודע, אבל ברגע האחרון הוא הרגיש את העקוצץ הזה, במאחורה של הרגל, והודה שלא. אין לכם טלוויזיה שמה בפחונים שלכם, שאל האיש מהקיוסק, ולפני שאברם אדיטו הספיק לענות המשיך ואמר: זה האיש שיציל את המדינה הזאת. המועמד שלנו לרשות הממשלה. אברם אדיטו הסתכל במועמד שלנו לרשות הממשלה. היו לו עיניים גדולות וכחולות ומצח גבוה עם קמט אחד. היו לו גבות עבות עם רווח ביניהן, לא כמו הגבות של אברם אדיטו, שמדונה נשבעה שלילה אחד תתגנב אליו כשישן עם פינצטה ותפריד אותן סוף סוף אחת מהשניה, ומאז אברם אדיטו חיכה לה שתבוא ולא באה. היה לו זקן מסודר יפה יפה, וחולצה לבנה.

הוא הולך לנקות את המדינה שלנו, אמר האיש מהקיוסק, להעיף ממנה את הערבים ימח שמם ואת כל החארות האלה מאפריקה. לא אותכם, אמר האיש מהקיוסק, את אלה שבאו לא חוקי. הלא יהודים. האיש מהקיוסק הביט באברם אדיטו וחיכה שהוא יעשה "כן אני מבין" עם הראש. אז אברם אדיטו עשה. יש לך פה דבק, אמר האיש מהקיוסק והצביע לפינה. אתה לוקח תפוסטרים ומדביק אותם איפה שרק אפשר. לוחות מודעות, תחנות אוטובוס, קירות. אבל תעשה את זה בלילה, אה, שלא יתחילו לקשקש לך מותר לתלות אסור לתלות. אברם אדיטו שוב עשה כן עם הראש והאיש מהקיוסק שוב חייך. ארבע עשרה שקל לשעה. נגיד חמש שעות בלילה. זה יוצא... אברם אדיטו אמר 490 שקל לשבוע, והאיש מהקיוסק הסתכל עליו רגע לפני שהוא הוציא מחשבון וחישב ואמר וואלה נכון. ואם בא לך ארטיק בלילה אחרי שאתה מדביק אתה יכול לקחת. אבל דיר באלאק לא יותר מאחד בלילה, כן? ואז האיש מהקיוסק הרים יד למקרר הגדול והוריד לאברם אדיטו ארטיק, וכשהוא עשה את זה אברם אדיטו הריח את הבית שחי של האיש מהקיוסק וחשב שמדונה טעתה כשהיא אמרה שרוסים מסריחים מדגים. האיש מהקיוסק הסריח מזיעה רגילה לגמרי. בערב הוא התקשר למדונה ואמר לה את זה. שטויות, היא אמרה, אתה לא הרחת מספיק טוב. אם היית ממש נדבק לבית שחי שלו היית מיד קולט שזה דג. רוסים תמיד אומרים שאתיפים מסריחים והם בעצמם מריחים כמו דג רקוב.

אברם אדיטו לא רצה לריב עם מדונה, אז הוא שתק, אבל מדונה התעקשה: הם לא תמיד הריחו כמו דג רקוב, אתה יודע, כשהם באו לפה מרוסיה הם הריחו כמו אנשים רגילים. אבל אז הישראלים שהיו פה קודם תקעו אותם בכל מיני חורים, כמו העיר שלנו, מלא אנשים בבניין אחד, והם התחילו להסריח כמו דגים שזרוקים יחד בערימה. לא, כמו תרנגולות!

תרנגולות?

כן, תרגולות. כששמים אותן במשניות והן מטפסות אחת על השניה כדי לקבל אוויר וחצי נחנקות בדרך וזה מריח זוועה, או בעצם, כמו כלבים!

כלבים?

כמו הכלב של המגיל הוא משיכון ד', שהיה בועט בו כל הזמן ומקלל אותי, וחשבת שהוא הכלב הכי חמוד בעולם, ואז פעם נכנס לחצר שלו בטעות כלב אחר, קטן כזה, ואתה יודע מה הוא עשה?

מה הוא עשה?

טרף אותו! כמו שהרוסים טורפים אותנו! אתה מבין?

אברם אדיטו לא הבין. הרבה אנשים לא הבינו את מה שמדונה אמרה. בגלל זה שלחו אותה לפנימייה לילדים מיוחדים. אמרו שיש לה הפרעת הסתגלות. זה רק בגלל שאני לא מוכנה שיקראו לי אסתר, היא אמרה לו יום לפני שהיא נסעה, ואולי זה היה נכון, כי באמת אף אחד לא דיבר על פנימייה עד היום הוא שהיא רבה עם המורה על השם. המורה הקריאה שמות ונתקעה בשם של מדונה, אז עוד קראו לה טיגיסט. אי אפשר לבטא את הדבר הזה, המורה אמרה, זה לא עברית. נכון, אמרה מדונה, שאז עוד קראו לה טיגיסט, אבל זה השם שלי. אז מעכשיו יקראו לך אסתר. אף אחד לא התרגש מזה, לחצי מהבנות בכיתה כבר החליפו את השם לאסתר, בדיוק כמו שלחצי מהבנים כבר קראו אברם. אבל טיגיסט נעמדה והודיעה שמה פתאום שישנו לה את השם, ועוד לשם ישן כזה, מהתנ"ך. המורה דווקא ניסתה להיות נחמדה ואמרה לה שאסתר זה שם מאוד עדכני, אפילו מדונה הוסיפה את השם הזה מאז שהיא התחילה להתעניין בקבלה, וטיגיסט צחקה בקול רם ואמרה שאם ככה למה שלא פשוט יקראו לה מדונה. שבוע אחרי זה היא כבר היתה בפנימייה. כשאברם אדיטו בא לומר לה "שלום טיגיסט" היא אמרה לו מדונה. אתה תקרא לי מדונה. ואתה תתקשר אלי כל יום ונמשיך להיות ידידים. וזה מה שהיה.

אחרי שאברם אדיטו קיבל עבודה בלהדביק את הפוסטרים של המועמד, הוא כבר לא יכל לדבר כל יום עם מדונה. בפנימייה הרשו לדבר בטלפון רק בין תשע לעשר, ובשעות האלה אברם אדיטו עבד. מדונה כעסה קצת בהתחלה, אבל אחר כך היא הבינה, בייחוד כשהוא סיפר לה על הארטיקים. תבוא לשם בלילה ותיקח מלא, היא אמרה כשדיברו בשבת, ואחר כך תמכור לכולם בשכונה. אברם אדיטו אמר שאין סיכוי ומדונה צחקה ואמרה שהוא סתם פחדן. אני לא פחדן, אברם אדיטו אמר לה, אני פשוט לא רוצה שהוא ישאל אותי לאן נעלמו כל כך הרבה ארטיקים ולא יהיה לי מה להגיד לו. תגיד לו שהיתה הפסקת חשמל והכל התקלקל, מדונה אמרה, זה שקר לבן.

זה לא שקר לבן, מדונה.

זה שקר שאתה מספר לאיש לבן, לא? אז זה שקר לבן.

אברם אדיטו צחק, וגם מדונה צחקה, וזה היה נהדר, כי כבר הרבה זמן שהשיחות טלפון שלהם היו קצת מוזרות כאלה, כאילו שאין להם יותר על מה לדבר. באמצע הצחוק של אברם אדיטו מדונה שאלה כמה זה שתיים עשרה כפול אחת עשרה ורבע, וכשהוא ענה מאה שלושים וחמש היא צחקה עוד יותר.

ושבעה עשרה כפול חמש וחצי?

תשעים ושלוש נקודה חמש.

אתה יודע מה, לפחות תיקח שתי ארטיקים במקום אחד, רק לדעת שאתה יכול.

וכשאברם אדיטו עדיין אמר לא מדונה אמרה אחד בשבילי. תיקח עוד אחד בשבילי, כאילו שאני אוכלת איתך על הספסל. ואז אברם אדיטו ידע שהוא חייב.

אבל בלילה, כשהוא בא לקחת פוסטרים ודבק ושני ארטיקים במקום אחד, המועמד הסתכל עליו במבט כזה שלא היה לו נעים. כל הלילה אברם אדיטו מרח דבק ותלה פוסטרים, וכל הלילה המועמד הביט בו במבט מרוצה. בכל יום שעבר אברם אדיטו שם לב לעוד דברים שהוא אהב אצל המועמד. השפתיים שלו, למשל, שכשמתכלים עליהן מקרוב רואים שהן קצת מחייכות. או האוזניים שלו, שלא היו לגמרי באותו גודל, ובגלל זה הוא דווקא נראה פתאום יותר נחמד. פעם בכמה ימים הגיעו פוסטרים חדשים, ואברם אדיטו היה נכנס למחסן של הקיוסק ומגלה שהמועמד החליף חולצה, או התיישב מאחורי שולחן ושילב ידיים, או החזיק דגל. אבל לא משנה מה הוא עשה הוא תמיד נראה רציני כזה, וגם קצת שמח, ומאוד מאוד צודק.

אני לא מאמינה שאתה מעדיף לבלות את הלילה שלך עם תמונות של הנאצי הזה במקום לדבר איתי, מדונה אמרה, ואברם אדיטו התעבן.

למה נאצי?

אתה לא קורא עיתונים? לנו נותנים פה. שנדע מה קורה במדינה. ואני אומרת לך, המועמד שלך מטורלל על כל הראש.

עיתונים זה חרא אחד גדול, אברם אדיטו אמר, האיש מהקיוסק אמר את המשפט הזה כל הזמן, וזה נשמע נכון.

בסדר. למי אכפת. אכלת ארטיק בשבילי?

אברם אדיטו אמר שכן למרות שלא, ואחר כך אמר לעצמו עוד מאה פעם שמדונה בעצמה אמרה שהוא חייב ללמוד לשקר, בעיקר שקרים לבנים. יום אחר כך האיש מהקיוסק קרא לאברם אדיטו ואמר שהמלחמה התחילה. ראיתי שלטים של הזונה בדרך לפה, אמר האיש מהקיוסק. הזונה היתה מועמדת של המפלגה השנייה. האיש מהקיוסק אף פעם לא קרא לה בשם שלה. את אברם אדיטו זה קצת הצחיק. בטח סיפרו לה שכל העיר שלנו מכוסה בפוסטרים של המועמד, אמר האיש מהקיוסק, ועכשיו היא רוצה גם. אבל אנחנו נזיין אותה, נכון ילד? אברם אדיטו אמר שנכון. מאותו לילה אברם אדיטו יצא להדבקות של הפוסטרים יחד עם האיש מהקיוסק. אברם אדיטו היה מדביק פוסטרים של המועמד, והאיש מהקיוסק היה תולש פוסטרים של הזונה. לפעמים האיש מהקיוסק דיבר על המועמד ועל איך שהוא ינקה את המדינה. לפעמים הם היו שותקים. פעם אחת האיש מהקיוסק שאל את אברם אדיטו אם יש לו חברה, ואברם אדיטו אמר שלא בדיוק, אבל יש לו את מדונה, ואז האיש מהקיוסק צחק ונתן לו מכה על הגב, אבל לא מכה כואבת, מכה של חברים, ואברם אדיטו חיך.

אחרי כמה לילות כאלה אברם אדיטו שאל את האיש מהקיוסק על הקעקוע שלו. האיש מהקיוסק צחק צחוק רוסי גדול כזה, שכל השפם שלו התחיל לרעוד, ואברם אדיטו חשב שאם דובים היו צוחקים הם היו צוחקים ככה. זה שמש, אמר האיש מהקיוסק, והראה לאברם אדיטו מקרוב את הקעקוע שעל הגב של הכף יד שלו, שבאמת הזכיר קצת שמש. הכף יד של האיש מהקיוסק היתה גדולה מאוד, ושלושה ורידים בולטים חצו אותה כמו שלושה נהרות ענקיים.

עשיתי אותו בעצמי כשהצבא תקע אותי בהרי אוראל, כדי לזכור שיש דבר כזה, שמש. כי בהרי אוראל אין.

אברם אדיטו ניסה לדמיין לעצמו מקום שאין בו שמש, ולא הצליח. הוא ידע איפה זה הרי אוראל, כי המפה של כדור הארץ היתה תלויה ממש מולו בכיתה, והוא תמיד זכר דברים כאלה בעל פה. אבל הוא לא ידע שאין בהם שמש, רק שהם בצבע סגול, ושהם נמתחים מקזחסון, שהיא בצבע ירוק, ועד האוקיינוס הארקטי, שהוא בצבע תכלת. האיש מהקיוסק שיפסף את היד עם הקעקוע עם היד השנייה, והשמש נמעכה לרגע ואז חזרה לעצמה. עכשיו לא חסר לי שמש, אמר האיש מהקיוסק, עכשיו היא כבר יוצאת לי מהתחת.

ומה זה, אברם אדיטו הצביע על האותיות שהיו מתחת לשמש, בשפה שהוא לא יכל לקרוא.

זה השם שלי: לייב.

אבל קוראים לך אריה.

כן, אבל שמה קראו לי לייב.

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לילה אחד האיש מהקיוסק הביא איתו את הבן שלו, שהיה בגובה של אברם אדיטו ונעל נעלי נייק לבנות. האיש מהקיוסק אמר שהבן שלו בא לעזור, אבל היה ברור שהכריחו אותו, כי הוא בכלל לא הדביק פוסטרים של המועמד ולא תלש פוסטרים של הזונה, רק עמד בצד והסתכל על הנעלי נייק הלבנות שלו. האיש מהקיוסק דיבר על המועמד ועל איך שהוא הולך לנקות את המדינה, אבל הבן שלו המשיך להסתכל על הנעלי נייק שלו, ואפילו לא עשה כן עם הראש. אברם אדיטו עשה הרבה כן עם הראש, ולאט לאט האיש מהקיוסק הפסיק לדבר אל הבן שלו ודיבר אל אברם אדיטו. וזה היה נחמד.

בדרך חזרה האיש מהקיוסק שאל את הבן שלו אם הוא ירצה לבוא שוב מחר בלילה. אין מצב, אמר הבן של האיש מהקיוסק, תלך עם המפגר. אחרי זה היתה שתיקה לא נעימה באוטו. היא היתה לא נעימה כי לאיש מהקיוסק היה לא נעים. ראו את זה. לאברם אדיטו דווקא היה בסדר. זאת לא היתה הפעם הראשונה שקראו לו מפגר. הוא דיבר מעט ושתיק הרבה ובגלל זה אנשים חשבו לפעמים שהוא לא ממש בסדר. מדונה אמרה שאם היו לוקחים את כל המילים שלה ואת כל המילים שלו ועושים ממוצע זה היה ממש טוב, כי אברם אדיטו דיבר פחות מדי והיא יותר. מדונה אמרה שזה בסדר גמור שאברם אדיטו לא מדבר הרבה, שידבר כמה שבא לו, יש לו דברים אחרים טובים.

איזה דברים?

זה שאתה רואה דברים שאנשים אחרים לא רואים, בגלל זה באת היום, לא? היא אמרה לו את זה יום לפני שהיא נסעה לפנימייה לילדים מיוחדים, כשהוא בא אליה הביתה למרות שהיא אמרה לכולם לא לבוא והתעקשה שהיא צריכה לארוז. הוא בא בכל זאת וגילה שהיא בכלל לא צריכה לארוז, מה כבר יש לארוז. היא פשוט לא רצתה לראות את כולם כי היא פחדה שהיא תבכה, והיא אף פעם לא בוכה. הוא נשאר אצלה עד שהיה ממש מאוחר, היא דיברה הרבה והוא דיבר מעט, עד שבשתיים בלילה הוא אמר לה "שלום טיגיסט" והיא אמרה: תקרא לי מדונה. וגם: לילה אחד אני אבוא עם פינצטה ואפריד לך את הגבות.

גם את אברם אדיטו רצו לשלוח לפנימיה, אבל אחרת. המורה לחשבון דיברה עם המנהלת שדיברה עם אמא של אברם אדיטו ואמרה לה שיש לה ילד מחונן. חבל לבזבז כישרון כזה. בתל אביב יש פנימיה מיוחדת לילדים כמוהו, כדי שהפוטנציאל שלהם לא ילך לאיבוד באבק של הפריפריה. אבל אברם אדיטו חשב על מדונה שתתגנב עם פינצטה דרך החלון ותמצא את החדר שלו ריק, כמו שהוא הציץ לחלון של החדר שלה שבוע אחרי ששלחו אותה לפנימיה, הציץ למרות שהוא ידע שהיא לא שם, רק כדי לראות אם אולי בכל זאת. וכשהוא דימיין את מדונה עומדת עם הפינצטה בחדר הריק זה עשה אותו עצוב כל כך שהוא אמר לאמא שלו שהוא רוצה להישאר כאן.

האיש מהקיוסק והבן שלו הורידו את אברם אדיטו ליד הבית שלו. האיש מהקיוסק אמר לילה טוב ילד והבן שלו לא אמר כלום. אברם אדיטו אמר לילה טוב וירד מהאוטו, אבל במקום ללכת הביתה הוא הלך ברחוב שהיה ממש ריק ושקט ואפילו יפה. בכל מקום הוא ראה תמונות של המועמד וזה היה נהדר. אברם אדיטו הביט בעיניים הכחולות של המועמד, ובאוזניים שלו, הימנית שקצת יותר קטנה מהשמאלית, והכי הוא הביט לו בגבות הישרות עם הרווח הלבן באמצע. ופתאום הוא ממש ממש רצה לדבר עם מדונה, למרות שכבר היה מאוחר. הוא הוציא את הטלפון והתקשר אליה, וחשב שגם אם היא לא תענה, הוא ישאיר הודעה. פעם אחת בחיים שלו הוא ישאיר הודעה. כי כמה שהיה לו קשה לדבר לאנשים, למזכירה בטלפון הוא אף פעם לא דיבר. עכשיו הוא יעשה את זה. יגיד: שלום מדונה, חשבתי שאולי תבואי כבר להפריד לי את הגבות. או אולי רק: שלום מדונה, וינתק. גם זה

טוב, וזה הרבה יותר קל. אבל אחרי כמה צלצולים ענה לטלפון קול של בן, וכשאברם אדיטו אמר אפשר את מדונה הקול אמר היא עסוקה עכשיו, ומאחורה אפשר היה לשמוע את מדונה צוחקת ממש ממש חזק, כמו שהיא צחקה ביום העצמאות כשכולם השתכרו בחורשה, ואברם אדיטו לא יכל לסבול את הצחוק הזה וסגר.

הרחוב היה שקט כמו קודם, אבל אברם אדיטו עדיין יכל לשמוע את הצחוק של מדונה. הוא לא רצה לשמוע את זה אבל הוא שמע. אז הוא התחיל לרוץ, ובאמת הרגליים שלו דפקו על הכביש כל כך חזק שהוא לא שמע כלום. הוא רץ ורץ ורץ ואז הוא רץ עוד. בסוף הוא הגיע למקום שבו הדביקו את הפוסטרים של המועמד, הוא והאיש מהקיוסק והבן שלו עם הנעלי נייק. זה היה טוב, להגיע לשם. קיר שלם עם פוסטרים של המועמד, כמו שטיח, ואפילו לא פוסטר אחד של הזונה. אבל אז עצרה מכונית ליד הקיר ושני בחורים ירדו מהר ושלפו מהבגאז' דבק ופוסטרים והתחילו להדביק אותם ישר על הפנים של המועמד. אברם אדיטו אמר מה אתם עושים ואחד הבחורים אמר מדביקים, זאת העבודה שלנו. אברם אדיטו אמר אבל למה עליו. הבחור אמר לא יודע, ככה אמרו לנו, והתכוון להדביק עוד פוסטר על הפרצוף של המועמד ועל החולצה הלבנה שלו. אל תעשה את זה, אברם אדיטו אמר. הבחור הסתכל עליו ואמר אתה מחפש מכות? אברם אדיטו חשב על זה רגע, וידע שהוא לא מחפש מכות. הוא פשוט לא רצה שהאיש מהקיוסק יבוא מחר בבוקר ויראה שהרסו את כל מה שהם עשו בלילה. והוא לא רצה שהפרצוף של הזונה ידחף את עצמו על הפנים של המועמד. והוא לא רצה לדבר יותר עם מדונה אף פעם. אחר כך שני הבחורים ואברם אדיטו הלכו מכות. שני הבחורים ניצחו. אברם אדיטו שכב על המדרכה. ירד לו דם מהאף ומהפה ושן אחת שלו נשברה. מעליו, על הקיר, המועמד הביט בו בעיניים כחולות וטובות, בגבות עבות ורווח לבן באמצע.

## White Lies

**Ayelet Gundar-Goshen. Israel**

Two months before the election the man from the kiosk called Avram Aditu and asked whether he would like a job. Avram Aditu didn't come to him immediately, because the last time the man from the kiosk had called him he'd grabbed him by the neck and told him that if he sold his crappy lighters there again he would kick him back to Ethiopia. But this time the man from the kiosk wasn't angry at all. He smiled at Avram Aditu and asked how old he was. And when Avram Aditu answered fifteen, he smiled even more and said if that was the case, it was even legal. That wasn't entirely correct, because Avram Aditu was not quite fifteen, but Madonna had told him that he had to learn to lie a little, at least to tell white lies, and this seemed to him like a white lie.

After the man from the kiosk heard that Avram Aditu was fifteen and that he wanted a job, he took him to the kiosk storeroom. Between towers of wafers and cigarettes lay posters of the candidate.

"You know who this is?" asked the man from the kiosk.

Avram Aditu thought about Madonna and meant to say that he knew, but at the last minute he felt that twinge, on the back of his leg, and admitted that he didn't.

"Don't you have TV over in those tin shacks of yours?" asked the man from the kiosk, and before Avram Aditu could answer he continued, "This is the man who will save this country. Our candidate for prime minister."

Avram Aditu looked at our candidate for prime minister. He had big blue eyes and a high forehead with just one wrinkle. He had thick eyebrows with a space between them,

not like Avram Aditu's eyebrows, about which Madonna had sworn that one night she would sneak up on him with tweezers while he was sleeping and at last separate one eyebrow from the other, and ever since then Avram Aditu had waited for her to come but she didn't come. Our candidate had a well-trimmed beard and a white shirt.

"He's going to clean up our country," said the man from the kiosk, to kick out the Arabs, may their names be obliterated, and all those shits from Africa. "Not you guys," said the man from the kiosk. "Those who came illegally. The non-Jews."

The man from the kiosk looked at Avram Aditu and waited for him to nod. Yes, I understand. So Avram Aditu nodded.

"Here's some paste," said the man from the kiosk, and pointed to the corner. "You take the posters and you stick them everywhere you can –bulletin boards, bus stops, walls. But do it at night, uh, so they don't start telling you you're allowed to put up posters, you're not allowed."

Avram Aditu nodded again and the man from the kiosk smiled again. "Fourteen shekels an hour. Let's say fifteen at night. That comes to..."

"Four hundred and ninety shekels a week," said Avram Aditu, and the man from the kiosk looked at him for a moment before he took out a calculator and did the calculation.

"Wow, that's right. And if you feel like having an ice-cream bar at night after you've put up the posters you may take one. But deir balak [watch out]," he added in Arabic, "not more than one a night, okay?"

And then the man from the kiosk raised his arm to the large refrigerator and took down an ice-cream bar for Avram Aditu, and when he did that Avram Aditu smelled the armpit of the man from the kiosk and thought that Madonna had been mistaken when she'd said that Russians stink of fish. The man from the kiosk stank of totally ordinary sweat. In the evening he called Madonna and told her.

"Nonsense," she said, "you didn't smell it well enough. If you had really stuck your nose in his armpit you would have immediately smelled that it was fishy. Russians always say that Ethiopians stink, and they themselves stink like a rotten fish."

Avram Aditu didn't want to quarrel with Madonna, so he remained silent, but Madonna kept on:

"They didn't always smell like rotten fish, you know. When they came here from Russia they smelled like regular people. But then the Israelis who were here before stuck them in all kinds of holes, like our city, a ton of people in a single building, and they started stinking like fish dumped in a pile. No, like chickens!"

"Chickens?"

"Yes, chickens. When you put them in trucks and they climb on top of each other to get some air and half of them choke to death on the way and it stinks awfully. Or, actually, like dogs!"

"Dogs?"

"Like that disgusting dog from the Dallet neighbourhood he used to kick all the time and swear at, and I thought he was the cutest dog on earth, and then once another dog came into his courtyard by accident, a little one, and do you know what he did?"

"What did he do?"

"He devoured him! Like the Russians devour us! Do you understand?"

Avram Aditu didn't understand. A lot of people didn't understand what Madonna

said. That was why they sent her to a boarding school for exceptional children. They said she had an adjustment disorder.

"That's only because I won't let them call me Esther," she told him the day before she went away. Maybe that was the truth, because no one at all had talked about a boarding school until the day she'd quarrelled with the teacher about the name. The teacher took roll call and got stuck on Madonna's name, when she was still called Tigist.

"It's impossible to pronounce that thing," the teacher said. "It's not Hebrew."

"That's right," said Madonna, who until then had been called Tigist. "But it's my name."

"So now you'll be called Esther."

No one got upset about it. Half the girls in the class had already had their names changed to Esther, just as half the boys were already called Avram.

But Tigist stood up and declared, "Why on earth should you be changing my name, and especially to an old name like that, from the Old Testament?"

The teacher tried to be nice and told her that Esther was a very with-it name, that even Madonna added it to her name when she started taking an interest in Kabala, and Tigist laughed out loud and said that if that was the case, why shouldn't they simply call her Madonna? A week later she was already in the boarding school. When Avram Aditu came to say Hi, Tigist said:

"Madonna. You'll call me Madonna. And you'll phone me every day and we'll stay friends."

And so it was.

After Avram Aditu got the job of putting up posters of the candidate he could no longer speak to Madonna every day. At the boarding school they allowed pupils to use the phone only between 9 pm and 10 pm, and that was

when Avram Aditu was working. Madonna was a little angry in the beginning, but later she understood, especially when he told her about the ice-cream bars.

“Come there at night and take a bunch,” she said when they talked on Saturday. “And then sell them to everyone in the neighbourhood.”

Avram Aditu said there wasn’t a chance, and Madonna laughed and said he was just a coward.

“I’m not a coward,” Avram Aditu said to her. “I just don’t want him to ask me where so many ice-cream bars have disappeared to and I wouldn’t have anything to say to him.”

“Tell him there was a power outage and everything was spoiled,” Madonna said. “That’s a white lie.”

“That’s not a white lie,” Madonna.

“It’s a lie that you’re telling a white man, right? So it’s a white lie.”

Avram Aditu laughed, and Madonna laughed too, and it was wonderful, because for a long time their phone conversations had been kind of strange, as if they no longer had anything to talk about. In the middle of Avram Aditu’s laughter Madonna asked him how much twelve times eleven and a quarter is, and when he answered, one hundred thirty-five, she laughed even more.

“And seventeen times five and a half?”

“Ninety-three point five.”

“You know what, at least take two ice-cream bars instead of one, just to know that you can.”

And when Avram Aditu still didn’t say no, Madonna said one was for her, as if she were eating it with him on the bench. And then Avram Aditu knew that he had to.

But at night, when he came to take posters and paste and two ice-cream bars instead of one, the candidate looked at him in a way that made him feel uncomfortable. All night Avram Aditu smeared paste and hung post-

ers, and all night the candidate looked at him with a satisfied look. With every passing day, Avram Aditu noticed more things that he liked about the candidate. His lips, for example; when you looked at them closely you saw that they were smiling a little. Or his ears, which were not exactly the same size, and precisely because of that he suddenly looked nicer. Every few days a new batch of posters arrived, and Avram Aditu would go into the storeroom of the kiosk and discover that the candidate had changed his shirt, or had sat behind a desk and folded his hands, or was holding a flag. But no matter what he did, he always looked kind of serious, and also a little happy, and very, very in the right.

“I don’t believe that you’d rather spend your time at night with pictures of that Nazi than talk to me,” Madonna said. And Avram Aditu was annoyed.

“Why Nazi?”

“Don’t you read the newspapers? They let us do that here. So we’ll know what’s going on in the country. And I’m telling you, your candidate is totally nuts.”

“Newspapers are a hunk of shit,” Avram Aditu said. The man from the kiosk said that all the time, and it sounded right.

“Okay. Whatever. Did you eat an ice-cream bar for me?”

Avram Aditu said he had, even though he hadn’t, and later he said to himself another hundred times that Madonna herself had told him that he had to learn to tell lies, especially white lies.

The next day the man from the kiosk called Avram Aditu and told him that the war had begun.

“I saw posters of the whore on the way here,” said the man from the kiosk.

The whore was the woman candidate of the other party. The man from the kiosk never

called her by her name. Avram Aditu thought that was slightly amusing.

“They must have told her that our whole city is plastered with posters of the candidate,” the man from the kiosk said. “And now she wants it too. But we’ll screw her. Right, kid?”

“Right,” said Avram Aditu.

From that night on, Avram Aditu went to put up posters with the man from the kiosk. Avram Aditu would put up posters of the candidate, and the man from the kiosk would tear down posters of the whore. Sometimes the man from the kiosk would talk about the candidate and about how he would clean up the country. Sometimes they were silent. Once the man from the kiosk asked Avram Aditu if he had a girlfriend, and Avram Aditu said not exactly, but he had Madonna, and then the man from the kiosk laughed and whacked him on the back, but not so it hurt, a friendly whack, and Avram Aditu smiled.

After a few nights like that, Avram Aditu asked the man from the kiosk about his tattoo. The man from the kiosk laughed a big Russian kind of laugh, which made his whole moustache quiver, and Avram Aditu thought that if bears laughed, they would laugh like that.

“It’s a sun,” said the man from the kiosk, and he showed Avram Aditu the tattoo on the back of his hand up close, which really did look a little like the sun. The hand of the man from the kiosk was very big, and three prominent veins crossed it like three great rivers.

“I made it myself when the army stuck me in the Ural Mountains, to remember that there is something like this sun. Because in the Ural Mountains there isn’t any.”

Avram Aditu tried to imagine a place that had no sun, and he couldn’t. He knew where the Ural Mountains were, because the map of the world hung right in front of him in class, and he always remembered things like that by heart. But he didn’t know that

they had no sun, only that they were purple, and that they stretched from Kazakhstan, which was green, to the Arctic Ocean, which was light blue. And the man from the kiosk rubbed his hand with the tattoo with his other hand, and the sun was squashed for a moment and then returned to its usual shape.

“Now I don’t lack sun,” said the man from the kiosk. “Now it comes out of my ass.”

“And what is that?” Avram Aditu pointed at the letters that were under the sun, in a language he couldn’t read.

“That’s my name: Leib.”

“But they call you Arye.”

“Yes, but there they called me Leib.”

\* \* \*

One night the man from the kiosk brought his son with him, who was Avram Aditu’s height and was wearing white Nike shoes. The man from the kiosk said his son had come to help, but it was obvious that they had made him come, because he didn’t put up any posters of the candidate and didn’t pull down any posters of the whore, he just stood on the side and stared at his white Nikes. The man from the kiosk talked about the candidate and about how he was going to clean up the country, but his son kept staring at his Nikes, and he didn’t even nod his head in agreement. Avram Aditu nodded his head a lot, and gradually the man from the kiosk stopped talking to his son and started talking to Avram Aditu. And that was nice.

On the way back, the man from the kiosk asked his son if he wanted to come again the following night.

“No way,” said the son of the man from the kiosk. Go with the retard.

After that there was an uncomfortable silence in the car. It was uncomfortable because the man from the kiosk felt uncomfortable. You could see it. Avram Aditu, howev-

er, felt fine. It wasn't the first time he'd been called a retard.

He spoke little and was silent a lot and because of that people sometimes thought he wasn't all there. Madonna said that if they took all her words and all his words and averaged them, it would be great, because Avram Aditu spoke too little and she spoke too much. Madonna said it was fine that Avram Aditu didn't talk much. He should talk as much as he felt like; he had other good things about him.

"What things?"

"That you see things that other people don't see. That's why you came today, isn't it?"

She'd said that to him the day before she left for the boarding school for exceptional children, when he'd come to her house even though she'd told everyone not to come and insisted that she had to pack. He'd come just the same and discovered that she didn't have to pack at all. What was there to pack, anyway? She just didn't want to see everyone because she was afraid she'd cry, and she never cried. He stayed with her until it was really late, she talked a lot and he talked little, until 2 am, when he said to her, "Goodbye, Tigist." and she said, "Call me Madonna." And also: "One night I'll come with tweezers and separate your eyebrows."

They'd wanted to send Avram Aditu to a boarding school too, but a different one. The maths teacher had spoken to the principal who spoke to Avram Aditu's mother and told her that she had an exceptionally bright child. It was a shame to waste such talent. In Tel Aviv there was a special boarding school for children like him, so their potential wouldn't be wasted in the dust of the periphery. But Avram Aditu thought about Madonna sneaking through his window with tweezers and finding the room empty, as he had peeked into her room a week after they sent her to the boarding school, peeked even though he

knew she wasn't there, only to see if maybe, despite everything... And when he pictured Madonna standing with the tweezers in the empty room it made him so sad that he told his mother he wanted to stay.

The man from the kiosk and his son dropped Avram Aditu at his house. The man from the kiosk said, "Goodnight, kid," and his son didn't say anything. Avram Aditu said, "Goodnight," and got out of the car, but instead of going home he walked down the street, which was completely empty and quiet and even beautiful. Everywhere he saw pictures of the candidate and that was wonderful. Avram Aditu looked at the blue eyes of the candidate, and at his ears, the right one that was slightly smaller than the left, and most of all he looked at the straight eyebrows with the white space in the middle. And suddenly he really, really wanted to talk to Madonna, even though it was late. He took out his phone and called her and thought that even if she didn't answer, he would leave a message. For once in his life he would leave a message.

Because, hard as it was for him to talk to people, he had never spoken to the voice mail. He would say, "Hi, Madonna. I thought that you would come already to separate my eyebrows." Or maybe just, "Hi, Madonna," and hang up. That would be good, too, and a lot easier.

But after a few rings, a boy's voice answered, and when Avram Aditu said, "May I speak to Madonna?" the voice said she was busy now, and in the background he could hear Madonna laughing really, really hard, the way she'd laughed on Independence Day when everyone got drunk in the grove, and Avram Aditu couldn't stand that laugh and hung up.

The street was as quiet as it had been before, but Avram Aditu could still hear Madonna's laugh. He didn't want to hear it, but

he heard it. Then he began to run, and indeed his legs hit the pavement so hard that he didn't hear a thing. He ran and ran and ran, and then he ran some more. In the end he reached the place where they had hung the posters of the candidate, he and the man from the kiosk and his son with the Nike shoes. It was good, getting there. A whole wall of posters of the candidate, like a carpet, and not even one poster of the whore. But then a car stopped near the wall and two boys got out quickly and pulled paste and posters out of the trunk and started sticking them right on the face of the candidate.

"What are you doing?" said Avram Aditu.

"Hanging posters, that's our job," said one of the boys.

"But why on him?" said Avram Aditu.

"I don't know," said the boy, "that's what they told us to do." And he was about to

stick another poster on the face of the candidate and on his white shirt.

"Don't do that," said Avram Aditu.

The young man looked at him and asked: "Are you looking to get beat up?"

Avram Aditu thought about it for a moment, and knew that he wasn't looking to get beat up. He just didn't want the man from the kiosk to come in the morning and see that they'd destroyed everything they'd done that night. And he didn't want the face of the whore to be thrust over the face of the candidate. And he didn't want to talk to Madonna ever again.

Later, the two boys and Avram Aditu had a fistfight. The two boys won. Avram Aditu lay on the pavement. His nose and mouth were bleeding and a tooth was broken. Above him, on the wall, the candidate looked down at him with his good, blue eyes, with the thick brows with the white space in the middle.

## Posebna vožnja

Vesna Hauschild. Republika Slovenija

Zvočnik v dvorani televizijske hiše zahrumi. »**Prestali ste zadnji krog izbora, katera skupina bo zmagala?**« Negibna tišina. Kandidati A zajamejo dih. »**Sporočamo vam, da ... niste sprejeti na resničnostni šov why bother.**« Kandidate pogoltno žalost. Toda po vsakem dežju posije sonce in tudi naši nadebudneži dočakajo svojih pet minut: časopisna hiša, ki ima v lastni teve hišo, ki ima v lasti avtoprevoznike, ki imajo v lasti ... torej, nameni jim tolažilno nagrado. Varno so nameščeni v minibusu, na katerem se sveti napis »Posebna vožnja.« »**Pozdravljeni, z vami sem Zoja in vas peljem na brezplačni izlet v Dramo.**« Skupinica nesojenih resničnežev se začne nemirno spogledovati. »**Pomirite se, ne gre za gledališče, gre za kraj malo naprej od Otočca, kjer bo piknik,**« oznani Zoja. Minibus zajame vonj olajšanja. Zoja kandidatov izroči anketne listke. Vprašanje: »Kaj bi naredil, da bi postal slaven?« Vsi obkrožijo »vse«. »**Ne pozabite se podpisat, na koncu bo nagradno žrebanje.**« Tako, zavarovani so. Minibus se počasi, nič hudega sluteč pelje proti cilju. Zoja jim razdeli revije. »**Časti naša založniška hiša,**« reče, med zobmi pa ji škrtta šefov glas: »... revije nam ostajajo na pultih ... Treba je najti nove pristope, treba je razširiti krog bralcev!« Prifliknjeni primitivci pametujejo, pecajo in prcajo drug drugega, kot se za prave željne slave pač spodobi. Ura mine, čas je za postanek. Zoja skrivaj pokliče v pisarno. »**Kako, je šlo že v tisk? Kaj pa, če ne bo uspelo?!**« **Preplavi jo preplah.** »**Kaj ste pa napisali? O, to se bo dobro prodajalo,**« zaključi. Odpre prtljajnik, pripravi pojedino. »**O, ugriznili bomo v tortice,**« vzkliknejo kandidati, »**O, ugriznili bodo v vabo,**« skovika v Zoji. Poženejo se v vrsto. Štikla, ki bi rada svoje stikle sprehajala po Hollywoodu, noče kalorij. »**Vzemi vsaj šampanjec,**« ji svetuje Zoja. V mehurčkih utonijo sleherne skrbi ... Štikla pokima. Ata Greblar se zagrebe za njeno tortico, ko jo zgrabi, priteče dekletce, vso zaripló v obraz. V ozadju vidimo mamo, ki sunkovito izdihuje in leze skupaj. »**Mama, ne more, ne more-**« deklíč pograbi tortico. Zoja jo prestreže. »**Žal imamo ravno za vsakega izletnika po eno.**« »**Pa če ji je padel sladkor, no, skup bo padla!**«, zacvili deklíč. »**Saj bi ti odstopila svojo, pa mi kot vodički žal ne pripada,**« pojasni Zoja, medtem ko Ata Greblar tlači v usta tuje sladkobe in grenkobe. Nihče nič ne reče. Deklica poklapano odide. Encijan preučuje embalažo. »**Nalepka je čez sestavine,**« in on, revež, ima alergijo na gluten. Pa le vzame. Ne splača se zamerit Zoji, »**Sigurno ima kakšne veze.**« In minibus spet spravi pot pod kolesa. Šoferju šampanjec ni bil zadosti, izpod suknjiča pokuka mala rjava steklenička. Nagne. Ne more drugače. Encijan se priziba do njega. »**A bi se dalo ustavit, slabo mi je?**« »**O, Šit,**« si misli Zoja. »**Kaj, če bo vse zamočil?**« Zoja že kliče taksi, toda Encijan se ne da odgnati. Samo bruhal bi rad. Potem pa bi rad postal slaven. »**Mogoče nas pa snemajo,**« mu roji po glavi oportunitizem. Zoja mrzlično premleva ... »**Edini je, ki je izbruhal uspavalo ...**«. »**Pavza za vece!**« se zadere. Vsi se zakadijo ven in avtobusa, da se – zakadijo. Zoja teče na vece. Iz torbice vzame plastično plastenko z vodo, vanjo vmeša prašek, dolije vodo, pomeša. Teče k Encijanu. Priden je, vse spije. »**Saj bo šlo,**« si med tem govori šofer, »**saj boš speljal.**« Minibus se končno premakne, Zoja si oddahne. »**Načrt mora uspeti, ne glede na vse!**« Pogleda po minibusu –

živahnost je zaspala, in večina kandidatov z njo. Bližajo se Otočcu. Zoja vzame psičko iz naročja Encijana, pomigne šoferju, naj ustavi. **»Če se kdo zbudi, jim reci, da jih na pikniku čaka kakšen zvezdnik,«** reče Zoja in izstopi. Minibus odpelje usodi naproti. Zoja gleda za njim, psička se steguje iz naročja, hoče nazaj, hoče k lastniku, toda Zoja jo trdno drži. **»Vse bo še dobro,«** jo boža. In psička verjame, ker psi pač niso ljudje. Šofer se prekriža in spelje. Zoja natipka sms: **»Spijo kot angelčki.«** Šofer zapelje na makadamsko cesto, ob kateri se vije reka. **»Zakaj si nam prikrival? Še dobro, da imamo zveste zdravnike. Koliko imaš še? Mesec, dva?«** mu odmeva v glavi Zojin glas. Vedela je, zakaj je prišel v Slovenijo, da družini pošilja denar. Vedela je, da bodo brez njegovega odmerka umrli. In če bo itak umrl tudi on, je vredno od tega vsaj kaj imeti. **»Naredi to, pa bomo omogočili hčeri, da bo šla študirat!«** resno zarenči Zoja. Tresejo se mu roke, trese se minibus. Kandidati spijo. **»To ni pravi čas in kraj, da bi bil sebičen,«** si Josip vrti Zojin govor, ko poljublja križec za vratom. Minibus drvi ob cesti, tekmuje z reko. **»To ni pravi čas in kraj, da bi bil sebičen,«** minibus se bliža bregu. **»To ni pravi čas in kraj, da bi bil sebičen, moraš pomagati Saneli, kaj bo, ko te več ne bo,«** minibus se prekopicuje po vaškem kamenju. Kandidati spijo. Josip se še enkrat prekriža, minibus drvi, še malo in kolesu bo zmanjkalo ceste, še malo in bo prepad, še malo in bo ... konec. Minibus pada v globino, reka ga žalostno objame in počasi, minuto za minuto, začne naplavljati vse neuslišane želje. Nastane megla. Radio že oznanja nesrečo. Na drugi strani sveta Sanela v spalni srajci skače pred televizorjem: **»Zadela sem, o, moj bog, zadela sem!«** Zoja je držala obljubo, šofer se zdaj svetlika med zvezdami, zvezde se svetlikajo na naslovkah revij. Naklada je povišana, misija je uspela. Nekaj žrtev gor ali dol. **»Pa saj so hoteli biti slavni,«** si misli Zoja. V pisarno stopi šef. Miza se zašibi pod težo bankovcev. **»Super,«** reče, **»sploh tista novička, da naj bi šlo za skupinski samomor,«** Zoja vdano pokima, počoha psičko. Šef jo votlo pogleda: **»Kaj boš pa s tem?«** Zoja jo spet počoha: **»Saj ona ni nič kriva.«**

## Slip Road<sup>1</sup>

Vesna Hauschild. Slovenia

“You’ve completed the last stage of our contest,” blares the loudspeaker in the studio lobby. “And the winners are...”

There’s a motionless hush as the contestants in Group A suck in air. “No, not you, we’re afraid,” says the loudspeaker. “Your group has *not* been accepted for our ‘Why Bother?’ reality show.”

The contestants are devastated. But it’s always darkest just before dawn and our troopers will have their fifteen minutes of fame: the media corporation that owns the television station that owns the transport company that owns... long story short, the contestants are awarded a consolation prize. They’re safely boarded onto a minibus lit with the sign Special Service.

Then it’s “Hi everyone, my name’s Zoja and I’m your guide today and we’re off to Drama!” The contestants glance nervously back and forth.

“Relax,” says Zoja, “Drama’s no theatre, it’s just a spot past Otočec where we’ll stop for a picnic.” An air of relief settles over the minibus.

Zoja distributes questionnaires. Q: What would you be willing to do for fame? All the contestants circle A: Anything.

“Don’t forget to sign it,” Zoja says, “because we’ll be drawing for prizes at the end.” (So the company’s covered.) No suspicions raised, the minibus heads slowly towards its destination. Zoja hands out magazines. “Compliments of our publishing house,” she

says, her boss’s voice still ringing in her ears. (“Copies are piling up on the shelves! We’ve got to find a way to beef up our readership!”) The simpletons try to act smart, bickering with one another like real fame junkies. After an hour of this, it’s time to stop for a snack.

Slipping off the bus, Zoja calls the office. “What? It’s already gone to press?” A wave of panic breaks over her. “But what if I screw up? What did you write? Oh, at least that’ll sell well,” she sighs.

She opens the cooler and gets the banquet ready.

“Oh, you can almost taste those cakes!” exclaim the passengers.

“Just follow the crumbs,” says Zoja invitingly.

They line up in a flash and she starts to serve them. High Heels fancies herself strolling down Hollywood Boulevard in her stilettos but she’s watching her calories.

“Have some champagne, at least,” Zoja suggests.

Candy’s dandy but liquor’s quicker. High Heels gives in and Old Man Grebler snatches her cake. He’s got it in his hands when up runs a little girl, her face all flushed. Behind her, to one side, there’s a woman gasping for breath.

“My mum can’t – she can’t.” The child makes a grab for the cake but Zoja stops her.

“I’m sorry,” she says, “just one per passenger and you’ve had yours.”

“But her sugar’s dropped,” whimpers the girl, “she’s going to faint!”

“Look, I’d give you mine if I had one,” explains Zoja, “but unfortunately as your guide I don’t.”

1. This edited version of the original translation was made by Kymm Coveney, Joe Graham, Barnaby Noone and Alfredo Zucchi between March and September of 2012.

And all the while, Old Man Greblar's cramming his mouth full of someone else's unhealthy treat. No one says anything. Dejectedly, the girl walks away. Encijan studies the wrapper. The label's covering the list of ingredients, and he, poor fellow, is allergic to gluten. But he eats the cake anyway. It isn't worth antagonizing Zoja. She must be well connected.

Then the minibus sets out on its way again. The champagne was not enough for the driver. A small brown bottle pops out from under his jacket. He takes a sip. He can't help it. Encijan waddles towards him.

"Can we stop? I feel sick."

*Oh, shit!* Zoja thinks. *This is going to screw up everything!* She starts to call for a cab, but Encijan won't allow himself to be chased off. He just wants to throw up, and then he wants to become famous. The thought springs opportunely to his mind: *Maybe they're filming us.* Zoja feverishly takes stock: he's the only one who threw up the sedative.

"Toilet break!" she yells. Everyone piles off the bus. Zoja sprints to the toilet, yanks a plastic bottle out of her handbag, pours in some powder and some more water. She shakes it, then hurries over to Encijan. He behaves himself and drinks it up.

"We'll manage," the driver mutters to himself, "the wheels are starting to turn."

The travellers are finally off again, Zoja is relieved. *We've just got to make this work!* she thinks. She checks up and down the aisle. The excitement has ebbed away, and most of the candidates are out cold. They're approaching Otočec. Zoja picks up a puppy that's sitting in Encijan's lap and signals to the driver to pull over.

"If anyone wakes up, just tell them there's some celebrity lined up for the picnic."

And off she gets. The minibus's fate is sealed. Zoja stands there watching, the puppy pushing away from her. It wants to go back to its owner, but Zoja hugs it tight.

"Everything's going to be okay," she says, stroking it, and the puppy grins back because dogs are not people. The driver crosses himself and pulls away from the curb. Zoja texts the office: "They're sleeping like angels." The tyres skid on the macadam where it traces the river's winding course.

"Why have you been hiding this from us?" Zoja's voice echoes in the driver's head. "Just as well we have doctors on the payroll. How long have you got left, anyway? A month or two?"

She knew he had come to Slovenia in order to send money to his family. She knew they would die, with or without his help. And if he was going to die anyway, why not make it worth the trouble?

"Just do it, and we'll pay for your daughter's studies!" she'd snarled angrily. His hands are trembling, the whole minibus is trembling. The candidates are sleeping. In Josip's mind, Zoja's words play themselves over and over. *This is neither the time nor the place for selfishness.* He kisses the cross that hangs at his neck. The minibus flies along, racing against the river. *This is neither the time nor the place.* The riverbank is getting closer. *Neither the time nor the place. You've got to help Sanela. What will become of her when you're gone?*

The minibus crosses the village, moving steadily over the cobblestones. None of the contestants stir. Josip crosses himself again as the minibus hurtles onward. Just a little farther and no more road left for the tyres. Just a little bit farther and it will all be over. The minibus is tipping into the abyss, the river sadly embraces it, minute by minute all those unfulfilled hopes washing up. A fog rises and spreads. Already, the radio is reporting the accident. On the other side of the world, Sanela jumps up and down in her nightgown.

"Oh my god!" she screams at the television. "I hit the jackpot!"

Zoja has kept her promise. The driver now glitters among the stars, just as the stars glitter on the covers of the magazine. Circulation is on the rise, the mission was a success. What difference do a few victims make? *They wanted to be famous, didn't they?* Zoja thinks. Her boss enters the office. The desk is flooded with banknotes.

“Great stuff,” he says. “Especially the mass suicide angle.”

Zoja nods intently and pats the puppy. Her boss looks at her pointedly:

“What are you going to do with that?”

Zoja goes on petting it.

“Well,” she says, “it wasn't the puppy's fault, was it?”

## Ladies who travel East /Tuniský svůdce/

**Kateřina Horová.** Česká republika

### Devils from Shell Go to Hell

(slogan na zdi občanské základny v Lybii, 2. března 2011)

#### I

„Nikdy jsem se necítila krásnější, než když jsem tři týdny v poušti mezi beduíny ani na chvilku neviděla zrcadlo,“ přiznává mi v rozhovoru pro Cosmo moje učiteka břišních tanců. Evana se třikrát ročně zbalí a zmizí vegetit do egyptských hor. Do míst, kam nejezdí už ani džípy, ale musíte přesehnout na velblouda a u moře se tam v kempu, který vypadá jako jedna dřevěná budka, ohniště a organizovaný bordel na pláži, válí nezávislí traveleri přibližně za stovku denně.

„Vloni mi mamka přenechala zájezd do pětihvězdrové rezidence v Hurghadě. All inclusive. Když jsme s kámoškou dorazily na recepci a viděly to otřesný divadlo pro turisty včetně unavených velbloudů a všudypřítomných animátorů, sbalily jsme druhý den ráno krosny a místo na schůzku s delegátkou ujízďely opět mezi beduíny. Recepční v hotelu nejdřív zírali, když jsme se ptali po džípu do hor. Pak ale ocenili, že chcem poznat opravdový život v jejich zemi. Ostatní Češi zas zírali, když jsme se těsně před transferem na letiště ukázaly v mramorovém lobby s krosnami, celé špinavé a s perskými koberci kolem ramen,“ vyprávěla mi mladá nezávislá žena s jiskrou v oku. Celá kavárna plná vystresovaných tváří, zatímco ona zářila štěstím. To bylo v roce 2010 a už tenkrát bylo zjevné, že se cosi chystá.

Paní Sammoudi jsem potkala také při práci pro Cosmopolitan. Jako reportérka prestižního ženského magazínu každý měsíc zoufale i naruživě sháním příběhy zajímavých žen. Jednou mi takhle kamarád předhodil kolegyni z práce.

„Danča si přivezla z dovolené Tunisana. Nedopadlo to dobře. Málem ji zabil.“ Jediná slast novináře. Když vidí nosné téma, skočí po něm. Jako lev.

Přesto nečekám od setkání s Danielou nic zázračného, občas se stane, že má práce i cenný čas přijdou nazmar. Jenomže se pletu. Příběh o destruktivním tunisko-českém manželství je zároveň příběhem nás všech. Příběhem revoluce, která na začátku letošního roku navždy změnila politickou mapu světa. Ohromujícího vzepětí lidské touhy po svobodě, která nás spojuje v jedno lidstvo.

#### II

Čtvrtek, půl šesté odpoledne. Čekám před budovou nadnárodní společnosti O2. Dávno pryč jsou časy, kdy jsem si zapomněla vzít na rozhovor se známou módní stylistkou tužku i blok. Ona upovídaná dáma se velmi divila, že si nedělám poznámky! Situaci zachránil až telefon, jež jsem vydávala za diktafon. Po rozhovoru jsem statečně utíkala k počítači. Dokud vše nezapomenu.

„Dobrý den,“ třesu si za chvíli rukou se silnější pohlednou blondýnkou. Paní Sammoudi je na antidepresivech a já těhotná, takže si zalezeme do Coffee Heaven na pořádné čokoládové dorty.

„Zvu vás na účet svého šéfa,“ pokusím se odlehčit atmosféru.

Daniela je ze mně totiž lehce nervózní. Nejtěžší úkol novináře je svůj protějšek při rozhovoru uvolnit a naladit na správnou vlnu. Jinak na sebe máloco prozradí.

Často se mi stává, že teprve po dvou hodinách, kdy konečně odložím tužku, na sebe lidi začnou sypat zajímavé informace. Před tím se každý většinou snaží udělat naoko dobrý dojem. Nebo se bojí.

„Tak jeden čokoládový sen,“ vybírá sympat'áčka nesměle.

Vypadá inteligentně a hned na začátku se omlouvá, má prý dnes otřesné nehty, neboť nestihla zajít na manikúru a sama si sundávala gelové dráčky. Ukazují jí své oteklé buřtíky, aby se uklidnila, a zažertují, že si možná několikrát odskočím na záchod se vyzvracet. Je uvolněnější, ale přesto má slzy v očích, když přinesou hnědou nadýchanou nádheru a čokoládu s dvojitou porcí šlehačky. Místo jídla začne vyprávět.

„Na Džerbu jsem jezdila moc ráda, kvůli moři, místním a tak,“ začíná a já si píšu. Dívám se jí při tom do očí. Nevěřím, že se absolventka VŠE zachovala tak naivně a nechala uhranout od jednoho z místních číšníků, kteří ve snaze pojistit si letenku do Evropy uhání blond'atá děvčata bažící po romantice.

„Hned mě napůl česky, napůl slovensky a napůl německy zval na kafe, pomáhal mi s kufrem a odpřisahal, že se do mě zamiloval na první pohled.“

„Aha,“ chápavě kývu. Na to mu snad neskočila. Je libo trochu romantiky výměnou za vízum?

Mám vědlejšák. Tlumočím tu a tam pro policii. Jednou jsem byla požádána o delikátní službu. Přetlumočit telefonát do Hurgady. Jednapadesátiletá Češka mě oslovila. Přítel si tam našla, sedmadvacetiletého číšníka. V jejích očích jsme viděli lásku, osudovost. Tak jsme volali. Ani si nepamatoval její jméno. Jen opakoval, ať mu pošle prachy. Byl to docela trapas. Uhrála jsem to na špatný signál.

„Abderrazakovi, nebo Abdulovi, jak na něj spiklenecky volali kamarádi, jsem hned suše oznámila, že jsem zadaná. Jiskřičky v jeho černých očích okamžitě pohasly,“ pokračuje Daniela, srká čokoládu a jde vidličkou porazit dorta. Protože se jí ale líbilo jeho vyprávění o místních lidech a o bratrovi, který se oženil do Čech, párkrát si spolu vyšli na pláž. Tenkrát netušila, že polovina věcí, které o sobě Abdul tvrdí, je lež. Například prohlašoval, že bratr studuje v USA. Jeho bratr sice studoval americké dějiny, ale v Tunisu. Hm. Příznačné. Vzpomněla jsem si na číšníka Ismaila, který na univerzitě falšoval doklady, jen aby se dostal na stáž do Francie. Na taxikáře, který neuměl psát. Na recepčního, který se styděl říct, že je Libanonec a tvrdil, že je Ital. Na reliatu Východu, která se probouzela. Na to, že nebudu nikdy soudit lidi podle národnosti.

„V letadle zpátky jsem na Abdula hned zapomněla, jenže on mi půl roku vytrvale esemeskoval a prozváněl.“ Taky mě občas prozvánějí taxikáři z dovolenkouových destinací. Potěší to. Ale proč vlastně?

Když se pak Daniela rozešla s přítelem, tuniský donchuán se chopil životní šance.

„Vrátila jsem se na Džerbu s maminkou a Abdul na nás čekal v pozoru před hotelem i s celou svou rodinou,“ vzpomíná žena naproti mě, v očích slzy.

„Za skromný byt, kde žil s příbuznými, se styděl, takže si kvůli mně na čtrnáct dní pronajal luxusní dům. Potencionální tchyně nachystala pravé rybí hody. Cítila jsem, že na mě hodlá udělat dojem, já ale jeho lásku neopětovala.“

Vše se zlomilo až ve chvíli, když tuniský svůdce naplánoval romantický výlet na pevninu.

„Řídila jsem já, Abdul, ačkoliv byl o čtyři roky starší, neměl řidičák. Po náročné cestě mi navrhl, ať u něj přespím. Celou noc mě pozoroval a něžně objímal. Právě taková péče a doteky, aniž by mělo dojít k sexu, mi hrozně dlouho chyběly.“

Chápavě kývám.

### III

Léto, 1996, volejbalové hřiště v italském Bibione. Stydím se za své občanství, protože všude na trzích visí cedulky „Češi, nekráťte!“ a je všeobecně známo, že některé intelektuprosté Češky chodí do postele s cizinci snad i za zmrzlinu. Tak se před italskými kamarády pasuji na obyvatelku Vídně. Po hře jdeme na kapučíno.

„Někoho ti představíme,“ nadhodí zvesela moje kamarádka Antonella. V hotelu s ní pracuje jeden Vídeňák.

„Grüss dich,“ bafne na mě chlapec. Nerozumím mu ani pozdrav, slušný trapas. Nejhorší posezení v kavárně v mém životě!

Mrknou zpátky na rozrušenou Danielu, která se konečně bez zábran rozpovídá.

„Po odletu jsem v Praze vydržela jen měsíc a půl a na Vánoce se vrátila zpátky s kamarádkou. Abdul vystrojil stromeček, který zjevně ukradl někde v hotelu, pod něj naaranžoval dort s prskavkami.“

Tu noc se poprvé milovali a domluvili se, že když on nemůže do Čech, přijede za ním Daniela na ostrov jako delegátka.

„Sice mi velkoryse nabízel, že mě uživí, nechtěla jsem ale riskovat a být na něm v cizím prostředí závislá,“ vzpomíná Daniela na léto 2007 a ujišťuje mě, že práce delegátky není med, ačkoliv její plat pětkrát převyšoval příjmy drahého. Nekonečné transfery z letiště do hotelů a zpět, pohotovost čtyřicet hodin denně a neustálé řešení stížností klientů na to, že slunce svítí málo, že jim při večeři sousedé u vedlejšího stolu snědli rýži a v bufetu žádná nezbyla, že mají tvrdé polštáře, že je místní prodejci ošidili na trhu při smlouvání...

„Volno máš asi dva dny z měsíce,“ líčí Daniela, kterou práce bavila i vyčerpávala. Zato s partnerem se cítila šťastná.

„Jdlo i nájem jsme platili napůl, občas vařil on, občas já. Když jsem onemocněla a dostala horečky, celou noc nespál a otíral mě studeným hadříkem! Tohle jsem ještě s žádným Čechem nezažila! Jeho kolegové z hotelu se mi klaněli a zdravili mě madame Sammoudi. Už tehdy ale vyplouvaly na povrch další přítelovky lži. Provalilo se, že jeho bratr Vetef se sice do Čech oženil, ale ženu záhy opustil a našel si přítelkyni. Pak přišla řeč na naši svatbu.“

Sleduji inteligentní ženu naproti mě. Jak její románek dopadne? Po roce chtěla zpátky domů. Jenže jinak než jako manželka si tmavooký suvenýr do Čech vzít sebou nemohla. Odletěla tedy do Prahy zařídit dokumenty, po jejichž podpisu se museli do deseti dnů vzít. Přišlo první zklamání, Abdul měl pořídit šaty, ale nesehnal na ně finance.

„Tak jsem se vdávala v sukni a halence. Cestou na obřad ale přišla mnohem děsivější rána.

Manželovi volal na mobil z Čech Vetef, ať se nežení, jinak se okamžitě zabije. Abdul mu vynadal a telefon típl. Následující den připadl na posvátný svátek Aidek, jakousi tuniskou obdobu Vánoc,“ vysvětluje Daniela: „Rodina při něm zabíjí ovci nebo kozla. Uprostřed oslav se tchyně najednou začala svíjet pláčem na zemi a rvát si vlasy z hlavy. Vetef totiž skutečně předchází večer v Praze skoncoval se životem. Lanem svázal svou přítelkyni a ubodal ji a poté se na tom laně sám oběsil z okna. Ve zprávách to viděl i můj otec.“

V Tunisku lidé po smrti blízkého truchlí jinak než u nás. Nesmějí se až do pohřbu koupat, stříhat, holit ani převlékat a smutek zahánějí sebepoškozováním. Abdulova matka dva dny brečela, ať syn neodjíždí do Evropy, nebo taky země.

## IV

V televizi nad barem běží zprávy. Tuniský prezident prchl ze země. Daniela se ptá, jestli také sledují politickou situaci. Kdepak. Nevím tradičně nic, starám se jen o svůj chabý výdělek a o pár zálib. Jako většina Evropanů, kteří žijí v míru. Daniela mi doporučuje pár knih a vysvětluje, že zemi jejího ex ovládá chudoba a totalitní režim navíc ještě umocněný náboženstvím. Občané se mohou do Evropy dostat jen jako studenti nebo třeba ředitelé hotelů.

„Nebo jako manželé Evropanek,“ hořce dodává.

„Onen tuniský prodavač ovoce, který to celé rozjel, se neupálil proto, že by umíral hladu, ale proto, že ho ponižovalo upláctet darebné úředníky jenom proto, aby mohl dělat svoji práci,“ poučí mě ještě má společnice. Za okny kavárny jako vždy proudí vystresované a ztrhané tváře z práce, zatímco svět už nikdy nebude jako dřív. Uvažuji o tom, zda si příští rok zase se stádem Čechů vyrazím na levný last minute někam do Hammametů.

## V

Léto 1972, Československo. Babička s dědou balí věci na dovolenou do Jugoslávie. Povolení vycestovat vyřizovali devět měsíců. Auto je narvané k prasknutí. Na střeše trůní loď, moje desetiletá máma a její brácha se těší, že poprvé uvidí moře. Na hranicích se objeví problém.

„Popojed'te prosím kousek stranou,“ naviguje dědu celník.

Rád by zkontroloval vnitřek vozu. Pod sedačkou pak nalézá dědův univerzitní diplom, srolované bankovky odhalí v pádlu lodi.

Děti se tváří nechápavě, když z koše na jídlo celník loví porcelán. Rodiče mají v tváři hrůzu. Pokus emigrovat se nezdařil. Proto nejsem Američanka.

„Abdul zkusil štěstí v jednom hotelu jako číšník, což se zdálo jako ideální způsob, aby se naučil dobře česky. Bohužel se ale naučil hlavně pít zelenou a pivo,“ píše si.

„Asi po měsíci se s kamarády z práce opil a domů přišel až v půl sedmé ráno. V devět jsem ho budila, že musí vstávat, ale drahý típl budík, vypnul mobil a tvrdil mi, že si vzal volno. Když ale v šest večer zapnul telefon, zavalily ho textovky od šéfa a Abdul mě prosil, ať do hotelu zavolám a omluvím ho. Vymýšlela jsem si, že jsme cestou z Prahy píchli pneumatiku, ale manažer mi nevěřil ani slovo,“ vzpomíná mladá žena se rty od čokolády. Abdul se už do práce nevrátil. A další si nehledal. Prý kvůli rasismu.

„Ve skutečnosti mu ale vyhovovalo, že ho živím a žije si v blahobytu. Na pračku a lednici by doma šetřil roky, u mě měl všechno. Nakonec chodil do hospody častěji než domů. Jednou na mě ječel, že si už nikdy nenajdu chlapa, který mě bude milovat jako on. Pak na mě řval, že už si nikdy nenajdu žádného chlapa. Jednou na mě česky řval, že mě prodá jako kurvu. Sousedí grilovali na zahradě, slušný trapas!“ Není ale nikdy tak zle, aby vám osud nenadělil alespoň jednu sladkou naději.

„Na Vánoce si manžel půjčil od mé mámy tisícovku, aby mi mohl koupit dárek, peníze ale propil. Když se na Hod boží vrátil domů až k ránu, prorazil skleněné dveře do koupelny a se

střepem v ruce řval, že mě zabije. Naštěstí v opilosti nezvládl koordinovat pohyby. Na pomoc mi přišel otec, který žije v přízemí našeho rodinného domku. Je to dvoumetrový bývalý horník, a tak jsem čekala, že se strhne bitka. Táta ale Abdula přátelsky poplácal po rameni a povídá: ‚Tady si, kámo, lehni a spi,‘ a na mě vyjel: ‚Si úplně blbá? Proč ho v tomhle stavu provokuješ?‘ Tímhle chytrým přístupem mi možná zachránil život,“ líčí Daniela.

Po svátcích sehnala levný jednosměrný let na Džerbu a přesvědčila chotě, aby se podíval domů. Jezdil tam rád, vždycky se naparoval, jak se má v Čechách dobře.

„Hned po přiletu volal a sliboval, že se změní. Prý ho v Evropě posedl démon. Démon alkohol. Spoléhal, že mu zaplatím cestu zpátky do Prahy, ale nestalo se. Už se nevrátil. Neměl peníze na letenku, a kdyby se přesto objevil na hranicích, celníci by ho na naše území nepustili,“ kulminuje příběh i má pracovní doba. Reportér je jen tak dobrý, jako jeho poslední článek. Je to přesně rok, co Daniela Abdula neviděla. Na cizinecké policii, kam šla v zoufalství vypovídat, aby měla v případě dalších střetů důkazy, jí policisté slíbili, že povolení k pobytu, které manželovi zrovna díkybohu končilo, mu už nikdy neprodlouží.

## VI

Když jedu po čtyřech hodinách vyčerpaná MHD domů a raduji se, že jsem nikdy neposunula prázdninové flirty s egyptskými číšníky dál, Daniela mi volá a třese se jí hlas. Listovala si v zářijovém Cosmopolitanu, který jsem jí přinesla jako dárek, a našla rozhovor s mistrem v kulturistice. Sportovec začal ostře trénovat až poté, co mu zavraždili manželku.

To s ní si začal Vetef, bratr Abdula, to ji tenkrát v den sňatku ubodal! V článku tato informace chybí. Jediné, co kulturista byl ochotný kolegyni vyzradit, bylo, že manželku zabil bláznivý zhrzený milenec. Daniela ale podle jména příběh poznává.

Svět je stále menší. Další měsíce mě na webu New York Times uhranou fotografie nabitě touhou po svobodě a vtipnými slogany jako například „Guys from Shell Go to Hell.“ Lidé tam někde teď bojují za svobodu. Čmárají na zdi hesla, jaká jsme v Praze vyvolávali v roce 1989 i my. Na mysl mi vyvstane vzpomínka, když jsme v roce 1990 s mámou jely autobusem do Švédska. Před vstupem na trajekt si náš autobus celníci odstavili stranou. Stáli jsme v řadě se svými kufry a potupně ukazovali všechno, co vezeme. České občanství mělo pachut' čehosi nežádoucího. Časy se ale mění. Revoluce se neptá a koná. Něco bude. Často sice dočasně horší než to, proti čemu revoluce vypukla, ale bude to jiné než předtím. Čas vaše rány zahojí.

## Ladies Who Travel East, or the Tunisian Seducer

**Kateřina Horová.** Czech Republic

### Devils from Shell Go to Hell

(A slogan written on the wall of a civilian base in Libya, March 2nd, 2011)

I

“I never felt more beautiful than when I spent three weeks among the Bedouins in the desert and did not see a mirror even for a moment.” This is what my belly dancing teacher told me during my interview with her for Cosmo. Three times a year, Evana packs up her things and flies away to spend some time vegetating in the mountains of Egypt. She travels to places where not even jeeps will go; that is, places where you have to travel by camel, places where independent travellers lie around in seaside camps that look like nothing but a combination of a wooden shack, a campfire and an organized mess of things on a beach for 100 Czech Crowns per day.

“Last year, my mum let me have her trip to a five-star residence in Hurghada. All-inclusive. But when me and my friend got to the reception and saw that horrible show they put on for tourists, including tired camels and animators who were all over the place, we just knew that we couldn’t stay there. The very next morning, we loaded up our backpacks, and instead of meeting with a delegate, like we were supposed to, we were driving away to live among the Bedouins yet again. At first, the hotel receptionists stared at us as if we were crazy when we asked about getting a jeep for travelling to the mountains. But after hearing us out, they actually said that it’s good that we want to see what life in their country is really like. However, that

did not stop the other Czechs from giving us strange looks when, just before the transfer to the airport, we showed up in the hotel’s marble lobby with backpacks, Persian carpets over our shoulders and dirt all over us.”

As the young, independent woman told me these things, she had a sparkle in her eye. The entire cafe was full of stressed out faces while she was just glowing with joy. That was in 2010, and it was already evident that some dramatic turn of events was in the works.

I also met Mrs Sammoudi while working for Cosmopolitan. As a reporter for a prestigious women’s magazine, I am always desperately and passionately searching for stories of interesting women. One day, a friend of mine told me about his colleague from work, saying that she would make a good story. His exact words were: “Danča came back from her vacation with a Tunisian husband, but it definitely wasn’t a match made in heaven. In fact, the guy tried to kill her.” This was one of those moments in my career when I felt that sense of sheer bliss that every reporter feels when she sees an obvious story. When she sees such a story, she jumps on it without thinking twice. Like a lion.

But still, I did not expect anything miraculous from my meeting with Daniela. Sometimes it happens that all my work and all the valuable time that I put into it come to nothing. But here I was wrong. The story of this destructive Czech-Tunisian marriage is the story of us all. It is the story of the revolution that, at the beginning of this year, forever changed the political map of the world, and of an overwhelming uprising of the human desire for freedom which connects all of us into one human race.

## II

Thursday, 5.30 pm. I am waiting in front of a building of the multinational company O2. Long gone are the times when I forgot to take a pencil and a pad to an interview with a famous fashion stylist. That extremely talkative lady was actually surprised that I was not taking notes! I only managed to save my credibility by acting as if my mobile phone were a Dictaphone. Needless to say, after the interview, I bravely ran to my computer as fast as I could to write down all that I remembered before I would forget it.

Soon, I am shaking hands with a mildly overweight but still attractive blonde.

Mrs Sammoudi is on antidepressants, and I am pregnant, so we decide to conduct our interview over some very good chocolate cake from Coffee Heaven.

I am trying to lighten up the atmosphere by saying, “Eat all you want. My boss will pay the bill.”

This is because Daniela appears to be slightly nervous in my presence. The hardest task for any reporter is to loosen the interviewee up and get them into a reasonably good mood. But besides her nervousness, she reveals very little about herself. But it often happens that after a two-hour interview is over, the interviewee really starts to tell me interesting things. This is because it is usually the case that, while the interview is actually being conducted, the interviewee tries to make the best possible impression. Either that or they are scared.

My likable companion timidly orders a Chocolate Dream.

She looks intelligent. Right at the beginning of our interview, she is apologizing for the horrible state of her nails because she did not have time to go to the manicurist and also had to take her gel nails off by herself. To calm her down, I show her my swollen

fingers, which resemble fat little sausages, and joke about how I might have to go to the bathroom to throw up a few times during the interview. She is now more comfortable, but she still has tears in her eyes when the waitress brings her a lovely, brown airy cake and hot chocolate with a double helping of whipped cream. Instead of eating, she simply starts to tell me her story while I quickly begin to jot down notes.

“I always liked to go to Jerba because of the sea, the locals, and stuff like that.” While she speaks, I am looking into her eyes. I can’t believe that a graduate of the Prague College of Economics could have been so naive as to start something with a Jerban waiter. Jerba is just full of waiters who chase after romantic blonde girls from Europe in an effort to travel there for free.

“Right when we met, he was already talking to me in a mix of Czech, Slovak and German and asking me to go have coffee with him. He was helping me with my suitcase and swearing to me that he fell in love with me at first sight.”

I say “aha” and nod understandingly. Surely she didn’t fall for that old trick. Would you like a little bit of romance in exchange for a visa?

I actually have a second job as an interpreter for the police. One of my assignments for this job was a very delicate service for a 51-year-old Czech woman. In Hurghada, she found herself a boyfriend – a 27-year-old waiter. She needed me to interpret a phone conversation between them. We saw love and fatefulness in her eyes, and so we tried calling him, but he did not even remember her name. He just kept repeating that he wants her to send him money. It was a painful and embarrassing situation. I got out of it by saying that the mobile phone signal was bad.

“Without much emotion, I just told Abderazzak, or Abdul, as his friends liked to call

him, that I was taken, and this automatically made him lose the spark in his black eyes.” By now, Daniela is slurping her hot chocolate and getting ready to kill her cake with her fork. Even though Daniela rejected Abdul, she liked the way he talked to her about the locals and also about his brother, who married a Czech woman and moved back to the Czech Republic with her. Thus, Abdul and Daniela went to the beach together a few times. Back then, she did not realize that about half of the things Abdul said about himself were lies. For example, he said that another brother of his was studying in the US. While it was true that his brother was studying American history, he was actually studying it in Tunisia. Hmm, typical.

I remember a waiter called Ismail, who falsified his identification documents in college just so that he could get an internship in France; a taxi driver who could not write; a receptionist who claimed to be Italian because he was ashamed of being Lebanese; the reality of an East that is just waking up; my promise to never judge people according to their nationalities.

“On the flight back home, I forgot about Abdul right away, but he evidently did not forget about me, since over the next six months he kept texting and calling me repeatedly.”

Taxi drivers from the places I’ve been on holiday sometimes call me up too. It flatters me. But why exactly do they do that?

When Daniela broke up with her boyfriend, that Tunisian Don Juan quickly grabbed the great opportunity that presented itself to him.

“I came back to Jerba with my mother. When we got to our hotel, Abdul was waiting there with his entire family, looking very upright and attentive.” As the woman before me remembers these things, she has tears in her eyes. “Abdul was ashamed of his family’s apartment. It was actually pretty humble. And so, because of me, he rented a big

luxurious house for two weeks. My potential mother-in-law prepared a proper fish feast for the occasion. I saw how he was trying hard to impress me, but the problem was that I did not feel the same way about him.”

But this soon changed when the Tunisian seducer asked her to join him on a romantic trip to the mainland.

“During the trip, I drove. Even though Abdul was four years older than me, he did not have a driver’s license. After our difficult journey, he asked if I would like to spend the night with him. All night long, he just tenderly held me close to his body and looked at me. We did not have sex that night, but his caresses and the feeling that someone was taking care of me were precisely what I had been missing since my breakup.”

I nod understandingly.

### III

Summer, 1996, a volleyball field in the Italian city Bibione. I am ashamed of my nationality because the markets are full of signs saying “Czechs, don’t steal!”, and it is also a generally known fact that some intellectually deficient Czech women will go to bed with a foreigner for as little as an ice-cream cone. Thus, in front of my new Italian friends, I am trying to pass myself off as a resident of Vienna. After our volleyball game, we go to get a cappuccino.

My friend Antonella cheerfully offers to introduce me to someone. You can imagine my shock when I find out that this person is a real guy from Vienna who works with her at the hotel.

Right when I meet him, he barks out “Grüs dich” at me. I don’t even understand his greeting, and so I’ve put my foot in it, and it is the worst coffee shop conversation of my life.

I glance back to the agitated Daniela, who is finally starting to speak without inhibitions and really say what’s on her mind.

“After I got back to Prague, I only spent a month and a half there because I soon came back to Tunisia for Christmas with a friend of mine. Abdul decorated a Christmas tree for us, although it was evident that he stole it from some hotel. He put a cake with sparklers under it.”

That night, Abdul and Daniela made love for the first time. They agreed that if Abdul could not go to the Czech Republic, Daniela would come to his island as a delegate.

“Although Abdul kindly offered to financially support me, I did not want to risk becoming dependent on him in a foreign country.” Daniela really did move there as a delegate in the summer of 2007. She assures me that working as a delegate was no easy ride, but her wages were five times higher than those of her significant other.

The work was demanding – unending transfers from airports to hotels and back; being ready and available to take action 24 hours a day; constantly dealing with clients’ complaints about the sun not shining enough, about how during dinner the people at the next table ate all their rice when there was no rice left on the buffet table, about how their pillows are hard, about how a seller at the local marketplace ripped them off when they haggled over the price with him, and so on.

Daniela says that she only had about two free days per month and that while she enjoyed the work, it exhausted her. But she felt happy with her partner.

“We equally shared the costs of food and the rent. Sometimes he cooked, and sometimes I did. When I came down with a fever, he stayed up all night to wipe my face with a cold towel! I never had a Czech man do that for me! His colleagues from the hotel bowed down before me and called me “Madame Sammoud”. But even then, I saw that my boyfriend still sometimes lied to me. For example, I eventually heard that while his

brother Vetef really did marry a Czech girl and move to the Czech Republic with her, he soon left her and found himself a girlfriend. But still, eventually, me and Abdul started to discuss our own wedding.”

I am looking at the intelligent woman in front of me. How will her romance end? After a year in Jerba, she wanted to go back home. But the only way she could take a dark-eyed Tunisian home with her was by marrying him. So she flew back to Prague to take care of the necessary documents. After signing them, she had to get married within the next ten days. But her first disappointment in Abdul came when he was supposed to buy her wedding dress but could not do so because he could not get together a sufficient amount of money.

“So I got married in a blouse and a skirt. But something even more horrible occurred on our way to the marriage ceremony. Abdul got a call on his mobile phone from Vetef in the Czech Republic. Vetef told him not to get married, and that if he still went through with the wedding, he would kill himself. Abdul would not stand for this, and so he just told Vetef off and hung up on him. The next day was the sacred holiday Aidek, which is like a Tunisian version of Christmas. When celebrating Aidek, a family usually slaughters a sheep or a goat and then has a feast. That is what Abdul’s family was doing when, suddenly, my mother-in-law fell to the floor and started to writhe, cry and tear out her hair. She just learned that during the previous evening, Vetef took his own life in Prague. He tied up his girlfriend with a rope and stabbed her with a knife until she was dead. Then he took the same rope and hung himself from a window with it. The incident made it to the news. Even my father saw it.”

In Tunisia, after someone dies, their close friends and relatives mourn differently than people here in the Czech Republic. Until

the funeral, they are not allowed to bathe, cut their hair, shave or change clothes. They also try to chase the sadness away by physically hurting themselves. For two days, Abdul's mother cried and begged him not to go to Europe, or else he would die too.

## IV

On the television above the bar, the news is on. The Tunisian president escaped from the country. Daniela asks me if I follow the political situation there. Not at all. I usually don't know anything about stuff like that. I only care about my very limited wages and a few likes and hobbies, like most Europeans who are struggling to make a living under conditions of peace. Daniela recommends to me a couple of books on the subject. She explains to me that her ex's homeland is ruled by both poverty and a totalitarian regime whose authority is strengthened by its connections to the local religion. Also, citizens of Tunisia can come to Europe only as college students or directors of hotels...

"...or as husbands of European women," she adds bitterly.

My companion teaches me some more about the situation: "That Tunisian fruit vendor who started it all did not set himself on fire because he was dying of hunger, but because he felt degraded when he had to bribe corrupt officials just so that they would let him do his job."

From the window of the cafe, I see how the strained and stressed faces, probably on their way home from work, quickly move by just as they always do, even though the world just changed, and it will never be the same.

I wonder how I'll spend my holiday next year. Will I once again join a large group of Czechs for a cheap last minute trip to Hammamet?

## V

Summer 1972, Czechoslovakia. Grandma and grandpa are packing for their family holiday in Yugoslavia. They spent nine months dealing with government officials just to get a permit to leave the country. Their car is filled to the point of bursting. A canoe sits on the roof like a throne. My 10-year-old mother and her brother are looking forward to seeing the ocean for the very first time. But at the border, they run into a problem.

A customs officer asks my grandfather to move his car a bit to the side. He wants to inspect the car's interior. Under one of the seats, he finds my grandfather's university diploma. He also discovers some rolled up bank notes in one of the paddles of the canoe. The kids look puzzled as the officer is pulling porcelain from out of a food basket. Meanwhile, their parents' faces are full of fear. This attempt to emigrate did not succeed. If it did, I would be an American today.

"When we settled down in the Czech Republic, Abdul tried working as a waiter at a hotel. It seemed like the perfect way for him to learn Czech. But sad to say, it mainly just taught him to drink beer and green mint liquor." I am taking all this down.

"After about a month, he got drunk with his friends from work and came home at 6.30 in the morning. At nine, I was trying to wake him up, but he just turned off the alarm clock, turned off his phone, and told me that he took the day off. But when he turned his phone on again at six in the evening, it was full of angry text messages from his boss. Abdul begged me to call the hotel and excuse him. I did that, and I told the manager that Abdul could not come to work that day because we had a flat tyre while outside of Prague, but the manager would not believe a word I said." As the young woman remembers these things, her lips are smeared with

chocolate. As could be expected, Abdul did not return to his job, and he did not try to find another one either. He said that it would be pointless because Czechs are racist.

“But the reality of the situation was that he was enjoying a life of luxury, by Tunisian standards, and did not even have to work because I made enough money to support us both. In his homeland, he would have to scrimp and save for years just to buy a washing machine and a refrigerator. With me, he had all that and more. But he spent all that free time drinking, and it eventually got so bad that he spent more time at the pub than at home. We naturally fought because of this, and during one of our fights, he shouted at me that I should show more appreciation for him because I would never find a man who would love me as much as he does. Another time, he yelled at me that I would never find another man at all. And then there was that other time when he screamed at me in Czech that he would sell me as a whore. That was just when our neighbours were having a barbecue in the garden, so you can imagine how humiliated I felt.”

But things are never so bad that fate could not give a person at least one sweet ray of hope.

“When it was getting close to Christmas, my husband borrowed a thousand crowns from my mum, saying that he needed some money to get me a Christmas present. But he just spent it all at the pub over the holidays. But the biggest turn of events came on Christmas Day, when he finally came home in the morning acting drunk and crazy. In this mood of his, he smashed through the glass door leading to the bathroom. With a shard of glass stuck in his hand, he started screaming that he would kill me and he even swung at me a few times. Luckily for me, though, he could not coordinate his movements well when he was drunk. My dad lives on the first

floor of our family house, and so he came to help me when he heard all the noise. He is a former miner, two metres tall, and I thought that it would end with them fighting each other. But my dad did not react violently. He just tapped Abdul on the shoulder in a friendly way and said, “Calm down, buddy, and go to bed. You’ll feel better after sleeping a bit.” And sure enough, he did succeed in calming Abdul down. Although my dad also scolded me for provoking Abdul when he was drunk out of his mind, he probably saved my life that morning.”

After the holidays, Daniela convinced Abdul to go back home to see his friends and family and even found an inexpensive one way flight to Jerba for him. He liked to go there. During his previous visits, he always bragged about how good his life in the Czech Republic was.

“After arriving in Jerba, he called me up and promised that he would change. He said that the problem was that in Europe he was possessed by a demon, the demon called alcohol. He expected that I would pay for his flight back to the Czech Republic, but that did not happen. And so he never came back. He did not have enough money for the flight back, and even if he did return, the customs officials would not let him enter the country because his residence permit expired.” That is the culmination of both the story and my working hours. A reporter is only as good as her last story. It is now exactly one year since Daniela last saw Abdul. In her desperation, she went to the Foreign Police to discuss her problems with him and also so that their records of the conversation could be used as evidence in case any further violent confrontations with him took place. Luckily for her, though, at the time of her visit, her husband’s residence permit just expired, and so the police just promised that they would never extend it.

## VI

After the four-hour interview, I am taking the tram home and feeling glad that I never took my holiday time flings with Egyptian waiters to a more serious level. But suddenly, my mobile phone rings. It is Daniela and her voice is shaking. She was looking through the September issue of Cosmopolitan, which I brought her as a small gift, when she came across an interview with a bodybuilding champion. It said that he truly started to exercise a lot only after his wife was murdered. But Daniela recognized some of the names and saw that it was Vetef, Abdul's brother, who killed the woman! She was the girlfriend he stabbed to death just before killing himself on Daniela and Abdul's wedding day! But this piece of information is missing from the article. The only detail the bodybuilder was willing to reveal about the matter to my colleague is that his wife was killed by a heartbroken lover after she tried to end the affair.

The world is constantly getting smaller. In the following months, I am looking at the web site of the New York Times and I'm entranced by photos that are filled with the desire for freedom and humorous slogans like "Guys from Shell Go to Hell." Somewhere in those distant places, people are fighting for freedom at this very moment. The slogans they are scrawling on the walls are similar to the ones we chanted in 1989. Just then I remember how my mum and I took a bus to Sweden in 1990. Before we could get on the ferryboat, the customs officials took our bus to the side and made us all stand in a line and suffer the humiliation of showing absolutely everything that we were carrying. A Czech citizenship had connotations of being something that was at least vaguely unpleasant all over the world. But times are changing. A revolution does not ask. It just acts. Something will happen. Often the new situation is worse than what the revolution fought against – at least temporarily. But the new situation will still be better than what came before. Time will heal all your wounds.

## حكاية ثورة

محمد إحسان كعدان سوريه

ليلة مطرة من أيام الشتاء، الكل مشغول. أمي تنادي الجميع:

ياالله يا أولاد، يا أبو محمد تفضل. العشاء صار جاهزاً.

يلتفت أبي ويسألني:

أين أخوك حمزة؟.

لا أعرف!! تركته في الغرفة يكمل وظيفة الرياضيات.

أبي ينادي حمزة.... لا أحد يجيب!

اذهب لترى ما القصة، وقل له أنّ أمك قد حضرت العشاء، وبعد العشاء تعود وتكمل الوظيفة.

ذهبت إلى غرفة حمزة. صوت بكاء شديد، كلمات لا أستطيع فهمها. فتحت الباب، حمزة في سريرته وهو يهتز من كثرة البكاء.

حمزة... حمزة، لماذا تبكي حبيبي؟

يستدير حمزة باتجاهي ويضع رأسه على صدري:

اليوم جاء أناس غرباء إلى المدرسة، أخذوا سمير وعمار إلى السجن.

إلى السجن؟! لماذا؟ وكيف؟

كنا في حصة العلوم، وفجأة يفتح باب القاعة بقوة ويدخل أربعة رجال، كل واحد منهم كان طويل وسمين، كان مظهرهم مخيف جداً. واحد منهم يحمل مسدساً. كانوا يريدون سمير وعمار.

أين كان الأستاذ؟

توقف هنا حمزة قليلاً ومسح دموعه وأخذ يروي ما حدث:

الأستاذ: من انتم؟ كيف تدخلون القاعة بهذه الصورة؟

أحد الرجال: نحن فرع الأمن السياسي ومعنا أمر بإلقاء القبض على عمار وسمير.

الأستاذ: ما بتأخوهم غير على جتتي.

فقام أحد الرجال وضرب الأستاذ ضربة قوية على رأسه فوقع على الأرض. عندما رأيت هذا اقتربت من أصدقائي وبدأنا نرتجف خوفاً.

رجال الأمن بصوت قوي: وين سمير وعمار ولاك؟؟

لم يردّ أحد... ثم أمسك واحد منهم أحد الطلاب من يده:

ولاك أنت سمير؟

لا عمو مو أنا.

لكن مين سمير؟ مين؟ رد ولاك.

وعندما بدأ يزيد الضغط على يد الطالب، أشار الطالب بإصبعه وهو يبكي إلى سمير وعمار. حاول عمار وسمير أن يهربا ولكنهما لم يفلحا، فأمسك بهما رجال الأمن وهما يبكيان ويصرخان ماما... بابا.... وفي تلك الأثناء وصل مدير المدرسة.

مدير المدرسة: شو يا معلم وين أخذين الطلاب؟

رجل الأمن: روح هيك.... رجاع هيك.

ودفعوا المدير بعيدا.

كنت أشعر بحزن حمزة مع كل كلمة:

حبيبي حمزة اغسل وجهك الآن، وهي لتتناول معنا العشاء، وانتبه لنفسك فإنهم مجرمون.

منذ فترة انطلقت شرارة احتجاجات اجتاحت الدول العربية واحدةً تل والأخرى. ثم ما لبث أن كثر الحديث عن احتمال انتقال هذه الاحتجاجات إلى بلدنا، وقد امتلئ الناس غيظاً من الاستبداد والاضطهاد الممارس عليهم من قبل أجهزة الأمن.

في أحد الأيام وأنا جالس مع والدي في الدكان سمعت صوت سيارات الأمن تأتي وتذهب بسرعة من أمامنا. خرجتُ مع والدي لنستطلع الأمر، وإذ بثلاث سيارات أمن سياسي تقف عند باب المدرسة الابتدائية. ذهبنا إلى هناك لنستطلع الأمر أكثر. همس والدي في أذن جارنا:

أبو زهير ماذا يحدث؟

أبو زهير: سمعت أنه كُتبت شعارات ضد رئيس الدولة على جدار المدرسة، وقد أتى الأمن ليحقق في الموضوع.

أدركت حينها أن تلك الدعوات التي يطلقها الناشطون للتظاهر من أجل الحرية والكرامة قد لاقت أذاناً صاغيةً من أهالي القرية. وهاهي أولى هذه المظاهر التي عبر عنها الأطفال ببراءتهم ليكتبوا ما وقع على أسماعهم عبر التلفاز من شعارات ردها متظاهرون كثر في دولٍ أخرى.

كنت مندهشاً لما سمعته اليوم. كيف يمكن لأحد أن يفعل ذلك؟ لا بل كيف يمكن لأحد أن يفكر بذلك؟ هل هي شجاعة الأطفال أم هي البراعة التي لا تعرف الخوف؟ فعلاً شيء محير.

إنه منتصف الشهر، قد مرّ على اعتقال سمير وعمار ثلاثة أيام، لا معلومات عنهما ولا حتى عن مكانهما. إنّه اليوم المقرر من قبل الناشطين للبدء ببعض التظاهرات المنادية بالحرية. الحياة الطبيعية في القرية لا تجمعات، سيارة أمن تتجول داخل القرية لترصد كل حركة غير طبيعية. أبناء عن بعض التجمعات في العاصمة تمّ تفريقها بشدة، مع بعض الاعتقالات.

في اليوم التالي، جرى اعتصام أمام وزارة الداخلية في العاصمة للمطالبة بالإفراج عن المعتقلين. تم إنهاء الاعتصام بقوة مع مزيد من الاعتقالات!!

أسبوع كامل دون الإفراج عن سمير وعمار. أمي الآن شديدة القلق على والدي:

أين كنت أبو محمد.

آخ يا أم محمد، أنا متعب كثيراً.

خير إن شاء الله؟

كنت مع أبو عمار وأبو سليم والمختار في فرع الأمن السياسي...

الأمن السياسي؟ لماذا؟

بسبب قصة عمار وسمير. اليوم بعد صلاة العصر جاء أبو عمار وطلب مني لأذهب معه ومع المختار وأبو سليم إلى فرع الأمن السياسي لمقابلة رئيس الفرع لكي نطلب منه الإفراج عن الأولاد، وبالفعل ذهبت معه. عندما وصلنا لمبنى الفرع في المدينة، طلبنا لقاء رئيس الفرع.

وقف رئيس الفرع مرحباً بنا. جلسنا وبدأ أبو عمار بالحديث:

أبو عمار: يا سيدي الله يكرمكم أين عمار وسمير؟ قلوبنا تتمزق على فراقهما.

رئيس الفرع: لا تخافوا هم بضيافتنا بالفرع.

أبو سمير: هل تسمحون سيدي بإخراجهم معنا؟ ونعدكم أنهم لن يكرروها أبداً.

رئيس الفرع: لا يا أبو سمير لن نسلمهم. فهما كتبنا شعارات تحريضية ضد الدولة وضد الوحدة الوطنية! ولذلك نحن نستضيفهم عندنا هنا لكي نُعيد تربيتهم....

المختار: تُعيدوا تربيتهم؟! إنهم مجرد أطفال، فهما لا يعلمان ماذا فعلا.

رئيس الفرع: هذا آخر كلام عندي. الله معكن.

المختار: عم تقلعنا يا حضرة العميد؟ أنت تعلم ماذا فعلت الآن؟ سوف نأتي بكل رجال القرية ونُخرج عمار وسمير.

رئيس الفرع: عندها سوف نقتل كل رجالكم ونتزوج نساتكم.

المختار بغضب شدي: سوف ترى ماذا سيحصل إذاً. تفضلوا يا جماعة.

كان كلام رئيس فرع الأمن خطيراً جداً، فهي شتيمة كبيرة في حق أهل القرية، ولم أكن أعتقد أنها سوف تقف عند هذا الحد.

مساء يوم الخميس، وبعد تسعة أيام على اعتقال عمار وسمير. بشرنا جارنا بخروج الأطفال من السجن، ذهبت مع أبي وحمزة إلى بيتهم لنبارك لأهلهم، كان حمزة يطير من الفرح بعودة صديقيه الحميمين. وصلنا إلى بيت سمير وقد كان عدد كبير من أهل القرية قد سبقونا، رأينا الغضب في عيونهم.

أبي: ماذا هناك أبو سمير؟ خير؟

انظر ماذا فعلوا بالأولاد يا أبو محمد.

انطلقنا إلى غرفة الأولاد، وإذ بجسد كل من سمير وعمار قد امتلئ بأثار التعذيب، وجههما مدمى، أظفرهما قد اقتلعت، الأطراف صبغت بلون بني (اكتشفت بعدها أنها علامات الحرق بالكهرباء التي تُستعمل في المعتقلات) صدمت لهول ما رأيت، أيعقل هكذا ظلم يقع على أطفال لم تتجاوز أعمارهم ثلاثة عشر عام؟ هل من المعقول أن تصل جرائم الأمن لهذا الحد؟

المختار: والله لقد توقعتُ أن يتم ضرب الأولاد، ولكن لم أتوقع أن تصل بهم إلى هذه الدرجة. واستمر بترديد: الله أكبر... الله أكبر. غداً نواجه هؤلاء المجرمين.

أوما لي أبي أن أخذ حمزة وأذهب إلى البيت، كانت الدمعة لا تجف عن خد حمزة لكن دون صراخ أو نحيب.

استيقظت يوم الجمعة وصورة عمار وسمير لا تغادرني، أحضر نفسي لصلاة الجمعة. الكل جاهز الآن للصلاة. انطلقنا إلى المسجد الكبير في القرية، تكلم الخطيب عن الظلم، وواجب الوقوف في وجه الظالم وعدم السكوت عنه، كان هذا بشكل عام، ولم يسم شيئاً باسمه، لم يدع الخطيب لرئيس الدولة كما كان يفعل عادةً. فجأة وفور انتهاء الصلاة صدح صوت مدو: الله أكبر... الله أكبر. تشجع معظم المصلين، وبدأ الكل بالخروج من المسجد وهم يكبرون، اجتمعوا في الساحة أمام المسجد، وهم ينادون بشعارات الحرية والكرامة وللوحدة الوطنية.

إنها أول مظاهرة أراها في حياتي، أول تجمع، أول تحدي للأمن. سار المشاركون باتجاه المساجد الأخرى، انضم إلينا متظاهرون جدد، أصبحنا بالعشرات. تفاجئنا بقدم القوى الأمنية، صاروا يطلقون الغاز المسيل للدموع. هذه أول مرة أعرف ما هو الغاز المسيل للدموع، سمعت عنه الكثير ولكن لا أعرف ما هو. لم تنفض الجموع واستمرت في طريقها مصممة على أن تسير في كل أنحاء القرية لتجمع أكبر عدد ممكن من المتظاهرين الغاضبين. كانت الصيحات مدوية، أحس أنها تخرج من أعماقنا وهي ممزوجة بالقهر والألم، مع كل صيحة كنت أسمع صوتي لأول مرة، تملكني شعور غريب، شعور التماهي مع كل المتظاهرين، كأننا كتلة متحركة واحدة.

في لحظة باغته شق تلك الصيحات صوت الرصاص. لا شعورياً انفض الجميع باتجاه الأزقة، تفقدنا أنفسنا، لم يصب أحد. أدركنا حينها أنه رصاص في الهواء لتفريقنا، توقف إطلاق النار المتقطع تماماً بعد عشر دقائق. عدنا وتجمعنا من جديد و عادت وانطلقت صرخات الغضب المطالبة بالحرية، وشعارات أخرى مناهضة للأمن أقوى

من سابقتها، عاد إطلاق النار في الهواء، لم يكثر أحد. ثم توقف، ثم عاد لينهال علينا بكميات كبيرة مباشرة. كنت أسمع صوت الرصاص وهو يخترق الهواء من حولي، أدركت حينها أنه استهداف مباشر للمتظاهرين. حاولنا الهرب وإذ بسبعة أشخاص يسقطون أرضاً، لم نستطع سحبهم، انتظرنا حتى توقف الرصاص تماماً ثم انطلقت مجموعة من الشباب المعروفين عندنا في القرية بجرأتهم ليسحبوهم. لم أكن بتلك الجراءة لأكون واحداً منهم، انتظرت مع بقيت الناس أراقب. استطاع الشباب سحب المصابين بصعوبة بالغة. كانت النتيجة شهيدين وخمسة جرحى، ثلاثة منهم في حالة خطيرة، أسرعنا بهم على الأكتاف وبالأيدي وحملناهم إلى المستوصف لإسعافهم، كان الكل مذعوراً من هول ما حدث، كأننا في حلم، لم تكن عيني تصدق ما تراه، أحاول أن أستعيد تركيزي ولكن كنت في كل مرة أفشل من جديد.

وصلنا إلى المستوصف وكان رجال الأمن بانتظارنا هناك. استلم الأطباء منا المصابين ثم تم اعتقالنا من قبل رجال الأمن. كنا خمسة عشر شخصا، ذهبوا بنا إلى مخفر الشرطة، ومن هناك تم نقلنا إلى مكان آخر لا نعلمه، ضربات العصي لم تكن تغادر أجسادنا طوال الطريق، إلى جانب الشتائم المتكررة وعبارات التخوين.

وصلنا إلى المكان المقرر، لم نعد نقوى على الوقوف، وأصبنا بالإرهاك الشديد.

خذوهم إلى الزنزانة، يالله. صاح أحد رجال الأمن

بعد ساعات فُتح باب الزنزانة. وبدؤوا يأخذون الواحد تلو الآخر. في المرة الرابعة جاء دوري، تم اقتيادي إلى غرفة صغيرة تحوي طاولة وخلفها كرسي. انتظرت حتى جاء شخص إلي.

ما اسمك الثلاثي؟ ما هو اسم أمك؟

أجبتة...

لماذا خرجت بالمظاهرة ولاك عميل؟

لم أستطع الإجابة!!

ما عم تجاوب يا كلب... قل لي لصالح مين أنت تعمل؟ أمريكا أم إسرائيل؟

والله يا سيدي لا أعمل مع أحد.

لكن لماذا خرجت بالمظاهرة ولاك مهندس!!؟

رأيت الناس تنادي للحرية بعد الصلاة فوقفت معهم.

قلنتي بدك حرية لكن. مساعد جميل....يا مساعد جميل. خذ هذا العميل وشوف  
شغلك معو.

والله يا سيدي ليس لي علاقة. والله مثل ما أقول لك....

خراس ولاك.... خراس

سحبني المساعد جميل إلى غرفة أخرى، أدخلني في دولاب حتى أصبحت قدماي  
للأعلى دون أن أستطيع التخلص منه.

امسك المساعد جميل الخيزرانة:

الآن سوف أعلمك يا خاين كيف تخرج للتظاهر وتطالب بالحرية.

بدأت الخيزرانة تهوي على قدمي وأنا أصيح:

الله يوفقك كفى.... كفى. لم أعد أحتمل أكثر من ذلك. كفى...

مع كل ضربة كنت أحس أن روحي تكاد تخرج من بين أضلاعي. أنا أتلو من الألم  
وأستغيث وهو يزيد من عزمه و من قوة الضربة وهو يشتمني. لم أعد أحس بقدمي،  
كأنهما تخدرتا تماماً.

دخل بعد ذلك أحد العناصر:

يبدو أن صاحبنا قد استسلم. اتركه.

لم أستطع الوقوف على قدمي ولكن كل صيحة من صيحات العناصر كانت تجبرني لا  
شعورياً على الوقوف.

أعادني المساعد جميل إلى غرفة المحقق من جديد.

المحقق: كيف الاستضافة؟ هل أعجبتك؟

لم أستطع التكلم.

إي يا عميل هذا فقط تعارف. وثاني مرة إذا بتعيدها لا تلوم إلا نفسك.

أمرك سيدي أمرك.

خذ هذه الورقة وابصم عليها.

ما هذه يا سيدي؟

خراس ولاك و ابصم، وإلا أنادي للمساعد جميل.

لأ سيدي، ببصم بلا مساعد جميل. ( علمت بعدها أنها عبارة عن تعهد بعدم الخروج بأي مظاهرة)

يا الله انقلع الآن، أهلك ينتظرونك خارجاً.

كانت كل العائلة بانتظاري. ومن كثرة فرحي بالخروج نسيت ألم قدمي المتورمتين. احتضنتني أمي وهي تبكي:

الحمد لله على سلامتك يا ابني... الله يكسر أيديهم

ونحن في طريقنا إلى البيت اخبروني عن مدى الغضب في القرية بعد سقوط الشهداء، وأنَّ تحركات أخرى اليوم قد شهدتها العاصمة.

تتالت الأيام والغضب يشتد، أعداد المتظاهرين تزداد جمعةً بعد جمعة، يوماً بعد يوم. انضمت مناطق عديدة في مختلف أنحاء البلاد إلى الاحتجاجات، حتى أصبح يوم الجمعة كابوس يؤرق النظام. أصبح الثابت في يوم جمعة هو سقوط الشهداء، والمتحول هو أعداد هؤلاء الشهداء. يوم السبت كان يوم تشييع الشهداء إضافة إلى المزيد من التظاهر. مع اتساع رقعت الاحتجاجات قرّرت الدولة الحسم العسكري، أنزلت الجيش ليحاصر إحدى المدن حصاراً خانقاً بهدف إيقاف الاحتجاجات ولكن كل هذا لم ينفع، بل على العكس ازدادت التظاهرات قوةً وعزيمةً، وبات الأطفال جزء بارز من الاحتجاجات اليومية.

إنها ليلة الخميس، ليلة الترقب. الاستعدادات على قدم وساق لجمعة تظاهرات جديدة. كانت المعنويات مرتفعة جداً، ولم يثنى الحل الأمني من عزيمة المتظاهرين. قرر أهل القرية غداً بالانطلاق إلى تلك المدينة المحاصرة والتي لا تبعد عن قريتنا سوى بضعة كيلو مترات. كل بيت تبرع ببعض الطعام والشراب والدواء إلى تلك المدينة، وتم تحميلها في السيارات بانتظار يوم الغد. حمزة كان مشغولاً بتجهيز لافتة كبيرة بعض الشيء، رسم عليها دبابة وهي تلاحق طفلاً مسرعاً يحمل الطعام، كانت آثار أقدام الطفل تكتب "فكوا الحصار" لتأتي الدبابة وتزيلها. أحسست بحزن حمزة الشديد و قرأت الإصرار في عينيه على دخول تلك المدينة مع الأهالي.

انتهت صلاة الجمعة، الكل مستعد للانطلاق بسيارات الإمدادات حسب الخطة. لوحة حمزة تكاد لا تفارقه أبداً. خرجنا بحوالي خمس سيارات، وصلت الأخبار من القرى المجاورة الأخرى بأنهم رتبوا أنفسهم أيضاً لفك الحصار، تم التنسيق مع باقي القرى على اللقاء على بعد سبعة كيلو مترات من مدخل المدينة.

وصلت جميع السيارات من القرى المجاورة وتقرر الانطلاق، وما أن تقدمنا أكثر حتى انهال علينا الرصاص كالمطر، كأنه كمين وقد وقعنا في داخله، بدأت الدماء تسيل من كل جانب، حاولنا العودة أو الهرب لكن لم نفلح، كنا محاصرين من جميع الاتجاهات، لم أعد أرى والدي ولا حمزة في تلك الفوضى، كانت مجزرة حقيقية بكل ما تحمله الكلمة من معنى. توقف الرصاص وبدأنا نتجمع إلى بعضنا. الجثث مُلقاة على الأرض وقد اختلطت الدماء مع حليب الأطفال.

فجأة وجدتُ أبي وهو أيضاً لم يصب. تعانقنا بقوة وسألني:

أين حمزة؟

لا أعلم. أذكر أنه كان معك

نعم، ولكن لا أدري أين اختفى بعد ذلك.

حاولنا أن نبحث عنه، لكن لم نجد له أثر لا بين الأحياء ولا بين الشهداء. ازداد قلقنا أكثر، بحثنا كثيراً ولكن دون جدوى. أصبْتُ باليأس. كان لا بد أن نغادر المكان لخطورة الهجوم علينا من جديد، حسبنا أنه قد عاد إلى البيت لوحده سيراً على الأقدام.

حمزة ليس بالبيت، حاولنا أن نسأل عنه بقية الناس الذين حضروا معنا المجزرة. لكن لم يره أحد.

خمسة أيام على اختفاء حمزة. لا معلومات لا اتصال. قرر أبي في الغد أن يسأل عنه فروع الأمن و مخافر الشرطة.

جلبة قوية. تُرى من القادم في هذا الوقت المتأخر؟ قمت مسرعاً وإذا بأبي يفتح الباب. أربعة عناصر أمن يحملون شيء ملفوفاً بقماش أبيض، يتركونه أمام الباب ويضعون فوقه ورقة. لم يتجرأ أحد على الاقتراب من هذا الشيء الملفوف، الكل كان مذعوراً وقد تغيرت معالم وجهه وكأنه عرف ما بداخل هذا الشيء. اقترب أبي وكشف جزءاً من هذا الشيء وإذ بحمزة قد قتل وتم لفه بهذا الكفن. سقط أبي فوق الجثة يبكي، عندها تأكدت توجساتنا، أمي فقدت صوابها وبدأت تصيح بصوت هستيري. كشفنا عن جثة حمزة وقد صعقنا لما وجدناه، علامات التعذيب في كل مكان من جسده الغض، آثار طلقات نارية على أطرافه، عنقه ملتوٍ ومكسور، حتى أنهم قد قطعوا عضوه الذكري. أمسكت الورقة التي تركها رجال الأمن وإذ بها بضع كلمات:

وجدنا ابنكم عند مشارف المدينة (إشارة إلى المدينة المحاصرة) وهذا جزء كل من تسول له نفسه في تحدي إرادة الدولة.

عندها فهمت معنى تلك الرسوم في لافتة حمزة ليلة فك الحصار. اجتمع عدد كبير من الجيران على وقع صوت أمي، قام أحدهم بتصوير جسد حمزة الطاهر وتحديد علامات التعذيب عليه.

يوم الخميس مساءً. أتفاجئ بأن صور أخي تملئ شاشات كل وكالات الأنباء العالمية. وهي تتحدث عن بشاعة هذه الجريمة بحق الإنسانية، خاصةً أنها كانت على جسد طفل بريء.

لم أكن يوماً أتوقع أن أخي سيكون المحرك الأساسي للضمانر في البلد لتثور على الظلم والاستبداد و على القهر والاستعباد الذي عانت منه على مر عقود سابقة. فها هو زخم الثورة اليوم بعد تصفية حمزة يتصاعد أكثر مما هو عليه قبل مقتله. وهاهي مظاهرات الأطفال تنطلق في كل مكان من البلاد تحت اسم "أصدقاء حمزة"، لعل روح حمزة وكل الأطفال الآخرين الذين قضوا تنتصر على آلة القتل والبطش.

## A Story of a Revolution

**Muhammad Ishan Kaad. Syria**

It was a rainy night in winter, everyone was busy, and my mum called everybody:

“Come on kids, come on Abu Muhammad, dinner is ready.”

My father turned around and asked: “Where is your brother Hamza?”

“I don’t know. I left him in the room solving a maths problem.”

My father called Hamza, but there was no answer.

“Go and see what it is and tell him that his mother has prepared dinner and he can carry on solving the maths problem after dinner.”

I went to Hamza’s room; I heard mournful cries and some ambiguous words, so I opened the door to see Hamza lying on his bed, crying and shivering violently.

“Hamza, Hamza. Why are you crying?”

Hamza turned to me and put his head on my chest and said: “Today, some strange men came to the school and arrested Samir and Ammar to put them in jail.”

“In Jail!! Why?? How??”

“We were attending our science lesson when the classroom door opened suddenly and four men appeared. Each one of them was tall and fat, they had rugged features and very scary appearances and one of them was holding a pistol. They wanted Samir and Ammar.”

“Where was the teacher?”

Hamza stopped a little to wipe his tears away, and then he started recalling what happened:

“The teacher asked them who they were and how they entered the class. One of the men said they were from Political Security and had an order to arrest Samir and Ammar. The teacher said they would take them only

over his dead body. One of the men stood up and hit the teacher on the head, knocking him over. Upon seeing that, we all started to tremble out of fear and anxiety. One of the men asked where Ammar and Samir were. No one answered, so he grabbed one of our companions by the hand and asked him if he was Samir? He said he wasn’t so they asked where he was. When the man started to squeeze the boy’s hand, he cried and pointed his finger to Samir and Ammar. Samir and Ammar tried to escape, but they failed. The men caught them and the boys were weeping and screaming... Mummy... Daddy... Then the school headmaster arrived and asked them where they were taking the students? The men pushed the headmaster out of the way.”

I was grieved by every one of Hamza’s words:

“Wash your hands and join us for dinner, and be careful because they are criminals.”

Recently many protests have broken out and swept through Arab countries one by one; and there was much talk of the possibility of transmitting these protests to our country. People were filled with anger at the tyranny and oppression used against them by the security forces.

One day when I was sitting with my father in our shop, I heard the sound of some police cars passing by very quickly. I went out with my father to see what was going on.

My father whispered to one of our neighbours: “Abu Zoher, what’s going on?”

“I heard that some slogans were written on the school wall against the president and

the security forces came to investigate,” said Abu Zoher.

Then I realized that those calls by activists to demonstrate for freedom and dignity have been warmly received by villagers, and this was expressed by the innocence of children writing some of the slogans chanted by demonstrators in many other countries, which they heard on television.

I was surprised at what I heard that day; how could anyone do that? How could anyone think like that? Was it the children’s courage or their innocence that knew no fear? It was very puzzling.

It was mid-month, three days had passed since Samir and Ammar had been arrested, and there was no information about them or even about where they were. This was the same day some activists had planned pro-freedom demonstrations. Life was normal in the village; there were no gatherings, but there was a security vehicle roaming across the village to monitor any unnatural movement. In the capital, there was news about many arrests and some assemblies that were roughly broken up.

The next day, a sit-in was staged before the Ministry of the Interior in the capital demanding the release of the detainees. The sit-in was violently terminated with more arrests!!

A whole week had passed without the release of Samir and Ammar, and my mother was worried about my father:

“Where were you, Abu Muhammad?”

“Ah, I am very tired, Om Muhammad.”

“God willing, everything will be fine.”

“I was with Abu Ammar, Abu Samir and Al Mokhtar in the Political Security branch.”

“Political Security?? Why?”

Because of Ammar and Samir. Today after evensong, Abu Ammar came and asked me to accompany him along with Abu Samir and Al Mokhtar to Political Security to meet

the head of the branch and ask him to release Ammar and Samir. We went together and we asked to meet the head of the branch, who welcomed us, and then we sat and Abu Ammar started to talk:

“Sir, please tell us where Ammar and Samir are, our hearts are aching for them,” said Abu Ammar.

“Don’t be afraid, they are our guests,” said the head of the branch.

“Sir, would you please let us see them and we will make them promise that they will never do such a thing again?” asked Abu Samir.

“No, we won’t release them; they wrote slogans of incitement against the state and national unity.”

“They are just children; they don’t know what are they doing,” said Al Mokhtar.

“This is my final decision, God be with you,” said the head of the branch.

“Are you expelling us, Mr Brigadier General? Do you realize what the result of what you are doing will be? We will bring all the villagers and release Samir and Ammar by force,” warned Al Mokhtar.

“Then we will kill all your men and marry your wives,” threatened the head of the branch.

“You will see what is to be. Let’s go men,” said Al Mokhtar angrily.

The words of the head of the branch were serious; it was a terrible insult to the villagers and I did not think that it would stop at this point.

On Thursday evening and nine days after Samir’s and Ammar’s arrest, our neighbour informed us that the boys had left prison. I went with my father and Hamza to congratulate their parents on their children’s release. Hamza jumped for joy when he heard that his close friends were on their way back home.

We arrived at Samir's house and found that a lot of people had arrived there before us, but we saw fury growing in their eyes!

"What is it, Abu Samir?" asked my father.

"See what they did to our children, Abu Muhammad!" said Abu Samir.

We dashed to the children's room to see that Samir's and Ammar's bodies had been tortured, their faces bleeding, their fingernails pulled out, their hands and feet dyed brown. Later, I realized that these were the signs of electrocution used in prisons. I was dreadfully shocked to see them in such a horrible state. Was it rational that children under the age of thirteen should be exposed to such injustice? Was it possible that the Political Security's crimes could reach this point?!

"I expected the boys to be beaten, but not to this extent. God is great. God is great. We will face those criminals tomorrow," said Al Mokhtar.

My father beckoned me and asked me to take Hamza and go home. Silent and bitter tears were overflowing from Hamza's eyes.

I woke up on Friday and Ammar's and Samir's image had haunted me all night. I started to perform my ablutions to go to Friday prayer. Everybody was ready; we headed to the Grand Mosque in the village. El-Sheikh preached about injustice and our duty to face unfairness and never observe it in silence. El-Sheikh did not pray to God to bless our president as he used to do every Friday. Suddenly and immediately after prayer, there was a thunderous sound: "God is great. God is great". Most of the worshippers were encouraged, got up and gathered in the square opposite to the mosque. They chanted slogans of freedom, dignity and national unity.

It was the first demonstration I had witnessed in my whole life, the first gathering and the first challenge to Political Security. The participants walked towards other

mosques; new protestors joined us and we became dozens. We were surprised at the arrival of the security forces firing tear gas. It was the first time I had experienced tear gas. I had heard much about it, but I was never exposed to it. The crowd did not give up and they continued walking around the village to bring the largest possible number of angry demonstrators. The cries were very loud; I felt that it was coming from the bottom of our hearts mixed with oppression and pain. With every cry I felt as if I was hearing my voice for the first time. I got a strange feeling: I felt a sense of identification with all protestors as if we were a single block moving together.

Abruptly, the cries were interrupted by the sound of bullets. Instinctively, everyone ran into the alleys. We made sure that no one was hurt, and we realized that they were spraying the air with bullets to separate us. Sporadic shooting stopped completely after ten minutes. We assembled again and started to raise outraged cries calling for freedom and other slogans against the security forces, stronger than before. The firing returned, but no one cared. I heard the sound of bullets penetrating the air around us and I realized that they had started to target the protestors directly. As we tried to escape, seven people fell to the ground and we could not move them. We waited until the shooting stopped completely, then a group of young men who were known for their bravery dragged them away. I was not brave enough to join them, so I remained with the others watching. The young men were able to drag the injured men only with great difficulty. The result was two martyrs and five wounded; three of them were in a critical condition. We carried them on our shoulders and took them to the clinic. Everyone was terrified of what they had witnessed. We felt as if we were dreaming; my eyes could not believe what they saw, so I tried many times to concentrate, but all

my attempts were in vain. We arrived at the clinic and the security forces were waiting for us there. The doctors received the injured men and we were arrested. We were fifteen persons, they took us to the police station, and then we were taken to another unknown place. We were beaten all the way, and repeatedly insulted and accused of treason. We arrived at the assigned place; and could no longer stand, out of extreme exhaustion.

One of the men shouted: "Take them to the cell."

Hours later, the cell opened and they started to take us one by one. The fourth time was my turn. I was taken to a room containing a chair and table, and I waited until someone came.

"What is your full name? And your mother's name?"

I answered him.

"Why did you join the demonstration? Are you an infiltrator?"

I could not reply.

"Answer me, pooch... Who do you work for? America or Israel?"

"Honestly sir, I don't work for anyone."

"But why did you participate in that demonstration, you must be a spy."

"No sir, I saw people calling for freedom after prayer so I stood with them."

"Ah, you told me you long for freedom, hah? Detective Gamil, take this infiltrator away. You know what to do."

"I swear on the Koran I have no relation to anybody... I swear... I swear I'm telling the truth."

"Shut up ... shut up."

Detective Gamil took me to another room. He put me in a cupboard where my feet were at the top, so that I could not escape, and then he held a stick and said:

"Now I'll teach you, traitor, how to take part in demonstrations and call for freedom."

He started to strike me with the stick and I screamed hysterically: "Enough... enough... I can't stand it anymore."

With every blow I felt as if my soul was almost outside of my ribs. Pain wracked my body and I pleaded for help, but he kept beating me savagely and cursing me angrily till I could no longer feel my feet; as if they were numb.

Another man entered and said: "I think our friend has given up. Leave him."

I could not stand on my feet, but they forced me. Detective Gamil took me back to the investigator.

"How was our hospitality? Did you like it?" asked the investigator.

I could not utter a word.

"Are you going to give up so early, infiltrator?"

"Ok, sir, ok."

"Take this paper and sign it."

"What is this, sir?"

"Shut up and sign the paper, or I will call Detective Gamil."

"No sir, I will sign the paper without Detective Gamil's help." I found out later that it was a pledge not to participate in any other demonstrations.

"Go now, your family is waiting for you."

All the members of my family were waiting outside for me. I forgot the pain of my swollen feet out of joy. My mother hugged me and cried:

"I praise God for your safety my son, may God break their hands."

While we were going home, they told me about the villager's anger after the martyrs' fall and about the other movements sparked in the capital the same day.

Days followed one after the other and anger intensified. The number of demonstrators increased every Friday, and many people in the country joined the protests until they became

a nightmare haunting the system. The fall of martyrs became fixed every Friday. Saturday became the day of funerals and further demonstrations. With the expansion of protests, the state decided to use military forces. The army laid a suffocating siege in order to stop the protests, but it did not work. On the contrary, the demonstrations became stronger and more determined and children became a prominent part of the daily protests.

It was Thursday night, anticipating a new Friday demonstration. Morale was very high, so the security forces could not weaken the protestors' determination. The villagers decided to go to the besieged city the next day, a few kilometres away. Each house donated food, drink and medicine that were loaded into cars waiting for the next day to come.

Hamza was busy making a large sign; he painted a tank pursuing a child carrying food. The footprints of the child wrote "Remove the Blockade" and the tank wiped them away. I felt Hamza's inconsolable grief and perceived the determination in his eyes upon entering that city with the men.

Friday prayer ended. All the people were ready to go to the city with the car supplies according to the plan. Hamza's painting had never left him. We went out with about five vehicles. A news report announced that the neighbouring villages had decided to join us in breaking the siege. It had been coordinated with the rest of the villages to meet at seven kilometres from the city entrance. All the people arrived and started to drive towards the city and, as we approached, bullets fired down on us like rain as if it was an ambush. Everybody was bleeding so we tried to escape or return, but we failed. We were trapped from all directions and I could no longer see my father or Hamza in the chaos. It was a real massacre in every sense. The shooting stopped and we began to look for

each other. The bodies lay on the ground and their blood was mixed with children's milk.

Suddenly, I saw my father; he was not injured like me so we hugged each other tightly and he asked me: "Where is Hamza?"

"I don't know, but I remember that he was with you."

"Yes, but then he disappeared."

We tried to look for him, but we did not find him among the living or even among the martyrs!! Our worry increased and we searched again but in vain. I was desperate. We were obliged to return home as it was very dangerous to remain because the army could attack us again. We thought that Hamza must have returned home alone on foot.

Hamza was not at home, we asked everybody but nobody had seen.

Five days had passed since Hamza's disappearance, with no calls and no news, so my father decided to ask about him in police stations and security branches the next day.

A loud knock! I wondered who would come at this late time. I stood up quickly and my father opened the door. We found four security men carrying something wrapped in a white cloth. They left it on the ground with a piece of paper on it. No one dared to approach the wrapped cloth, everybody was terrified and our faces revealed that all of us knew what was inside. My father approached and lifted up a part of the cloth to find that Hamza was dead and wrapped in this shroud!! My father fell over the dead body and wept, and my mother lost her mind and started screaming with a hysterical voice. We uncovered Hamza's body and were stunned when we saw signs of torture everywhere on his soft body, gunshot wounds on his limbs, his neck twisted and broken, and his penis cut off!! I grabbed the piece of paper left by the security men and read:

“WE FOUND YOUR SON ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY AND THIS IS THE PENALTY FOR ANYONE WHO DEFIES THE WILL OF THE STATE.”

So, I understood the meanings of Hamza’s painting. Upon hearing my mother’s screams, many of our neighbours came to see what was wrong. One of them captured images of Hamza’s body and identified the signs of torture.

On Thursday evening, I was surprised when my brother’s photos appeared on all the international news agencies and they were talking about the ugliness of this crime

against humanity, especially as it was on the body of an innocent child.

I had never expected my brother to act as the main catalyst for our country to rise up against injustice, tyranny, oppression and slavery, which it had suffered over the last few decades.

Today, the momentum of revolution is gaining pace more than it did before Hamza’s murder, and here several demonstrations have been sparked by children under the name of “Hamza’s Friends”. Perhaps the spirits of Hamza and all the other children who were murdered triumph over the oppression and killing machine.

## Sugarcane Juice

**Yasser Kashef.** Egypt

It was Friday. I woke up early, maybe earlier than the previous days. The sun was like an apricot. I kept watching it until I became dazzled, as if I were watching it for the first time. I did some push-ups as a habit of my daily routine. Every time my arms pushed me up, I remembered the scenes of police brutality. The vision seemed blurred in my mind. Vinegar and teargas had choked me. A volley of rubber bullets had penetrated my eyes. It rained water bottles and Molotov cocktails. Bare hands fought batons and live ammunition. Death was everywhere, but we were not numb. Bangs were loud, but we were not silent.

I got ready and headed to the Al Qaed Ibrahim mosque. On the way there, the seventeen-day memories seized my mind. Every scene had left a wrinkle on my tanned face. I reached the mosque when it was overflowing with people; it was like a fountain of blessed water nourishing the thirsty lands of history. It was the greatest gathering ever. More than two million concentrated there, calling for freedom. Among the crowds, a recognizable voice called my name twice. I looked for the voice, trying to make my way through the crowds. It was Rady's sonorous voice. I found him in his wheelchair with his pale face and stout body. We shook hands and I pushed him to a shadowy place near the mosque, while people began to form rows. They papered the streets with newspaper rags, in order to pray. The imam preached to us and his sermon encouraged us to call for our freedom and humanity. We asked God for support. During prostration, I felt a great need to have my disgusting sins forgiven, but I insisted on praying to God to grant us freedom and determination.

After we had finished our prayers, we collected all the papers we had prayed on. People threw them in dustbins as if they were throwing all the buttered words, smears and lies. We stood up in amazing rows, shouting in the same tone "LEAVE!" as if we were ordering every misery to leave. Rady grunted, "Leave and let us live!" The scene was indescribable. I saw Egypt's flag everywhere. It was on a cute child's face, an old man's turban and a beautiful woman's veil. Flags and the pictures of martyrs were the source of shadow in this blessed march. Amidst the march, Rady asked me, "What do they call this Friday?" A young man answered, "Friday of Defiance."

"Honestly Rady, I don't care whether it's called 'Friday of Anger' or 'Friday of Defiance', all that really matters is our demands and our rights," I replied.

\* \* \*

The march approached the Ras El Tin presidential palace that presented a symbol of tyranny and corruption. On the way, we saw a plethora of graffiti narrating those historical events of the 25th January revolution. Rady started to hum some old songs when I was trying to push him to the shadowy side of the street.

"Would you please leave me on the sunny side?" said Rady.

“Why?”

“I was detained for more than ten years. I rarely saw the sun. Can you imagine... African pharaoh lives without sun. Can a human being hide the sun from another just because he grew his beard or memorized some holy speech? Until now, I can't find answers to my questions. Until now, I hide the truth, and you know what? Once you hide the truth, it'll be your unbearable burden. I'm a detainee of fear, pain and silence. Sometimes I envy martyrs because I live spiritless the same as zombies. The damned regime succeeded in zombifying us. I even fear articulating the tyrant's name, as it causes me this throbbing shiver. And now you want to push me to the shadow?”

His words brought tears to my eyes. I could not reply or even pacify him. Bitterness and the desire for vengeance choked my throat. I only pushed him back to the sun. He looked at me and said:

“Smile even if your burdens are awfully unbearable. Smile even if your face is seized by wrinkles. Smile even if your teeth suffer from deformity. Just smile and do not let a depressed forlorn zombie like me break you down!”

My heart went out for Rady and for every victim of the damned regime, and I screamed violently, “LEAVE!”

One of my best friends approached me. Her name is Sandra. She works as a journalist and she always takes her camera everywhere she goes, it was like this notebook diary that poets carry whenever and wherever... quite a poet she was! She joined us after I introduced her to my bosom friend Rady. She joined the revolution from its first day, and her camera witnessed a glut of events and saved a welter of memories. I looked at the pictures to find a mother lamenting her murdered son. A child holding Khalid Saied's picture surrounded by other martyrs. A brave young man facing off with police brutality.

“Aren't you afraid?” asked Rady.

“Should I be? Look Rady! The highest level of freedom is death when our bodies liberate our souls in order to reach the transparent sea of light. Thus do not fear death in your search for freedom,” replied Sandra. “Now I'm convinced and not worried about you.”

“Thanks a zillion Rady, but tyranny has reached its peak here. They treated us like lousy dogs and maybe worse. They torture you to death without trial while they release others who killed thousands of people on a train obediently following its trails or a ship wildly piercing the seas, or beings who were struggling in between. They forced some people to live one-eyed, and led others to be orphans and widows. After all of this they ask us to be polite and show some mercy!”

“Yes and they led the likes of me to live in a wheelchair...”

“Sorry about that.”

“Never mind...”

“Bear in mind, Rady, that what begins with a capital letter ends with a full stop. Also, Rady, hope is still alive though chances seem to be dead. Yet you may still find answers to your questions.”

“I appreciate your words, but come down to earth. Your words can't cure me or bring back my lost dignity or humanity. They tortured me to paralysis. I didn't even have the chance to reach the ultimate freedom of death I was telling you about! They humiliated me enough until I lost faith in tomorrow. I don't have dreams because I don't sleep, but I have a surfeit of

nightmares. By the way, there is nothing that can answer my questions. I learnt through my life that questions kill people.”

Lots of people die beyond every “why”.

Lots of doors are shut beyond every “what”.

Lots of things lost there, beyond every “where”.

Lots of crimes are hidden beyond every “who” and “when”.

Lots of blinds go in tow beyond every “how”.

There is a line between light and dark beyond every big fat question mark...

“I agree with you Rady. However, you are the one who is supposed to come down to earth. Nothing can be called impossible. Impossibility is the motto of lazy people. This revolution has shown us that dreams might come true even after thirty years of tyranny. You may sacrifice everything to gain freedom; in return, freedom grants you everything.”

Sandra’s words were fiery arrows of hope that lightened Rady’s spirit. For the first time in fourteen years, I saw Rady’s smile though it dimmed in tears.

The three of us were a part of a unique mixture of old people, youths and children. We hardly knew the others, but at least we all had one demand, which was freedom. We lost our voices, but we did not lose our hope. The Friday sun was nearly set. Sandra suggested that we could drink something to quench our thirst and help our voices back. We went to a shop that sold sugarcane juice. The shop included a black-and-white television, but this nearly dud television announced one of the most important pieces of news in our lives. Suleiman announced Mubarak’s resignation in a thirty-second televised statement. Like a bat out of hell, I ran to the street with my dark wings carrying me, telling people that our prayers were answered; and our hopeless, thirty-year-old dream of freedom finally came true. A big grin wrapped around the wizened faces. Yet, a wave of mirth attacked the street. Rady squealed with joy. He moved with his wheelchair quickly until he fell down. People carried him and juggled him high in extreme happiness. Sandra captured many photos of this historical moment. We were dancing, singing and waving Egypt flags. 11/02/2011 was a day to remember in Alexandria and all over Egypt. Mubarak left, but still there is a welter of Mubaraks to leave, but at least we reached the first step. From that day forward, I did not stop this feeling of pride. Moreover, I did not stop drinking sugarcane juice. Cheers!

Changes only happen when we go against  
everything we are used to do...

Paulo Coelho

## Mīlestības reps

**Laura Lapiņa.** Latvijas Republika

Viņas garā skropsta... Atrodu to uz savas jakas... Paceļu pret saules staru... Tā mirdz un plati smaida... kā viņa... МОЯ ФЕЯ<sup>1</sup>... Te nenormāla rībināšana pie manām durvīm pārtrauc manu patīkamo domu straumi.

„Kas ir? Ko vajag?” – atraucu!

„Aleksandr!”

Atslēdzu tēvam savas istabas durvis.

„Tavas mātes veikalā ir izsists logs! Jums pagalmā ir nemitīgas razborkas! Un cieš vienmēr kāds cits! Labi, ka nekas nav aiznests, tavs vārds uz lapiņas līdz ar akmeni logā ir iemests! Īsti nenobriedušu puiku gājieni!”

„Mans vārds? Tēt, tāds vārds ir pusrajonam!”

„Neizrunājies un netaisies par idiotu! Gaļinai ģimenē Sašu nav, tā tad paliek tikai tava mamma!”

„Nu, protams, kā vienmēr – es esmu sliktais, stulbais, vainīgais!”

Es tēva priekšā aizcērtu durvis, nekad tā vēl līdz šim neesmu uzdrošinājies.

Un, protams, tēvs dobji norūc: „Neuzdrošinies!” Viņa īpaši bargā balss aiz durvīm turpina vibrēt vēl ilgi pēc tam, kad vārds jau ir izteikts.

„Tagad ar mani viņš droši vien vairs vispār nerunās, pat nepaskatīsies uz mani!” nodomāju.

Mans tēvs runā reti, un viņš noteikti ieteiktu tāpat darīt arī citiem. Vienīgās reizes, kad viņš atplaukst smaidā, ir runājot par manu brāli, jo uzskata viņu par normālu keksu, kam nauda pieturas un galva vietā. Savukārt man ko labu nedzirdēt. Kad pirmais niknums par nepelnīto „uzbraucieni” ir pāri, es tveru klausuli.

„Hallo! Ušatij, kā sviežas? Klausies, man ne visai patīk vardarbīgas metodes, bet šoreiz laikam tiem pižoniem būs...”

„Nuss, Saņa, beidzot esi dzirdams, citādi jau domāju, ka esi kur emigrējis! Vairākas dienas nekas nav dzirdēts no tevis! Turklāt vēl pieņēmiem prātā, starik!”

„Klausies, manas mātes veikalā ir izsists logs. Un esot pielikta zīmīte klāt – veltījums, tjiņa man, batjka jau ir noskaidrojis!”

„Kā tad?”

„Nu, mans vārds tur bijis rakstīts.”

„Saņa, bet tavs vārds ir gandrīz visam Ziepečikam<sup>2</sup>! Grizunu, Ostriju un Bistriju ieskaitot!”

„Es jau arī to vecajam teicu!”

„Nuss?!”

„Bet, ņemot vērā pēdējo razborku parkā, tomēr ir skaidrs, ka tie ir latviešu pižoni! Čuju iz daļeka!”

1. Krievu valodā „Mana Laumiņa”.

2. Ziepniekkalna (sarunvalodā „Ziepečiks”) daudzstāvu māju rajons ir celts 1980. gados.

„Tātad tavam batjkam tomēr ir taisnība!”

„Nē?”

„Kā, nē?!”

„Viņš ne no tiem faktiem sprieda! Viņam es vienmēr esmu vainīgs! Ai, labi... Galvenais jāizdomā, ko darām!”

„Viss jau ir skaidrs! Sadosim tā, ka paši aiz sāpēm savus logus izsitīs!... Oi! Saņa, klau, man ienāca prātā vēl viena lieliska doma! Ja viņi ir tādi „padļeci”, ka grib iziet uz mums, tavu matušku apbižojot! Tad, dāvai, mēs arī viņus nedaudz „izsmalcinātāk” paņemsim caur galvenā pižona radiniekiem priekšā!”

„Edža nesen tikai dzīvo mūsu rajonā, un es neko par viņa radiem nezīnu, tos pārējos es vairāk pazīstu! Tomēr tā nav laba doma, Ušatij, mēs taču nenolaidīsimies līdz viņu līmenim – jābļiež pa taisno!”

„Saņa – neliedz to prieku, pa muti sadot varam vienmēr! Es zīnu Edžas māsu – viņa te vazājās un kaķus kopj! Saņa... aļļo, tu tur?”

„Lauma?”

„Nu, re, tu izrādās pat zīni viņas vārdu!”

„Nu, beidz tā taču nav viņa māsa!”

„Priķiņ, vecais, ir gan! Viens tāds idiņš, a otra miernīlīga aitiņa, kas gana kaķus!”

„Nu un kas tur tāds?!” es uzvelkos.

„Nu nekas! Tikai tā spriedelēju! Ka tāpat kā tu ar batjku – it kā no vienas ābeles, bet tomēr galīgi no citas. Tāpat arī tie! Bet nekas, pabiedēsim kaķu princesi, i šis riktīgi izbesīsies!”

„Nē, nav laba ideja! Klausies – nav man vairs laika tagad! Sazvanāties vakarā un tiekāmies mūsu vietā pie Ķīnas Mūra<sup>3</sup>.”

Bļāvieni, tā jau zināju, nekas manā dzīvē nevar būt tik perfekts. Paņem notici brīnumam un atkal ablomies! Kauties ar Laumas brāli es nevaru, bet džekiem pateikt, ka draudzējos ar Edžas māsu... Diez vai viņi sapratīs... Bet laika – tikai līdz vakaram, lai tiekoties ar džekiem jau būtu izdomājies, ko darīt!

\* \* \*

Jau braucot trolejbusā jutu, ka esmu izsmēlusi pēdējos spēkus, šodien dzīvnieku patversmē gāja traki. Mani gandrīz sakoda Bertolds – milzīgs kaukāzietis, un, šķiet, manam mīlulim, rudajam kaķim Rūdīm, tomēr šī var izrādīties pēdējā diena. Nemaz nezīnu, vai rīt viņu vēl satikšu! Taču, neskatoties uz visu to, kaut kur dziļi manī mājō un silda liels, liels prieks! „Я нашел твою ресницу, моя Фея, она блестела ярче чем солнечный луч!”<sup>4</sup> – no rīta mani lutināja jaukas īsziņas un, iespējams, vakarā jau atkal satikšu viņu! Cik labi, ka Saša dzīvo tepat – mums pa vidu ir vien parks!

„Labvakar!” – es noklīdzos, ienākot pa mājas durvīm.

„Labvakar! Nāc vakariņās! Mēs jau ēdam!” atsaucas mamma.

Ieeju virtuvē. Brālis jau sēž pie galda un mielojas ar kotletēm, bet mamma vēl cītīgi gatavo un liek tikko izceptās kotletes pa taisno no pannas brālim šķīvī.

3. Garākā māja Ziepniekkalnā – 510 metri.

4. Krievu valodā „Es atradu tavu skropstu, mana Feja, tā mirdzēja spožāk par saules staru.”

„Ēd siltās, dēliņ!”

Mamma noliek uz plīts atpakaļ pannu un pabužina viņa matus, bet brālis īgni sarauc seju un nogrūž nost no galvas viņas roku!

„Cik jauki, ka vakariņas ir galdā!” priedājos.

„Liec tu nu arī, Lauma!”

Paņemtu šķīvi un uzlieku salātus, tālāk no sevis pastumju gaļas bļodu.

„Mani reāli interesē, ko tu vienmēr vazājies pa tām Ziepečika daudzstāvenēm!? Es te cīnos pret tiem urlām, atmosferiskiem! Bet tu tur lien ap viņu mājām un vāc viņu mēslus!”

Edgaram nav gana ar savu porciju un viņš ir kāri sarosījies apēst mani. Tā gan mūsu ģimenē ir normāla parādība.

„Tie nav nekādi mēsli – tie ir dzīvnieki, kam nepieciešama palīdzība. Atšķirībā no tevis es daru kaut ko lietderīgu! Un atmosferozoks esi tu pats – nevajag visus krievus vērtēt pēc vienas mērauklas, turklāt tur dzīvo arī latvieši.”

„Protams, apmēram 0,2 procenti.”

„Bet, ko tu man tā šodien piesienies, kas tev iekodis!?”

„Internetā izplatīta jauka dziesmiņa par tevi! Jau Draugos<sup>5</sup> tev nosūtīju - paklausies! Bet neuztraucies – es atbildi jau esmu sagatavojis.”

Interesanti – dziesma par mani!? Gan jau Edgars ko atkal izgudro, lai mani izvestu no pacietības!

Tomēr pārliecinoši nosaku: „Paklausīšos arī – noteikti kas vērtīgāks par taviem uzbraucieniem!”

„Meitiņ, brālim taisnība, man arī nepatīk, ka tu cauriem vakariem pa to Ziepniekkalnu ņemies ar tiem kaķiem! Tur taču visādi nenormālie staigā!” sarunā iesaistās arī mamma.

„Nē, nenormāli, ir tas, ka jūs esat tik aizspriedumaini! Tur taču dzīvo tādi paši cilvēki kā mēs!”

„Jā, jā!” aizrautīgi atkal iesaistās Edgars. „Tikai ar skūtu galvu, trenuškāš un gremo se-muškas, un tādi, kas regulāri pamet savus dzīvniekus!”

„Tu pēc dažiem tiptiem spried par visiem!” dusmīgi iesaucos.

„Neizmirsti, Lauma, ka mūsu ģimene no viņiem ir smagi cietusi! Faktiski mūsu ģimenes ir paaudzēm izpostītas! Vectēvi, omes, citi radnieki, tauta, visa tēva bērnība sabojāta tāpat kā veselība!” mamma sāk slaucīt asaras.

Viņai ikreiz jāraud, kad piemin tēti, kas pirms trim gadiem nomira no smaga plaušu karsoņa. Mamma vaino tēta bērnību, ko viņš Sibīrijā<sup>6</sup> ar ģimeni pavadījis. Viņaspriekā tādēļ tēvs visu mūžu mocījies ar dažādām kaitēm un nomiris. Pēc viņa nāves no Talsiem esam pārcēlušies uz Rīgu, kur omīte mums mantojumā atstājusi māju.

„Redzi! Tev patīk, ka mamma raud!? Tautu draudzības aizstāve atradusies!”

„Mammu, tiem cilvēkiem, kas dzīvo tajās augstceltnēs, taču nav ar to nekāda sakara!”

„Ko tu tā meties viņus aizstāvēt, varbūt jau arī esi kādā urļiku bandā iesaistījies, ne par velti viņi par tevi dzied, ko?” Edgars ierēcas.

„Varbūt arī, un kas tad būtu?” vēl vairāk iekarstu.

„Laumiņ, meitiņ, tīrās šausmas!” māte iesaucas. „Ko tu saki, tas nevar būt!? Vai tiešām esi zaudējusi saprātu!”

5. Latviešu Facebook.

6. Padomju varas laikā masveida izsūtīšanu laikā no Latvijas tika deportēti 1941. gadā 15 tūkstoši un 1949. gadā 43 tūkstoši iedzīvotāju.

„Nevis zaudējusi prātu, bet man ir veselīga attieksme pret cilvēkiem un spriežu par ikvienu tikai tad, kad esmu iepazinusies, nevis no tāluma nodarbojos ar diagnostiku! Jā, man patīk puisis, kurš ir krievs! Un nesaskatu tajā neko briesmīgu!”

„Nevar būt!” mamma iesaucas. „Nekādā gadījumā tu vairs pat uz to daudzstāveņu pusi nepaskatīsies!”

„Aha, tagad, mammu, vēl gribi noteikt, ar ko draudzēties! Bet zini – es ne tikai turpināšu draudzēties, bet arī kļūšu par ko humānāku – par veterinārārsti, nevis skolotāju kā tu, kas nemiīgi māca citiem dzīvot!”

„Lai dzīvniekus koptu, tev nebija jābrauc dzīvot uz galvaspilsētu!” māte iebļaujas.

„Žēl gan, ka manā mājā patiešām dzīvo kas daudz trulāks par dzīvniekiem! Cilvēks, ko pazīstu pāris dienas man ir pateicis daudz, daudz vairāk laba par jums un atšķirībā no jums ir sajūsmā par to, ko daru!” iebļaujos un uzraujos no virtuves krēsla.

„O! Saldi dziedāt jau viņi prot, meitiņ! Tu jau esi galīgi nozombēta!” iesaucas māte.

Es aizcērtu virtuves durvis un galīgi sašutusi dodos uz savu istabu! Ieslēdzu uzreiz datoru. Neskatoties uz aizkaitinājumu, mani urda ziņkāre, vai Edgars ir melojis, vai tomēr patiešām ir kāda dziesma. Nē, tiešām viņš man ir ko atsūtījis! Nospiežu „play” un dzirdu Sašas balsi!

Viens divi... Viens divi...

Šķiet, Edžu, tu tālāk skaitīt nemāki  
Ja tikai ar muskuļu spēku visu risini  
Bet zini Ziepčikā dzīvo pacani  
Kuri rubī kaut ko vairāk par dzīvi

Hei, mēs tevi izaicinām!  
He, tu jau nopriecājies  
Ka uz kulaku vicināšanu?  
Būs vilšanās  
Sāc jau asaras birdināt  
Mēs tevi izaicinām uz ko daudz intelektuālāku  
Uz repa divkauju  
Vai zini tādu mūzikas virzienu?  
Vai atpazīsti tikai šlāgeri?

Pirms tu mēģini kaut ko sacerēt  
Gribu pateikt kaut ko par mūsu rajonu  
Ar Ziepčiku kopā mēs auguši  
Tāpēc tieši mēs esam to pelnījuši

Par nacionālo taisnīgumu cīnies?  
Kāpēc tu domā, ka tieši jums pieder tiesības uz Ziepčiku, Rīgu un Latviju?  
Ar ko jūs tās būtu pelnījuši vairāk par mums?  
Varu derēt, ka tev nav atbildes!?

*Un tad citā balsī ir iedziedāts.*

Un, starp citu, tu, Edža, laikam stipri atšķiries no savas mīlīgās ģimenes  
Tava māsa jau sen pie mūsu daudzstāvenēm tusē  
Tieši mūsu šarmu viņa augsti novērtē  
Ziepčika džeki, ne kaķi viņu interesē ...

Jūtos sagrauta! Un es vēl viņu tā mammas priekšā aizstāvēju! Tomēr negribu līdz galam  
noticēt! Jābūt noteikti kādam izskaidrojumam! Edgars ir atsūtījis vēl vienu failu! Vai tas ir tur-  
pinājums!? Klausos, bet tā ir Edgara balss...

Zini, man nepavisam nav grūti pāris rindiņas sarīnēt  
Tagad labi ieklausieties, ko es par jums visiem domāju!

Jūs kā dzīvnieki būros dzīvojat  
Dzīvoklis blakus dzīvoklim  
Dzīvoklis blakus dzīvoklim  
Durvis, durvis, logs, logs  
Kastīte, kastīte  
Astīte, astīte  
*Fonā dzirdamas ar balsi atdarinātas džungļu dzīvnieku skaņas.*

Ostrijs metas kaujā, vicinās plaukstām  
Nu gluži kā šimpanzei tam pat visas grimases  
Ušatījs pārvietojas kā smags, smags zilonis  
Novāciet traukus! Novāciet traukus!  
Saņa grib izlikties par gudro pūci!  
Bet nesanāk pat ūpis!

Stop! Stop! Tomēr par Saņu vēl ir stāsts!  
Vai zināt to krievu dziesmu „izcilo”?

*Tad turpinājums iedziedāts, atdarinot smalku sievietes balstiņu.*  
Saņa solnce ja tebja ļubļu no zamuž ņepaidu!<sup>7</sup>

Re, cik intelektuāla, ir jūsu tautas kultūra  
Šitādu un līdzīgus mēslus var dzirdēt pie jums ik uz stūra

Nu, Saņa, kā tev patīk, ka tavu vārdu šādos intelektuālos darbos izmanto?

Bet atbildot par Ziepčiku  
Tie ir mūsu senči, kas par šo zemi asinis ir lējuši  
Tieši viņi pirms jūsu kastīšu celšanas jau sen, sen ir šeit bijuši  
Un tāpēc, tieši tāpēc, Ziepčiks ir mūsu

7. Krievu valodā „Saņa, saule, es tevi mīlu, bet precēties netaisos.”

Un tieši tādēļ arī mēs iesim vēl daudz, daudz tālāk  
 Repa ritmos vēl krietni, krietni dziļāk  
 Uz frīstailu mēs jūs izsaucam  
 Re, mēs vēl daudz, daudz, daudz intelektuālāk tās lietas kārtojam!

\* \* \*

Dodos uz parku. Kaut gan jūtos galīgi sūdzīgi, jo Feja vairs klausuli neceļ un neatbild uz manām īsziņām, bet ar Ušatiju esmu reāli sastrīdējies par to, ka viņš bez manas ziņas pantiņu par Feju ar Ostriju bija repā ielikuši! Viņš gan taisnojās un vienlaicīgi man pārmeta, ka nezinājis par draudzību ar Edžas māsu, tomēr...

Neierasties uz cīņu ar Edžu nevaru! Man šī situācija jāatrisina, ja gribu turpināt draudzēties ar Feju, bet arī laikā ierasties nevarēju saņemt. Centos līdz pēdējam brīdim sakopot domas un jau savirpināt kādus pantiņus, jo frīstails jau vairs nav iepriekš sacerētā deklamēšana.

Tad pa gabalu redzu, ka Edžus ar Ostriju jau parkā vicinās ar dūrēm, Ušatijs iesaistījies un cenšas abus noturēt atstatus. Es skrienu, un, Edžu aizpleca atraudams, uzsāku repu.

Tāda kulaku vicināšana patiesi ir sūds  
 Jo tai jēgas nav dziļākas par zilu aci  
 Mēs, tu un es, esam vienlīdzīgi, nu gluži kā brāļi divi

Jā, jā, mēs visi esam no vienas mīklas taisīti – cilvēki  
 Un zini šo vērtīgo ideju man iemācīja tieši tava māsa

Mēs visi te bez jēgas apkārt vazājamies  
 Un nezinām, kā cits citam izrādīties  
 Bet zini, esmu izdomājis mums daudz jēdzīgāku nodarbi  
 Kas padarītu daudz, daudz zīmīgāku arī šo repu kariņu

Jā, jā, un gribēju tev pateikties  
 Ka tieši tu esi palīdzējis radīt šo ideju  
 Es sevi esmu beidzot patiesi atradis  
 Turklāt ne tikai sevi, bet, noklausoties tavu repu, šķiet, arī, ka tevi

Jā, jā, tu nepārklusījies  
 Vecīt, man tev patiesi ir jāspiež roka  
 Jo, šķiet, ka tu ar repu esi kopā piedzimis

Un to, ka atšķiramies, mums vajag izmantot  
 Gabalus rakstot kopā divās valodās  
 Par to, kas svarīgs gan latviešu džekiem, gan krievu  
 Par dzīvi Ziepcīkā, Rīgā un Latvijā

\* \* \*

Kad zvana Saša, neceļu. Tomēr, kad zvana, šķiet, ka pa taisno uz sirdi, roka jau tveras pēc telefona, tomēr noturos. Aizmigt ilgi nevaru. Tomēr pamazām jūtu, ka nogurums, kas šķiet neizturamākais un smagākais, kāds vien bijis, ņem virsroku. Aizmiegu.

Skatos televizorā *National Geographic* raidījumu par mani pašu. Es esmu Āfrikas savannā, ir karsts un tveicīgs, redzu, ka ievainotai tīģeru mammai dzimst bērniņi (pat miegā iedomājos! – „Gluži kā tai dienā, kad ar Sašu satikos, tikai kaķēnu vietā tagad daudz lielāki sugas brāļi!”). Skatos apkārt, nav neviena! Nodomāju: „Kas varējis būt tik nežēlīgs?” Tad tūliņ nedaudz tālāk ieraugu guļam Edgaru – lai gan viņš ir tīģera ievainots, mani pārņem nežēlīgas dusmas. Es viņam pieeju klāt un prasu: „Kā tu varēji!? Vai tu zini, ka, ievainojot šo tīģeri, esi ievainojis daļu sevī, un ne jau par tavu roku ir runa! Mēs visi, debesis un zeme esam savā starpā saistīti, viens vesels!” Tad es jūtu, ka mani apvij maigas, pazīstamas rokas un ir tik viegli un labi. Tas ir Saša, viņš pārlicinoši saka: „Viss būs labi – mēs izglābsim mazuļus! Neuztraucies! Un piedod par visu!”

Klauvējiens pie loga! Pielecu gultā sēdus! Otrajā stāvā – tas nevar būt! Esmu tik pārmoctusies, ka jau murgoju arī nomodā?!

„Feja! Atver logu!”

Izberzēju acis, bet tas patiešām ir viņš, uzrāpies pa piestutētām trepēm! Pieskrienu pie loga.

„Feja! Piedod! Tas pantiņš par tevi – to es nerakstīju, mani draugi to izdarīja! Un viņi jau mani lūdza tev atvainoties! Un to repu es aizsāku, lai nebūtu jākaujas ar tavu brāli! Un, zini, tava brāļa dziesmā jau kaut kāda taisnība ir, es tiešām dažreiz jūtos kā ieslodzīts kastē. Tu esi tā, kas mani atbrīvo, esot kopā ar tevi, es jūtos kā uzvarētājs! Un ne jau tāpēc, ka esmu dabūjis Edgara māsu, bet tāpēc, ka tu man liec justies labi! Zini, šis kašķis starp mani un tavu brāli... šķiet pat aizraujošs un kaut kas labāks par to neko, ar ko ik dienu te Ziepcikā nodarbojamies! Jau agrāk kaut kādus gabalus rakstīju, bet reps ir īstais, kurā varu izteikt visu, ko domāju! Un to esmu atklājis, pateicoties tev!... Feja, tu dzirdi, tu klausies?... Es jau ar tavu brāli sarunāju, mēs ierakstīsim dziesmu kopā! Tu vari tam noticēt? Viens pantiņš latviski, viens krieviski – reāli rullēsim!”

Viņš noglāsta manus matus... Viņa apķer manu kaklu...

## Love Rap

**Laura Lapīņa.** Latvia

Her long lash... I find on my jacket... raise it toward the sun... it shines and smiles broadly... like her... *Maya feya*<sup>1</sup>... Suddenly an abnormally loud pounding on my door interrupts my pleasant stream of thought.

“What is it? What do you want?” I snarl back.

“Alexander!”

I unlock the door for my father.

“A window’s been smashed in your mother’s store! There’s a constant set-to and ruckus in the courtyard! And always someone else pays the price! It’s good at least that nothing has been stolen! Your name is on the piece of paper with the stone thrown through the window! A real immature kid’s manoeuvre.”

“My name? Dad, half the neighbourhood has that name.”

“Don’t talk nonsense and don’t play the fool! In our neighbour Galina’s family there are no Sashas.”<sup>2</sup>

“Of course, as always. I’m the bad one, the stupid one, the guilty party.”

I slam the door in my father’s face, something I’ve never dared do before.

And of course my father growls in a deep voice:

“Don’t you dare!”

His unusually stern voice continues to vibrate behind the door long after the words have been spoken.

“For sure he won’t talk to me at all now, won’t even look at me,” I think.

My father rarely talks and he would definitely advise others to do the same. The

only time that he breaks into a smile is when he talks about my brother, whom he considers a normal guy because money sticks to him and his head is in the right place. But I never hear any good things about me. When the first flush of anger about him getting on my case has passed, I grab the phone.

“Hello, Ushatiy, how goes it? Listen, I don’t particularly go for violent methods, but this time those swellheads will have...”

“Well, what do you know, Sasha, finally you surface, otherwise, I was thinking you emigrated somewhere. For several days I’ve heard nothing from you! And what’s more you’ve got smarter, pal.”

“Listen, a window has been smashed in my mother’s store. And a note was attached, a gift for me. My old man has already figured that out.”

“How?”

“My name was written on it.”

“Sasha, but all of Ziepchik<sup>3</sup> has that name! Guys like Grizun, Ostria and Bistria!”

“That’s what I said to my old man.”

“Well, then?”

“But taking into account the last set-to in the park, it’s clear that they’re Latvian guys! I can just tell.”

“So your old man really is right.”

“No.”

“What do you mean, no?”

“He didn’t come to that conclusion based on facts. I’m always the guilty one in his eyes. Hey, forget it... The main thing is to figure out what we should do.”

1. “My fairy” – in Russian.

2. Sasha is a nickname for Alexander.

3. Ziepchik – shortened version in common use for the suburb of Riga called Ziepniekkalns, a residential high-rise neighbourhood developed in 1980.

“It’s clear already. Let’s beat them up so they’re so sore they’ll knock out their own windows ... Yeah! Sasha, listen, I just had a bright idea! If they’re such scum that they want to move in on us, hassling your mum! Then, let’s go and get at them in a classier way – take them on through the big cheese’s next of kin.”

“Edge<sup>4</sup> only moved to our neighbourhood a short while back, and I don’t know anything about his family. But it’s not a good idea Ushatiy, we can’t sink down to their level – let’s bash them straight.”

“Sasha don’t deny me the pleasure, we can give them a licking anytime. I know Edge’s sister – she hangs out here taking care of cats! Sasha ...hello, are you there?”

“Lauma?”

“See, you even know her name.”

“Come on, that’s not his sister.”

“Hell, yeah, man, but she is. One a moron, the other a peace-loving sheep who herds cats.”

“And, so what?” I get hot under the collar.

“Nothing! Just tossing it around. It’s the same, as you with your old man – like from the same apple tree, but really totally from another. The same with them. But not to worry, let’s scare the cat princess, and he’ll have a fit.”

“No, that’s not a good idea. Listen – I don’t have the time now. Let’s phone tonight and meet at our place by the China Wall.”<sup>5</sup>

Blast, I knew it – nothing is ever perfect in my life. Go believe in miracles and again get screwed! I really can’t slug it out with Lauma’s brother, but to tell the guys that I’m getting friendly with Edge’s sister... I doubt they’ll understand... But so little time – just

until tonight, when I meet up with the guys, to figure out what to do.

\* \* \*

Already riding on the bus I feel totally exhausted, because it was a madhouse in the animal shelter today. Bertold, the gigantic Caucasian, nearly bit me and it looks as if this could turn out to be the last day for my darling ginger cat Rudy. I don’t know if I’ll even still see him tomorrow. But, despite all this, somewhere deep inside me a great, great joy has settled in and warms me! “Ya nashol tvoyu resnyitsu, maya feya, ona blyestyela yartshe tshem solnyetshniy lutsh!”<sup>6</sup> In the morning I was spoiled by lovely text messages and it’s possible that I’ll see him again tonight. How good that Sasha lives right here – with only a park separating us.

“Hi,” I shout on entering our house.

“Hi. Come and have your supper. We’re already eating,” my mamma calls back.

I enter the kitchen. My brother is sitting at the table eating meat patties, while my mamma is busy preparing and transferring the already fried patties directly from the pan onto my brother’s plate.

“Eat them while they’re warm, son.”

Mamma places the pan back on the stove and tousles his hair, but my brother makes a sullen face and pushes her hand away.

“How nice that supper is already on the table,” I exclaim happily.

“Fill your plate too, Lauma.”

I scoop some salad onto my plate but push the bowl with the meat away.

“I really want to know why you’re always hanging out at those Ziepchik high rises. Here I am bashing those *urlas*,<sup>7</sup> those

4. Edge – nickname given to Edgar, one of the protagonists of this story.

5. China Wall – the longest house in Ziepniekkalns – 510 metres.

6. In Russian “I found your lash, my Fairy, it shone more brightly than a sunbeam.”

7. *Urlas* is a negative epithet in Russian, meaning “hooligans” or “uncultured persons”.

morons while you crawl around their homes, collecting their shit.”

Edgar, not satisfied with his portion, is all hyped up to devour me. This is a normal occurrence in our family.

“That’s no shit – those are animals needing help. Unlike you I’m doing something useful! And you’re the moron yourself – you shouldn’t judge all Russians by one measuring stick. Besides, Latvians also live there.”

“Of course, about point two percent.”

“But why pick on me today, what’s got into you?”

“A lovely new song about you has gone viral on the net. I already sent it to you in *Draugi*.<sup>8</sup> Listen to it! But don’t get uptight – I’ve already prepared an answer.”

Interesting – a song about me? Edgar probably made it up to get under my skin.

But I say with conviction:

“I will listen to it – for sure it’ll be more worthwhile than your attacks.”

My mamma also gets involved in the discussion:

“Dear child, your brother is right, I also don’t like that for evenings on end you’re worrying yourself with those cats in Ziepniekkalns! All kinds of abnormal people are wandering about there.”

“No, it’s abnormal that you’re so prejudiced! The same sorts of people as us live there.”

“Yeah, yeah!” Edgar adds with vehemence. “Just skinheads in sneakers chewing sunflower seeds and the sort that regularly abandon their pets.”

“And you’re judging everyone based on a few odd characters,” I exclaim angrily.

“Don’t forget, Lauma, that they’ve caused great suffering for our family. In fact, generations of our family have been devas-

tated. Grandfathers, grandmothers, other relatives – our people. And your father’s childhood as well as his health ruined,” mamma says, starting to wipe away tears.

She always bursts into tears when she mentions our dad, who three years ago died from severe pneumonia. Mamma blames this on dad’s childhood, which he spent in Siberia<sup>9</sup> with his family. In her opinion this is why dad had endured all sorts of health problems during his lifetime and died because of them. After his death we moved from the city of Talsi to Riga, where our grandma had willed us her house.

“See? Do you like seeing mamma cry? What a defender of Latvian-Russian friendly relations you’ve turned out to be.”

“Mamma, those people who live in the high rises don’t have anything to do with that.”

“Why are you so quick to defend them, maybe you too have joined some Urals gang now, small wonder they’re singing about you, right?” Edgar snarls.

“Maybe, and so what?” I feel more and more pissed off.

“Lauma, dear girl, that’s absolutely dreadful,” mamma exclaims. “What are you saying, it can’t be? Have you really lost your mind?”

“No, I’ve not lost my mind, but I’ve a healthy attitude about people because I judge each person only after I’ve got to know them, not wasting time on a long distance diagnosis! Yes, I like a boy who is Russian! And I don’t see anything dreadful in it.”

“That can’t be,” mamma exclaims. “There’s no way I’ll let you’ll even look in the direction of those high rises again.”

“Aha, mamma, now you want to tell me who my friends can be. Well, you must know

8. *Draugi* means “Friends” in Latvian. The Latvian version of Facebook.

9. During the Soviet occupation of Latvia, the regime instituted mass deportations to Siberia: in 1941, 15,000 and in 1949, 45,000 residents of Latvia were deported to Siberia.

that I'll not only continue to be friends with them, but I'll become even more humane – I'll be a veterinarian, not a teacher like you, who constantly teaches others how to live.”

“To take care of animals you didn't have to come to the capital city,” mamma yells.

“It's a pity that something much more stupid than an animal lives in my home! A person I've only known for a few days has told me many more good things than you have, and unlike you is enthusiastic about what I do,” I yell and jump up from the kitchen chair.

“Oh! They sure do know how to sing sweetly! You've already been hypnotized,” my mother exclaims.

I slam the kitchen door shut and, totally infuriated, head for my room! I turn on my computer right away. Despite my irritation, curiosity spurs me on to see if Edgar has lied, or if there really is a song. No, but he has sent me something. I press “play” and I hear Sasha's voice.

One, two...One, two  
Edge, it seems you can't count any higher  
If you must solve all just with muscle power  
But know that in Ziepchik live some guys  
Who dig something more out of life.

Hey, we challenge you to a duel!  
He, he, you already rejoice at the thought  
That fists and punches will fly?  
But we'll have to disappoint you  
Start shedding a tear or two  
We challenge you to something smarter  
We challenge you to a duel of rappers  
Do you dig this kind of music?  
Or do you know only pop, just pop?

Before you try to compose something  
Here's a bit on our neighbourhood  
We've grown up together with Ziepchik  
That's precisely why we deserve it.

Are you fighting for national justice?  
Why should Ziepchik, Riga, Latvia be yours  
alone?

Why have you earned it more than us?  
I bet you don't have the answer.

(But then, a different voice has recorded the next stanzas.)

And what's more, Edge, you so differ  
From all the others in your family  
Your sister has for ages now partied at our  
high rises  
It's our charm she greatly values  
The Ziepchik guys, not cats, interest her.

I feel absolutely destroyed! And I defended him so in front of my mamma! But I don't want to totally believe it! There must be some explanation for all this! Edgar has sent me another file! Is that the sequel? I listen to it, but it's Edgar's voice...

Know, I don't find it hard to rhyme a few lines  
Now listen closely to what I think of you!

You live like beasts in cages  
Flat beside flat  
Flat beside flat  
Door, door, window, window  
Box, box  
Tail, tail

(In the background a voice is heard mimicking jungle beast sounds.)

Ostriy throws himself into the fight, brandishing fists  
Much like a chimpanzee even down to the grimaces  
Ushatiy heavy, heavy like an elephant moves  
Hide the dishes! Hide the dishes!  
Sasha wants to pretend he's a wise old owl!  
But manages just to look like a silly bubo!

Stop! Stop! But there's one more Sasha story.  
Do you know this Russian song "extraordinary"?"

(The sequel is sung in a mimicked high women's voice.)

Sasha, solntse, ya tebya lyublyu, no zamuzh nye paidu.<sup>10</sup>

See how intellectual is your national culture  
This and other shit is heard on every corner

Now, Sasha, do you like your name used in  
such an intellectual ditty?

But as for Ziepchik  
These are our ancestors  
Who've shed blood for this land  
They're the ones who were here  
Long before your boxes were built  
And just because of this, Ziepchik is ours.

And just because of this  
We'll go much further  
Yes deeper into rap rhythm  
We challenge you to a freestyle duel  
And just watch, how we do things  
To be much more intellectual.

\* \* \*

I head for the park. Even though I feel like  
shit, because Fairy Fay is no longer picking  
up the phone and doesn't respond to my text-  
ed messages, but I've really had a fight with  
Ushatiy because they had put the verse about  
Fay and Ostriy in the rap without telling me.  
He did make excuses and at the same time  
accused me of not telling him about my rela-  
tionship with Edge's sister, but still ...

10. In Russian "Sasha, sun, I love you, but won't marry you."

I can't not show up for the rumble with  
Edge! I have to resolve this situation, if I  
want to continue being friends with Fay, but  
I can't bring myself to be there on time. Until  
the last minute I try to collect my thoughts  
and to spin off some verses, because freestyle  
after all isn't supposed to be the recitation of  
something composed beforehand.

Then from a distance I see Edge and  
Ostriy already in the park in a punch up, with  
Ushatiy getting involved trying to keep the  
two apart. I run and, grabbing Edge by the  
shoulder, I start to rap.

Such fist swinging truly is just shit  
No more sense than a black eye from it  
We, you and I, are very alike, two brothers

Yeah, yeah, we're all made from the same  
dough – human  
And know, it's your sister who taught me this  
valuable lesson

We all drift / aimlessly  
And we don't know how to be one to the other  
But know, I've invented an occupation more  
fruitful  
Which would make this rap war more mean-  
ingful

Yeah, yeah, I wanted to thank you  
For it was really you who had the idea  
I've finally truly found myself  
Not just myself, but listening to your rap  
I've also managed to find you

Yeah, yeah – you heard it right  
Man, I really must shake your hand  
Because, I think you were born with rap

But we should try to use our differences  
To create rap together in two languages  
About what's important for both Latvian and  
Russian guys

And about life in Ziepchik, Riga and Latvia.

\* \* \*

When Sasha phones, I don't answer. But when the phone rings, it seems as if its ring goes directly to my heart and my hand reaches for the phone, but I resist. I can't fall asleep for a long time. But bit-by-bit I feel my exhaustion, which seems the most unbearable and severest ever, take the upper hand. And I fall asleep.

I'm looking at a "National Geographic" programme on TV, which is about me. I'm in the African savannah, it's swelteringly hot and I look on as an injured tigress gives birth to cubs (even in sleep it makes me think: "Just like the day I met Sasha, but in place of the kittens now there are its brethren from a larger species!"). I look around and there's no one to be seen. And I think: "Who could have been so merciless?" Then a short distance away I see Edgar – even though he has been injured by the tiger, dreadful anger overcomes me. I go to him and I ask: "How could you? Do you know that in harming this tiger you have harmed a part of yourself, and I'm not speaking of your arm. We and the heavens and earth are joined together in an inseparable whole." But then I feel warm, familiar arms embrace me and I feel so good and light. It's Sasha, and he says with conviction:

"Everything will be fine – we'll save the little ones. Don't worry! And forgive me for everything."

A knock at the window. Startled, I sit up in bed. On the second floor – that just doesn't happen.

"Fay! Open the window."

I rub my eyes, but it really is him, having crawled up a leaning ladder.

I run to the window.

"Fay! Forgive me. That verse about you – I didn't write that, my friends did. And they already asked me to apologize to you. And that rap I began so as not to fight with your brother. And, you know, there's some truth in your brother's song, I really feel as if I have been trapped in a box. You're the one that has freed me, being together with you I feel like a winner. And not because I've got Edgar's sister, but because you make me feel so good. You know this hassle between your brother and me... it even seems exciting and something better than the nothing we ourselves do here in Ziepchik! I started writing some pieces a while back, but rap is the real thing, in which I can express all that I feel. And I've discovered that thanks to you. Fay, do you hear me, are you listening? I've already arranged with your brother that we'll write a song together. Can you believe it? One verse in Latvian, the next in Russian – we'll really be cooking with gas."

He caresses my hair... I wind my arms around his neck.

# Žaidžiame demokratiją arba mergaitė iš Kambario Respublikos

**Gintarė Laurinavičiūtė. Lietuva**

Vienoje raudonojo komunizmo nuspalvintoje Baltijos šalyje gyveno maža mergaitė, kuri niekuo nesiskyrė nuo kitų vaikų. Ji turėjo didelę blondinę lelę užsiverčiančiomis akimis ir medžiaginiu pilvu, turėjo mažą kvailą šuniuką, didelį kaspiną plaukuose, o didžiausia jos svajonė buvo gauti kramtomosios gumos. Ši mergaitė neturėjo daug draugų, tačiau turėjo fantaziją. Ji buvo pats paprasčiausias Sovietų Sąjungos vaikas, kurį valdžia pasididžiudama vadintų Spaliuku – Lenino Anūku. Turėti įsivaizduojamą draugą yra labai natūralu, kai tau tik šeši. Būti įsivaizduojamos šalies valdovu labai natūralu, kai tau dvylika, todėl aštuonerių metų mergaitė, kuri įsivaizdavo viską, buvo tiesiog labai natūralus darinys. Kai už lango siaučia korupcija ir draugo Lenino atminimas vaikšto Maskvos gatvėmis, skelbdamas save dievu, jos kambario viduje santvarka buvo visai kitokia, nei raudonais gvazdikais apsidintose gatvėse. Tomas Moras šią „kambario“ santvarką būtų pavadinęs Utopija, o Winstonas Churchill'is geriausia santvarka iš pačių blogiausių tarpo, tačiau ši mergaitė, kurios vaizduotė augo greičiau nei šviesios kasos, to nevadino niekaip. Kiekvienas meškinas, pasiūtas iš dusios gauruotos medžiagos, ir kiekviena lėlė, sėdinti ant lovos atbrailos, savo nebyliomis stiklinėmis ar saginėmis akimis įsivaizduotinai sprendavo, kokią pasaką girdės ir kokia arbata geltonkasė įsivaizduotoja vaišins drauges, kurios pasišnibžbėdamos ir kikendamos darys slaptus balsavimus, kuri su kokia lėle žais. Visa jos kambario tauta sprendavo visus iškilusius klausimus ir vaikiškas jos dilemas bendrai, nes raudonosios sofos respublikoje visi turėjo balsavimo teisę, nors turėjo tik įsivaizduojamą balsą.

Ši sistema vėliau, kaip ji pastebėjo, buvo taikoma mokykloje, kai berniukai ir mergaitės vienodomis apykaklėmis ir rankogaliais mechaniškai keldavo rankas, taip reikšdami savo nuomonę apie artėjančias klases išvykas. Tik šie vaikai neturėjo teisės klausti, prieš keliant ranką, ar išgirti atsakymų, kurie taip rūpėjo mažam žmogui, ką tik supratusiam, ką reiškia komunizmas. Jokių klausimų – buvo svarbiausia taisyklė, taip ir nesuprasta mergaitės, kurios kambario respublikoje santvarka buvo visiškai kitokia.

Maža mergaitė, gimusi raudonojo komunizmo laikotarpiu, pati to nežinodami kūrė demokratiją, kai jos bendraamžiai įsivaizduodavo užjūrio karalystes. Būdamas šalies valdovu, jautiesi viršesnis už kitus, todėl vaikams taip ir patinka monarchijos, tačiau mergaitė savo kambaryje buvo ne caraitė, karalaitė ar princesė – ji buvo valdovė, kuri klausėsi, kas yra labai nebūdinga jos amžiaus vaikui. Vaikai nežaidžia demokratijos, nes nemoka klausytis, tačiau mergaitė, suteikusi balsą pliušinei meškai, mokėjo. Ji buvo viena iš tų vaikų, kurie turėjo nuomonę ir balsą, tačiau skyrėsi nuo kitų tuo, kad mokėjo ne tik jį savanaudiškai išsakyti, bet ir skirti kitam. Jos mama buvo buhalterė, o tėvas mašinistas – tai profesijos, kuriose nekyla per daugiausiai klausimų, o pagrindinis darbas yra vykdyti nurodymus. Gal todėl šeimoje taip pat vyravo buitinis komunizmas, kuris jos tėvams atrodė paprastas, suprantamas ir įgimtas. Kodėl aš turiu eiti į teatrą su mama, o negaliu likti namuose su tėčiu? Kodėl aš trečią dieną iš eilės plaunu indus, o brolis nedaro nieko? Kodėl aš turiu daryti taip, kaip man pasakoma, o ne taip, kaip man atrodo

teisinga? Ir kodėl negalima klausti jokių klausimų? „Kodėl“ buvo žodis nepageidaujamas nei tėvų, nei vadovų, todėl atskyrus savo nuomonę, balsą ir idėjas nuo kitų mergaitė užsidarė savo kambario respublikoje, kurioje kiekvienam „kodėl“ buvo ieškomas „todėl“ ir kiekvienam „daryk taip“ sugalvojamas „kitaip“.

Sugriuvus Sovietų Sąjungai, kartu su ja išnyko ir komunizmas. Išnyko vienpartinė sistema, prekių deficitas, metaliniai nuzulę stomatologiniai gražtai, kurie dantistą paversdavo į serijinį žudiką, ištroškusį kraujo, skausmo ir aimanų. Pranyko viskas, išskyrus valstybės įsivaizdavimo stereotipai, kuriems išnykti reikia šio to daugiau, nei griuvusios Sąjungos. Tai buvo ilgiausias darinys iš visų trumpalaikių, tačiau šio laiko pakako pasikeisti kartoms, žmonių mąstymui ir pačiai pilietiškumo sąvokai. Nors jau seniai nuvirto geležinės uždangos ir nukrito raudono aksomo užuolaidos, „homo sovieticus“ dar išliks kuriam laikui. Šis žmogus, šitaip troškęs savo akimis išvysti naująją demokratijos aušrą Pabaltijoje, paėmė valstybę į rankas ir paleido, nes nežinojo, ką daryti, kai sprendimus pagaliau turėjo priimti pats, o ne partinis komitetas.

Mergaitė iš kambario respublikos tuo tarpu augo ir pamažu suprato, kad kambario sienos griuvo, nes jos sofos santvarka įsigalėjo valstybėje, kuri prieš tai neišivaizdavo nieko. Pliušinės meškos virto realiais žmonėmis, kurie rinko ir turėjo būti išrinkti. Tačiau natūrali lyderystė buvo numarinta, o naujų lyderių žmonės kelti nemokėjo. Todėl po ilgo laiko priespaudoje ir valstybė padarė tai, ką ir maža mergaitė kadaise – įsivaizdavo pilietiškus piliečius ir suteikė jiems balso teisę. Pati pilietiškumo sąvoka įsigalėjo visur: kultūroje, pasąmonėje, tačiau ne politikoje. Žmonės, kurie kitados buvo tik mergaitės ir berniukai, kurie susikibę užrankų dainavo valdžiai, skindami kelią demokratijai, užmiršo ką reiškia priimti bendrus sprendimus, formuoti nuomonę, argumentuotai kelti ranką prie balsadėžės, nedarydami nuodėmės ir nebalsuodami už balčiausią šypseną, slepiančią rudas melagio akis. Tačiau laisva era prasidėjo tik tada, kada berniukai, stumdę medinius tankus, suprato, kad laimingai šaliai reikalinga demokratinio kambario sistema, kurioje kiekvienas, atmerkęs akis po raudonojo spalio miego, pabustų kaip piliečiai, kurie žino ne tik savo, bet ir šalies vardą.

Demokratijos ir pilietiškumo negalima atskirti, tarė mergaitė savo pliušinei meškai, kuri prieš daugelį metų buvo ne demokratiškosios, o tiesiog jos santvarkos dalis. Vaikystėjetie žodžiai skambėjo paprastai ir naiviai, tačiau ir užaugusi ji vis dar tikėjo, kad jos kambario meškų demokratijos santvarkos supratimas buvo toks, kokio reikėjo ir jai, ir jos sukurtai valstybei. Tik vaikystėje lėlės buvo jos piliečiai, o ji buvo jų valstybė, kurios gyvenimas buvo pliušinės meškos, medinės matrioškos bei vilnonės deficitinės pėdkelnės, o dabar ji buvo lėlė tos valstybės, kuria kadaise įsivaizdavo save esančia. Ši maža mergaitė tada dar nesuprato, ką reiškia pilietiškumas, nežinojo, kas yra demokratija, tačiau savo kambarėlyje, nutilus pionierių trimitams, ji sugalvojo patį vaikiškiausią, naiviausią ir nuoširdžiausią paaiškinimą, kuris nekilo nei iš politinės ideologijos, kuris nenusėdo tarptautiniuose žodynuose, nesugulė didžiųjų žmonių lūpose. Ji liko tik mergaitės širdyje, kurios paslapčių ji neišdavė niekam, išskyrus kambario sienom.

Valstybė kėlėsi kiekvieną rytą, siūlydama balsuoti, rinkti, deleguoti ir vadovauti. Piliečiai kėlė rankas, siūlė, delegavo, rengė referendumus, kol metų bėgyje pradėjo suprasti, kodėl ir kam jie visa tai daro. Tada sugalvojo, kad laikas vėl tapti Piliečiais ir bandyti paleisti Seimą, kurti dar trisdešimt naujų partijų, laidą pavadinimu „Aš myliu Lietuvą“, kurioje taškai skaičiuojami vėliavomis, o lietuvybė silikoniniais implantais. Internetas pradėjo mirgėti nuo milijono priešasčių, kodėl Lietuvoje gyventi gera, o paprasčiausi gyventojų susirinkimai, ką jau kalbėti apie mokyklinius, liko nelankomi. Nėra laiko! Reikia surasti tūkstantis pirmą priešastį, kodėl čia

gyventi geriau, pridėti bent vieną punktą sąrašė „Top10 priežasčių, kodėl neverta emigruoti“, ant nuogo kūno nusipaišyti trispalvę vėliavą ir apibėgti tris kartus aplink rajoną, kad žmonės pamatytų kaip Jūs mylite Lietuvą. Išmokome būti piliečiais be pilietiško, ir apsukę ištisą ratą grįžome prie besikuriančios demokratijos tobulėjimo pusiaukelėje apverstojo modelio, kada laisvės turime į valias, meilės savo šaliai irgi, žinome milijoną būdų kaip ją netikusiai parodyti, dar milijoną būdų kaip ją išpeikti ir nei vieno pasiūlymo kaip pakeisti esamą padėtį, kurią keičiame visais neįmanomais būdais, bandydami išvengti pagrindinio ir svarbiausio – dalyvavimo. Visi piliečiai dabar yra tame Raudonajame kambaryje, laukdami savos mergaitės, kuri kuri ne tik suteiks jiems balsą, bet ir išmokys juo naudotis.

Kambaryje savo demokratinę respubliką sukūrusi mergaitė jau seniai nebe maža mergaitė, o moteris, kurios kambaryje dabar savo valstybę kuria jos pačios vaikai. Nežinau, kokią santvarką jie išivaizduoja, bet žinau kad žaidžia valstybę ir toliau, nes taip daro visi vaikai, kurių pilietinis išivaizdavimas dar nėra biurokratinis, o labiau toksai, kurį Tomas Moras vadintų Utopiją. Nes tik tolimojoje Utopijoje vaikai turi savo valstybę ir kuria tyrą demokratiją, balsuodami už tai, kas šiandien žais slėpynių. Demokratija yra politinio režimo forma, pilietiškumas yra valstybinio dalyvavimo forma, tačiau pasakykim tai vaikams, kurie žaidžia valstybę geriau, nes mes išivaizduojame. Nėra geresnio pilietinio dalyvavimo pavyzdžio nei žaidimas pavadinimu „vaikystė“, į kurį yra įtraukti visi vaikai, kurie nežinodami, nei kas ta demokratija, nei kas ta politika, vieningai kelia rankas ir balsuoja, dalyvauja savo valstybės gyvenime, nerezga intrigu, o tiesiog žaidžia gaudynių ir gauda viens kitą, savo svajones, bėga vaikystės saulėlydžio link naiviai tikėdamiesi, kad jie užaugs, bet Utopija liks.

## Playing Democracy or a Girl from the Republic Room

**Gintarė Laurinavičiūtė.** Lithuania

In a Baltic country coloured by red communism lived a little girl, who was just like all other kids. She had a big blonde doll with goggled eyes and a cotton belly, a silly little dog, and a big ribbon in her hair. Her greatest dream was to try bubble gum. The girl did not have many friends, but she had a great imagination. She was a mere common kid of the Soviet Union; a kid the government would proudly call “Octobrist” – a grandchild of Lenin. Having an imaginary friend is very natural when you are only six and being the ruler of an imaginary country is very natural when you are twelve. When corruption rages behind windows and the memory of Lenin wanders in the streets of Moscow like a god, the system inside her room is completely different from the streets dressed in red carnations. Thomas Moore would have called this “room” system Utopia and Winston Churchill would have seen it as the least worst system. But this girl, whose imagination was growing faster than her fair hair, gave no name to it. Each and every bear made from drizzly shaggy material and each doll sitting on the edge of the bed, with their mute glass or button eyes, decided which tales they would listen to or what tea the fair-haired girl would serve to her friends, and whisper about who was to play with which doll. The nation of her room solved all current questions and her childish dilemmas collectively, because in the red sofa republic everyone had a vote, even with only an imaginary voice.

This system was later applied in school, where boys and girls with the same collars and cuffs mechanically raised their hands to express their opinion about forthcoming class

outings. But those children did not have a right to ask before raising their hands, or to hear the answers, which were so important to a small person who had just understood what communism means. The rule about not asking question was not understood by the girl, because in her republic room the system was completely different.

The little girl, born in the period of red communism, without being aware of it, created democracy at a time when her peers were imagining overseas kingdoms. Being a king of a country one can feel superior to others, which is why children are so fond of monarchies. But the girl in her room was not a daughter of a tsar or king, she was not a princess – she was a ruler, who listened, something very uncommon for a child of her age. Children do not play democracy as they listen to others, but the girl who gave her teddy bear a voice did. She was one of those kids who had an opinion and a voice, but was different in the way that she used it, not expressing it selfishly but giving way to others. Her mother was a bookkeeper and her father was a car salesman – the professions which usually do not raise too many questions, as the main work is to follow directions. Maybe that is why the family was also governed by domestic communism, which to her parents seemed so simple, clear and inborn. Why do I have to go to the theatre with mother and cannot stay at home with dad? Why for the third day in a row do I have to wash dishes while my brother does nothing? Why do I have to do what I am told rather than what seems right to me? And why can I not ask any questions? “Why” was the word

undesirable to parents or managers, so the girl hid her opinion, voice and ideas from others and shut herself in her republic room, where for every “why” she looked for a “because” and for every “do it this way” she sought “the other way”.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, communism also vanished. The one-party system, deficiency of goods, and worn-out metal dental drills all disappeared. Everything disappeared except for state stereotypes, as for those to fade away one needs more than a collapsed Union. It lasted long enough to change generations, thought and the very notion of citizenship. Although iron walls and red velvet curtains have long fallen, “homo sovieticus” was to remain for some time. This person, who desired so much to see the new dawn of democracy in the Baltic states with his own eyes, took the state into his hands and lost control because he did not know what to do when it was him and not the party committee who had to make decisions.

In the meantime, the girl from the republic room grew up and gradually started to understand that the walls around her room had fallen, because her sofa system had gained ground in the state. Teddy bears turned into real people who elected and had to be elected. But natural leadership was extinct and people did not know how to put forward new leaders. Therefore, after a long period of suppression, they did the same as the little girl had done – they imagined public-spirited citizens and provided them with the right to vote. The same definition of citizenship gained ground everywhere in public culture and awareness, but not in politics. People, who once had been girls and boys singing hand in hand for the government, paving the way to democracy, forgot what it meant to make collective decisions, to formulate opinion, to use the ballot box wisely. However, the free era started only when the boys who

had pushed wooden tanks understood that a happy country needs a democratic room system, in which after the Red October each and every person opening their eyes would wake up as citizens who know not only their name but their country’s name.

The girl told her teddy bear, which years ago had been a part the system – not of a democratic one, but just of her system – that democracy and citizenship cannot be separated. In childhood, words sounded simple and naive, but as a grownup she still believed that her understanding of the system was necessary for her and the state she had created. In childhood, dolls had been her citizens and she was their state. In those days this little girl did not understand what citizenship meant, did not know what democracy was, but in her room, after pioneering trumpets fell silent, she created the most childish, naive and sincere explanation, which was not based on political ideology and would not enter the mouths of great people. It just stayed in the girl’s heart, her secrets guarded within the walls of the room.

The state woke up every morning proposing to vote, elect, delegate and rule. Citizens raised their hands, delegated, and organised referenda, until in the course of a year they began to understand why. Then they thought that the time had come to become citizens again and try to dissolve the Seimas, to create another thirty new parties, to start a broadcast called “I Love Lithuania”, in which points are calculated by flags, and the Lithuanian spirit is measured by silicone implants. Internet instantly became full of a million reasons why it is good to live in Lithuania, while meetings went unattended. No time! One needs to find a thousand and one reasons why it is better to live here, to add at least one point to the list of the “Top10 reasons not to emigrate”, to draw a tricolour flag on the body and to run three times round the suburb so that all the people would see how you love

Lithuania. We learned to be citizens without citizenry and came back to the model inverted halfway to improve democracy, where we have freedom as well as love for our country, where we know a million ways to slate it and do not make one single proposal on how to change the present situation. And we avoid the most important aspect – participation. All the citizens are now in that red room waiting for their girl, who will not only provide them with a voice but will teach them how to use it.

The girl who once created the democratic republic in her room is no longer a little girl, but a woman. I do not know what system they imagine, but I know that they are still playing the state, because this is what all the kids do. Their citizenry imagination is still not bureaucratic and much closer to the one

which Thomas Moore would call Utopia because only in Utopia do kids have their own state and create pure democracy, voting for who will play hide and seek. Democracy is a form of political regime, public spirit is a form of civil participation, but try to tell this to kids who play a much better state than we can imagine. There is no better example of participation than the game called “childhood”, which involves all kids, who without knowing what democracy or politics are, with one accord raise their hands and vote, participate in the life of their state, weave no plots and just play chase and run and keep catching each other and their dreams. They keep running to the sunset of their childhood, naively hoping that they will grow up but that Utopia will stay.

## Turning Tables

**Razan Majdalawieh and Raneem Tayeh. Jordan**

If someone were to pass by the neighbourhood at this exact moment, they would think that we were not just neighbours, but the closest of friends. It was never like that though. We were never all friends – none of the people in the neighbourhood got along with one another. We never truly felt like a community – we would just stare each other down as we saw each other pulling into the driveway, pulling out of the drive way, or taking a stroll around the neighbourhood. We were separate entities living side by side barely acknowledging the fact that one or the other existed. Our cultural differences were the main reason behind our feuding. He was Shiite, they were Sunni, the others were Libyan, and some were Syrian, and so on and so forth. I’m not criticizing – I must admit that I had some culturist views of my own – I’m just stating the facts. There’s just one sad part. One really sad part. How we got here. How we all of a sudden became friends. It tears me apart.

We met on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in the winter. I often look back and reflect on how things would have been if he hadn’t had the nerve to speak to me. They say courage is contagious. I finally understand what they mean by that. His smile gave me all the confidence in the world. The sun was serenely setting in the sky and painting a beautiful canvas with the most striking hues of purple and pink. Most days felt insignificant to me, but I remember feeling different that afternoon. I woke up searching for something. I didn’t realize what that something was until I found him. He likes to believe he found me. But the reality is that we had been neighbours for years, afraid to approach each other. The only time people would speak within our neighbourhood would be to speak about each other. Of course I knew everything about his family. And he knew everything about mine. But that is where the line was drawn. A line which we were finally able to cross. I was at the marina going to meet up with a few of my friends when we crossed paths. He was alone yet walking at an unusually fast pace. It was as if he had somewhere important to be. I like to think it was me he was impatiently walking towards. We made eye contact. I quickly lowered my gaze in an attempt to avoid any awkward conversation.

“Hey... you’re Tala right?”

His bold question took me by surprise. I looked up and suddenly felt my face flush. I was a very outspoken girl. Not the shy type at all. But in that exact minute, I felt completely numb.

“Yeah I am. And you are?”

I froze after saying that. A cold breeze sent my hair flying over my face. I hoped that it would cover the embarrassment in my eyes. Of course I knew who he was. I wanted the ground to open up and eat me whole.

“Mohamed. We’ve been neighbours for years.” He smiled. It wasn’t a flirtatious smile, but a kind and friendly one. I stayed quiet.

“Sorry, I’m sure you have somewhere to be. I just wanted to introduce myself...”

I quickly interrupted him. “Right... Mohamed. The Sheikh’s son. I’ve seen you around before.”

We continued talking for a few minutes, and then we parted ways. Soon after that we began crossing paths on a daily basis and talking. I didn't feel shy anymore. Instead I felt revived. We shared so many common interests. Each conversation would leave me craving more of him, until he finally became mine. Until we finally became inseparable.

Mohamed was just one of those people everyone drew themselves to. He was the only soul that got along with everyone else in the neighbourhood despite our differences. He was of Libyan origin. He was 26 years old. He was the son of the Sheikh. He was tall, compared to me at least. Still pretty tall though. His eyes were... how shall I describe his eyes to you? To start off he had beautiful eyes. I do not believe they were one solid colour. They changed depending on what he was wearing or how sunny it was outside or some other strange reason. Sometimes blue. Sometimes green. But they were the most beautiful shades of blue or green I had ever seen in my life. He obviously inherited that from his mother, who was of European origin. I believe she was Swiss. Maybe Polish. His father married her before he became a Sheikh. I do not quite understand his hypocrisy though. He was allowed to marry a foreign lady, one that had a completely different religion when they first met, yet Mohamed had to stay away from me. I'm Palestinian. My family is not as religious as his parents were, but they were still considered somewhat religious. I'm not saying my father would ever let me marry a half-Libyan, half-Swiss or Polish gentleman himself either, I'm just saying his father had no right not to let him. Truth is I never really pictured myself with anyone who wasn't Palestinian.

I was never racist – none of the families in the neighbourhood were racist either. We just didn't get along because of a few arguments we had regarding certain aspects of our religion or cultural background. In the mosque is where their opinions seemed to emerge. The arguments usually went on for a while and Mohamed was usually the one to calm everyone down. He kept preaching to everyone about social solidarity. He said that it was important for us to have one another. Yeah, right. Try telling that to Ali Jubran. He was the bitterest person I've ever met in my life. He is an Iraqi Shiite. He hated our family the most. Whenever any of us try to speak to him he goes on to say people with no country should not speak. Only later I found out that he was once married to a Palestinian Christian lady. She died of cancer a while back and they had two children – two children her family took away from him because her family wanted them to be raised as Christians. He's hated Palestinians ever since. He refused to marry after his wife passed away. He loved her so much. But she was the only Palestinian he'd ever love. The only person he ever will love. Everyone grieves in their own way I suppose, but his ways were over the top. He was rude to Mohamed, but Mohamed kept reassuring me he only acts rudely to him in front of other people, which I found extremely childish for a 50 year old. Whenever he argued with my family, his one and only comeback would be asking if we were now going to throw a rock at him. He would laugh hysterically for about three minutes. He told me I should go join the people on the Flotilla boat to Palestine in order for me to realize there is no Palestine. He told Mohamed to go fight with his people to get rid of Gaddafi in Libya because his country was a joke. He told the Syrians they were next. Crazy son of a bitch.

But the one good thing about Ali Jubran was that he at least conversed with the neighbours – unlike the Khrafy family. They led a life away from the rest of the community. They were of Kuwaiti origin. They lived in their own gated castle-like home where the neighbours could only guess what lavish or exquisite thing they were up to next. The only time we would see them would be during Friday Prayer, or at a charity event where they would brag about how

much money they donated. I bet it wasn't even a millionth of their fortune. They had a Ferrari, a Bentley, and a Phantom. They kept them framed in their driveways for the neighbours to see what they couldn't afford. If anyone came close to their property their high-tech alarm system would go off. Technology was never quite my forte, but this alarm system was so crafty that it would wake up the entire neighbourhood within a minute. Anyone walking by the Khrafy estate would assume that a celebrity or a politician of some sort was inhibiting it. However, no one really knew what the Khrafy family did to earn their fortune. It was social stratification. They owned the caste system, and we were the untouchables at the bottom of the pyramid. Some liked to believe that they inherited the money. I like to create my own theories. Maybe the father worked as a torturer or an assassin for the government. That made their fortune sound a little bit more exciting and realistic in my mind. I remember one day bumping into their youngest daughter Areej at a concert. I could never forget her failed attempts to dodge me as if I was the plague itself. She was wearing an extremely revealing dress. Her legs were shining under the moonlight and her hair looked flawless. I imagine she had bathed in gold before leaving her home. She was 17 years old, but that evening she could have easily fooled anyone. Except me. I knew that her family was extremely conservative, but I was never one to judge. I kept her secret safe with me.

My family adored Mohamed but they did not want me to marry him. They couldn't stand his family. And he wasn't Palestinian. But what kind of excuse is that? They said his father is not eligible to be a Sheikh due to the way he acts towards everyone in the neighbourhood. He should be the one promoting social solidarity, not his son. I still didn't see the problem in marrying him. They knew he was a good guy. I didn't want to argue with my family, though, because they were pretty much all I had. It was hard. It was between choosing the man I love and my family. I suppose both ways would make me miserable. Mohamed and I knew we had no future. There was just something about us being together that felt right. We were both Arab. We were both Muslims. We were both Sunni Muslims as a matter of fact. Our parents just wouldn't allow it. It had nothing to do with religion. Nowhere in the Quran does it say people from two different countries cannot marry each other. It's a cultural thing, they say.

Mohamed was always trying to change things for the better. He was the only one in the neighbourhood that was actually trying to bring us together. Nobody wanted it, though. We didn't see the point. Mohamed then went on to tell me his next plan since the neighbourhood one wasn't really working out for him. He was going to go to Libya. He was going to help the people of his country get rid of the monsters who were in charge of it. I thought he was joking. But he wasn't. He came to tell me an hour before he was leaving. I was shocked. I admired his courage and bravery, but what were to happen to me if he got hurt? How would I go on without him? He told me I was being selfish. I couldn't stop him though. He told me that bringing the neighbourhood together was too difficult. He had to get our approval. With Libya it was simple. He would just get on a plane, fly over to his country, and join the rest of the protestors in the street. And just like that, he did.

He would send me an email every week. An email telling me how passionate he and the rest of the protestors were about the whole situation. He would tell me he wouldn't come back until Gaddafi was no longer in power. He described every detail of the situation. The sounds of firearm drumming in his ear. The fear of not being able to see due to the lack of light surrounding him and the other protestors. The tears rolling down his eyes as he heard the sounds of crying

children. It went on for about two months. Then, I stopped getting an email for about two weeks. I sent him some, but he never replied. I began to panic. Then his father stopped showing up at the mosque for the prayers.

One morning I woke up and heard our doorbell ringing. My mother had answered it. She began to shout my name. My heart was racing. A smile slowly started to form on my face. Mohamed came back to surprise me. I went down to find his father. No, I thought. This can't be happening. His eyes began to water. He told me everything I needed to know. Mohamed took a 14 year old rebellious freedom fighter under his wing. The little boy was involved in an uprising with some government officials and their attempt to shoot him failed. Mohamed was the collateral damage. He then announced that the funeral would be held at their house for the next three days. That's when I lost it. I completely lost it.

The whole neighbourhood began talking. Not the malicious kind of talking. They would pray together. Pray for God's forgiveness. Repent for their wrongdoings. Remember all that Mohamed was when he was still amongst us. They would constantly visit our house. I felt disgusted. I had a vacant soul full of remorse. In my head, this was all a show to them. I felt like it would eventually die down. They would eventually go back to their normal secluded routines. Everyday a new neighbour would be at our house, crying and praying. The Khrafy's. Ali Jubran. I just watched them silently with pity, without shedding a single tear. Death is truly the most unique battle I've ever had to face. There would be days where all I would hear would be silence. It would surround me everywhere I'd go. The only time it would disappear would be when my fears settled. And that's when I realized that these people truly cared.

Something had changed in the neighbourhood. Mohamed had finally won his battle. It was too bad he couldn't witness it himself. And with time, I finally found inner peace. I finally found the closure that I had hopelessly been searching for. Ironically, I found it through the people I hated the most. I found it through a sense of a community. With every kind word, a stranger would become family. And just like that, I began finding myself again. Instead of hearing silence, I would hear his gentle voice. And I would remember his resilient eyes. And I would be thankful for each day I was blessed to know him.

## Thank you, Ma'am

**Odăescu Bogdan. România**

Dragă Skip,

Uite că de câteva zile lucrez la documentarea cazului Piața Universității din România (1990). Îmi fac teme pentru deplasare. Ți-am explicat pe scurt care-i situația. Revoltă populară la căderea Cortinei de Fier, haos, nomenclaturiștii de rang doi execută dictatorul și preiau puterea, pozează în mari salvatori ai națiunii. Scenariul tipic, de manual. Opoziția, eclectică și agitată, demonstrează câteva luni într-o piață. Președintele interimar, Iliescu, se cam satură de atâta democrație și cheamă câteva mii de mineri, aseasonați cu membrii ai serviciilor secrete, să-i căsăpească. Bat la studenți și intelectuali câteva zile, le bagă miștile-n cap, omoară vreo 150, Iliescu le mulțumește frumos și wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am. Happy end. Iliescu prinde două mandate și acum e președinte de onoare al Partidului Social-Democrat. E îmbârligată acolo situația, încă nu am înțeles ce e-n capul lor per total, dar am impresia că nici ei nu știu sigur. Pare să le meargă mai bine după 21 de ani, dar tare mi-e că au memorie la fel de scurtă ca a ăstora de pe la noi. Cică serviciile secrete de atunci mai mișcă și acum, aceleași fețe, alte haine, dacă e să-l cred pe șefu'. Sper să nu am probleme, zonele fără conflicte sunt cele mai parșive și nesigure, habar n-ai ce, unde și în ce fel îți poate exploda în cap, într-un mod sau altul.

Știi că nu eu am cerut reportajul, chiar am încercat să scap de el, dar n-am avut cum. Trebuie să trag o fugă la Bruxelles înainte să ajung în România, după care înapoi în Iran. Numai de asta n-aveam nevoie. Cel puțin așa credeam.

În fine, motivul pentru care îți scriu de fapt e un e-mail pe care l-am primit azi de la fiul unuia din cei uciși acolo. Îți trimit câteva bucăți din el, detaliile mișto le găsești printre rânduri, nu mă apuc să-ți explic tot. Tipul e președintele unui ONG pentru imigranți la București, m-a ajutat cu niște date mai demult și am aflat, din fericire și din greșeală, că taică-so (fii atent aici!) nu numai că a murit bătut de mineri, dar e un fel de personaj iconic pentru toată faza. Îți dai seama că mi-a filat un bec. Oricum aveam nevoie de un unghi pentru narațiune, iar povestea e perfectă. În mailul precedent zicea că probabil din cauza lui taică-său a ajuns să-și facă o carieră din trezirea societății civile și cred că putem exploata detaliul. Tipul ăsta, care nici 25 de ani nu are, a pus pe picioare vreo cinci ONG-uri mari și are rubrici în trei săptămânale importante (din cele neafiliate, îți dai seama). Cred că e deștept, s-a prins că faza cu ecologia prinde bine, acum are și un mic sprijin politic din afara țării. Asta vroiam să te întreb: crezi că iese un reportaj prin gura băiatului? Știi că e cam patetic pe alocuri, dar asta ne-a ajutat de multe ori. Uite ce zice:

Domnule Casia,

La fel cum v-am promis și în mailul precedent (îmi cer scuze, munca asiduă de la organizație nu mi-a permis sub nicio formă să detaliez mai repede), vă voi oferi toate datele pe care le am legate de tatăl meu, așa cum am avut (ne)șansa de a le afla, de cele mai multe ori, din vorbele

unor oameni față de care nu am neapărat o formă de încredere sau empatie. Voi încerca să leg, din toate sursele pe care le-am avut la dispoziție, o poveste cât se poate de apropiată de fapte, însă nu știu în ce măsură va folosi în vreun fel demersului dumneavoastră jurnalistic. Știți și din discuția pe care am avut-o la telefon săptămâna trecută: deși personalitatea lui Adrian Pop mi-a marcat copilăria într-un mod extrem de puternic, îmi e foarte greu să îl numesc „tată” în sensul clasic al cuvântului, prima și ultima amintire directă pe care o am (care se poate, de asemenea, să fie nimic mai mult decât o falsă amintire la rândul ei) aș putea să o fixez undeva în jurul vârstei de patru ani. Am avut parte, în schimb, de zeci și sute de povești, relatări și articole de ziar care, pe lângă faptul că l-au transformat pe tatăl meu într-o stafie mai vie decât orice prezență fizică, au reușit mai mult să mă deruteze.

[...]

Adrian Pop este, în continuare, un subiect tabu în casa mamei, iar motivele ei sunt, oricât de meschine ar părea, perfect legitime. Dincolo de orice mare adevăr istoric, ea știe una și bună: având doi copii în cărcă, într-o perioadă extrem de neagră, începutul anilor '90, soțul ei, în loc să își caute un loc de muncă, a preferat să facă pe revoluționarul. În momentul în care orice om rațional, intelectual sau proletar, prefera să își găsească un loc privilegiat în toată mișcarea tectonică a răsturnării regimului, tatăl meu, alături de câteva mii de nebuni (așa îi numea mama, nebuni, fără cel mai mic loc lăsat nuanțelor), prefera să se zbată pentru niște cuvinte goale care nu aduceau sub nicio formă pâinea pe masă. [...] Nu le spunea „golani din Piața Universității”, nici „huligani anarhiști”, cum erau numiți în presă, acestea fiind apelativele preferate ale regimului neo-comunist care se insinuase (criptocomunist, socialist moderat, democratic, de tranziție, spuneți-i cum doriți, fiecare cu eticheta sa), nu, mama nu avea niciun strop de poziție politică, ea le zicea „nebuni”, pentru că doar un nebun ar face pe boemul, cântând lozinci protestatare, în timp ce copiii și nevasta rabdă foame asemeni unor avataruri străvezii din romanele lui Dickens. Femeia asta, domnule Casia, e imaginea fidelă a românului de rând. În momentul în care a apărut într-o seară alcoolizat (aici tind să o cred pe mama, cu toate exagerările ei, știu că îi plăcea să bea alături de amicii lui scriitori, „telectualii ăia terchea-berchea”), golind frigiderul și cămara dintr-o mișcare, prăvălind bruma de alimente într-un sac de cadavru (nici azi n-am aflat de unde-l luase) pentru a-și hrăni prietenii protestatari, mamei i s-a rupt filmul și l-a scos afară în șuturi. Atunci l-a văzut ultima oară și tot atunci a instituit embargo pe numele său.

Acum o săptămână am încercat, după ani buni, să deschid subiectul la masa de Paște, însă fără niciun rezultat. [...] Vă voi scuti de restul detaliilor dramatice ce au urmat, însă vă asigur că am făcut tot ce se putea, iar asta nu de dragul dumneavoastră, ci dintr-o dorință la care mi-e foarte greu să renunț, aceea de a convinge un om drag, poate cel mai drag, că gândirea radicală își are limitele dincolo de orice calitate profund umană și că toleranța e dură, însă poate fi cultivată, chiar și fără o educație în acest sens. Ocupându-mă atât de des cu probleme ce privesc toleranța, mă încapățânez să refuz faptul că pierd tocmai acasă această luptă. Poate că, la rândul meu, îmi lipsește toleranța. E o gheață foarte subțire aceasta, nu-i așa, domnule Casia? Când în jurul tău se ridică baricade, trebuie să stai de o parte sau de cealaltă a lor, chiar și numai pentru a alege culoarea gloanțelor care te vor sfârteca sau marca bocancilor care te vor călca.

[...]

Tatăl meu a făcut pe clownul, cu un curaj tembel, exact în vârful baricadei. Știți la ce mă refer, doar ați fost jurnalist de război. Cum poți judeca memoria unui astfel de om, domnule

Casia? Nu e o întrebare retorică, chiar cred că îmi puteți oferi un răspuns. Sunt sigur că ați dat de astfel de oameni de-a lungul timpului. Poate în Afganistan. În Bosnia. Darfur? Irak? Africa de Sud? Cecenia? Ceva îmi spune că planeta e plină de astfel de inconștienți angelici. Uniformele nu îi judecă, uniformele îi împrușcă. Dumneavoastră cum îi judecați? Ce faci când un astfel de om e prins, pe de o parte, în priza fermă a istoriei, iar pe de altă parte, de problemele patetice ale facturilor de curent? Ați trăit alături de ei, poate că unul sau doi chiar v-au salvat viața. Aveau copii sau doar lozinci?

[... etc., etc., etc. ...]

Am citit ieri, într-un roman de Milorad Pavić, scriitor pe care, dacă nu mă înșel, chiar l-ați cunoscut prin 1999, următoarele vorbe, puse în gura unui personaj feminin: „Uită-te la mine. Am 17 ani. Sunt de o vârstă cu omenirea, fiindcă omenirea are întotdeauna 17 ani. Asta înseamnă că un popor e pururi un copil. Care tot crește și căruia, precum hainele, îi rămân mereu strâmte limba sa, spiritul, memoria și chiar viitorul”. Poți acuza un om dacă se consideră croitorul perfect al acestor mari cuvinte? Limbă. Spirit. Memorie. Viitor. Are cineva habar cât de mult au intrat la apă aceste cuvinte? Adrian Pop era sigur că știe măsura perfectă a acestor cuvinte. La fel credea și Hitler, la fel și Ghandi. Pe un om al istoriei îl judeci după măsura etică ori politică, dar cum îl judeci pe „nebu”? ”

Am pus 11 semne de întrebare în ultimul alineat și cred că e timpul să încep să răspund la cele pe care le-ați ridicat dumneavoastră. Îmi cer scuze dacă m-am întins excesiv.

[...]

Continuarea, într-adevăr, nu prezenta nicio noutate pentru mine. Logic, oficialitățile române n-au dat nicio cifră a celor împrușcați sau omorâți în bătaie de mineri. I-au înmormântat pe ascuns, ca „necunoscuți”, într-un cimitir de la marginea Bucureștiului. Undeva între 100 și 150, printre care și Adrian Pop, cvasi-faimos din cauza unei fotografii care, habar n-am cum, a ajuns pe coperta revistei Time. Nici măcar nu se știe cine a făcut-o. Când am căutat poza, m-a lovit. O știam foarte bine. În colțul stânga jos, sub close-up-ul cu fața plină de sânge a unui bărbos în agonie, cu ochii injectați ridicați spre ceva în afara cadrului, ce ar putea la fel de bine să fie Dumnezeu sau un baston de miner, era titlul unui articol pe care l-am scris despre Războiul din Golf. Prea se leagă toate, ca-ntr-un film prost, simt că nu trebuie să ratez povestea. Poți râde de mine, însă genul acesta de superstiții mi-au salvat viața de câteva ori. Trebuie să mă hotărâsc clar, înainte de plecare, dacă merg pe direcția asta, iar tu poți să-mi spui dacă înghite șefu’ povestea sau nu. Îl cunoști mult mai bine decât mine, tu lucrezi cu el de douăzeci de ani.

Tocmai asta e treaba, e prea întortocheat totul și n-am nicio șansă, în trei zile, să scot ceva care să stea în picioare istoric vorbind, niciun detaliu care n-a fost întors deja pe toate părțile, așa că apăs cât de mult pot pedala estetică, las zona ambiguă la suprafață. La naiba, dacă nu-mi acceptă materialul, scriu o carte și gata!

Pop jr. e un idealist pasabil, săritor și implicat. Cred că tot cu el o să mă scot în România. Chiar dacă e patetic, nu pare unul din activiștii radicali, nebuni de legat. Știi, aici am avut probleme de fiecare dată când am vorbit cu românii. Sunt rupți în două – fie vor să-i facă unuia statuie, fie vor să-l căsăpească. Iar asta e fix psihologia zonelor de război. E prima oară când dau de așa ceva, în halul ăsta, într-o țară care n-a avut un conflict armat din ’45. Sunt mai înfocați ca irlandezii. La fel și cu mina pe care vor să le-o exploateze o companie canadiană, exact același tip de scandal (caută cazul, e interesant, Roșia Montană îi zice).

Te rog scrie-mi repede, în trei zile plec și în alte cinci sunt la București. Mă duc să le vând ăstora libertate la 25 de cadre pe secundă, după care mă întorc să le vând alor noștri libertate la 25 de cadre pe secundă. Doamne, am ajuns să-mi urăsc slujba.

Toate cele dragi,  
al tău,  
E.C.

# Thank you, Ma'am<sup>1</sup>

**Odăgescu Bogdan. Romania**

Dear Skip,

For a few days now I've been working on a documentary about Piata Universitatii in Romania (1990).<sup>2</sup> I'm doing my homework before leaving. I already told you about the story. People's resurrection at the fall of the Iron Curtain, chaos, second-level people of the regime kill the dictator and seize power, pretending to be the saviours of the nation. Typical scenario that you find in manuals and books on this subject. The "oppositions", the ones against the regime, eclectic and hectic, demonstrate for several months in some open place or market. Interim President Iliescu had enough of so much democracy and called for thousands of miners, helped by supporters of his regime, to disperse the demonstrators, even with the use of violence. They beat the hell out of students and other intellectuals altogether, to "make them come to their senses," killing about 150, thanked by the President and wham-bam thank-you-ma'am. The president has had two presidential terms and is now the honorary president of the Social Democratic Party. I don't understand what's in their minds, but I think they do not know for sure either. It seems to work better after 21 years, but I think their memory is short...

1. Another way to tell a story, told from the perspective of a young boy with literary knowledge and a true gift, using some different styles and mixing the facts with legends, creating a whole different perspective of some events. It is the story of pain, heroes and daily life that can be generalized to other events and places, from no matter what part of the world.

2. The market where the Revolution took place, legendary for that event in Romania. It is also the very centre of the city.

They say their secret services are still active, same faces, different image, if I am to believe my boss. I hope I will have no problems, the conflict areas are the most unreliable, I have no idea what, where and how you can just blow something in your head, one way or another.

You know, I haven't asked for the documentary, I even tried to get rid of it, but it was impossible. I have to fly to Brussels before reaching Romania, and then back to Iran. This was the last thing I needed. At least I thought so.

Anyway, the reason for my letter is actually an email that I got today from the son of one of the guys killed there. I sent you some pieces of the message, the cool stuff you find reading between the lines, I will not explain everything to you...

The guy is the president of an NGO focused on immigrant issues, located in Bucharest, and he helped me with some data some time ago, when I happened to find out – by mistake – that his pap (isn't it incredible!) only died because of the injuries inflicted by miners (who beat the hell out of him), but he's a sort of iconic character now. You can see that I've got some ideas. Anyway, I needed a track, a different angle for the story. And the story is damn perfect. My guy said in the previous email that his father was likely to be the real reason behind his choice of trying to raise awareness inside civil society – and I think we can somehow take advantage of this detail. Our guy, who's less than 25 years old, managed to start about 5 big NGOs from scratch and has some editorials in three major newspapers (the ones without political

affiliation, of course!). I think he's smart. He figured out that the environmental protection stuff is working. Now he even has a little political support from outside the country. And now I will get to the point: I wanted to ask you if you honestly think a real story can come out through his words. I know it is somehow pathetic, but this sort of tool has often helped us to achieve support. Well, judge for yourself, from the words I'm reproducing below:

Mr Casia,

As promised in the previous email (and please forgive me for not being able to give you more details so far because of the hard work with the foundation), I will provide you with all the details that I have about my father, the way I had the (mis)fortune to find out, mostly from some people that do not necessarily make me feel sympathy or inspire trust in me. I will try to connect the pieces of information that I have to create a story that shall be as close to real facts as possible, but I still don't really understand how this will help you in your journalistic approach.

You also know from our conversation over the phone last week that even though the personality of Adrian Pop greatly influenced me as a child, it is still very difficult to call him dad in the classical meaning of the word. The first and last direct memory that I have of him (which may well prove to be a false memory) comes from when I was about 4. In turn, I've read many stories, articles and other information that, while transforming my father into a living memory – more alive than a real presence – and haunting me, only managed to confuse me in the end.

My father played the clown, insanely brave, on the barricade. You know what I mean, you were a war reporter. How can you judge the memory of such a man, Mr Casia? It is not

rhetoric, because I really think you can give me an answer! I'm sure you met these sorts of people. Maybe in Afghanistan. Or Bosnia. Darfur? Iraq? South Africa? Chechnya? Something makes me think the whole world is full of this angelic foolishness. The men with uniforms do not judge them, they just kill them. But you, Sir, how do you judge them? What do you do when such a character is caught in the eye of history on the one hand and in life's pathetic little nonsense (like bills and stuff) on the other? You lived with these sorts of guys, maybe one or two even saved your life. Did they have children, or just slogans?

[etc etc]

I read yesterday, in a Milorad Pavić novel – a writer that I think you met once, probably around the year 1999 – the following words, spoken by a female character: “look at me. I'm 17. I'm as old as mankind because mankind is always 17. That means that a person is always like a child who never grows up and whose language, spirit and even memory are growing short.” Can you accuse someone who considers himself the true tailor of these words? Language. Spirit. Memory. Future. Does anybody realize how antiquated and somehow out of use these words are? Adrian Pop was sure he knew exactly what these words mean. So did Hitler or Gandhi. But a character that made history is to be judged only by ethics or political measures... then again, how do you judge a foul?

I put too many question marks in the last lines and I think it is about time to answer the ones raised by you, Sir. Please forgive me for the digression. [...]

What came next was not new to me. Logic, the Romanian authorities never made public the numbers of the injured or deaths in the fight with the protesters. The victims were buried as “unknown victims” in some cemetery outside Bucharest. Probably there were between 100-150, including Adrian

Pop, almost famous because of a picture that, no one knows how, got on the cover of Time Magazine. We don't even know who took that picture. When I saw it, it hit me. I knew it so well. Somewhere in the bottom right corner, in close-up, was the face of a bearded man, covered with blood, staring at something unseen that might well be God or the aggressor – it was the title and the idea of an article that I once wrote about the Gulf War. There are too many connections, like in a silly movie, that are making me think I should not miss the opportunity. You can laugh, but this sort of superstition saved my life a couple of times. I have to definitely decide before I leave if I should follow this road – and you can tell me if the Boss is buying the story or not. You know him much better than I do, because you have worked with him for the last 20 years.

That's the fact, everything is too complicated and I don't stand a chance of getting anything out and proving it to be true – from the historic point of view – in three days. There's no detail that hasn't been turned upside down and challenged, so I will leave the ambiguity to dominate. Damn, if he doesn't

accept the material, I will write a book and that's it!

Pop Jr is a dreamer, helpful and involved. I think he still helps me out in Romania. Even if he may sometimes be pathetic, he's not one of the activists that seem radical or crazy. You know, here I had some problems every time I spoke with the people: they seem to be torn in two – either they want to make one into a statue or destroy him. And that's the psychology of war zones. It's the first time I have found something like that in a country that had had no armed conflict since '45. They are more ardent than the Irish. Same type of scandal (look at the case, it's interesting) you can also find these days.

Please write to me soon as in 3 days I will leave and in another 5 I'll be in Bucharest. I'm going to sell liberty with 25 frames per second, after that I will come to sell our guys liberty with 25 frames per second. God, I came to hate my job!

All the best,

Yours,

E.C.

## Le cadenas

**Hanane Oulahillah. Maroc**

Khalid s’approchait d’un pas rapide de l’école primaire « Naguib Mahfouz ». Ce matin là, il passa plus d’une heure dans sa salle de bain. Il avait rasé sa barbe, frottait ses pieds avec une pierre ponce jusqu’à ce qu’ils deviennent aussi lisses et aussi doux que ceux d’un nouveau né. Ensuite, il se badigeonna le cou d’eau de toilette à base de musc et décida de porter sa plus belle gandoura qu’il ne sortait que pour les jours de fête. Et ce jour du lundi 10 octobre était justement une grande occasion.

Il y a quelques semaines, Khalid avait été désigné responsable du bureau de vote du centre ville de la capitale. Un grand honneur pour ce quinquagénaire, père de 5 filles. Il avait pour mission de veiller à ce que tout se déroule bien dans le bureau en ce jour historique. Jour où la démocratie fut enfin rendue au peuple après plus de 50 ans de dictature, de censure, d’emprisonnement arbitraire, de têtes coupées et des milliers de litres de sang versé. Le dictateur était un général schizophrène du nom d’Ali. Il venait de se faire assassiner par Mohamed l’un de ses plus proches domestiques. Une vendetta réussie et préparée des années à l’avance. Une vendetta dont on parla partout dans le monde arabe.

Tout commença lorsque que Hamid, le père du domestique, un petit marchand de pommes de terre avait été exécuté sur ordre de Ali il y a plus de 5 ans. Son tort : avoir abîmé l’un des pickups appartenant à ses gardes du corps garé en centre ville. Hamid cherchait à descendre sa lourde carriole remplie de légumes du trottoir et en la poussant, il en perdit le contrôle et la carriole alla se loger dans l’aile droite du véhicule de luxe. Sans perdre une seconde, l’un des gorilles du dictateur sortit du véhicule et prit Hamid par les épaules et l’entraîna violemment à l’intérieur de la voiture. Une semaine plus tard, le commissariat appela la famille du marchand par téléphone en leur demandant de venir chercher Hamid et surtout de ne pas oublier de rapporter avec eux une couverture. Mohamed et sa mère partirent sur le champ au commissariat. Dès leur arrivée, on les invita à descendre au sous-sol et de se rendre au bureau n° 4. Une odeur putride et de chair brûlée envahissait ce minuscule bureau sombre. Un policier à moitié endormi, les mains et les ongles remplis de sang séchés leur montra d’un signe de la tête un long sachet en plastique placé sur un vieux lit en bois. Mohamed et sa mère s’approchaient sans dire mot. Deux mouches affamées se battaient en duel au dessus du sac. Le policier l’ouvrit et la femme de Hamid lança un cri de douleur et s’effondra sur le sol sale. Elle avait reconnu le visage de son mari mort. Enfin du moins ce qu’il en restait. Son nez et ses oreilles avaient été coupés, son front et ses joues comportaient d’immenses hématomes et des traces de brûlures de cigarettes. Les yeux du pauvre homme étaient encore ouverts. Totalement pétrifiés. Mohamed posa délicatement sa main droite sur les paupières de son père pour les fermer. Le policier se tourna vers Mohamed et lui dit en ricanant :

– Je te conseille de ne pas regarder le reste de son corps, c’est encore plus moche ! Ton père est mort sans être un homme ! Maintenant toi et ta pute de mère, vous allez me ramasser cette merde. Voilà ce qu’encourent les gens qui osent s’attaquer à notre Bienfaiteur Ali. Allez maintenant dégagez, que je ne vous vois plus dans les parages sinon vous aurez le droit aux mêmes privilèges.

Mohamed s'abaissa au sol pour réveiller et relever sa mère. Il recouvrit le corps de son père avec la couverture qu'ils avaient rapporté, puis porta le cadavre sur son épaule. Sa mère et lui sortirent rapidement et en silence de ce lieu de torture.

Quelques années plus tard, Mohamed avait grandi mais n'avait pas oublié ce que le Général Ali et ses soldats avaient fait subir à son père. Le temps passait et son envie de vengeance grandissait en lui. La meilleure façon de se venger était donc d'entrer au service du dictateur, de faire parti de sa garde rapprochée. Mohamed envoya sa famille à l'étranger. Puis il changea son nom de famille. Il brûla sa carte d'identité et se fit faire de faux papiers d'identité. Il déclara à ses recruteurs qu'il était orphelin depuis son plus jeune âge. Sans plus attendre, il se fit embaucher dans les appartements privés du dictateur comme homme de ménage. Après plusieurs mois de loyaux services, Mohamed gagna très vite la confiance du Général Ali et de sa cour. C'est au moment où on lui fit le plus confiance qu'il passa à l'acte et qu'il assassina Ali. Le dictateur regardait la finale de la coupe du monde de football dans sa salle de cinéma privée et le domestique en profita pour verser quelques gouttes de cyanure dans son verre de vin. Alors que le Brésil marquait le but de la finale, Ali se leva en criant et en gesticulant dans tous les sens, puis il retourna s'asseoir sur son fauteuil et but une gorgée de vin. Il commença à trembler, une mousse verdâtre, plus verte que son uniforme sortit de sa bouche et il finit par s'effondrer sur son marbre noir italien. Le dictateur était bel et bien mort.

Mohamed en profita pour lui voler quelques bijoux en or posés sur sa commode et disparut à jamais. Mais beaucoup racontent que Mohamed partit rejoindre sa famille réfugiée dans un pays voisin. Pour le peuple, Mohamed était leur libérateur. Un véritable héros anonyme.

En entrant dans la petite école, Khalid salua froidement un militaire en uniforme assis sur une chaise. C'était dans cet établissement pas très loin du commissariat de police où fut torturé le père de Mohamed que le peuple allait voter pour élire un successeur au sanguinaire Ali. En marchant dans la cour de l'école pour se rendre dans une classe qui servirait de bureau de vote, Khalid observait les murs. Ils n'avaient pas été repeints depuis bien longtemps. Pas une seule couleur ou de dessins sur les murs. Pas de marelles sur le sol. Rien. Ça sentait plus la pisse que l'amour de la transmission du savoir. Et pourtant, c'était dans ce lieu que l'on apprit à des générations d'enfants à devenir des êtres soumis, à vénérer des monstres, à apprendre par cœur le nom de leurs ancêtres comme s'ils avaient marché sur la lune ou découvert le vaccin contre la rage.

En entrant dans la classe, la première chose qui attira l'attention de Khalid est un vieux portrait d'Ali accroché au dessus du tableau noir. Il prit alors une chaise, monta dessus et décrocha la photo poussiéreuse du dictateur souriant et levant du poing. Il déchira le portrait en 4, jeta les morceaux de la photo à la poubelle et s'essuya les mains sur sa gandoura en murmurant :

– Brûle en enfer, saloperie !

On frappa à la porte de la classe. Khalid se retourna et éclata de rire.

– Entrez, entrez je vous en prie.

Deux hommes entrèrent et saluèrent chaleureusement Khalid. Mourad était le plus jeune, âgé d'une vingtaine d'années. Il portait un jean serré et un tee-shirt avec une photo de Michael Jackson. L'autre homme, Ahmed un peu plus âgé portait une longue barbe noire et une gandoura bleu marin.

– Il ne manque plus que Malika et l'équipe est au grand complet, lança Khalid.

A peine cette phrase prononcée, une voix de femme se fit entendre.

– Ne vous inquiétez, je suis là. Vous croyiez que j’allais vous laisser tomber en ce jour historique !

Tous se retournèrent et accueillirent Malika chaleureusement. La jeune femme voilée retira ses grosses lunettes de soleil pour mettre ses lunettes de vue.

Khalid monta sur la petite estrade de la classe devant le tableau noir.

– Mes chers amis, je suis très heureux que vous soyez tous là. Aujourd’hui nous avons une mission très importante à relever. Faire que tout se passe bien pour que le peuple vote dans les meilleures conditions ! L’urne est arrivée hier soir, les listes des votants sont prêtes, les bulletins sont tous placés sur la table. La seule chose que je vous demanderai, c’est d’être sérieux. Ce sont nos premières élections libres, elles demandent toute notre attention. En cas de problème, venez m’en parler tout de suite. S’il n’y a pas de questions, je vous demanderai donc de vous installer à vos postes et je finirais par dire : « Vive la démocratie ! ».

Les trois compagnons de Khalid se mirent à applaudir en criant à l’unisson « vive la démocratie ! ». Chacun regagna son poste. Mourad et Ahmed eurent pour tâche de vérifier les cartes des électeurs et les pièces d’identité. Quand à Khalid et Malika, tous les deux durent veiller à ce que personne ne s’approche de trop près de l’urne.

Il était presque neuf heures. Les premiers électeurs commencèrent à arriver pour voter. Effrayés, ils piochaient rapidement les noms des candidats et partaient se cacher dans l’isoloir. Ils en ressortaient encore plus apeurés comme si les soldats de Ali allaient débarquer pour les emmener en prison parce qu’ils votaient. Ils s’approchaient doucement de l’urne, regardaient furtivement à droite et à gauche et finissaient par glisser leur enveloppe dans la grosse boîte transparente. Certains respiraient et souriaient de soulagement. D’autres se mirent à pleurer. Ils n’y crurent pas leurs yeux. Ils devenaient enfin maîtres de leur destin. Désormais c’est eux seuls qui allaient désigner l’homme ou la femme qui allait les gouverner. Plus jamais personne ne leur sera imposé de force.

Et la journée continua ainsi. Des centaines et des centaines de citoyens se déplacèrent pour voter. Les piles de bulletins de vote diminuaient et partaient comme des petits pains chauds à la boulangerie. La seule fois où l’équipe de Khalid bougea de son poste, c’était sur le temps du midi pour que elle aussi puisse voter.

19 heures arrivèrent rapidement. Les derniers électeurs s’empressèrent de rentrer pour voter. De son côté, le militaire à l’entrée de l’école ferma le portail. Plus aucune personne n’était admise à l’intérieur pour voter. Fin des votes certes, mais la journée était loin d’être terminée pour Khalid et ses compagnons. Ils devaient maintenant passer à la clôture de l’urne qui allait être récoltée dans moins d’une heure par un taxi réquisitionné à cet effet. Mourad, Ahmed et Malika s’approchèrent de l’urne pour la contempler de près. Elle était pleine à craquer.

– Je serai curieux de savoir quel est le nom qui revient le plus souvent, questionna Mourad.

– Ah ça mon fils, seul Dieu le sait ! Désormais ce n’est plus de notre ressort ! Notre mission a été de veiller à ce que tout se déroule bien aujourd’hui ! Une mission accomplie à 100 %. Maintenant pour ce qui est du décompte, c’est le travail d’autres personnes ! lança Ahmed.

– Et si les personnes qui décomptent les bulletins ne sont pas honnêtes, vous y avez pensé ? Imaginez si elles choisissent un nom à la place du peuple ! dit Malika inquiète.

– Tu sais ma chère Malika, tout est possible dans ce monde ! Il faut être réaliste. Quand on a vécu pendant 50 ans sous le joug d’un dictateur aussi horrible qu’Ali, je suis sûre d’une chose, la personne qui va remporter ces élections, de manière honnête ou pas, sera beaucoup mieux que

lui. Un chien aurait eu plus d'humanité que lui. La démocratie est bel et bien en marche dans notre pays et c'est ce qui compte à mes yeux ! expliqua Khalid.

– Mais comme a dit Ahmed, notre mission est accomplie. Je vais passer maintenant à la fermeture de l'urne. Si la personne qui a rangé le cadenas pouvait me le passer rapidement...

Mourad, Ahmed et Malika se regardèrent tous avec des yeux ronds.

– Mais Khalid, on ne l'a pas, nous, le cadenas de l'urne, lança Malika.

– Comment ça personne n'a le cadenas ? Quelqu'un a bien dû le prendre ? cria Khalid.

– Mais non, je t'assure Khalid, on ne l'a pas pris ! Je ne sais même pas de quelle couleur il est ce cadenas ? interrompit Ahmed.

– Peut-être que le bureau central a oublié de remettre le cadenas avec l'urne ? lança Mourad.

– Vous vous moquez de moi là, vous voulez me faire une farce ? J'ai vérifié personnellement l'urne hier soir et je peux vous assurer qu'il y avait un cadenas !

– Ecoutez, gardons notre calme ! Ce que l'on va tous faire c'est chercher dans la classe, il a dû tomber quelque part ! Ne vous inquiétez pas, on va le retrouver, dit Ahmed confiant.

Les quatre collègues se mirent donc à chercher le fameux cadenas. Malika se mit à genou et sillonna le sol de la classe. Ahmed, lui chercha sur et sous les bureaux de la classe. Mourad chercha autour des bulletins de votes posés sur une grande table et Khalid se chargea de chercher autour de l'urne et du tableau noir. Mais rien. Le cadenas ne fut pas retrouvé.

– Ecoutez, si vous voulez, je peux aller acheter un nouveau cadenas au supermarché d'à côté, personne n'y verra que du feu ! lança essoufflé Mourad.

– On a passé toute la journée ici à veiller au bon déroulement du vote, c'est pas maintenant qu'on va tout gâcher pour un simple cadenas. On ne partira pas d'ici sans l'avoir retrouvé ! ordonna Khalid.

– Peut-être que Mourad a raison, ce serait plus simple d'en acheter un nouveau ! Mon mari et mes enfants vont m'attendre pour le dîner, murmura Malika.

– Moi aussi j'ai ma femme et mes enfants qui m'attendent pour dîner. Mais c'est non, on ne partira pas d'ici sans l'avoir retrouvé ! Vous parliez tout à l'heure des craintes que vous aviez que quelqu'un sabote le vote d'aujourd'hui et bien je suis désolé mais la démocratie commence par un engagement et le sérieux de chacun d'entre nous. L'urne nous a été livrée avec un cadenas, elle sera rendue ce soir fermée avec ce même cadenas ! Point final. Continuez à chercher, hurla Khalid.

Et ils se mirent encore à chercher le cadenas partout, dans les moindres recoins de la classe. Soudain Ahmed se releva du sol.

– Et dans l'urne, vous avez regardé dans l'urne ? demanda Ahmed

– Quoi dans l'urne ? lança Mourad

– Réfléchissez ! On a cherché partout ! Peut-être que le cadenas est dans l'urne sous tous les bulletins de vote !

Un silence envahit la classe. Tous les quatre s'approchèrent de l'urne en la scrutant. Khalid s'avança vers la boîte transparente.

– Ecoutez, ce qu'on va faire c'est vider l'urne ! Débarrassez la grande table de tous les bulletins de vote et on va mettre délicatement toutes les enveloppes dessus. Dépêchons-nous car le taxi ne va pas tarder à venir la récupérer !

Mourad et Ahmed portèrent donc l'urne et vidèrent délicatement son contenu sur la grande table. Soudain un fort bruit retentit. Le fameux cadenas était tombé par terre. Khalid s'agenouilla, le ramassa en esquissant un petit sourire et ferma définitivement l'urne.

## The Padlock

**Hanane Oulahillah. Morocco**

Khalid was walking quickly to the “Naguib Mahfouz” primary school. That morning, he had spent more than one hour in the bathroom. He had shaved his beard and exfoliated his feet with a pumice stone until they were as smooth as a newborn’s. Then, he smeared his neck with musk-based eau de toilette and decided to wear his best gandoura that he only used on public holidays. And that Monday 10th October was indeed a great occasion.

Some weeks before, Khalid had been appointed head of the polling station in the capital’s central district, a great honour for this man in his fifties, the father of five girls. His mission was to ensure that everything ran smoothly on that historic day, a day when democracy was finally restored to the people after more than fifty years of dictatorship, censorship, arbitrary imprisonment, beheadings and thousands of litres of spilt blood. The dictator was a schizophrenic general called Ali. He had just been assassinated by Mohamed, one of his closest servants. A successful vendetta prepared in advance for years. A vendetta with great repercussions throughout the Arab world.

Everything began when Hamid, the servant’s father, a potato trader, had been executed on Ali’s order more than five years ago. His crime was damaging one of the bodyguards’ cars parked in the town centre. Hamid was trying to move his heavy cart full of vegetables on the pavement and, while pushing it, he lost control and the cart crashed into the right side of the luxurious vehicle. Without wasting a second, one of the dictator’s gorillas got out of the vehicle and took Hamid by his shoulders and violently

dragged him into the car. One week later, the police station phoned the trader’s family and asked them to come and pick up Hamid and, above all, not to forget to bring a blanket with them. Mohamed and his mother immediately left for the police station. When they arrived, they were invited to go down to the underground floor to office number 4. A putrid smell of burnt flesh filled that dark tiny office. A half-asleep officer, with his hands and nails full of dried blood, nodded towards a large plastic sack on a wooden bed. Mohamed and his mother moved closer without uttering a word. Two hungry flies were duelling above the sack. The officer opened it and Hamid’s wife let out a cry of pain and fainted on the dirty ground. She had recognised the face of her dead husband. At least, what remained of him. His nose and ears had been cut off, his forehead and cheeks bore enormous bruises and traces of cigarette burns. The poor man’s eyes were still open. Totally petrified. Mohamed gently put his right hand on his father’s eyelids to close them. The officer turned towards Mohamed and told him, sniggering:

“Best not look at the rest of body, it is even uglier! Your father is dead and has lost his masculinity! Now you and your whore mother will pick up this piece of shit. That’s what happens to people who dare attack our Benefactor Ali. Now, out of my sight, I don’t want to see you here anymore or you’ll suffer the same fate.”

Mohamed knelt down to revive and pick up his mother. He covered his father’s body with the blanket they had brought with them, then carried the corpse over his shoul-

der. He and his mother quickly and silently left that place of torture.

Some years later, Mohamed had grown up but he hadn't forgotten what General Ali and his soldiers had put his father through. Time went by and his thirst for vengeance grew. The best way to avenge him was to enter the dictator's service, to form part of his personal guard. Mohamed sent his family abroad. Then he changed his surname. He burnt his identity card and obtained forged documents. He told his employers that he had been an orphan from a very young age. He was immediately assigned to the dictator's private apartments as a cleaner. After several months of loyal service, Mohamed quickly gained the confidence of General Ali and his entourage. It was then when he put his plan into effect and assassinated Ali. The dictator was watching the world cup final in his private cinema auditorium and the servant took the opportunity to pour some drops of cyanide into his wine. When Brazil scored the final goal, Ali stood up screaming and writhing about, then he sat down again in his armchair and drank a gulp of wine. He began trembling, a greenish foam, greener than his uniform, frothed out of his mouth and he finally collapsed on his Italian black marble. The dictator was well and truly dead.

Mohamed took the opportunity to steal some gold jewels lying on his sideboard and disappeared forever. But many say that Mohamed went to meet his refugee family in a neighbouring country. For the people, Mohamed was their liberator, a real anonymous hero.

When he entered the school, Khalid coldly greeted a soldier in uniform sitting on a chair. It was in this place, not very far from the

police station where Mohamed's father was tortured, where people would vote to elect a successor to the bloody-thirsty Ali. While walking through the school playground to go to a classroom used as a polling station, Khalid looked at the walls. They hadn't been repainted for a long time. There was not a single colour or drawing on the walls. No hopscotch on the ground. Nothing. It smelt more of pee than love for the transmission of knowledge. And, yet, it was in this place where generations of children were taught to become subjected human beings, to worship monsters, to learn by heart the name of their ancestors as if they had walked on the moon or discovered the rabies vaccination.

Once in the classroom, the first thing that called Khalid's attention was an old portrait of Ali hanging above the blackboard. He then took a chair, jumped on it and pulled down the dusty photo of the smiling dictator with his fist raised. He tore the portrait into four pieces, threw them into the rubbish and wiped his hands on his gandoura while whispering:

"Burn in hell, you piece of junk!"

Someone knocked on the classroom door. Khalid turned around and burst out laughing.

"Come in, come in, please."

Two men went in and warmly greeted Khalid. Mourad was the youngest, in his twenties. He was wearing tight jeans and a T-shirt with a photo of Michael Jackson. The other man was Ahmed, a little younger than him, with a long black beard and a sea blue gandoura.

"We only need Malika and the team will be complete," shouted Khalid.

Just after he said this, a woman said:

"Don't worry, I'm here. You didn't think I'd miss this historic day!"

All of them turned and warmly welcomed Malika. The veiled young woman took

off her big sunglasses to put on her normal glasses.

Khalid went up onto the small platform in front of the blackboard.

“My dear friends, I’m very happy that you are all here. Today you have a very important mission to fulfil. Do everything you can to make it as easy as possible for people to vote! The ballot box arrived yesterday, the voters’ lists are ready, the ballot papers are all on the table. The only thing I ask of you is to be serious. These are our first free elections, they require all our attention. If there’s a problem, come and talk to me immediately. If there are no questions, please sit in your places and I’ll end by saying: ‘Long live democracy!’”

Khalid’s three companions began applauding and shouting altogether “long live democracy”. They all took their places. Mourad and Ahmed were responsible for checking the electors’ voting and identity cards. Khalid and Malika had to ensure that nobody got too close to the ballot box.

It was almost 9 in the morning. The first voters began to arrive. Frightened, they quickly picked up the voting papers with the names of the candidates and went to conceal themselves in the polling booth. They came out looking even more frightened as if Ali’s soldiers would appear and drag them off to prison. They gently approached the ballot box, looked furtively to the right and to the left and finally slipped their envelope into the large transparent container. Some breathed out and smiled with relief. Others burst into tears. They couldn’t believe their eyes. They had finally become the masters of their destiny. Henceforth, they would decide themselves the man or the woman who would govern them. They would never again be imposed on them by force.

And the day went on. Hundreds and hundreds of citizens came to vote. The piles

of voting papers gradually decreased and disappeared like freshly-baked cakes. The only time Khalid’s team moved from their place was at midday so that they could also vote.

7 pm quickly came. The final electors hurried in to vote. The soldier at the school entrance closed the gate. Nobody else could be admitted in to vote. It was the end of voting, certainly, but the day was far from over for Khalid and his companions. Now they had to lock the ballot box, which would be collected in less than one hour by a taxi called for this purpose. Mourad, Ahmed and Malika approached the ballot box for a closer look. It was full to brimming.

“I’m curious to see the name that appears most often,” said Mourad.

“This, my son, only God knows! It is no longer in our hands! Our mission was to make sure everything went well today! A mission fulfilled 100%. Now, the count is the work of other people!” observed Ahmed.

“And what if the people counting the voting papers are dishonest, have you thought about that? Imagine if they choose a name not chosen by the people!” said Malika worried.

“You know, my dear Malika, everything is possible in this world! We need to be realistic. When you have lived for fifty years under the yoke of such a horrible dictator as Ali, one thing is certain, the person who wins these elections, honestly or otherwise, will be much better than him. A dog would have more humanity than him. Democracy is well and truly underway in our country and this is what matters to me!” explained Khalid.

“But as Ahmed has said, our mission is fulfilled. I’ll now proceed to lock the ballot box. If the person who has the padlock would give it to me...”

Mourad, Ahmed and Malika stared at each, eyes wide open.

“But Khalid, we don’t have it,” said Malika.

“How is it possible? Someone must have taken it!” shouted Khalid.

“No, I assure you, we haven’t taken it! I don’t even know what colour the padlock is!” interrupted Ahmed.

“Perhaps the central office has forgotten to send the padlock with the ballot box,” suggested Mourad.

“You’re kidding me, aren’t you? I personally checked the ballot box yesterday evening and I can assure you that there was a padlock!”

“Listen, let’s not lose our nerves! What we will do is to look for it in the classroom, it must have fallen somewhere! Don’t worry, we’ll find it,” said Ahmed confidently.

The four companions began to look for the padlock. Malika knelt down and crawled along the classroom floor. Ahmed searched for it on and under the desks. Mourad looked for it around the voting papers on the large table and Khalid tried to find it around the voting box and the blackboard. But nothing. The padlock was nowhere.

“Listen, if you want, I can go and buy a new padlock at the supermarket round the corner, no one will notice!” said Mourad breathlessly.

“We have spent the whole day here making sure the voting went well, we won’t ruin everything because of a padlock. We won’t leave here until we find it!” ordered Khalid.

“Perhaps Mourad is right, it would be much easier to buy a new one! My husband and my children are waiting for me for dinner,” whispered Malika.

“Me too, I have a wife and children waiting for me for dinner. But no, we won’t leave here before we’ve found it! Just now you were talking about your fear that someone would sabotage the voting today and, well, I’m sorry but democracy begins with a commitment and a serious involvement by all of us. The ballot box was sent to us with a padlock, it will be given back this evening locked with the same padlock! End of story. Continue searching,” shouted Khalid.

And they went on looking for the padlock everywhere, in all corners of the classroom. Suddenly, Ahmed got up from the floor.

“And the ballot box, have you looked in the box?” asked Ahmed.

“In the box?” shouted Mourad

“Think! We’ve searched everywhere! Perhaps the padlock is inside the box under all those voting papers!”

A silence filled the classroom. All four approached the voting box, scrutinising it. Khalid lent over the transparent box.

“Listen, what we’ll do is to empty the box! Clear the large table of all the voting papers and we’ll carefully put all the envelopes on it. Hurry up because the taxi will arrive soon for it!”

Mourad and Ahmed picked up the box and gently emptied its content on the large table. Suddenly, a loud noise was heard. The famous padlock had fallen on the floor.

Khalid knelt down, picked it up with the faintest trace of a smile and definitively locked the box.

# Les larmes des anges

**Marine Ronzi.** France

À toutes les Marie, les Aissatou et toutes les femmes de ce monde.  
Qu'elles luttent comme des lionnes aussi longtemps que notre monde  
sera rongé par les maux causés par cet te bêtise si humaine.

## Prologue

Les jambes de Karima flageolent, mais elle continue d'avancer en scrutant les numéros pairs. Le 44. Ses mains encore couvertes de henné referment délicatement la porte d'entrée. Karima a 24 ans. Elle a déjà beaucoup vécu.

C'est Marie qui la reçoit et qui la guidera, avec beaucoup de tact, à travers les méandres des administrations françaises. Obtenir un titre de séjour, rechercher un emploi, connaître ses droits, mais aussi ses devoirs, apprendre la citoyenneté française. Aissatou, elle, accompagnera Karima durant plus d'une année afin de s'assurer qu'elle va bien. Dans sa tête. Dans son corps. Savoir écrire. Connaître son quartier, participer à la communauté, rendre service. Echanger des savoirs.

Aujourd'hui, Karima va bien. Elle a eu de la chance, son mari est un homme honnête et doux. Cette année, elle lui donnera un enfant. Un enfant qui ne vivra jamais ce qu'elle a enduré.

## Chapitre 1. L'histoire d'Aissatou

La douleur

La douleur me transperce comme une lance imbibée du poison le plus foudroyant. Je ne crie plus, je ne pleure plus. Je n'ai plus de larmes. Je ne veux pas mourir, simplement parce que je suis responsable de cette querelle qui oppose ma famille aux autres. Autour de moi, plus rien ne va. J'en veux à cette mère qui n'a pas eu le Coeur de me laisser agoniser au village pour enfin trouver la paix dans un sommeil éternel. La fièvre l'emporte sur toutes mes tentatives de raisonner correctement.

Ça s'est passé si vite. En trois jours, on a organisé mon départ pour la France. Là-bas, m'a-t-on dit, il y a de bons hôpitaux, des médecins compétents. C'est ta seule chance de survivre. Recroquevillée sur mon siège, je regarde le soleil qui se lève à travers le hublot. Si je meurs, c'est un échec pour Mahamane, qui a tant investi. Si je vis, je suis maudite. Maudite, maudite, maudite.

Le choix

Désinfilulée. Enfin. Ce qui n'avait pas marché au village ressemblait ici à une simple formalité. La femme de Mahamane s'est bien occupée de moi. Ici à l'hôpital, tout le monde s'accorde à

dire que je suis enfin libérée. Libérée ? Ça me révolte. Que savent-ils, ces blancs si arrogants, sur l'enfer qui m'attend auprès de mon mari ?

Prisonnière, oui. Il est hors de question que je rentre au Mali. Je ne veux plus voir le visage de ces femmes. Au fond de leurs yeux ne brillait pas la sagesse. Au fond de leurs yeux, je l'ai vu, il y avait la tristesse, la soumission aussi. Mais il y avait surtout la Peur. Cette légère crainte que j'avais ressentie dans ma jeunesse avant que maman ne vienne me prendre pour m'emmener chez la matrone se transformerait en un monstre immonde et hurlant qui me dévorerait comme il avait dévoré ma cousine Fatim. Fatim. Fatim était morte. Morte.

Le vide

Je n'ai plus de patrie. Plus d'identité. Plus de certitudes. Tout ce que j'avais construit dans ma tête et dans mon coeur, mes rêves de gosses, tout a disparu. Et ne réapparaîtra plus jamais. Je ne veux plus voir Mahamane, j'en ai eu marre d'être son esclave.

Les mots

Je repense à cet homme que j'avais croisé en Suisse, dans une bibliothèque, peu après mon arrivée. Ce sombre géant à la tignasse et à la barbe si indomptables parlait seul, comme possédé par l'esprit des mots. Il passait son temps à écrire des vers, des formules. Des pages et des pages s'envolaient de son pupitre. Tous les soirs, il remettait livres, journaux et magazines à leur place, emplis d'étranges inscriptions. Tous les soirs, je guettais son départ pour me jeter sur ces ouvrages et tenter de percer son secret. Je l'avais appelé « le Géant aux mille secrets ».

La chute

Je me sentais si loin de lui. Je respirais à pleins poumons le souffle grisant de la liberté. Je lisais, je lisais, j'apprenais, j'observais, j'écarquillais mes grands yeux, je n'en croyais pas mes oreilles, le monde était si vaste, si complexe, si tragique ! Je me joignais au mouvement, j'avais tant d'espoir, je voulais me battre, me battre pour tous ceux qui comme moi avaient eu à subir les injustices de ce monde...

Mais la réalité du quotidien nous rattrape. La dérive aussi. L'Europe est un continent magnifique et cruel à la fois.

Ici, le lien familial, cette solidarité si précieuse à nos yeux africains, s'est estompée peu à peu pour laisser place à une société morcelée où l'on souffre dans son coin, en silence. Il n'y a plus que les mots, glissant silencieusement sur le papier de ces pages d'un livre inconnu, attrapé au hasard sur une étagère de la bibliothèque du nord de la France. J'étais devenue la jeune fille sombre aux mille secrets. J'étais seule.

## Chapitre 2. L'accident

– Zoé !

– Maman !

Une infime fraction de seconde avait suffi au Drame pour se produire. Une fraction violente et douloureuse à jamais. La petite main de Zoé avait quitté un instant celle de Marie, et au moment où l'enfant se penchait pour ramasser sa poupée, le chauffeur du camion n'avait pas eu

le temps de l'éviter. Mais une ombre mystérieuse avait eu le temps de plonger sur la fillette et s'était fait violemment percuter à sa place.

La scène s'était déroulée si rapidement que personne, hormis Marie, n'avait pas eu le temps de réaliser ce qui venait de se produire.

À présent gisaient a terre deux corps inertes, et tandis que les badauds s'approchaient, les yeux écarquillés de Marie se remplissait de larmes. Elle ne criait pas. Elle se mit à trembler. Elle perdit rapidement la maîtrise de son corps qui convulsa violemment. Une flaque de sang sombre et épais se répandait lentement autour des deux corps immobiles lorsque Marie perdit connaissance à son tour.

### Chapitre 3. L'histoire de Marie

#### La perte

J'ai envie d'être un oiseau. De m'envoler loin. D'avoir un cerveau de la taille d'une noisette. De tout laisser derrière moi d'un battement d'aile. J'ai l'impression que la vie m'échappe chaque jour un peu plus. Je ne vis plus dans le vrai monde ; je ne suis qu'un objet transitionnel de la même manière que ma vie n'est qu'une succession de transitions. J'ai voulu porter sur mes épaules plus de responsabilités qu'elles n'en pouvaient supporter. Ah, c'est cela, la femme libérée de l'Occident ! Je hais mon appartement miteux, je hais ce village de périphérie.

Chaque jour qui passe est un pas de plus vers l'abdication. Alors que je devrais me dépêcher de disparaître à nouveau pour reconstruire ailleurs, il y a cette idée qui germe dans ma tête : et si chaque mouvement vers l'avant n'était qu'une fuite de la réalité ? Et si je ne faisais que changer les choses temporairement ? Et si ma vie n'était qu'une succession d'histoires à répétition ? J'ai besoin d'aide. Je n'y arriverai pas, toute seule avec ma fille. J'ai 28 ans, je m'appelle Marie et j'ai envie d'être un oiseau.

#### L'espoir

Le soleil se reflète sur les luxueuses voitures qui ne cessent leur ballet matinal que pour s'attarder aux yeux des passants. Le ciel est d'un bleu si intense que nous nous attardons quelques secondes pour l'observer.

– Pas un nuage ! S'exclame Zoé.

– Pas un nuage, tu as raison.

Nous continuons notre route d'un pas léger. Aujourd'hui j'arriverai au travail à 10 heures du matin. Je n'en ai que faire, j'ai remis la carapace à sa place. Dans ma tête, il n'y a plus qu'un objectif : la réussite sociale. J'ai balayé les vapeurs de la veille et j'avance, sûre de moi. Une petite main serre la mienne. Nous allons nous en sortir.

Depuis que j'ai décidé de vivre seule avec ma fille, tout a changé dans ma vie. En fait, depuis quelques mois seulement, tout a véritablement changé. Non seulement je suis isolée géographiquement, mais je suis isolée socialement aussi. Sans parler de ma dette qui me ronge un coin du cerveau. Si je n'étais pas mère célibataire... Si ce n'était pas le cas, je travaillerais jour et nuit. Je ne dormirais pas. Je travaillerais jusqu'à rembourser tout cet argent. Puis je partirais. Loin.

## Le rêve

Je veux un grand appartement avec plein de lumière dans une grande avenue avec une grande terrasse et les feuilles des arbres qui jouent avec le soleil juste devant. Je l'ai vu à Buenos Aires, il y a 7 ans, et c'est mon image du bonheur. Je veux apprendre et découvrir. Je veux toujours des personnes différentes chez moi, et aussi une femme de ménage. Je veux changer d'air. Je veux une carrière. Je veux que Zoé s'épanouisse. Je veux voyager dans toute l'Amérique latine. Je veux apprendre la *Murga* et boire des *Quilmes*.

Tout cela, c'est à portée de mains, et inaccessible en même temps. Mes montagnes quotidiennes m'empêcheront à vie de me rapprocher de mon entourage. Il y a bien longtemps que nous nous sommes déconnectés les uns des autres. Je suis seule avec ma fille, je vis pour travailler, et tout le monde a l'air de penser que je m'en sors très bien, pour une mère célibataire. Mais autour de moi, il n'y a que du vide. Un immense vide.

## L'hypocrisie

Aujourd'hui, j'ai fait rire l'assistante sociale au téléphone.

– Mais madame, vous avez un travail ! Vous ne toucherez rien !

– Alors, dites-moi à qui je peux m'adresser ! Qui peut nous porter secours lorsqu'on est seul et désemparé ? Qu'est-ce que notre pays a prévu pour nous, ceux qui n'ont plus personne ?

– Pour vous ? Mais rien, madame, ai-je entendu d'un ton malicieux.

## L'amour

Le mois dernier j'ai rencontré un garçon. Il a 30 ans. 30 ans, c'est encore très jeune, chez nous. J'ai de la chance, il a l'air d'apprécier les enfants. Avec lui, je m'envole vers un monde imaginaire. Lorsque j'enfouis mon visage au creux de son épaule, j'ai envie de lui dire combien je suis vulnérable. Mais le malheureux est dans la même détresse que moi, qu'il comble a coups de sorties nocturnes interminables. Je ne sais pas s'il m'aime vraiment. Il fait comme moi, il trouve dans mes bras le réconfort dont il a besoin pour continuer à vivre.

Je ne sais plus ce qu'est l'amour. Tout le monde se sépare, de toute façon, même mes parents.

Pourtant dans ma mémoire, il y a cette autre image du bonheur qui subsiste et contribue à ma frustration. Ce ne sont que des éclairs, mais ils sont assez chargés pour me rappeler une certaine plénitude qui s'est noyée prématurément dans l'alcool et la drogue.

## Épilogue

Le destin fait bien les choses.

C'est dans l'ambulance qui ramenait la petite Zoé à la vie que Marie rencontra Aissatou pour la première fois.

Elle ouvrit les yeux lentement et croisa ce regard noir et intense qui la scrutait déjà depuis quelques minutes. Les yeux d'Aissatou semblaient dire : « Tout va bien, je suis là maintenant ». Puis ils se refermèrent. Aissatou dormit longtemps, très longtemps. Plus de deux mois. Mais lorsqu'ils s'ouvrirent à nouveau, c'est Marie qu'ils découvrirent en premier. Ensemble, Marie et Aissatou pleurèrent. En silence. C'étaient des larmes d'anges, n'en déplaise à Marie, que Zoé dessina plus tard.

Les yeux de Marie, qui autrefois cherchaient une réponse, son désormais apaisés et sereins. Aissatou. La jeune femme qui a sauvé sa fille mettra trois années pour retrouver ses capacités motrices. Ces années passées ensemble auront permis aux deux amies de construire leur projet. Ensemble, avec leur coeur, leurs connaissances et toutes leurs forces, elles ont ouvert ce centre pour les jeunes femmes, qui, comme elles, se sont perdues un jour et ont décidé de se battre.

# The Angels' Tears

**Marine Ronzi. France**

To all the Maries, Aissatous and all  
the women in this world.  
Let them fight like lions as long as  
our world is ravaged by the evils  
caused by such human nonsense.

## Prologue

Karima's legs are trembling but she continues on scrutinizing the even numbers. Number 44. Her hands, which are still covered with henna, gently close the front door. Karima is 24. She has already experienced a lot.

It's Marie who welcomes her and will sensitively guide her through the labyrinths of French bureaucracy. To get a residence card, to find a job, to understand her rights, but also her duties, to learn about French citizenship. Aissatou will accompany Karima for more than one year to make sure she's fine. In her mind. In her body. To learn how to write. To become familiar with her neighbourhood, to participate in the community, to contribute. To exchange knowledge.

Today, Karima is fine. She's been lucky; her husband is an honest gentle man. This year, she will give him a child. A child who will never experience what she has endured.

## Chapter 1. Aissatou's Story

Pain

Pain pierces like a spear soaked with the most devastating poison. I've stopped shouting, I've stopped crying. I've run out of tears. I don't want to die, just because I'm responsible for

this dispute between my family and the others. Around me, nothing is going right. I am angry at this mother who didn't have the courage to let me die in the village so that I could finally find peace in eternal sleep. The fever is stronger than my attempts to reason well.

It happened so fast. In three days, they organised my departure to France. I had been told there are good hospitals there, skilful doctors. It's your only chance to survive. Curled up in my seat, I'm looking at the sun rising up through the window. If I die, it'll be a failure for Mahamane, who has invested so much. If I die, I'll be damned. Damned, damned, damned.

The Choice

Reinfibulation. Finally. What hadn't worked in the village seemed a mere formality here. Mahamane's wife took good care of me. Here at the hospital, everyone agrees that I'm finally free. Free? This revolts me. What do they know, such arrogant whites, of the hell that is waiting for me with my husband?

A prisoner, yes. It's out of the question for me to return to Mali. I don't want to see the faces of those women anymore. Wisdom didn't shine within their eyes. Deep within their eyes, I've seen it, there was sadness, and submission too. But above all there was fear. This slight fear that I had felt in my youth before my mum came to take me to the midwife would turn into a hideous yelling which would devour me as it had devoured my cousin Fatim. Fatim. Fatim was dead. Dead.

Emptiness

I no longer have a motherland. Or an identity. Or certainties. Everything I had built in my

mind and in my heart, my dreams as a kid, has all vanished. And it won't come back. I don't want to see Mahamane anymore, I'm fed up with being her slave.

### The Words

I'm thinking again about this man that I had met in Switzerland, in a library, soon after my arrival. That sombre giant with such a wild shock of hair and beard was speaking alone, as if he were haunted by the spirit of words. He spent his time writing verses, formulas. Pages after pages were flying out of his desk. Every evening, he put the books, newspapers and magazines in their place, filled with strange inscriptions.

Every evening, I waited for him to leave and delve into these works and try to uncover his secret. I had called him "the Giant with a thousand secrets".

### The Fall

I felt so far away from him. I breathed the intoxicating air of freedom deeply. I read, I read, I learnt, I observed, I stared opened-eyed, I didn't believe my ears, the world was so vast, so complex, so tragic! I joined the movement, I had so much hope, I wanted to fight, to fight for all those who like me had had to suffer the injustices of this world.

But the reality of daily life takes hold of us. The current too. Europe is both a great and cruel continent.

Here, the family bonds, this solidarity which is so precious to our African eyes, has gradually faded to give way to a divided society in which people suffer in their corner, in silence.

There is nothing but words, silently slipping on the paper of these pages of an unknown book, caught at random on a shelf of this library in Northern France.

I had become the sombre young girl with one thousand secrets. I was alone.

## Chapter 2. The Accident

"Zoé!"

"Mum!"

A tiny fraction of a second had been enough for the tragedy to take place. A forever violent painful fraction. Zoé's little hand had removed Marie's for a moment, and when the child leant over to pick up her doll, the lorry driver didn't have time to swerve round her. But a mysterious shadow had had time to fall on the little girl and had violently been crushed in her place.

The event had occurred so quickly that nobody, except Marie, had had the time to realise what had just happened.

Two motionless bodies were lying on the floor, and as the onlookers approached, Marie's wide open eyes were filling with tears. She didn't cry. She began to shiver. She quickly lost control of her body, which violently convulsed. A pool of thick dark blood was slowly spreading around the two motionless bodies as Marie fainted.

## Chapter 3. Marie's Story

### Iniquity

I feel like being a bird. Flying far away. Having a brain the size of a nut. Leaving everything behind with the flap of a wing. I have the feeling that life is escaping me a little more every day. I'm not living in the real world anymore; I'm just a transitional object, just as my life is no more than a succession of transitions. I have wanted to carry more responsibilities on my shoulders than I could endure. So this is the free woman of the West! I hate my seedy flat, I hate this village on the outskirts.

Every day that goes by is a step towards abandonment. Although I should rush to disappear again to rebuild somewhere else, there is this idea that has grown in my head:

what if each movement forward was just an escape from reality? If the only thing I did was to change things temporarily? And if my life was just a succession of repeated stories? I need help. I won't manage alone with my child. I'm 28, my name is Marie and I feel like being a bird.

### Hope

The sun reflects off the luxury cars which only stop their morning ballet to linger in the eyes of passers-by. The sky is such an intense blue that we linger a few seconds to watch it.

"Not a single cloud!" shouts Zoé.

"Not a single cloud, you're right."

We continue our brisk walk. Today I'll get to work at ten in the morning. It doesn't matter, I've put on my carapace again. In my head, there is just one objective: social success. I have swept off the fumes of the day before and I'm moving forward, sure of myself. A little hand is holding mine. We'll get through this.

Since I've decided to live alone with my child, everything in my life has changed. In fact, after just a few months, everything has changed a lot. Not only am I geographically isolated but also socially. Not to mention the debt eating away at a corner of my brain. If I weren't a single mother. If it wasn't so, I'd work day and night. I wouldn't sleep. I would work until I had paid back all that money. Then, I would go. Far away.

### The Dream

I want a spacious flat with plenty of light on a large avenue with a wide balcony and trees with leaves playing with the sun just in front. I saw it in Buenos Aires, 7 years ago, and it is my image of joy. I want to learn and discover. I want different people at home, and also a cleaning lady. I want a change of scenery. I want a career. I want Zoé to blossom. I want to travel all

over Latin America. I want to learn to dance the *murga* and drink *Quilmes*.

All this is both within my reach and inaccessible. My daily mountains will stop me forever from getting closer to what is around me. We've been apart from each other for such a long time. I am alone with my daughter, I live for work and everybody looks as if they think that I'm doing quite well, for a single mother. But around me, there's only emptiness. An immense emptiness.

### Hypocrisy

Today, I've made the social worker laugh on the telephone.

"But, madam, you have a job! You won't get anything!"

"Then, tell me who I can talk to! Who can give us assistance when we are alone and helpless? What has our country planned for us, for those who have no one anymore?"

"For you? Well, nothing, madam," she said with a malicious tone.

### Love

Last month I met a boy. He's 30. 30 years old, he is still very young in our country. I'm lucky, he seems to like children. With him, I fly towards an imaginary world. When I rest my face on his shoulder, I feel like telling him how vulnerable I am. But the poor thing is in the same distress as me, which he fills with endless nights out. I don't know if he really loves me. He does like me; he finds in my arms the comfort he needs to continue living.

I don't know what love is anymore. Everybody separates, anyway, even my parents.

However, in my memory, there is this other image of joy that persists and contributes to my frustration. They are just flashes, they are vivid enough to remind me of a certain plenitude which had drowned prematurely in alcohol and drugs.

## Epilogue

Destiny does things right.

It was in the ambulance that brought little Zoé to life that Marie met Aissatou for the first time.

She opened her eyes slowly and met that intense black face which had already been staring at her for some minutes. Aissatou's eyes seemed to say: "Everything's fine, I'm here now." Then they closed. Aissatou slept for a long time, for a very long time. More than two months. But when they reopened, it was Marie they saw first. Together,

Marie and Aissatou cried. In silence. They were tears of angels, whatever Marie likes believes, that Zoé later drew.

Marie's eyes, which in the past had searched for answers, are now calm and serene. Aissatou. The young woman who saved her daughter will take three years to recover her motor skills. These years spent together will have enabled the two friends to build their project. Together, with their hearts, knowledge and all their strength, they have opened this centre for young women who, like them, were lost one day and have decided to fight.

## Aşure

**Bihter Esin Yücel.** Türkiye

Ben o illeri hiç bilmezdim. O bozkırları, o sarı dağları, o tozlu, kurak ve sapa yolları ilk görüşümdü. Tüm hayatım kültür beşiği, Avrupa ve Asya'nın gözbebeği İstanbul'da geçmişti. Çocukluğumun yazlarıysa, Marmara Denizi'nin incisi Büyükada'da ve Rum evleriyle bezeli, Midilli'nin karşı komşusu Ayvalık'ta geçen tatlı bir düş gibi. Dinlediğim masallarda ise hep, uykuya dalarken pencereden ışıklarını gördüğüm Midilli ve annemin dünyaya gelişine ve benim doğumumla taçlanan, sakız kokulu bir aşk hikâyesine ev sahipliği yapan Sakız Adası anlatılırdı. Hiç görmesem de, dinlediğim anılardan ve evdeki birkaç fotoğraftan tanır gibi hissederim kendimi. İşte gördüklerim bunlardı benim. Ötesini görmemiştim, öğretmenliğe başlayana dek.

\* \* \*

Benim ülkem rengârenk bir mozaik gibi... Duruşu mağrur, sırtını acılara dönmüş, inadına gülümsemek isteyen bir yüz size gülümser. Bir kadın yüzüdür bu, Anadolu'nun bereketli toprağının, Avrupa'nın en doğusuyla birleştiği noktadır. Doğurgandır benim ülkem, gençtir. Bir öğretmen daha başka ne ister?!

Kim yanbaşımda papatyalar, sümbüller, yaseminler ve hatta gelincikler bir arada açmaktayken, yalnızca güllerden oluşan bir bahçede dolaşmak ister ki? Benim ülkemi sevmek, tüm çiçekleri birden koklamak ve her birini ayrı ayrı sevebilmektir.

Yazık ki her yürek açık değil böyle büyük sevgilere. Her yürekte yer yok başka kokulara. Nasıl ki, her toprakta her çiçek yetişemez, kimi yürekler, hiçbir güzelliğe geçit vermeyen, hiçbir mutluluğu yeşertmeyen, çorak topraklar gibidir.

Yüreği küçük olanlardır çiçeği çiçeğe düşman etmeye çalışan. Kendi yüreklerindeki nefreti başka yüreklerdeki korku ile alevlendirmek gayretindedir onlar. Başarırlar da... İçten içe belli belirsiz ön yargılarla şekillendirmeye çalışırlar güçlerinin yettiklerini. Nedensiz sürüp giden ve belki de hiç var olmamış bir çekişmenin tohumları atmaya çalışırlar zihinlere... Her tohum kendi çiçeğine dönüşür. Nefret, korku ve düşmanlık ekip mutluluk biçilemez, malum. Kimi toprakları böyle zehirlenir işte... Toprak ki, insan gibi, çiçek ki çocuk gibi... Ve büyüdükçe çocuklaşan insan; hem çocuk hem kadın, hem çocuk hem de adam...

Nefretle beslenmiş aynı bahçede filizlenen iki çiçek korkar birbirinden. Suretlerinden değil, yaratılan bir hayalden korkarlar. Gördüklerinden değil, akıllarında canlandırdıklarından; koyulan sıfatlardan, yapılan gruplandırılardan, gerçekleştiklerine “binlerce yeminler edilen” dehşet dolu olaylardan ve “ya tekrarlanırsa!” düşüncesiyle, olabileceklerden korkarlar. Korktukları “öteki”ler değil, “kendileri”dir aslında, “düşündükleri”dir. Bilmezler.

İşte ben de o mozaığın sıradan bir parçasıyım. Ne hafife alınacak kadar değersiz, ne müstesna sayılacak kadar bulunmaz. Herkesten biriyim. Ve hayır! Ben asla “öteki”lerden korkmadım. Çünkü hangi kıydan bakarsan bak, hep “öteki” oldum ben.

\* \* \*

Öğretmen olarak tayininin Mardin'e çıkması bir bomba gibi düşmüştü aileye. Annem ve babamın, bildikleri iklimlerin ve renklerden ötesinden korkuyla bahseden sesleri titreyerek heceledi "Mar-din..." Babam telefonda bir ölüm haberi gibi verdi haberi dedem Dimitri'ye: "Sevda'nın tayini Mardin'in sınır köylerinden birine çıkmış."

\* \* \*

Adım Sevda. Sevda Türkçede aşırı sevgi, aşk, tutku ve istek için kullanılır; hatta kimi zaman aşırı sevgiden doğan bir tür hastalık anlamında.

Adım Sevda, çünkü ben büyük bir aşkın çocuğuyum: Yunan babamla, Türk anamın aşkının. Tarihin, kültürün, geleneklerin dost; siyasetin düşman kıldığı iki toplumun. Korkuları ve menfaatleri, yüreklerini karartabilenlerin; aynı şakalara gülen, aynı acılara ağlayan, iki karşı kıyımın çocuklarının aşkının... Dügünleri, dansları bir; Ayvalıklı Alexi ve Sakız Adalı Defne'nin aşkının... Türk vatandaşı Ortodoks Alexi ile Yunan vatandaşı Müslüman Defne'nin kızları, iki pasaportlu Sevda'yım.

Bilir misiniz Defne'nin Yunancası Dafni'dir. Sizce Türkçe ve Yunanca mıdır bunlar? Yoksa aynı toprakta yaşamış toplumların aynı sözcüğü farklı seslendirmesi midir? Ben bilemedim hangisidir.

Adım Sevda; çünkü bu aşk iki gönüle de düşmüştür. Adım Sevda çünkü "Sevdas" dır Sevda'nın Yunancası. Benzerdir, aynıdır, tektir! Sevda tüm illerde, tüm şarkılarda birdir aslında. Fazladan bir "s" harfi midir, birini diğerinden farklı kılan!

Adım Sevda; Müslüman bir anadan, Ortadoks bir babadan olmayım. Kendi dinim yok. Ne rengârenk yumurtalı Paskalya Bayramları'ndan, ne de pırıl pırıl, şeffaf renkleriyle akide şekerlerinin süslediği Şeker Bayramı'ndan vazgeçemedim. İkisi de benim. İkisi de BENim. Seçemedim, seçemedim.

\* \* \*

Aşure nedir bilir misiniz? Aşure Nuh'un tatlısıdır. Efsaneye göre, büyük tufan sona erdiğinde Nuh'un gemisi, Nemrut Dağı'na oturduğu gün, gemidekiler kutlamak için bir yemek pişirmek istemişler. Ambarda bir kaç çeşit tahıldan azar azar kalan parçalar, biraz meyve ve bir avuç fındık fıstıktan başka bir şey yokmuş. Bakmışlar olacak gibi değil, tek başlarına bir işe yaramayacaklar, hepsi karıştırılıp bir tatlı pişirilmiş. Birbirinden bunca farklı tatlar, bu tatlıda bir araya gelmiş. Tozşekerle kaynatılan, nohut, kuru fasulye, pirinç, buğday, kuru kayısı, üzüm, incir, portakal, limon, nar... Üzerine eklenen fındık, ceviz badem, tarçın...

Bugün Nuh'un gemisinin özel tarifi, ülkenin dört köşesinde, her bölgeye has farklılıklarla pişirilir. Ancak değişmeyen bir âdet vardır ki, bu âdete göre; tarifi ne şekilde olursa olsun; kız evlada sahip aileler, her yıl Muharrem Ayı'nda aşure yapmalı ve komşularına dağıtmalıdır. Rivayete o ki, annesi aşure yapıp dağıtan kız çocuğu o yılı hep bolluk ve bereket içinde geçirirmiş. İşte bu inançla ülkenin dört bir yanında kökeni ne olursa olsun anneler, kızları için aşure kaynatıp birbirlerine dağıtırlar. Kulağa ne kadar karman çorman, ne kadar lezzetsiz gelse de, karmaşadan doğan bir uyum; bir teklilik vardır bu tatlıda! Ben işte öğretmenliğimin ilk durağı Mardin'i aşureye benzetirim hep.

\* \* \*

Suriye ile sınır olan Mardin'in, Nusaybin ilçesinin Balaban köyü öğretmenliğine atandığımda 24 yaşındaydım. Mardin'e ve kültürel zenginliğine gelir gelmez vurulmuş, görevimi yapmak için sabırsızlanıyordum. Şehir merkezinin başında adeta bir taç gibi yükselen Mardin Kalesi ve aşağı doğru basamak basamak inen; toprak renginin bin bir tonunu barındıran taş evler bana zamanın ötesinde bir şehirde olduğumu fısıldamıştı. Etli yemekleri, bugüne dek hiç tatmadığım çeşitli börekleri, kavurucu sığağa karşı insanın içini ferahlatan lezzetli şerbetleri ve türlü çeşit yemişiyle Mardin adeta bir masal kenti olmuştu benim için. Şehirdeki ilk gecemde, kaldığım taş evin avlusuna çıkıp şehrin ışıklarını ve ovanın uçsuz bucaksız karanlığını izlemiş; kendimi İstanbul'da, Büyükkada'da veyahut Ayvalık'ta hissetmişim. Ovalar deniz; taş evlerin ışıklarıysa karşı kıyıların ışıkları olmuştu benim için. Ertesi gün zorlu bir yolculukla varmışım görev yerim Balaban'a.

Balaban; etrafını çevreleyen geniş ovaların ortasında, küçük, fakir ve kete<sup>1</sup> kokan bir köy. Çökmüş asfalt yolun yakınında, damı akan, bakımsız ve küçük okulsuz benim çalıştığım okul olacaktı. Düşlediklerimden çok farklı, alıştığımdansa çok uzak bir hizmet sürecine girdiğimi hissetsem de yapabilecek hiçbir şeyim yoktu. Burayı sevecek ve benimseyecektim.

Hepsi daha şekillenmemiş birer fidan, toplam sekiz öğrenciden oluşan ilkökul sınıfımla karşılaştığımda yaşadığım şaşkınlık bugün gibi hatırımdadır. Beni daha iyi inceleyebilmek için iyice açılmış on altı tane göz üzerimdeydi. Beşi erkek üçü kız öğrenciden oluşan sınıfımla ilk dersimin uzunca bir süresi, çocuklarla birbirimizi inceleyerek geçmişti.

–Adım Sevda Morisis<sup>2</sup>. İstanbul'dan buraya sizin öğretmeniniz olmak için geldim. Beni kabul edip sevecek misiniz? Apaydınlık sekiz tane yüz, evet dercesine kafalarını salladı, ben de vakit kaybetmeden yoklamaya başladım.

–Benjamin<sup>3</sup> Yıldız!

–Buradayım öğretmenim!

Kapkara saçları, kara gözleri ve kırmızı yanaklarıyla afacan bir çocuktu ayağa kalkan.

–İlona<sup>4</sup> Yıldız!

–Buradayım öğretmenim!

Banjamin'e neredeyse ikiz kardeşi kadar benzeyen bir kız çocuğuydu bu kez ayağa kalkan.

– Kardeş misiniz yavrum siz?

–Amca çocuklarıyız öğretmenim.

–Ahmet<sup>5</sup> Ay!

–Buradayım öğretmenim!

Uzun boyu ve daha ince hatlarıyla Ahmet, sınıf arkadaşlarından daha büyük gösteriyordu.

–Yadid<sup>6</sup> Eken!

–Buradayım öğretmenim.

Ayağa kalkan Yadid, belli ki; daha ilk günden okul önlüğünü kirlettiği için utanıyordu. Kirpikleri kaşlarına degecek kadar uzundu Yadid'in ve elleri yara bere içindeydi.

1. Külde pişmiş bir tür çörek, Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgesi'nde oldukça yaygın pişirilen ve içine peynir, et ya da sebze konmaksızın, yalnızca hamur ve yağ ile hazırlanan bu yemek, özellikle dar gelirli kesim tarafından sıkça tüketilmektedir.

2. Morisis soy adı, Türkiye'deki Rum ailelerde rastlanan bir soyadıdır.

3. Benyamen, Süryanice bir addır.

4. İlona, Süryanice bir addır.

5. Ahmet, Türkçe bir addır.

6. Yadid, Süryanice bir addır.

–Ishak<sup>7</sup> Kara!

–Buradayım öğretmenim!

Daha sonra köyün tek minibüsünün sahibinin babası olduğunu öğreneceğim Ishak diğer çocuklara göre biraz daha gürbüzdü.

–Meryem<sup>8</sup> Doğan!

–Buradayım öğretmenim!

Pespeembe yanakları, kıvrıkcık saçları ve durmak bilmeyen gülümsemesiyle Meryem, hiç de babamın çalışma odasındaki Kutsal Meryem resmindeki adaşına benzemiyordu. Magdalalı Meryem ne kadar hüznölüyse, adaşı Balabanlı Meryem bir o kadar güleçti.

–Hasan<sup>9</sup> Ay!

–Buradayım öğretmenim!

–Siz de Ahmet ile amca çocukları mısınız yavrum?

–Yok, Ahmet benim ağabeyim, üç sene okula gidemedi. Okula öğretmen gelmemişi.

Ve son olarak gözlerim o mini mini güzele takıldı. Gece rengi dalgalı saçları, kocaman açılmış bal rengi gözleriyle, büyüünce ne kadar güzel bir kadın olacağıın işaretini veriyordu minicik yüzü.

–Senin adın listede yok yavrum, adın nedir?

–Yezida<sup>10</sup> dedi önüne bakarak.

Böylece, üçü Müslüman, dördü Süryani ve biri Yezidi, beş erkek ve üç kızdan oluşan sınıfla tanışmış olduk. Ne tuhaftı ki, hepsi Türkiye Cumhuriyeti vatandaşı olan ve toplu toplu iki yüz kişilik bir köyde hayatlarını huzur içinde sürdüren bu çocukların öğretmeni, de yine onlar gibi bir karışımıdı. Mardin’in aşureliğinden git gide nasibimizi alıyorduk.

\* \* \*

–Sınıf başkanı ayağa kalksın! dedim. Kendisine bazı görevler vereceğim.

Çocuklar şaşkınlıkla birbirlerine bakıyorlardı.

–“Sınıf başkanınız yok mu yoksa?”

–Yok öğretmenim. dedi Ishak. Ama ben olmak isterim.

–Teşekkür ederim Ishak’cığım ancak sınıf başkanının arkadaşları tarafından seçilmesi gerekir. Madem ki bu kadar küçük bir sınıftız, tüm arkadaşlarınızın aday olmasını ve sınıf başkanı seçilirlerse, arkadaşlarına neler vaat edeceklerini anlatmalarını isteyeceğim. Sonra da oylamaya geçeceğiz.

–Vaat etmek ne demek? dedi Hasan Ay kafası karışmış bir halde.

–Bir şeyi yapacağına söz vermek demektir Hasan’cığım.

–Peki, oylamak nasıl bir şey? Oynamak gibi mi? Kalkıp göbek mi atacağız şimdi? diye sordu Balabanlı Meryem kıkır kıkır gülererek.

–Hayır, Meryem’cığım, oylamak; ben bu arkadaşımın sınıf başkanı olmasını istiyorum demektir.

7. Ishak, Süryanice bir addir.

8. Mother Mary’nin Türkçe karşılığı Meryem Ana’dır. Gerek Müslüman, gerekse Hıristiyan Türkler arasında sıkça kullanılan bir addir.

9. Hasan, Türkçe bir addir.

10. Yezida, Yezidiler arasında en sık kullanılan kadın isinlerinden biridir.

–O zaman herkes kendisine oy verir. diye mırıldandı Yadid sessizce.

–Burada önemli olan, hangi arkadaşınızın verdiği söz en çok hoşunuza gidiyorsa o arkadaşınıza oy vermenizdir. Önemli olan herkesin mutlu olmasıdır. Şimdi biraz çıkın oynayın, teneffüsten sonra herkesin arkadaşlarına neler vaat edeceklerini dinleyeceğim. Sonra da başkanı seçeceğiz.

Okulun bahçesi bir ovanın devamıydı. Çocuklardan beşi çember olmuş, biri ise elinde bir mendil çemberin etrafında dönüyordu. Şarkı söylenerek oynanan bu oyunda elinde mendil tutan çocuk, bir ara istediği bir arkadaşının sırtına mendiliyle dokunuyordu ve bundan sonra kendisine dokunulan çocuk ayağa kalkıyor ve kendisine dokunan çocuğu yakalamaya çalışıyordu. Her kim boş yere önce otursa diğeri mendili eline alıyor ve aynı oyun yineleniyordu.

Oyuna katılmayan yalnızca iki çocuk vardı. Yezida ve Ahmet. Yezida, katılmak isteyen gözlerle çocukları izliyor, Ahmet ise belli etmemeye çalışsa da Yezida'nın yüzüne hayran hayran bakıyordu. Okula öğretmen atanmadığı için kaybettiği üç yıl kendisini Ahmet'in erken girdiği ergenlikle gösteriyordu. Bıyıkları ufak ufak terlemeye başlamıştı. Yezida'ya bakarken yüzü belli belirsiz kızarıyordu.

Yezida oynayan çocuklara özlemlerle, Ahmet ise Yezida'ya hayranlıkla bakarken, sınıfın diğer öğrencileri neşe içinde koşuyorlardı. Bir ara Yadid'in, Ilona sırtına mendille dokunduğunda “Ahhhh!!!” diye bağırdığını duydum. Belli ki canı yanmıştı. Ilona ise Yadid'in nasıl canını yaktığını anlamaya çalışıyor, arkadaşlarına “Vurmadım ki ben!” diyerek kendini savunmaya çalışıyordu.

Derse geçtiğimizde artık oylama başlayacaktı. Çocuklarıma kuralları anlattım.

–Önce arkadaşlarınızı dikkatle ve sessizce dinleyeceksiniz. Herkes söyleyeceklerini bitirdikten sonra ben sizlere küçük kâğıt parçaları dağıtacağım. Hangi arkadaşınızı seçtiyseniz onun isminin yanına bir çarpı işareti atacaksınız. Sonra ben çarpıları sayıp, başkanın kim olduğunu ilan edeceğim. Haydi bakalım Benyamin, senden başlayalım.

Benyamin kafasını kaşıya kaşıya tahtanın önüne geldi. Sobanın yanında durdu. Bir süre düşündükten sonra “Beni başkan seçerseniz, hepinize gizli iksirim tarifini vereceğim!” dedi.

–Gizli iksirin mi? Ne iksiriymiş bu Benyamin?

Gevrek gevrek gülerek yanıtladı: “Ben sınıfın hem en hızlı koşanı, hem de en uzağa zıplayanım çünkü gizli iksirimden içiyorum.” dedi.

–Tarifini söyleme ama biraz anlat bakalım bu iksiri. dedim Benyamin'e.

–Çekirge suyunun içine, özel karışımı dököp, tam üç gün çalkalıyorum. Ondan sonra da içiyorum. Ama içindekileri başkan olursam söyleyeceğim. dedi.

Çocuklardan kimileri “ıyyy!” diyerek ne kadar öğrendiklerini ifade ederken, bir kısmı ise katıla katıla gülüyordu.

Benyamin'den sonra sıra Hasan'a gelmişti.

–Ben başkan olursam, anama söylerim her gün size kete yapar. Teneffüste herkese bir tane kete veririm.

–Bu kadar mı yavrucuğum?

–Evet öğretmenim.

Gülümseyerek yerine oturdu Hasan. Belli ki teklifine çok güveniyordu. Hasan yerine oturur oturmaz, Balabanlı Meryem kıkır kıkır gülerek ayağa kalktı.

–Ben sınıf başkanı olursam, haftanın iki gününü okul, beş gününü tatil yaparım! dedi kahkahalar içinde. Sınıf arkadaşları Meryem'i bir yandan alkışlıyor, bir yandan da seçim zamanı

büyüklerinden gördüklerini taklit ederek “Yaşa! Var Ol!” diye bağıryorlardı. Belli ki galibiyeti garantilemişti.

–Ama Meryem’ciğim okul günlerine sınıf başkanı karar veremez ki. deyince, haylaz “Öyleyse tenefüsleri uzatırım!” demez mi? Gönüllere taht kurmuştu Meryem. Peşi sıra en yakın arkadaşı Süryani güzeli Ilona kalktı.

–Eğer ben sınıf başkanı seçilsem, Sevda öğretmen ne derse onu yapacağım.

–Peki neden her dediğimi yapacaksın Ilona’cığim?

–Çünkü siz meleksiniz de ondan!

–Onu da nereden çıkardın küçüğüm?

–Siz meleksiniz, çünkü saçlarınız sarı ve gözleriniz de mavi. İnsanların saçları ve gözleri bu renkte olmaz, meleklerin olur. Bizim kilisemizdeki melek resimleri hep sizin gibi.

Yavrucuk tüm dünyayı Balaban köyünden ibaret sanıyordu, güneşin altında alev alev yanan bu çorak topraklarda, ne beyaz ten, ne sarı saç ne de renkli göz yaygındı. Belli ki, köyde bir tek bende vardı bu özellikler ve Ilona’nın hayatında ilk kez gördüğü bu sıradan renkler, onu melek olduğuma ikna etmişti.

Durumun böyle olmadığını daha sonraki bir zamanda açıklamak planıyla, saçlarını okşadım ve onu yerine oturttum. Sözü Yadid almıştı, ağzının içinde mırıldanıyor, adeta sesinin çıkmasından korkuyordu.

–Ben sınıf başkanı olursam eğer, babaların çocuklarını dövmesini yasaklayacağım! dedi tüm saflığıyla.

Yüzüme tokat gibi indi bu sözler. Çocuklarımin yüzlerine baktığımda bazılarımin yüzlerinin önlerine eğildiğini gördüm, belli ki onlar da dayak yiyorlardı babalarından. En kısa zamanda bir veli toplantısı yapmamın şart olduğunu düşünürken sözü Ishak aldı.

–Ben sınıf başkanı olursam, bütün sınıfı babamın minibüsüyle Mardin’e götüreceğim. Hem de hiç para almadan haaa!

Ishak da arkadaşlarından kuvvetli bir alkış almıştı. Başkanlık konuşmaları büyüklerinkileri hiç aratmıyordu ki, sıra Yezida’ya geldi.

–Sınıf başkanı olursam eğer, Avrupa’ya çalışmaya giden tüm Yezidileri buraya geri çağıracağım. dedi hüzünle. Kendisini sınıf başkanı değil, cumhurbaşkanı zannediyordu aklınca.

–Neden yavrum?

–Çünkü herkes göç etti. Kalanların da hepsi yaşlı. Balaban’daki tek Yezidi çocuk benim. Annem söylerken duydum. Midyat’ta yaşayan bir kaç tane daha Yezidi çocuk varmış ama... içini çekerek devam etti, Bizim paramız yok, Midyat’a gidemiyoruz. Oysa onlar da burada olsa oyunlar oynardık beraber... Hem ben biraz büyüyünce beni de göndereceklermiş Almanya’ya. Orada uzak bir akrabamızın oğlu var, büyüyünce onunla evlendireceklermiş beni. Onunla evlenmezsem beni Yezidilikten atarlarmış. Ben hiç gitmek istemiyorum.

–Yezidiler şeytana tapıyorlar. diye fıslıladı Hasan bana, dünyanın en büyük sırrını veriyormuşçasına.

–Hayır Hasan, öyle bir şey yok! Senin nasıl bir dinin varsa Yezida’nın da öyle bir dini var, sen bu uydurma şeylere inanıyor musun yoksa? diye sordum Hasan’a.

–Valla öğretmenim, ben de inanmıyorum ama herkes söyleyince ne bileyim...

–Bir daha duymayacağım Hasan! Hepiniz kardeşsiniz burada.

Küçüklerim bu konuları anlayamazdı. Yezida da anlamıyordu aslında. Ne Yezidiliğin ne olduğunu, ne de evlenmenin ne kadar ciddi bir şey olduğunu bilmiyordu. Onun tek derdi, annesinden hiç ayrılmamaktı.

Son konuşma, sınıfın en büyüğü olan Ahmet'e kalmıştı. Ahmet, düşünceli bakışlarla ayağa kalktı, yüzüme dimdik baktı, sonra arkadaşlarına döndü.

–Sınıf başkanı olursam, dedi, Çember çizilmesini yasaklayacağım. Çember şeklindeki oyunları başka şekilde oynatacağım.

–Neden? diye sordum istemsizce.

–Çünkü, dedi, Yezida bizimle oynayamıyor. Çemberin ortasına düşerim, sonra da çıkmam diye korkuyor. Yezidiler için çember önemlidir. Eğer etrafına bir çember çizersen içinden çıkamazlar, ta ki, çemberde biri cennete, diğeri cehenneme açılan iki kapı işaretleyinceye kadar. Yezida bundan korkuyor ve bizimle oynayamıyor. Zaten o oynamıyor diye ben de oynamıyorum. dedi ve ekledi: O yüzden başkan olursam, bütün oyunları Yezida'nın da bizimle oynayabileceği şekilde değiştireceğim!

–Teşekkürler Ahmet'ciğim! dedim. O yaşta bir çocuktan bu duyarlılığı hiç beklememiş ve şaşkınlığa düşmüştüm.

Oylama sonlanıp da oy pusulalarını açmaya başladığımda ise, küçüklerimin o kocaman yürekleriyle karşılaşmıştım. Açtığım her kâğıdın üzerinde Ahmet'in isminin yanında bir çarpı vardı. Çocuklarım, hayatlarındaki en değerli şeyden; oyunlarından, arkadaşlarının da aralarına katılabilmesi uğruna kolayca vazgeçebilmişlerdi.

Ahmet görev sürem boyunca hep sınıf başkanı seçildi. Sonrasında ise İzmir'e çıkan tayinim nedeniyle, çocuklarımdan yalnızca yazdıkları mektuplar sayesinde haber alabildim. Aradan geçen 10 yıla karşın, mektuplarını hiç aksatmayan Balabanlı Meryem; Ahmet ve Yezida'nın her zorluğa göğüs gererek, evlenip Sevda isminde bir kız çocuğu dünyaya getirdiklerini müjdeledi bana son mektubunda. Okurken Meryem'in çocuk kahkahalarını hala duyabiliyordum.

Mektubu okuduktan sonra dolaptaki aşureden iki kaşık yedim. Biri Alexi ve Defne'nin sakız; diğeri ise Ahmet ile Yezida'nın kete kokan sevdalarının hatırına...

## Ashura<sup>1</sup>

**Bihter Esin Yücel.** Turkey

I never knew the places. It was my first experience of the steppes; mountains of yellow, dusty, arid and remote roads. I had been living in Istanbul, which is the cradle of culture, the pupil of Europe and Asia. In the summers of my childhood, the Pearl of the Sea of Marmara and the Greek houses dominated Prencences Island; Lesvos was against the neighbour, Ayvalik. Those days seemed like a sweet dream. I heard tales at night; I saw the lights of the window reflecting the story of a love of Lesbos and Chios gum scented. To never see you, at home I look at few photographs of the memories and allow myself to feel. Here is what I saw. I never saw beyond, until my teaching career began.

\* \* \*

My country is like a colourful mosaic. Haughty posture, back pain returned, smiling out of spite wishing you a hundred smiles. A woman is the face of this, the fertile soil of Anatolia, Europe, the connecting point for the East. My country is fertile, young. Like a teacher, what else?!

Who's doorstep, daisies, hyacinths, jasmine, and even when a combination of poppies, just wants to move in a garden of roses? I love my country, more than all the flowers to smell and to love each one separately.

Unfortunately, such a great love for every man's heart is not open. Every heart, there is no other smell. Just as each flower can match any in the soil, some hearts, there is no beauty that we may not pass, there is no increase in happiness, is as barren land.

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1. Noah's puding, a dessert made of wheat grains, nuts, dried fruit, and so on.

The heart of the enemy is small ones that try to flower blossom. Another effort to rekindle people's hearts with hatred in their hearts they fear your own. They manage too. Inside a vague attempt to shape the forces of preconceptions people can afford. For no reason, and perhaps never have existed in a protracted attempt to take the seeds of the conflict with people's minds... Each flower seeds into their own. Hate, fear and hostility, the team is priceless happiness, you know. Some land is poisoned at work so... Soil that, as human beings, such as flower child that... And grows as the Child, the people, both children and women, both the child and the man...

Two flowers from each other fears burgeoning hatred fed the same garden. Copies, but an illusion created by fear. What they see, not envisaged in mind, laid such properties, the classifications, concerning the events in "The vows of thousands of" terror-filled events, and "repeated" the idea, afraid of the possibilities. Fear of "others", not "own" in fact, "think" is. They do not know.

Here I am ordinary part of that mosaic. What are you unworthy to be taken lightly; I do not have to be considered exceptional. I am anyone else. And no! I've never scared the others. Because what you look from the shore, always the "other" I've been.

\* \* \*

As a teacher I am going to Mardin<sup>2</sup> family like a bomb had fallen. My mother and my father, they know fear, beyond the mention of climate and the colours quivering tones

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2. A city in the east of Turkey.

spelled “Mar-din...” My father was on the phone as a death news story to my grandfather Dimitri’s: “Sevda’s determination of the border villages of Mardin came to one.”

\* \* \*

My Name is Sevda (Love). Turkish name of the excessive love of Sevda, love, passion, and is used for the request, and even sometimes a kind of disease resulting from excessive love means.

My name is Sevda (Love), because I am child of a big love of the Greek father of the Turkish mother’s love. History, culture, traditions, friends, politics, made enemies of both communities. Fears and interests, the hearts of people who found the courage, the same jokes laughing, crying the same suffering, both against the child’s love of the coast... Weddings, dances are same of Alexi from Ayvalik<sup>3</sup> and Defne from Chios who love each other... Sevda is daughter of Alexi who is Muslim citizens of the Turkey and Defne is Greek Orthodox, Sevda has two passports.

Do you know Greek meaning of Defne is Dafni. Do you think they are Turkish and Greek? Or is it the same soil, speaks in different societies in the same word? What I did not know.

My name is Sevda, because it fell in love two hearts. My name is Sevda because meaning Sevda is Sevdas in Greek. Similar, they are the same, is one! Sevda is same at everywhere; all the songs actually are one. An extra letter “s” Is it that makes one different from the other!

My name is Sevda, daughter of a Muslim mother and Orthodox father. There is not my own religion. I cannot give up the colourful Easter eggs or the sparkling, transparent colours and adorned with candy sugars of an

Eid Al Fitr.<sup>4</sup> Both of them are me. I could not, did not choose.

\* \* \*

What is *ashura*? It is Noah’s pudding, a dessert with wheat grains, nuts, dried fruit, etc. According to legend, at the end of the great flood, Noah’s Ark, Mount Nemrut sitting days, wanted to cook a meal to celebrate the people on board. Little by little, the remaining parts of a few kinds of grain in the barn, some fruit and a handful of nuts and peanuts wearing nothing else. As will be looked at, but will not be alone, all mixed and cooked in a sweet. So many different flavours from each other come together in this dessert. Boiled with sugar, chick peas, dry beans, rice, wheat, dried apricots, raisins, figs, oranges, lemon, pomegranate... Added on nuts, walnuts, almonds, cinnamon...

Today Noah’s Ark is a special dessert recipe, unique to each region and differences in the corners of the country to be cooked. But there is one that does not change for years. This is menstruating; recipe in whatever way; girl with filial families, each year starting in Muharram Days they must cook *ashura* and its neighbours should be distributed. It is said that the mother of that girl who always delivers *ashura* whether to spend in prosperity and abundance. Here is the origin of this belief around the country, regardless of mothers and daughters together to distribute *ashura* boil. Even if it may sound a mixed up, no matter how tasteless, even if this is a confusion arising from the integration, there is a uniqueness of this dessert! Mardin that is my first stop of teaching is like *ashura*.

\* \* \*

3. A city in the west of Turkey, near the Aegean Sea.

4. The Celebration of Breaking the Fast marks the end of Ramadan.

I was 24 years old when I started teaching at the village of Balaban Nusaybin with Syria borders the province of Mardin. When I came to Mardin, cultural wealth of the city was surprised and was excited to do my duty. Mardin Castle at the beginning of the city centre, almost like a crown rising and descending down step by step, the colour of earth containing thousands of stone houses in a tone that I whispered to me a timeless city. Meat dishes, so far not tasted various pastries, the scorching heat of man against the inside of the grout and all kinds of delicious fruit refreshment with the city of Mardin was like a fairy tale for me. My first night in town, stayed in the courtyard of the house of stone out of the darkness of the vast plain where the city lights, and was followed by myself in Istanbul, the Princes Island had a feeling Or Ayvalik. Plains sea; stone against the coastal lights of the houses had lights on for me. The next day I got to ride a tough task to Balaban Village.

Balaban Village is in the middle of the plains surrounding the large, small, poor village, and a scented *kete* pastry. I work in a small school that collapsed near the asphalt road, flowing roof, maintenance-free. It was very different from my dreams, very far from the service process entered the feeling it had nothing to do also. I loved this village and going to accept living there.

All is in an unformed a sapling, a total of eight elementary school students faced the class I was very surprised and I still remember it. In order to examine me more thoroughly opened sixteen eyes watching me. The class consisting of five male and three female students for a long time the first lesson, the children had been looking and understanding each other...

My name is Sevda Morisis.<sup>5</sup> I came here from Istanbul to make your teacher. Would you accept and love me?

5. Morisis is surname of Greek origin.

Eight faces, yes, dogs shook their heads, and I immediately started probing.

“Benjamin<sup>6</sup> Yildiz!”

“Here.”

Jet black hair and dark eyes, red cheeks and a mischievous boy stood up...

“Ilona<sup>7</sup> Yildiz!”

“Here!”

A girl stood up almost like her twin brother of Benjamin.

“Are you Sister?”

“Cousin.”

“Ahmet Ay!”

“Here!”

Tall and thin lines, Ahmet, showed greater than their classmates.

“Yadid<sup>8</sup> Eken!”

“Here.”

Yadid stood up, obviously, than the first day of school was ashamed to pollute her school clothes. Worth up to his eyebrows and lashes were long Yahid’s hands covered in bruises.

“Ishak Kara!”

“Here!”

Later I learn that Ishak’s father is only one minibus owner at the village and Ishak is a little more powerful than other children.

“Meryem<sup>9</sup> Dogan!”

“Here!”

Pink cheeks, curly hair and a relentless smile of Meryem, Blessed Virgin Mary in the study of my father’s paintings, the island did not appear at all. Blessed Virgin Mary is sad in painting but Meryem, just as his namesake Balabanli smiling.

“Hasan Ay!”

“Here!”

“Are you cousin of Ahmet?”

6. Benyamen is an Assyrian name.

7. Ilona is an Assyrian name.

8. Yadid is an Assyrians name.

9. Turkish meaning of Blessed Virgin Mary.

“No, Ahmet is my brother, he could not go to school for three years. School teachers did not come.”

And finally, my eyes caught the mini-mini-beauty. Wavy hair the colour of the night, honey-coloured eyes wide open, you’ll grow up and how beautiful a woman was giving the tiny face of the sign.

“Your name is not in the list, my child, what is the name?”

“Yezida”<sup>10</sup> she said, looking at the front.

Thus, three of them are Muslim, four of them are Assyrian, and one of them is Yezidi, consisting of five boys and three girls became acquainted with my students. What was strange that they all collectively, and the ball two hundred people, who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey in a village teacher in the lives of these children continued in peace, as they are also a mixed. I began to recognize, Mardin was like *ashura*.

\* \* \*

The president of the class stands up! I said. I will give him some tasks.

Children stared at each other in surprise.

“Do not have a president of Class?”

“No,” Ishak said. “But I want to be.”

“Thank you, Ishak. But we must be selected by the friends of the head of the class.”

Since we are such a small class, and class president elected all your friends to be a candidate, ask your friends to tell what they will promise. Then we will vote.

“Promise to what?” Hassan said in a confused state Month.

“One thing is promised to give Hasan.”

“So, how to vote on something? It is like to play? I stand up and take a belly dance now?” Meryem asked as chuckled.

“No, Meryem, vote, and I want this to be the class president is my friend.”

“Then everyone will vote for her,” Ya-did muttered quietly.

“What is important here, which she attends a friend’s friend; vote like you can give the most promise? The important thing is that everyone’s happy. Now, let’s quit playing, after inhalation what promise that everyone will listen to your friends. Then we will choose the president.

The school garden is a continuation of the plain. Five of the children were a circle, holding a handkerchief in one revolved around the circle. Song played in this game by telling the child that keeps wipes his hand, touched a handkerchief on the back of a friend wants a break and then touched his children are standing up and trying to catch him touching a child. Whoever takes it in vain before the handkerchief and the other is seated in the same game was repeated?

There were only two children to not to attend the game, they are Yezida and Ahmet. Yezida, followed by children wishing to participate in the eyes, Ahmed tries not to show the face of the Yezida’s staring in admiration. Ahmet lost three school years because of not having teacher at the school and he entered into early adolescence showed. Whiskers had begun to emerge. When he was looking to Yezida, his face was red.

Yezida was looking at kids playing; Ahmet is looking at Yezida in admiration, the other students in the class played happily. When Yezida touched Ilona’s back with the handkerchief, “Ahhhh!” I heard him shout. Obviously, there was a pain. Ilona was trying to explain her friends she had pain by Yezida. “I didn ‘hit it!” Yezida was trying to defend himself.

Now we move to the voting would begin the course. I told my kids the rules.

10. Yezida is name that is very popular at Yezidies.

“First, carefully and quietly listen to your friends. After graduating, I have to say everyone you to deploy small pieces of paper. If you mark a cross next to his name by which you will take a friend. Then I count crosses, I will declare who is the president. Come on, Benjamin, you begin.”

Benjamin came to in front of the board with scratching his head. He stood by the stove. After thinking for a while, “If I were the president of class, I will give you the entire secret recipe for the potion/elixir!” he said.

“Secret potion/elixir? What potion/elixir is this, Benjamin?”

He crispy crunchy answered with a laugh:

“I am the fastest running of the class as well, because the secret potion I drink as well as jumping to the far.” He said.

“Tell me the recipe to say, but let’s look at some of this elixir,” Benjamin said.

“At special mixture into grasshopper water and shape it a full three days. Then you should drink. If you select me I’ll tell the recipe of it.”

Some of the children said “iyyyy!” When he expressed how much they report feeling bad, is a part of one’s laughing.

After Benjamin next was Hasan.

“If I were the president of class, say to my mother every day, she makes *kete* pastry to give you during on lesson breaks.”

“That’s all, my son?”

“Yes, teacher.”

Hasan sat back with a smile. Obviously, many relied on the proposal. Hasan sat down, Meryem, chuckled, and stood up.

“If I were the president of class, the school two days a week, do five-day vacation! She said in laughter. Meryem’s classmates applauded the one hand, it also saw the big ones to choose the time to mimic the LIVE! Bravo!” “They cried. Obviously, she has grantee for victory.

“Meryem, the school teacher, but cannot decide which days of the class president.”

The lazy indicates, “Then an improved duration of breaks!” minds? Won over the hearts of Meryem. Assyrian best friend got up one after the beautiful Ilona.

“If I were the president of class, I will do what Sevda teacher says.”

“So why are you going to do what she says, Ilona?”

“Because you are angel!”

“What is the meaning of it, my little?”

“You are angel, because have yellow hair and the blue eyes. People do not have hair and eyes the colour like that, angels have. Angel pictures on our church likes you.”

Students thought that the whole world does not consist of the village of Balaban, under the blazing sun in this barren land, what white skin, blond hair, nor what was common eye colour. Obviously, the village had one of these features and Ilona I saw for the first time in his life those ordinary colours, to convince him that I had an angel.

Is not the case at a later time to explain the plan, I stroked her hair and placed her instead of him. Yadid had promised, he mutters in his mouth, literally feared sound.

If I were the president of class, prohibited beat children by parents said all the purity.

These words fell like slap in my face. When I look at the faces I saw some of my children’s faces tilted in front of them, apparently, their father beat them. A parent meeting is required as soon as possible when considering Ishak started to speak.

“If I were the president of class, I will take all of you to Mardin with my father’s minibus free of charge.”

Ishak had received a strong applause from his friends. Presidential speeches of children are equally good to old people’s speeches. After Ishak next was Yezida.

If I were the president of class, all the Yezidis to Europe to work here I'll call back. She said sadly. It is not the class president, president According to her imagined.

"Why my child?"

"Because everyone emigrated. All of the elderly live in the village as survivors. I am only child Yezidi in Balaban. I heard my mother say. Yezidi children living in Midyat had a few more, but... continued with a sigh, we cannot afford, not go to Midyat. But they are also used to play games together here though... And I grew up a little they will send me to Germany. There is a distant relatives have a son, when I grow up, I have to marry with him. If I am not to marry him, they are going leave out me from the Yezidi community. I do not want to go there."

"Yezidis worship the devil. Hassan whispered to me, as is the largest secret of the world."

"No, Hasan, there is no such thing! If you have a religion, a religion so is how you have Yezida, what do you believe that you do not have this fitting?" Hassan asked.

"Well, my teacher, I do not believe but everyone says like that."

"Hassan, I will not hear one more time! You are all fraternal."

My little students do not understand these issues. Yezida in fact did not understand. She does not know what the meaning of Yezidi is and how serious thing is marriage. Just, she does not want to leave from her mother.

Last one was Ahmet. He was the biggest student of the class. Ahmet, staring thoughtfully stood up, looked straight at me, and then turned to his friends.

"If I were the president of class, I prohibit scratching the circle. I will allow play-

ing Ring-shaped games with other way, not circle."

"Why?" I asked involuntarily.

"Because, he said, Yezida do not play with us. She scared to fall in the middle of circle and get stuck. The circle is important for the Yezidis. If you draw a circle around her, she cannot step out of line until someone drop two doors – one of them is hell, other one is heaven – and she select the one of them. Yezida afraid of it and do not play with us. I am not playing because of she could not play. He said and added: So, if I were the president of class, I will change all the way to play games as much as Yezida play with us!"

"Thank you, Ahmet!" I said. I never waited the sensitivity of a child that age and I surprised.

When I started to open the envelopes in the election vote, I met the students' huge hearts. When I open the vote, Ahmet had a cross next to the name on every paper. My children, the most precious thing in their lives, for the sake of his friends participate in the games between them easily did not give up.

Ahmed was elected class president all along the task continuum. Thereafter, the determination of Izmir, news of my children bought with only a few letters. Despite the intervening 10 years, never to interrupt the letters of Meryem; Ahmet and Yezida chest stretching every challenge, She married a girl named Sevda brought to the world heralded the last letter to me. Meryem, still I could hear the laughter of children while reading.

After reading the letter I had two table-spoons of *ashura* on the pantry. Anniversary of both Alexi and Defne's Sevda which is smelling of the gum; and Ahmet and Yezida's Sevda which is smelling like of *kete* pantry...

