

Ant Creature

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Student Anthology
of Creative Writing
In English at KAA

edited by David Livingstone et al.

Palacký University

Olomouc 2015

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First Edition

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Matthew Sweney, 2015

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Contents

Introduction	8
Dorota Bachratá	12
Mother of Nature	12
S & M	13
Markéta Byrtusová	16
No Harm	16
Catherine Dubravova	24
We Creatures	24
House or Home	25
Café Terrace.....	26
Markéta Effenbergerová	29
Short Story.....	29
Ruth.....	32
Markéta Fořtová	38
The Road to Damnation	38
Pavel Gončarov	49
Sparkling Rainbow Chrome Bug	49
Martin Hovadík	50
From the Old House.....	50

Next Generation?	51
Train	51
Wine Cellar	52
Barbora Hrabalová	53
Bath talks	53
Ivana Karásková	55
Gift	55
Jiří Kaspar	57
How I Created a Boyband.....	57
Jakub Kašpar	61
Message in a Bottle	61
Milan Kovalčík	69
The Island	69
Monika Liová	77
Seeing Red	77
Ondřej Papuga	88
Masterpiece #1.....	88
Masterpiece #3.....	89
Adam Petrásek	91
Be Fit	91
Eugene	98
Nikola Petrusová	102

What I Remember.....	102
A Portrait of Myself.....	103
Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.....	104
Markéta Rojíčková	107
Experiment 616.....	107
Lada Smejkalová	117
Strangers in Hoblina	117
The Open Road	118
Hana Sobotková	127
Late Night Train	127
Jan Vavroš	134
Fear Beyond Order	134
Shrnutí.....	147

Introduction

The present anthology is one of the results of a two year grant project IGA (FF_2013_062) focused on developing Creative Writing in English at the Department of English and American Studies, FFUP (Tvůrčí psaní na KAA: výzkum a implementace podle vzoru předních zahraničních univerzit).

Creative writing is not a new discipline at the department. In the past, several faculty members (Jiří Flajšar, Matthew Sweney, David Livingstone) have introduced courses focused on writing poetry, short stories and non-fiction prose. Robert Hýsek has pioneered the teaching of slam poetry for a number of years teaching one course per semester in the subject. Each class culminates in one or more public performances. Students and staff regularly write and perform theatre plays and films for various department-related events and celebrations.

The grant project, however, was designed in order to make creative writing a more permanent and systematic part of the curriculum at the English department.

The grant project has included three intensive workshops, output from which has been included in the anthology.

Bilingual site-specific street art poetry workshop led by Pavel Gončarov from May 23 to May 24, 2013. This was a workshop for 10-12 people on composition of poems/nursery rhymes in both English and Czech; in the end the students will have produced their poems in bilingual versions. The poems will be meant to work together with a potential site-specific street art piece.

Intensive Poetry Writing Workshop led by Renée Ruderman from Metropolitan State University of Denver, USA from June 3 to June 5, 2013. This event culminated in a public reading of the works created over the course of the event.

Gimme Fiction!: Intensive Weekend Workshop led by Dr. Brad Vice from Josef Škvorecký Literary Academy in Prague and West Bohemian University in Plzeň from February 1 to February 3, 2013.

Two semester-long creative writing courses have been organized.

The first took place in the spring semester of 2014 and involved inviting a series of guest lecturers. Each of them introduced a specific genre of creative writing. The aim of the course was to examine the wealth of possibilities of creative writing in a wide range of areas.

March 7, David Livingstone (KAA), "Stand-Up Comedy"

March 14, António Pedro Nobre (Portugal), "Film making, videos, etc."

March 28, Richard Peters (U.K.), "Genres and themes in creative writing"

April 11, Nick C. Gerrard (U.K.), "Punk Fiction, self-publishing, small press, etc."

April 25, Gabrielle Smith-Dluha (U.S.A.), "Writing Picture Books for Children"

May 9, Hana Sobotková (KAA), "Introduction to Drama Writing"

The second took place in the autumn semester of 2014 and was designed as an opportunity for students to focus their creative energy in a small group format. Four small groups were formed of from three to five students. Each was led by a member/members of the grant project and focused on a specific genre of creative writing.

David Livingstone, short stories (general); Matthew Sweney, fantasy writing; Hana Sobotková, drama; Dorota Bachratá, Pavel Gončarov, poetry

Apart from the above-mentioned workshops and courses, Creature also organized a so-called short-short competition in November 2013. We received 13 submissions and the authors of the 3 best pieces were awarded a cash prize for their efforts.

Last but not least, this time delivered in Czech on October 29, 2014, we organized a science fiction writing workshop led by Jan Gončarov which involved an introduction to the genre and explanation of his own experience as a published author in the field and a song writing workshop on Nov. 13, 2014 with the singer-songwriter folk duo Genna and Jesse (<http://www.gennaandjesse.com/>) entitled **The Creative Process Behind Songwriting**. Their visit was part of a European tour which also involved two concerts in Olomouc co-organized by Creature.

We have also purchased a number of books and texts related to creative writing and have established a specialized section for the genre in the department library.

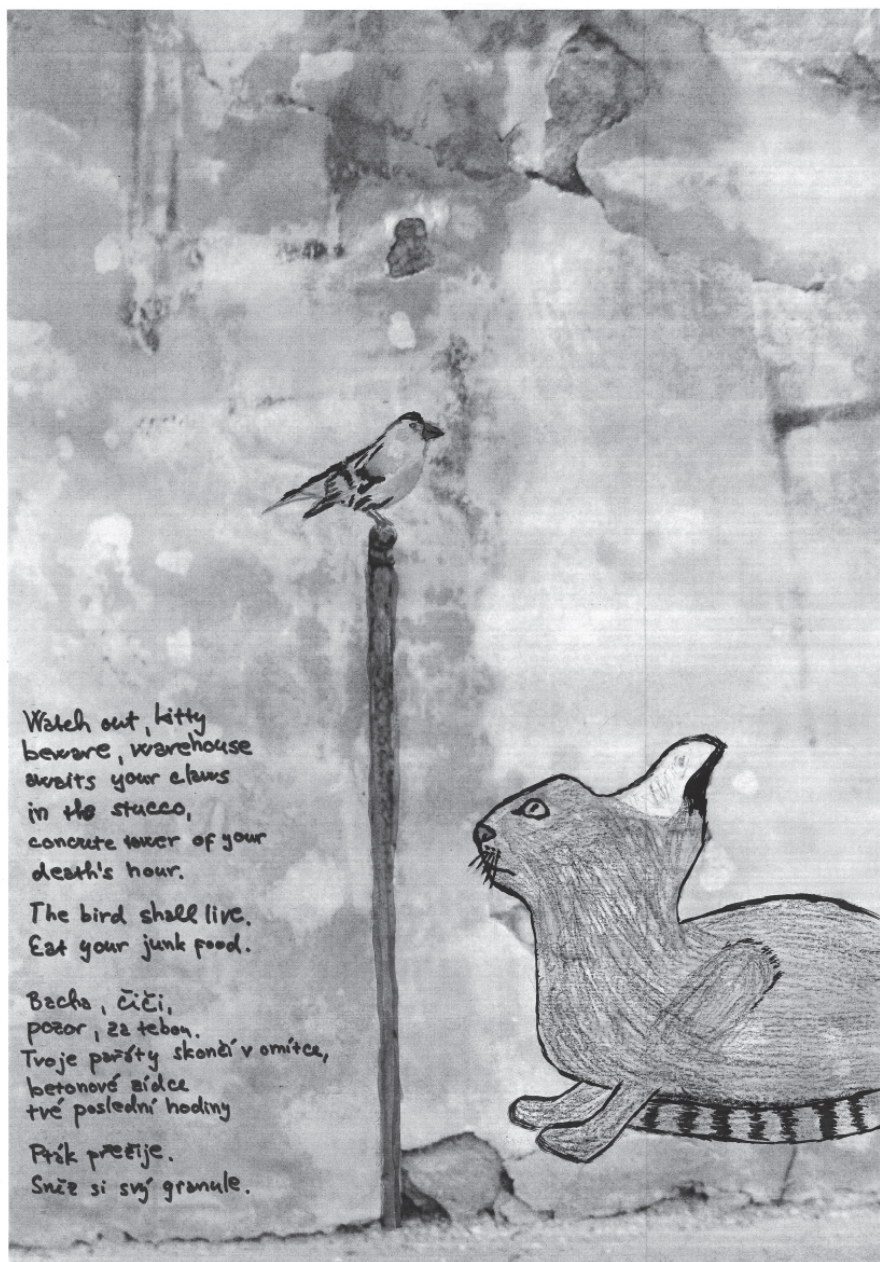
The grant has also been aimed at developing the discipline of creative writing as an academic discipline. Consequently, two of our current students in the Mgr. Degree programme will be writing their theses on topics related to creative writing under the supervision of David Livingstone. Two students of the Bc. Degree programme will also be writing their theses under his supervision. The latter two students will be focused on tracing the history of English language writers who have visited and read in Olomouc since the Velvet Revolution in 1989. Their research work will also be included in a grant project ending exhibition to be held at the KAA department at the end of February.

Much of the student work has been published already on-line on the grant web-page <http://creature.upol.cz/index.html>

The current anthology is focused on a selection of the works from the two year project. We would like to thank the Philosophical Faculty, Palacký University for their support.

On behalf of the grant team (Matthew Sweney, Robert Hýsek, Pavel Gončarov, Hana Sobotková, Vojtěch Duda, Dorota Bachratá, Dana Straková).

David Livingstone



Watch out, kitty
beware, warehouse
awaits your claws
in the stucco,
concrete tower of your
death's hour.

The bird shall live.
Eat your junk food.

Becha, čiči,
pozor, za tebou.
Troje pařátky skončí v omítce,
betonové sídce
tvé poslední hodiny

Prák přeřije.
Sněží si své granule.

Dorota Bachratá

„...balances on tips of icebergs, carefully examining what's underneath. She believes that when her pen is leaking, it's aroused. Her air-headedness helps her float around the world.“

Mother of Nature

I once told her
to never worry about
worthlessness again
why don't you
rhyme my friend
above all necessity
there is conclusion
corroding in a clash
how far is
warfare
oh my, what
a stare
ripples on mirrors
make more beauty
than artificial
reliance

S & M

There was once a little girl with a watermelon head. The rest of her was normal, five fingers on each hand and foot, two eyes, two ears, a nose and a mouth. She just had to wear large hats, couldn't swim and was a bit slow when it came to counting. She couldn't add or multiply numbers larger than the number of seeds she had in her head. She was lucky to come from a wealthy family so she never was in danger of getting eaten by her parents. Her name was Madeleine, or as everyone called her, Melly.

She had few friends, though. People made her cry and that made her dry. She just had a pet rabbit Oscar, trained to eat spinach, that she liked to take to the park with her friend Sally. Sally always helped Melly with her math troubles, went hat shopping with her and played cards on the beach while other kids swam in the sea.

One day, Sally, Melly and Oscar decided to change location for their afternoon walk and talk and turned left, to the royal garden. It was huge, savage, almost forest-like. They walked for a long time till they found a good spot for their picnic. When they finally did and ate their lunch, they grew drowsy and dozed off, right in the middle of the savage garden. Oscar, however, wasn't tired at all. He sniffed around, looking for fellow furry creatures, alert, for quite a long time. At last he found an interesting trail of scent to follow and disappeared in the bush.

Sally woke up after a while, yawning. Something was odd. She was alone. No, not alone.

"Melly? ...i-is tha-at you? Wh-where is your...?"

Melly opened her eyes and there was a huge, exquisitely laid table with glittering silverware and china. In front of her head stood a steaming silver plate with a roasted rabbit. Oscar. That was the last thing she saw and thought before the knife cut through.



Brad Vice giving his talk at the Department of English and American Studies



Markéta Byrtusová

"This is the fifth year I keep studying English Literature, still alive, so feel free to try too. What I love about literature is the fact that it makes incredible connections between divergent issues. What I hate about it is that from time to time you have to read some "praised classic" that turns out to be crap, no offence Mr. Dickens.

I started writing two years ago, when I attempted to help my friend out with a Gothic story assignment. However, since literature geek life is inevitably going to bend your back, I balance it out by climbing, dancing and snowboarding. So here is a little end note advice: Read and move to your heart's and spine's content, my dear intellectuals."

No Harm

It was one of those rather small, but quiet 'cities' that cling to their old glory days. It was one of those places crammed with all those magnificent churches, columns and museums. These served as public lighting especially after dark, due to the vehement activism of cultural heritage people. Such a density of picturesque history provided a great opportunity to those, who lived there and knew some English, to boast now and then to eager American tourists that this or that building is older than the United States. It didn't have to be true necessarily, because the tourists bought it anyway. But you know, apart from these little mischiefs, people there didn't do any harm in general. Everyone stuck to their own business, a pleasant place to live in, right?

You could meet old people sitting in the cafés in the morning, sipping mint tea, recalling their youth and scorning the current generation. Honestly, how would the whole bunch of coffee places survive, if they didn't get any money out of a customer for half a day? Around noon of course, they didn't need the oldies anymore, they could do nicely with white collars seeking a quick lunch. You know, the place looks somewhat more up to date with them. In the evening, all those students,

looking for any place to sit together, filled all the pubs and clubs and so the city drew its people in and breathed them out of its insides with a steady pulse, day by day.

This evening wasn't any different, there were a few people shuffling their feet, waiting for a tram to stop at the rather small, but distinguished, square in the centre. They waited for the vehicle to gulp them all, and mix these strangers within its insides into the late-evening-workday-soup. There was a girl in her twenties pacing towards the stop to join the shufflers. She was wearing a mustard colour bonnet at the side of her head and newspapers under her arm on which the handbag was hung. She had to clutch all these attributes which were supposed to make her look intellectual not lose them, clumsy. As she arrived, she scanned the place and fixed her sight on the lighted board-map which was indicating all the nearby monuments. At the left centre of it, there was a bunch of curly red hair that made its owner look even more fragile than she would want to. Katherine approached the board and saluted teasingly:

'Good evening Mademoiselle Anna.'

The red head turned, swinging its locks, 'Oh, hey Kath! I didn't see you.'

'I can see that,' said Katherine, laughing to herself, and adjusted her bonnet. Sorry for the lag Ann, I couldn't call you anyway, hard up ...for a change. When's the tram coming? I can't see the figures properly.'

'Tram's gonna be here in five mins I guess, always a bit delayed like you,' chuckled Anna, and went on: 'So how was your study, eh? You smuggled the paper out again, any news, something serious happened?'

'Oh come on, Ann. I Didn't have time to finish it. I wish they didn't close the library so early, one has to help oneself a bit then. And besides, the paper makes me look pretty intelligent, if you didn't notice,' said Katherine in a mocking posh manner, gesturing snobbishly. 'But listen, here's what's happened: 'Young Man Drowned Last Tuesday in the River After Policemen 'not allowed' to Rescue Him. What do you say to that Annie?'

'Student, I bet,' said Anna, frowning.

'Yeah, Faculty of Sciences, undergraduate. And guess what Anna, it happened just five mins from my place! Would you believe that? Listen, 21-year-old Thomas

Walden died after falling over the bridge into the river while returning with his sister and her friend from a party...' Anna cut in, shocked.

'What do they mean, not allowed to rescue him?'

'Wait, getting there,' said Katherine and read quickly on: 'Police were called to the scene by his sister, 23-year-old Julia Walden.' 'After some shouting at my brother to swim nearer to the edge, the policemen said they could not enter the water for health and safety reasons,' reported Julia. 'Soon after, I lost sight of him,' at this point, Katherine looked away from the paper, pretending to be bored by the matter and went on summing up the event: 'And so on and so forth, wept Miss Julia as if she was staring into a Shakespeare tragedy, ... there's some alcohol in the blood in the story too, so that's it.'

Anna looked at her friend disapprovingly: 'How can you be so cynical about it, Kath. I thought it's their job, for heaven's sake!'

'I don't know what I would have done in their place. The guy was stone-drunk I bet, better one drowned than three. Well, at least I'm glad that I didn't know him,' responded Katherine, musing.

'The tram's coming Kath, let's get on. There's plenty of space in the evening, that's cool, at least we can sit down.'

The artificial, and strangely happy and composed instruction voice informed passengers to the ringing of the tram signal:

-----The door is closing-----

The girls found seats quickly as the tram started to move noisily. Katherine brought back the subject, eager to parade all her opinions:

'Anyway, I bet he was showing off, how else could he fall over that rail? He must have been having the time of his life. Well, shit happens,' she finished for herself.

'Hmm, I guess you're right Kath,' sighed Anna. 'If only people stopped underestimating alc.'

'Oh, come on Anna, who was dancing on the bar the last time?' asked Katherine sharply, raising one eyebrow in a comic way.

‘Ok, ok, but turn the volume down, will you? Not everyone in the car needs to know about it,’ said Anna in a lower voice, looking around.

‘No worries Mademoiselle, only a few workhorses leaving job notoriously late, some muttering weirdo, another student kicked out of the library perhaps, plus some homeless folk after the next stop, to complete the dream team. That won’t ruin your reputation Annie, believe me.’

The people in the tram looked much like Katherine described them, the majority worn out, hardly anybody talking, except one man around forty, who was sitting near the door, facing the front. He was a bit bulky, wearing a jacket over a grey sweater, apparently drunk.

‘I, I am a good man, a good man. ...You know, I, I help people even. That’s why I am a good man, a good man. But sometimes it’s, it’s hard. ...Sometimes it’s not easy. Why anyone doesn’t help me. Don’t you know, Madam?’ He leaned over his seat towards a middle-aged woman who was about to leave. He almost fell off his place and at the last moment readjusted himself back, as if he was doing the reverse of the motion, then he continued with his monologue. ‘Madam is leaving, good night Madam ...’

-----The door is closing-----

The girls stared at the man uneasily, wondering if they should feel afraid.

‘There we go Ann, now he’s gonna tell us all his sad life story that he’s got on the program for today’s boozing. I’m glad we’ll be off soon.’

‘Pretty much, if only he stopped burbling,’ said Anna, looking a bit scared.

‘I know ...’ The murmuring of the man grew louder, he pronounced every sentence with a certain effort:

‘I woulda be a good man if somebody helped me. ...Jolly good firemen I was. Trained. I went for that boy. I did, really, ‘twas me, I rescued him. I coulda be professional, they said. They said, I could. But I quit. Why I quit? ...If I was good, I woulda saved that boy. Why nobody helped me? He was dead. But I am a good man, you see? A good man ...’

The tram approached another stop and its noise cut in to the monologue:

-----The door is closing-----

'I hope he is not getting off with us,' said Anna, seeing that the man didn't even attempt to leave.

'He doesn't have a clue, where is he getting off, I guess. Let's leave and better not look at him, or else he might follow.' As they approached the exit, the man leaned over to them:

'Good night, young ladies ... I, I wished them good night, I did ... Good man, I am. If only someone helped me, a little bit. I woulda be good man. If someone wished me good night, maybe ... just a little bit.'

The girls hurried out when the tram's door opened, Katherine pushed Anna from behind slightly, eager to be away from the man's voice.

'You see? I said better not look at him, let's be quick,' she murmured quickly, a bit nervous.

-----The door is closing-----

The man shifted himself back to his position, facing the front again. He began to be a bit sleepy but still continued rather audibly, as if he did it on purpose:

'I am ... good to people, you see? I am a good man. If only I didn't, didn't drink so much. I have a family, even, had family. I was a fireman ... coulda make it professional. If somebody helped me, a bit, maybe...' He went on in a pathetic voice until all the passengers gradually got off and the tram reached its terminus:

-----Terminus, please exit the vehicle-----

Everybody left, but the man remained seated, unaware of the surroundings. The driver shut the door of his cabin and looked at the man who, unable to move much, stared at him blankly, his arms hanging grotesquely by his sides.

‘Hey man, leave now. Don’t you hear me? Everybody’s gone.’

No reaction.

‘Get out, I say! Are you deaf? It’s the last stop, you moron!’

The man got up as if he had just remembered where he was. He grabbed the pole by the door and supported himself. As he was stepping off the tram, he resumed his talk again, but this time having no audience, barely audible:

‘Good night, Sir ...I told even the driver good night. I am good man ... used to be a jolly good fireman. ...till, till I quit. Now, I am free, free to go wherever I want...’

He staggered in the direction of the city centre again as if to prove public transport useless. After a while, he vanished out of sight in the shadow of the trees, still murmuring to himself.

‘Mornin’, Bob,’ said the young policeman, grinning at his older colleague who was still looking sleepy as he took his uniform out of his closet, apparently annoyed that he had to serve the morning shift with this over-positive guy.

‘Don’t you start, Martin. I fucking hate morning shifts!’

‘Get your uniform on, Bob. We’re gonna walk your grumpiness off. ‘Let’s get round the centre first and then we’re gonna walk it through.’

‘Yeah, better not start by that homeless lot,’ said Bob, a bit less grumpily.

‘Take it easy, Bob. It’s just another morning, nothing’s gonna happen anyway...’

The two of them set off to one of the streets that led round the centre. Soon they reached the edge of the park that closed around the north part of the city.

‘Ok. Let’s check through it and then we can cross the centre to the south and back,’ suggested Martin.

They walked for a few minutes, talking the time away, apparently the only way to make their shift a bit entertaining. Suddenly, Martin stopped in the middle of a sentence and pointed to a boulder partially surrounded by bushes.

‘Someone is lying over there, Bob.’

'I see Martin, I bet that sleeping beauty is still stone drunk, let's kick him out.'

As they approached, Bob called at the reclining man mockingly, to wake him up:

'Good morning, Sir! I am afraid your lordship will have to leave his residence.'

No response, no movement.

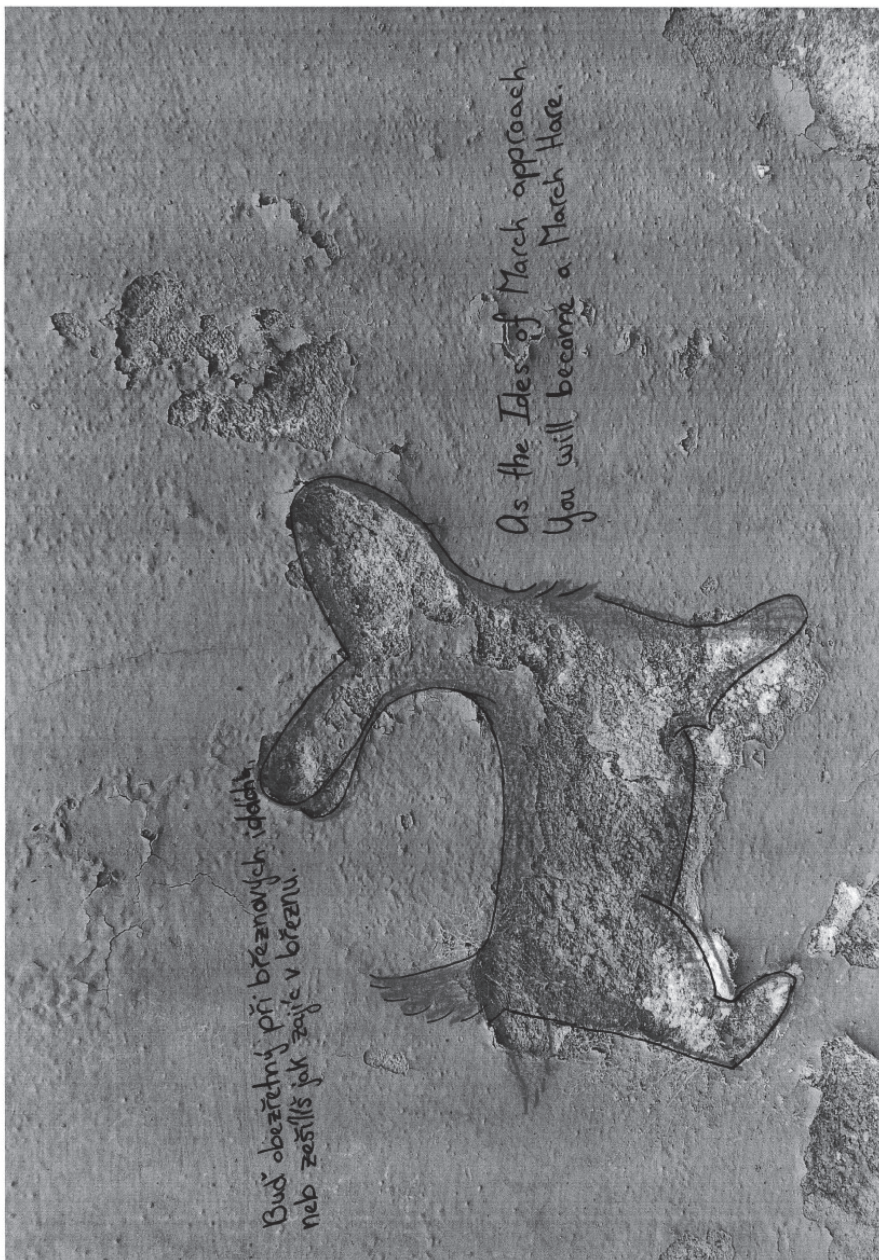
'Deaf, that moron, we'll have to pick him up.'

Martin grabbed the man's jacket and pulled him by his shoulder, turning him towards himself. A few leaves were tangled in the grey sweater, then he looked at the man's face, shocked:

'Oh fuck, Bob! ...He, he's finished.'

'The hell with morning shifts,' gasped Bob and leaned over, examining the body.

'Look, he's choked himself. Must have been lying here all night ...Holy shit.' 'This is no good, newspapers gonna snap this up, make a nice story of it and drag us in, with all their bullshit about the failure of police responsibilities. I can see the contents already: He was a good man in general. He did no harm...'



Catherine Dubravova

“Born in Zlin, she fell for reading and writing literature during her studies in Ostrava. Even after changing her field to translation and interpreting, she kept her passion for literature and has recently taken up a few other artistic activities, including painting and dance.”

We Creatures

Our own shadows make us confess about
what is supposed to stay inside,
for everyone else these hide
also underneath the cover of her face.
Her hair as neat as grass on the meadow,
eyes as deep as a wishing well,
behind the eyelids a complete countryside
of stories that are yet to tell.
The forehead carries troubles of a mother,
even though she's just the bride-to-be,
with ideas spread in the air like feathers
all spun into the veil of mystery.
But kindness penetrates through every little pore,
from temples to lips, the average ones, and chin,
any decent creature would never wish for more,
the treasure tied up by her cheekily blushing skin.

House or Home

The pavement made of concrete slabs
leads to the front garden,
a little wild, but colourful.
In a village like ours
each household has a garden,
and a lane of field
which is eagered to be farmed on,
to soak the sweat of people's foreheads.
When you come home,
the rooms cluttered and messy,
full of the things that
could still be of any use.
And you sit down,
become part of this mess
and the only thing you want to do at that very moment
is to rest.
But you stand up,
pissed off like any other day,
you make yourself some coffee,
trying to turn this house into a home.
You shiver, dreams are long gone,
this can't be it,
the thing that every adult envies.
Out of the prison, in the back yard,
a dog can be a better friend than a sister,
it is fair to you, listens to you,
unlike all that rubbish in this house.

Café Terrace

Lovely night cannot cause creeps
unless upstairs lonely lady sleeps,
because of the hubbub from outside,
slowly the window shutter opens wide.

Stars mirror the yellow terrace curtain
luring the passers-by to sit and breathe in.
Silent music is what they all can hear,
for those who hesitate, the message's clear.

Either you join their cheerful company
and let yourself – for a while – forget about money,
or fight it, the terrace will disturb your dreams
along with laughter, chatter, screams.

Its mouth is open and its white teeth
carry plates and cups and arms in sleeves,
more people are captivated by
calm atmosphere, no fear, no sigh.

Like a star that has fallen down
among the buildings of this town,
it enlightens corners and wakes up walls
and helps the lady to make that call.

Café Terrace: Vincent van Gogh [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Van_Gogh_-_Terrasse_des_Café_an_der_Place_du_Forum_in_Arles_am_Abend1.jpeg



Public poetry reading at Café '87 with Dr. Renée Ruderman. June 4th 2013



Markéta Effenbergerová

Short Story

I'm walking through some nameless night city. At night, names are not important.

I'm passing the never-closing taverns with stray cats in front of them, waiting for leftovers, hoping, that this night is still going to throw up some.

I'm trying to put on a face of a gangster from old movies, I'm trying to look like Al Capone, Don Corleone, no, like Henry Fonda whom I always cheered for in *Once Upon a Time in the West*, because despite his villainousness, I always believed him to be the one and only hero of that well known spaghetti western.

No one asks me for a cigarette.

It must be the Fonda-like look in my Fonda-like blue eyes, blue eyes that at a certain time together with fair hair used to be proof of being part of the superior race.

How Adolf justified himself to all those "superior" ones had always been beyond my understanding.

I'm coming closer to the headquarters of the Reich, with the eagle on the front, what else could it possibly be?!

A railway station.

The borders between evils are unclear in these times, soaked like a watercolour painting left in the rain. God knows if it's ever been different. The memory of the human race is short, broken like that of an old woman with Alzheimers, slowly fading away in an old folks house with no relatives. None that would be willing to come to see her anyway.

Many of the men with beer-and-sausages bellies, sucking at their, today tenth or so already, stinking beer in the statin bar, are not able to tell you what they had for lunch yesterday, but how amazing it'd been like at the time of the Communist regime, that is something they're 190% sure about.

I don't really know what I had for lunch yesterday neither, but what a sorry excuse for life it'd been like during the regime I know nevertheless, even though I wasn't even born at the time of the Velvet Revolution.

That's us, the naughty generation, the generation that didn't experience any war, the Communists or anything, nothing in fact, according to the pub elders. We're probably not even alive, we're just staggering through this world, that is partly created by something that doesn't even go "trrr-eee-oo" when you try turning it on anymore. That's us, those ungrateful brats that like Havel or maybe not, that's not really important for those drunkards, may it be this way or that, but to go vote in the elections? No, no way, thank you, maybe only if those elections came to them, swam through the ocean of smoke from the Start cigarettes and beer leftovers and only if they bought them another drink and if they arranged that their precious would be 5.50 CZK again, yeah, that would be good.

I'm passing the darkened station tavern and the darkened lives of those men that can remember better times and I feel sad.

I'm hurrying through the station underpass towards the flat that seems to be far-far-away, but I know, that the journey is going to take as long as it takes to have a cigarette and to think about the faith of this world we're living in, where the States still don't have health insurance.

I emerge in the middle of a village, where people still greet each other even though it's the first time they see the other one in their life, and I just stare up at those oh-so-distant stars up in the sky, because the light pollution is suddenly nowhere to be seen. It probably went to seek a better life, to apply for it to the authorities' office, and I'm telling myself that, yeah, there's gotta be a place, somewhere really far away, where they don't have to deal with this kind of shit, because it simply does not exist.

I'm probably just fooling myself, it's crap, there's no hope, everywhere in this bloody universe there are those know-it-alls that are seeking their wisdom at the bottom of their beer mugs, from which you can gain only one thing and that's gastric flu. These know-it-alls that are going to feed you with stories of how amazing it's been with a crimson star behind your butts and if only butts but in the drainage pipe

of your toilette even, because what if you didn't shit how they planned it in the five-year plan?

But then it strikes me. There is a place where it's alright somewhere and not even that far away, right at the orbit of the Earth, where the goddamned international space station is, where people actually enjoy each other's company and where they don't care that the government has been shut down in several countries and that NASA isn't working, no, they'll just keep on eating their weird food that doesn't actually look like anything you would eat before you open the package when it suddenly gains an appealing form and they'll keep on posting pictures on Twitter, pictures with the Sun rising above the horizon once again and everything is suddenly just fine.

I'm sticking the key into the lock, slowly, quietly, to not wake up my flat-mates, and there he is, suddenly, the cat. He's probably expecting me to give him some food, he doesn't know, and he probably wouldn't even care, what is happening in the outside world, in the neighbours' flat or at the space station.

He doesn't care if the Sun rises again tomorrow.

So why do we?

Ruth

Ruth woke up from a very disturbing dream that she forgot instantly, which was probably good.

Unable to fall asleep again she just lay in her bed, hand on the spot which should've been occupied by her wife, staring at the ceiling. The lights of cars riding through the street were dancing together on it reminding her of her childhood when her father would take her to see the Swan Lake. She could see the dancers so vividly in her memory and it was slowly lulling her back to sleep.

Then, as if struck by lightning, she realized she couldn't recall what her father looked like. She cried.

She must've fallen asleep at some point, because when she opened her eyes again the unmerciful daylight burned her eyes and she realized that she was late for her job. Shit.

She skipped her breakfast, quickly put on some decent clothes, brushed her teeth and then quickly ran out of her flat. She almost killed a few people and almost got killed herself several times during her bike ride to work knowing that there was no point in risking so much when she was already so late. But she knew she was in deep trouble and she didn't want to give up the poor excuse for hope she had in her mind.

Mr White was who they all were supposed to call their boss. Ruth doubted he had any first name at all and even if he did it was hard to imagine anyone calling him by it. He wasn't a merry man. No one had ever seen him smile and, hell, was it hard to get a compliment from him. Mr White didn't like when something was out of order and when chaos started creeping into his perfect machine he wanted his company to be. So when Ruth opened the door to her job, he was already waiting for her and without slipping as much as "Follow me," he led her to his office.

"Ruth," it was almost funny that he called everyone who worked for him by their first name when no one knew his "do you know how this company survived for so long in this world? Do you think that the key to success is, I don't know, not doing as you're told by the rules? Do you think that this company would be where it is today if

everyone was too lazy to get their arses out of the bed in the morning? Do you think that I'd have such a nice office if I'd be forgetting my duties all the time? Being late with a task I've been given? Do you think that I'd be where I am now if I'd be doing THOSE GODFORSAKEN SINFUL THINGS I HEARD ABOUT?" that was the first time Ruth ever experienced her boss get so angry. But she finally knew why he's always been so hostile to her. That one allusion explained everything, "No. That is not the key to success at all."

His face was pale white, perfectly suiting his name. He fired her, of course, she's been expecting it for some time now, but she never knew why, not until his little monologue. He was one of those men that lived in traditions and in hazy images of times when women did as they were told, never standing up to their husbands, with the only purpose in their lives being providing giving their men with an heir.

It never occurred to Ruth that she'd get fired like this, without trying to fight back. This case wasn't done exactly by the book and she'd probably be able to get at least some money from the company, but after what she'd been told she didn't really have the strength to look that man in the eyes without a very tempting image of his eyes out of their eye sockets and his balls, if he had any, in his mouth to keep it shut.

So she left. She packed the few things that she owned in the office and left without looking back.

She was feeling her blood thumping against her temples, trying to break free and stain the whole posh elevator bright red. The colour of the fake marble floor in the hallway hurt her eyes and the tiny cracks seemed to be dancing, dancing to get her, to finish her off. To finish this horrible nightmare her life had become.

She threw the box next to her bike and anxiously lit a cigarette. She felt like calling someone, mostly Caroline, her wife, her perfect wife. But Caroline was gone, gone for good, gone and never coming back. She left her, told her she had become a cold machine and left. Ruth was sitting next to the bookcase, her head at the same height as the shelf with mostly once opened cooking books. She wanted to be a good cook when she was younger, but never had the time for it when she got her job in the office. Oh, how easy it was to take one of those books and throw it at Caroline,

beautiful, saint Caroline, Caroline in a black-striped deep-blue dress, Caroline with tiny freckles on her heavenly face and ears. Caroline. Caroline.

Of course she felt bad about throwing “100+1 Ways of Preparing Beef” seconds after she lost her grip on the book in hard cover.

Of course she knew everything was her fault, but then, how the hell were they supposed to manage if she lost her job? The bloody job with inhuman working hours and a low salary. The bloody job with a homophobic boss and half of her colleagues.

She lit another cigarette and lay on a bench.

What was she supposed to do now? What had her life become? A poor excuse for one, surely.

A weight of realization fell on her chest making her unable to breathe for a moment. God, what had SHE become? What happened to her younger self that wanted to open her own café with a little bookshop and a jazz club? What happened to her dreams of seeing the world and maybe moving to the other side of it for good?

Ruth felt as if some bizarre curtain had been lifted from her eyes and suddenly she knew that she needed to change, needed to run, run, run, run, run far away. She stood up, finished the cigarette and got on her bike.

She arrived home, opened the door, took her shoes off and took what felt like the deepest breath in her life, feeling as if she was standing on the edge of a very very steep cliff. Was she really going to do this? A useless question, if she gave this up now, she knew she's going to end up as some grumpy old lady with moustache under her nose and expired milk in her fridge, with books that smelled of tobacco and lost dreams, her flat full of cats that would breed so quickly that she'd drown in them eventually, she'd die all alone and the cats would get hungrier and hungrier and her body would be just lying there, a delicious feast just waiting for them so they would eat her face off eventually. Charity would take her smelly books and clothes and her cats would be probably put to sleep because there'd be just too many of them. And the world would just move on.

Ruth ate two slices of bread with cheese and some vegetables, made herself a big cup of coffee and while doing that managed to write a letter to Caroline, sweet Caroline.

*My dearest,
I'm moving away.
Evil job quitted.
The world is waiting.
I'm leaving the flat to you, do whatever you want with it.
I'm sorry.*

*With love,
Ruth
XXX*

As she was drinking her coffee she packed all the necessary things into a backpack, things she would send for sooner or later she packed into boxes. What she thought she wouldn't need or miss at all, she put into plastic bags and boxes in the corner of the living room and left notes on everything. She found her passport and all other necessary documents.

When she had everything done she took a shower and watered the plants.

She looked over the flat that had been her home for such a long time. Somehow she knew she's never going to see this place, this place full of memories, scents, thoughts, sleepless nights with Caroline, making love to her with Robert Johnson singing to them from their gramophone.

Ruth sighed, grabbed her backpack, re-checked if she had everything she's going to need and stepped into the corridor. She closed the door and locked it, then went to Mrs Roberts next door and left the key and the letter for Caroline in her care.

"Going away for a holiday, are we?"

"Yes, holiday. A really long one. Thanks for everything, Mrs Roberts."

Ruth smiled at the old lady and patted her tomcat that rubbed his head against her leg.

After arriving at the airport she called her and Caroline's friend, Toby, so that he'd let Caroline know she's going away and the flat wouldn't become some curiosity museum after some time.

“Send me a postcard, love, will you? And be careful. Give me a ring if you need anything, ok? Oh, you bloody lunatic, be careful, be careful, be careful, promise me that.”

“I promise, Toby, I promise.”

She put down the receiver and left the phone booth.

And with a brand new world in front of her eyes, Ruth was gone.

Markéta Fořtová

The Road to Damnation

I.

The candle was slowly dripping on the wooden table, creating layers of slowly hardening wax. New layers covered old as new lies should cover the once earlier said. The candle didn't light the room very well, but it was good enough to light my face and uncover the terrible shame, disappointment and lost hopes in it. It was as if it shone through my soul, showing the dirt, the selfishness, the memories of what once was and the destruction. The clock on the wall was ticking. Time was passing slower than usual. I was desperately looking through the window at the horizon, searching for the first signs of a redeeming morning and saw nothing more than damned dark skies. It seemed like the morning would never come. An occasional shot somewhere in the gloomy forest would break the complete silence. With new wax layers being created on the table, the moments spent together became more and more unbearable. Dripping wax, ticking clock and shots in the dark were the only reminders of the cruel reality. The hunt was on. With every shot, the unmistakable hunters, hit the target and the animals dropped down. Death was all around. The mist mixed with blood and guts. The signs of deer being gutted stained the meadows. The blood was washed off into a small, cold river flowing nearby, but the essence of death remained till noon. And in that chilly night we sat there trying to rewind time and find the breaking point. The exact moment when it all became more than just a game.

"I knew it, I knew he couldn't do what you accused him of" she said calmly. "Just tell me one thing, why?"

"I am sorry, I was just afraid I will lose you. I was afraid he was going to take you away from me!" I lied once again. My eyes were filled with tears

"I cannot believe you would do such an awful thing." She started crying.

I stopped nervously walking around and sat down behind the table. The room was small as it was and with her tears it suddenly grew a little smaller. We were sitting at the table. There was no space to escape, even if I wanted to. One small room filled with so many emotions. I had to apologize for what I had done. I had to take all the blame. They have to get back to their old lives. How can I do it and not get tangled with my own lies again? *"I should never have started this!"*, my conscience screamed in my head. I was surprised, I have always lived my life with no regrets. I felt terrible ever since I told that terrible lie, six months ago. I took it too far, terrible, dirty lies that shattered lives. He didn't look at me once. He was holding her hand, while looking out into the dark.

"I know you Jordan, I know you well enough to know you are suffering terribly, there is nothing that can help you now. There is nothing that can help us. It's too late. What has been done and said cannot be taken back," Kate whispered and covered her face with her hands.

"I will never leave you, but we can't be under one roof." Her cry tore my heart.

"I will go, I love you please I want you to be happy again. I can't see you like this anymore."

"I know what I have to do. I have to leave ..."

We were so close before the incident. Our relationship was perfect, respectful and loving. But ever since she brought him to our house things have changed. We shared one passion only. We both were in love with one person. Richard, charming, charismatic Richard. A name worthy of kings and knights. He was much more than a king for me, he was my personal savior. I admired him, listened to his advice. My teenage passion outgrew everything I had learned and turned my life around. I would do anything for him and now I am doing everything I can to fix my terrible mistake. This foolish teenage love quickly destroyed everything I loved and cared about. And on that foggy night I was reminded once again that I still loved him deeply

II.

“Here is a letter for you Jordan. I’m sorry I opened it. It’s bad news.” I looked down at the bed where my Mom threw the ripped white envelope. I was afraid to touch it so I just stared. My body was in paralysis. My mind was a weird mixture of chaos and a complete blank. My life was filled with loads of precious people and I knew one of my friendships had ended inside the envelope. All of my precious friends ran through my mind. Friends I hadn’t heard from in a while. Immediately my friend whose father killed his mother in a jealous rage and then shot himself came to mind. “Oh God I hope it’s not him.” This was followed by my friend who is struggling with cancer at a very young age and then by friends with no trouble at all. “Life is unpredictable” I said to myself and imagined how one of them was on the way to school and got ran over by a car.

This complete chaos in my head lasted only a split second and then I made myself reach for the envelope. My hand was exceptionally heavy and slow. I wasn’t shaking which is unusual during intense situations. I felt strong in my knees but in my head I begged God not to have to open this envelope, I made myself believe that if I didn’t know who had tragically died it would keep them alive. The otherwise white envelope had a black stripe which confirmed my previous worries about the obituary, which lay inside the envelope like a dead rabbit. The edges of the paper were slightly rumpled as if someone hadn’t really been paying attention when sending it to me. Another moment of stiffness occurred. I was trying to read from the details who it could be, before I opened the letter and hit hard reality and certainty. Ignorance is bliss I repeated to myself, still trying to somehow avoid opening the letter. If I didn’t know who died, it wouldn’t hurt me and I could keep pretending that I still had them and that I could call that them if needed. I could live a happy life, still have their contact in my phone and not miss them. I am just not good with death. Knock on wood, all my close family is still alive. I am an inexperienced mourner.

So finally I gathered all my strength and reached for the piece of black framed paper. Unwrapping it, I tried not to see the name at first glance, as if I wanted to stretch the stress and uncertainty even more. I started reading from the top. It began with a little poem about angels, heaven and eternity and continued with the cliché,

unoriginal lines “With deep sorrow we wish to announce to all that our loving father, brother has left us forever.” and then I finally saw the name; it was my Father. I cannot describe the gratitude and huge relief I felt that I didn’t see the name of someone I knew and loved...

The situation in our family never allowed me to realize that I unconsciously needed a father and I have been longing for him for so long. My Mom never remarried after she divorced the man I call my biological father, and her boyfriends were more of a joke to me than actual role models. It was only after his death that I realized how I needed him in my life and that I have been searching for a father figure ever since I can remember. Not too long after, I received the news, my Mom found a new boyfriend. I was sceptical and tired of her constant new beginnings. I never understood why she was attracted to such losers and low lifes, when she herself was a successful businesswoman. From my previous experience I would have a bad attitude to all of them. To test them and protect myself from disappointment. Too many first dinners had passed for me to be excited anymore. So I wasn’t thrilled to meet yet another loser that would stay with her until she realized it would not work out.

“Get dressed, he will be here any minute now,” Mom yelled from her bedroom.

“Mom, I don’t care. I am wearing my sweat pants. He won’t notice plus he is here to make an impression on me,” I screamed and she knew I was trying to sabotage her date night

“You are terrible, I hope he won’t run away,” Mom whispered.

The door-bell rang. “Be on your best behavior!” she hissed at me and ran to open the door. Coco would be proud of her, she looked gorgeous. I thought what a waste to dress up like this for another loser. The smell of her perfect perfume overwhelmed me and I was hoping he wouldn’t smell of gasoline, like the last one. I put great effort into getting up and turning off the TV. Just as I was taking a deep breath, the one I always take before an unpleasant situation, someone stormed into the living room. I remember it like it was yesterday. I was standing there, my eyes closed, taking that deep breath, when for a split second I smelled his Channel cologne. I quickly opened my eyes and I saw him. He came right up to me, shook my hand and gave me a kiss on a cheek. He immediately filled the entire living room. I felt relieved.

He looked decent, smelled nice and was entertaining. During dinner we hit it off like old friends. His stories and jokes made the time pass by so quickly, that I wished he would stay longer. He was finally that successful man Mom deserved. After he left we spend the rest of the night talking about him. Mom's eyes were sparkling and I hoped this would all work out for the best. Our dinners and lunches continued for several weeks and time seemed to be our worst enemy. Magically with him time passed by so quickly and one hour seemed like a minute. As their relationship progressed he took us to his cottage to go hunting. Mom was not a big fan of mud, blood and shooting and during these adventures I was always the one to go with him. He was teaching me how to shoot, how to gut a buck and deer, something I had never done before. It was all so exciting and new, I couldn't wait for the weekend to go hunting. Mom had finally found a man in her life she could rely on and who respected her. She had finally found a great father for me. He was my role model, the father figure I was searching for.

However, something inside me started to long for him more than was acceptable. It started with small signals, longer looks into his eyes, a forgotten hand on his legs under the table. Then the feeling became unbearable. My dreams were all about him. I became obsessed and the fact that it was unacceptable worked as fuel to my actions. A very bad idea nested in my head and refused to leave.

Right after my birthday, he organized an annual get-together at his cottage with his friends to start the hunting season. Mom could not come because of her business trip. It was a perfect occasion to try out if he would be interested. I begged Mom to let me go with him alone. Mom knew there was always alcohol involved and I wasn't eighteen yet, but Richard gave her his word he would not let me drink. Mom finally agreed and I was thrilled to go. Hunting became my passion, but I was excited more about being alone with Richard. I knew very well all his friends were heavy drinkers and that if I mad a little effort they would drop under the table before eleven. The night went great, I was in the kitchen cooking and serving beer and liquor just as planned. To my surprise Richard didn't want to drink that much. I secretly drank a couple of beers to loosen up a little bit and when everyone started to leave to the upstairs bedrooms, I was finally there alone with him. I was cleaning up

the table and taking all the glasses left to the kitchen, when he touched me. Not like a father, it was different. He knew what I was trying to do. My seduction methods worked and I sat down next to him. We kissed. It was wild, passionate, forbidden and it felt great. Before we went upstairs, drunken me wanted to say something extremely clever. Luckily Richard stopped me and I didn't say a word until exhausted, I whispered good night, kissed him on the cheek and left his bedroom.

I never imagined I would have the guts to do this. I never believed my conscience would allow me this. Not only did I do it, he did it with me. We were partners in crime now. In my dreams I only got to the point of having sex with him, but what now? How am I going to look into his eyes and into my Mom's eyes? I never got this far in my dreams. I woke up and refused to open my eyes, I refused to admit this was real. I knew when I opened them and walked downstairs I would see him there and it would be confusing. I would be ashamed and lost. I stayed in bed for two more hours and then decided to finally get up. I opened the door to the hall and I could hear them talking. My paranoia made me think for a second they were talking about me, but something shocked me even more. I heard my Mom's voice. I wasn't ready to face them together. If I could have I would have jumped out of the window and walked home, but I would have to see them sooner or later. I walked down to the living room, greeted everybody and went to kiss Mom. I could still smell his cologne on me and I prayed Mom wouldn't notice.

"Good morning Jordan, how was your night?" I turned around and saw his big smile. A wave of calmness overwhelmed me and I knew at that moment that I didn't need to be afraid of anything, that he would always have a plan B. I was surprised how his present made me feel safe with this uncomfortable situation only we knew about. It was as if something turned around in my head and the shame was gone. Instead I felt great. I smiled provocatively and replied, *"It was great, Richard. I really like your new cottage, we should come here more often, don't you think?"*

"We will, the hunting season is on, right guys!" and turned to his five friends, waiting for approval.

"Yes, for the next month, you won't see us anywhere else," Big Joe, one of his close friends, replied with a smile on his face. All hunters are always extremely excited for

the hunting season and this year I was deeply excited with them for all the wrong reasons.

We continued with our little forbidden romance and his hunting trips combined with business trips created a perfect window of opportunity for our adventures. Mom thought I was at my friends or I went to a party, but every second I had I gave to Richard. I loved hunting with him. I watched his passionate aiming and killing with a religious awe. It was never ordinary, the minute he reached for his gun. At that exact moment he became the man of my life. The man that every woman longs for. He made me feel safe. I knew nothing in the world could harm me. The feeling of complete safety in the middle of wild and unknown forests overwhelmed me every time and I forgot about the world outside. His charm worked its magic. He was the perfect prototype of a man. A man of multiple faces and each and every one of them was better than the one before. A fearless hunter, a successful businessman, an over-protective father, an outstanding lover, a dear friend and a hardworking man. He knew exactly what to say and when to say it.

It was the first snowy night. We went out for a hunt again. He left all of his friends to be with me alone. He knew how much I loved spending time with him, alone, where we could be who we really are. No masks, no fake gestures, just us. These nights were the reason I breathe. These were the nights I could die for. We could do what we wanted. We could say what we felt. It was such a relief to be with him. He knew my dark sides and he loved me for them. We were just like two animals hunted by our basic instincts. The hunger for passion. No doubts. We looked at one other, there were no words necessary. He understood me completely. The myth about forbidden fruit works perfectly and it kept us together.

"Didn't you miss me my sweet Jordan?"

"Of course I missed the real you, incredibly," I whispered quietly. He held my hand tight and stopped the car.

"You are an incredible young woman Jordan, you know that?"

Something was odd tonight. It was not like our usual secret dates. I felt he wanted to tell me something, but I needed to tell him something first. The circumstances made everything harder for me. I knew that the emotions I had been

holding inside for so long would surface. I was touching his hand and slowly rubbing his head, he laid down.

"Just lay down next to me, I want to cuddle that's all," he whispered. All the animal instincts I was trying to hide my actions behind, were dead and gone. Everything was lost. It was a complete surrender after a long war against moral values. I lay down with him, filled with the love I've been feeling for so long. I whispered,

"I love you Richard, I love you incredibly and it's killing me to see you and Mom kissing and holding hands. I want to be your number one."

Richard was speechless, even though the dark of the forest I could see his face.

"I brought you here today to end this little romance Jordan. I love your mother and I want to marry her."

He paused for a little while to give me a chance to process what was happening.

"You know you and me, it was just fun. I don't regret it, but it has to stop before we hurt ourselves. I can never be with you. I would destroy your life, you would be so unhappy with me. You would lose your Mother and I know she is very important to you. I cannot let this happen."

I didn't know what to do. I left the car. I wanted to scream, kick and cry. I wanted to kick his lights in and break his windows, but I stormed out of the car and decided to go for a little walk. We weren't far from the cottage so I reached the road and began walking towards the cottage. He drove next to me, I guess to make sure nothing happened to me on my way. I wished he was dead for seducing me and letting me fall in love with him. I made it to the cottage, dropped down in tears onto a snowy meadow and didn't make a sound. I only looked at the skies full of stars and the reflection of snow. *"Why me,"* I whispered to myself, tears rushing down my face. He slowly walked up to me and without a word lay down and gazed at the stars. Then he softly said,

"You know Jordan, she can never find out. Under no circumstances can she ever find out. We are like friends, but you can't play football that's why we are doing what we are doing. We are having fun."

His last words stabbed me like a knife. So I am just a way to pass your spare time and you are the love of my life, how fair is that?

"Please leave me alone here," I asked him and he left.

I can't tell him I love him unconditionally and I can't tell him I hate his guts. I am grateful for every moment I spent with him. Only the memories of our moments together are what keeps me alive. His bed is a sacred altar and I am the sacrifice resurrected each morning to walk out of his room to my miserable life where I have to lie to everyone I know including myself and Mom. Every night with him I am tortured but those moments of relief are worth the pain. At that moment we are created for each other and that keeps me alive. And now all these moments are gone for good. I don't remember how long I was out there on the meadow, but when I returned everyone was asleep.

III.

When I woke up Mom and Richard were sitting downstairs having dinner. The look on his face made me sick. His wide smile changed to something I couldn't stand. His terrible jokes and stupid stories were annoying. And his irritating voice sounded in my head long after he finally stopped talking. Mom noticed the change in my behavior towards Richard.

"Is everything okay, you two?"

"Did you do something to my sweet Jordan?"

She turned to Richard with this rhetorical question. She didn't expect any answer because she was sure he would never treat me badly. I tried a fake smile to mask my torture and took my breakfast to my room. If I ate downstairs with them I would definitely throw up from their sweet kisses and silly love comments. During my sleepless nights, I created a perfect plan to get Richard to like me again. He was planning the end of the hunting season get-together and Mom of course wasn't going to be there. It was the perfect opportunity for me to show up there later in the evening when they are drunk to seduce him again. So I proceeded with my plan. I showed up uninvited. Richard was surprised but too drunk to say anything. I was sweeter than ever, served him, cooked, cleaned for him and the guys that night and when I walked him to his bedroom hoping for the best he refused to let me in. What a disgrace! I am a young, attractive woman and he should be grateful that I am offering myself to him. I felt betrayed and incredibly mad. That same night I called

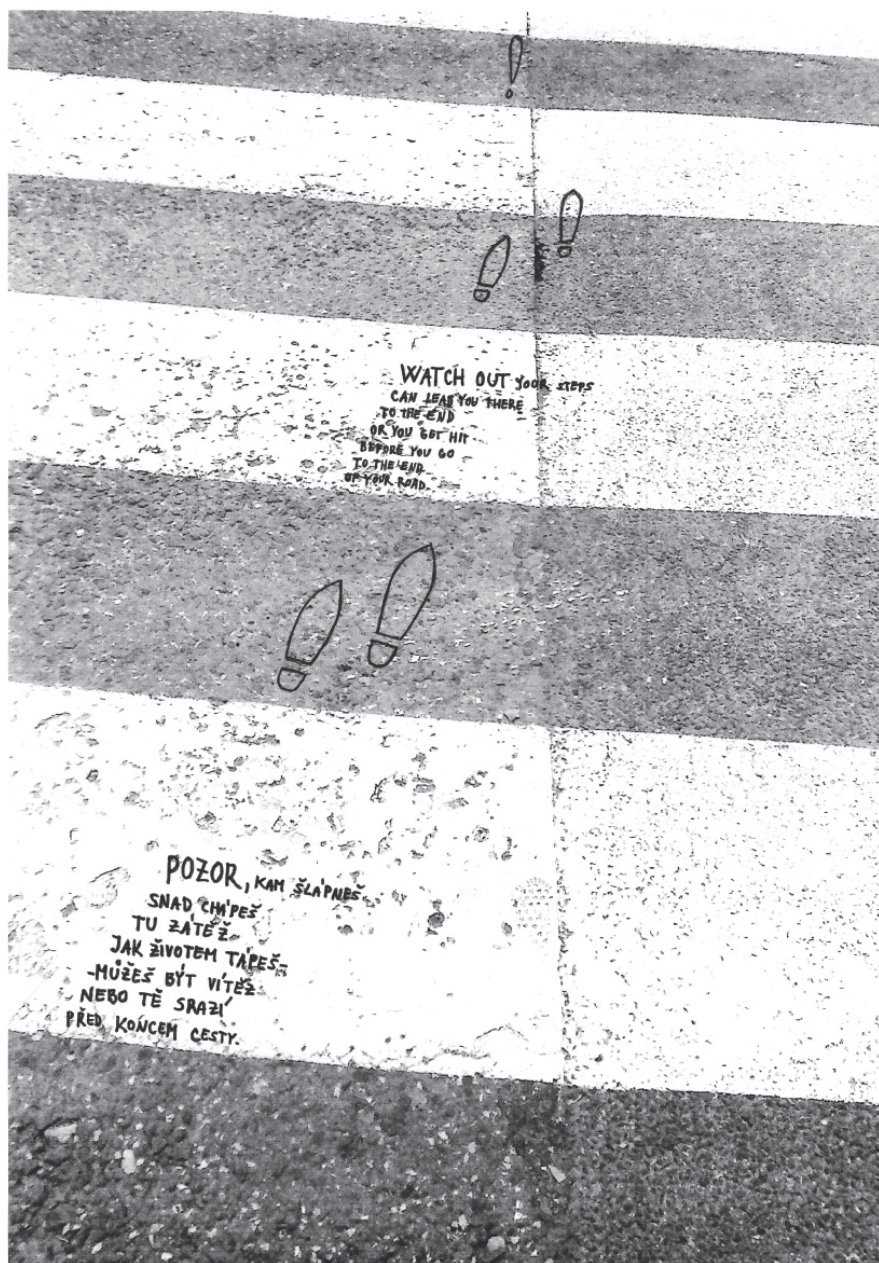
my friends to pick me up and on my way back I called the police to report a rape. I cried when I arrived at the police station. After I described what happened to me in great detail, they called my Mom to come and pick me up. I was exhausted. When I saw Mom I couldn't help myself. I fell down to the floor and cried hysterically. I cried out of guilt for what I was doing, for all the lies, all the impostures but most importantly out of love. I loved them to death, both of them. She sat down on the floor, holding me in her arms and cried with me. We sat there for a good half an hour. She kept apologizing and I wanted to die. I realized what I had done. What desire makes stupid people do. How passion can be dangerous and how stupid I was for even trying to seduce him. I immediately realized Mom had lost a great man. We had both lost him. The rest of the night was all a blur to me. I woke up refusing to open my eyes, once again. I wished it was all just a bad dream.

IV.

Months have passed and I was dying inside. I saw my Mom suffering. I never wanted to see her like this. My teenage stupidity destroyed her life and she blamed herself. She blamed herself for bringing him into our lives.

"I am sorry you had to go through this," she said at least a hundred times a day.

I saw her drowning in regrets, she was weaker and weaker every day. I never realized how deeply it would influence our lives. My Coco turned to Courtney Love. She started drinking and blaming only herself. I couldn't let this happen. My not so innocent teenage love. I wished I could do something to help Mom, I wished I could stop it all. Stop all the suffering I have caused her. And Richard? He was in and out of court. All the hearings, interrogations and accusations made his life miserable. He was labeled as child molester and that terrible accusation stained his spotless reputation. What had I done? I couldn't sleep at night, I couldn't look into the mirror any longer. The terrible pain inside was unbearable. I had to say something to help them. I had to go to the police and tell them the truth. I had not been raped. I had not been molested. It was all just revenge. I had to tell everybody! He didn't deserve to be treated like this. He needed to be innocent again. After all he was the closest thing I ever had to a father.



Pavel Gončarov

„When you don't know what you want then I offer three suggestions. If you don't pick any of them, then, please, let me go, I will be imitating ducks—when you hear ducks, think of ducks. They spend the winter here.“

Sparkling Rainbow Chrome Bug

I have captured a sparkling rainbow chrome bug and will never set him free. I pretend that he might like apples in his plastic mp3 player box. Not having taken much time to see what leaves or dung he eats, I will have no story to present it with. Maybe just: He dried up in five days, groping for air, as I decided to withstand it. I spotted him in the woods when I was taking a leak. I was there to lie in my hammock and read an old book that bored me. He crawled up my middle finger, stretched his orchestrated legs and as I expected him to mechanically take off on hidden wings, he squeezed out an orange drop from his butt with much hardship instead. Now watch his beauty.

Later I added an already dead cockroach in that box.

Much later, I opened it and smelled how it was full of disease. I threw up in the bathroom like a motherfucker and then threw out the cockroach. Now watch his beauty.

Martin Hovadík

From the Old House

The smell of spring, my younger years.
I loved trains, the steaming one was special.
And the SOUNDS!
Squeaking,
Cracking,
Buzzing,
Rustle,
Who-hoo and cho-choo ...
Whistle was my thing, light blue clothes.
In this kind of uniform – my new-born sister.
It was a big thing – a birth of a child.
So how come she was so tiny?!
Never mind. I will keep her close and look after her.
Oh, how terrible she was! But just once in a while.
Older brothers have to take care, who else would
on your second secret date? Parents? Ha.
But we don't need any medals,
just a sympathetic ear and TRUST.
Don't tell everything to mom!
GIRLS and SECRETS...
They spot the chink in the armor, get their candy and sell you to the Inquisition!

Next Generation?

A sandal, trodden by Monty Pythons,
sacred,
taken from those, who once ruled the Realm.
Flowers on their graves!
“Like in that song of...what’s his name, dad?
Oh, yes. Bob Dylan,” my daughter would say.
Sun – in the conjunction with Mars.
T1 – Planet Earth – once called – going to be burnt.
“Watching LIVE! My God, that’s a show!”
(only too slow)

Train

On the train over the horizon,
just a strip of film – final destination.
Sniff, feel, have a chat with a complete stranger.
Go to the café on the corner.
“Cardamon, isn’t it?”
“Yes, we put in a little bit.”
Markets and bazaars, beautiful tapestries.
Fire show on the square, flamenco, wine...

Hand to hand we fight – sounds of laughter.
Then falling asleep, together.
Sit on the train again, waiting for a century.
Finally, you see the blue light.
It’s the sun that tries to warm your rigid bones.

Wine Cellar

I am empty
as a wine

c
e
l
l
a
r
r
r
.

You can hear your heart beating.
.. I .. I .. I .. I .. I .. I .. I .. I .. I .. I .. I ..

A heart?
The one I lost many miles ago
on the Pampas,

Barbora Hrabalová

“...is a relocated Bohemian in Moravia. She likes subtle steps and non-pompous poetry. She's unable to write about herself in three sentences.”

Bath talks

When you come to think about it...

Bubbles...what's so special about bubbles?

Hmm?

OK, they're round...and the colours...

They're kinda...perfect

What do you say? Hmm...?

Don't give me that grumpy face...

If you were a dog, you could be here too.

Not my fault you're a non-swimmer.

Fluffy paws...not much good for nothing, ha?

Comment? Something?

Hmm?

Feeling good? Like I need to ask...

Grumpy rabbit...

I'm fine. In case you wanted to ask.

The water's fine. In case you cared...

Don't give me that ironic earflip...

Dumb, dumb grumpy bastard...

Every night...just...forget it...

Last chance - wanna bite a bubble?

Hmm? No? Something? Nothing?

Should have bought a parrot.

Ivana Karásková

Gift

It was slowly getting dark when she proudly got off the train. She looked beautiful that night and was perfectly aware of it. As she walked down the street as if it were a catwalk, a young man was approaching her. She looked him in the eye and concentrated. *What a babe.* She arrogantly smiled and went on. This was exactly what she had expected.

From the first time she realized that she was somehow more perceptive (not sure about your choice of word here) than she used to be, she had made major progress. Every day it was much easier to listen to what people were thinking. She spent the last few days mostly at home, sitting by the window and practising on the passers-by. It was tragically funny to know people's stupid thoughts. Sometimes she didn't know whether to laugh or cry, for example, when she heard that brawny boy thinking of his deep fear of rabbits. Now she was looking forward to exploring the minds of her friends, and especially their thoughts about her. She couldn't wait for the jealous thoughts of the girls and the horny remarks of the boys. She looked so hot that night!

When she entered the pub and turned around the corner into the main room, most of the people were there. She made the smile of a rock star entering the stage and greeted everyone overconfidently and seated herself at the table. *Wow. Sexy. Gosh, that bitch's here? Oh, yeah, star's coming. What was her name? Didn't need to see her tonight. Could fuck that body.* What? She was confused. There were too many voices! She didn't know which thoughts were only thoughts and which were said out loud. She turned to her best friend and tried to talk to her, tried to concentrate only on her and ignore the other voices. *What is she thinking? She looks like a whore. Everyone hates her. Couldn't she act normal for once?* What? Her best friend thinks this? No, no, that's not possible. She ran out, straight back to the train station. She was trembling. The only safe thing now she could think of was her home and her family. Maybe they

would be back from their trip by now. She loved her parents and her sister and did they love her! She turned her head to the corner of the wagon. God! She almost vomited. What was that sleazy guy there thinking about doing to her!

It was all too much. She ran out of the train and hurried home. They were there, thank God! She flung the door open and hugged her Mom. "I am so happy to see you Mommy!" "Me too, honey." *Yeah, holiday's over. What happened to her? I bet she broke something. Oh, and that mess in the kitchen! Why do I have to have the worst daughter in the world? Why can't she be like the younger one?*

No! Her mom? No! She thoughtlessly ran out of the flat crying and headed directly to the rooftop.

I'm just an ordinary college student with a big mess in my head, which combined with some of fantasy results in thousands of stories and verses running around in my brain. Then sometimes, when I'm not too busy with procrastination, some of them get the chance to land on a piece of paper. Or in Word, actually, 'cause you know it's easier to let the Windows Search find it for you than look for a lost paper in the mess of your bedroom.

Jiří Kaspar

How I Created a Boyband

I can still remember the time when I wasn't famous yet. Not that I am now, I just assume that by the time you read this I will be rich and famous with as many kinds of drugs as I can eat. So when I was still not famous, I was thinking about how to become famous. I was a very good writer, I was just too lazy to write anything. I was also a talented actor but did not want to act with anyone apart from me.

Because of the lack of fame I suffered from severe depression, refused food, drink and women. One day during a demanding extended lecture I figured it all out. The teacher suddenly started talking to girls in class about the Blue which was apparently a group of handsome boys who made their living by singing, although they could not sing or play any instruments. Yet their first hit song, which was made in the studio after 50 failed attempts in a row, made them into a sexuality-doped, half-dressed-groupies-underwear-tossing stage phenomenon.

And suddenly I understood, I could not sing either, as my father who was a half-deaf plumber said. Nonetheless I, despite my father's attacks on the walls of my room, threats of starvation and urinotherapy, neglected his support and kept singing my opera arias with a repertoire ranging from Pavarotti to Madonna causing all our relatives to stop visiting our house.

A good signal for me was the fact that apart from singing I could neither play a musical instrument nor keep the rhythm; just like in the dance course when I often felt that I had to step at least ten times on the feet of my dance partners in order for them to stop leading me; and yes I have had many dance partners. All women. For I was very dancily promiscuous at that time and considered frequent partner switches as socially necessary. A man-conqueror often switches his female partners and then runs away from them after his friends with whom he can spend quality time better. A man-peasant stays with a single woman all the time using excuses like he does not want to catch anything. Thanks to things like my natural manly authority and all-

over-the-face-acne, I had a high rate of manly hormones which is an important sexual sign, making me a conqueror.

I realized that thanks to my hormone-doped face and Bogart-film charisma they would go where I go, and by they I mean the groupies. For nothing attracts women more than guys with pale skin, representing someone aristocratic, noble and intelligent who is smart enough not to get dirty, smelly and have an excessive tan like a Mexican illegal laborer with a manual job outdoors.

The only challenge I felt was that I was not gay. I have tried to compromise myself, thinking of the singer of the band Europe who despite being a man was a pretty hot chick. However I had to abandon my possible homosexuality because I could never find myself masturbating to him.

I had me in the center of the band but I also needed something more going on. Like other guys not all that handsome or interesting to steal all the attention and not too ugly either, or wait, they can be ugly, whatever makes me king of the hill. So I only knew like five other boys because we were in the same grade, two of them were rednecks that were mostly known for their countryish odor, idiotic jokes about muck shoveling at home and their pride in this rich life of theirs. Out of the other three, one was diagnosed with behavioral issues and would always follow me around. One was that kind of guy everyone knows who would always post statuses on how much he loves his current girlfriend or how she should trust him and not believe the things others say about him. Come on if you want to tell her use a private message, tool, it makes me stupider just reading this. The last guy was the tallest, funniest and most confident of all of us and was probably my best friend.

I chose the more smelly redneck to steal some Taylor Swift fans. The psycho for emos and that kind of women who see a ruin, start feeling sorry for him and want to help him. Mr. facebook love to attract One direction queers and 13 year old girls... doesn't matter, still groupies. And lastly a lesbian from our grade; to get the feminists, genderists, human rightists and media attention; for being not only a boyband but also a socially sensitive one. Just a shame I didn't know any black or Mexican people. After all that was not a bad score, thanks to the lesbian we could remain a **boyband**, because nobody would want to enrage the feminists by saying

anything different. And as for not taking my best friend on; he was an alpha male and I hated competition.

And so my journey begun, I did not yet have a band or a name for it but I had a plan and a dedication to blackmail anybody in order to get me lots of viewers.

CAST

MAIN CHARACTER	JIŘÍ KASPAR
OTHER CHARACTERS	SOME TRANNIES
AND	
LESBIAN	GENDERFEMINIST

FROM A SCRIPT BY
JIŘÍ KASPAR

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY
JIŘÍ KASPAR

PRODUCER
JIŘÍ KASPAR

DIRECTOR
JIŘÍ KASPAR

Just kidding, never had a boyband or friends.

The author is often referred to as the Obelix of Czech literature, probably because he fell into a cauldron of marijuana as a little kid. The author, Beethoven in succession, and he swear they have nothing in common with the protagonist of the story. On the contrary, he wants to assure you, that he is 6 foot 10, has a very muscular body, a head full of hair, blue eyes and white teeth. He wants you know that, especially if you are an attractive female.

Jakub Kašpar

“An insomniac (possibly nihilistic) madman whose creative processes are fueled by copious amounts of alcohol.”

Message in a Bottle

THE FUNNY thing about stasis is that you are not completely removed from time—you only experience it at greatly reduced rate. Another popular misconception is that you are unconscious through the whole ordeal. This is only partially true, as you do dream while in stasis; you also have an extremely limited awareness of your surroundings during these rare moments. One thing you will become aware of pretty quickly while in stasis—it is boring.

Another dream, I don't know how long it was since the last time, could be weeks, cycles, even centuries. There are some sounds to which you really do not want to wake up. One such is the sound of a ship-wide alert. ‘Spirits, what now?’ I groan. No time for breakfast, I grab a nutri-stick, horrible as always, and run to my post. *Wait, this is no dream, a memory.* Ops area is a study in organized chaos; I’m greeted by an ancient-looking man surrounded by a floating globe of displays sitting in the centre of the room. ‘What took you so long?’ are the first words I hear coming from his mouth.

‘I just woke up, Zael,’ I shoot back. ‘What’s going on?’

‘Looks like that Machari ship that’s been trailing us for the last three hundred cycles has finally decided to do something,’ he replies, ‘but we’re not sure what, yet.’

‘Great, that’s one more mystery to add to the list,’ I deadpan.

‘What do you mean?’ he asks, raising one eyebrow.

‘I don’t know, how they were even able to trail us,’ I say, throwing my arms up in the air, ‘especially since their method of FTL is a lot slower than ours.’

‘Today you’ll luckily get your answer. Now get to your post.’

‘Aye, sir!’ I mock-salute him and go to my chair.

A quick glance on my screen proves Zael right: the Machari ship, the ugly oblong blob that has been sitting there unmoving in the corner of my screen for the past three hundred cycles was indeed moving. *But why now, I think to myself, and why here? This is nowhere near their territory, hells, we're not even in their home galaxy.* I quickly look over the navigation data, placing us on the edge of the outer Spiral Arm of the C15 Galaxy—the area of space we've started to expand into relatively recently.

A smug voice coming through the intercom derails my train of thought: 'Why hello there, Kaeli, nice of you to finally join us.'

'Not now, Baen I'm not in the mood,' I growl into my headset. 'And the answer is still no.'

Baen, the gunner I'm working with, has been trying to woo me for the last two hundred cycles; so far I have dismissed him on grounds of him being a colossal pervert, but boy is he persistent—anyone else would have taken the hint by now.

'Oh come on!' he says in a mock-hurt voice, 'One day you'll reveal your neck to me.'

'Not even if you were the last male in the Universe,' I shoot back, my irritation dripping off of every syllable.

'Guys, please,' another voice joins in, 'can't it wait until we're not in imminent danger?'

'Sorry Jaela,' the response comes simultaneously from both Baen and me.

Jaela, the observer, is the last of our little work group. Calm and collected, she usually serves as the voice of reason between me and Baen. She is also my favourite drinking buddy.

Not to mention she is right. The Machari may be technologically inferior to us—while they do possess means of faster-than-light propulsion, their method is much slower than what we use—they are far from harmless; and if there is one thing we learned while dealing with them, it is that they should never be underestimated, as the survivors from several decimated colony worlds would tell you.

My screen lights up, a flurry of activity coming from the direction of the other ship: 'Jaela, the Machari have launched something—too big, with a flight path too straight to be missiles, waiting for visual confirmation, will be in visual range in one

hundred and thirty seconds; Baen, as soon as those enter weapon range, shoot them down.' Murmurs of confirmation come from my headset.

'We've got visual,' I call out, so Zael can relay this upstairs, 'boarding craft,' my eyes go wide at the figures, 'five hundred forty-six contacts now entering weapon range and more incoming.'

'All right boys and girls,' I hear Zael announce from his vantage point, 'show-time!'

—And then yet again the darkness overtakes me and I fall into a blissful embrace of unconsciousness.

There are some sounds that disturb you from your dreams whether you like it or not. My dream of the home-world is disturbed by sound of activity and an incessant low beeping.

What is going on?

<'This place gives me the creeps.'>

A voice.

<'Everything gives you the creeps.'>

Voices.

<'Can you can it guys? Some of us are trying to work here.'>

Alien voices. This is not good. Spirits, why do I feel so weak?

<'I dunno, none of these seem to be active anymore and probably haven't been for quite some time now. I say we take what we can and leave.'>

I wish I knew what they were blabbering about. Also, what is that annoying beeping sound?

<'Hey, there's something flashing on this one, by Benevolence, I think it's still active and there's something inside.'>

There are several of those aliens standing around my pod now. Using all the strength I have left I try to open one of my eyes. It is unbelievably exhausting to lift my eyelid just a bit. Through the haze I see only several helmeted faces and the display of the pod's internal chronometer—it reads: 4032501.21.4.

Twenty thousand cycles.

<'Let's take it aboard, I think Doc is gonna have a field day with this one.'>

<'OK. Just let me file this in; found floating near Alpha Orionis on 23rd March 2833... '>

<'What did I tell you about using Terran names and time stamps?! '>

<'Sorry, I'm not used to Galstandard yet. I'll fix that later.'>

And yet again the darkness overtakes me.

On my screen I see that the first wave is completely vaporised as the gunners do their job, but more keep coming. *This again! Why do I keep coming back to this one?* The fireworks continue for several more waves, but then some of them manage to slip through as the gunners cannot keep up with the sheer numbers they are throwing at us. The moment the first of the Machari boarding craft bites into the hull it transmits a message through the ship's intercom. It sounds like fast metallic chirping, the high-pitched sound harsh on everyone's ears: 'LIFEFORMS. INSIDE. NOT. MACHARI. EXTERMINATE!'

I don't like the sound of that.

... Wait, what's that noise?

<'Are you sure this is a good idea Doc? '>

<'It's the only way I can determine just what are we dealing with. The damn pods are too well shielded for my scanning equipment to get a clean reading.'>

Two masculine sounding voices: the first of them sounding younger.

<'I advise caution,'> *another voice, a female* <'we do not want a repeat of what happened to Lykis, the poor bastard.'>

<'Wait, what happened to ... '>

<'You don't wanna know.'>

Even muted by the pod, I can hear the distinct sound of metal grinding on metal. *They are trying to force one of the pods open!*

Loss of consciousness, we meet once again.

Another alarm sounds, a different siren this time: 'Intruder alert, all hands, ready to repel boarders.'

'All right, you lot,' Zael's authoritative voice cuts through the chaos, 'remember this is not our fight, our job is to get rid of that big hunk of metal outside that keeps sending us guests. All gunners fire at will, hit them with everything we've got.'

With that the surface of the Machari ship turned into one big explosion, but that is still not enough to put down the metal behemoth still spewing out small craft; now only thing we can hope for is that we can blow it up fast enough before we get overwhelmed.

‘There are less of the small craft coming in, looks like we’ve hit one of their hangar bays,’ I hear someone call out.

‘Good,’ comes Zael’s response, ‘but this isn’t over yet. Keep at it!’

Several painfully long minutes pass and then, finally, there is a huge fireball that gets quickly snuffed out by the vacuum of space, leaving only a field of debris where the Machari ship used to be. There is much rejoicing. Our victory celebration is short-lived however.

Now we finally get to listen to all the damage and casualty reports that come flooding in and it does not look good. Fights are still going on all around the ship—the Machari drowning us in their numbers just as they did in space, some have even made it to the core.

Just when I thought today couldn’t get any worse.

‘This is the Captain speaking,’ a voice issues forth from the intercom, ‘all hands to your designated escape pods: we are evacuating.’

Just had to jinx it, didn’t I? Spirits, is the damage done to the ship really that bad? My mind is trying to conjure an image of what could have happened. Then it hits me: *the core.*

It is Zael’s voice that pulls me from my reverie: ‘You all heard the man, get moving!’

Just as he says those words the room explodes into activity as everyone is trying to get where they are supposed to be as quickly as possible. I do so too, no need to linger. Luckily our section was not hit by the boarding craft so our way to the pods is rather uneventful. On my way I drop by my room to get my lucky medallion, a gift from my father from when I joined the crew.

Ok, nothing else to do here, time to go.

<‘Dark Gods damn it!’>

<‘Doctor! Language!’>

The voices are back. The Elder and the Female.

<‘You’d be frustrated too, I’ve already scanned this corpse twenty times, and every time the thrice-damned machine shows a picture of a banana and insists that’s not a banana, but a female phreek.’>

The Elder sounds irritated.

<‘Alright then, I have two questions though. First: what is a banana? And second: what is a phreek?’>

<‘Banana is a Terran fruit, and phreek is a small ungulate native to Rivai.’>

<‘But, that does not make any sense.’>

The Female sounds confused. If only I knew what were they talking about.

<‘Have the boys working on opening the other pods, leave the blinking one for last; I’ve got me some good ol’ fashioned alien autopsies to do.’>

I wish I could reach out to learn more about my . . . captors? Saviours? I’m not sure myself; so weak, it’s getting more difficult to keep myself conscious with each passing moment. I feel that my grasp is slipping once again.

The escape pods, lovingly referred to as the freezer because of the integrated stasis units put in there to conserve resources, thus allowing for survival over prolonged periods of time. To say everyone’s spirits are low would be an understatement.

‘All this work and for nothing,’ grumbles Jaela. Being down was so unlike her.

‘Look, I know it looks grim . . .’ I start in a feeble attempt to console her.

‘I have to agree with Jaela on this one,’ adds Baen, ‘we did our best and it wasn’t enough.’

Spirits, you really are a ray of sunshine.

‘Don’t worry we’re still alive and we sent a message to the nearest colony,’ *at least someone has to remain optimistic*, ‘they’ll pick us up and it’ll be back to business before you know it.’

I see Baen rolling his eyes: ‘Sorry for not sharing your optimism.’

To this I can only let out a defeated sigh. *Baen, the ever-pessimist.*

‘See you on the other side,’ says Jaela as we climb into our freezers.

There are six stasis units per pod: one of which is always used as a storage unit for the rations and equipment the survivors might need to protect them from the ravages of time. So there are five of us: me, Jaela, Baen, and two ghaemonhe troops accompanying us. One last look on the chronometer before the long sleep: 4012405.24.9.

<‘We’re losing it.’>

The Youngster’s voice is clear, as if no longer muffled by the pod’s protective shell.

<‘Watch the life-signs, report any changes however minor; I’ve got no idea what’s normal for these folks, but this one shows all the tell-tale signs of severe malnutrition. Where are those lazy lab rats?’> *There is worry in the Elder’s voice.* <‘Oh, and ignore the bananas.’>

<‘How long do you think they have been out there Doc?’>

<‘The people in Xenotech have determined that those pods are between twenty and twenty-one millennia old.’>

Even the Female’s here.

<‘That long, huh? I bet archeotech division is going berserk over this.’>

Strange, I’m out of the pod, and yet I can’t feel anything. My mind is racing, more than ever before. *Could this be . . . ?*

<‘Ah, here you are. I need you to replicate the biochemical composition of what’s in the yellow box. And I need it yesterday.’>

They say your brain is the most active just before death . . . *Spirits, am I dying?!*

Fun fact: it is actually easier to achieve biological immortality than it is to achieve faster-than-light travel. We just do not die of old age. This makes the mere thought of the end of one’s own life both incredibly fascinating and utterly terrifying. *Will I join the Spirits of the Ancestors and guide future generations, or will I just fade away into nothingness?*

<‘Alright, here goes. Now it all depends on our guest. There’s nothing more I can do.’>

Sleep sounds like a really good idea right now.

My dream is interrupted by a sound of activity near me. *A dream; haven’t had those in a while.* The sound causes me to try opening my eyes—it’s difficult: I can lift

my eyelids only a little bit, but I can feel my body again. A thought of relief pops into my mind: *I'm alive.*

I haven't seen any of the aliens to whom I owe my life yet, but I've heard them plenty of times; quite often they would just come here and babble something in that tongue of theirs. Either ignorant of the fact that I can't understand a word of what they are saying, or they simply don't care. I think it's a bit of both.

I'm staring at a strange ceiling, lying on an unfamiliar bed, a tray filled with various foodstuffs, *at least I hope it's food*, is laying on a nightstand next to me, and an empty container next to the stand. *Hmm, I wonder what this one is for?*

Milan Kovalčík

“I am a student of translation and interpreting. I am that kind of person who probably reads too much, has a vivid imagination, and possesses the foolish notion that he can write. All in all, I like to tell stories; regardless of whether they are real or not: and if somebody likes them, then that for me is the greatest reward.”

The Island

War, war changes people. In war a person is capable of doing things he wouldn't ever consider doing in order to survive. I did things I am not proud of, but I survived, and when the war ended for me, I thought I can rust and die in peace. How wrong I was. As it turned out, War wasn't even close to being finished with me; and if I learned one thing, it is that war is eternal and doesn't change... regardless of where you are. Even in different planes of existence.

Prologue

July 3rd, 1948 Boston, Massachusetts

A dull pain shot through my head.

It was raining again, the day barely started, and it was clear that it wouldn't be a good one, either. I just stood there, staring out of the window, not really seeing anything. I tried to gently massage the hurting area around the place where my left eye used to be. In weather like this it hurt.

I heard the ding of the door and looked up. The guy who delivers the mail came. He dropped the assorted letters for the company to the secretary, tossed a few words back and forth with her—but he didn't leave, as he normally does—he stopped for a second and rummaged through his bag. He looked at me as if I were the only other person present, and asked:

“Are you Jack Fox?”—scrutinizing me.

I just grunted an affirmative and he threw a slim manila envelope on my desk. And with the obligatory Have-a-nice-day, he left.

I didn't know it then, but this unremarkable event changed my life forever.

With a sigh, I lifted the envelope.

From Chile?

I opened it. Inside I found a photo, showing rocky islands with a red circle around one of them. On the back was written ‘Tierra del Fuego, U-196’ and a few weird symbols. Some kind of code? They seemed familiar. It was signed on the bottom by one J. J. O’Malley.

Now that’s a name I hadn’t heard for in some time. I’d known him since we went to high school together, where they called us The Malarkey Machine. When the war began we enlisted in the British Royal Air Force together and we served as RAF fighter pilots; during the Battle of Britain in the same squadron, till J.J. got injured and later, after he recovered, was transferred to some kind of special operations unit. And after I finished my tour, I was transferred to the US Army Air Force’s 7th Photographic Reconnaissance and Mapping Group, where I spent most of my service. I was an ideal candidate for them, due to my previous service with the RAF where I was used to the photo reconnaissance equipment we used in the Spitfires. And I met J.J. again, during my service in the 7th; this time he was serving as a liaison between the OSS and us. Thanks to his recommendation, I got my current job, after I got injured and lost my eye on a recon mission in 1944 and was discharged on a medical furlough. I knew that after the war he continued his work in the OSS, now CIA, and last thing I heard about him was that he had supposedly disappeared off the Earth’s surface two years ago—chasing some Nazi ghosts.

I flipped the photo over again and studied the picture.

Tierra del Fuego, the southernmost tip of the South American mainland, across the Strait of Magellan, consisting of a number of smaller islands, my mind supplied. The Land of Fire, a very fitting name for such an inhospitable and now politically unstable region, as Chile and Argentina had started rattling sabers over which part belonged to who, now that oil reserves had been found there. I dug through my memory, the symbols were familiar, and then it hit me like a freight train: they looked like our written version of the old vocal codes we were using during the Battle of Britain to tell where German planes were over the radio so that Germans listening didn’t catch on.

So what was J.J. up to? And for what he did need such a rusty piece of scrapheap like me? I didn't know—and in particular, I didn't feel the need to find out.

Funny, how things work: life had just left its karate lesson and was ready to kick my ass into motion.

I spent the rest of the day cataloguing the photos I made during my last flight so they could be used in the process of creating a map. And then I finally went home, to my small apartment.

When I came onto my floor I reached into my pocket and froze. The lock on my door had been forced open. I reached in my pocket for a handkerchief and gently nudged the door open. Inside I could see that my apartment was a mess.

Somebody had done a really thorough search through it. I looked around, cataloguing what was missing, but I couldn't ascertain it in all that mess. I walked to the small cabinet where I stored my liquor. Luckily they didn't break my bottles. I chose a flask of whiskey and dug out a glass and poured myself a big stiff drink. My headache was just getting started. I took two painkillers from the bottle and popped them in my mouth and chased them with the whiskey. I poured myself another drink and I walked over to my desk, where I started to sift through the papers scattered all over the table before finding the phone I was looking for.

I sat on the cleared edge of the desk, glass in one hand, as I took the receiver in my other and tested if it was still working. It was, to my surprise. I just reached for the base to dial the Police, when I heard something... as if several men were grouping in front of my broken door. And then opened it: my only eye narrowed and I scowled, as two hulking brutes entered the room. These men were huge, at least seven feet, I barely had a chance against one, but against two? Not good at all.

One of them spoke in a heavy Spanish accent:

"Mister Fox, today you received an envelope, give it to us and you will live. Resist and we..." His partner finished the threat by noisily smacking his meaty fist into his other hand and cracking his knuckles.

"Okay, okay, keep your shirt on," I grumbled, lowering the receiver.

Yeah, like I would believe them, I might be ripe for scrapping but I would be damned if I sold my skin cheaply, I thought darkly.

When I returned the phone to its cradle I did it deliberately in slow motion, as if I were reaching into my inner jacket pocket, when I suddenly and violently flung the contents of my glass—and the glass—into the face of the nearest brute. I didn't wait to see if I made a hit as I rolled over the table and yanked the drawer open, pulling out a war souvenir I bought from an airborne sergeant for a box of whiskey. A fully automatic C96 Mauser. I brought the gun up and pointed it in the direction of the two brutes. And pulled the trigger.

The noise of the gunshots was followed by a surprised yelp, heh, I managed to at least clip one of them. They scrambled and were out of the room, faster than I could get back on my feet.

I looked at the messed up room that now had the nice addition of spilled whiskey, glass shards and a blood trail. I had to figure out what the hell J.J. had dragged me into. This was shaping as really not my day.

Chapter One: Visit from the Past

Okay this was bad, ran through my head as I looked around, assuring myself that those two were gone. I had to figure this out, and fast, but first things first. I had mentally resigned myself that to get most of my answers directly, I had to visit Tierra del Fuego, and so I pulled out an old suitcase. I didn't have much that I needed to take from my flat on such a trip so I threw some spare clothes, my checkbook and all the cash I had in my apartment together with my passport, a box of spare rounds and spare magazines for my gun. I tucked my gun into an underarm holster and threw a trench coat and fedora over myself.

As I left my apartment, some small part of my mind was telling, no yelling, at me that it was stupid to go into this, but did I have a choice? No, not really. But I couldn't go as half-cocked as I was, so I jumped in my Chevy and pulled into the night. I knew exactly where I could get some answers. It wasn't that late and he should be at home already. He didn't live far, but I decided to take the scenic route. In case I was followed. Just as I rounded the corner of my street, two police cars came by, sirens screeching, probably one of my neighbors heard the gunshots and called the boys in blue.

My paranoia kicked into high gear as the car behind me took the same turn as me again, for the fifth time. And we practically just circled through the neighborhood aimlessly.

Well maybe it was the whiskey with painkillers talking, but I jammed the pedal to the metal, and my car rocketed forward. Damn the consequences.

One wild ride through the fair city of Boston (and one of its parks) later, I was sure I was no longer followed and I pulled my now battered car up to an nondescript house and knocked at the door.

The door lock rattled and the door was opened with the surprised words. “Jack, what is it? Can’t it wait till tomorrow?”

“No Frank, it can’t. Please, let me in, we need to talk.” I heard him grumbling underneath his breath as he let me in and ushered me into the living room. His raised eyebrow told me that he had noticed that I was armed. He poured me a drink and gestured me to take a seat as he settled into his own armchair.

“So, Jack, pray tell me what are you doing here, in the middle of the night and packing?” He said as he sipped his drink.

“Frank. It’s J.J. O’Malley: what do you know about his current whereabouts... or mission?” I asked unceremoniously, fully aware of his position as a senior CIA agent.

“Jack, you know I can’t talk about this...” he started but I interrupted him.

“Hell, Frank, don’t give me that bull. We have been through a lot together and today, my flat was broken up, I was accosted by two Spanish brutes that tried to rearrange my face and worse, and when I got rid of them I was followed through the whole damn city of Boston. And everything has to do with O’Malley. So, at least give me a bone to work with. Please.” The funny thing was that I was getting rather excited about all this; it was so much more different and exciting than just desk jockeying and rare occasional photo flights.

Frank and I had a long history. I was shot down in 1941 over France, but I somehow managed to evade German capture and ended up with French Resistance. And during our escape from France back to Britain I was helping an injured OSS agent.

Frank was that agent.

At his continued silence I added:

“Look, Frank, you owe me, so help me out here and we call ourselves even.” I said tiredly.

Frank Foutaine gave me a long searching look before he sighed:

“Fine.” He grunted as he lifted himself up and went over to his file cabinet. And after rummaging through it, he took one slim file from it. He sat back into his place and opened the file and he quickly leafed through it, pulling out a photo which he placed on the table.

And spoke:

“When the war ended, we started sorting through the captured German equipment and found out that one of their Cargo Submarines U-196 was missing. We started to look for it. It wasn’t listed as destroyed in the German files. It wasn’t captured by either the Soviets or the British. We didn’t have the ship’s logbook, but we did have the dates of the ship’s arrivals and departures during the war as well as its cargo lists.

It was strange: not only the dates, but the cargo as well. In the beginning it was shipping construction materials, fuel, food, supplies, munitions and later even two light tanks and a navy observational plane were shipped out. And then it was returning with cargo like swords, gems, and gold statues. We didn’t know what to make of it. And then there was its crew. They were leaving quite a lot of men behind, returning only with skeleton crew. Disappearing for prolonged periods. Where did they go? We don’t know. How many people were taken? We don’t know: although we guess it was over a thousand, and most of them were SS. And all of that was headed under one project... run by these three.” He tapped on the photo on the table.

I picked it up. It showed two high-ranking SS officers and one from the Kriegsmarine.

“It was taken in 1943 in Berlin when they were on their last briefing, with Der Führer together. The one on the left is Hermann von Guttenmeyer. He was an SS-Oberführer, as well-known for his sadistic methods as he was for his interest in archeology and the occult. He has a doctorate in archeology from the University of Berlin and he founded this project in 1937.

The next one is SS-Obersturmbannführer Gunter Mann, an engineer. He was a bunker builder before he joined the project shortly after the war started and here our knowledge ends. The last of the trio is Kapitänleutnant Franz Schenenbraun, an old sea wolf. He served in the First World War and joined this project in the 1938, and he commanded the U-196.

We know next to nothing about this project and that scares us. Wherever they were and whatever they had found it can't be anything good. There was no paperwork trail. No report was ever made on paper; if they reported anything, it was only directly in person to Der Führer. Nothing has heard about them since 1944. J.J. was assigned to investigate this project. He didn't have any conclusive results at first, but then he found some rumors that a cargo submarine has been being seen sometimes in the Tierra del Fuego for the past four years, and he went to investigate undercover six months ago. But his investigation has been canceled, due to the political situation in the region." Frank finished. I was idly playing with a cigarette in my hand, as I was looking at the photo. I had a bad feeling about these three.

"Frank: what about J.J.?" I asked carefully.

He just shrugged, "The official investigation was canceled, but we started a covert one, and that one was cancelled three months ago, as it was decided that any covert US operation might be harmful for the US oil interests in the region and we were ordered to pull out all our operatives from there. We sent him a notice, but we haven't heard anything from him in four months and we cannot send anybody into that area. That's all I can tell you."

"Thanks Frank, I will look into this." I got up to leave, but Frank's voice stopped me:

"You are really going to try to find him." Frank said it more like a statement than a question. "I spilled. Now it's your turn"

I caved and started to speak:

"I got a strange piece of mail from him today. And those thugs wanted it." I pulled out the photograph from J.J. and handed it to Frank.

He looked at it, deep in thought as he tapped his finger on the written code. "It looks familiar," he mused.

"It looks like the code we used during the Battle of Britain," I supplied. He looked at it again. "Any idea what it means?"

Now that was a tricky question... I scratched my head, I sucked on my teeth. I waited. I answered:

"Well, the best I can tell, it's code for the position of the circled island. The wording is as follows: 'ISLAND5 NE STAINEDGLASSISLAND' but I don't understand the rest."

Frank sighed and rubbed his jaw. "So I guess he got our message after all, and was calling for help... by someone unconnected to the CIA."

"Can't imagine why he picked a rustbucket like me." I snorted, derisively.

I didn't like the amused look I received from Frank; then he cocked his head and his eyes lit up with an idea:

"Okay, Jack. I owe J.J. one too. We will do this: I will get you a new identity, a cover, a plane with a radio and any imaginable gear you might need. You will go there. And investigate."

Wait, what? Was I just volunteered? What in the name of Harry S. Truman did I just get myself into?

Monika Liová

„My family thinks I am shy and boring; a bookworm (never mind my martial arts and fencing lessons). My friends think I am completely insane and suffering from multiple split.“

Seeing Red

His father was dead now, so it was too late to make amends. Mike shifted in his seat, the uncomfortably long flight back home was just as he had expected – uncomfortable and way too long. He had had enough time to ponder and regret and – to some degree – feel guilty.

He should have called him, at least once a month. Or a year, at least.

The captain's order to fasten their seatbelts and prepare for landing was a very welcome distraction. Mike closed his eyes and ignored the ringing in his ears. His traitorous mind turned back to his father.

The truth was, and had been for more than 11 years, that he hated his father with a passion. He had hated him for most of his teenage years and had never forgiven him. Even now, being the sensible young man he was and very much over his childish emotions, he could not bring himself to simply call, let alone visit his father's house.

Sick and tired of other people's constant company, their squeaky voices and unpleasant body odors, he rushed through the security checks and hurried to reclaim his luggage.

“Mike, Mike! Over here! Mike! Come on, Mike Epon!”

Someone was loudly calling his name and it took a second to register. Mike turned to the voice and watched his mother's husband approach. Ted was tall and broad in the shoulders, a moving mass of muscles, and people parted before him. Mike was reminded of the sea and a steamship splitting the waves.

“Hey there. Need some help?” he said and took his bag. “Can’t say you look well, you know. You’re a bit green. Rough landing?”

“Yeah, how are you?”

“Well enough. Your Ma is ecstatic you’re finally here. I’ve been listening to her complaints for months now. Sure, the circumstances aren’t that great, but...”

By the ‘circumstances’ Ted had meant the funeral. Being the third party, he didn’t have much to say about the situation. He hadn’t know George Epton personally and wisely refused to take any part in the talks and gossiping Mike’s family from his mother side had been so fond of.

Mike shrugged and followed him through the entrance.

Breathing the cool early morning air, he shuddered and looked around. He felt numb and tired; tired from the long journey back here and tired from feeling the emotions he couldn’t exactly sort out.

“How’s everyone been?” Mike asked after several minutes of a silent ride. Ted glanced at him and slowed down. The roads had frosted over and Ted was always the responsible one.

“Well, you know – the usual. Grandma has kittens; your sisters are in puberty. She doesn’t fancy the idea of being a great-grandmother all that much.”

“No wonder.”

“Yeah, I feel too young to be a grandpa myself. We don’t get much sleep these days. I’ve got my shotgun at ready to scare off most of the boys. They don’t dare come near our house.”

“And Ma? Not having kittens?”

Ted laughed. “She thankfully gave up worrying... well, worrying too much, otherwise she would have turned gray by now. Probably remembers how she was at that age. The girls take after her anyway, so it’s pretty obvious they ignore anything we say or do. Ginny’s favorite escape route is through the second story bathroom window.”

“And Laura’s?”

“The garage. At least I don’t have to worry about her breaking her neck while parading on the roof. But she dates – the horror! – a leather-clad biker.”

It was Mike's turn to laugh and Ted winked at him.

"Anyway, how long you're staying?"

"Only for the funeral."

"Ma hopes you could be here for a week or so. I'm sure your colleagues manage to goof off even without you."

Mike sighed and shook his head. Ted was grinning. The two of them had always had a great relationship, surprisingly. Mike was a bookworm, and proud of it, while Ted was a sport obsessed maniac.

"Well, I'm sorry..."

"George and Elise moved out of the town three years ago, you know. You can't run into her even if you'd try."

Mike shifted uncomfortably and gazed out the window. He hadn't known, just like he hadn't known about the cancer. He hadn't answered the phone whenever his father or Elise had called and he never talked about them.

Ted gave him a knowing look. It was no secret that Mike had the unfortunate pleasure of meeting his father's wife every time he went to town. It was not a big town in the first place and they did seem to share the same interests and tastes. They had occupied the same places at the same times and it had freaked Mike out.

He had been avoiding Elise even more than his father, and that's something. He couldn't stand looking at her.

"Where they... she lives?"

"In the country. She comes shopping to town once a week. You should know that a lot of things changed when your father got sick."

"Yeah, sure."

"Hey, buddy, I know you all think... Well, let's be honest, ok? Lay off her, are we clear? None of us can even imagine what she'd done for your Dad, Mike. You know I've never joined in the bad-mouthing. Guess why? 'Cause your Ma and all of the old wicked hags were talking rubbish, that's why."

"So, you're turning into Elise's new white knight?"

"You should stop seeing red any time someone mentions her name."

Mike swallowed and unclenched his hands, stubbornly avoiding looking at Ted.

"That's not true."

"You've never been a good liar."

"And you've never even talked to her!"

"I've met her a few times." Ted said calmly and Mike turned his head towards him so quickly that his neck cracked.

"What? When?"

"We've run into each other in the mall, had a coffee, talked. I've told your mother what I think, too, so don't worry about that."

"What does Ma think about you hanging around with that gold-digging whore?"

"Mike! Elise stayed with your father until the end. For her, it has never been about the money. You all wronged her! Again and again and she never said a word in her defense. I'm sick of how you all treat her."

"Are you what? Fucking her now, too?"

"Now be really careful there, kid. Don't insult me, and don't insult her. For God's sake, if you can't be civil to her, you better not even go to the funeral."

They drove in stuffy silence for another 20 minutes. Mike was seeing red.

The funeral was the next morning at half past ten. Mike, after several very vivid dreams, had given up sleep at five a.m. and wandered down to the kitchen. Sitting there in the semi-dark with only a spot light switched on in the corner, he brooded.

His conversation with Ted had been bothering him for the rest of the day. As he'd been lazing around, annoying his sisters, or surviving through the family dinner, it had been always somewhere at the edge of his consciousness.

He had acted like an idiot and was actually surprised Ted hadn't smacked him over the head. It seemed as if Mike was far from over his childish emotions and he was angry at himself because of it. It had been years and he was not a kid anymore.

He heated up a mug of milk and put a spoon of honey in it, slowly stirring.

With this familiar motion came memories of other sleepless nights. As a boy, he had loved his father and managed to tolerate Elise. In fact, he had actually liked her.

She had been the only one who had ever expressed any interest in his comic books and all the stupid games he had loved at that time. She had listened patiently while he had rambled on and on, and she had asked questions and made comments as if she had been really paying attention. Maybe she truly had.

They had often met in the kitchen at night; Mike in his striped pajamas with a comic book clutched to his side, lured towards the light, and Elise sitting there with a mug of hot milk with honey, reading her own book. It had become something of a ritual. Every time he had spent the weekend with his father, he had had this night date with her.

Mike frowned into his mug. He had liked Elise. He had liked her a lot; she had been his first crush.

Sipping the milk, he burnt his tongue.

One night, he'd been twelve and half at that time, she hadn't been sitting in the kitchen. It had been later than usual and Mike had been afraid he had missed her. But there had been a flicker of light in the living room, so he had crept closer. The door hadn't been closed properly by accident. Nearing the light, he had heard faint noises and muffled voices and he had known he should have stopped. He hadn't.

He put the empty mug in the sink and sighed.

It wasn't their fault he had always turned red every time he had seen Elise afterwards. It wasn't their fault he hadn't been able to look his father in the eye. It wasn't their fault he had been an embarrassed boy who had chosen to avoid them and kept avoiding them, blaming them and hating them for years.

The image of that night had stayed with him and no matter how hard Mike had tried, he simply could not get rid of it. He was certain he never would, anyway.

Mike turned and looked from the window. He would like to have some snow, it would be fun to push Laura or Ginny, or both, into it head first. He had missed his little sisters, he had missed his mother and Ted. He hadn't missed his grandmother

that much, she was a little bit too preachy for his tastes, but he was glad he had seen her in the afternoon.

He had done everything in his power to stay away from the town, so he would not meet Elise or his Dad, and now it all seemed so childish, so stupid. It had cost him, hadn't it?

Mike nodded to himself, determined to be a better brother, a better son and in doing so, a better man. But first things first: he did owe an apology to Elise.

The day was cold and cloudy. Mike didn't know what he was supposed to feel as he watched the priest; he wasn't devastated by grief. It felt like he was burying a stranger and it was this thought that made him feel remorse and sadness.

As the ceremony progressed, he became nervous, and glanced around, in an attempt to mask his actual reason for averting his eyes from the coffin so much. Elise Epton stood slightly to his left, with a noticeable empty space between her and Mike's family.

She was there alone, with only a handful of her friends who had known George Epton huddled behind her. No family of her own. She appeared to be lost in memories, her eyes bright and glassy. Mike observed her and couldn't help but stare.

Elise was small and lithe. At first glance, she looked like a stronger gust of wind could blow her away, yet there was something about her that gave off an impression of an unmovable rock. She was steady, solid, someone you could lean on.

The reason why Mike kept staring, however, was shallower; Elise looked almost the same as he remembered he, she hadn't aged much. The features of her face were more striking though, and hair longer, her curves fuller – and Mike was fascinated by the way her coat fitted her.

When it was over and all the condolences were expressed, he cautiously approached. The moment his feet started to move, however, Elise headed towards the exit, followed and quickly surrounded by her friends.

Mike, ignoring his own family, hurried and called: "Ah, Elise?"

She stopped and turned and he shoved his hands into his pockets. They were all staring at him quizzically.

“Hi.”

“Hello, Michael.” Her voice was calm, deeper than he expected, and she eyed him warily. Her words stung: “Long time no see.”

“Yeah, listen...” He shifted and took a step closer. One big guy from behind Elise was glaring at him and Mike was happily glaring back with all his might. “Could we... talk?”

“If you wish. Don’t wait up, guys, I’ll meet you at my place. Jake, you got the keys, right?”

“Sure, Hon.” The big oaf Jake squeezed her hand and the group walked away.

Elise watched them go with a soft fond smile and Mike watched her with a distasteful expression.

“Ok, what can I-”

“Dad’s not lying in the grave more than 10 minutes, for God’s sake! How long you fu-fool around with that big ugly ogre?”

She simply blinked at him, all the softness from her face disappearing at once. “I can’t really say it’s a pleasure to see you again, darling. So, what you wanted exactly?”

“Well, answer me. How long have you cheated on my Dad?”

“It would be nice if you could keep your voice down a bit. This is a cemetery, not a football pitch.”

“Fine! Fine!” Mike hissed.

“Thank you. Considering you have no right to question me, I don’t see any reason to answer you. Was there anything else, darling?” Her forefinger tapped on her lips and her eyes, darkened by anger, pierced him.

Mike took a calming breath. This was not the way he’d planned to act.

“Don’t treat me like a boy, I’m an adult.”

“You certainly behave like one.”

He felt his face heating up, and his ears turned a bright red. A beat of silence followed and then Elise turned on her heel and took a step away.

Before she could move further, Mike smacked himself over the head and hurried after her once more.

"Look, sorry, ok? Sorry, I was just... seeing red, I guess. You're absolutely right, I can't question you like this."

"Hm-hm." She slowed down, but didn't stop and didn't even glance at him, purposefully marching out of the cemetery. Her heels were clicking rapidly, an angry staccato.

"Well, but... you know, it looks bad, you and that... that guy, at the funeral. Bad."

She nodded her head and finally decided to look at Mike. They were nearing the parking lot now. "It's still not your business."

"I guess so, and I'm really sorry I snapped at you like that. Really, Elise."

"Ok, you are forgiven, then. It's not like I don't appreciate the chance to chat with you, but we usually don't do that, so what's the matter? Do you need something?"

She was being just polite, he knew. He could see her set jaw and the annoyance in her eyes. She was turned to face him only partly.

"Actually, yeah?" He offered weakly and shifted. Then he forced his body to hold still, and took another long calming breath. Then he looked down at her and swallowed.

"I would like to have a chat with you." The words were out of his mouth before his brain had any chance to filter them.

"We are talking right now, Mike."

"Uh, yeah, but I mean... over coffee or something. I'm staying here for another week, so... if you have time, we could... talk more." He was babbling and it was embarrassing. A mental slap followed.

"Why?"

"I've screwed up. I want to just talk. How you're doing, how Dad... was." He offered a weak smile. "Who Jake the ogre is... No, just kidding. Please?"

Elise was silent and she watched him thoughtfully.

"Ted said you do drink coffee. I would be insulted if you would drink it with that sporty madman and not with a fellow bookworm."

She grinned slightly. "Ask nicely."

"Pretty, pretty please?"

“All right, but only because you are sweet. Meet me at five tomorrow in the café near the library. You know which one.”

“It’s still open?”

“And they still make one hell of a milkshake. Though I guess you grew out of milkshakes by now. Bye, Mike.”

Elise waved and departed, once looking over her shoulder at him with a dumfounded look in her face.

Mike stood where she had left him, mulling over how exactly he had managed to make an ass of himself yet again. Twice in two days – that was his personal record. He usually did behave like a reasonable, intelligent man of twenty five. Finding no answer, he slowly moved towards the other side of the parking lot, where his mother and Ted were waiting.

He had come ten minutes earlier and sat in a corner near the door. His mother had been very happy when he had announced he would stay for a whole week. His boss, on the other hand, had not been, but he hadn’t made a fuss about Mike’s longer absence.

Elise was running late. At ten after five Mike began to get worried that she had forgotten about their meeting and he felt like a teenager on his first date with the prettiest girl in school. Only a moment later, she came rushing through the door.

“Hi, sorry I’m late.” She smiled and sat down on the chair opposite Mike’s. “So, have you ordered anything?”

“Just water. I wondered if you still drink milk with honey and if we could talk the staff into preparing us some.”

“You bet. How have you been?”

“Oh, I’m doing fine, despite what an idiot I really am.” Mike chuckled and shrugged his shoulders. Then he became serious. “Let me apologize to you, Elise. I was a stupid kid and well, I have no excuse for making things so difficult for you and Dad.”

"I won't pretend it didn't sting, Mikey, but it's in the past and it doesn't matter now, does it?" Elise offered, and scanned the menu. Her words were surprisingly generous and Mike nodded, inwardly smiling.

"You are right, I guess. Still, I want to make it up to you. We were... friends, right?"

"We were." She smiled thinly and put the menu down, giving him her full attention.

"And..." Mike found the color of her eyes very distracting. "Do you think we could be friends again?"

"We can but I have some conditions. You would need to come home from time to time, you know, and answer the phone."

"I will. Actually, I will visit here regularly from now on, and... if you would like, I'll call you whenever you want me to. Deal?"

She was taken aback by his behavior, he could tell. They hadn't spoken in years and the last time they had, he had been screaming at her how she had ruined everything.

"Deal." She answered finally.

The waitress came then, and Mike managed to persuade her into bringing them two glasses of hot milk with honey. Smugly pleased, he turned to Elise and was startled by the laughter that escaped her.

"That was an impressive feat, darling."

"Hey, could you stop calling me that? It sounds weird."

"How so?"

"We're not a couple and no one is buying you are my mother."

"You spoil all the fun, Mike. All of it."

"Oh, I'm so, so sorry. Anyway... I wanted to ask you; there's this new movie based on my favorite comic. Come with me, tomorrow. Could be fun and you know what? That's exactly what you need. Fun. Your eyes are so sad, Elise."

Mike fell silent and smiled softly at her. It was true – he had never seen eyes so sad, so old in a face so young.

“Where did that little boy disappear, Mike?” Now she watched him with an expression of a predator watching its prey, her eyes sharp, her features closed off. She didn’t know what he wanted and obviously disliked it.

“He grew up. I told you, I’m not a boy anymore. The childish emotions are completely gone, Elise. Completely. So, say ‘yes, Mike, pick me up at seven’.”

When she didn’t answer him for a few moments, nervous, he teased: “Will Jake let you?”

She searched his face, peered into his eyes, and he felt uncomfortable because he wasn’t sure what exactly she could see.

“Ok, darling. We have a date tomorrow, pick me up at seven.”

“Great.” Mike grinned like a fool, but this time, he didn’t mind being an ass.

“It’s only a movie, Mike. Don’t get too excited, I will probably drive you mad with questions about what is happening and why.” A strange emotion flickered in her gaze and she shifted, turning away from him. “I’m not sleeping with Jake, by the way. I love your father still.”

His smile faltered and Mike slowly moved his hands from the table into his lap. There he fisted them and managed to grin weakly.

“I... can see it. You know, Elise, you are good at driving me mad. Now you even have a permission to do it.”

She looked at him and smiled painfully. Her glance lasted only a moment and Mike found a pity shimmering in her eyes. She saw right away what had taken him years to understand.

“Well, what should we have to eat? Cheesecake?” Elise snatched up the menu again and busied herself with it. Mike wondered if she was as uncomfortable as he was. Their hot milk arrived and he stirred it, watching Elise intensely. He was glad she was not paying attention to him, so she could not see the way his eyes roamed over her face, stopping always on her lips.

Mike understood now how his Dad could have fallen for her, a girl only eight years older than his own son. Mike understood perfectly now, that age is just a number and crushes come and go. But you just can’t get rid of that nuisance called love.

Ondřej Papuga

Masterpiece #1

This day I feel like a wild rabbit
who just wanders through the forest
day by day by huntsmen hunted.

This rabbit is a gambling one.
He plays with life not smart enough.
One day will end his little fairytale,
but not for now cause the rabbit doesn't care.

One day he'll suffer,
one day he'll mind
but right now it's fun time.

Life is too short,
and claws too sharp,
the ugly rabbit still doesn't mind
he's now busy stomping butterflies.

Masterpiece #3

But there was fun oh it was great.
When i came home there was my pet,
making strange noise, wanting his lunch
and in the morning waking us up.
I loved him and he loved me back,
he was Freddy the guinea pig.
One summer day at aunt's house
Freddy was eating the grass outside
when a Tom cat approached his cage,
he went right up, face to face.
A few looks exchanged, a grimace was made
in animal world the sign of respect.
But Freddy was bored, he didn't care
that the big cat might eat him as well.
He was so brave, he slashed the cat's nose.
The stupid cat still has a scar from his strength.
I saved Freddy, their relationship wouldnt go well,
he rewarded me with love in advance.

One day i came, i came back home,
Freddy was gone and I alone

Ondřej Papuga and Dr. Renée Ruderman at poetry writing workshop session, 3. 6. '14



Adam Petrásek

Be Fit

‘Everybody knows the two basic steps behind keeping his or her body fit and in shape. Everyone knows them. Each of you who is sitting here knows them. The first one is, exercise. You’ve got to exercise. You’ve got to run, you’ve got to go to the gym, you’ve got to sweat, bring the pain and do all of this regularly. And you’ll be fit. Second is, and I think you all know what it is, yes, it’s a healthy diet. Eat fruits, vegetables, no fat, have enough proteins, don’t overeat and don’t eat junk food. Abide by those two basic rules and you’ll be fit. You’ll be a strong, beautiful individual with the world at your feet.’

‘But I know one more step. A step you’ve never heard of. The third step. The step that’s gonna put the first two aside. In fact if you obey the rule of this step, you can forget the first two. I’m gonna tell you that rule and I’m hundred percent sure you all will thank me after the first month. The rule is simple. Every morning you get up and just drink down this pill. This pill that’s gonna change your life once and for all. No more running, no more sweating in the gym and no more worrying about food. You can forget all of that. The only thing you’ll have to do is drink it down and wait. This pill, which has been made in cooperation with the best scientists and top athletes in the world is what you need. It is modern exercise. It is the future. It is you in shape.’

‘Bullshit,’ said Tim. Clicking the screen of the phone, he turned the video off. ‘No pill is gonna help you be fit. You’ve gotta work out. Work out and pump iron. Nothing else, no pill. Look at me. What do you think is behind this? Hours in the gym. Nothing more. If you wanna be buff, just exercise,’ he said and cast his eyes down to the phone in his hand.

‘Yeah, fine but you take some pills, don’t you,’ said Marty.

‘Well, yes, but that’s something else,’ said Tim. ‘They are not some magic pills that do all the work. I’ve got to exercise and so do you if you wanna be somebody.’

'I know and I really try to push through the beginning,' said Marty searching in the photo gallery. 'Look, every night I take a picture of myself. I have done this for a month already. You see? There is something, don't you think?'

Tim leaned over the table. 'Nice, man,' he said with a smile and nodded his head. 'That's it. You better carry on with this instead of buying crap from the Internet. The only thing you could take at this point are fat burners, to speed it up a little. If you want I've got some spares.'

'Well, yeah. I will see, you know,' said Marty and looked around the place. There was only a man at a jukebox and a waitress coming to their table.

'Two more for you boys?' she asked.

Raising his head from the phone, Tim handed her an empty glass. 'Yes,' he said.

'Yeah, thank you,' said Marty and looked back at the waitress heading to the bar. 'That guy's there for like an hour and still didn't pick a song,' he said and turned back to his friend.

'What?' asked Tim with a vacant frown.

'That guy at the jukebox,' said Marty and turned back again.

'Check out this,' said Tim giving Marty a poke with the phone. 'There are some really cool before-after pictures.'

'Yeah,' said Marty and nodded his head. Heavy guitar riff filled the place and Tim watched the guy from the jukebox taking his place at the bar.

'Five more months and I'll send them my photo,' said Marty giving the phone back to Tim.

Tim put it on the table, looked what time it was and rubbed off the dirt from the table with his hand. Marty examined the pictures hanging on the wall next to him. Small black and white pictures of an astronaut, a footballer and a portrait of Albert Einstein.

'Here you are boys,' said the waitress putting the two beers on the table. They both looked at her. 'Thank you,' they said nodding their heads.

'Cheers, man.'

'Cheers.'

'Good beer,' said Marty and tried to settle his glass into the centre of the coaster.

‘Not bad,’ said Tim rubbing his biceps. ‘And what about Mary? How is she?’ he asked.

‘Yeah, cool. You know, all right,’ said Marty gently shaking his head in time with the music and tapping his fingers on the table.’

‘You haven’t killed each other yet?’ asked Tim with a smile and gulped his beer.

‘No. Well we had to get used to each other but, it’s good now,’ said Marty, sipped his beer, he placed it back in the centre of the coaster and tapped along again. ‘And what about Sam?’ he asked.

‘All swell, you know. Nothing to complain about.’

‘Yeah, I saw the pictures you posted. Where were you?’ asked Marty.

‘We went for a ski trip together. I didn’t wanna go by myself, you know,’ said Tim and drank the beer. ‘And, you know, at least I post normal pictures, like... Not like others,’ he said shaking his head.

‘Hell yeah,’ said Marty. ‘Others post such crap. Like it’s really something. I don’t give a shit about their lunch,’ laughed Marty while raising his glass.

‘Or the statuses like, gone to take a shit or cuddling with my honeybee. Oh God,’ exhaled Tim and guzzled down the beer. Having heard the squeak of the door, both of them glanced at the entrance but no one came in. Turning back, Marty swallowed the rest of the drink with a gulp. ‘Hey and did you see the picture Smith posted?’ he asked.

‘The one in the tub?’ said Tim laughing. ‘Yeah. What a dickhead. Tell me, who takes pictures in a tub,’ he shook with mirth and coughed before he finally simmered down. ‘You want one more?’ he asked.

‘Yeah, third’s not gonna hurt,’ said Marty with a grin.

‘I’ll go for a piss and tell her,’ said Tim, put the phone in his pocket and left.

Marty looked around. Once more, he glanced at the pictures on the wall and took out his phone. ‘Anything new?’ he thought to himself and nodded his head to the rhythm trembling with the pub. He clicked the ficon and waiting for the page to load he glanced at the footballer on the wall again. Scrolling down the posts he read, Twenty laws of karma, Not them but you are the master of your life, What are you waiting for now is the time, Dear friends have a nice day. ‘Good thing that positive

thinking,' he thought and rolled down through everything his friends wanted him to know.

'Here you are,' said Tim and put the glass of beer and a shot in front of Marty.

'What is that?' Raising his shoulders he pointed to the table.

'Little something to get it going,' said Tim, grabbed his shot and smacked Marty on the arm. They guzzled down the drinks. 'Fuck, vodka,' said Marty with the wince of disgust. The pub was all quiet again.

'Wash it down with beer,' said Tim.

'I have to, man,' said Marty and flushed the vodka aftertaste down to his stomach.

'Uhh, my back so fucking hurts,' said Tim stretching on the chair and settling down into a comfortable position. 'I went to a gym with a buddy of mine this morning.'

'Let's have another shot, on me. To kill the pain, huh?' said Marty. 'Hey, Miss. Two more shots of vodka please,' he shouted to the bar. 'We're gonna have it today, man,' he said banging his fist on the table.

'Finally some tune again,' said Tim, shaking his shoulders and pointing at the man at the jukebox.

'Good one, man,' shouted Marty to the bar.

'Shame there are no girls here,' said Tim feeling the wheeling sensations in his head. 'Man, I'm so hammered again. Guess that tomorrow morning run's not gonna happen. Again!'

'You dog. Maybe it's better we have a little sausage fest here,' said Marty leaning back in his chair. 'I talked to some girl last week at the club and huuu, good thing I'm such a good boy, otherwise...' he said raising his eyebrows.

'Come on, you wouldn't cheat on Marry, would you?'

'No, I wouldn't, but that time in the club it was like, I dunno. Good thing I'm such a good boy,' said Marty and moved closer to the table.

'Well, I wouldn't cheat on Sam either, you know. But Pete, man. Pete from the gym. Do you know him?' asked Tim playing with the glass.

'I don't know, maybe I have seen him.'

‘He’s the one I’ve been to the gym with today, you know, Pete.’

‘And what about him, huh?’

‘Well, guess what, dude’s got a girlfriend and fucks a bunch of others. All the time,’ said Tim, banging out each syllable with the glass.

‘Well, you know, some people do that but we’re different. We’re like, the good boys. We don’t do that. It’s not worth it,’ balancing on his chair, Marty continued. ‘She’d find out and be pretty fucked up. You’d be fucked up. It’s not worth it. Not a bit. Good boys don’t do that.’ Yelling, ‘Hey, where’s our vodka,’ over to the bar, he quickly grabbed hold of the table and sat normally again.

‘You know what else is fucking crazy. He’s finishing the university this year you know and...’ said Tim.

‘Who?’ asked Marty.

‘Pete. Form the gym.’

‘I thought we’re talking about the girls.’

‘Yeah, yeah, man, but he’s never passed any exam by himself. He like cheated through the three years and got away with that. Such a stupid idiot is gonna be your boss or my boss.’

‘Well, fuck it, man. Nowadays everybody can study and you can see it everywhere. Some stupid wanker bossing you around. Not that I wanna complain. I’m good. I have everything I need. Everything. Just saving up to buy a new phone,’ said Marty.

‘Yeah? And what do you want?’ asked Tim.

‘I don’t know, maybe 6s or some Android,’ said Marty.

‘Cool, man, but you’ve got to be careful ‘cos some dick’ll steal it and you’ll have nothing.’

‘Don’t worry, I will...,’ said Marty and Tim interrupted him.

‘Look man, it’s Pete from the gym. You know him, right?’

Marty looked around. ‘Yes I do, I know him,’ he said.

‘Don’t tell him about the things I told you, ok?’ said Tim and stood up. ‘Hey Pete, come here let’s have a drink,’ he shouted to the bar.

‘I’ll take three shots,’ said Marty.

‘Hey, Pete. That’s Marty,’ said Tim and drank the beer. ‘Come on, show him that freaking pill video. We won’t have to work out anymore you’ll see Pete,’ said Tim and laughing into his glass, drank the rest of the beer.

‘Everybody knows two basic steps...



Eugene

6:30 am

Eugene opened his eyes and raised his face from the pillow. Turning onto to his back, he eased the pressure on his underbelly and tried to get back to sleep. Words started flashing through the dark room of his mind. Boots, books, lectures, morning, water. The lustre of these words lit up his thoughts and the room became more and more lucid. He thought of himself. He thought of the people he knew. He thought of Miles who's at this instant resonating in the room where an empty bed yawns in the opposite corner. He tried to recall tonight's dream but having heard Mother was about to leave for work he only remembered how he used to sleep in her arms. Dazed by her unparalleled scent. The unique scent that he as a child thought had been made in her closet, filled him with anxiety and fear. 'Be quiet baby, come to mummy, don't wake daddy up.' The tidal wave of tears burst out of his eyes and he exposed his naked body to the empty room.

Eugene got to the kitchen in the gloom, and a spotty underwear. He ordered the kettle to get the cooling water back to throbbing and put the two and a half spoons of coffee into the cup himself. There was a window in the kitchen. Beyond, the blue dust of the early morning slowly scattered to the other side of the world. Eugene felt the wind creep in and flow through the little hole in his belly button. He slowly stirred the coffee and looked out of the window. 'Why do I have to be here?' he asked himself. 'A nightmare in existence. Stupid, dirty, frigging idiots of this stinky hollow, ordering and advising wisdom.' He saw St. Cloud, Stockholm, Susanne. Susie in bed, like tonight. Unaware of his hand reaching for her breasts. Holding them, stroking them, going lower and lower in a jittery snake track. The pressure raised again and he fixed his boxers. 'Oh, how did it continue,' Eugene thought and gulped the coffee which dripped on the floor through the hole, now impounding his guts.

Suddenly he felt pressure on the other side. Taking up the book of crossword puzzles, he went to the only place where he felt pleasure and relief recently. He sat

down and browsed to page twenty one. Fuzzy image, Blur. Edible frog parts, Legs. Utah city, Celebrity, Water closet. Shit.

Eugene washed his hands, wet the toothbrush, put the paste on and moistened it again. He slowly brushed his teeth and watched the face reflected in the mirror. Looking straight into his eyes he kept on brushing. Little by little his mouth was drained of the paste mixed with saliva. The flow went down the brush and covered his palm in the white sticky goo. He washed it off. Reaching for the comb, he again fixed the eyes in the mirror. After a few strokes, the parting appearing on the right evoked in him the hair parting theory with all its aspects. 'Why didn't I study instead of reading this nonsense,' he thought and saw himself sitting at the desks, surrounded by the bulky bookshelves, inhaling the hard smell. The hard smell of dust mixed up with sweat in the vacuum of the afternoon library. 'Men with the left parting are perceived as popular and successful.' With two deep strokes of the comb he settled the slick right parting to the left. He put the comb down, exchanged a glance with the reflection once more and went to get dressed.

Eugene got to work. He passed the gate house and entered the hall. There was nobody. Thoughts resonated in his head. 'I can still leave and run away. Live like a hermit. Do something else and then try again.'

'Finally, you are here,' said the boss rubbing his hands. 'Come on, get dressed and come to my office over there. I'll tell you what you gonna do.'

Eugene went to a room next to the office and opened one of the dark green lockers for the employees. The rusty squeak of the hinges ran through his ear drum. 'Suck me cock-sucker,' he read on the back of the door. Exhaling, he moved to another locker with a poster of a naked girl inside. He threw his bag in. Looking around, he saw his face and the lockers in a mirror, hanging on the opposite wall. He came closer. There was only his face and the washed out writing under the mirror, 'unit of temporariness is forever'. He moved back to the locker, dressed and went to the office.

'Good, come in,' said the boss. 'Today you're gonna be with Jamie at the saw-mill. You'll just take the timber from the saw, nothing else. Not like reading books at school but it could've been worse, huh?'

'Yeah,' said Eugene nodding. All that he heard, while the boss went on with his talk, was the sharp shriek of the saw piercing through his head.

'Now, sign this. And also this,' said the boss. He picked up the box from under the table, blew the dust away and took out a pair of working gloves. 'Here take it. You're gonna need it,' he said and Eugene stuffed them into his pocket. 'Jamie's already waiting at the saw. It'll be just the two of you, so listen to him, ok? If some of the other guys tell you to do something, say you work with Jamie. They'll shut up. Yeah and if some of them ask you questions like 'Have you ever shagged a girl?' or anything, just ignore them, ok.'

'Okay' said Eugene. The empty space in his belly grew bigger and bigger as he went towards the saw-mill.

In a sudden flash he realised he's on a way home. His powerless arms dangling along the sore body and finger nails scraping on the wet sidewalk. He walked on. Once in a while stepping into a puddle. While waiting at a crossing he watched the cars pass by with wet swishes. Little drops of water swiftly stabbed his face and the smell of crushed worms banged in his nose. A hearse stopped to let him cross. Eugene glanced at the driver and hurried to the other side of the road. Sharp wind blew the drizzly rain into his face as he imagined his own funeral. People sitting in the cold hall of a crematory. Gazing in the imperishable silence at the big portrait resting down by the empty lectern. And the music. Sad, tranquil music making girls cry the unstoppable flood of tears. All the mourners slowly walking out, looking at the ground without a word. A big sombre thunderstorm raging above their heads.

Eugene made it home. He went to his room and sat in front of the computer. Johnny D Amorato likes Sarah Bootie's photo. Randy Ruttish is feeling alone. There are four upcoming events this week. Timmy Tuleik posted something via YouTube. There are no new friend requests.

Eugene heard his mother coming home. She gently knocked and opened the door.

'Hi, Eugene. So how was it, tell me,' she said standing at the door.

'It was okay.'

'And did you like it? And the people there?' she asked and came in.

'Mmm, it was good,' said Eugene, glanced at her and looked back at the screen.

'You sound a bit sad. Are you all right? You know you can tell my anything,' she said and stroked his shoulder.

'Yeah I know,' he said moving the shoulder away from her hand.

'All right then. Take your dirty clothes to the bathroom if you have some. I'll lie down for a while. Can I fix you dinner later?'

'No, I'm good,' said Eugene fiercely moving the mouse and his mother left the room.

He refreshed the page to see if something new had happened.

Nikola Petrusová

“A poet without a muse. A writer without words to spare. A trickster mime with spellbound look. A banshee of the past foregone. All of this I myself declare.”

What I Remember

What I remember from
The dominion of that room
(That was not my own)
And I wish those images were gone,
Is that
There was no shelter for my thoughts,
(And still isn't)
Where I could hide from the eyes of gods,
The vengeful All-seeing eye of the crow,
The thunder of eight-legged horses,
The serpent rising from the seas,
A mistletoe arrow,
The howling of the wolf swallowing the dawn.
And in the dark—the demons crept in,
Snarling and wiggling their tongues,
Susceptible to light,
But I never had a torch
Nor a single strip of day
To keep the monsters at bay;
Only a fictional lover—
The gentle Frost Giant—
To keep my bed and body warm.

A Portrait of Myself

The trickles of watery gold—
The crowning jewel of her skin,
So pale and genteel,
Yearning for a touch.
Those tainted glaciers of her eyes,
Grey with dust of highways and towns,
Magnified with transparent chunks of ice—
I have known none such.
The pursed petals of her lips,
Seductive and warm,
Speak volumes of her soul lovelorn.
And with a smile she shakes her head,
Filled with the most bizarre of ideas,—
But not too keenly, lest they might fall out and shatter
Like the most fragile of glass.

“Who are you?” ask I, “An angel, heaven’s divine spy?”
She laughs at that, twisting her face, then suddenly gone is all grace;
“A demon then?” I rephrase, “A devil’s spawn?”
“A warlock’s enslaved elfin pawn?”
“Corrupted and rotten under your outer splendour?”
She lets out but a snigger,
Then in her creaky voice she sardonically does speak:
“I am many monsters, and each of them is you.”

Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned

The mere words carrying the air of finality of one's own condemnation, the burden of having practiced such a gruesome act. To confide is to admit one's guilt, to condemn oneself.

Her eyes flicker across the furnishings of the kirk as she sits slouched on the pew; from the gilded angels to the painted skies adorning the arched Gothic ceiling, to the dark wooden surface of the pew and its worn out varnish, to the prayer book rank with age and yellow with sweat shed upon its pages through long centuries of usage, to the confessional.

The candles flutter their flames as finally she stands and makes her way to the wooden booth, the heels of her black lacquer shoes clapping at the stone as the drops of wax measuring her destiny, are dripping and ever dripping. Her will spilling from her fingers the way tears spill from their glands to melt the dignity of the carefully applied mascara. And the echo, ever-present and mocking, resonates her pathos as her steps dwindle and she nigh turns around to make for the door instead. But there stands he who is the object of her shame, a form of whom is represented by a ghastly colourless orb of light and suddenly she is overcome by the fright of him and her direction changes once more.

The wood creaks under her heavy step as she enters and takes her seat, shaded from the priest's sight by the dimness of the candle light entering through holes large enough to fit her index finger at most. Her tear smeared lips open in a sigh as she searches for the appropriate words to begin her declaration.

"Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned," she voices at last, meekly and guiltily, much tremor moving her heart.

The elderly priest hurries outside as quickly as his stroke-impaired leg allows him, stunned by the severity of what the woman has confessed. Despite his vow of silence, he sees no way of keeping the secret hidden away from the consciousness of the concerned authorities. Yet, when finally he crosses the door-step of the kirk out

to the cobbled street to have his long black tunic ruffled by the chilly September wind, the woman is long gone and her face just as unknown as her voice, accented by the feign superiority of the southern university towns.

His breath's pace, already quickened by the shock of her words, races with much strain the journey from the confessional to the great wooden door has proven to be and he presses the palm of his hand onto his breast in order to prevent the pumping organ from leaping out of his chest, but inside the raging flesh cracks and bursts apart.

Upon the altar inside the kirk's walls a knot of a molten candle drowns in wax and the flame dies at the moment when priest's knees wobble under their burden and give way.

Markéta Rojíčková

"The inspiration for my short story was a conversation I had with one of my friends recently. We were talking about machines and how more and more sophisticated they are. My friend said: "Just imagine how fascinating it is, what if we are some kind of machines too?" This is a very disturbing question and I decided to write a story based on it. I describe the potential creators of humankind as some kind of scientists, and all the process of creation can be seen from their perspective. But my story goes even further: because even the creators themselves had to be created by someone or something."

Experiment 616

He was looking at the Orb, full of pride and satisfaction. So many years of research, experiments, and engineering, and it was finally coming towards the end. The project of the energy system was a piece of cake in comparison with this small new world, but they did it. He was especially proud of the blue color... yes it was definitely the most beautiful thing he had ever designed.

"Sir?" the voice came from one of the Technicians present in the production hall and it was expressed mentally according to the habits of the Advanced. The Technician's number was around 20 but He did not want to bother with his exact categorization.

"Yes?" he responded in the same way.

"We are finished." He would have given him a satisfied smile if he had had muscles which were capable of this. The expressing of emotions had been forgotten many years ago, as well as other useless habits from the ancient times: only science remained.

"Do you want to see them?" asked the voice again.

"Yes, of course, just give me a minute..." All these years and now it is finally done. He wanted to savor the atmosphere of the blue orb as long as it was still immaculate, just as they created it. The main experiment was about to start soon and... who knew what would happen? But right now, it was just perfect.

"We can go now."

He faced two containers full of transparent liquid. The subjects were floating inside, their eyes closed as if asleep. The control panel was all green, which meant that the construction process was successfully finished as well as all the final tests.

“They look much better than the previous model.”

He put one hand on the container as if it were possible to touch more than the cold glass. The subjects were sleeping very calmly with an occasional twitch, which was very annoying, but it indicated that the respiratory system was fully activated. He had not seen the final phase of the construction yet, it was not his task to give them the external appearance.

“What about the self-production? I do not want them to fail again.”

A quiver of nervousness appeared in his mind but it vanished so quickly that it was impossible to identify the source.

“We used your latest upgrade; the machines are fully automatic, capable of modification. They are ready to launch.”

Maintenance was the biggest problem to solve, because it was necessary to figure out an absolutely self-reliant system. Of course there were attempts to create the machines practically immortal, without any extra needs, but they ended in failure. But finally he came up with the idea of self-production; production without any external intervention.

He could not wait for the experiment to start; the Advanced put a lot of effort into creating a perfect structure and this attempt seemed to have satisfied all the previous concerns. It was so fascinating to observe what the experiment could do if it had enough time.

“Start the experiment.”

Engineer's log no. 1: (why)

What started as small research turned out to be a huge project. For the first few millenniums the data was almost the same. Subjects did self-produce very successfully but every new individual was almost the same as the previous one. No external interruption was

intended, but then we decided to do so. We started to create a new environment; this process had to be slow enough to give them a chance to react.

We changed the ventilation, humidity, heating and cooling conditions, and later decided to go even further, the original surface was separated. It was not my idea and I have to admit that it should have been. It gave us the opportunity to observe the self-production and modification under several different conditions. We were surprised how quickly the subjects reacted to the changes. But the most unexpected was the development of their control center.

The Orb turned slowly, he could look at it for ages. There were a few changes of course; there was no mist at the beginning. He started to control the collected data again to verify the anomaly which was indicated recently and came to the same conclusion.

“What is it?”

Technician no. 62 shrugged his shoulders.

“We are still working on it but it seems like the control centers are developing more quickly than we expected.”

It was obvious, the control centers started to show extreme activity. It increased ten times during the last few decades and He did not know why, which was unacceptable. He was desperate to discover the cause of this but it still escaped his notice. He controlled the interventions many times but found no anomaly, so they made some secondary changes, nothing too big.

“And what about the visions, did you find out their origin?”

“No... we can only speculate, the inner structure became very complicated since the anomaly occurred.”

It was true, the inner structure started to change very quickly. They found out recently that the original control center complicated its structure but it was not as important as the rest of the structure. But now they faced something which had never occurred before in the history of the experimentation, visions, coming from nowhere and it was inevitable to do a new systems analysis.

“Should I inform the Council?”

He looked upon the Technician's face and saw nothing. Only plain expectation of the answer.

"No... not yet; we need a few samples."

Engineer's log no. 10:

We investigated ten new samples from different parts of the Orb and in all those cases the same anomaly was detected. It manifests itself during the dark period of the shortest cycle when the subjects tend to recharge. We do not know where the visions come from but it seems to have some connection with the control center because the first of them appeared soon after we noticed its abnormal enlargement in comparison to the rest of the structure.

At the present moment we are trying to find the source of the visions because it is certainly not under our control. It bothers me...It seems like the center itself takes control over the rest of the structure, which was not planned. Is it a self-defense reaction? This is still just a speculation and we need to collect more data.

"First time here?"

It was taking all his attention to focus, his eyes were not used to the darkness. The Technician bothered Him, his way of communicating was not usual: he used sound vibrations, like the subjects did. He was designed to look very similar to them so he could collect the data directly. This had become very useful since the enormous activity of the control center was detected.

"Sir?"

"Yes, the first time. The dark is so complicated..."

There was no answer, but He could swear that the muscle movement in the corner of the Technician's lips was somehow connected with His comment. They were heading to some huge structure made of stones. It was very high and surrounded by some kind of figures. He had never felt so cold before; unlike here, the temperature in the lab was stable. They should have notified Him, why they did not have any protective suits anyway?

"You will get used to it."

He hesitated, there was no question sent out. Or was there?

“To what?”

“To the dark, and the cold too.”

They entered the stone structure and let the portal swallow them. The dark was even heavier but after a while they entered a spacious hall with some kind of blinking orange light. It was fascinating. He had heard about the fire light but He had never seen it with His own eyes. The technology gave Him the data of course, but this was different.

“This is what you wanted to see.”

He looked at the wall and saw the very inaccurate picture. At first He thought that it was just some kind of spot without any shape but gradually it become to make sense. Suddenly He saw an outline of... Himself. There was no doubt that that was His portrait on the cold stone wall.

“But... how?”

He knew it was impossible for them to see Him, the subjects came on board unconscious and the Technicians put a lot of attention to keep them in this state during the whole process of the surgery. Those who returned to the Orb were put through the deletion process; they made sure that there were no memories of the ship or the lab. The subjects were clear. So how do they know? There had to be something more going on...

“Paintings of this type are spread all over the Orb; they differ of course, but not much. So how is it that you did such a horrible job?”

He looked at the Technician, putting His hand on the technician’s shoulder.

“You are relieved of duty.”

Later He exited the stone structure alone.

Engineer’s log no. 12:

Generally the experiment is accompanied by many unexpected effects. The accident inside the stone structure gave me an idea. If the subjects know about us, and I intentionally do not ask the question how, it would be beneficial for the research to build a base on the Orb. This solution is much easier than collecting the samples to transport them to the ship. I still cannot forget to exterminate Technician no. 62, his behavior was unusual and I have a

suspicion that he was infected, and my opinion is that it has a connection with the control center. We have to bring it under control.

“Your suggestion is very extraordinary and potentially dangerous. If the infection—as you call it—spreads, it can have a huge impact on our race.”

He stood on the shiny ground, surrounded by the wisest ones of the Advanced, his head bent down. They were floating in the created atmosphere deep inside the endless universe. He was always fascinated with their inventiveness and opulence too. They were old, very old, many of them were present at the birth of the race of the Advanced.

“That is exactly why we should intensify the research.”

The Chancellor straightened in his levitation seat and slowly looked around to see the reaction of the other Council members. There was not even one microscopic movement on their faces. They were real masters; only logic, no destructive emotions.

“According to the latest report you failed to keep our identity safe, so why should we grant your suggestion?”

He hesitated:

“With all due respect, I do not make mistakes—you know. Our identity was revealed without my intention and the only possible explanation is that our subjects have a connection to a different source of information.”

A moment of silence followed.

“What source?”

“That is what we want to figure out.”

The Chancellor closed his big dark eyes, and He knew that the decision would come soon. They were surrounded by space, with all of its lights—and He thought of all the experiments that he done. This might be the last; the galaxy had gotten old—and so had He.

“You have the permission.”

Engineer's log no. 36:

We investigated thousands of the subjects since the lab has been on the Orb. But I assume that there is still more to investigate. The Orb itself is much more complex than we expected. Subjects' control centers are still developing very fast but they are not capable of using all of it. These centers have a very interesting self defense reaction; they simply deny access to some parts. Maybe that is the source of the visions, but we still do not know how they are generated. How do they know things hidden to their sight? How did they recognize us? There is also something very disturbing in their behavior, it seems they can predict danger or the character of others simply by some kind of inner processes. What is more, we figured out that they cluster mostly around the fields with the energetically highest flow. We know that the Orb has places with residue energy which originate from us, we had to start its rotation and that required a lot of energy. But what we did not do was put the sensors capable of recognizing this energy into the machines. I observe that my co-workers are more and more concerned with their research. The Orb influences our senses and wakes up something that was forgotten for thousands of years, we were not prepared for this. I have not told my theory to anyone yet but they will figure out very soon and the experiment will be ended. I am not ready to leave the Orb; I have to know what that is, which, more than us, influences the local environment; it fascinates me.

“We examined hundreds of samples and there is no meaningful result. How long do you want to stay here?”

Technician no. 67 looked at him with a spark of anger in his big black eyes. How was that possible? But maybe there was no anger. Maybe it was just some kind of illusion caused by the central heat source which was now shining very brightly into the lab. He liked how the bottles full of chemicals were sparkling; this was something rarely experienced in space.

They were surrounded by many rooms built for more effective observation of many aspects of the samples' behavior. Each room had its own team of Technicians who concentrated on different areas of the research. He was the one who supervised their work.

“I want to know what it is. Can you imagine the benefit for us when we have access to such information? They have potential to develop even further, and I want to make use of that.”

During the research He found out that the machines had huge potential hidden in their control centers. Like it was some kind of parallel data bank but everyone knew that the data inside was not written by the Advanced. The Technicians called it a Spirit in the machine.

“Their further development can be dangerous for us; even now they are capable of using our technology.”

He knew quite well that some secondary experiments did not work the way they had imagined. Once it was decided to try how good They are in solving problems and tried a reaction to space technology. Surprisingly the subject not only used the light generator in a proper way but after it was released the similar generators made by Them appeared on the Orb.

“You have to notify the Council.”

He was not listening, a new small experiment was in progress and he observed with keen interest how one of the ‘she’ samples was put into a small enclosure with hundreds of new replicants.

“How does she know which one is the correct one? Did you ever know this? I tried it for many times and the result was always the same, I can just measure the time.”

“‘She’... Since when are they called that way?”

“Why not? They apparently have greater power that we have, soon they will deserve to be treated as an advanced race.”

The Technician gave a shudder and left silently. That same night one of the space modules left the atmosphere of the Orb and He knew that the evacuation would start soon.

Engineer’s log no. 42:

This is maybe the last record, I am trying to stay calm but I know that nothing can be saved. All the results will be gone soon. I have to be quick... Oh I am so tired... The final phase

of my research has to be done tonight. I have recently found the ideal subject, He can stay alive long enough to let me see the Source. I 'believe' that there is some source... 'believe'... I do not even know how I know this word, it is not mine, it came from the Orb, the Orb itself is alive... I... I... know it. I have a theory but can I support it with indisputable evidence? No I cannot, no more experiments... I am so tired.

Technician no. 67 stood inside the space laboratory looking at the Orb. It was turning just as at the beginning. He was thinking about the first impulse and wandered how far they had come. But what happened? How is it that one of the best engineers has lost his mind?

"It's the Orb..."

"The Orb?"

He turned quickly and saw the Chancellor floating towards him. After he sent an emergency signal the Council decided to take strong action against the main engineer. They never left the base but now there was the Chancellor right in front of him.

"Your magnitude..." the Technician bowed.

"Your report was highly alarming. The experiment has to be terminated. Go down and put the Advanced wise to evacuation."

The Technician motioned to him in proof of understanding and the floating chair slowly turned away.

Engineer's log no. 44:

The evacuation has started. I have to be quick. I have already got the sample and now I am about to finish the program for transfer. I wish I could wring the Technician's neck, he betrayed me, but what can I expect from the Advanced? My plan is to transfer my consciousness into the machine and follow. There is no way back but the Orb will be destroyed soon anyway. My results will not be taken into consideration and I will be sentenced to death. I have to know.

There were two huge bottles full of liquid in the room. He put the sample into one of them and worked on configuration. The second bottle was prepared for Him.

“Sir, the evacuation has started.”

He did not hesitate, the Technician fell down immediately. The Advanced were not used to violence, it was very easy. No one could disturb him now; He was just about to connect the last integrated circuit.

“Well, let’s see who you are.”

Lada Smejkalová

"I love all forms of art, beer and dogs.

I hate hypocrisy.

I hope that I will have the possibility to express myself further, and that what I write will be useful for others."

Strangers in Hoblina

The world turned black when I entered the room.

Now my eyes burn when I see the scene

of people

agonizing.

Even ice would burn

in that heavy air

that choking air and people stare

people like skeletons hanging on walls

their talks are like old bones shaking,

otherwise this place is empty.

Someone turned off the radio.

Make light, the darkness frightens me, they disturb me.

They are empty, you're not empty.

Make light with your guitar and speak the truth.

If it's like this, no one hears you,

but we can hear and we can say something

later

when these zombies drink up their lemon beers with straws and leave

forever

The Open Road

The last time I saw him, death was looking from his eyes directly at me as if there was no one else, not only in the room, but in the whole world. It was turning his pupils into two dark endless tunnels that contained all the suffering that is known to humans.

He was walking the streets although it was a short time before winter. He was one of those men without a name and without roots, living outside for days and nights. I saw him various times from a distance like a shadow, the shape of a hunched human body. Normally, he stood on the sidewalk near the park and smoked cheap cigarettes as I did. Once I met him in a pub. But he was not a drunkard like the majority of them. He just liked beer, similarly to me. I believe that without beer and those cigarettes it would not be him anymore, if he still was somebody.

It was strange, but whenever I saw his silhouette, I would wonder when was the last time he had heard something like “sorry”, or some other basic words to make things right. I was thinking when was the last moment somebody treated him as a dignified human being. What if people in his past were like the people in my present? It looked like the mine never learned those things. Otherwise, I would not have that painful feeling that I had done something wrong and it was all just on me. But he did not seem to be concerned about the people from his past. His past vanished and now there was just the open road in front of him.

I lived at that time with nine roommates in the factory. This might suggest that I really had done something terrible. I felt miserable there and was thinking about leaving that place. There was a jealousy in me as I watched him through the broken window of my room. I had a secret desire to be free like him, to shake all the old scary and tiresome things off of me.

My only joy then was cheap coffee and rolled cigarettes from awful tobacco. My only adventure was the stupid job on the weekends, where I was for ten or more hours doing exactly what I knew I did not want to do, but to be shouted at kind of meant I was still alive. And then I always came back to the factory with a wish to abandon that place. I needed that more than air to breath, especially, when

somebody was nice to me there. Because I could only respond to cruelty at that time. I could stand it and tolerate it. But I certainly was not able to respond to kindness. I could not accept it, because that strange wrecked stuff in me would simply not put up with it. Sometimes, I found myself contemplating a fatal jump into some dark tunnels, to the eternity that I saw later in the eyes of that man. I was not thinking twice then. I did not know at that time how cruel and harsh the next winter was going to be and how it would change everything.

In my flat, people normally sat in the living room, which once served as a place for workmen, and talked. They would talk about normal stuff. Their work and hobbies. Family issues. Rubbish. In the meantime, I would sit in the corner of my room, sipping coffee as if I were drinking my favorite poison and listening to the echo of their voices. The clock was ticking on the wall where I had placed an old broken mirror to, from time to time, see the pieces of my face that did not look familiar to me anymore.

The movement of the people in that flat was the most hectic thing I have ever witnessed.

Strangers came and left without my realizing day after day. I lost track of that very soon. Almost every day I met somebody new sitting on the sofa during the afternoon or sleeping on the floor at night. I never knew if they were actually living there or whether they were just visitors. I used my old tactic with them *“say ‘hi’ and don’t ask any questions”* and that was, perhas, the reason why I never found out their interest in staying there, because it was the most miserable place I had ever been to.

Sometimes we were more than ten, lying on the old mattresses everywhere on the floor. My roommates, their old friends, their new friends, current lovers or lovers from the past (which was making me think about the end of humanity), some hitchhikers that were just passing by and stopped there, and people without a home, like me, who were barely able to pay the rent. Always new strangers. There was nowhere to escape from the chaos. I did not want to talk with any of those weirdos that turned up with bags full of stones from Moldavia and protest signs . And they also somehow knew that if they brought my name up, some people could be shouted at. So, the result was that the only place where I could have any peace was on the

street. But it did not resolve everything, because you certainly cannot spend all the time in the city.

I did not want to be in the factory all day. I would have my lunch and dinner in the park even when ill. I would drink beer on the cycle route and when police arrived to wake up some people on the benches, I covered it with my worn out sweater. I would buy coffee in the drink dispensers in libraries and seek out lonely places to stop and think about my life. The main topic was usually my pain from feeling alone in the crowd of roommates. Second, were the sickening worries of going back to all those strangers in the House of Terror, which I was secretly calling the place. But the streets were not like the factory. The strangers there were the real ones. I did not have to meet them in the kitchen. I could walk in front of them and pretend that they were transparent, which all the strangers in the world should be.

Quite often a bunch of homeless people would come up to me and beg for money, food, or a ligh. I rarely gave them anything. Just in the situations when I was outnumbered and no one was there, I gave them a few crowns as a charitable contribution for cheap wine. When they looked harmless, I did not give them anything, because I always remembered my sleeping bag or a thin blanket eaten by moths, as the only thing to cover myself at night, and bread and water, as my only food, and cheap tobacco and debts and the stupid job and I was not very sympathetic with them when I saw their name brand cigarettes unbearable craving for nicotine, because I had run out of my rollups. But, when I was even more miserable, I was a bit scared of them. I realized that I was leading almost the same life just with the difference, that I was spending my nights in the House of Terror.

One night, there was a gypsy celebration in the factory, so I disappeared before the police arrived. I went to the pub. I would go there now and then because I had to maintain my reputation as the irresponsible brat which people attributed to me. That night I came there and sat in the corner from where I could see the whole place, all the people and their activities. I was there alone, just watching them. I felt good there, because it always looked like a place for people whose lives were just chains of troubles. There was a group of men and women singing and dancing on the tables, jumping between the mugs and crying out in a very loud voice like animals in the

zoo. In the front, there were two girls and one of them was the cutting hair of the other with an electric razor. Black hair was falling on the floor and dogs and cats were running through the mess.

Note of that really bothered me.

But near the toilets, there was a girl with a huge tattoo which said *literature* across her collar bone and she was talking about some poems on the paper she was holding in her hand. She was sitting next to her companion a young man who did not seem to listen to her at all. From the few words that I caught I realized that she was quite silly. She was arguing, mostly with herself, which word would fit best in the text and then she was reading that rubbish aloud while drinking beer and smoking marijuana. It was making me sick as well as her empty laughter. I also caught her look, when she turned her head to watch the clock. Her eyes were vacant. Dark, but somehow flat, as if there was nothing in them. Just blindness and naivety great enough to endure for the rest of her life.

I took a piece of meat rather than keep looking at her and put my hand under the table with it. In a few seconds, a dog's teeth bit my finger and the meat disappeared with a disgusting grunting. Then I straightened up again and looked at the broken mirror that was on the wall. But I gave it up quickly because I realized that staring at my own eyes was even worse than looking at the girl.

I was thinking about returning to the factory when I noticed him at the back of the pub. He had a beer, two vodkas and a cigarette paper with a bit of tobacco in front of him and he was looking at those things as if wondering what to do. I could not put up with the stupid talk of the girl anymore and feeling a new strange excitement was thinking about how to start a conversation. It seemed that I might be helped in that, because the pub was slowly turning into a rainforest. A lighted joint was suddenly in my hand, somebody threw a shot into my beer. Wild shouts were inviting me to join some obscene dance on the tables.

A whining dog jumped on my lap to have another piece of meat. I shook it off as I was looking at the unoccupied space on the bench right next to my mysterious double.

After a painful period of thinking about asking him some stupidities such as “Hi. How are you?” or saying something like “This pub is very crowded tonight.”, I offered him my cigarette lighter. I could not think of anything better. I simply moved it closer to his beer. He looked straight into my eyes and I had a feeling as if something hit me strongly. His expression looked as if death was staring out of his pupils. He had something deadly in his eyes which were otherwise pure and incredibly present. I once heard that from the eyes of a person you could recognize everything. Sadness, happiness, intelligence or silliness but also illnesses. And that day I started thinking that you could read in them even how many days a certain person had ahead of him.

The man made a slow movement and took the lighter. Then he picked up his rolled cigarette. He had the same rolls as me, the tobacco was of the same mark. It was a mark for very poor people. His beer was also darkened with rum that somebody had poured in. I smiled and wanted to offer some rolls from my pocket, but I could not find them. With the fear that I had been robbed of even those stupid cheap cigarettes I realized that they were already on the table. I had obviously put them there before.

After a few seconds he said, as if we had already been talking and he just wanted to add something: “Today I woke up and I thought I couldn’t take it anymore.”

The girl at the opposite table was drinking her beer and leading the same old monologue. I took a look at her. She seemed to be trying to catch her companion’s eye, but he was still staring at the opposite wall where the mirror was. She was the most superficial person I had ever met. On her forehead there was written that her parents were still around and they gave her everything she needed. I guessed that her family was well-off and she did not have to worry about her existence. In the factory, she would not survive a single night. I was sure about that. With the ignorance written in her eyes, I bet she could not imagine those factories existing in her limited world.

“And then I woke up once again. And the day was like without an end,” continued the man.

Again, it reminded me of the factory.

"I know it too," I said. "The same things to do, the same places and everything you do is wrong. It seems like you're cursed."

"Sure. And it's true."

The girl was now talking louder than before. It sounded like she had prepared her talk. We heard news about her mother, about her brother, her school composition and her nightdress. Everything was leading to a conclusion about how the limited world was getting on her sensitive nerves.

The man next to me was staring at her with the same expression that I thought I had.

"Dislike those people," he said after a while. "They think they can fool you but they can't."

Nothing they say is real. It's all artificial like their own contorted reality. But they will be happy with that disguise for the rest of their lives. Unless some really terrible thing happens to them."

First, I did not know what to say to that I and thought it would be better to remain quiet. But

then I opened my mouth and it was too late to stop it.

"As for me, this life is truly crushing me. I don't know what I've done wrong, but I think that God could give me a break some time." I said this with a secret wish that the words would have come from my companion's mouth because it would definitely be more suitable.

"Are you happy in the place you live?" he asked me.

I shook my head.

"Neither am I."

"Every day I wake up and see that room, I want to throw up."

We kept silent for a while. Just smoking and drinking, being there together like one man in the corner of the pub. But it was clear that each of us was somehow closed in our own world. But it was still a lot better than being in the flat and saying superficial stuff all the time.

An idea came to my mind.

"Can I ask you something?" I looked at the beggar.

He said I could.

“Do you think that it is better to leave some place when you aren't happy, if that leaving means losing some securities?”

Another moment of silence. Quite a long one. The man had almost finished his cigarette, but all the time he seemed to be thinking about what to answer and not pretending that he hadn't heard my question.

“It is terrible when you have to live somewhere where you feel like a nobody,” he said. “It does not seem like living at all. But when it rains, when it snows, there's always a roof over your head, you know. When you don't want to sleep on some muddy road, there is a bed to lie down on. You don't have to worry about money that much. Once you leave, you can't come back, because it's simply impossible. The bridge is burnt. You are there alone with nothing, living off the cheapest things. And it can last for the rest of your life. It's hard to give you an answer. And I think nobody can do it. But if I were you, I would try to stay calm and let things be as they are. Just behave naturally and if something really terrible happens, take it as part of all those continuing things. And as for the securities, you can live without the majority of material things, you really can. But what you can't live without, is peace in your heart, the realization that you don't cause any harm. If you're not like the young people over there.”

The girl was coming back from the restrooms, with red eyes. She was crying and her companion did not make a single move. I was looking at them but I did not see anything. In my mind there were the words the homeless man had just told me. I tried to write them down at least in my memory, because I had the feeling that the next day I would wake up with a terrible headache and think that what happened was just a vision caused by a lot of beer and marijuana.

The silent cries of the girl were making me feel uncomfortable. I thought, for a while, I was also about to cry.

“I'd love to live in misery,” she was saying to her beer, because her friend sat still as a statue. “I'd love to. And do all those things like having lunch in train stations, sleeping somewhere illegally and causing trouble. That would be so romantic. And I

could write some poems about it. About what it is like to have a life on the road without an end.”

With this she finished her beer and left the pub to go somewhere else. To her big house, perhaps. To her bed with a duvet and pillows. Her vacant eyes stayed there for a long time after her. Eyes that reveal nothing because nothing is in them. Later, I would often see them in my life. I also saw the look of my homeless companion possessed by death. I saw those two absolutely different expressions based on my good and bad days, so clearly as if they were a reflection from a big mirror on a wall right in front of me.

But I did not know those things that day in the pub. That day I just lit another cigarette.

The winter was rough. All the homeless people went to look for some place where they could survive, because on the streets it was impossible due to the frost that arrived God only knew from where. Even I, in the safety of the factory, felt like something in me was killed by that frost. Thanks to that, perhaps, I stopped torturing myself with the question whether I had done something wrong in my life or not. I instead began to accept my life the way it was, as a chain of continuous things.

When it got a bit warmer, I walked through the whole city. But I did not find him anywhere. Not even in the park or near the garbage. He had vanished. I also visited the pub various times. The place was no different after the winter. It was the same, except for the big mirror on the wall. It was not there anymore, so when I sat there, I could only see the real things and not reflections. Not even the girl came there again.

I was wondering about those last words for a very long time, although, when I think about it now, no one knew where they came from, just like the frost. They never resolved my dilemma anyway. I never found a clear answer to my question and if you asked me now, I would tell you to have a cheap coffee and take things as they come, because as simple humans, we sometimes feel too small to change things.

I could not stay in the factory. Shortly after the winter my roommates found out that my part of the rent had not been paid for a number of months and they did

not like it at all. Maybe they knew it before the winter, but they did not want to kick me out into that deadly weather. So they did it afterwards. They told me very calmly that they were not able to afford having me there. And also, my least favorite hitchhiking roommate found a new boyfriend and I had the strange feeling that she wanted my stupid place in the corner of the bedroom under the window. When she moved to that corner, she apologized for breaking my old mirror which had been there and wished me the best of luck with her absent stare. When I left she went on and on about hitchhiking to the Ukraine. To the wild dark forests with a lot of bad wolves in them.

And me? With a sarcastic thought that I sometimes felt like I was in a forest in the House of Terror, I went out in the wild dark streets. First, I wanted to visit all the familiar places and pay tribute to the man without a name, living off the cheapest things. Then I decided to turn my back on the city. I was going far away from the naïve little girl, although her superficial voice sometimes sounds in the back of my head, mostly when I am angrily complaining about how no one understands me. But it's all right, I am a simple human and, besides, I keep it very quiet, almost inaudible.

When I left the park forever, going down the cycle route, around the library with the dispenser and all the filthy fast food windows, I finally realized that the frost that had come from God knows where, was not as severe as before. The green grass was slowly growing on the sides of the open road, a sign that a completely new spring was on its way.

Hana Sobotková

“A postgraduate student at Palacký University. She is interested in both theoretical and practical side of writing. In writing fiction, she tries to be optimistic.”

Late Night Train

The train was approaching quite fast. Faster than I would expect, because it was supposed to stop in a moment. A scraping sound. Then it stopped.

I took my suitcase and started to look for a less crowded car. The rear. The middle. The first one behind the locomotive. I got on and luckily found an empty compartment.

A young man showed up instantly and asked me to share the compartment. “Good afternoon, yes, these seats are unoccupied,” I said.

The train was already late when it came in the station, so it didn’t take long to set off. I barely had time to put my suitcase on the upper shelf, than sat down and that was it. A slow, solid movement forward. In the window people standing under grey wavy metallic shelters on the platforms, looking cold and passing away from my view.

Winter’s fine, I thought.

I took a look at the young man sitting diagonally from me. He was slightly younger than I was and probably traveling a short distance, because he did not have much to carry. Only a small backpack. A flashy green and yellow sports jacket was lying on the seat next to him. But he noticed I was watching him so I returned to the passing buildings through the window.

Soon we were out of town and heading to the next station, Olomouc. I was looking forward to that station, because I knew that most of the passengers were not traveling far, like the guy in my compartment, and they are going to get off the train there. A new set will be getting on, but they will be fewer and travel further.

I found myself watching the guy again, unintentionally. I needed a good sleep after last night and his presence was annoying me. I didn't want a stranger staring at my impassive face as I slept.

After about ten more minutes, the train began to slow down as we neared Olomouc. I looked at him again, this time for signs of restlessness. The old factory buildings appeared on the right, where I expected them. Not a move. The motorway bridge came into view. Nothing. I could see the platforms, long blocks of concrete, welcoming our train with arms open. I began to distinguish the faces of the people outside.

Suddenly he sprang up to his feet and made three long steps to the window. He opened it quickly and shouted at a group of young people: "Hey, over here!"

In the window the light was beginning to fade as the sun neared the horizon. The air in the compartment was stuffy. It was impossible to think about getting to sleep now. I was staring for ten minutes at the same page of the book that I was carrying with me and I kept rereading the same few lines over and over again: "I had to will / myself to see what I was seeing / and nothing else."

They cornered me. I had been hoping for a comfortable journey home and got this instead. A group of noisy youngsters, friends of the one with the flashy jacket, got on in Olomouc and were there to stay. A bottle was being passed around. Somebody near the door had a guitar. And a kazoo.

I was struggling to understand the poem, when a girl came over to me and said: "Scuse me, would you terribly mind if I opened the window for a little while? The air really is suffocating here."

"Yes, of course. Go ahead."

She opened the window and I felt a gust of fresh air on my face. Then she signaled to the boy sitting opposite me to get the hell out of there and after he was gone, made a disgusted face and took his seat with a little thump.

The wind was messing with my hair, but I ignored it. I also tried to ignore her. But the poem I was reading didn't make any sense anymore.

“Is it a really interesting book?” she asked me suddenly. I was forced to look at her. She had curly hair, shoulder length, a warm sweater and a very beautiful face.

“I’m not sure yet, I’ve just started reading it.”

“I see.” She was watching me as if she were studying me. “Is it a long way to the station you’re going to?”

“It’s about an hour from now.”

She saw me return to my book. She hesitated before she spoke again. “Would you mind me asking a question? What do you do for a living?”

“I’m a civil engineer.”

This surprised her. “Hey everyone, this guy says he’s a builder!” she hollered excitedly at the others.

“Yay! Cheers to you,” they cried back in unison.

“Have I seen any of your work?” asked a young guy with glasses. He was holding a glass of milk in his hand and sipped it in intervals till he had a milk moustache on his upper lip. The Milky Man, I called him to myself. He was looking at me intensely though the frame of his glasses, as if hypnotizing me.

“No, I don’t think so. Technically I am a civil engineer, but, in fact, most of the time I make corrections of calculations.”

“Oh.” Then he added, “and what is your latest work?” His eyes lost some of the interest but still there was a little hope that he would be sharing a compartment with somebody if not famous than at least interesting.

“Ehm... I specialize in bridges,” I said. I saw despair creeping into his childish milky face. “Our team has been reconstructing a historical bridge in Ronov nad Sázavou. It’s a Renaissance bridge from the 16th century which was seriously damaged during the floods last year.”

He started thinking, his forehead wrinkled, and after a moment he said: “I know which one you mean.” Then he turned away from me and we never talked again in our lives.

“This is Péta, he never drinks. Alcohol, I mean,” the girl giggled. “Being a builder must be very interesting... I am Vera, by the way.” She waited for me to make an introduction but I was still looking at the milky guy and missed the right moment.

So I just looked at her with a smile for an apology and started to look out the window, being perfectly aware that I was being clumsy but unable to change it.

A song was being played by this point. A loud jovial holler with an annoyingly catchy melody. It reminded me of the night before. I had been to a get-together of my schoolmates from the university. It had been about five years since I graduated and we were still meeting regularly, each half a year in a small club in Prostějov. The meeting mainly consisted of drinking and sharing the latest trends in the building industry. Occasionally someone showed around a picture of a child. A toddler and two hands holding it.

The girl didn't give up on me, though.

"So, is it interesting? Building bridges I mean. It must be interesting. Connecting places and making life easier for so many people. In fact, you are connecting people, ain't you?"

"Yes, it is a very interesting job." A Nokia ad came to my mind. *Connecting people*.

"I thought you must like it. Do you know why? You seem so absent-minded now. You certainly don't enjoy reading that book, I can tell for sure. So I thought that you must like something else, your job for example. And I was right. You see, everybody likes something. Life would be meaningless if there wasn't anything to live for."

I was stunned by her simplistic view of life. And she went on.

"As for me, I like tennis. I was born in Bělá pod Pradědem and I spend all my childhood on the courts, playing and watching others. Those summers were priceless." I imagined her in summer shorts, leaning against the railing, eyes fixed on the ball. "The courts in Bělá are right next to the local sewage disposal plant and you can smell it in the air, but beside that... I simply love it. My friends make fun of me constantly but I couldn't care less."

Her eyes were full of excitement over her beloved topic. Blood ran to her cheeks and made her angelic face even prettier. I started to be more uncomfortable than before when she asked me if I liked my job.

"I'm teaching kids to play at a tennis club now so that I'm at the courts from spring to fall almost every day. Have you ever played tennis?" she asked me.

"No, I've never tried that."

“Well, maybe you should try.”

“Well...maybe I will,” I said. She shifted her eyes to the window. The darkness outside become a mirror to what was happening inside.

The guitar player and the kazoo player had exchanged their instruments by then, making the next song louder and worse than ever. It started to snow and the train was going so fast now that I had to get up and close the window if I didn’t want to catch a cold.

The guy sitting next to me was trying to hand me the bottle, almost empty now. I refused. This was ridiculous. I have never in my life experienced anything like this. Of course, my classmates and I used to drink a lot at the university, and before that and after that too, but never like this. We were responsible. We never drank on trains. I couldn’t remember one time my mates and I drank from the same bottle.

The guitar stopped playing suddenly. “Hey, we’re here!” a voice shouted and the train stopped. The Milky Man nearly spilled his milk.

Vera got up from her seat and started to collect her luggage. She reached her hand for her parka and the guy with the flashy jacket handed it to her. Then she turned to me again. She pulled out a piece of paper and scribbled something on it. She handed it over to me.

“Vera, are you coming?” the guy shouted from somewhere in the aisle. She took a few steps toward the door of the compartment. As she was closing the door her curly hair glittered in the artificial light. After that she was gone.

I looked at the piece of paper in my hand. It was a train ticket. From Olomouc to Ramzová, 97 km, 104 CZK. The name of a street was written below. It was the address of the tennis club. I folded the paper and put it into my back pocket.

I heard the outer door being slammed shut and the train started moving once more. I looked out of the window and the platforms were on the other side of the train. The compartment was the same as it had been but for an empty bottle of milk stuffed below one of the seats. I put it into the garbage can.

In the window, I could see streets covered with snow, reflecting the yellow light of the streetlamps as the train went through town. The branches of trees were coated

in white and both the trees and the snow became less visible as we left the town behind. Then the darkness came.

The train stopped at the last station and I took my bag and got off. A bunch of people, huddled in their caps and scarves, were leaving the platform. Behind my back the train stood quietly, showing no intention of going anywhere. The clouds were heavy around the tops of the mountains and white snowflakes kept falling from the sky.

I unfolded the train ticket and looked at it again. The letters were still there. I put it back into my pocket, carefully. After that I turned to the exit, where all the other passengers went, and headed home, with the snowflakes, unthawing and symmetrical, clinging to my winter jacket.



April 11 2014, Nick C. Gerrard (U.K.), “Punk Fiction, self-publishing, small press”



April 25 2014, Gabrielle Smith-Dluha (U.S.A.), “Writing Picture Books for Children”

Jan Vavroš

“My name is Jan Vavroš, I come from Opava and I study English and Spanish Philology in Olomouc at Palacký University. I like Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter. I enjoy listening to music, food and cooking, spiritual, esoteric and psychological literature and videos on Youtube. I like sleeping and resting.”

Fear Beyond Order

The night was black and the clouds were like grey milk stains on it covering the stars and the moon. The city lights were still visible from the rear but they were growing smaller and smaller as Edmund Berkley entered the countryside in his old Range Rover. His almost fifty-year-old face was white and pale. He was working late that day. He had had an important meeting and then went through a big pile of paperwork till very late. He had told his wife in the morning he would come late at night. He didn't talk to her much because he wanted to avoid the conversation about his schedule for that day. Now, it was midnight. He turned on the radio.

The news summarized the most recent events- two car crashes- nobody dead, one woman slightly injured; a robbery of a shop in the centre of London, an everyday column about the progress of the fever virus in Central Africa and the most serious and frequent topic in Britain over the last month or so - the missing children. “Another child has disappeared today,” said the man's voice. “An eight-year-old girl from Wembley was last seen this afternoon at 3 p.m. when she left her school. She did not arrive home. This is the eighth child that has disappeared from London over the last two months. Police officers are surveying the terrain without any success so far. No light has been brought to the case not even after today's meeting of the police superintendent with Scotland Yard. Prime Minister, Edmund Berkley, who attended the meeting stated: ‘We are facing the most serious case in years,’.” “The kidnappers take care not to leave any traces. Nevertheless, I still believe that all the children will be found perfectly healthy.”

Berkley turned off the radio and sighed. Cool air was entering the car through the windows. The narrow road led to a nearby village where a few houses still emanated light. Berkley wiped mist from the side window and looked up at the sky. Stars were blinking through the milky clouds like a cosmic compass. He spotted the brightest one and thought how far it might be from our planet. Since his childhood, he had imagined that the view of a starry night was like looking in the microscope only that the microscope shows us smaller particles than we are while the sky shows particles as much bigger. The patterns of the star net and the scheme of particles are the same.

The mobile phone rang and Berkley answered it: "Hello Darling... I... I told you in the morning that... Listen, I told you that I have a lot of work! ...A' right... Because I'm seeing someone important... Yes! Well, I'm sorry, It's actually... a secret meeting!... Yes, secret!... It is part of my fucking work! I'm telling you the truth... You knew who I was when you married me, so don't start again... What do you want me to do? I'm in the car, in the middle of fucking nowhere! Do you want me to open the window? A'right, this is the fucking wind! That's what it looks like outside London! ...So you don't believe me! You think I'm fucking 5 Asian sluts? Well I don't give a shit what you think!... So what should I say?... I'm telling you the truth! But you are either not listening or don't give a shit about what I am saying to you... Good!... No... Thank you very much. Good night sweetheart!"

He threw the phone against the dash board. Everything was slow and somehow as if in an echo. Voices were swirling through his head- what was said, what he didn't say and what she didn't say. After a while he opened the bottle of water and took a sip. It had been a long time since he had smelled her scent, made love with her. They didn't understand each other. They had two kids, a boy and a girl. He was sorry for them, but he didn't know how to solve the situation- he was the prime minister and she didn't care.

He hesitated for a while and then turned the radio on again. He pressed button number 2 with a jazz station. He thought about that African fever virus. It was said that it led to death in eighty percent of the infected people. The virus had not left Africa so far, but it might do so, however, in a few weeks' time. All the countries had

come up with strict controls at the airports. The situation had become serious as the virus was spreading among big cities. The public actually didn't know much about it. They didn't know what places were actually infected, about its speed, about all the precautions that were made, and nobody knew where it had come from, not even Berkley, even though he was pretty sure that the spreading was a premeditated act. For his own sake, he didn't want to know. He knew that there was this desire to connect up the world. Those who ruled this world were willing to do so at all costs. When the North and South American Unions were connected, this would be the next step, the Global Union.

Berkley reached a dark roundabout just before the village. The first exit led toward it, but he took the second one, passing it from the left and continuing into complete darkness. His head started aching. Thoughts were flickering in it and he was unable to suppress them. When he went there for the first time- he could never forget it- he had never experienced such a shock. Today, he was afraid of that same shock. He realized that history and politics and religion were a perfectly organized mess so no one could see through to what was really happening. He didn't understand everything either, he understood his bit. It was interesting that he didn't even know enough to console his wife. He was the prime minister, uttering paid lies on TV, a fake symbol of Great Britain, and that was all.

The road was now surrounded with trees and bushes on both sides. There were no traces of civilization any longer. Berkley thought about the fever in Africa. 'What is a fever, actually?' thought Berkley. 'It is a reaction of a body to some kind of a virus- it is not an illness itself, it's a kind of corporal antivirus program. If there is a potential danger, the body gives signals first to communicate that it needs rest. When the danger enters the body, the body turns on its system to cope with viruses.'

'But what if the body does not notice that it is being destroyed? Is it possible for the body to slowly die and think that there is no other option? That the way it feels is normal, even though it is not good? That a person is so used to certain kind of behaviour that he or she does not know how to find a cure. Let's imagine that the body suffers from something, the body is aware that it is harmful, but does not do anything about it, because the owner of the body does not let it to cope with it. Maybe

the owner lacks some information, does not realize that it hurts the body, or he or she believes to a harmful information. Think about an ordinary flu- the person's body give signals that it needs rest to be cured. But the person does not listen to it, because the person obeys something else- the voice of money, the voice of income, the voice of fear of losing a job.'

Berkley remembered one biology lesson he had at St. George's- a lesson on a bacteriophage. He remembered the picture of it. This thing, according to his memories, entered a cell and killed it by sucking out all the nutriments. When it was done, it moved to another cell. 'Is it possible for the body to work its own way, or does it need the help of drugs? And if it needed drugs, where is the barrier between helping the body and abusing it? And was it good for a person to undergo a cure to survive even though it soils the body?' Berkley felt the pressure of these thoughts on his mind and whispered to himself: 'If there is a way, please show me.'

His heart began to beat quicker, he was getting near. He had learned to recognize when he was approaching. The dead tree on the left side meant the village was about five minutes from him. When he went there for the first time, the slow and melancholic Adagio by Samuel Barber made the fat winter snow flakes fall even slower. He stopped on the outskirts to buy some cigars. A grey concrete house served an off-license with an old local man at the cash register. Berkley didn't like him because he reminded him of some animal-like quality that was repugnant, but also somehow interesting. He got out, unwrapped one cigar of doubtful quality, and gazed on the sleeping field lit up by the moon. White smoke blew out of his mouth. Smoking helped him loosen the stress he felt in his stomach. It was almost 2 am. Haste made him enter the car with the as yet unfinished cigar. The pressure of time burned in his throat as he neared the eastern exit of the village. In the past, there used to be a monastery, but it had been abandoned recently. A tall stone cathedral was part of the complex. Its walls were faded with dull stains and around it was a cemetery.

Berkley left the car on a mud path and made his way to the main door of the cathedral on foot.

"You're late," said a voice from the crack of the door after Berkley had knocked on it.

"It's five to two," said Berkley.

"Your watch is slow. Come in."

The door opened and emanated stink and coldness from inside. Berkley stepped in and said hello to a bald priest. He led him to a private cell behind the chancel without uttering a single word. The priest was a pale, wrinkled man who had nothing good to say, if anything at all. If there was a God, it was the worst advertisement for him.

They entered a small, dark room from where amused voices were emanating. As he entered, the voices came to a stop. They belonged to two individuals standing by the left wall. They were wearing blue robes.

"Welcome, Mr. Berkley," said another man in front of him. He was a tall man with black receding hair; He was wearing a purple robe and was sitting on a dirty armchair, smoking a cigar.

"How was your way here?"

"Good."

"Goodie! Please, put on the robe," he said and pointed with his open palm toward a pile of blue robes on a wooden cabinet. Berkley noticed a rusty cross with a once coloured Jesus Christ on it. It was leaning against the wall. Berkley took the upper robe, unfolded it and quickly looked it over. It was a shiny blue robe with yellow adornments.

"Ed!" said the purple man. "Do you know Charles and Tony here?"

"Well, of course," said Berkley. "We met in a... in a..."

"It was in my office, two years ago," said Charles Stinson. "You must remember Anthony Enthwistle. Used to work for me. Not anymore. Kind of workaholic this chap, aren't you, Tony?"

"The same old Charlie, always pulling my leg," said Tony. "Say, eh, Edmund, I've seen today's news. It was a pretty good job you did there."

"Thank you," answered Berkley. "It was actually quite hard. Superintendent is a very aggressive and mistrustful person."

“It is his job, isn’t it?”

“Now! We can go,” said the purple man.

The priest led the way back to the nave. The purple man followed by the two men and Berkley. In the chancel, on the left side of the altar, was a barred door on the floor leading to the underground crypt. The priest unlocked and opened it. All the men went in and the priest locked them inside. They went along several tombs until they reached the last one on the left. The lid was missing, there were metal spiral stairs inside the tomb instead. They descended it and found themselves in a brick tunnel with a chain of lights leading downward. Nobody talked. Footsteps on the wet ground could be heard and from the front a drumming and humming was echoing.

“So, Tony,” said Berkley. “What do you do now?”

“I own a company that supplies the army and police squads with weapons.”

“Steel Tech?”

“Yes. Actually, more precise, we develop weapons. We produce the most modern and efficient weaponry.”

Berkley was silent for a while. “What is your job exactly?”

“Mr. Berkley, I’d better not discuss this stuff on this occasion. You are always welcome to Steel Tech. Let’s say that I’m one of those office rats that spend their days stuck to the computer screen.”

“I think we all are like this, aren’t we?” said Charles Stinson.

“I suppose so,” nodded Berkley.

The drumming and humming must have been near, because the place was visibly shaking. And indeed, the tunnel opened into a great hall made of limestone. It was supported by limestone pillars with torches which gave the room an orange colour. The chamber was full of people, a crowd looking in one direction toward a kind of stage. There were eight drummers in a line, four on each side and in the middle a choir humming in a deep voice. The man in the purple robe told them to join the group of blue people and left. Berkley, with Stinson and Enthwistle, joined them. The people in blue robes made up approximately one third of the crowd. Then there were people in carmine, brown or tan, white and the drummers and the choir

were wearing dark brown suits with hoods. In front of the stage, there were three people in purple robes, the man that led Berkley joined them.

The music went on for a few minutes more, until the drummers and choir suddenly stopped and left the stage. Behind them were numerous tall pillar candles shining brightly. On the limestone wall was a pentagram- a symbol of Satan - painted with red paint, or perhaps worse. Berkley thought it quite pretentious, but still scary. Chains with shackles lay on the ground around the symbol.

An old man with short white hair in a purple robe entered the stage and looked at the people. He made a gesture with his hands and fingers- it was a triangle. He was clean-shaven. Then he spoke.

“These premises were built by Jesuits. Not everything they did was supposed to be seen by the *populus*. They were practising secret rituals and sacrifices. It is actually very ironic. These secret ceremonies have been an integral part of all the societies that have ruled this world. Even the savages in America made their sacrifices. We owe a great deal to the Jesuits. They established the foundation for the modern oligarchy. When they entered the American Continent, all the Europeans destroyed the natives in savage, brutal ways. But the Jesuits were the only ones who tried to stop this killing, to make peace. Not everyone knows, however, that it was they who incited the killing in the first place. Their next stop was to openly declare native sacrifices as barbaric and thus establish new moral rules for the new nation. Yes, sometimes their sacrifices were unintentionally revealed, such as the witch hunting for example, but who would suspect them of it. They were the givers of culture, the givers of safety and freedom. In order to give it, they had to take it first, of course... By means of sacrifices. And that is how they inherited our planet. I say inherited, yes; that is the purpose of those rituals and also of today's session. We are to thank our Gods for entrusting us with this beautiful planet, for giving us the power to wisely rule it, to maintain peace and witness the technological progress that this planet is undergoing in all its glory.

Thank you all who are here for the good job you are doing. I am truly proud of what you do, all of you. You help maintain order with millions of people and that is the most important task in our game. Before we cross the border, I want you to know

that you are doing a good job not only for yourselves, but also for all the people that you lead. I want you to know that there is no other way for them and even though you have doubts about yourselves, you need to know that you are doing your best.

We are the new rulers of this world, but nobody must know, because it is not our privilege, it is our duty. The Jesuits and others were full of themselves, they thought they were more important than the others and this was exactly the reason they fell. It is our sacred duty, but we are not better, not even privileged, because everything involves a sacrifice.”

The man paused, and then added energetically: “Now, let us start,” and turned his back. Two of the people who played the drums earlier led a little girl onto the stage. Although her eyes were closed, she was still walking on her own- she must have been drugged. They put her in front of the symbol on the wall, leaning against it, and locked her wrists and ankles in the shackles. She was shivering.

“Praise the Almighty ones for they are very benevolent with us,” continued the man. “They hold a protective hand above us, they have provided us with dignity and progress. There is the Universal Law within the world; and those who obey it will be given wealth and well-being for them and for their descendants. Today, on the day of the Summer Solstice, My Lords, please accept this sacrifice, this child that has not yet passed the age of puberty, accept it as a symbol of my, and our respect, for your Godly reign! Come! Oh Great one, come, and take this girl!”

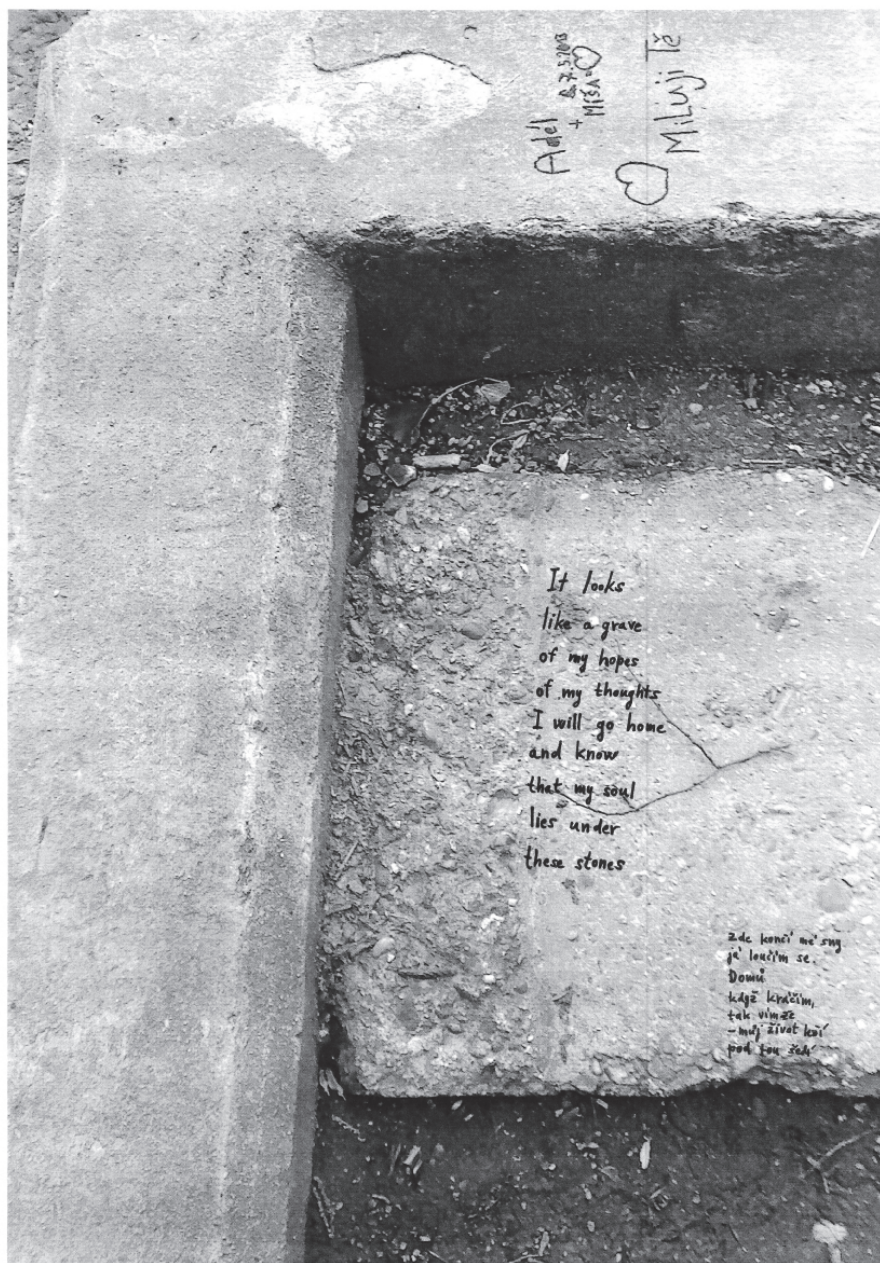
A man in a dark brown hood approached the girl with something that looked like a dagger, but its blade was shining dark red. Berkley lowered his head. He didn’t want to see what came next. He knew that the man would cut the body of the girl open and then tear out her still beating heart. He could hear her gasping and thought of his own little girl.

After a moment he raised his head and witnessed the shining white bubbles leaving the body of the girl and fly in a swarm above the stage to create a bright cloud which settled now above the dead body. The stillness could be felt and a silence could be heard when all the candles in the room suddenly emanated less light and the chamber darkened. Those with sharp eye-sight could make out something moving

in the front. It was as if a shadow was moving very quickly, as if a mirror or glass refracted the light. Then it stopped in the centre of the stage and nothing could be seen. The bright cloud split up into a swarm of shining bubbles and flew right into the centre of the stage where it completely disappeared. Suddenly two bright eyes could be seen there, at the height of a human, but only the eyes, nothing else. It was like pointing car lights into a cat's eyes at night. They were bright green and the pupils were narrow and long. They were watching the chamber, slowly winking from time to time, until they closed for the last time.

Berkley didn't know what happened next; he found himself driving the car entering London. It was a bit before 6 am when he arrived home. He parked his Land Rover in the garage, right next to his Aston Martin and his wife's Kia and went upstairs to the room of his daughter Franklin. She was sound asleep. He approached her to caress her cheek with the back of his hand and went to the bedroom. Before opening the door, he hesitated for a moment. Then he entered. He was sure that Elizabeth was awake just pretending to be asleep. He carefully got into bed. He fell asleep almost immediately.





October 29, 2014. Jan Gončarov: "Writing a readable sci-fi story"



November 13, 2014. Genna and Jesse: “The Creative Process Behind Songwriting”



SHRNUTÍ

Antologie, kterou držíte v ruce, je jedním z výstupů projektu IGA s názvem Tvůrčí psaní na KAA: Výzkum a implementace podle vzoru předních zahraničních univerzit. Tvůrčí psaní na Katedře anglistiky a amerikanistiky ale není zcela novou disciplínou. Kurzy podobného formátu zde proběhly již v minulosti, například semináře slam poetry, psaní poezie či povídek. Díky grantu získanému v roce 2013 však bylo možné této tradičně spíše vedlejší disciplíně věnovat více prostoru v rámci výuky na katedře.

V průběhu realizace grantu, tedy od března 2013 do února 2015, jsme organizovali řadu workshopů, nových kurzů a přednášek. V květnu 2013 se uskutečnil workshop psaní Street Art Poetry pod vedením Pavla Gončarova. V červnu 2013 naše pozvání přijala zahraniční lektorka Dr. Reneé Rudeman z Metropolitní státní univerzity v Denveru, která vedla workshop tvůrčího psaní poezie. Dále jsme organizovali workshop orientovaný na psaní prózy, který vedl Dr. Brad Vice ze Západočeské univerzity v Plzni v listopadu 2013. Poslední z kurzů tohoto formátu se uskutečnily v listopadu 2014. Jednalo se o dva kurzy, jeden pod vedením Jana Gončarova zaměřený na psaní vědecko-fantastické literatury a druhý cílený na tvorbu hudebních textů, ve kterém přednášeli naši hosté Genna and Jesse, folkoví hudebníci z USA.

Kromě workshopů, které probíhaly formou několikadenních intenzivních seminářů či přednášek, jsme pořádali také klasické semestrální kurzy. V letním semestru 2014 jsme otevřeli kurz, který měl seznámit studenty s co nejširším spektrem žánrů tvůrčího psaní. Na tomto semináři vystupovalo několik lektorů, zahraničních i tuzemských, kteří se tematicky zaměřili např. na stand-up comedy, psaní blogů, literaturu pro děti, tvorbu filmových scénářů, možnosti publikování atd.

V zimním semestru 2014 jsme otevřeli kurz, který více korespondoval s formátem výuky tvůrčího psaní na zahraničních univerzitách. Účastníci tohoto kurzu byli rozděleni do skupin pod vedením členů týmu grantu a zaměřovali se na určitou formu a na zdokonalování vlastních tvůrčích schopností. Jejich úkolem bylo vytvořit text, který bude publikován v této antologii.

V neposlední řadě jsme uspořádali i literární soutěž pro studenty katedry. Uskutečnila se v listopadu 2013 a autoři nejlepších povídek získali finanční odměnu, která byla financována z grantu. V průběhu realizace grantu jsme také zakoupili odbornou literaturu zaměřenou na oblast tvůrčího psaní a jeho výuku, která se stala permanentní součástí knihovny katedry.

Pevně doufáme, že jsme svou činností položili základy pro rozvoj této disciplíny na Katedře anglistiky a amerikanistiky a budeme dále pokračovat ve snaze upevnit pozici tvůrčího psaní ve výukovém rámci katedry, a to i po ukončení grantu na konci února 2015.

Jménem členů řešitelského týmu projektu děkuji Filozofické fakultě Univerzity Palackého v Olomouci za podporu.

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